

1 Timothy 1:1, 2

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in our relationship with God and warns against the dangers of questioning and seeking human wisdom.

Scripture: Psalm 64:5, Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 7:7, Matthew 7:9, John 5:39, Acts 13:2, Acts 22:21, 1 Corinthians 9:16, 1 Timothy 5:23, Titus 2:15

Topics: "Apostolic Authority", "Christian Faith"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dignity of an Apostle, emphasizing Paul's humility in being called by the commandment of God as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul's authority as an Apostle is highlighted to show that his teachings are not from man but from God. Chrysostom encourages Timothy by reminding him of God as our Saviour and Christ as our hope, especially in times of suffering and peril. The sermon also addresses the importance of faith over questioning, warning against false doctrines, fables, and endless genealogies that lead to doubt and disbelief. Chrysostom urges believers to focus on heavenly things, trust in God's Providence, and seek eternal delights through faith in Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. [The R.V. omits κυρ■ου and translates: Christ Jesus our hope, τ■ς ■λπ■δος ■μ■v .]

1. Great and admirable is the dignity of an Apostle, and we find Paul constantly setting forth the causes of it, not as if he took the honor to himself, but as entrusted with it, and being under the necessity of so doing. For when he speaks of himself as called, and that by the will of God, and again elsewhere, a necessity is laid upon me 1 Corinthians 9:16, and when he says, for this I was separated, by these expressions all idea of arrogance and ambition is removed. For as he deserves the severest blame, who intrudes into an office which is not given him of God, so he who refuses, and shrinks from it when offered to him, incurs blame of another kind, that of rebellion and disobedience.

Therefore Paul, in the beginning of this Epistle, thus expresses himself, Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God. He does not say here, Paul called, but by commandment. He begins in this manner, that Timothy may not feel any human infirmity from supposing that Paul addresses him on the same terms as his disciples. But where is this commandment given? We read in the Acts of the Apostles:

The Spirit said, Separate me Paul and Barnabas. Acts 13:2 And everywhere in his writings Paul adds the name of Apostle, to instruct his hearers not to consider the doctrines he delivered as proceeding from man.

For an Apostle can say nothing of his own, and by calling himself an Apostle, he at once refers his hearers to Him that sent him. In all his Epistles therefore he begins by assuming this title, thus giving authority to his words, as here he says, Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ according to the commandment of God our Saviour. Now it does not appear that the Father anywhere commanded him. It is everywhere Christ who addresses him. Thus, He said to me, Depart, for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles Acts 22:21; and again, You must be brought before Cæsar.

Acts 27:24 But whatever the Son commands, this he considers to be the commandment of the Father, as those of the Spirit are the commandments of the Son. For he was sent by the Spirit, he was separated by the Spirit, and this he says was the commandment of God. What then? Does it derogate from the power of the Son, that His Apostle was sent forth by the commandment of the Father? By no means. For observe, how he represents the power as common to both. For having said, according to the commandment of God our Saviour; he adds, and Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.

And observe, with what propriety he applies the titles. And indeed, the Psalmist applies this to the Father, saying, The hope of all the ends of the earth. Psalm 64:5 And again, the blessed Paul in another place writes, For therefore we both labor, and suffer reproach, because we have hope in the living God. The teacher must suffer dangers even more than the disciple. For I will smite the shepherd, (he says,) and the sheep shall be scattered abroad. Zechariah 13:7 Therefore the devil rages with greater violence against teachers, because by their destruction the flock also is scattered.

For by slaying the sheep, he has lessened the flock, but when he has made away with the shepherd, he has ruined the whole flock, so that he the rather assaults him, as working greater mischief by a less effort; and in one soul effecting the ruin of all. For this reason Paul, at the beginning, elevates and encourages the soul of Timothy, by saying, We have God for our Saviour and Christ for our hope. We suffer much, but our hopes are great; we are exposed to snares and perils, but to save us we have not man but God.

Our Saviour is not weak, for He is God, and whatever be our dangers they will not overcome us; nor is our hope made ashamed, for it is Christ. For in two ways we are enabled to bear up against dangers, when we are either speedily delivered from them, or supposed by good hopes under them.

But Paul never calls himself the Apostle of the Father, but always of Christ. Because he makes everything common to both. The Gospel itself he calls the Gospel of God. And whatever we suffer here, he implies, things present are as nothing.

Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith.

This too is encouraging. For if he evinced such faith as to be called peculiarly Paul's own son, he might be confident also with respect to the future. For it is the part of faith not to be cast down or disturbed, though circumstances occur that seem contrary to the promises. But observe he says, my son, and even my own son, and yet he is not of the same substance. But what? Was he of irrational kind? Well, says one, he was not of Paul, so this does not imply 'being of' another. What then? Was he of another substance? Neither was it so, for after saying my own son, he adds, in the faith, to show that he was really his own son, and truly from him. There was no difference. The likeness he bore to him was in respect to his faith, as in

human births there is a likeness in respect of substance. The son is like the father in human beings, but with respect to God the proximity is greater. For here a father and a son, though of the same substance, differ in many particulars, as in color, figure, understanding, age, bent of mind, endowments of soul and body, and in many other things they may be like or unlike, but there is no such dissimilarity in the divine Essence. By commandment. This is a stronger expression than called, as we learn from other passages. As he here calls Timothy my own son, in like manner he says to the Corinthians, in Christ Jesus I have begotten you, i.e. in faith; but he adds the word own, to show his particular likeness to himself, as well as his own love and great affection for him. Notice again the in applied to the faith. My own son, he says, in the faith. See what an honorable distinction, in that he calls him not only his son, but his own son.

Ver. 2. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why is mercy mentioned here, and not in the other Epistles? This is a further mark of his affection. Upon his son he invokes greater blessings, with the anxious apprehension of a parent. For such was his anxiety, that he gives directions to Timothy, which he has done in no other case, to attend to his bodily health; where he says, Use a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your frequent infirmities 1 Timothy 5:23 Teachers indeed stand more in need of mercy.

From God our Father, he says, and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here too is consolation. For if God is our Father, He cares for us as sons, as Christ says, What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Matthew 7:9

Ver. 3. As I besought you to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia.

Observe the gentleness of the expression, more like that of a servant than of a master. For he does not say I commanded, or bade or even exhorted, but I besought you. But this tone is not for all: only meek and virtuous disciples are to be treated thus. The corrupt and insincere are to be dealt with in a different manner, as Paul himself elsewhere directs, Rebuke them with all authority Titus 2:15; and here he says charge, not beseech, but charge some that they teach no other doctrine. What means this? That Paul's Epistle which he sent them was not sufficient? Nay, it was sufficient; but men are apt sometimes to slight Epistles, or perhaps this may have been before the Epistles were written. He had himself passed some time in that city. There was the temple of Diana, and there he had been exposed to those great sufferings. For after the assembly in the Theater had been dissolved, and he had called to him and exhorted the disciples, he found it necessary to sail away, though afterwards he returned to them. It were worth enquiry, whether he stationed Timothy there at that time. For he says, that you might charge some that they teach no other doctrine: he does not mention the persons by name, that he might not, by the openness of his rebuke, render them more shameless. There were in that city certain false Apostles of the Jews, who wished to oblige the faithful to observe the Jewish law, a fault he is everywhere noticing in his Epistles; and this they did not from motives of conscience, so much as from vainglory, and a wish to have disciples, from jealousy of the blessed Paul, and a spirit of opposition to him. This is meant by teaching another doctrine.

Ver. 4. Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies.

By fables he does not mean the law; far from it; but inventions and forgeries and counterfeit doctrines. For, it seems, the Jews wasted their whole discourse on these unprofitable points. They numbered up their fathers and grandfathers, that they might have the reputation of historical knowledge and research. That

you might charge some, he says, that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies. Why does he call them endless? It is because they had no end, or none of any use, or none easy for us to apprehend. Mark how he disapproves of questioning. For where faith exists, there is no need of question. Where there is no room for curiosity, questions are superfluous. Questioning is the subversion of faith. For he that seeks has not yet found. He who questions cannot believe. Therefore it is his advice that we should not be occupied with questions, since if we question, it is not faith; for faith sets reasoning at rest. But why then does Christ say, Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you Matthew 7:7; and, Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life? John 5:39 The seeking there is meant of prayer and vehement desire, and He bids search the Scriptures, not to introduce the labors of questioning, but to end them, that we may ascertain and settle their true meaning, not that we may be ever questioning, but that we may have done with it. And he justly said, Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than the dispensation of God in faith. Justly has he said, the dispensation of God. For great are the blessings which God is willing to dispense; but the greatness of them is not conceived by reasoning. This must then be the work of faith, which is the best medicine of our souls. This questioning therefore is opposed to the dispensation of God. For what is dispensed by faith? To receive His mercies and become better men; to doubt and dispute of nothing; but to repose in confidence. For what ministers questions displaces faith and that which faith has wrought and built. Christ has said that we must be saved by faith; this these teachers questioned and even denied. For since the announcement was present, but the issue of it future, faith was required. But they bring preoccupied by legal observances threw impediments in the way of faith. He seems also here to glance at the Greeks, where he speaks of fables and genealogies, for they enumerated their Gods.

Moral. Let us not then give heed to questions. For we were called Faithful, that we might unhesitatingly believe what is delivered to us, and entertain no doubt. For if the things asserted were human, we ought to examine them; but since they are of God, they are only to be revered and believed. If we believe not, how shall we be persuaded of the existence of a God? For how do you know that there is a God, when you call Him to account? The knowledge of God is best shown by believing in Him without proofs and demonstrations. Even the Greeks know this; for they believed their Gods telling them, says one, even without proof; and what?-- That they were the offspring of the Gods. But why do I speak of the Gods? In the case of the man, a deceiver and sorcerer, (I speak of Pythagoras,) they acted in like manner, for of him it was said, He said it. And over their temples was an image of Silence, and her finger on her mouth, compressing her lips, and significantly exhorting all that passed by to be silent. And were their doctrines so sacred, and are ours less so? And even to be ridiculed? What extreme madness is this! The tenets of the Greeks indeed are rightly questioned. For they were of that nature, being but disputes, conflicts of reasonings, and doubts, and conclusions. But ours are far from all these. For human wisdom invented theirs, but ours were taught by the grace of the Spirit. Their doctrines are madness and folly, ours are true wisdom. In their case there is neither teacher nor scholar; but all alike are disputants. Here whether teacher or scholar, each is to learn of him from whom he ought to learn, and not to doubt, but obey; not to dispute, but believe. For all the ancients obtained a good report through faith, and without this everything is subverted. And why do I speak of it in heavenly things? We shall find upon examination that earthly things depend upon it no less. For without this there would be no trade nor contracts, nor anything of the sort. And if it be so necessary here in things that are false, how much more in those.

This then let us pursue, to this let us adhere, so shall we banish from our souls all destructive doctrines, such, for instance, as relate to nativity and fate. If you believe that there is a resurrection and a judgment,

you will be able to expel from your mind all those false opinions. Believe that there is a just God, and you will not believe that there can be an unjust nativity. Believe that there is a God, and a Providence, and you will not believe that there can be a nativity, that holds all things together. Believe that there is a place of punishment, and a Kingdom, and you will not believe in a nativity that takes away our free agency, and subjects us to necessity and force. Neither sow, nor plant, nor go to war, nor engage in any work whatever! For whether you will or not, things will proceed according to the course of nativity! What need have we more of Prayer? And why should you deserve to be a Christian, if there be this nativity? For you will not then be responsible. And whence proceed the arts of life? Are these too from nativity? Yes, you say, and it is fated to one to become wise with labor. But can you show me one who has learned an art without labor? You cannot. It is not then from nativity but from labor that he derives his skill.

But why does a man who is corrupt and wicked become rich, without inheriting it from his father, while another, amidst infinite labors, remains poor? For such are the questions they raise, always arguing upon wealth and poverty, and never taking the case of vice and virtue. Now in this question talk not of that, but show me a man who has become bad, while he was striving to be good; or one that, without striving, has become good. For if Fate has any power, its power should be shown in the most important things; in vice and virtue, not in poverty and riches. Again you ask, why is one man sickly and another healthy? Why is one honored, another disgraced? Why does every thing succeed well with this man, while another meets with nothing but failure and impediments? Lay aside the notion of nativity, and you will know. Believe firmly that there is a God and a Providence, and all these things will be cleared up. But I cannot, you say, conceive that there is a Providence, when there is such disorder. Can I believe that the good God gives wealth to the fornicator, the corrupt and dishonest man, and not to the virtuous? How can I believe this? For there must be facts to ground belief. Well then, do these cases proceed from a nativity that was just, or unjust? Unjust, you say. Who then made it? Not God, you say, it was unbegotten. But how can the unbegotten produce these things? For they are contradictions. These things are not then in any wise the works of God. Shall we then enquire who made the earth, the sea, the heavens, the seasons? Nativity, you answer. Did nativity then produce in things inanimate such order and harmony, but in us, for whom these things were made, so much disorder? As if one, in building a house, should be careful to make it magnificent, but bestow not a thought upon his household. But who preserves the succession of the seasons? Who established the regular laws of nature? Who appointed the courses of day and night? These things are superior to any such nativity. But these, you say, came to be of themselves. And yet how can such a well-ordered system spring up of itself?

But whence, you say, come the rich, the healthy, the renowned, and how are some made rich by covetousness, some by inheritance, some by violence? And why does God suffer the wicked to be prosperous? We answer, Because the retribution, according to the desert of each, does not take place here, but is reserved for hereafter. Show me any such thing taking place Then! Well, say you, give me here, and I do not look for hereafter. But it is because you seek here, that you receive not.

For if when earthly enjoyment is not within your reach, you seek present things so eagerly as to prefer them to future, what would you do if you were in possession of unmixed pleasure? God therefore shows you that these things are nothing, and indifferent; for if they were not indifferent, He would not bestow them on such men. You will own that it is a matter of indifference whether one be tall or short, black or white; so is it whether one be rich or poor. For, tell me, are not things necessary bestowed on all equally, as the capacity for virtue, the distribution of spiritual gifts?

If you understood aright the mercies of God, you would not complain of wanting worldly things, while you enjoyed these best gifts equally with others; and knowing that equal distribution you would not desire superiority in the rest. As if a servant enjoying from his master's bounty food, clothing, and lodging, and all other necessaries equally with his fellow-servants, should pride himself upon having longer nails, or more hair upon his head; so it is for a Christian to be elated on account of those things, which he enjoys only for a time.

For this reason it is, that God withdraws those things from us, to extinguish this madness, and transfer our affections from them to heaven. But nevertheless we do not learn wisdom. As if a child possessing a toy, should prefer it to things necessary, and his father, to lead him against his will to what was better for him, should deprive him of his toy; so God takes these things from us, that He may lead us to heaven. If you ask then why He permits the wicked to be rich, it is because they are not high in His esteem.

And if the righteous too are rich, it is rather that He allows it to be, than that He makes them so. Now these things we say superficially, as to men not knowing the Scriptures. But our discourses would be unnecessary if you would believe and take heed to the divine word, for that would teach you all things. And that you may understand that neither riches, nor health, nor glory, are anything, I can show you many, who, when they might gain wealth, do not seek wealth; when they might enjoy health, mortify their bodies; when they might rise to glory, make it their aim to be despised.

But there is no good man, who ever studied to be bad. Let us therefore desist from seeking things below, and let us seek heavenly things; for so we shall be able to attain them, and we shall enjoy eternal delights, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, power, and honor, now, and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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