

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the urgency of accepting God's grace and living a life worthy of the calling amidst trials and suffering.

Scripture: Matthew 5:11, 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, 2 Corinthians 6:10

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not receiving the grace of God in vain, urging believers to reconcile with God and not be complacent. He emphasizes the urgency of seizing the present time as the acceptable time and day of salvation, encouraging believers to work together with God and display zeal for His grace. Chrysostom highlights the paradoxical nature of Christian living, where believers may appear poor, sorrowful, unknown, and dying in the world's eyes, yet are rich, rejoicing, well-known, and alive in Christ. He challenges believers to find joy in suffering for Christ's sake, to value spiritual riches over material wealth, and to cultivate a mindset of heavenly philosophy and virtue.

Transcript

And working together with Him we intreat also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he says, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto you. And in a day of salvation did I succor you.

For since he said, God beseeches, and we are ambassadors and suppliants unto you, that you be reconciled unto God: lest they should become supine, he hereby again alarms and arouses them, saying: We intreat that you receive not the grace of God in vain. 'For let us not,' he says, 'therefore be at ease, because He beseeches and has sent some to be ambassadors; nay, but for this very reason let us make haste to please God and to collect spiritual merchandise;' as also he said above, The love of God constrains us, 2 Corinthians 5:14 that is presses, drives, urges us, 'that you may not after so much affectionate care, by being supine and exhibiting no nobleness, miss of such great blessings. Do not therefore because He has sent some to exhort you, deem that this will always be so. It will be so until His second coming; until then He beseeches, so long as we are here; but after that is judgment and punishment.' Therefore, he says, we are constrained.

For not only from the greatness of the blessings and His loving kindness, but also from the shortness of the time he urges them continually. Wherefore he says also elsewhere, For now is our salvation nearer. Romans 13:11 And again; The Lord is at hand. Philippians 4:5 But here he does something yet more. For not from the fact that the remainder of the time is short and little, but also from its being the only season

available, for salvation, he incited them.

For, Behold, he says, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Let us therefore not let slip the favorable opportunity but display a zeal worthy of the grace. For therefore is it that we also press forward, knowing both the shortness and the suitableness of the time. Wherefore also he said; And working together we intreat also. Working together with you; 'for we work together with you, rather than with God for Whom we are ambassadors. For He is in need of nothing, but the salvation all passes over to you.' But if it is even with God that he speaks of working together, he repudiates not even this [interpretation]; for he says in another place, we are God's fellow-workers: 1 Corinthians 3:9 in this way, says he, to save men. Again, We entreat also. For he indeed, when beseeching, does not barely beseech, but sets forth these His just claims; namely, that He gave His Son, the Righteous One that did not so much as know sin, and made Him to be sin for us sinners, that we might become righteous: which claims having, and being God, He displayed such goodness. But what we beseech is that you would receive the benefit and not reject the gift. Be persuaded therefore by us, and receive not the grace in vain. For lest they should think that this of itself is reconciliation, believing on Him that calls; he adds these words, requiting that earnestness which respects the life. For, for one who has been freed from sins and made a friend to wallow in the former things, is to return again unto enmity, and to receive the grace in vain, in respect of the life. For from the grace we reap no benefit towards salvation, if we live impurely; nay, we are even harmed, having this greater aggravation even of our sins, in that after such knowledge and such a gift we have gone back to our former vices. This however he does not mention as yet: that he may not make his work harsh, but says only that we reap no benefit. Then he also reminds of a prophecy, urging and compelling them to bestir themselves in order to lay hold of their own salvation.

For, says he, He says,

At an acceptable time I hearkened unto you,

And in a day of salvation did I succor you:

behold, now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation.

The acceptable time. What is this? That of the Gift, that of the Grace, when it is appointed not that an account should be required of our sins nor penalty exacted; but besides being delivered, that we should also enjoy ten thousand goods, righteousness, sanctification, and all the rest. For how much toil would it have behooved us to undergo in order to obtain this time! But, behold, without our toiling at all it has come, bringing remission of all that was before. Wherefore also He calls it acceptable, because He both accepted those that had transgressed in ten thousand things, and not acceded merely, but advanced them to the highest honor; just as when a monarch arrives, it is a time not for judgment, but for grace and pardon. Wherefore also He calls it acceptable. Whilst then we are yet in the lists, while we are at work in the vineyard, while the eleventh hour is left [us], let us draw near and show forth life; for it is also easy. For he that strives for the mastery at such a time, when so great a gift has been shed forth, when so great grace, will early obtain the prizes. For in the case of monarchs here below also, at the time of their festivals, and when they appear in the dress of Consuls, he who brings a small offering receives large gifts; but on the days in which they sit in judgment, much strictness, much sifting is requisite. Let us too therefore strive for the mastery in the time of this gift. It is a day of grace, of grace divine; wherefore with ease even we shall obtain the crown. For if when laden with so great evils He both received and delivered us: when delivered from all and contributing our part, shall He not rather accept us?

2. Then, as it is his constant wont, namely, to place himself before them and bid them hence to take their example, so he does in this place also. Wherefore also he adds,

2 Corinthians 6:3

Giving no occasion of stumbling, that our ministration be not blamed, persuading them not from considering the time only, but also those that had successfully labored with them. And behold with what absence of pride. For he said not, 'Look at us how we are such and such,' but, for the present, it is only to do away accusation that he relates his own conduct. And he mentions two chief points of a blameless life, none in any thing. And he said not 'accusation,' but, what was far less, occasion of stumbling; that is, giving ground against us to none for censure, for condemnation, that our ministration be not blamed; that is, that none may take hold of it. And again, he said not, 'that it be not accused,' but that it may not have the least fault, nor any one have it in his power to animadvert upon it in any particular.

2 Corinthians 6:4

But in every thing commending ourselves as ministers of God.

This is far greater. For it is not the same thing to be free from accusation; and to exhibit such a character as in everything to appear ministers of God. For neither is it the same thing to be quit of accusation, and to be covered with praises. And he said not appearing, but commending, that is 'proving.' Then he mentions also whence they became such. Whence then was it? In much patience, he says, laying the foundation of those good things. Wherefore he said not barely patience, but much, and he shows also how great it was. For to bear some one or two things is no great matter. But he adds even snow storms of trials in the words, In afflictions, in necessities. This is a heightening of affliction, when the evils are unavoidable, and there lies upon one as it were a necessity hardly extricable of misfortune. In distresses. Either he means those of hunger and of other necessities, or else simply those of their trials.

2 Corinthians 6:5-6

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tossings to and fro.

Yet every one of these by itself was intolerable, the being scourged only, and being bound only, and being unable through persecution to remain fixed any where, (for this is in 'tossings to and fro,') but when both all, and all at once, assail, consider what a soul they need. Then along with the things from without, he mentions those imposed by himself.

In labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness.

But by pureness here, he means either chasteness again, or general purity, or incorruptness, or even his preaching the Gospel freely.

In knowledge. What is in knowledge? In wisdom such as is given from God; that which is truly knowledge; not as those that seem to be wise and boast of their acquaintance with the heathen discipline, but are deficient in this.

In long-suffering, in kindness. For this also is a great note of a noble soul, though exasperated and goaded on every side, to bear all with long-suffering. Then to show whence he became such, he added;

In the Holy Ghost. 'For in Him,' he says, 'we do all these good works.' But observe when it is that he has mentioned the aid of the Holy Ghost. After he had set forth what was from himself. Moreover, he seems to me to say another thing herein. What then is this? Namely, 'we have both been filled with abundance of the Spirit and hereby also give a proof of our Apostleship in that we have been counted worthy of spiritual gifts.' For if this be grace also, yet still he himself was the cause who by his good works and his toils attracted that grace. And if any should assert that besides what has been said, he shows that in his use of the gifts of the Spirit also he gave none offense; he would not miss of his meaning. For they who received the [gift of] tongues among them and were lifted up, were blamed. For it is possible for one even in receiving a gift of the Spirit, not to use it aright. 'But not so we,' he says, 'but in the Spirit also, that is, in the gifts also, we have been blameless.'

In love unfeigned. This was the cause of all those good things; this made him what he was; this caused the Spirit also to abide with him, by Whose aid also all things were rightly done of him.

2 Corinthians 6:7

In the word of truth.

A thing he says in many places, that 'we continued neither to handle the word of God deceitfully nor to adulterate it.'

In the power of God. That which he always does ascribing nothing to himself but the whole to God, and imputing whatsoever he has done aright to Him, this he has done here also. For since he uttered great things, and affirmed that he had manifested in all things an irreproachable life and exalted wisdom, he ascribes this to the Spirit and to God. For neither were those commonplace things which he had said. For if it be a difficult thing even for one who lives in quiet to do aright and be irreproachable, consider him who was harassed by so great temptations, and yet shone forth through all, what a spirit he was of! And yet he underwent not these alone, but even far more than these, as he mentions next. And what is indeed marvelous is, not that he was irreproachable though sailing in such mighty waves, nor that he endured all nobly, but all with pleasure even. Which things, all, he makes clear to us by the next words, saying,

By the armor of righteousness on the right and the left.

3. Do you see his self-possession of soul and well-strung spirit? For he shows that afflictions are arms not only which strike not down, but do even fortify and make stronger. And he calls those things 'left,' which seem to be painful; for such those are which bring with them the reward. Wherefore then does he call them thus? Either in conformity with the conception of the generality, or because God commanded us to pray that we enter not into temptation.

2 Corinthians 6:8

By glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report.

What saying thou? That you enjoy honor, and setting down this as a great thing? 'Yes,' he says. Why, forsooth? For to bear dishonor indeed is a great thing, but to partake of honor requires not a vigorous soul. Nay, it needs a vigorous and exceeding great soul, that he who enjoys it may not be thrown and break his neck. Wherefore he glories in this as well as in that, for he shone equally in both. But how is it a weapon of righteousness? Because that the teachers are held in honor induces many unto godliness. And besides, this is a proof of good works, and this glorifies God. And this is, further, an instance of the wise contrivance

of God, that by things which are opposite He brings in the Preaching. For consider. Was Paul bound? This too was on behalf of the Gospel. For, says he, the things which happened unto me have fallen out unto the progress of the Gospel; so that most of the brethren, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12-14 Again, did he enjoy honor? This too again rendered them more forward. By evil report and good report. For not only did he bear those things nobly which happen to the body, the 'afflictions,' and whatever he enumerated, but those also which touch the soul; for neither are these wont to disturb slightly. Jeremiah at least having borne many temptations, gave in upon these, and when he was reproached, said, I will not prophesy, neither will I name the Name of the Lord. Jeremiah 20:9 And David too many places complains of reproach. Isaiah also, after many things, exhorts concerning this, saying, Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye overcome by their reviling. Isaiah 51:7. Septuagint And again, Christ also to His disciples; When they shall speak all manner of evil against you falsely, rejoice and be exceeding glad, Matthew 5:11-12 He says, for great is your reward in heaven. Elsewhere too He says, And leap for joy. Luke 6:23 But He would not have made the reward so great, had not the contest been a great one. For in tortures the body also shares the anguish with the soul; for the pain is both of the body and of the soul; but here it is of the soul alone. Many at any rate have fallen by these alone, and have lost their own souls. And to Job also the reproaches of his friends appeared more grievous than the worms and the sores. For there is nothing, there is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul. Wherefore along with the perils and the toils he names these also, saying, By glory and dishonor. At any rate, many of the Jews also on account of glory derived from the many would not believe. For they feared, not lest they should be punished, but lest they should be put out of the synagogue. Wherefore He says, How can you believe which receive glory one of another? John 5:44 And we may see numbers who have indeed despised all dangers, but have been worsted by glory.

4. As deceivers, and yet true.

This is, by evil report and good report.

2 Corinthians 6:9

As unknown, and yet well known. This is, by glory and dishonor. For by some they were well known and much sought after, while others designed not to know them at all.

As dying, and behold, we live.

As under sentence of death and condemned; which was itself also matter of dishonor. But this he said, to show both the unspeakable power of God and their own patience. For so far as those who plotted against us were concerned, we died; and this is what all suppose; but by God's aid we escaped the dangers. Then to manifest also on what account God permits these things, he added, As chastened, and not killed.

Showing that the gain accruing to them from their temptations, even before the rewards, was great, and that their enemies against their will did them service.

2 Corinthians 6:10

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

For by those that are without, indeed, we are suspected of being in despair; but we give no heed to them; yea, we have our pleasure at the full. And he said not rejoicing only, but added also its perpetuity, for he

says always rejoicing. What then can come up to this life? Wherein, although dangers so great assault, the joy becomes greater.

As poor, yet making many rich.

Some indeed affirm that the spiritual riches are spoken of here; but I would say that the carnal are so too; for they were rich in these also, having, after a new kind of manner, the houses of all opened to them. And this too he signified by what follows, saying,

As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

And how can this be? Yea rather, how can the opposite be? For he that possesses many things has nothing; and he that has nothing possesses the goods of all. And not here only, but also in the other points, contraries were produced by their contraries. But if you marvel how it is possible for one that has nothing to have all things, let us bring forth this man himself into the midst, who commanded the world and was lord not only of their substance, but of their very eyes even. If possible, he says, ye would have plucked out your eyes, and have given them to me. Galatians 4:15

Now these things he says, to instruct us not to be disturbed at the opinions of the many, though they call us deceivers, though they know us not, though they count us condemned, and appointed unto death, to be in sorrow, to be in poverty, to have nothing, to be (us, who are in cheerfulness) desponding: because that the sun even is not clear to the blind, nor the pleasure of the sane intelligible to the mad. For the faithful only are right judges of these matters, and are not pleased and pained at the same things as other people. For if any one who knew nothing of the games were to see a boxer, having wounds upon him and wearing a crown; he would think him in pain on account of the wounds, not understanding the pleasure the crown would give him. And these therefore, because they know what we suffer but do not know for what we suffer them, naturally suspect that there is nought besides these; for they see indeed the wrestling and the dangers, but not the prizes and the crowns and the subject of the contest. What then were the all things which Paul possessed, when he said, As having nothing, and yet possessing all things? Things temporal, things spiritual. For he whom the cities received as an angel, for whom they would have plucked out their own eyes and have given them to him, Galatians 4:14-15 he for whom they laid down their own necks, how had he not all things that were theirs? Romans 16:4 But if you desire to see the spiritual also, you will find him in these things also especially rich. For he that was so dear to the King of all as even to share in unspeakable things with the Lord of the angels, 2 Corinthians 12:4 how was not he more opulent than all men, and had all things? Devils had not else been so subject to him, suffering and disease had not so fled away.

5. And let us therefore, when we suffer anything for Christ's sake, not merely bear it nobly but also rejoice. If we fast, let us leap for joy as if enjoying luxury; if we be insulted, let us dance as if praised; if we spend, let us feel as if gaining; if we bestow on the poor, let us count ourselves to receive: for he that gives not thus will not give readily. When then you have a mind to scatter abroad, look not at this only in almsgiving, but also in every kind of virtue, compute not alone the severity of the toils, but also the sweetness of the prizes; and before all the subjects of this wrestling, our Lord Jesus; and you will readily enter upon the contest, and will live the whole time in pleasure. For nothing is wont so to cause pleasure as a good conscience.

Therefore Paul indeed, though wounded every day, rejoiced and exulted; but the men of this day, although they endure not a shadow even of what he did, grieve and make lamentations from no other cause than

that they have not a mind full of heavenly philosophy. For, tell me, wherefore the lamentation? Because you are poor, and in want of necessities? Surely for this you ought rather to make lamentation, [not] because you weep, not because you are poor, but because you are mean-spirited; not because you have not money, but because you prize money so highly.

Paul died daily, yet wept not but even rejoiced; he fought with continual hunger, yet grieved not but even gloried in it. And do you, because you have not all the year's provisions stored up, grieve and beat yourself? 'Yes,' he replies, 'for he had to care only for his own needs, while I have besides to care for servants, and children, and wife.' Rather, he alone had not to care for his own needs, but for the whole world's. And thou indeed [hast to care] for one household, but he for those so many poor at Jerusalem, for those in Macedonia, for those everywhere in poverty, for those who give to them no less than for those who receive.

For his care for the world was of a twofold nature, both that they might not be destitute of necessities, and that they might be rich in spiritual things. And your famishing children distress not you so much as all the concerns of the faithful did him. Why do I say, of the faithful? For neither was he free from care for the unfaithful, but was so eaten up with it that he wished even to become accursed for their sakes; but thou, were a famine to rage ten thousand times over, would never choose to die for any whomsoever.

And you indeed care for one woman, but he for the Churches throughout the world. For he says, My anxiety for all the Churches. 2 Corinthians 11:28 How long then, O man, do you trifle, comparing yourself with Paul; and will not cease from this your much meanness of spirit? For it behooves to weep, not when we are in poverty but when we sin; for this is worthy of lamentations, as all the other things are of ridicule even. 'But,' he says, 'this is not all that grieves me; but that also such an one is in power, while I am unhonored and outcast.'

And what is this? For the blessed Paul too appeared to the many to be unhonored and an outcast. 'But,' says he, 'he was Paul.' Plainly then not the nature of the things, but your feebleness of spirit causes your desponding. Lament not therefore your poverty, but yourself who art so minded, yea rather, lament not yourself, but reform you; and seek not for money, but pursue that which makes men of more cheerful countenance than thousands of money, philosophy and virtue. For where indeed these are, there is no harm in poverty; and where these are not there is no good in money.

For tell me, what good is it when men are rich indeed, but have beggarly souls? Thou dost not bewail yourself, so much as that rich man himself, because he has not the wealth of all. And if he does not weep as you do, yet lay open his conscience, and you will see his wailings and lamentations.

Will you that I show you your own riches, that you may cease to count them happy that are rich in money? Do you see this heaven here, the sun, this bright and far shining star, and that gladdens our eyes, is not this too set out common to all? And do not all enjoy it equally, both poor and rich? And the wreath of the stars and the orb of the moon, are they not left equally to all? Yea, rather, if I must speak somewhat marvellous, we poor enjoy these more than they. For they indeed being for the most part steeped in drunkenness, and passing their time in revellings and deep sleep, do not even perceive these things, being always under cover and reared in the shade : but the poor do more than any enjoy the luxury of these elements. And further, if you will look into the air which is every where diffused, you will see the poor man enjoying it in greater both freshness and abundance. For wayfarers and husbandmen enjoy these luxuries more than the inhabitants of the city; and again, of those same inhabitants of the city, the

handicraftsmen more than those who are drunken all the day. What too of the earth, is not this left common to all? 'No,' he says. How do you say so? Tell me. 'Because the rich man, even in the city, having gotten himself several plethra, raises up long fences round them; and in the country cuts off for himself many portions.' What then? When he cuts them off, does he alone enjoy them? By no means, though he should contend for it ever so earnestly. For the produce he is compelled to distribute among all, and for you he cultivates grain, and wine, and oil, and every where ministers unto you. And those long fences and buildings, after his untold expense and his toils and drudgery he is preparing for your use, receiving from you only a small piece of silver for so great a service. And in baths and every where, one may see the same thing obtaining; the rich of it all with perfect ease. And his enjoyment of the earth is no more than yours; for sure he fills not ten stomachs, and thou only one. 'But he partakes of costlier meats?' Truly, this is no mighty superiority; howbeit, even here, we shall find you to have the advantage. For this costliness is therefore thought by you a matter of envy because the pleasure with it is greater. Yet this is greater in the poor man's case; yet not pleasure only, but health also; and in this alone is the advantage with the rich, that he makes his constitution feebler and collects more abundant fountains of disease. For the poor man's diet is all ordered according to nature, but his through its excess results in corruption and disease.

6. But if you will, let us also look at this same thing in an example. For if it were requisite to light a furnace, and then one man were to throw in silken garments and fine linens, many and numberless, and so kindle it; and another logs of oak and pine, what advantage would this man have over that? None, but even disadvantage. But what? (for there is nothing to prevent our turning the same illustration round after another manner,) if one were to throw in logs, and another were to light his fire under bodies, by which furnace would you like to stand, that with the logs, or that with the bodies?

Very plainly that with the logs. For that burns naturally and is a pleasant spectacle to the beholders: while this with the steam, and juices, and smoke, and the stench of the bones would drive every one away. Did you shudder at the hearing, and loathe that furnace? Like it are the bellies of the rich. For in them one would find more rottenness than in that furnace, and stinking vapors, and filthy humors, because that, all over in every part, indigestion abounds in consequence of their surfeiting.

For the natural heat not sufficing for the digestion of the whole but being smothered under them, they lie smoking above, and the unpleasantness produced is great. To what then should one compare those stomachs of theirs? Yet do not be offended at what I say, but if I do not say true things, refute me. To what then should one compare them? For even what has been said is not enough to show their wretched plight. I have found another resemblance yet. What then is it? As in the sewers where there is accumulation of refuse, of dung, hay, stubble, stones, clay, frequent stoppages occur; and then the stream of filth overflows at top: so also it happens with the stomachs of those people.

For these being stopped up below, the greater part of these villainous streams spurts up above. But not so with the poor, but like those fountains which well forth pure streams, and water gardens and pleasure grounds, so also are their stomachs pure from such-like superfluities. But not such are the stomachs of the rich, or rather of the luxurious; but they are filled with humors, phlegm, bile, corrupted blood, putrid rheums, and other suchlike matters. Wherefore no one, if he lives always in luxury, can bear it even for a short time; but his life will be spent in continual sicknesses.

Wherefore I would gladly ask them, for what end are meats given? That we may be destroyed, or be nourished? That we may be diseased, or be strong? That we may be healthful, or be sickly? Very plainly, for nourishment, creating unto the body disease and sickness? But not so the poor man; on the contrary,

by his plain diet he purchases to himself health, and vigor, and strength. Weep not then on account of poverty, the mother of health, but even exult in it; and if you would be rich, despise riches.

For this, not the having money but the not wanting to have it, is truly affluence. If we can achieve this, we shall both be here more affluent than all that are rich, and there shall obtain the good things to come, whereunto may all we attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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