

1 Timothy 2:1-4

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the necessity of praying for all, including enemies, to cultivate love and maintain peace in society.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27, Romans 12:14, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Timothy 2:1

Topics: "Christian Love", "Power Of Prayer"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of praying for all people, including kings and those in authority, to lead a peaceful life in godliness and honesty. He highlights the power of prayer in transforming hearts, fostering love, and drawing people to God. Chrysostom urges Christians to offer supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for both believers and unbelievers, showcasing the significance of forgiveness and compassion towards enemies. He stresses the need for Christians to imitate God's mercy and kindness by praying for those who persecute them, as this reflects the essence of true Christian love and discipleship.

Transcript

I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. [R.V.: who wills that all men should be saved, etc.]

The Priest is the common father, as it were, of all the world; it is proper therefore that he should care for all, even as God, Whom he serves. For this reason he says, I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. From this, two advantages result. First, hatred towards those who are without is done away; for no one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays: and they again are made better by the prayers that are offered for them, and by losing their ferocious disposition towards us. For nothing is so apt to draw men under teaching, as to love, and be loved. Think what it was for those who persecuted, scourged, banished, and slaughtered the Christians, to hear that those whom they treated so barbarously offered fervent prayers to God for them. Observe how he wishes a Christian to be superior to all ill-treatment. As a father who was struck on the face by a little child which he was carrying, would not lose anything of his affection for it; so we ought not to abate in our good will towards those who are without, even when we are stricken by them. What is first of all? It means in the daily Service; and the initiated know how this is done every day both in the evening

and the morning, how we offer prayers for the whole world, for kings and all that are in authority. But some one perhaps will say, he meant not for all men, but for all the faithful. How then does he speak of kings? For kings were not then worshipers of God, for there was a long succession of ungodly princes. And that he might not seem to flatter them, he says first, for all men, then for kings; for if he had only mentioned kings, that might have been suspected. And then since the soul of some Christians might be slow at hearing this, and reject the exhortation, if at the celebration of the holy Mysteries it was necessary to offer prayers for a heathen king, he shows them the advantage of it, thus at least to reconcile them to the advice, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life; as much as to say, Their safety is a security to us; as also in his Epistle to the Romans, he exhorts them to obey their rulers, not for wrath but for conscience' sake. Romans 13:5 For God has appointed government for the public good. When therefore they make war for this end, and stand on guard for our security, were it not unreasonable that we should not offer prayers for their safety in wars and dangers? It is not therefore flattery, but agreeable to the rules of justice. For if they were not preserved, and prospered in their wars, our affairs must necessarily be involved in confusion and trouble; and if they were cut off, we must either serve ourselves, or be scattered up and down as fugitives. For they are a sort of bulwarks thrown up before us, within which those who are inclosed are in peace and safety.

He says, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks. For we must give thanks to God for the good that befalls others, as that He makes the sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sends His rain both upon the just and the unjust. Observe how he would unite and bind us together, not only by prayer but by thanksgiving. For he who is urged to thank God for his neighbor's good, is also bound to love him, and be kindly disposed towards him. And if we must give thanks for our neighbor's good, much more for what happens to ourselves, and for what is unknown, and even for things against our will, and such as appear grievous to us, since God dispenses all things for our good.

Moral. Let every prayer of ours, then, be accompanied with thanksgiving. And if we are commanded to pray for our neighbors, not only for the faithful, but for the unbelieving also, consider how wrong it is to pray against your brethren. What? Has He commanded you to pray for your enemies, and do you pray against your brother? But your prayer is not against him, but against yourself. For you provoke God by uttering those impious words, Show him the same! So do to him! Smite him! Recompense him! Far be such words from the disciple of Christ, who should be meek and mild. From the mouth that has been vouchsafed such holy Mysteries, let nothing bitter proceed. Let not the tongue that has touched the Lord's Body utter anything offensive, let it be kept pure, let not curses be borne upon it. For if revilers shall not inherit the kingdom of God 1 Corinthians 6:10, much less those who curse. For he that curses must be injurious; and injuriousness and prayer are at variance with each other, cursing and praying are far apart, accusation and prayer are wide asunder. Do you propitiate God with prayer, and then utter imprecations? If you forgive not, you will not be forgiven. Matthew 6:15 But instead of forgiving, you beseech God not to forgive; what excessive wickedness in this! If the unforgiving is not forgiven, he that prays his Lord not to forgive, how shall he be forgiven? The harm is to yourself, not him. For though your prayers were on the point of being heard for yourself, they would never be accepted in such a case, as offered with a polluted mouth. For surely the mouth that curses is polluted with all that is offensive and unclean.

When you ought to tremble for your own sins, to wrestle earnestly for the pardon of them, you come to move God against your brother -- do you not fear, nor think of what concerns yourself? Do you not see what you are doing? Imitate even the conduct of children at school. If they see their own class within giving account of their lessons, and all beaten for their idleness, and one by one severely examined and

chastised with blows, they are frightened to death, and if one of their companions strikes them, and that severely, they cannot have while to be angry, nor complain to their master; so is their soul possessed with fear.

They only look to one thing, that they may go in and come out without stripes, and their thoughts are on that time. And when they come out, whether beaten or not, the blows they have received from their playmates never enter their minds for the delight. And you, when you stand anxiously concerned for your own sins, how can you but shudder at making mention of others' faults? How can you implore pardon of God? For your own case is made worse on the terms of your imprecations against another, and you forbid Him to make allowance for your own faults.

Might He not say, If you would have Me so severe in exacting offenses against you, how can you expect Me to pardon your offenses against Me? Let us learn at last to be Christians! If we know not how to pray, which is a very simple and easy thing, what else shall we know? Let us learn to pray like Christians. Those are the prayers of Gentiles, the supplications of Jews. The Christian's are the reverse, for the forgiveness and forgetting of offenses against us. Being reviled, it is said, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. 1 Corinthians 4:12-13 Hear Stephen saying, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

Acts 6:60 Instead of praying against them, he prayed for them. You, instead of praying for them, utter imprecations against them. You then are wicked in the degree that he was excellent. Whom do we admire, tell me; those for whom he prayed, or him who prayed for them? Him certainly! And if we, much more than God. Would you have your enemy stricken? pray for him: yet not with such intention, not to strike him. That will indeed be the effect, but let it not be your object. That blessed martyr suffered all unjustly, yet he prayed for them: we suffer many things justly from our enemies.

And if he who suffered unjustly dared not forbear to pray for his enemies, what punishment do we deserve, who suffer justly, and yet do not pray for them, nay, pray against them? You think indeed that you are inflicting a blow upon another, but in truth you are thrusting the sword against yourself. You allow not the Judge to be lenient to your own offenses, by this way of urging Him to anger against others. For, with what measure you measure, He says, it shall be measured to you again; and with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged. Matthew 7:2 Let us therefore be disposed to pardon, that God may be so disposed towards us.

These things I wish you not only to hear, but to observe. For now the memory retains only the words, and perhaps hardly those. And after we are separated, if any one who was not present were to ask you, what had been our discourse, some could not tell: others would know merely the subject we had spoken of, and answer that there had been a Homily upon the subject of forgiving injuries, and praying for our enemies, but would omit all that had been said, as they could not remember: others remember a little, but still somewhat.

If therefore you gain nothing by what you hear, I entreat you not even to attend at the discourse. For of what use is it? The condemnation is greater, the punishment more severe, if after so many exhortations, we continue in the same course. For this reason God has given us a definite form of prayer, that we might ask for nothing human, nothing worldly. And you that are faithful know what you ought to pray for, how the whole Prayer is common. But one says, It is not commanded there to pray for unbelievers.

This you would not say, if you understood the force, the depth, the hidden treasure of that Prayer. Only unfold it, and you find this also comprised within it. For it is implied, when one says in prayer, Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Now, because in heaven there is no unbeliever nor offender; if therefore it was for the faithful alone, there would be no reason in that expression. If the faithful were to do the will of God and the unbelievers not to do it, His will were not done in earth as it is in heaven.

But it means; As there is none wicked in heaven, so let there be none on earth; but draw all men to the fear of You, make all men angels, even those who hate us, and are our enemies. Do you not see how God is daily blasphemed and mocked by believers and unbelievers, both in word and in deed? What then? Has He for this extinguished the sun? Or stayed the course of the moon? Has He crushed the heavens and uprooted the earth? Has He dried up the sea? Has He shut up the fountains of waters?

Or confounded the air? Nay, on the contrary, He makes His sun to rise, His rain to descend, gives the fruits of the earth in their seasons, and thus supplies yearly nourishment to the blasphemers, to the insensible, to the polluted, to persecutors; not for one day or two, but for their whole life. Imitate Him then, emulate Him as far as human powers admit. Can you not make the sun arise? Abstain from evil speaking. Can you not send rain? Forbear reviling. Can you not give food?

Refrain from insolence. Such gifts from you are sufficient. The goodness of God to His enemies is shown by His works. Do thou so at least by words: pray for your enemies, so will you be like your Father who is in heaven. How many times have we discoursed upon this subject! nor shall we cease to discourse; only let something come of it. It is not that we are drowsy, and weary of speaking; only do not you that hear be annoyed. Now a person seems to be annoyed, when he will not do what one says.

For he who practices, loves often to hear the same thing, and is not annoyed by it; for it is his own commendation. But annoyance arises simply from not doing what is prescribed. Hence the speaker is troublesome. If a man practices almsgiving, and hears another speak of almsgiving, he is not wearied, but pleased, for he hears his own good actions recommended and proclaimed. So that when we are displeased at hearing a discourse upon the forgiveness of injuries, it is because we have no interest in forbearance, it is not practiced by us; for if we had the reality, we should not be pained at its being named.

If therefore you would not have us wearisome or annoying, practice as we preach, exhibit in your actions the subject of our discourses. For we shall never cease discoursing upon these things till your conduct is agreeable to them. And this we do more especially from our concern and affection for you. For the trumpeter must sound his trumpet, though no one should go out to war; he must fulfill his part. We do it, not as wishing to bring heavier condemnation upon you, but to avert it from ourselves.

And besides this, love for you constrains us, for it would tear and torture our hearts if that should befall you, which God avert! It is not any costly process that we recommend to you: it does not require the spoiling of goods, nor a long and toilsome journey. It is only to will. It is a word, it is a purpose of the mind. Let us only set a guard on our tongues, a door and a bar upon our lips, that we may utter nothing offensive to God. It is for our own advantage, not for theirs for whom we pray, to act thus.

For let us ever consider, that he who blesses his enemy, blesses himself, he who curses his enemy, curses himself, and he who prays for his enemy, prays not for him, but for himself. If we thus act, we shall be able to reduce to practice this excellent virtue, and so to obtain the promised blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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