

# 2 Corinthians 10:7

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon calls for humility, self-reflection, and immediate repentance in the pursuit of true faith in Christ.*

**Topics:** "Humility And Pride", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of humility and prudence in self-exaltation, as seen in Paul's approach in his Epistles. Paul rebukes those who are easily deceived by outward appearances and challenges them to consider their true allegiance to Christ. He highlights the need for self-reflection and not boasting beyond one's measure, attributing all authority and accomplishments to the Lord. Chrysostom urges the congregation to repent and turn to the Lord, warning against the dangers of delaying reconciliation and the uncertainty of life, emphasizing the need to prioritize spiritual growth and virtue over worldly pleasures.

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## Transcript

You look at the things that are before your face. If any man trusts in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself that even as he is Christ's, so also are we.

What one may especially admire in Paul among other things is this, that when he has fallen upon an urgent necessity for exalting himself, he manages both to accomplish this point, and also not to appear offensive to the many on account of this egotism; a thing we may see particularly in his Epistle to the Galatians. For having there fallen upon such an argument, he provides for both these points; a matter of the very utmost difficulty and demanding much prudence; he is at once modest and says somewhat great of himself. And observe how in this place also he makes it of great account, You look at the things that are before your face. Behold here also prudence. For having rebuked those that deceived them, he confined not his remarks to them, but he leaps away from them to these too; and he does so constantly. For, in truth, he scourges not those only that lead astray, but the deceived also. For had he let even them go without calling them to an account, they would not so easily have been reformed by what was said to the others; but would have been greatly elated even, as not being amenable to accusations. Therefore he scourges them also. And this is not all that is to be admired in him, but this farther, that he rebukes either party in a manner suitable to each. Hear at least what he says to these, You look at the things that are before your face. The accusation is no light one; but a mark of men exceedingly easy to be deceived. Now what he says is this, 'you test by what appear, by things carnal, by things bodily.' What is meant by 'what appear?' If one is rich, if one is puffed up, if one is surrounded by many flatterers, if one says great things

of himself, if one is vain-glorious, if one makes a pretence of virtue without having virtue, for this is the meaning of, you look at the things that are before your face.

If any man trust in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that even as he is Christ's, even so also are we. For he does not wish to be vehement at the beginning, but he increases and draws to a head little by little. But observe here how much harshness and covert meaning there is. He shows this by using the words with himself. For he says, 'Let him not wait to learn this from us; that is, by our rebuke of himself,' but let him consider this with himself, that even as he is Christ's, so also are we; not that he was Christ's in such manner as the other was, but, that even as he is Christ's, so also am I Christ's. Thus far the community holds good: for it is not surely the case that he indeed is Christ's, but I some other's. Then having laid down this equality between them, he goes on to add wherein he exceeded, saying,

2 Corinthians 10:8

For though I should glory somewhat abundantly concerning our authority which the Lord gave for building you up, and not for casting you down, I shall not be put to shame.

For since he was going to say somewhat great, observe how he softens it. For nothing does so offend the majority of hearers as for any one to praise himself. Wherefore to cut at the root of this offensiveness, he says, For though I should glory somewhat abundantly. And he did not say, 'if any man trust that he is Christ's let him think that he is far short of us. For I possess much authority from Him, so as to punish and to kill whomsoever I choose;' but what? For though I should glory even somewhat abundantly. And yet he possessed more than can be told, but nevertheless he lowers it in his way of speaking. And he said not, 'I glory,' but, if I should glory, if I should choose to do so: at once both showing modesty, and declaring his superiority. If therefore he says, I should glory concerning the authority which the Lord gave me. Again, he ascribes the whole to Him, and makes the gift common. For building up, and not for casting down. Do you see how again he allays the envy his praises might give rise to, and draws the hearer over to himself by mentioning the use for which he received it? Then why does he say, Casting down imaginations? Because this is itself a special form of building up, the removing of hindrances, and detecting the unsound, and laying the true together in the building. For this end therefore we received it, that we might build up. But if any should spar and battle with us, and be incurable, we will use that other power also, destroying and overthrowing him. Wherefore also he says, I shall not be put to shame, that is, I shall not be proved a liar or a boaster.

2 Corinthians 10:9-11

2. But that I may not seem as if I would terrify you: for his letters, say they, are weighty and strong: but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account. Let such a one reckon this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such are we also in deed when we are present.

What he says is this: 'I could boast indeed, but that they may not say the same things again, to wit, that I boast in my letters, and am contemptible when present, I will say nothing great.' And yet afterwards he did say something great, but not about this power by which he was formidable, but about revelations and at greater lengths about trials. 'Therefore, that I may not seem to be terrifying you, let such an one reckon this, that what we are by letters when we are absent, such are we also in deed when we are present.' For since they said, 'he writes great things of himself, but when he is present he is worthy of no consideration,' therefore he says these things, and those again in a moderated form. For he did not say, 'as we write

great things, so when we are present we also do great things,' but in more subdued phrase. For when he addressed himself to the others indeed, he stated it with vehemency, saying, I beseech you that I may not when present show courage with the confidence wherewith I think to be bold against some: but when to these, he is more subdued. And therefore he says, 'what we are when present, such too when absent, that is, lowly, modest, no where boasting. And it is plain from what follows,

2 Corinthians 10:12

For we are not bold to number, or compare in ourselves with some that commend themselves.

Here he both shows that those false Apostles are boasters and say great things of themselves: and ridicules them as commending themselves. 'But we do no such thing: but even if we shall do any thing great, we refer all unto God, and compare ourselves with one another.' Wherefore also he added,

But they themselves measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are without understanding. Now what he says is this: 'we do not compare ourselves with them, but with one another.' For further on he says, in nothing am I behind the very chiefest Apostles; 2 Corinthians 12:11 and in the former Epistle, I labored more abundantly than they all; 1 Corinthians 15:10 and again, Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience. 2 Corinthians 12:12 'So that we compare ourselves with ourselves, not with those that have nothing: for such arrogance comes of folly.' Either then he says this with reference to himself, or with reference to them, that 'we dare not compare ourselves with those who contend with one another and boast great things and do not understand:' that is, do not perceive how ridiculous they are in being thus arrogant, and in exalting themselves among one another.

2 Corinthians 10:13

But we will not glory beyond our measure: as they do.

For it is probable that in their boasting they said, 'we have converted the world, we have reached unto the ends of the earth,' and vented many other such like big words. 'But not so we,' he says,

But according to the measure of the province which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even unto you. So that his humility is evident on either hand, both in that he boasted nothing more than he had wrought, and that he refers even this itself to God. For, according to the measure of the province, says he, which God apportioned to us, a measure to reach even unto you. Just as if portioning out a vine to husbandmen, even so He meted out unto us. As far then as we have been counted worthy to attain to, so far we boast.

2 Corinthians 10:14

For we stretch not ourselves overmuch, as though we reached not unto you: for we came even as far as unto you in preaching the Gospel of Christ.

Not simply 'we came,' but, 'we announced, we preached, we persuaded, we succeeded.' For it is probable that they having merely come to the disciples of the Apostles, ascribed the whole to themselves, from their bare presence among them. 'But not so we: nor can any one say that we were not able to come as far as to you, and that we stretched our boasting as far as to you in words only; for we also preached the word to you.'

## 2 Corinthians 10:15-16

3. Not glorying beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope that as your faith grows, we shall be magnified in you according to our province unto further abundance, so as to preach the Gospel even unto the parts beyond you, and not to glory in another's province in regard of things ready to our hand.

He sets forth a large accusation of them on these grounds, both that they boasted of things without their measure, and of other men's labors; and that while the whole of the toil was the Apostles', they plumed themselves upon their labors. 'But we,' says he, 'showed these things in our deeds. We will not imitate those men therefore, but will say such things where our deeds bear us witness. And why,' says he, 'do I say, you?' for I have hope that as your faith grows; for he does not assert absolutely, preserving his own character, but, 'I hope,' he says, 'if you make progress, that our province will be extended even farther, to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond. For we shall advance farther yet,' he says, 'so as to preach and labor, not so as to boast in words of what other men have labored.' And well did he call it province and measure, as though he had come into possession of the world, and a rich inheritance; and showing that the whole was wholly God's. 'Having then such works,' he says, 'and expecting greater, we do not boast as they do who have nothing, nor do we ascribe any part to ourselves, but the whole to God. Wherefore also he adds,

## 2 Corinthians 10:17

He that glories, let him glory in the Lord. This also, he says, accrues to us from God.

## 2 Corinthians 10:18

For not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

He did not say, we are so, but whom the Lord commends. Do you see how modestly he speaks? But if as he proceeds he stirs up loftier words, wonder not, for this also comes of Paul's prudence. For if he had gone on in every part to speak lowly words, he would not have hit these men so effectually, nor have extricated the disciples from their error. For it is possible both by modesty ill-timed to do harm, and by saying something admirable of one's self at a proper time to do good. As therefore he also did. For there was no little danger in the disciples being persuaded into any mean opinion of Paul. Not that Paul sought the glory that comes of men. For had he sought this, he would not have kept silence so long on those great and marvellous matters of fourteen years ago; 2 Corinthians 12:20 nor would he, when necessity was laid upon him, have so shrunk back and hesitated to speak of them; very evidently he would not even then have spoken, had he not been compelled. Certainly then it was not from a desire after the glory which comes from men that he said these things, but out of tender care for the disciples. For since they cast reproaches at him as a braggart, and as boastful in words but able to show nothing in deeds, he is compelled subsequently to come to those revelations. Although he had it in his power to convince them by his deeds, at the time when he said these things: yet he still persists, nevertheless, in using menaces in words. For he was most especially free from vain-glory; and this his whole life proves, both before and after this. For instance, it was because of this that he changed all at once; and having changed, confounded the Jews and cast away all that honor he had from them, although he was himself their head and their champion. But he considered none of those things when he had found the truth; but took instead their insults and contumely; for he looked to the salvation of the many, thinking this everything. For he that thinks nothing of hell nor of heaven nor of ten thousand worlds in regard of his longing after Christ, how

should he hunt after the glory which comes from the many? By no means; but he is even very lowly when he may be so, and brands his former life with infamy when he calls himself, a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. 1 Timothy 1:13 And his disciple Luke too says many things of him, evidently having learned them from himself, himself displaying fully his former life no less than that after his conversion.

4. Now I say these things, not that we may hear merely, but that we may learn also. For if he remembered those transgressions before the Laver, although they were all effaced, what forgiveness can we have who are unmindful of those after the Laver ourselves? What do you say, O man? You have offended God, and do you forget? This is a second offense, a second enmity. Of what sins then do you ask forgiveness? Of those which thou even know not yourself? Surely, (for is it not so?) you are deeply anxious and thoughtful how you may give account of them, thou who dost not so much as care to remember them, but sportest with what is no sporting matter.

But there will come a time when our sport can go on no longer. For we must needs die: (for the great insensibility of the many obliges me to speak even of things that are evident:) and must needs rise again, and be judged, and be punished; nay rather this needs not, if we choose. For those other things are not at our own disposal; neither our end, nor our resurrection, nor our judgment, but at our Lord's; but our suffering punishment or not is at our own disposal; for this is of those things that may or may not happen.

But if we choose, we shall make it of the number of impossible things; just as Paul, as Peter, as all the saints did; for it is even impossible for them to be punished. If therefore we have a mind, it is in like manner impossible also that we should suffer ought. For even if we have offended in ten thousand things, it is possible to recover ourselves so long as we are here. Let us then recover ourselves: and let the old man consider that in a little while hence he will depart, since he took his pleasure long enough in his lifetime; (although what sort of pleasure is this, to live in wickedness?)

But for the present I so speak in respect to his way of thinking;) let him consider, besides, that it is possible for him in a short time to wash away all. The young man again, let him also consider the uncertainty of death, and that oftentimes, when many older persons continued here, the young were carried off before them. For, for this reason, that we may not make traffic of our death, it is left in uncertainty. Wherefore also a certain wise man advises, saying, Make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for you know not what tomorrow shall bring forth.

Sirach 5:7; Proverbs 27:1 For by putting off there is danger and fear; but by not putting off manifest and secure salvation. Hold fast then by virtue. For so, even if you have departed young, you have departed in safety; and if you should come to old age, you shall arrive [at death] with great provision made, and shall have a double feast all your life long; both in that you abstain from vice, and layest hold on virtue. Say not, 'there will come a time when it may be well to turn,' for this language provokes God exceedingly.

And why so? Because He has promised you countless ages, but you are not even willing to labor during this present life, this short life that endures but a season; but art so indolent and unmanly as to seek a shorter even than this. Are there not the same revellings daily? Are there not the same tables, the same harlots, the same theatres, the same wealth? How long will you love those things as though they were anything? How long will your appetite for evil remain insatiate? Consider that as often as you have fornicated, so often have you condemned yourself.

For such is the nature of sin: once committed, the Judge has also passed his sentence. Have you been drunken, been gluttonous, or robbed? Hold now, turn right back, acknowledge it to God as a mercy that He snatched you not away in the midst of your sins; seek not yet another set time wherein to work evil. Many have been snatched away in the midst of their covetousness, and have departed to manifest punishment. Fear lest you also should suffer this, and without excuse. 'But God gave to many a set time for confession in extreme old age.'

What then? Will He give it to you also? 'Perhaps He will,' says one. Why do you say 'perhaps,' and 'sometimes,' and 'often?' Consider that you are deliberating about your soul, and put also the contrary case, and calculate, and say, 'But what if He should not give it?' 'But what if He should give it?' says he. God has indeed given it; but still this supposition is safer and more profitable than that. For if you begin now, you have gained all, whether you have a set time granted you or not; but if you are always putting off, for this very cause perhaps you shall not have one given you.

When you go out to battle, thou dost not say, 'there is no need to make my will, perhaps I shall come back safe;' nor do you when deliberating about marriage, say 'suppose I take a poor wife, many have even in this way got rich contrary to expectation;' nor when building a house, 'suppose I lay a rotten foundation, many houses have stood even so;' yet in deliberating about the soul, you lean on things more rotten still; urging your 'perhaps,' and 'often,' and 'sometimes,' and trustest yourself to these uncertainties.

'Nay,' says one, 'not to an uncertainty, but to the mercy of God, for God is merciful.' I know it too; but still this merciful God snatched those away of whom I spoke. And what if after you have had time given you, you shall still continue as thou were? For this sort of man will be listless even in old age. 'Nay,' he said, 'not so.' For this mode of reasoning even after the eighty years desires ninety, and after the ninety an hundred, and after the hundred will be yet more indisposed to act.

And so the whole of life will have been consumed in vain, and what was spoken of the Jews will happen also to you; Their days were consumed in vanity. Psalm 78:33 And would that in vanity only, and not unto evil also. For when we have departed there bearing the heavy burden of our sins, this will be unto evil also. For we shall carry away fuel for the fire and a plentiful feast for the worm. Wherefore I pray and conjure you to halt at length in noble wise, and to desist from wickedness, that we may also obtain the promised good things: whereunto may we all attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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