

1 Timothy 1:12-14

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, faith, and love in Christ Jesus, and encourages listeners to love God as they would love a friend.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:10

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the humility exemplified by the Apostle Paul, who acknowledges his past sins and the mercy he received from Christ despite his ignorance and unbelief. Paul attributes his ministry to God's enabling and faithfulness, emphasizing the need to recognize God's role in our lives while still exercising our free will. Chrysostom highlights the abundant grace of the Lord, which not only forgives but also bestows faith and love through Christ Jesus, underscoring the importance of loving God through Christ and acknowledging the blessings received through Him.

Transcript

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry [R.V.: to his service, εἰς δακονίαν]; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

The advantages arising from humility are generally acknowledged, and yet it is a thing not easily to be met with. There is affectation of humble talking enough and to spare, but humbleness of mind is nowhere to be found. This quality was so cultivated by the blessed Paul, that he is ever looking out for inducements to be humble. They who are conscious to themselves of great merits must struggle much with themselves if they would be humble. And he too was one likely to be under violent temptations, his own good conscience swelling him up like a gathering humor. Observe therefore his method in this place. I was entrusted, he had said, with the glorious Gospel of God, of which they who still adhere to the law have no right to partake; for it is now opposed to the Gospel, and their difference is such, that those who are actuated by the one, are as yet unworthy to partake of the other; as we should say, that those who require punishments, and chains, have no right to be admitted into the train of philosophers. Being filled therefore with high thoughts, and having used magnificent expressions, he at once depresses himself, and engages others also to do the like. Having said therefore that the Gospel was committed to his trust; lest this should seem to be said from pride, he checks himself at once, adding by way of correction, I thank Christ Jesus

our Lord, who has enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. Thus everywhere, we see, he conceals his own merit, and ascribes everything to God, yet so far only, as not to take away free will. For the unbeliever might perhaps say, If everything is of God, and we contribute nothing of ourselves, while He turns us, as if we were mere wood and stone, from wickedness to the love of wisdom, why then did He make Paul such as he was, and not Judas? To remove this objection, mark the prudence of his expression, Which was committed, he says, to my trust. This was his own excellence and merit, but not wholly his own; for he says, I thank Christ Jesus, who enabled me. This is God's part: then his own again, Because He counted me faithful. Surely because he would be serviceable of his own part.

Ver. 13. Putting me into his service, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

Thus we see him acknowledge both his own part and that of God, and while he ascribes the greater part to the providence of God, he extenuates his own, yet so far only, as we said before, as was consistent with free will. And what is this, Who enabled me? I will tell you. He had so heavy a burden to sustain, that he needed much aid from above. For think what it was to be exposed to daily insults, and mockeries, and snares, and dangers, scoffs, and reproaches, and deaths; and not to faint, or slip, or turn backward, but though assaulted every day with darts innumerable, to bear up manfully, and remain firm and imperturbable. This was the effect of no human power, and yet not of Divine influence alone, but of his own resolution also. For that Christ chose him with a foreknowledge of what he would be, is plain from the testimony He bore to him before the commencement of his preaching. He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings. Acts 9:15 For as those who bear the royal standard in war require both strength and address, that they may not let it fall into the hands of the enemy; so those who sustain the name of Christ, not only in war but in peace, need a mighty strength, to preserve it uninjured from the attacks of accusers. Great indeed is the strength required to bear the name of Christ, and to sustain it well, and bear the Cross. For he who in action, or word, or thought, does anything unworthy of Christ, does not sustain His name, and has not Christ dwelling in him. For he that sustains that name bears it in triumph, not in the concourse of men, but through the very heavens, while all angels stand in awe, and attend upon him, and admire him.

I thank the Lord, who has enabled me. Observe how he thanks God even for that which was his own part. For he acknowledges it as a favor from Him that he was a chosen vessel. For this, O blessed Paul, was your own part. For God is no respecter of persons. But I thank Him that he thought me worthy of this ministry. For this is a proof that He esteemed me faithful. The steward in a house is not only thankful to his master that he is trusted, but considers it as a sign that he holds him more faithful than others: so it is here. Then observe how he magnifies the mercy and loving-kindness of God, in describing his former life, who was formerly, he says, a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. And when he speaks of the still unbelieving Jews, he rather extenuates their guilt. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Romans 10:2 But of himself he says, Who was a blasphemer and a persecutor. Observe his lowering of himself! So free was he from self-love, so full of humility, that he is not satisfied to call himself a persecutor and a blasphemer, but he aggravates his guilt, showing that it did not stop with himself, that it was not enough that he was a blasphemer, but in the madness of his blasphemy he persecuted those who were willing to be godly.

But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

Why then did other Jews not obtain mercy? Because what they did, they did not ignorantly, but willfully, well knowing what they did. For this we have the testimony of the Evangelist. Many of the Jews believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. John 12:42-43 And Christ again said to them, How can you believe, who receive honor one of another John 5:44? And the parents of the blind man said these things for fear of the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.

John 9:22 Nay the Jews themselves said, Perceive how we avail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him. John 12:19 Thus their love of power was everywhere in their way. When they admitted that no one can forgive sins but God only, and Christ immediately did that very thing, which they had confessed to be a sign of divinity, this could not be a case of ignorance. But where was Paul then? Perhaps one should say he was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, and took no part with the multitude who conspired against Jesus: for Gamaliel does not appear to have been an ambitious man.

Then how is it that afterwards Paul was found joining with the multitude? He saw the doctrine growing, and on the point of prevailing, and being generally embraced. For in the lifetime of Christ, the disciples consorted with Him, and afterwards with their teachers, but when they were completely separated, Paul did not act as the other Jews did, from the love of power, but from zeal. For what was the motive of his journey to Damascus? He thought the doctrine pernicious, and was afraid that the preaching of it would spread everywhere.

But with the Jews it was no concern for the multitude, but the love of power, that influenced their actions. Hence they say, The Romans will come and take away both our place and nation. John 11:48 What fear was this that agitated them, but that of man? But it is worthy of enquiry, how one so skillful in the law as Paul could be ignorant? For it is he who says, which He had promised before by His holy prophets. Romans 4:2 How is it then that you know not, you who are zealous of the law of their fathers, who were brought up at the feet of Gamaliel?

Yet they who spent their days on lakes and rivers, and the very publicans, have embraced the Gospel, while you that study the law are persecuting it! It is for this he condemns himself, saying, I am not meet to be called an Apostle. 1 Corinthians 9:9 It is for this he confesses his ignorance, which was produced by unbelief. For this cause, he says, that he obtained mercy. What then does he mean when he says, He counted me faithful? He would give up no right of his Master's: even his own part he ascribed to Him, and assumed nothing to himself, nor claimed for his own the glory which was due to God.

Hence in another place we find him exclaiming, Sirs, why do ye these things to us? We also are men of like passions with you. Acts 14:15 So again, He counted me faithful. And again, I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 And again, It is He that works in us both to will and to do. Philippians 2:13 Thus in acknowledging that he obtained mercy, he owns that he deserved punishment, since mercy is for such. And again in another place he says of the Jews, Blindness in part is happened to Israel. Romans 11:25

Ver. 14. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

This is added, lest hearing that he obtained mercy, we should understand by it only, that being deserving of punishment, as a persecutor and blasphemer, nevertheless he was not punished. But mercy was not confined to this, that punishment was not inflicted; many other great favors are implied by it. For not only has God released us from the impending punishment, but He has made us righteous too, and sons, and

brethren, and heirs, and joint-heirs. Therefore it is he says, that grace was exceeding abundant. For the gifts bestowed were beyond mercy, since they are not such as would come of mercy only, but of affection and excessive love. Having thus enlarged upon the love of God which, not content with showing mercy to a blasphemer and persecutor, conferred upon him other blessings in abundance, he has guarded against that error of the unbelievers which takes away free will, by adding, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Thus much only, he says, did we contribute. We have believed that He is able to save us.

Moral. Let us then love God through Christ. What means through Christ? That it is He, and not the Law, who has enabled us to do this. Observe what blessings we owe to Christ, and what to the Law. And he says not merely that grace has abounded, but abounded exceedingly, in bringing at once to the adoption those who deserved infinite punishment.

And observe again that in is used for through. For not only faith is necessary, but love. Since there are many still who believe that Christ is God, who yet love Him not, nor act like those who love Him. For how is it when they prefer everything to Him, money, nativity, fate, augury, divinations, omens? When we live in defiance of Him, pray, where is our love? Has any one a warm and affectionate friend? Let him love Christ but equally. So, if no more, let him love Him who gave His Son for us His enemies, who had no merits of our own. Merits did I say? Who had committed numberless sins, who had dared Him beyond all daring, and without cause! Yet He, after numberless instances of goodness and care, did not even then cast us off. At the very time when we did Him the greatest wrong, then did He give His Son for us. And still we, after so great benefits, after being made His friends, and counted worthy through Him of all blessings, have not loved Him as our friend! What hope then can be ours? You shudder perhaps at the word, but I would that you shuddered at the fact! What? How shall it appear that we do not love God even as our friends, you say? I will endeavor to show you -- and would that my words were groundless, and to no purpose! But I am afraid they are borne out by facts. For consider: friends, that are truly friends, will often suffer loss for those they love. But for Christ, no one will suffer loss, or even be content with his present state. For a friend we can readily submit to insults, and undertake quarrels; but for Christ, no one can endure enmity: and the saying is, Be loved for nothing -- but be not hated for nothing.

None of us would fail to relieve a friend who was hungering, but when Christ comes to us from day to day, and asks no great matter, but only bread, we do not even regard him, yea though we are nauseously over full, and swollen with gluttony: though our breath betrays the wine of yesterday, and we live in luxury, and waste our substance on harlots and parasites and flatterers, and even on monsters, idiots, and dwarfs; for men convert the natural defects of such into matter for amusement.

Again, friends, that are truly such, we do not envy, nor are mortified at their success, yet we feel this toward (the minister of) Christ, and our friendship for men is seen to be more powerful than the fear of God, for the envious and the insincere plainly respect men more than God. And how is this? God sees the heart, yet man does not forbear to practice deceit in His sight; yet if the same man were detected in deceit by men, he thinks himself undone, and blushes for shame.

And why speak of this? If a friend be in distress, we visit him, and should fear to be condemned, if we deferred it for a little time. But we do not visit Christ, though He die again and again in prison; nay, if we have friends among the faithful, we visit them, not because they are Christians, but because they are our friends. Thus we do nothing from the fear or the love of God, but some things from friendship, some from custom. When we see a friend depart on travel, we weep and are troubled, and if we see his death, we bewail him, though we know that we shall not be long separated, that he will be restored to us at the

Resurrection.

But though Christ departs from us, or rather we reject Him daily, we do not grieve, nor think it strange, to injure, to offend, to provoke Him by doing what is displeasing to Him; and the fearful thing is not that we do not treat Him as a friend; for I will show that we even treat Him as an enemy. How, do you ask? Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, as Paul has said, and this we always carry about us. And we persecute Christ, when He advances toward us, and comes to our very doors.

For wicked actions in effect do this, and every day we subject him to insults by our covetousness and our rapacity. And does any one by preaching His word, and benefiting His Church, obtain a good reputation? Then he is the object of envy, because he does the work of God. And we think that we envy him, but our envy passes on to Christ. We affect to wish the benefit to come not from others, but from ourselves. But this cannot be for Christ's sake, but for our own: otherwise, it would be a matter of indifference, whether the good were done by others or ourselves.

If a physician found himself unable to cure his son, who was threatened with blindness, would he reject the aid of another, who was able to effect the cure? Far from it! Let my son be restored, he would almost say to him, whether it is to be by you or by me. And why? Because he would not consider himself, but what was beneficial to his son. So, were our regard to Christ, it would lead us to say, Let good be done, whether by ourselves or by any other. As Paul said, Whether in pretense or in truth Christ is preached.

Philippians 1:18. In the same spirit Moses answered, when some would have excited his displeasure against Eldad and Modad, because they prophesied, Do you envy for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets! Numbers 11:29 These jealous feelings proceed from vainglory; and are they not those of opponents and enemies? Does any one speak ill of you? Love him! It is impossible, you say. Nay, if you will, it is quite possible. For if you love him only who speaks well of you, what thanks have you?

It is not for the Lord's sake, but for the sake of the man's kind speech that you do it. Has any one injured you? Do him good! For in benefiting him who has benefited you there is little merit. Have you been deeply wronged and suffered loss? Make a point of requiting it with the contrary. Yes, I entreat you. Let this be the way we do our own part. Let us cease from hating and injuring our enemies. He commands us to love our enemies Matthew 5:44: but we persecute Him while He loves us.

God forbid! We all say in words, but not so in deeds. So darkened are our minds by sin, that we tolerate in our actions what in words we think intolerable. Let us desist then from things that are injurious and ruinous to our salvation, that we may obtain those blessings which as His friends we may obtain. For Christ says, I will that where I am, there My disciples may be also, that they may behold My glory John 17:24, which may we all attain, through the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

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