

Colossians 1:9, 10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of prayer, spiritual wisdom, and living a life worthy of the Lord in his exposition of Colossians 1:9-10.

Scripture: Psalm 33:15, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 1:11-15, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of prayer, continual growth in spiritual wisdom, and understanding God's will. He emphasizes the need to walk worthily of the Lord, bearing fruit in good works, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Chrysostom encourages believers to be strengthened with all power, to endure trials with patience and long-suffering, and to live a life of virtue and citizenship in God's kingdom. He warns against complacency, urges gratitude for God's gifts, and stresses the certainty of the Judgment and Resurrection.

Transcript

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding; to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

For this cause. What cause? Because we heard of your faith and love, because we have good hopes, we are hopeful to ask for future blessings also. For as in the games we cheer on those most who are near upon gaining the victory, just so does Paul also most exhort those who have achieved the greater part.

Since the day we heard it, says he, we do not cease to pray for you. Not for one day do we pray for you, nor yet for two, nor three. Herein he both shows his love, and gives them a gentle hint that they had not yet arrived at the end. For the words, that you may be filled, are of this significancy. And observe, I pray, the prudence of this blessed one. He nowhere says that they are destitute of everything, but that they are deficient; everywhere the words, that you may be filled, show this. And again, unto all pleasing, in every good work Colossians 1:11, and again, strengthened with all power, and again, unto all patience and long-suffering; for the constant addition of all bears witness to their doing well in part, though, it might be, not in all. And, that you may be filled, he says; not, that you may receive, for they had received; but that you may be filled with what as yet was lacking. Thus both the rebuke was given without offense, and the praise did not suffer them to sink down, and become supine, as if it had been complete. But what is, that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will? That through the Son we should be brought unto Him,

and no more through Angels. Now that you must be brought unto Him, you have learned, but it remains for you to learn this, and why He sent the Son. For had it been that we were to have been saved by Angels, He would not have sent Him, would not have given Him up. In all spiritual wisdom, he says, and understanding. For since the philosophers deceived them; I wish you, he says, to be in spiritual wisdom, not after the wisdom of men. But if in order to know the will of God, there needs spiritual wisdom; to know His Essence what it is, there is need of continual prayers.

And Paul shows here, that since that time he has been praying, and has not yet prevailed, and yet has not desisted; for the words, from the day we heard it, show this. But it implies condemnation to them, if, from that time, even assisted by prayers, they had not amended themselves. And making request, he says, with much earnestness, for this the expression ye knew shows. But it is necessary still to know somewhat besides. To walk worthily, he says, of the Lord. Here he speaks of life and its works, for so he does also everywhere: with faith he always couples conduct.

Unto all pleasing. And how, all pleasing? Bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Seeing, says he, He has fully revealed Himself unto you, and seeing you have received knowledge so great; do ye then show forth a conduct worthy of the faith; for this needs elevated conduct, greater far than the old dispensation. For, he that has known God, and been counted worthy to be God's servant, yea, rather, even His Son, see how great virtue he needs. Strengthened with all power.

He is here speaking of trials and persecutions. We pray that you might be filled with strength, that you faint not for sorrow, nor despair. According to the might of His glory. But that you may take up again such forwardness as it becomes the power of His glory to give. Unto all patience and long-suffering. What he says is of this sort. Summarily, he says, we pray that you may lead a life of virtue, and worthy of your citizenship, and may stand firmly, being strengthened as it is reasonable to be strengthened by God.

For this cause he does not as yet touch upon doctrines, but dwells upon life, wherein he had nothing to charge them with, and having praised them where praise was due, he then comes down to accusation. And this he does everywhere: when he is about writing to any with somewhat to blame them for, and somewhat to praise, he first praises them, and then comes down to his charges. For he first conciliates the hearer, and frees his accusation from all suspicion, and shows that for his own part he could have been glad to praise them throughout; but by the necessity of the case is forced into saying what he does.

And so he does in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. For after having exceedingly praised them as loving him, even from the case of the fornicator, he comes down to accuse them. But in that to the Galatians not so, but the reverse. Yea, rather, if one should look close into it, even there the accusation follows upon praise. For seeing he had no good deeds of theirs then to speak of, and the charge was an exceeding grave one, and they were every one of them corrupted; and were able to bear it because they were strong, he begins with accusation, saying, I marvel.

Galatians 1:6 So that this also is praise. But afterwards he praises them, not for what they were, but what they had been, saying, If possible, you would have plucked out your eyes, and given them to me. Galatians 5:15.

Bearing fruit, he says: this has reference to works. Strengthened: this to trials. Unto all patience and longsuffering: long-suffering towards one another, patience towards those without. For longsuffering is toward those whom we can requite, but patience toward those whom we cannot. For this reason the term patient is never applied to God, but longsuffering frequently; as this same blessed one says elsewhere in

his writings, Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering?

Unto all pleasing. Not, one while, and afterwards not so. In all spiritual wisdom, he says, and understanding. For otherwise it is not possible to know His will. Although indeed they thought they had His will; but that wisdom was not spiritual. To walk, says he, worthily of the Lord. For this is the way of the best life. For he that has understood God's love to man, (and he does understand it if he have seen the Son delivered up,) will have greater forwardness. And besides, we pray not for this alone that you may know, but that you may show forth your knowledge in works; for he that knows without doing, is even in the way to punishment.

To walk, he says, that is, always, not once, but continually. As to walk is necessary for us, so also is to live rightly. And when on this subject he constantly uses the term walk, and with reason, showing that such is the life set before us. But not of this sort is that of the world. And great too is the praise. To walk, he says, worthily of the Lord, and in every good work, so as to be always advancing, and nowhere standing still, and, with a metaphor, bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God, that you might be in such measure strengthened, according to the might of God, as is possible for man to be.

Through His power, great is the consolation.-- He said not strength, but power, which is greater: through the power, he says, of His glory, because that everywhere His glory has the power. He thus comforts him that is under reproach: and again, To walk worthily of the Lord. He says of the Son, that He has the power everywhere both in heaven and in earth, because His glory reigns everywhere. He says not strengthened simply, but so, as they might be expected to be who are in the service of so strong a Master.

In the knowledge of God. And at the same time he touches in passing upon the methods of knowledge; for this is to be in error, not to know God as one ought; or he means, so as to increase in the knowledge of God. For if he that has not known the Son, knows not the Father either; justly is there need of increased knowledge: for there is no use in life without this. Unto all patience and longsuffering, he says, with joy, giving thanks Colossians 1:12 unto God. Then being about to exhort them, he makes no mention of what by and by shall be laid up for them; he did hint at this however in the beginning of the Epistle, saying, Because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens Colossians 1:5: but in this place he mentions the things which were already theirs, for these are the causes of the other.

And he does the same in many places. For that which has already come to pass gains belief, and more carries the hearer along with it. With joy, he says, giving thanks to God. The connection is this. We cease not praying for you, and giving thanks for the benefits already received.

Do you see how he bears himself along into speaking of the Son? For if we give thanks with much joy, it is a great thing that is spoken of. For it is possible to give thanks only from fear, it is possible to give thanks even when in sorrow. For instance; Job gave thanks indeed, but in anguish; and he said, The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Job 1:21 For, let not any say that what had come to pass pained him not, nor clothed him with dejection of soul; nor let his great praise be taken away from that righteous one. But when it is thus, it is not for fear, nor because of His being Lord alone, but for the very nature of the things themselves, that we give thanks. To Him who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He has said a great thing. What has been given, he says, is of this nature; He has not only given, but also made us strong to receive. Now by saying, Who made us meet, he showed that the thing was one of great weight. For example, were some low person to have become a king, he has it in his power to give a governorship to whom he will; and this is the extent of his power, to give the dignity: he

cannot also make the person fit for the office, and oftentimes the honor makes one so preferred even ridiculous. If however he have both conferred on one the dignity, and also made him fit for the honor, and equal to the administration, then indeed the thing is an honor. This then is what he also says here; that He has not only given us the honor, but has also made us strong enough to receive it.

For the honor here is twofold, the giving, and the making fit for the gift. He said not, gave, simply; but, made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, that is, who has appointed us a place with the saints. But he did not say simply placed us, but has given us to enjoy even the very same things, for the portion is that which each one receives. For it is possible to be in the same city, and yet not enjoy the same things; but to have the same portion, and yet not enjoy the same, is impossible. It is possible to be in the same inheritance, and yet not to have the same portion; for instance, all we (clergy) are in the inheritance, but we have not all the same portion. But here he does not say this, but with the inheritance adds the portion also. But why does he call it inheritance (or lot)? To show that by his own achievements no one obtains the kingdom, but as a lot is rather the result of good luck, so in truth is it here also. For a life so good as to be counted worthy of the kingdom does no one show forth, but the whole is of His free gift. Therefore He says, When you have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants, for we have done that which was our duty to do. Luke 17:10 To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,-- he means, both the future and the present light, -- that is, in knowledge. He seems to me to be speaking at once of both the present and the future. Then he shows of what things we have been counted worthy. For this is not the only marvel, that we are counted worthy of the kingdom; but it should also be added who we are that are so counted; for it is not unimportant. And he does this in the Epistle to the Romans, saying, For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, but perhaps for the good man some one would even dare to die. Romans 5:7

Ver. 13. Who delivered us, he says, from the power of darkness.

The whole is of Him, the giving both of these things and those; for nowhere is any achievement of ours. From the power of darkness, he says, that is, of error, the dominion of the devil. He said not darkness, but power; for it had great power over us, and held us fast. For it is grievous indeed even to be under the devil at all, but to be so with power, this is far more grievous. And translated us, he says, into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Not then so as to deliver man from darkness only, did He show His love toward him. A great thing indeed is it to have delivered from darkness even; but to have brought into a kingdom too, is a far greater. See then how manifold the gift, that he has delivered us who lay in the pit; in the second place, that He has not only delivered us, but also has translated us into a kingdom. Who delivered us. He said not, has sent us forth, but delivered: showing our great misery, and their capture of us. Then to show also the ease with which the power of God works, he says, And translated us, just as if one were to lead over a soldier from one position to another. And he said not, has led over; nor yet has transposed, for so the whole would be of him who transposed, nothing of him who went over; but he said, translated; so that it is both of us and of Him. Into the kingdom of the Son of His love. He said not simply, the kingdom of heaven, but gave a grandeur to his discourse by saying, The kingdom of the Son, for no praise can be greater than this, as he says elsewhere also: If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. 2 Timothy 2:12 He has counted us worthy of the same things with the Son; and not only so, but what gives it greater force, with His Beloved Son. Those that were enemies, those that were in darkness, as it were on a sudden he had translated to where the Son is, to the same honor with Him. Nor was he content with only this, in order to show the greatness of the gift; he was not content with saying, kingdom, but he also added, of the Son; nor yet with this, but he added also beloved; nor yet with this, but he added yet, the dignity of His nature.

For what says he? Who is the Image of the invisible God. But he proceeded not to say this immediately, but meanwhile inserted the benefit which He bestowed upon us. For lest, when you hear that the whole is of the Father, you should suppose the Son excluded, he ascribes the whole to the Son, and the whole to the Father. For He indeed translated us, but the Son furnished the cause. For what says he? Who delivered us out of the power of darkness. But the same is, In whom we have the full redemption, even the forgiveness of sins. For had we not been forgiven our sins, we should not have been translated. So here again the words, In whom. And he said not redemption, but full redemption, so that we shall not fall any more, nor become liable to death.

Ver. 15. Who is the image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation.

We light here upon a question of heresy. So it were well we should put it off today and proceed with it tomorrow, addressing it to your ears when they are fresh.

But if one ought to say anything more: the work of the Son is the greater. How? Because it were a thing impossible to give the kingdom to men while continuing in their sins; but thus it is an easier thing, so that He prepared the way for the gift. What do you say? He Himself loosed you from your sins: surely then He Himself also has brought you near; already he has laid by anticipation the foundation of his doctrine.

But we must put a close to this discourse, when first we have made one remark. And what is this? Seeing we have come to enjoy so great a benefit, we ought to be ever mindful of it, and continually to turn in our minds the free gift of God, and to reflect upon what we have been delivered from, what we have obtained; and so we shall be thankful; so we shall heighten our love toward Him. What do you say, O man? You are called to a kingdom, to the kingdom of the Son of God-- and are you full of yawning, and scratching, and dozing? If need were that you should leap into ten thousand deaths every day, ought you not to endure all? For the sake of office you do all manner of things; when then you are going to share the kingdom of the Only-Begotten, will you not spring down upon ten thousand swords? Would you not leap into fire? And this is not all that is strange, but that when about to depart even, you bewail, and would gladly dwell among the things which are here, being a lover of the body. What fancy is this? Do you regard even death as a thing of terror? The cause of this is luxury, ease: for he at least that should live an embittered life would wish even for wings, and to be loosed from hence. But now it is the same with us as with the spoiled nestlings, which would willingly remain for ever in the nest. But the longer they remain, the feebler they become. For the present life is a nest cemented together with sticks and mire. Yea, should you show me even the great mansions, yea the royal palace itself glittering with all its gold and precious stones; I shall think them no better than the nests of swallows, for when the winter has come they will all fall of themselves. By winter I mean That Day, not that it will be a winter to all. For God also calls it both night and day; the first in regard of sinners, the latter of the just. So do I also now call it winter. If in the summer we have not been well brought up, so as to be able to fly when winter has come, our mothers will not take us, but will leave us to die of hunger, or to perish when the nest falls; for easily as it were a nest, or rather more easily, will God in that day remove all things, undoing and new molding all. But they which are unfledged, and not able to meet Him in the air, but have been so grossly brought up that they have no lightness of wing, will suffer those things which reason is such characters should suffer. Now the brood of swallows, when they are fallen, perish quickly; but we shall not perish, but be punished forever. That season will be winter; or rather, more severe than winter. For, not winter torrents of water roll down, but rivers of fire; not darkness that rises from clouds is there, but darkness that cannot be dispelled, and without a ray of light, so that they cannot see either the heaven, or the air, but are more straitened than those who have been buried in the earth.

Often times do we say these things, but there are whom we cannot bring to believe. But it is nothing wonderful if we, men of small account, are thus treated, when we discourse of such things, since the same happened to the Prophets also; when they spoke not of such matters only, but also of war and captivity. Jeremiah 21:11; 27:12, etc. And Zedekiah was rebuked by Jeremiah, and was not ashamed. Therefore the Prophets said, Woe unto them that say, Let God hasten with speed His work, that we may see it, and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel come, that we may know it. Isaiah 5:18-19 Let us not wonder at this. For neither did those believe who were in the days of the ark; they believed, however, when their belief was of no gain to them; neither did they of Sodom expect [their fate], howbeit they too believed, when they gained nothing by believing. And why do I speak of the future? Who would have expected these things which are now happening in various places; these earthquakes, these overthrows of cities? And yet were these things easier to believe than those; those, I mean, which happened in the days of the ark.

Whence is this evident? Because that the men of those times had no other example to look at, neither had they heard the Scriptures, but with us, on the other hand, are countless instances that have happened both in our own, and in former years. But whence arose the unbelief of these persons? From a softened soul; they drank and ate, and therefore they believed not. For, what a man wishes, he thinks, and expects; and they that gainsay him are a jest.

But let it not be so with us; for hereafter it will not be a flood; nor the punishment till death only; but death will be the beginning of punishment for persons who believe not that there is a Judgment. And does any ask, who has come from thence, and said so? If now you speak thus in jest, not even so is it well; for one ought not to jest in such matters; and we jest, not where jesting is in place, but with peril; but if what thou really feelest, and you are of opinion that there is nothing hereafter, how is it that you call yourself a Christian? For I take not into account those who are without. Why do you receive the Laver? Why do you set foot within the Church? Is it that we promise you magistracies? All our hope is in the things to come. Why then do you come, if you believe not the Scriptures? If you dost not believe Christ, I cannot call such an one a Christian; God forbid! But worse than even Greeks. In what respect? In this; that when you think Christ is God, you believe Him not as God. For in that other impiety there is at least consistency; for he who thinks not that Christ is God, necessarily will also not believe Him; but this impiety has not even consistency; to confess Him to be God, and yet not to think Him worthy of belief in what He has said; these are the words of drunkenness, of luxury, of riot. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. 1 Corinthians 15:32 Not tomorrow; but now you are dead, when you thus speak. Shall we then be in nothing different from swine and asses? Tell me. For if there be neither a judgment, nor a retribution, nor a tribunal, wherefore have we been honored with such a gift as reason, and have all things put under us? Why do we rule, and are they ruled? See how the devil is on every side urgent to persuade us to be ignorant of the Gift of God. He mixes together the slaves with their masters, like some man-stealer and ungrateful servant; he strives to degrade the free to the level of the criminal. And he seems indeed to be overthrowing the Judgment, but he is overthrowing the being of God.

For such is ever the devil's way; he puts forward everything in a wily, and not in a straightforward manner, to put us on our guard. If there is no Judgment, God is not just (I speak as a man): if God is not just, then there is no God at all: if there is no God, all things go on at haphazard, virtue is nought, vice nought. But he says nothing of this openly. Do you see the drift of this satanical argument? How, instead of men, he wishes to make us brutes, or rather, wild beasts, or rather, demons? Let us then not be persuaded by him. For there is a Judgment, O wretched and miserable man! I know whence you come to use such words.

You have committed many sins, you have offended, you have no confidence, you think that the nature of things will even follow your arguments. Meanwhile, says he, I will not torment my soul with the expectation of hell, and, if there be a hell, I will persuade it that there is none; meanwhile I will live here in luxury! Why do you add sin to sin? If when you have sinned you believe that there is a hell, you will depart with the penalty of your sins only to pay; but if you add this further impiety, you will also for your impiety, and for this your thought, suffer the uttermost punishment; and what was a cold and shortlived comfort to you, will be a ground for your being punished forever. You have sinned: be it so: why do you encourage others also to sin, by saying that there is no hell? Why did you mislead the simpler sort? Why unnerve the hands of the people? So far as you are concerned, everything is turned upside down; neither will the good become better, but listless; nor the wicked desist from their wickedness. For, if we corrupt others, do we get allowance for our sins? Do you see not the devil, how he attempted to bring down Adam? And has there then been allowance for him? Nay, surely it will be the occasion of a greater punishment, that he may be punished not for his own sins only, but also for those of others. Let us not then suppose that to bring down others into the same destruction with ourselves will make the Judgment-seat more lenient to us. Surely this will make it more severe. Why thrust we ourselves on destruction? The whole of this comes of Satan.

O man, have you sinned? You have for your Master One that loves man. Entreat, implore, weep, groan; and terrify others, and pray them that they fall not into the same. If in a house some servant, of those that had offended their master, says to his son, My child, I have offended the master, do thou be careful to please him, that you be not as I: tell me, will he not have some forgiveness? will he not bend and soften his master? But if, leaving so to speak, he shall say such words as these, that he will not requite every one according to his deserts; that all things are jumbled together indiscriminately, both good and bad; that there is no thanks in this house; what do you think will be the master's mind concerning him? will he not suffer a severer punishment for his own misdoings? Justly so; for in the former case his feeling will plead for him, though it be but weakly; but in this, nobody. If no other then, yet imitate at least that rich man in hell, who said, Father Abraham, send to my kinsmen, lest they come into this place, since he could not go himself, so that they might not fall into the same condemnation. Let us have done with such Satanical words.

What then, says he, when the Greeks put questions to us; would you not that we should try to cure them? But by casting the Christian into perplexity, under pretense of curing the Greek, you aim at establishing your Satanical doctrine. For since, when communing with your soul alone of these things, you persuade her not; you desire to bring forward others as witnesses. But if one must reason with a Greek, the discussion should not begin with this; but whether Christ be God, and the Son of God; whether those gods of theirs be demons. If these points be established, all the others follow; but, before making good the beginning, it is vain to dispute about the end; before learning the first elements, it is superfluous and unprofitable to come to the conclusion. The Greek disbelieves the Judgment, and he is in the same case with yourself, seeing that he too has many who have treated these things in their philosophy; and albeit when they so spoke they held the soul as separated from the body, still they set up a seat of judgment. And the thing is so very clear, that no one scarcely is ignorant of it, but both poets and all are agreed among themselves that there is both a Tribunal and a Judgment. So that the Greek also disbelieves his own authorities; and the Jew does not doubt about these things nor in a word does any man.

Why then deceive we ourselves? See, you say these things to me. What will you say to God, that fashioned our hearts one by one Psalm 33:15; that knows everything that is in the mind; that is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword? Hebrews 4:12 For tell me with truth; Do you not condemn

yourself? And how should wisdom so great, as that one who sins should condemn himself, come by chance, for this is a work of mighty wisdom. You condemn yourself. And will he who gives you such thoughts leave everything to go on at hazard? The following rule then will hold universally and strictly. Not one of those who live in virtue wholly disbelieves the doctrine of the Judgment, even though he be Greek or heretic. None, save a few, of those who live in great wickedness, receives the doctrine of the Resurrection. And this is what the Psalmist says, Your judgments are taken away from before his face. Psalm 10:5 Wherefore? Because his ways are always profane; for he says, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Do you see that thus to speak is the mark of the grovelling? Of eating and drinking come these sayings which are subversive of the Resurrection. For the soul endures not, I say, it endures not the tribunal which the conscience supplies, and so it is with it, as with a murderer, who firsts suggests to himself that he shall not be detected, and so goes on to slay; for had his conscience been his judge, he would not hastily have come to that daring wickedness. And still he knows, and pretends not to know, lest he should be tortured by conscience and fear, for, certainly, in that case, he would have been less resolute for the daring deed. So too, assuredly, they who sin, and day by day wallow in the same wickedness, are unwilling to know it, although their consciences pluck at them.

But let us give no heed to such persons, for there will be, there will assuredly be, a Judgment and a Resurrection, and God will not leave so great works without direction. Wherefore, I beseech you, let us leave off wickedness, and lay fast hold on virtue, that we may receive the true doctrine in Christ Jesus our Lord. And yet, which is easier to receive? The doctrine of the Resurrection, or that of Fate? The latter is full of injustice, of absurdity, of cruelty, of inhumanity; the other of righteousness, awarding according to desert; and still men do not receive it. But the fault is, indolence, for no one that has understanding receives the other. For among the Greeks even, they who did receive that doctrine, were those who in their definition of pleasure affirmed it to be the end, but they who loved virtue, would not receive it, but they cast it out as absurd. But if among the Greeks this were so, much more will it hold good with the doctrine of the Resurrection. And observe, I pray you, how the devil has established two contrary things: for in order that we may neglect virtue; and pay honor to demons, he brought in this Necessity, and by means of each he procured the belief of both. What reason then will he be able to give, who obstinately disbelieves a thing so admirable, and is persuaded by those who talk so idly? Do not then support yourself with the consolation, that you will meet with forgiveness; but let us, collecting all our strength, stir ourselves up to virtue, and let us live truly to God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, etc.

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