

1 Thessalonians 3:5-8

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's concern for the Thessalonians' faith and love is a demonstration of his love and humility, and a reminder of the importance of love in the life of a Saint.

Scripture: Genesis 43:30, 1 Samuel 16:7, Acts 3:12, Romans 8:35, 2 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:26, 1 Thessalonians 3:5

Topics: "Christian Love", "Holiness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of faith, love, and the need for continual growth in holiness. He emphasizes the role of love in overcoming temptations and the power of love to make believers unblamable before God. Chrysostom highlights the exemplary love shown by Saints like Paul and Joseph, urging the congregation to imitate their compassion and forgiveness towards others. He encourages believers to pray fervently, increase in love for one another, and strive for unblemished hearts in holiness, looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Transcript

For this cause I also, when I could no longer forbear, sent that I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain. But when Timothy came even now unto us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also to see you; for this cause, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our distress and affliction through your faith: for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

A question lies before us today, which is much disputed, and which is gathered from many sources. But what is this question? For this cause, he says, when I could no longer forbear, I sent Timothy that I might know your faith. What do you say? He, who knew so many things, who heard unutterable words, who ascended even to the third heaven, does not he know, even when he is in Athens? And yet the distance is not great, nor has he been long parted from them. For he says, Being bereaved of you for a short season. He does not know the affairs of the Thessalonians, but is compelled to send Timothy to know their faith, lest, he says, the tempter had tempted you, and our labors should be in vain.

What then is one to say? That the Saints knew not all things. And this one might learn from many instances, both of the early ones, and of those who came after them, as Elisha knew not concerning the woman 2 Kings 4:27; as Elijah said to God, I only am left, and they seek my life. Wherefore he heard from God, I have left me seven thousand men. 1 Kings 19:10 and 18 Samuel again, when he was sent to anoint

David; The Lord said to him, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for God sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7

And this comes to pass out of great care on God's part. How, and in what way? For the sake both of the Saints themselves, and of those who believe in them. For as He permits that there should be persecutions, so He permits that they should also be ignorant of many things, that they may be kept humble. On this account also Paul said, There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted over much. 2 Corinthians 12:7 And again, lest others also should have great imaginations concerning them. For if they thought they were gods from their miracles, much more if they had continued always knowing all things. And this again he also says: Lest any man should account of me above that which he sees me to be, or hears from me. 2 Corinthians 12:6 And again hear Peter, when he healed the lame man, saying, Why are you looking at us, as if by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk. Acts 3:12 And if even when they were saying and doing these things, and from these few and small miracles, evil imaginations were thus engendered, much more would they have been from great ones.

But for another reason too these things were allowed. For that no one might be able to say it was as being other than men that they performed those excellent actions, and so all should become supine, he shows their infirmity, that from their folly he might cut off every pretext of shamelessness. For this reason he is ignorant, for this reason also, after having purposed, he frequently does not come, that they might perceive there were many things he knew not. Great advantage then came of this. For if there were some yet saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great Acts 8:10, and some, that it is this person, or that; unless these things had been so, what would they not have thought?

But here, however, there seems to be a censure on them. But quite otherwise, it even shows their admirable conduct, and proves the excess of their temptations. How? Attend. For if you first sayest that we are appointed thereunto, and let no man be moved, why again do you send Timothy, fearing that something might happen which you would not wish. This indeed he does from his great love. For those who love suspect even what is safe, from their exceeding warmth. But this is caused by their great temptations. For I said indeed that we are appointed thereunto, but the excess of the temptations alarmed me. Wherefore he has not said, I send him as condemning you, but when I could no longer forbear, which is rather an expression of love.

What means, Lest by any means the tempter had tempted you? Do you see that to be shaken in afflictions proceeds from the devil, and from his seduction? For when he cannot shake us ourselves, he takes another way, and shakes the weaker sort through our means, which argues exceeding infirmity, and such as admits of no excuse; as he did in the case of Job, having stirred up his wife, Speak some word against the Lord, she says, and die. Job 2:9, Septuagint See how he tempted her.

But wherefore has he not said, shaken, but tempted? Because, he says, I only suspected so much, as that you had been tempted. For he does not call his temptation a wavering. For he who admits his attack is shaken. Strange! How great is the affection of Paul! He did not regard afflictions, nor plots against him. For I think that he then remained there, as Luke says, that he abode in Greece three months, when the Jews laid a plot against him. Acts 20:3

His concern therefore was not for his own dangers, but for his disciples. Do you see how he surpassed every natural parent? For we in our afflictions and dangers lose the remembrance of all. But he so feared and trembled for his children, that he sent to them Timothy, whom alone he had for his consolation, his companion and fellow-laborer, and him too in the very midst of dangers.

And our labor, he says, should be in vain. Wherefore! For even if they were turned aside, it was not through your fault, not through your negligence. But nevertheless, though this were the case, I think, from my great love of the brethren, that my labor had been rendered vain.

Lest by any means the tempter had tempted you. But he tempts, not knowing whether he shall overthrow. Does he then, even though he knows not, yet assail us, and do we, who know that we shall completely overcome him, not watch? But that he does attack us, though he knows not, he showed in the case of Job. For that evil demon said to God, Have You not made a hedge about his things within, and his things without? Take away his goods, and surely he will bless You to Your face. Job 1:10-11, Septuagint He makes trial; if he sees anything weak, he makes an attack, if strong, he desists. And our labor, he says, be in vain. Let us all hear, how Paul labored. He does not say work, but labor; he does not say, and you be lost, but our labor. So that even if anything had happened, it would be happening with some reason. But that it did not happen was a great wonder. These things indeed we expected, he says, but the contrary happened. For not only did we receive from you no addition to our affliction but even consolation.

But when Timothy came even now unto us, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love. Brought us glad tidings, he says. Do you see the excessive joy of Paul? He does not say, brought us word, but brought us glad tidings. So great a good did he think their steadfastness and love. For it was necessary, the one remaining firm, that the other also must be steadfast. And he rejoiced in their love, because it was a sign of their faith. And that you have, he says, good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also to see you. That is, with praises. Not when we were present, nor when we were working miracles, but even now, when we are far off, and are scourged, and are suffering numberless evils, you have good remembrance of us. Hear how disciples are admired, who have good remembrance of their teachers, how they are called blessed. Let us imitate these. For we benefit ourselves, not those who are loved by us. Longing to see us, he says, as we also to see you. And this too cheered them; for to him who loves, to perceive that the beloved person knows that he is beloved, is a great comfort and consolation.

For this cause, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our distress and affliction through your faith. For now we live if you stand fast in the Lord. What is comparable to Paul, who thought the salvation of his neighbors was his own, being so affected towards all, as really towards members? Who now would be able to break forth into such speech? Or rather, who will ever be able to have such a thought? He did not require them to be thankful to him for the trials which he suffered for them, but he was thankful to them that they were not moved on account of his trials. As if he had said, that to you rather than to us was injury done by those trials; you were tempted rather than we, you who suffered nothing, rather than we who suffered. Because, he says, Timothy brought us these good tidings, we feel nothing of our sorrows, but were comforted in all our affliction; not in this affliction only. For nothing besides can touch a good teacher, as long as the affairs of his disciples go on to his mind. Through you, he says, we were comforted; you confirmed us. And yet the reverse was the case. For that when suffering they did not yield, but stood manfully, was sufficient to confirm the disciples. But he reverses the whole matter, and turns the encomium over to them. You have anointed us, he says, you have caused us to breathe again; you have not suffered us to feel our trials. And he has not said, we breathe again, nor we are comforted, but what? Now we live, showing that he thinks nothing is either trial or death, but their stumbling, whereas their

advancement was even life. How else could any one have set forth either the sorrow for the weakness of one's disciples, or the joy? He has not said we rejoice, but we live, the life to come.

So that without this we do not even think it life to live. So ought teachers to be affected, so disciples; and there will be nothing at any time amiss. Then further softening the expression, see what he says,

Ver. 9, 10. For what thanksgiving can we render again unto God for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Not only, he says, are you the causes of life to us, but also of much joy, and so much that we cannot worthily give thanks to God. Your good behavior, he says, we consider to be the gift of God. Such kindnesses have you shown to us, that we think it to be of God; yea, rather, and it is of God. For such a disposition of mind comes not of a human soul or carefulness.

Night and day, he says, praying exceedingly. This too is a sign of joy. For as any husbandman, hearing concerning his land that has been tilled by himself, that it is burdened with ears of grain, longs with his own eyes to see so pleasant a sight, so Paul to see Macedonia. Praying exceedingly. Observe the excess; that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith.

Here there is a great question. For if now you live, because they stand fast, and Timothy brought you glad tidings of their faith and love, and you are full of so much joy as not to be able worthily to give thanks to God, how do you say here that there are deficiencies in their faith? Were those then the words of flattery? By no means, far be it. For previously he testified that they endured many conflicts, and were no worse affected than the Churches in Judæa. What then is it? They had not enjoyed the full benefit of his teaching, nor learned all that it behooved them to learn. And this he shows toward the end. Perhaps there had been questionings among them concerning the Resurrection, and there were many who troubled them, not by temptations, nor by dangers, but by acting the part of teachers. This is what he says is lacking in their faith, and for this reason, he has so explained himself, and has not said, that you should be confirmed, where indeed he feared concerning the faith itself, I have sent, he says, Timothy 'to confirm you,' but here, to perfect that which is lacking, which is rather a matter of teaching than of confirming. As also he says elsewhere, that you may be perfected unto every good work. From 1 Corinthians 1:10, or 2 Timothy 3:17 Now the perfected thing is one in which there is some little deficiency: for it is that which is brought to perfection.

Ver. 11, 12. Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you: and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also do toward you.

This is a proof of excessive love, that he not only prays for them by himself, but even in his Epistles inserts his prayer This argues a fervent soul, and one truly not to be restrained. This is a proof of the prayers made there also, and at the same time also an excuse, as showing that it was not voluntarily, nor from indolence, that they did not go to them. As if he had said, May God Himself cut short the temptations that everywhere distract us, so that we may come directly to you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound. Do you see the unrestrainable madness of love that is shown by his words? Make you to increase and abound, instead of cause you to grow. As if one should say, that with a kind of superabundance he desires to be loved by them. Even as we do also toward you, he says. Our part is already done, we pray that yours may be done. Do you see how he wishes love to be extended, not only toward one another, but

everywhere? For this truly is the nature of godly love, that it embraces all. If you love indeed such an one, but do not love such an one, it is human love. But such is not ours. Even as we do also toward you.

Ver. 13. To the end He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

He shows that love produces advantage to themselves, not to those who are loved. I wish, he says, that this love may abound, that there may be no blemish. He does not say to establish you, but your hearts. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts. Matthew 15:19 For it is possible, without doing anything, to be a bad man; as for example, to have envy, unbelief, deceit, to rejoice at evils, not to be loving, to hold perverted doctrines, all these things are of the heart; and to be pure of these things is holiness. For indeed chastity is properly by preëminence called holiness, since fornication and adultery is also uncleanness. But universally all sin is uncleanness, and every virtue is purity. For, Blessed, it is said, are the pure in heart. Matthew 5:8 By the pure He means those who are in every way pure.

For other things also know how to pollute the soul, and no less. For that wickedness defiles the soul, hear the prophet, saying, O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness. Jeremiah 4:14 And again, Wash you, make you clean, put away the wickednesses from your souls. Isaiah 1:16, Septuagint He did not say fornications, so that not only fornication, but other things also defile the soul.

To establish your hearts, he says, unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. Therefore Christ will then be a Judge, but not before Him (only), but also before the Father we shall stand to be judged. Or does he mean this, to be unblamable before God, as he always says, in the sight of God, for this is sincere virtue-- not in the sight of men?

It is love then that makes them unblamable. For it does make men really unblamable. And once when I was discoursing of this to a certain one, and saying, that love makes men unblamable, and that love to our neighbor does not suffer any entrance of transgression, and in my discourse going over, and pursuing all the rest -- some one of my acquaintance interposing himself said, What then of fornication, is it not possible both to love, and to commit fornication? And it is indeed from love that this springs. Covetousness indeed, and adultery, and envy, and hostile designs, and everything of this sort can, from love of one's neighbor, be stopped; but how fornication? He said. I therefore told him, that even this can love stop. For if a man should love a woman that commits fornication, he will endeavor both to draw her off from other men, and not himself also to add to her sin. So that to commit fornication with a woman is the part of one exceedingly hating her with whom he commits the fornication, but one who truly loved her would withdraw her from that abominable practice. And there is not, there is not any sin, which the power of love, like fire, cannot consume. For it is easier for a vile faggot to resist a great pile of fire, than for the nature of sin to resist the power of love.

This then let us plant in our own souls, that we may stand with all the Saints. For they all pleased God by their love to their neighbor. Whence was Abel slain, and did not slay? From his vehement love to his brother, he could not even admit such a thought. Whence was the destructive pest of envy received by Cain? For I will no longer call him the brother of Abel! Because the foundations of love had not been firmly fixed in him. Whence did the sons of Noah obtain a good report? Was it not because they vehemently loved their father, and did not endure to see his exposure? And whence was the other cursed? Was it not from not loving him? And whence did Abraham obtain a good report? Was it not from love in doing what he did concerning his nephew? What he did as to his supplication for the Sodomites? For strongly,

strongly, were the Saints affected with love and with sympathy.

For consider, I pray; Paul, he that was bold in the face of fire, hard as adamant, firm and unshaken, on every side compact, riveted in the fear of God, and inflexible; for, who (said he) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35 he that was bold in the face of all these things, and of earth and sea, he that laughed to scorn the adamantine gates of death, whom nothing ever withstood -- he, when he saw the tears of some whom he loved, was so broken and crushed -- the adamantine man -- that he did not even conceal his feelings, but said straightway, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? Acts 21:13 What do you say, tell me? Had a tear the power to crush that soul of adamant? Yea, he says, for I hold out against all things except love. This prevails over me, and subdues me. This is the mind of God. An abyss of water did not crush him, and a few tears crushed him. What are you doing, weeping and crushing my heart? For great is the force of love. Do you not see him again weeping? Why do you weep? Tell me. By the space of three years, he says, I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:31 From his great love he feared, lest some plague should be introduced among them. And again, For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears. 2 Corinthians 2:4

And what did Joseph? Tell me, that firm one, who stood up against so great a tyranny, who appears so noble against so great a flame of love, who so out-battled and overcame the madness of his mistress. For what was there not then to charm him? A beautiful person, the pride of rank, the costliness of garments, the fragrance of perfumes, (for all these things know how to soften the soul,) words more soft than all the rest! For you know that she who loves, and so vehemently, nothing so humble but she will bring herself to say it, taking upon her the attitude of a suppliant. For so broken was this woman, though wearing gold, and being of royal dignity, that she threw herself at the knees perhaps of the captive boy, and perhaps even intreated him weeping and clasping his knees, and had recourse to this not once, and a second time, but oftentimes. Then he might see her eye shining most brilliantly. For it is probable that she not simply but with excessive nicety would set off her beauty; as wishing by many nets to catch the lamb of Christ. Add here I pray also many magic charms. Yet nevertheless this inflexible, this firm man, of rocky hardness, when he saw his brothers who had bartered him away, who had thrown him into a pit, who had sold him, who had even wished to murder him, who were the causes both of the prison and the honor, when he heard from them how they had worked upon their father, (for, we said, it says, that one was devoured by a wild beast Genesis 37:20, and 64:28) he was broken, softened, crushed, And he wept, it says, and not being able to bear his feelings, he went in, and composed himself Genesis 43:30, that is, wiped away his tears.

What is this? Do you weep, O Joseph? And yet the present circumstances are deserving not of tears, but of anger, and wrath, and indignation, and great revenge and retribution. You have your enemies in your hands, those fratricides; you can satiate your wrath. And yet neither would this be injustice. For thou dost not yourself begin the unjust acts, but defendest yourself against those who have done the wrong. For look not to your dignity. This was not of their contrivance, but of God, who shed His favor upon you. Why do you weep? But he would have said, far be it that I, who in all things have obtained a good report, should by this remembrance of wrongs overturn them all. It is truly a season for tears. I am not more brutish than beasts. They pour out a libation to nature, whatever harm they suffer. I weep, he says, that they ever treated me thus.

This man let us also imitate. Let us mourn and weep for those who have injured us. Let us not be angry with them. For truly they are worthy of tears, for the punishment and condemnation to which they make

themselves liable. I know, how you now weep, how you rejoice, both admiring Paul, and amazed at Joseph, and pronouncing them blessed. But if any one has an enemy, let him now take him into recollection, let him bring him to his mind, that while his heart is yet warm with the remembrance of the Saints, he may be enabled to dissolve the stubbornness of wrath, and to soften what is harsh and callous. I know, that after your departure hence, after that I have ceased speaking, if anything of warmth and fervor should remain, it will not be so great, as it now is while you are hearing me. If therefore any one, if any one has become cold, let him dissolve the frost. For the remembrance of injuries is truly frost and ice. But let us invoke the Sun of Righteousness, let us entreat Him to send His beams upon us, and there will no longer be thick ice, but water to drink.

If the fire of the Sun of Righteousness has touched our souls, it will leave nothing frozen, nothing hard, nothing burning, nothing unfruitful. It will bring out all things ripe, all things sweet, all things abounding with much pleasure. If we love one another, that beam also will come. Allow me, I beseech you, to say these things with earnestness. Cause me to hear, that by these words we have produced some effect; that some one has gone and thrown both his arms about his enemy, has embraced him, has twined himself around him, has warmly kissed him, has wept. And though the other be a wild beast, a stone, or whatever he be, he will be made gentle by such affectionate kindness. For on what account is he your enemy? Hath he insulted you? Yet he has not injured you at all. But do you for the sake of money suffer your brother to be at enmity with you? Do not so, I beseech you. Let us do away all. It is our season. Let us use it to good purpose. Let us cut asunder the cords of our sins. Before we go away to judgment, let us not ourselves judge one another. Let not the sun (it is said) go down upon your wrath. Ephesians 4:26 Let no one put it off. These puttings off produce delays. If you have deferred it today, you blush the more, and if you add tomorrow, the shame is greater, and if a third day, yet worse. Let us not then put ourselves to shame, but let us forgive, that we may be forgiven. And if we be forgiven, we shall obtain all blessings, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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