

1 Corinthians 4:10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 1 Corinthians 4:10 emphasizes the paradox of Christian strength in weakness and the call to embrace suffering as a path to true glory in Christ.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:10, 1 Corinthians 4:14-16, Ephesians 5:1

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Spiritual Wealth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the contrast between the worldly wisdom and glory sought by some and the humility and suffering embraced by true followers of Christ. He emphasizes the importance of imitating Christ in selflessness, endurance, and love, even in the face of persecution and dishonor. Chrysostom highlights the true value of wealth, urging the congregation to use it for the benefit of others and to seek spiritual treasures in heaven. He warns against the dangers of greed, injustice, and the pursuit of earthly riches, advocating for a life of virtue, generosity, and faith.

Transcript

"We are fools for Christ's sake: (For it is necessary from this point to resume our discourse:) but you are wise in Christ: we are weak, but you are strong: you have glory, but we have dishonor.

Having filled his speech with much severity which conveys a sharper blow than any direct charge and having said, You have reigned without us; and God has set forth us last, as men doomed to death he shows by what comes next how they are doomed to death; saying, We are fools, and weak, and despised, and hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and toil, working with our own hands: which were very signs of genuine teachers and apostles. Whereas the others prided themselves on the things which are contrary to these, on wisdom, glory, wealth, consideration.

Desiring therefore to take down their self-conceit and to point out that in respect of these things, so far from taking credit to themselves, they ought rather to be ashamed; he first of all mocks them, saying, You have reigned without us. As if he had said, My sentence is that the present is not a time of honor nor of glory, which kind of things you enjoy, but of persecution and insult, such as we are suffering. If however it be not so; if this rather be the time of remuneration: then as far as I see, (but this he says in irony,) ye, the disciples, for your part have become no less than kings: but we the teachers and apostles, and before all entitled to receive the reward, not only have fallen very far behind you, but even, as persons doomed to death, that is, condemned convicts, spend our lives entirely in dishonors, and dangers, and hunger: yea insulted as fools, and driven about, and enduring all intolerable things.

Now these things he said that he might hereby cause them also to consider, that they should zealously seek the condition of the Apostles; their dangers and their indignities, not their honors and glories. For these, not the other, are what the Gospel requires. But to this effect he speaks not directly, not to show himself disagreeable to them: rather in a way characteristic of himself he takes in hand this rebuke. For if he had introduced his address in a direct manner, he would have spoken thus; You err, and are beguiled, and have swerved far from the apostolic mode of instruction. For every apostle and minister of Christ ought to be esteemed a fool, ought to live in affliction and dishonor; which indeed is our state: whereas you are in the contrary case.

But thus might his expressions have offended them yet more, as containing but praises of the Apostles; and might have made them fiercer, censured as they were for indolence and vainglory and luxuriousness. Wherefore he conducts not his statement in this way, but in another, more striking but less offensive; and this is why he proceeds with his address as follows, saying ironically, But you are strong and honorable; since, if he had not used irony, he would have spoken to this effect; It is not possible that one man should be esteemed foolish, and another wise; one strong, and another weak; the Gospel requiring both the one and the other. For if it were in the nature of things that one should be this, and another that, perchance there might be some reason in what you say. But now it is not permitted, either to be counted wise, or honorable, or to be free from dangers. If otherwise, it follows of necessity that you are preferred before us in the sight of God; you the disciples before us the teachers, and that after our endless hardships. If this be too bad for anyone to say, it remains for you to make our condition your object.

2. And let no one, says he, think that I speak only of the past:

1 Corinthians 4:11

Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked. Do you see that all the life of Christians must be such as this; and not merely a day or two? For though the wrestler who is victorious in a single contest only, be crowned, he is not crowned again if he suffer a fall.

And hunger; against the luxurious. And are buffeted; against those who are puffed up. And have no certain dwelling-place; for we are driven about. And are naked; against the rich.

1 Corinthians 4:12-13

And labor; now against the false apostles who endure neither toil nor peril, while they themselves receive the fruits. But not so are we, says he: but together with our perils from without, we also strain ourselves to the utmost with perpetual labor. And what is still more, no one can say that we fret at these things, for the contrary is our requital to them that so deal with us: this, I say, is the main point, not our suffering evil, for that is common to all, but our suffering without despondency or vexation. But we so far from desponding are full of exultation. And a sure proof of this is our requiting with the contrary those who do us wrong.

Now as to the fact that so they did, hear what follows.

Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world. This is the meaning of fools for Christ's sake. For whoever suffers wrong and avenges not himself nor is vexed, is reckoned a fool by the heathen; and dishonored and weak. And in order that he might not render his speech too unpalatable by referring the sufferings he was speaking of to their city, what says he? We are made the filth, not, of your city, but, of the world. And again, the off-scouring of all

men; not of you alone, but of all. As then when he is discoursing of the providential care of Christ, letting pass the earth, the heaven, the whole creation, the Cross is what he brings forward; so also when he desires to attract them to himself hurrying by all his miracles, he speaks of his sufferings on their account. So also it is our method when we be injured by any and despised, whatsoever we have endured for them, to bring the same forward.

The offscouring of all men, even until now. This is a vigorous blow which he gave at the end, of all men; not of the persecutors only, says he, but of those also for whom we suffer these things: Oh greatly am I obliged to them. It is the expression of one seriously concerned; not in pain himself, but desiring to make them feel, (πλ■ξαι) that he who has innumerable complaints to make should even salute them. And therefore did Christ command us to bear insults meekly that we might both exercise ourselves in a high strain of virtue, and put the other party to the more shame. For that effect one produces not so well by reproach as by silence.

1 Corinthians 4:14

3. Then since he saw that the blow could not well be borne, he speedily heals it; saying, I write not these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For not as abashing you, says he, do I speak these things. The very thing which by his words he had done, this he says he had not done: rather he allows that he had done it, not however with an evil and spiteful mind. Why, this mode of soothing is the very best, if we should say what we have to say and add the apology from our motive. For not to speak was impossible, since they would have remained uncorrected: on the other hand, after he had spoken, to leave the wound untended, were hard. Wherefore along with his severity he apologizes: for this so far from destroying the effect of the knife, rather makes it sink deeper in, while it moderates the full pain of the wound. Since when a man is told that not in reproach but in love are these things said, he the more readily receives correction.

However, even here also is great severity, and a strong appeal to their sense of shame, (■ντροπ■) in that he said not, As a master nor yet as an apostle, nor yet as having you for my disciples; (which had well suited his claims on them;) but, as my beloved children I admonish you. And not simply, children; but, longed after. Forgive me, says he. If anything disagreeable has been said, it all proceeds of love. And he said not, I rebuke, but I admonish. Now, who would not bear with a father in grief, and in the act of giving good advice? Wherefore he did not say this before, but after he had given the blow.

What then? some might say; Do not other teachers spare us? I say not so, but, they carry not their forbearance so far. This however he spoke not out at once, but by their professions and titles gave indication of it; Tutor and Father being the terms which he employs.

1 Corinthians 4:15

4. For though, says he, you have ten thousand tutors in Christ, you have not many fathers. He is not here setting forth his dignity, but the exceeding greatness of his love. Thus neither did he wound the other teachers: since he adds the clause, in Christ: but rather soothed them, designating not as parasites but as tutors those among them who were zealous and patient of labor: and also manifested his own anxious care of them. On this account he said not, Yet not many masters, but, not many fathers. So little was it his object to set down any name of dignity, or to argue that of him they had received the greater benefit: but granting to the others the great pains they had taken for the Corinthians, (for that is the force of the word Tutor,) the superiority in love he reserves for his own portion: for that again is the force of the word Father.

And he says not merely, No one loves you so much; a statement which admitted not of being called in question; but he also brings forward a real fact. What then is this? For in Christ Jesus I begot you through the Gospel. In Christ Jesus. Not unto myself do I impute this. Again, he strikes at those who gave their own names to their teaching. For you, says he, are the seal of mine Apostleship. And again, I planted: and in this place, I begot. He said not, I preached the word, but, I begot; using the words of natural relationship. (τοῦ τῆς φιλίας ἐν μασί) For his one care at the moment was, to show forth the love which he had for them. For they indeed received you from me, and led you on; but that you are believers at all came to pass through me. Thus, because he had said, as children; lest you should suppose that the expression was flattery he produces also the matter of fact.

1 Corinthians 4:16

5. I beseech you, be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ. καθὼς καὶ Χριστός, omitted in our version: the Vulgate has it, see 1 Corinthians 11:1 Astonishing! How great is our teacher's boldness of speech! How highly finished the image, when he can even exhort others hereunto! Not that in self-exaltation he does so, but implying that virtue is an easy thing. As if he had said, Tell me not, 'I am not able to imitate you. You are a Teacher, and a great one.' For the difference between me and you is not so great as between Christ and me: and yet I have imitated Him.

On the other hand, writing to the Ephesians, he interposes no mention of himself, but leads them all straight to the one point, Be imitators of God, is his word. Ephesians 5:1 But in this place, since his discourse was addressed to weak persons, he puts himself in by the way.

And besides, too, he signifies that it is possible even thus to imitate Christ. For he who copies the perfect impression of the seal, copies the original model.

Let us see then in what way he followed Christ: for this imitation needs not time and art, but a steady purpose alone. Thus if we go into the study of a painter, we shall not be able to copy the portrait, though we see it ten thousand times. But to copy him we are enabled by hearing alone. Will ye then that we bring the tablet before you and sketch out for you Paul's manner of life? Well, let it be produced, that picture far brighter than all the images of Emperors: for its material is not boards glued together, nor canvass stretched out; but the material is the work of God: being as it is a soul and a body: a soul, the work of God, not of men; and a body again in like wise.

Did you utter applause here? Nay, not here is the time for plaudits; but in what follows: for applauding, I say, and for imitating too: for so far we have but the material which is common to all without exception: inasmuch as soul differs not from soul in regard of its being a soul: but the purpose of heart shows the difference. For as one body differs not from another in so far as it is a body, but Paul's body is like every one's else, only dangers make one body more brilliant than another: just so is it in the case of the soul also.

6. Suppose then our tablet to be the soul of Paul: this tablet was lately lying covered with soot, full of spider's webs; (for nothing can be worse than blasphemy;) but when He came who transforms all things, and saw that not through indolence or sluggishness were his lines so drawn but through inexperience and his not having the tints (τῆς ἐνθης) of true piety: (for zeal indeed he had, but the colors were not there; for he had not the zeal according to knowledge;) He gives him the tint of the truth, that is, grace: and in a moment he exhibited the imperial image. For having got the colors and learned what he was ignorant of, he waited no time, but immediately appeared a most excellent artist. And first he shows the head of the

king, preaching Christ; then also the remainder of the body; the body of a perfect Christian life. Now painters we know shut themselves up and execute all their works with great nicety and in quiet; not opening the doors to any one: but this man, setting forth his tablet in the view of the world, in the midst of universal opposition, clamor, disturbance, did under such circumstances work out this Royal Image, and was not hindered. And therefore he said, We are made a spectacle unto the world; in the midst of earth, and sea, and the heaven, and the whole habitable globe, and the world both material and intellectual, he was drawing that portrait of his.

Would you like to see the other parts also thereof from the head downwards? Or will you that from below we carry our description upwards? Contemplate then a statue of gold or rather of something more costly than gold, and such as might stand in heaven; not fixed with lead nor placed in one spot, but hurrying from Jerusalem even unto Illyricum, Romans 15:19 and setting forth into Spain, and borne as it were on wings over every part of the world. For what could be more beautiful than these feet which visited the whole earth under the sun? This same beauty the prophet also from of old proclaims, saying, Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace! Have you seen how fair are the feet? Will you see the bosom too? Come, let me show you this also, and you shall behold it far more splendid than these beautiful, yea even than the bosom itself of the ancient lawgiver. For Moses indeed carried tablets of stone: but this man within him had Christ Himself: it was the very image of the King which he bore.

For this cause he was more awful than the Mercy Seat and the Cherubim. For no such voice went out from them as from hence; but from them it talked with men chiefly about things of sense, from the tongue of Paul on the other hand about the things above the heavens. Again, from the Mercy Seat it spoke oracles to the Jews alone; but from hence to the whole world: and there it was by things without life; but here by a soul instinct with virtue.

This Mercy Seat was brighter even than heaven, not shining forth with variety of stars nor with rays from the sun, but the very Sun of righteousness was there, and from hence He sent forth His rays. Again, from time to time in this our heaven, any cloud coursing over at times makes it gloomy; but that bosom never had any such storm sweeping across it. Or rather there did sweep over it many storms and oft: but the light they darkened not; rather in the midst of the temptation and dangers the light shone out. Wherefore also he himself when bound with his chain kept exclaiming, 2 Timothy 2:9 The word of God is not bound. Thus continually by means of that tongue was It sending forth its rays. And no fear, no danger made that bosom gloomy. Perhaps the bosom seems to outdo the feet; however, both they as feet are beautiful, and this as a bosom.

Will you see also the belly with its proper beauty? Hear what he says about it, 1 Corinthians 8:13 If meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh while the world stands: Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak: 1 Corinthians 6:13 Meats for the belly and the belly for meats. What can be more beautiful in its kind than this belly thus instructed to be quiet, and taught all temperance, and knowing how both to hunger and be famished, and also to suffer thirst? For as a well-trained horse with a golden bridle, so also did this walk with measured paces, having vanquished the necessity of nature. For it was Christ walking in it. Now this being so temperate, it is quite plain that the whole body of vice besides was done away.

Would you see the hands too? Those which he now has? Or would you rather behold first their former wickedness? Acts 8:3 Entering (this very man) into the houses, he haled, of late, men and women, with the hands not of man, but of some fierce wild beast. But as soon as he had received the colors of the

Truth and the spiritual experience, no longer were these the hands of a man, but spiritual; day by day being bound with chains. And they never struck any one, but they were stricken times without number. Once even a viper Acts 28:3-5 revered those hands: for they were the hands of a human being no longer; and therefore it did not even fasten on them.

And will you see also the back, resembling as it does the other members? Hear what he says about this also. 2 Corinthians 11:24-25 Five times I received of the Jews forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.

7. But lest we too should fall into an interminable deep, and be carried away far and wide, going over each of his members severally; come let us quit the body and look at another sort of beauty, that, namely, which proceeds from his garments; to which even devils showed reverence; and therefore both they made off, and diseases took flight. And wheresoever Paul happened to show himself, they all retired and got out of the way, as if the champion of the whole world had appeared. And as they who have been often wounded in war, should they see but some part of the armor of him that wounded them feel a shuddering; much in the same way the devils also, at sight of handkerchiefs only were astonished. Where be now the rich, and they that have high thoughts about wealth? Where they who count over their own titles and their costly robes? With these things if they compare themselves, it will be clay in their sight and dirt, all they have of their own. And why speak I of garments and golden ornaments? Why, if one would grant me the whole world in possession, the mere nail of Paul I should esteem more powerful than all that dominion: his poverty than all luxury: his dishonor, than all glory: his nakedness than all riches: no security would I compare with the buffeting of that sacred head: no diadem, with the stones to which he was a mark. This crown let us long for, beloved: and if persecution be not now, let us mean while prepare ourselves. For neither was he of whom we speak glorious by persecutions alone: for he said also, 1 Corinthians 9:27. **■ποπι■ζω** rec. text, **■πωπ■αζω** I keep under my body; now in this one may attain excellence without persecutions. And he exhorted not to Romans 3:14 make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. And again, 1 Timothy 6:8 Having food and covering, let us be therewith content. For to these purposes we have no need of persecutions. And the wealthy too he sought to moderate, saying, 1 Timothy 6:9 They that desire to be rich fall into temptation.

If therefore we also thus exercise ourselves, when we enter into the contest we shall be crowned: and though there be no persecution before us, we shall receive for these things many rewards. But if we pamper the body and live the life of a swine, even in peace we shall often sin and bear shame.

Do you see not with whom we wrestle? With the incorporeal powers. How then, being ourselves flesh, are we to get the better of these? For if wrestling with men one have need to be temperate in diet, much more with evil spirits. But when together with fullness of flesh we are also bound down to wealth, whence are we to overcome our antagonists? For wealth is a chain, a grievous chain, to those who know not how to use it; a tyrant savage and inhuman, imposing all his commands by way of outrage on those who serve him. Howbeit, if we will, this bitter tyranny we shall depose from its throne, and make it yield to us, instead of commanding. How then shall this be? By distributing our wealth unto all. For so long as it stands against us, each single handed, like any robber in a wilderness it works all its bad ends: but when we bring it forth among others, it will master us no more, holden as it will be in chains, on all sides, by all men.

8. And these things I say, not because riches are a sin: the sin is in not distributing them to the poor, and in the wrong use of them. For God made nothing evil but all things very good; so that riches too are good; i.e. if they do not master their owners; if the wants of our neighbors be done away by them. For neither is

that light good which instead of dissipating darkness rather makes it intense: nor should I call that wealth, which instead of doing away poverty rather increases it. For the rich man seeks not to take from others but to help others: but he that seeks to receive from others is no longer rich, but is emphatically poor. So that it is not riches that are an evil, but the needy mind which turns wealth into poverty. These are more wretched than those who ask alms in the narrow streets, carrying a wallet and mutilated in body. I say, clothed in rags as they are, not so miserable as those in silks and shining garments. Those who strut in the market-place are more to be pitied than those who haunt the crossings of the streets, and enter into the courts, and cry from their cellars, and ask charity. For these for their part do utter praises to God, and speak words of mercy and a strict morality. And therefore we pity them, and stretch out the hand, and never find fault with them. But those who are rich to bad purpose; cruelty and inhumanity, ravening and satanical lust, are in the words they belch out. And therefore by all are they detested and laughed to scorn. Do but consider; which of the two among all men is reckoned disgraceful, to beg of the rich or the poor. Every one, I suppose, sees it at once:-- of the poor. Now this, if you mark it, is what the rich do; for they dared not apply to those who are richer than themselves: whereas those who beg do so of the wealthy: for one beggar asks not alms of another, but of a rich man; but the rich man tears the poor in pieces.

Again tell me, which is the more dignified, to receive from those who are willing and are obliged to you, or when men are unwilling, to compel and tease them? Clearly not to trouble those who are unwilling. But this also the rich do: for the poor receive from willing hands, and such as are obliged to them; but the rich from persons unwilling and repugnant, which is an indication of greater poverty. For if no one would like so much as to go to a meal, unless the inviter were to feel obliged to the , how can it be honorable to take one's share of any property by compulsion? Do we not on this account get out of the way of dogs and fly from their baying, because by their much besetting they fairly force us off? This also our rich men do.

But, that fear should accompany the gift, is more dignified. Nay, this is of all most disgraceful. For he who moves heaven and earth about his gains, who can be so laughed to scorn as he? For even unto dogs, not seldom, through fear, we throw whatever we had hold of. Which I ask again, is more disgraceful? That one clothed with rags should beg, or one who wears silk? Thus when a rich man pays court to old and poor persons, so as to get possession of their property, and this when there are children, what pardon can he deserve?

Further: If you will, let us examine the very words; what the rich beggars say, and what the poor. What then says the poor man? That he who gives alms will never have to give by measure (μετρί■σει perhaps corrupt: conj. πειν■σει, will never hunger); that he is giving of what is God's: that God is loving unto men, and recompenses more abundantly; all which are words of high morality, and exhortation, and counsel. For he recommends you to look unto the Lord, and he takes away your fear of the poverty to come. And one may perceive much instruction in the words of those who ask alms: but of what kind are those of the rich? Why, of swine, and dogs, and wolves, and all other wild beasts. For some of them discourse perpetually on banquets, and dishes, and delicacies, and wine of all sorts, and ointments, and vestures, and all the rest of that extravagance. And others about the interest of money and loans. And making out accounts and increasing the mass of debts to an intolerable amount, as if it had begun in the time of men's fathers or grandfathers, one they rob of his house, another of his field, and another of his slave, and of all that he has. Why should one speak of their wills, which are written in blood instead of ink? For either by surrounding them with some intolerable danger, or else bewitching them with some paltry promises, whomsoever they may see in possession of some small property, those they persuade to pass by all their relations, and that oftentimes when perishing through poverty, and instead of them to enter their own

names. Is there any madness and ferocity of wild beasts of any sort which these things do not throw into the shade?

8. Wherefore I beseech you, all such wealth as this let us flee, disgraceful as it is and in deaths abundant; and let us obtain that which is spiritual, and let us seek after the treasures in the heavens. For whoever possess these, they are the rich, they are the wealthy, both here and there enjoying things; even all things. Since whoever will be poor, according to the word of God, has all men's houses opened to him. For unto him that for God's sake has ceased to possess any thing, every one will contribute of his own. But whoever will hold a little with injustice, shuts the doors of all against him. To the end, then, that we may attain both to the good things here and to those which are there, let us choose the wealth which cannot be removed, that immortal abundance: which may God grant us all to obtain, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, etc.

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