

Colossians 1:21, 22

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reconciliation with God through faith and hope, and highlights the role of Christ in making this possible.

Scripture: Colossians 1:13

Topics: "Reconciliation Through Christ", "Sacrificial Atonement"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the reconciliation of unworthy sinners through Christ's death, emphasizing the great enmity and alienation that existed before. He highlights the powerlessness of angels compared to Christ in persuading and delivering humanity from darkness. Chrysostom underscores the significance of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, not only to deliver from sins but also to present believers as holy and blameless before God. He urges believers to continue in faith and hope, grounded and steadfast, to receive the fullness of the Gospel's promises.

Transcript

And you, being in time past, enemies and alienated in your mind, in your evil works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouvable before Him.

Here he goes to show that He reconciled those even who were unworthy of reconciliation. For by the saying that they were under the power of darkness, he shows the calamity in which they were. Colossians 1:13 But lest, on hearing of the power of darkness, you should consider it Necessity, he adds, And you that were alienated, so that though it appear to be the same thing that he says, yet it is not so; for it is not the same thing to deliver out of the evils him that through necessity came to suffer, and him that of his own will endures. For the former indeed is worthy to be pitied, but the latter hated. But nevertheless, he says, you that are not against your wills, nor from compulsion, but with your wills, and wishes, sprang away from Him, and are unworthy of it, He has reconciled. And seeing he had made mention of the things in the heavens, he shows, that all the enmity had its origin from hence, not thence. For they indeed were long ago desirous, and God also, but you were not willing.

And throughout he is showing that the Angels had no power in the successive times, forasmuch as men continued enemies; they could neither persuade them, nor, if persuaded, could they deliver them from the devil. For neither would persuading them be any gain, except he that held them were bound; nor would binding him have been of any service, except they whom he detained were willing to return. But both of

these were needed, and they could do neither of them, but Christ did both. So that even more marvelous than loosing death, is the persuading them. For the former was wholly of Himself, and the power lay wholly in Himself, but of the latter, not in Himself alone, but in us also; but we accomplish those things more easily of which the power lies in ourselves. Therefore, as being the greater, he puts it last. And he said not simply were at enmity, but were alienated, which denotes great enmity, nor yet alienated [only], but without any expectation even of returning. And enemies in your mind, he says; then the alienation had not proceeded so far as purpose only -- but what? in your wicked works also. You were both enemies, he says, and you did the works of enemies.

Yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouvable before Him. Again he lays down also the manner of the reconciliation, that it was in the Body, not by being merely beaten, nor scourged, nor sold, but even by dying a death the most shameful. Again he makes mention of the Cross, and again lays down another benefit. For He did not only deliver, but, as he says above, Who made us meet Colossians 1:12, to the same he alludes here also. Through His death, he says, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouvable before Him. For truly, He has not only delivered from sins, but has also placed among the approved. For, not that He might deliver us from evils only, did He suffer so great things, but that also we might obtain the first rewards; as if one should not only free a condemned criminal from his punishment, but also advance him to honor. And he has ranked you with those who have not sinned, yea rather not with those who have done no sin only, but even with those who have wrought the greatest righteousness; and, what is truly a great thing, has given the holiness which is before Him, and the being unreprouvable. Now an advance upon unblamable is unreprouvable, when we have done nothing either to be condemned for, or charged with. But, since he ascribed the whole to Him, because through His death He achieved these things; what then, says one, is it to us? We need nothing. Therefore he added,

Ver. 23. If so be that you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

Here he strikes a blow at their listlessness. And he said not simply continue, for it is possible to continue wavering, and vacillating; it is possible to stand, and continue, though turned this way and that. If so be that you continue, he says, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away. Wonderful! What a forcible metaphor he uses; he says not only not tossed to and fro, but not even moved. And observe, he lays down so far nothing burdensome, nor toilsome, but faith and hope; that is, if you continue believing, that the hope of the things to come is true. For this indeed is possible; but, as regards virtuous living, it is not possible to avoid being shaken about, though it be but a little; so (what he enjoins) is not grievous.

From the hope, he says, of the Gospel, which you heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven. But what is the hope of the Gospel, except Christ? For He Himself is our peace, that has wrought all these things: so that he who ascribes them to others is moved away: for he has lost all, unless he believe in Christ. Which ye heard, he says. And again he brings themselves as witnesses, then the whole world. He says not, which is being preached, but has already been believed and preached. As he did also at the outset Colossians 1:6, being desirous by the witness of the many to establish these also. Whereof I Paul was made a minister. This also contributes to make it credible; I, says he, Paul a minister. For great was his authority, as being now everywhere celebrated, and the teacher of the world.

Ver. 24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body's sake, which is the Church.

And what is the connection of this? It seems indeed not to be connected, but it is even closely so. And minister, he says, that is, bringing in nothing from myself, but announcing what is from another. I so believe, that I suffer even for His sake, and not suffer only, but even rejoice in suffering, looking unto the hope which is to come, and I suffer not for myself, but for you. And fill up, he says, that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh. It seems indeed to be a great thing he has said; but it is not of arrogance, far be it, but even of much tender love towards Christ; for he will not have the sufferings to be his own, but His, through desire of conciliating these persons to Him. And what things I suffer, I suffer, he says, on His account: not to me, therefore, express your gratitude, but to him, for it is He Himself who suffers. Just as if one, when sent to a person, should make request to another, saying, I beseech you, go for me to this person, then the other should say, it is on his account I am doing it. So that He is not ashamed to call these sufferings also his own. For He did not only die for us, but even after His death He is ready to be afflicted for your sakes. He is eagerly and vehemently set upon showing that He is even now exposed to peril in His own Body for the Church's sake, and he aims at this point, namely, you are not brought unto God by us, but by Him, even though we do these things, for we have not undertaken a work of our own, but His. And it is the same as if there were a band which had its allotted leader to protect it, and it should stand in battle, and then when he had gone, his lieutenant should succeed to his wounds until the battle were brought to a close.

Next, that for His sake also he does these things, hearken: For His Body's sake, he says, assuredly meaning to say this: I pleasure not you, but Christ: for what things He should have suffered, I suffer instead of Him. See how many things he establishes. Great, he shows, is the claim upon their love. As in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, he wrote, saying, he committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation 2 Corinthians 5:20; and again, We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ; as though God were entreating by us. So also here he says, For his sake I suffer, that he may the more draw them to Him. That is, though He who is your debtor is gone away, yet I repay. For, on this account he also said, that which is lacking, to show that not even yet does he consider Him to have suffered all. For your sake, he says, and even after His death He suffers; seeing that still there remains a deficiency. The same thing he does in another way in the Epistle to the Romans, saying, Who also makes intercession for us Romans 8:34, showing that He was not satisfied with His death alone, but even afterwards He does countless things.

He does not then say this to exalt himself, but through a desire to show that Christ is even yet caring for them. And he shows what he says to be credible, by adding, for His Body's sake. For that so it is, and that there is no unlikelihood in it, is plain from these things being done for His body's sake. Look how He has knitted us unto Himself. Why then introduce Angels between? Whereof I was made, he says, a minister. Why introduce Angels besides? I am a minister. Then he shows that he had himself done nothing, albeit he is a minister. Of which I was made, says he, a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given me to youward, to fulfill the word of God. The dispensation. Either he means, He so willed that after His own departure we should succeed to the dispensation, in order that you might not feel as deserted, (for it is Himself that suffers, Himself that is ambassador;) or he means this, namely, me who was more than all a persecutor, for this end He permitted to persecute, that in my preaching I might gain belief; or by dispensation he means, that He required not deeds, nor actions, nor good works, but faith and baptism. For you would not otherwise have received the word. For you, he says, to fulfill the word of God. He speaks of the Gentiles, showing that they were yet wavering, by the expression, fulfill. For that the cast-away Gentiles should have been able to receive such lofty doctrines was not of Paul, but of the dispensation of God; for I never could have had the power, he says. Having shown that which is greater, that his sufferings are Christ's, he next subjoins what is more evident, that this also is of God, to fulfill His

word in you. And he shows here covertly, that this too is of dispensation, that it is spoken to you now, when you are able to hear it, and comes not of neglect, but to the end ye may receive it. For God does not all things on a sudden, but uses condescension because of His plenteous love toward man. And this is the reason why Christ came at this time, and not of old. And He shows in the Gospel, that for this reason He sent the servants first, that they might not proceed to kill the Son. For if they did not reverence the Son, even when He came after the servants, much less would they had He come sooner; if they gave no heed to the lesser commandments, how would they to the greater? What then, does one object? Are there not Jews even now, and Greeks who are in a very imperfect condition? This, however, is an excess of listlessness. For after so long a time, after such great instructions, still to continue imperfect, is a proof of great stupidity.

When then the Greeks say, why did Christ come at this time? Let us not allow them so to speak, but let us ask them, whether He did not succeed? For as, if He had come at the very first, and had not succeeded, the time would not have been for us a sufficient excusation, so, seeing He has succeeded, we cannot with justice be brought to account on the score of the time. For neither does any one demand of a physician, who has removed the disease, and restored one to health, to give an account of his treatment, nor yet does any examine closely a general who has gained a victory, why at this time, and why in this place. For these things it were in place to ask, had he not been successful; but when he has been successful, they must even be taken for granted. For, tell me, whether is more worthy of credit, your reasoning and calumny, or the perfection of the thing? Conquered He, or conquered He not? Show this. Prevailed He, or prevailed He not? Accomplished He what He said, or no? These are the articles of enquiry. Tell me, I pray. Thou fully grantest that God is, even though not Christ? I ask you then; Is God without beginning? You will say, Certainly. Tell me then, why made He not men myriads of years before? For they would have lived through a longer time. They were now losers by that time during which they were not. Nay, they were not losers; but how, He who made them alone knows. Again, I ask you, why did He not make all men at once? But his soul, whoever was first made, has so many years of existence, of which that one is deprived which is not yet created. Wherefore made He the one to be brought first into this world, and the other afterwards?

Although these things are really fit subjects for enquiry: yet not for a meddling curiosity: for this is not for enquiry at all. For I will tell you the reason I spoke of. For suppose human nature as being some one continued life, and that in the first times our race was in the position of boyhood; in those that succeeded, of manhood; and in these that are near extreme age, of an old man. Now when the soul is at its perfection, when the limbs of the body are unstrung, and our war is over, we are then brought to philosophy.

On the contrary, one may say, we teach boys while young. Yes, but not the great doctrines, but rhetoric, and expertness with language; and the other when they have come to ripeness of age. See God also doing the same with the Jews. For just as though the Jews had been little children, he placed Moses over them as a schoolmaster, and like little children he managed these things for them through shadowy representations, as we teach letters. For the law had a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things.

Hebrews 10:1 As we both buy cakes for children and give them pieces of money, requiring of them one thing only, that for the present they would go to school; so also God at that time gave them both wealth and luxury, purchasing from them by this His great indulgence one only thing, that they would listen to Moses. Therefore He delivered them over to a schoolmaster, that they might not despise Himself as a tender, loving Father. See then that they feared him only; for they said not, Where is God?

But, Where is Moses? And his very presence was fearful. So when they did amiss, observe how he punished them. For God indeed was desirous of casting them off; but he would not permit Him. Or rather the whole was of God; just as when a Father threatens while a schoolmaster entreats Him, and says, Forgive them, I pray, on my account, and henceforward I undertake for them. In this way was the wilderness a school. And as children who have been a long while at school are desirous of quitting it, so also were they at that time continually desiring Egypt, and weeping, saying, We are lost, we are wholly consumed, we are utterly undone.

Exodus 16:3 And Moses broke their tablet, having written for them, as it were, certain words Exodus 32:19; just as a schoolmaster would do, who having taken up the writing tablet, and found it badly written, throws away the tablet itself, desiring to show great anger; and if he have broken it, the father is not angry. For he indeed was busy writing, but they not attending to him, but turning themselves other ways, were committing disorder. And as in school, they strike each other, so also, on that occasion, he bade them strike and slay each other.

And again, having given them as it were lessons to learn, then asking for them, and finding they had not learned them, he would punish them. For instance. What writings were those that denoted the power of God? The events in Egypt? Yes, says one, but these writings represented the plagues, that He punishes His enemies. And to them it was a school. For what else was the punishment of your enemies but your benefit? And in other respects too, He benefited you. And it was the same as if one should say he knew his letters, but when asked up and down, should be at fault, and be beaten.

So they also said indeed that they knew the power of God, but when asked their knowledge up and down, they could not give it, and therefore were beaten. Have you seen water? You ought to be reminded of the water in Egypt. For He that of water made blood, will be also of power to do this. As we also say often to the children, when in a book you see the letter A, remember that you had it in your tablet. Have you seen famine? Remember that it was He that destroyed the crops! Have you seen wars?

Remember the drowning! Have you seen that they are mighty who inhabit the land? But not mightier than the Egyptians. He who took you out of the midst of them, will He not much more save you when out? But they knew not how to answer their letters out of order, and therefore they were beaten. They ate, and drank, and kicked. Deuteronomy 32:15 When fed with their manna they ought not to have asked for luxury, seeing they had known the evils which proceed from it. And they acted precisely as if a free child, when sent to school, should ask to be reckoned with the slaves, and to wait on them -- so did these also in seeking Egypt-- and when receiving all needful sustenance, and such as becomes a free person, and sitting at his father's table, should have a longing for the ill-savored and noisy one of the servants.

And they said to Moses, Yea, Lord, all that you have spoken will we do, and be obedient. Exodus 24:7 And as it happens in the case of desperately bad children, that when the father would put them to death, the schoolmaster perseveringly entreats for them, the same was the case at that time also.

Why have we said these things? Because we differ in nothing from children. Will you hear their doctrines also, that they are those of children? Eye for eye, it is said, and tooth for tooth. Leviticus 24:20 For nothing is so eager to revenge as a childish mind. For seeing it is a passion of irrationality, and there is much irrationality, and great lack of consideration in that age, no wonder the child is tyrannized over by anger; and so great is the tyranny, that oftentimes after stumbling and getting up again, they will smite their knee for passion, or overturn the footstool, and so will allay their pain, and quench their rage. In some such way as

this did God also deal with them, when He allowed them to strike out Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, and destroyed the Egyptians and the Amalekites that had grieved them. And He promised such things; as if to one who said, Father, such and such an one has beaten me, the father should then reply, Such and such an one is a bad man, and let us hate him. So also does God say, I will be their enemy that are your enemies, and I will hate them that hate you. Exodus 23:22 And again, when Balaam prayed, the condescension which was used towards them was childish. For as with children, when having been frightened at anything not frightful, such as either a lock of wool, or any other thing of like sort, they are suddenly alarmed; that their fear may not continue in them, we bring the thing up to their hands, and make their nurses show it them: so also did God; seeing that the Prophet was a terror to them, he turned the terror of him into confidence. And as children who are under weaning have all manner of things in little baskets, so also did He give them everything, and dainties in abundance. Still the child longs for the breast; so did these also for Egypt and the flesh that was there.

So that one would not be wrong in calling Moses both a teacher, and a nursing-father, and a conductor Exodus 16:3; Numbers 11:4-5; the man's wisdom was great. Howbeit it is not the same thing to guide men who are already philosophers, and to rule unreasoning children. And, if you are inclined to hear yet another particular; as the nurse says to the child, When you ease yourself, take up your garments, and for as long as you sit, so also did Moses. Deuteronomy 23:13 For all the passions are tyrannous in children (for as yet they have not that which is to bridle them), vainglory, desire, irrationality, anger, envy; just as in children, so they prevailed; they spat upon, they beat, Moses. And as a child takes up a stone, and we all exclaim, O do not throw it; so did they also take up stones against their father; and he fled from them. And as, if a father have any ornament, the child, being fond of ornament, asks him for it, in like manner, truly, did the party of Dathan and Abiram act, when they rebelled for the priesthood. Numbers 16 And besides, they were of all people the most envious, and little-minded, and in all respects imperfect.

Ought then Christ, tell me, to have appeared at that time, at that time to have given them these teachings of true wisdom, when they were raging with lust, when they were as horses mad for the mare, when they were the slaves of money, of the belly? Nay, He would but have wasted his lessons of wisdom in discoursing with those of no understanding; and they would have neither learned one thing nor the other. And as he who teaches to read before he has taught the alphabet, will never teach even so much as the alphabet; so indeed would it then have been also. But not so now, for by the grace of God much forbearance, much virtue, has been planted everywhere. Let us give thanks then for all things, and not be over curious. For it is not we that know the due time, but He, The Maker of the time, and The Creator of the ages.

In everything then yield we to Him: for this is to glorify God, not to demand of Him an account of what He does. In this way too did Abraham give glory to God; And being fully persuaded, we read, that what He had promised, He was able to perform. Romans 4:21 He did not ask about the future even; but we scrutinize the account even of the past. See how great folly, how great ingratitude, is here. But let us for the future have done, for no gain comes of it, but much harm even; and let our minds be gratefully disposed towards our Master, and let us send up glory to God, that making for all things an offering of thanksgiving, we may be counted worthy of His lovingkindness, through the grace and love toward man of His Only-begotten, with whom, etc.

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