

2 Corinthians 7:8-9

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's letter to the Corinthians brings them to repentance and causes them to be careful and reformed, demonstrating the power of godly sorrow.

Scripture: Romans 13:1, 1 Corinthians 3:7, 2 Corinthians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10-12, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Godly Sorrow", "Church Discipline"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of godly sorrow leading to repentance and salvation, highlighting the difference between worldly sorrow and sorrow for sins. He emphasizes the need for correction and discipline in the Church, comparing the role of rulers in the Church to that of a father caring for his children. Chrysostom explains the significance of ruling oneself, ruling over others, and the spiritual rule in the Church, showing how it surpasses political rule in guiding souls towards salvation. He underscores the gentle and corrective nature of the Church's rule, focusing on extirpating sins and fostering repentance for spiritual growth.

Transcript

So that though I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret.

He goes on to apologize for his Epistle, when, (the sin having been corrected,) to treat them tenderly was unattended with danger; and he shows the advantage of the thing. For he did this indeed even before, when he said, For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you: not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love which I have toward you. 2 Corinthians 2:4 And he does it also now, establishing this same point in more words. And he said not, 'I regretted indeed before, but now I do not regret:' but how? I regret not now, though I did regret. 'Even if what I wrote,' he says, 'was such as to overstep the [due] measure of rebuke, and to cause me to regret; still the great advantage which has accrued from them does not allow me to regret.' And this he said, not as though he had rebuked them beyond due measure, but to heighten his praises of them. 'For the amendment ye manifested was so great,' says he, 'that even if I did happen to smite you too severely insomuch that I even condemned myself, I praise myself now from the result.' Just as with little children, when they have undergone a painful remedy, such as an incision, or cautery, or bitter physic, afterwards we are not afraid to soothe them; so also does Paul.

For I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season. Now I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry unto repentance.

Having said, I do not regret, he tells the reason also; alleging the good that resulted from his letter; and skillfully excusing himself by saying, though but for a season. For truly that which was painful was brief, but that which was profitable was perpetual. And what indeed followed naturally was to say, 'even though it grieved you for a season, yet it made you glad and benefited you forever.' But he does not say this: but before mentioning the gain he passes again to his praises of them, and the proof of his own concern for them, saying, Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, ('for what gain came to me from you being made sorry?') but that you were made sorry unto repentance, that the sorrow brought some gain.' For a father also when he sees his son under the knife rejoices not that he is being pained, but that he is being cured; so also does this man. But observe how he transfers all that was well achieved in the matter unto themselves; and lays whatever was painful to the account of the Epistle, saying, It made you sorry for a season; while the benefit that resulted from it he speaks of as their own good achieving. For he said not, 'The Epistle corrected you,' although this was the case; but, ye sorrowed unto repentance.

For you were made sorry after a godly sort, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing.

Do you see wisdom unspeakable? 'For had we not done this,' he says, 'we had done you damage.' And he affirms that indeed which was well achieved to be theirs, but the damage his own, if indeed he had been silent. For if they are likely to be corrected by a sharp rebuke, then, if we did not sharply rebuke, we should have done you damage; and the injury would not be with you alone, but also with us. For just as he that gives not to the merchant what is necessary for his voyage, he it is that causes the damage; so also we, if we did not offer you that occasion of repentance, should have wrought you damage. Do you see that the not rebuking those that sin is a damage both to the master and to the disciple?

2 Corinthians 7:10

2. For godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation, a repentance which brings no regret.

'Therefore,' he says, 'though I did regret before I saw the fruit and the gain, how great they were I do not regret now.' For such a thing is godly sorrow. And then he philosophizes about it, showing that sorrow is not in all cases a grievous thing, but when it is worldly. And what is worldly? If you be in sorrow for money, for reputation, for him that is departed, all these are worldly. Wherefore also they work death. For he that is in sorrow for reputation's sake feels envy and is driven oftentimes to perish: such sorrow was that which Cain sorrowed, such Esau.

By this worldly sorrow then he means that which is to the harm of those that sorrow. For only in respect to sins is sorrow a profitable thing; as is evident in this way. He that sorrowes for loss of wealth repairs not that damage; he that sorrowes for one deceased raises not the dead to life again; he that sorrowes for a sickness, not only is not made well but even aggravates the disease: he that sorrowes for sins, he alone attains some advantage from his sorrow, for he makes his sins wane and disappear.

For since the medicine has been prepared for this thing, in this case only is it potent and displays its profitableness; and in the other cases is even injurious. 'And yet Cain,' says one, 'sorrowed because he was not accepted with God.' It was not for this, but because he saw his brother glorious in honor; for had he grieved for this, it behooved him to emulate and rejoice with him; but, as it was, grieving, he showed that his was a worldly sorrow. But not so did David, nor Peter, nor any of the righteous.

Wherefore they were accepted, when grieving either over their own sins or those of others. And yet what is more oppressive than sorrow? Still when it is after a godly sort, it is better than the joy in the world. For

this indeed ends in nothing; but that works repentance unto salvation, a salvation that brings no regret. For what is admirable in it is this that one who had thus sorrowed would never repent, while this is a special characteristic of worldly sorrow. For what is more regretted than a true born son?

And what is a heavier grief than a death of this sort? But yet those fathers who in the height of their grief endure nobody and who wildly beat themselves, after a time repent because they have grieved immoderately; as having thereby nothing benefitted themselves, but even added to their affliction. But not such as this is godly sorrow; but it possesses two advantages, that of not being condemned in that a man grieves for, and that this sorrow ends in salvation; of both which that is deprived.

For they both sorrow unto harm and after they have sorrowed vehemently condemn themselves, bringing forth this greatest token of having done it unto harm. But godly sorrow is the reverse [of this]: wherefore also he said, works repentance unto salvation, a repentance that brings no regret. For no one will condemn himself if he have sorrowed for sin, if he have mourned and afflicted himself. Which also when the blessed Paul has said he needs not to adduce from other sources the proof of what he said, nor to bring forward those in the old histories who sorrowed, but he adduces the Corinthians themselves; and furnishes his proof from what they had done; that along with praises he might both instruct them and the rather win them to himself.

2 Corinthians 7:11

For behold, he says, this self-same thing, that you were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you. 'For not only,' he says, 'did your sorrow not cast you into that condemning of yourselves, as having acted idly in so doing; but it made you even more careful.' Then he speaks of the certain tokens of that carefulness;

Yea, what clearing of yourselves, towards me. Yea, what indignation against him that had sinned. Yea, what fear. 2 Corinthians 7:11 For so great carefulness and very speedy reformation was the part of men who feared exceedingly. And that he might not seem to be exalting himself, see how quickly he softened it by saying,

Yea, what longing, that towards me. Yea, what zeal, that on God's behalf. Yea, what avenging: for you also avenged the laws of God that had been outraged.

In every thing ye approved yourselves to be pure in the matter. Not only by not having perpetrated, for this was evident before, but also by not consenting unto it. For since he said in the former Epistle, and you are puffed up; 1 Corinthians 5:2 he also says here, 'you have cleared yourselves of this suspicion also; not only by not praising, but also by rebuking and being indignant.'

2 Corinthians 7:12

3. So although I wrote to you, I wrote not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong. For that they might not say, Why then do you rebuke us if we were clear in the matter? setting himself to meet this even further above, and disposing of it beforehand, he said what he said, namely, I do not regret, though I did regret. 'For so far,' says he, 'am I from repenting now of what I wrote then, that I repented then more than I do now when you have approved yourselves.' Do you see again his vehemence and earnest contention, how he has turned around what was said to the very opposite. For what they thought would have made him recant in confusion as having rebuked them hastily, by reason of their

amendment; that he uses as a proof that it was right in him to speak freely. For neither does he refuse afterwards to humor them fearlessly, when he finds he can do this. For he that said farther above such things as these, He that is joined to an harlot is one body, 1 Corinthians 6:16 and, Deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, 1 Corinthians 5:5 and, Every sin that a man does is without the body, 1 Corinthians 6:18 and such like things; how says he here, Not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong? Not contradicting, but being even exceedingly consistent with himself. How consistent with himself? Because it was a very great point with him to show the affection he bore towards them. He does not therefore discard concern for him, but shows at the same time, as I said, the love he had for them, and that a greater fear agitated him, [namely] for the whole Church. For he had feared lest the evil should eat further, and advancing on its way should seize upon the whole Church. Wherefore also he said, A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 1 Corinthians 5:6 This however he said at the time; but now that they had well done, he no longer puts it so but differently: and implies indeed the same thing, but manages his expressions more agreeably, saying,

That our care for you might appear unto you.

That is, 'that you might know how I love you.' Now this is the same thing as the former, but being differently expressed seemed to convey another meaning. For [to convince yourself] that it is the same, unfold his conception and you will perceive the difference to be nothing. 'For because I love you exceedingly,' says he, 'I was afraid lest ye should suffer any injury from that quarter, and yourselves succeed to that sorrow.' As therefore when he says, Does God take care for oxen? 1 Corinthians 9:9 he does not mean that He cares not, (for it is not possible for any existing thing to consist if deserted by the Providence of God): but that He did not legislate primarily for oxen, so also here he means to say, 'I wrote first indeed on your account, but secondly on his also. And I had indeed that love in myself,' he says, 'even independently of mine Epistle: but I was desirous of showing it both to you, and in a word to all, by that writing.'

2 Corinthians 7:13

Therefore we have been comforted.

Since we both showed our care for you and have been wholly successful. As he said also in another place, Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord; 1 Thessalonians 3:8 and again, For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye? 1 Thessalonians 2:19 For this is life, this comfort, this consolation to a teacher possessed of understanding; the growth of his disciples.

4. For nothing does so declare him that bears rule as paternal affection for the ruled. For begetting alone constitutes not a father; but after begetting, also loving. But if where nature is concerned there is so great need of love, much more where grace is concerned. In this way were all the ancients distinguished. As many, for instance, as obtained a good report among the Hebrews, by this were made manifest. So was Samuel shown to be great, saying, But God forbid that I should sin against God in ceasing to pray for you: 1 Samuel 12:23 so was David, so Abraham, so Elijah, and so each one of the righteous, those in the New Testament and those in the Old.

For so Moses for the sake of those he ruled left so great riches and treasures untold, choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God, Hebrews 11:25 and before his appointment was leader of the people by his actions. Wherefore also very foolishly did that Hebrew say to him, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Exodus 2:14 What do you say? You see the actions and doubt of the title? Just as if one seeing a

physician using the knife excellently well, and succoring that limb in the body which was diseased, should say, 'Who made you a physician and ordered you to use the knife?'

'Art, my good Sir, and your own ailment.' So too did his knowledge make him (i.e., Moses,) what he claimed to be. For ruling is an art, not merely a dignity, and an art above all arts. For if the rule of those without is an art and science superior to all other, much more this. For this rule is as much better than that, as that than the rest; yea, rather, even much more. And, if you will, let us examine this argument more accurately. There is an art of agriculture, of weaving, of building; which are both very necessary and tend greatly to preserve our life.

For others surely are but ancillary to these; the coppersmith's, the carpenter's, the shepherd's. But further, of arts themselves the most necessary of all is the agricultural, which was even that which God first introduced when He had formed man. For without shoes and clothes it is possible to live; but without agriculture it is impossible. And such they say are the Hamaxobii, the Nomads among the Scythians, and the Indian Gymnosophists. For these troubled not themselves with the arts of housebuilding, and weaving, and shoemaking, but need only that of agriculture.

Blush ye that have need of those arts that be superfluous, cooks, confectioners, embroiderers, and ten thousand other such people, that you may live; blush ye that introduce vain refinements into life; blush ye who are unbelievers, before those barbarians who have no need of art. For God made nature exceedingly independent, needing only a few things. However, I do not compel you nor lay it down for law that you should live thus; but as Jacob asked. And what did he ask? If the Lord will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on.

Genesis 28:20 So also Paul commanded, saying, And having food and covering let us be therewith content. 1 Timothy 6:8 First then comes agriculture; second, weaving; and third after it, building; and shoemaking last of all; for among us at any rate there are many both servants and laborers who live without shoes. These, therefore, are the useful and necessary arts. Come, then, let us compare them with that of ruling. For I have therefore brought forward these that are of all most important, that when it shall have been seen to be superior to them, its victory over the rest may be unquestioned.

Whereby then shall we show that it is more necessary than all? Because without it there is no advantage in these. And if you think good, let us leave mention of the rest and bring on the stage that one which stands higher and is more important than any, that of agriculture. Where then will be the advantage of the many hands of your laborers, if they are at war with one another and plunder one another's goods? For, as it is, the fear of the ruler restrains them and protects that which is wrought by them; but if you take this away, in vain is their labor.

But if one examine accurately, he will find yet another rule which is the parent and bond of this. What then may this be? That according to which it behooves each man to control and rule himself, chastising his unworthy passions, but both nourishing and promoting the growth of all the germs of virtue with all care.

For there are [these] species of rule; one, that whereby men rule peoples and states, regulating this the political life; which Paul denoting said, Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God. Romans 13:1-4 Afterwards to show the advantage of this, he went on to say, that the ruler is a minister of God for good; and again, he is a minister of God, and avenger to execute wrath on him that does evil.

A second there is whereby every one that has understanding rules himself; and this also the Apostle further denoted, saying, Would you have no fear of the power? Do that which is good; Romans 12:3 speaking of him that rules himself.

5. Here, however, there is yet another rule, higher than the political rule. And what is this? That in the Church. And this also itself Paul mentions, saying, Obey them that have the rule over you and submit to them; for they watch in behalf of your souls as they that shall give account. Hebrews 13:17 For this rule is as much better than the political as heaven is than earth; yea rather, even much more. For, in the first place, it considers principally not how it may punish sins committed, but how, they may never be committed at all; next, when committed, not how it may remove the deceased [member], but how they may be blotted out.

And of the things of this life indeed it makes not much account, but all its transactions are about the things in heaven. For our citizenship is in heaven. Philippians 3:20 And our life is here. For our life, says he, is hid with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 And our prizes are there, and our race is for the crowns that be there. For this life is not dissolved after the end, but then shines forth the more. And therefore, in truth, they who bear this rule have a greater honor committed to their hands, not only than viceroys but even than those themselves who wear diadems, seeing that they mould men in greater, and for greater, things.

But neither he that pursues political rule nor he that pursues spiritual, will be able well to administer it, unless they have first ruled themselves as they ought, and have observed with all strictness the respective laws of their polity. For as the rule over the many is in a manner twofold, so also is that which each one exerts over himself. And again, in this point also the spiritual rule transcends the political, as what we have said proved. But one may observe certain also of the arts imitating rule; and in particular, that of agriculture.

For just as the tiller of the soil is in a sort a ruler over the plants, clipping and keeping back some, making others grow and fostering them: just so also the best rulers punish and cut off such as are wicked and injure the many; while they advance the good and orderly. For this cause also the Scripture likens rulers to vine-dressers. For what though plants utter no cry, as in states the injured do? Nevertheless they still show the wrong by their appearance, withering, straitened for room by the worthless weeds.

And like as wickedness is punished by laws, so truly here also by this art both badness of soil and degeneracy and wildness in plants, are corrected. For all the varieties of human dispositions we shall find here also, roughness, weakness, timidity, forwardness, steadiness: and some of them through wealth luxuriating unseasonably, and to the damage of their neighbors, and others impoverished and injured; as, for instance, when hedges are raised to luxuriance at the cost of the neighboring plants; when other barren and wild trees, running up to a great height, hinder the growth of those beneath them.

And like as rulers and kings have those that vex their rule with outrage and war; so also has the tiller of the soil attacks of wild beasts, irregularity of weather, hail, mildew, great rain, drought, and all such things. But these things happen in order that you may constantly look unto the hope of God's aid. For the other arts indeed hold their way through the diligence of men as well; but this gets the better as God determines the balance, and is throughout almost wholly dependent thereupon; and it needs rains from above, and the admixture of weathers, and, above all, His Providence. For neither is he that plants any thing, nor he that waters, but God that gives the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:7

Here also there is death and life, and throes and procreation, just as with men. For here happen instances both of being cut off, and of bearing fruit, and of dying, and of being born (the same that was dead) over again, wherein the earth discourses to us both variously and clearly of a resurrection. For when the root bears fruit, when the seed shoots, is not the thing a resurrection? And one might perceive a large measure of God's providence and wisdom involved in this rule, if one go over it point by point. But what I wished to say is that this [rule] is concerned with earth and plants; but ours with care of souls. And great as is the difference between plants and a soul; so great is the superiority of this to that. And the rulers of the present life again are as much inferior to that [rule], as it is better to have mastery over the willing than the unwilling. For this is also a natural rule; for truly in that case every thing is done through fear and by constraint; but here, what is done aright is of choice and purpose. And not in this point alone does this excel the other, but in that it is not only a rule, but a fatherhood so to speak; for it has the gentleness of a father; and while enjoining greater things, [still] persuades. For the temporal ruler indeed says, 'If you commit adultery, you have forfeited your life,' but this, should you look with unchaste eyes, threatens the highest punishments. For awful is this judgment court, and for the correction of soul, not of body only. As great then as the difference between soul and body, is that which separates this rule again from that. And the one indeed sits as judge of things that are open; yea, rather, not of all these even, but of such as can be fully proved; and oftentimes moreover, even in these deals treacherously, but this court instructs those that enter it that He that judges in our case, will bring forward all things naked and laid open, Hebrews 4:13 before the common theatre of the world, and that to be hidden will be impossible. So that Christianity keeps together this our life far more than temporal laws. For if to tremble about secret sins makes a man safer than to fear for such as are open; and if to call him to account even for those offenses which be less does rather excite him unto virtue, than to punish the graver only; then it is easily seen that this rule, more than all others, welds our life together.

6. But, if you will, let us consider also the mode of electing the rulers; for here too you shall behold the difference to be great. For it is not possible to gain this authority by giving money, but by having displayed a highly virtuous character; and not as unto glory with men and ease unto himself, but as unto toils and labors and the welfare of the many, thus, (I say,) is he that has been appointed inducted unto this rule. Wherefore also abundant is the assistance he enjoys from the Spirit.

And in that case indeed the rule can go no further than to declare merely what is to be done; but in this it adds besides the help derived from prayers and from the Spirit. But further; in that case indeed is not a word about philosophy, nor does any sit to teach what a soul is, and what the world, and what we are to be hereafter, and unto what things we shall depart hence, and how we shall achieve virtue. Howbeit of contracts and bonds and money, there is much speech, but of those things not a thought; whereas in the Church one may see that these are the subjects of every discourse.

Wherefore also with justice may one call it by all these names, a court of justice, and a hospital, and a school of philosophy, and a nursery of the soul, and a training course for that race that leads unto heaven. Further, that this rule is also the mildest of all, even though requiring greater strictness, is plain from hence. For the temporal ruler if he catch an adulterer straightway punishes him. And yet what is the advantage of this? For this is not to destroy the passion, but to send away the soul with its wound upon it.

But this ruler, when he has detected, considers not how he shall avenge, but how extirpate the passion. For thou indeed dost the same thing, as if when there was a disease of the head, you should not stay the disease, but cut off the head. But I do not thus: but I cut off the disease. And I exclude him indeed from mysteries and hallowed precincts; but when I have restored him I receive him back again, at once

delivered from that viciousness and amended by his repentance. 'And how is it possible,' says one, 'to extirpate adultery?'

It is possible, yea, very possible, if a man comes under these laws. For the Church is a spiritual bath, which wipes away not filth of body, but stains of soul, by its many methods of repentance. For thou, indeed, both if you let a man go unpunished hast made him worse, and if you punish hast sent him away uncured: but I neither let him go unpunished, nor punish him, as thou, but both exact a satisfaction which becomes me, and set that right which has been done. Will you learn in yet another way how that thou indeed, though drawing swords and displaying flames to them that offend, work not any considerable cure; while I, without these things, have conducted them to perfect health?

But no need have I of arguments or words, but I bring forth earth and sea, and human nature itself, [for witnesses.] And inquire, before this court held its sittings, what was the condition of human affairs; how, not even the names of the good works which now are done, were ever heard of. For who braved death? Who despised money? Who was indifferent to glory? Who, fleeing from the turmoils of life, bade welcome to mountains and solitude, the mother of heavenly wisdom? Where was at all the name of virginity?

For all these things, and more than these, were the good work of this judgment court, the doings of this rule. Knowing these things then, and well understanding that from this proceeds every benefit of our life, and the reformation of the world, come frequently unto the hearing of the Divine words, and our assemblies here, and the prayers. For if you thus order yourselves, you will be able, having displayed a deportment worthy of heaven, to obtain the promised good things; which may all we obtain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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