

2 Corinthians 7:2-4

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 2 Corinthians 7:2-4 emphasizes the importance of love, mutual support, and the necessity of correction within the Christian community.

Topics: "Christian Love", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of genuine love and compassion in relationships, urging the Corinthians to open their hearts and make room for him and his fellow workers. He reassures them of their place in his heart, expressing a willingness to die and live together with them. Chrysostom addresses accusations made against him and his companions, asserting their integrity and highlighting their commitment to not wrong, corrupt, or defraud anyone. He encourages the Corinthians to show true repentance and to support each other in love and virtue, emphasizing the need for sincere reformation and the role of discipline in spiritual healing.

Transcript

Open your hearts to us: we wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man. I say it not to condemn you; for I have said before, [as I have also declared above] , that you are in our hearts to die together and live together.

Again he raises the discourse about love, mitigating the harshness of his rebuke. For since he had convicted and reproached them as being beloved indeed, yet not loving in an equal degree, but breaking away from his love and mixing up with other pestilent fellows; again he softens the vehemence of his rebuke, saying, Make room for us, that is, love us; and prays to receive a favor involving no burden, and advantaging them that confer above them that receive it. And he said not, 'love,' but with a stronger appeal to their pity , make room for. 'Who expelled us?' says he: 'Who cast us out of your hearts? How come we to be straitened in you?' for since he said above, You are straitened in your affections; here declaring it more clearly, he said, make room for us: in this way also again winning them to himself. For nothing does so produce love as for the beloved to know that he that loves him exceedingly desires his love.

We wronged no man. See how again he does not mention the benefits [done by him], but frames his speech in another way, so as to be both less offensive and more cutting. And at the same time he also alludes to the false apostles, saying, We wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we defrauded no man.

What is we corrupted? That is, we beguiled no man; as he says elsewhere also. Lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, so your minds should be corrupted. 2 Corinthians 11:3

We defrauded no man; we plundered, plotted against no man. And he for the present forbears to say, 'we benefited you in such and such ways;' but framing his language so as more to shame them, We wronged no man, he says; as much as saying, 'Even had we in no wise benefited you, not even so ought ye to turn away from us; for you have nothing to lay to our charge, either small or great.' Then, for he felt the heaviness of his rebuke, he tempers it again. And he was neither silent altogether, for so he would not have aroused them; nor yet did he let the harshness of his language go unmodified, for so he would have wounded them too much. And what says he?

2 Corinthians 7:3. I say it not to condemn you.

How is this evident? For I have said before, he adds, that you are in our hearts to die and live with you. This is the greatest affection, when even though treated with contempt, he chooses both to die and live with them. 'For neither are you merely in our hearts,' he says, 'but in such sort as I said. For it is possible both to love and to shun dangers, but we do not thus.' And behold here also wisdom unspeakable. For he spoke not of what had been done for them, that he might not seem to be again reproaching them, but he promises for the future. 'For should it chance,' says he, 'that danger should invade, for your sakes I am ready to suffer every thing; and neither death nor life seems anything to me in itself, but in whichever ye be, that is to me more desirable, both death than life and life than death.' Howbeit, dying indeed is manifestly a proof of love; but living, who is there that would not choose, even of those who are not friends? Why then does the Apostle mention it as something great? Because it is even exceeding great. For numbers indeed sympathize with their friends when they are in misfortune, but when they are in honor rejoice not with, but envy, them. 'But not so we; but whether ye be in calamity, we are not afraid to share your ill fortune; or whether ye be prosperous, we are not wounded with envy.'

2. Then after he had continually repeated these things, saying, You are not straitened in us; and, You are straitened in your own affections; and, make room for us; and, Be also enlarged; and, We wronged no man; and all these things seemed to be a condemnation of them: observe how he also in another manner alleviates this severity by saying, Great is my boldness of speech towards you. 'Therefore I venture upon such things,' he says, 'not to condemn you by what I say, but out of my great boldness of speech,' which also farther signifying, he said, Great is my glorying on your behalf.

'For think not indeed,' he says, 'that because I thus speak, I speak as though I had condemned you altogether; (for I am exceedingly proud of, and glory in, you;) but both out of tender concern and a desire that you should make greater increase unto virtue.' And so he said to the Hebrews also after much rebuke; But we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak: and we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence to the fullness of hope even to the end.

Hebrews 6:9-11 So indeed here also, Great is my glorying on your behalf. 'We glory to others of you,' he says. Do you see what genuine comfort he has given? 'And,' he says, 'I do not simply glory, but also, greatly.' Accordingly he added these words; I am filled with comfort. What comfort? 'That coming from you; because that you, having been reformed, comforted me by your conduct.' This is the test of one that loves, both to complain of not being loved and to fear lest he should inflict pain by complaining immoderately.

Therefore he says, I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy. 'But these expressions,' says one, 'seem to contradict the former.' They do not do so, however, but are even exceedingly in harmony with them. For

these procure for the former a favorable reception; and the praise which they convey makes the benefit of those rebukes more genuine, by quietly abstracting what was painful in them. Wherefore he uses these expressions, but with great genuineness and earnestness. For he did not say, 'I am filled with joy;' but, I abound; or rather, not abound either, but superabound; in this way also again showing his yearning, that even though he be so loved as to rejoice and exult, he does not yet think himself loved as he ought to be loved, nor to have received full payment; so insatiable was he out of his exceeding love of them.

For the joy it brings to be loved in any degree by those one passionately loves, is great by reason of our loving them exceedingly. So that this again was a proof of his affection. And of the comfort indeed, he says, I am filled; 'I have received what was owing to me;' but of the joy, I superabound; that is, 'I was desponding about you; but you have sufficiently excused yourselves and supplied comfort: for you have not only removed the ground of my sorrow, but have even increased joy.'

Then showing its greatness, he not only declares it by saying, I superabound in joy, but also by adding, in all our affliction. 'For so great was the delight arising to us on your account that it was not even dimmed by so great tribulation, but through the excess of its own greatness it overcame the sorrows that had hold of us, and suffered us not to feel the sense of them.'

2 Corinthians 7:5

For even when we had come into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief.

For since he said, our tribulation; he both explains of what sort it was, and magnifies it by his words, in order to show that the consolation and joys received from them was great, seeing it had repelled so great a sorrow. But we were afflicted on every side.

How on every side? For without were fightings, from the unbelievers; within were fears; because of the weak among the believers, lest they should be drawn aside. For not among the Corinthians only did these things happen, but elsewhere also.

2 Corinthians 7:6-7

Nevertheless He that comforts the lowly comforted us by the coming of Titus.

For since he had testified great things of them in what he said, that he may not seem to be flattering them he cites as witness Titus the brother, who had come from them to Paul after the first Epistle to declare unto him the particulars of their amendment. But consider, I pray you, how in every place he makes a great matter of the coming of Titus. For he says also before, Furthermore when I came to Troas for the Gospel, I had no relief for my spirit because I found not Titus my brother; c. ii. 12, 13 and in this place again we were comforted, he says, by the coming of Titus. For he is desirous also of establishing the man in their confidence and of making him exceedingly dear to them. And observe how he provides for both these things. For by saying on the one hand, I had no relief for my spirit, he shows the greatness of his virtue; and by saying on the other, that, in our tribulation his coming sufficed unto comfort; yet not by his coming only, but also by the comfort wherewith he was comforted in you, he endears the man unto the Corinthians. For nothing does so produce and cement friendships as the saying something sound and favorable of any one. And such he testifies Titus did; when he says that 'by his coming he has given us wings with pleasure; such things did he report of you. On this ground his coming made us glad. For we were delighted not only by his coming, but also for the comfort wherewith he was comforted in you. And

how was he comforted? By your virtue, by your good deeds.' Wherefore also he adds,

While he told us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me. 'These things made him glad,' he says, 'these things comforted him.' Do you see how he shows that he also is an earnest lover of theirs, seeing he considers their good report as a consolation to himself; and when he had come, gloried, as though on account of his own good things, unto Paul.

And observe with what warmth of expression he reports these things, Your longing, your mourning, your zeal. For it was likely that they would mourn and grieve why the blessed Paul was so much displeased, why he had kept away from them so long. And therefore he did not say simply tears, but mourning; nor desire, but longing; nor anger, but zeal; and again zeal toward him, which they displayed both about him that had committed fornication and about those who were accusing him. 'For,' says he, 'you were inflamed and blazed out on receiving my letters.' On these accounts he abounds in joy, on these accounts he is filled with consolation, because he made them feel. It seems to me, however, that these things are said not only to soften what has gone before, but also in encouragement of those who had acted in these things virtuously. For although I suppose that some were obnoxious to those former accusations and unworthy of these praises; nevertheless, he does not distinguish them, but makes both the praises and the accusations common, leaving it to the conscience of his hearers to select that which belongs to them. For so both the one would be void of offense, and the other lead them on to much fervor of mind.

4. Such also now should be the feelings of those who are reprehended; thus should they lament and mourn; thus yearn after their teachers; thus, more than fathers, seek them. For by those indeed living comes, but by these good living. Thus ought they to bear the rebukes of their fathers, thus to sympathize with their rulers on account of those that sin. For it does not rest all with them, but with you also. For if he that has sinned perceives that he was rebuked indeed by his father, but flattered by his brethren; he becomes more easy of mind.

But when the father rebukes, be thou too angry as well, whether as concerned for your brother or as joining in your father's indignation; only be the earnestness you show great; and mourn, not that he was rebuked, but that he sinned. But if I build up and thou pull down, what profit have we had but labor? Sirach 34:23 Yea, rather, your loss stops not here, but you bring also punishment on yourself. For he that hinders the wound from being healed is punished not less than he that inflicted it, but even more.

For it is not an equal offense to wound and to hinder that which is wounded from being healed; for this indeed necessarily genders death, but that not necessarily. Now I have spoken thus to you; that you may join in the anger of your rulers whenever they are indignant justly; that when you see any one rebuked, you may all shun him more than does the teacher. Let him that has offended fear you more than his rulers. For if he is afraid of his teacher only, he will readily sin: but if he have to dread so many eyes, so many tongues, he will be in greater safety.

For as, if we do not thus act, we shall suffer the extremest punishment; so, if we perform these things, we shall partake of the gain that accrues from his reformation. Thus then let us act; and if any one shall say, 'be humane towards your brother, this is a Christian's duty.' let him be taught, that he is humane who is angry [with him], not he who sets him at ease prematurely and allows him not even to come to a sense of his transgression. For which, tell me, pities the man in a fever and laboring under delirium, he that lays him on his bed, and binds him down, and keeps him from meats and drinks that are not fit for him; or he that allows him to glut himself with strong drink, and orders him to have his liberty, and to act in every respect

as one that is in health?

Does not this person even aggravate the distemper, the man that seems to act humanely, whereas the other amends it? Such truly ought our decision to be in this case also. For it is the part of humanity, not to humor the sick in every thing nor to flatter their unseasonable desires. No one so loved him that committed fornication among the Corinthians, as Paul who commands to deliver him to Satan; no one so hated him as they that applaud and court him; and the event showed it.

For they indeed both puffed him up and increased his inflammation; but [the Apostle] both lowered it and left him not until he brought him to perfect health. And they indeed added to the existing mischief, he eradicated even that which existed from the first. These laws, then, of humanity let us learn also. For if you see a horse hurrying down a precipice, you apply a bit and hold him in with violence and lash him frequently; although this is punishment, yet the punishment itself is the mother of safety.

Thus act also in the case of those that sin. Bind him that has transgressed until he have appeased God; let him not go loose, that he be not bound the faster by the anger of God. If I bind, God does not chain; if I bind not, the indissoluble chains await him. For if we judged ourselves, we should not be judged. 1 Corinthians 11:31 Think not, then, that thus to act comes of cruelty and inhumanity; nay, but of the highest gentleness and the most skillful leechcraft and of much tender care.

But, says one, they have been punished for a long time. How long? Tell me. A year, and two, and three years? Howbeit, I require not this, length of time, but amendment of soul. This then show, whether they have been pricked to the heart, whether they have reformed, and all is done: since if there be not this, there is no advantage in the time. For neither do we inquire whether the wound has been often bandaged, but whether the bandage has been of any service. If therefore it has been of service, although in a short time, let it be kept on no longer: but if it has done no service, even at the end of ten years, let it be still kept on: and let this fix the term of release, the good of him that is bound.

If we are thus careful both of ourselves and of others, and regard not honor and dishonor at the hands of men; but bearing in mind the punishment and the disgrace that is there, and above all the provoking of God, apply with energy the medicines of repentance: we shall both presently arrive at the perfect health, and shall obtain the good things to come; which may all we obtain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom, to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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