

Homily 1 on Galatians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the importance of grace and the dangers of returning to the Law as taught by Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

Scripture: Matthew 16:17, Acts 9:3, Acts 21:17, Romans 12:16, Galatians 1:1, Galatians 1:18

Topics: "Apostle Paul", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Paul's humble and obedient nature in his journey and interactions with the Apostles, highlighting his respect for Peter and James. Paul's zeal for preaching the Gospel among the Gentiles is emphasized, along with his avoidance of building on another's foundation. His humility is evident in his acknowledgment of his past persecution of the Church and the transformation brought about by God's grace.

Transcript

Verse 1-3

Paul, an Apostle, (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead;) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the Churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The exordium is full of a vehement and lofty spirit, and not the exordium only, but also, so to speak, the whole Epistle. For always to address one's disciples with mildness, even when they need severity is not the part of a teacher but it would be the part of a corrupter and enemy. Wherefore our Lord too, though He generally spoke gently to His disciples, here and there uses sterner language, and at one time pronounces a blessing, at another a rebuke. Thus, having said to Peter, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, Matthew 16:17 and having promised to lay the foundation of the Church upon his confession, shortly afterwards He says, Get behind Me, Satan: you are a stumbling block unto Me. Matthew 16:23 Again, on another occasion, Are you also even yet without understanding? Matthew 15:16 And what awe He inspired them with appears from John's saying, that, when they beheld Him conversing with the Samaritan woman, though they reminded Him to take food, no one ventured to say, What seekest Thou, or why do you speak with her? John 4:27 Thus taught, and walking in the steps of his Master, Paul has varied his discourse according to the need of his disciples, at one time using knife and cautery, at another, applying mild remedies. To the Corinthians he says, What will you? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in a spirit of meekness? 1 Corinthians 6:21 but to the Galatians, O foolish Galatians. Galatians 3:1 And not

once only, but a second time, also he has employed this reproof, and towards the conclusion he says with a reproachful allusion to them, Let no man trouble me; Galatians 6:17 but he soothes them again with the words, My little children, of whom I am again in travail: Galatians 4:19 and so in many other instances.

Now that this Epistle breathes an indignant spirit, is obvious to every one even on the first perusal; but I must explain the cause of his anger against the disciples. Slight and unimportant it could not be, or he would not have used such vehemence. For to be exasperated by common matters is the part of the little-minded, morose, and peevish; just as it is that of the more redolent and sluggish to lose heart in weighty ones. Such a one was not Paul. What then was the offense which roused him? It was grave and momentous, one which was estranging them all from Christ, as he himself says further on, Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing; Galatians 5:2 and again, You who would be justified by the Law, you are fallen away from Grace. Galatians 5:4 What then is this? For it must be explained more clearly. Some of the Jews who believed, being held down by the prepossessions of Judaism, and at the same time intoxicated by vain-glory, and desirous of obtaining for themselves the dignity of teachers, came to the Galatians, and taught them that the observance of circumcision, sabbaths, and new-moons, was necessary, and that Paul in abolishing these things was not to be borne. For, said they, Peter and James and John, the chiefs of the Apostles and the companions of Christ, forbade them not. Now in fact they did not forbid these things, but this was not by way of delivering positive doctrine, but in condescension to the weakness of the Jewish believers, which condescension Paul had no need of when preaching to the Gentiles; but when he was in Judæa, he employed it himself also. But these deceivers, by withholding the causes both of Paul's condescension and that of his brethren, misled the simpler ones, saying that he was not to be tolerated, for he appeared but yesterday, while Peter and his colleagues were from the first -- that he was a disciple of the Apostles, but they of Christ -- that he was single, but they were many, and pillars of the Church. They accused him too of acting a part; saying, that this very man who forbids circumcision observes the rite elsewhere, and preaches one way to you and another way to others.

Since Paul then saw the whole Galatian people in a state of excitement, a flame kindled against their Church, and the edifice shaken and tottering to its fall, filled with the mixed feelings of just anger and despondency, (which he has expressed in the words, I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my voice, Galatians 4:20) he writes the Epistle as an answer to these charges. This is his aim from the very commencement, for the underminers of his reputation had said, The others were disciples of Christ but this man of the Apostles. Wherefore he begins thus, Paul, an Apostle not from men, neither through man. For, these deceivers, as I was saying before, had said that this man was the last of all the Apostles and was taught by them, for Peter, James, and John, were both first called, and held a primacy among the disciples, and had also received their doctrines from Christ Himself; and that it was therefore fitting to obey them rather than this man; and that they forbid not circumcision nor the observance of the Law. By this and similar language and by depreciating Paul, and exalting the honor of the other Apostles, though not spoken for the sake of praising them, but of deceiving the Galatians, they induced them to adhere unseasonably to the Law. Hence the propriety of his commencement. As they disparaged his doctrine, saying it came from men, while that of Peter came from Christ, he immediately addresses himself to this point, declaring himself an apostle not from men, neither through man. It was Ananias who baptized him, but it was not he who delivered him from the way of error and initiated him into the faith; but Christ Himself sent from on high that wondrous voice, whereby He inclosed him in his net. For Peter and his brother, and John and his brother, He called when walking by the seaside, Matthew 4:18 but Paul after His ascension into heaven. Acts 9:3-4 And just as these did not require a second call, but straightway left their

nets and all that they had, and followed Him, so this man at his first vocation pressed vigorously forward, waging, as soon as he was baptized, an implacable war with the Jews. In this respect he chiefly excelled the other Apostles, as he says, I labored more abundantly than they all; 1 Corinthians 15:10 at present, however, he makes no such claim, but is content to be placed on a level with them. Indeed his great object was, not to establish any superiority for himself, but, to overthrow the foundation of their error. The not being from men has reference to all alike for the Gospel's root and origin is divine, but the not being through man is peculiar to the Apostles; for He called them not by men's agency, but by His own.

But why does he not speak of his vocation rather than his apostolate, and say, Paul called not by man? Because here lay the whole question; for they said that the office of a teacher had been committed to him by men, namely by the Apostles, whom therefore it behooved him to obey. But that it was not entrusted to him by men, Luke declares in the words, As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul. Acts 13:2

From this passage it is manifest that the power of the Son and Spirit is one, for being commissioned by the Spirit, he says that he was commissioned by Christ. This appears in another place, from his ascription of the things of God to the Spirit, in the words which he addresses to the elders at Miletus: Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost has made you bishops. Acts 20:28 Yet in another Epistle he says, And God has set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. 1 Corinthians 12:28 Thus he ascribes indifferently the things of the Spirit to God, and the things of God to the Spirit. Here too he stops the mouths of heretics, by the words through Jesus Christ and God the Father; for, inasmuch as they said this term through was applied to the Son as importing inferiority, see what he does. He ascribes it to the Father, thus teaching us not to prescribe laws to the ineffable Nature, nor define the degrees of Godhead which belong to the Father and Son. For to the words through Jesus Christ he has added, and God the Father; for if at the mention of the Father alone he had introduced the phrase through whom, they might have argued sophistically that it was peculiarly applicable to the Father, in that the acts of the Son were to be referred to Him. But he leaves no opening for this cavil, by mentioning at once both the Son and the Father, and making his language apply to both. This he does, not as referring the acts of the Son to the Father, but to show that the expression implies no distinction of Essence. Further, what can now be said by those, who have gathered a notion of inferiority from the Baptismal formula -- from our being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? For if the Son be inferior because He is named after the Father, what will they say seeing that, in the passage before us, the Apostle beginning from Christ proceeds to mention the Father? -- but let us not even utter such a blasphemy, let us not swerve from the truth in our contention with them; rather let us preserve, even if they rave ten thousand times, the due measures of reverence. Since then it would be the height of madness and impiety to argue that the Son was greater than the Father because Christ was first named, so we dare not hold that the Son is inferior to the Father, because He is placed after Him in the Baptismal formula.

Who raised Him from the dead.

Wherefore is it, O Paul, that, wishing to bring these Judaizers to the faith, you introduce none of those great and illustrious topics which occur in your Epistle to the Philippians, as, Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, Philippians 2:6 or which you afterwards declared in that to the Hebrews, the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of His substance; Hebrews 1:3 or again, what in the opening of his Gospel the son of thunder sounded forth, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; John 1:1. or what Jesus Himself oftentimes declared

to the Jews, that His power and authority was equal to the Father's? John 5:19-27, etc. Do you omit all these, and make mention of the economy of His Incarnation only, bringing forward His cross and dying? Yes, would Paul answer. For had this discourse been addressed to those who had unworthy conceptions of Christ, it would have been well to mention those things; but, inasmuch as the disturbance comes from persons who fear to incur punishment should they abandon the Law, he therefore mentions that whereby all need of the Law is excluded, I mean the benefit conferred on all through the Cross and the Resurrection. To have said that in the beginning was the Word, and that He was in the form of God, and made Himself equal with God, and the like, would have declared the divinity of the Word, but would have contributed nothing to the matter in hand. Whereas it was highly pertinent thereto to add, Who raised Him from the dead, for our chiefest benefit was thus brought to remembrance, and men in general are less interested by discourses concerning the majesty of God, than by those which set forth the benefits which come to mankind. Wherefore, omitting the former topic, he discourses of the benefits which had been conferred on us.

But here the heretics insultingly exclaim, Lo, the Father raises the Son! For when once infected, they are wilfully deaf to all sublimer doctrines; and taking by itself and insisting on what is of a less exalted nature, and expressed in less exalted terms, either on account of the Son's humanity, or in honor of the Father, or for some other temporary purpose, they outrage, I will not say the Scripture, but themselves. I would fain ask such persons, why they say this? Do they hope to prove the Son weak and powerless to raise one body? Nay, verily, faith in Him enabled the very shadows of those who believed in Him to effect the resurrection of the dead. Acts 5:15 Then believers in Him, though mortal, yet by the very shadows of their earthly bodies, and by the garments which had touched these bodies, could raise the dead, but He could not raise Himself? Is not this manifest madness, a great stretch of folly? Have you not heard His saying, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up? John 2:19 and again, I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again? John 10:18 Wherefore then is the Father said to have raised Him up, as also to have done other things which the Son Himself did? It is in honor of the Father, and in compassion to the weakness of the hearers.

And all the brethren which are with me.

Why is it that he has on no other occasion in sending an epistle added this phrase? For either he puts his own name only or that of two or three others, but here has mentioned the whole number and so has mentioned no one by name.

On what account then does he this?

They made the slanderous charge that he was singular in his preaching, and desired to introduce novelty in Christian teaching. Wishing therefore to remove their suspicion, and to show he had many to support him in his doctrine, he has associated with himself the brethren, to show that what he wrote he wrote with their accord.

Unto the Churches of Galatia.

Thus it appears, that the flame of error had spread over not one or two cities merely, but the whole Galatian people. Consider too the grave indignation contained in the phrase, unto the Churches of Galatia: he does not say, to the beloved or to the sanctified, and this omission of all names of affection or respect, and this speaking of them as a society merely, without the addition Churches of God, for it is simply Churches of Galatia, is strongly expressive of deep concern and sorrow. Here at the outset, as well as

elsewhere, he attacks their irregularities, and therefore gives them the name of Churches, in order to shame them, and reduce them to unity. For persons split into many parties cannot properly claim this appellation, for the name of Church is a name of harmony and concord.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This he always mentions as indispensable, and in this Epistle to the Galatians especially; for since they were in danger of falling from grace he prays that they may recover it again, and since they had come to be at war with God, he beseeches God to restore them to the same peace.

God the Father.

Here again is a plain confutation of the heretics, who say that John in the opening of his Gospel, where he says the Word was God, used the word Θεός without the article, to imply an inferiority in the Son's Godhead; and that Paul, where he says that the Son was in the form of God, did not mean the Father, because the word Θεός is without the article. For what can they say here, where Paul says, πᾶσι θεοῖς Πατρός, and not πᾶσι τοῖς θεοῖς? And it is in no indulgent mood towards them that he calls God, Father, but by way of severe rebuke, and suggestion of the source whence they became sons, for the honor was vouchsafed to them not through the Law, but through the washing of regeneration. Thus everywhere, even in his exordium, he scatters traces of the goodness of God, and we may conceive him speaking thus: O you who were lately slaves, enemies and aliens, what right have you suddenly acquired to call God your Father? It was not the Law which conferred upon you this relationship; why do you therefore desert Him who brought you so near to God, and return to your tutor?

But the Name of the Son, as well as that of the Father, had been sufficient to declare to them these blessings. This will appear, if we consider the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ with attention; for it is said, you shall call His Name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins; Matthew 1:21 and the appellation of Christ calls to mind the unction of the Spirit.

Ver. 4. Who gave himself for our sins.

Thus it appears, that the ministry which He undertook was free and uncompelled; that He was delivered up by Himself, not by another. Let not therefore the words of John, that the Father gave His only-begotten Son John 3:16 for us, lead you to derogate from the dignity of the Only-begotten, or to infer therefrom that He is only human. For the Father is said to have given Him, not as implying that the Son's ministry was a servile one, but to teach us that it seemed good to the Father, as Paul too has shown in the immediate context: according to the will of our God, and Father. He says not by the command, but according to the will, for inasmuch as there is an unity of will in the Father and the Son, that which the Son wills, the Father wills also.

For our sins, says the Apostle; we had pierced ourselves with ten thousand evils, and had deserved the gravest punishment; and the Law not only did not deliver us, but it even condemned us, making sin more manifest, without the power to release us from it, or to stay the anger of God. But the Son of God made this impossibility possible for he remitted our sins, He restored us from enmity to the condition of friends, He freely bestowed on us numberless other blessings.

Ver. 4. That He might deliver us out of this present evil world.

Another class of heretics seize upon these words of Paul, and pervert his testimony to an accusation of the present life. Lo, say they, he has called this present world evil, and pray tell me what does world [age] αἰών mean but time measured by days and seasons? Is then the distinction of days and the course of the sun evil? No one would assert this even if he be carried away to the extreme of unreasonableness. But they say, it is not the 'time,' but the present 'life,' which he has called evil.

Now the words themselves do not in fact say this; but the heretics do not rest in the words, and frame their charge from them, but propose to themselves a new mode of interpretation. At least therefore they must allow us to produce our interpretation, and the rather in that it is both pious and rational. We assert then that evil cannot be the cause of good, yet that the present life is productive of a thousand prizes and rewards. And so the blessed Paul himself extols it abundantly in the words, But if to live in the flesh, if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I wont not; Philippians 1:22 and then placing before himself the alternative of living upon earth, and departing and being with Christ, he decides for the former.

But were this life evil, he would not have thus spoken of it, nor could any one, however strenuous his endeavor, draw it aside into the service of virtue. For no one would ever use evil for good, fornication for chastity, envy for benevolence. And so, when he says, that the mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be, Romans 8:7 he means that vice, as such, cannot become virtue; and the expression, evil world, must be understood to mean evil actions, and a depraved moral principle.

Again, Christ came not to put us to death and deliver us from the present life in that sense, but to leave us in the world, and prepare us for a worthy participation of our heavenly abode. Wherefore He says to the Father, And these are in the world, and I come to You; I pray not that You should take them from the world, but that You should keep them from the evil, John 17:11-15 i.e., from sin. Further, those who will not allow this, but insist that the present life is evil, should not blame those who destroy themselves; for as he who withdraws himself from evil is not blamed, but deemed worthy of a crown, so he who by a violent death, by hanging or otherwise, puts an end to his life, ought not to be condemned.

Whereas God punishes such men more than murderers, and we all regard them with horror, and justly; for if it is base to destroy others, much more is it to destroy one's self. Moreover, if this life be evil, murderers would deserve a crown, as rescuing us from evil. Besides this, they are caught by their own words, for in that they place the sun in the first, and the moon in the second rank of their deities, and worship them as the givers of many goods, their statements are contradictory.

For the use of these and the other heavenly bodies, is none other than to contribute to our present life, which they say is evil, by nourishing and giving light to the bodies of men and animals and bringing plants to maturity. How is it then that the constitution of this evil life is so ministered to by those, who according to you are gods? Gods indeed they are not, far from it, but works of God created for our use; nor is this world evil. And if you tell me of murderers, of adulterers, of tomb-robbers, these things have nothing to do with the present life, for these offenses proceed not from that life which we live in the flesh, but from a depraved will.

For, if they were necessarily connected with this life, as embraced in one lot with it, no man would be free or pure from them, for no man can escape the characteristic accidents of humanity, such as, to eat and drink, to sleep and grow, to hunger and thirst, to be born and die, and the like; no man can ever become superior to these, neither sinner nor just man, king nor peasant, We all are subject to the necessity of nature. And so if vice were an essential element of this life, no one could avoid it, any more than the things

just mentioned.

And let me not be told that good men are rare, for natural necessity is insuperable by all, so that as long as one virtuous man shall be found, my argument will in no way be invalidated. Miserable, wretched man! What is it you say? Is this life evil, wherein we have learned to know God, and meditate on things to come, and have become angels instead of men, and take part in the choirs of the heavenly powers? What other proof do we need of an evil and depraved mind?

Why then, they say, does Paul call the present life evil? In calling the present world [age] evil, he has accommodated himself to our usage, who are wont to say, I have had a bad day, thereby complaining not of the time itself, but of actions or circumstances. And so Paul in complaining of evil principles of action has used these customary forms of speech; and he shows that Christ has both delivered us from our offenses, and secured us for the future. The first he has declared in the words, Who gave Himself for our sins; and by adding, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world, he has pronounced our future safety. For neither of these did the Law avail, but grace was sufficient for both.

Ver. 4. According to the will of our God and Father.

Since they were terrified by their notion that by deserting that old Law and adhering to the new, they should disobey God, who gave the Law, he corrects their error, and says, that this seemed good to the Father also: and not simply the Father, but our Father, which he does in order to affect them by showing that Christ has made His Father our Father.

Ver. 5. To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This too is new and unusual, for we never find the word, Amen placed at the beginning of an Epistle, but a good way on; here, however he has it in his beginning, to show that what he had already said contained a sufficient charge against the Galatians, and that his argument was complete, for a manifest offense does not require an elaborate crimination. Having spoken of the Cross, and Resurrection, of redemption from sin and security for the future, of the purpose of the Father, and the will of the Son, of grace and peace and His whole gift, he concludes with an ascription of praise.

Another reason for it is the exceeding astonishment into which he was thrown by the magnitude of the gift, the superabundance of the grace, the consideration who we were, and what God had wrought, and that at once and in a single moment of time. Unable to express this in words, he breaks out into a doxology, sending up for the whole world an eulogium, not indeed worthy of the subject, but such as was possible to him. Hence too he proceeds to use more vehement language; as if greatly kindled by a sense of the Divine benefits, for having said, To whom be the glory for ever and ever, Amen, he commences with a more severe reproof.

Ver. 6. I marvel that you are so quickly removing from Him that called you in the grace of Christ, unto a different Gospel.

Like the Jews who persecuted Christ, they imagined their observance of the Law was acceptable to the Father, and he therefore shows that in doing this they displeased not only Christ, but the Father also, for that they fell away thereby not from Christ only, but from the Father also. As the old covenant was given not by the Father only, but also by the Son, so the covenant of grace proceeded from the Father as well as the Son, and Their every act is common: All things whatsoever the Father has are Mine. John 15:16 By

saying that they had fallen off from the Father, he brings a twofold charge against them, of an apostasy, and of an immediate apostasy. The opposite extreme a late apostasy, is also blameworthy, but he who falls away at the first onset, and in the very skirmishing, displays an example of the most extreme cowardice, of which very thing he accuses them also saying: How is this that your seducers need not even time for their designs, but the first approaches suffice for your overthrow and capture? And what excuse can you have? If this is a crime among friends, and he who deserts old and useful associates is to be condemned, consider what punishment he is obnoxious to who revolts from God that called him. He says, I marvel, not only by way of reproof, that after such bounty, such a remission of their sins, such overflowing kindness, they had deserted to the yoke of servitude, but also in order to show, that the opinion he had had of them was a favorable and exalted one. For, had he ranked them among ordinary and easily deceived persons, he would not have felt surprise. But since you, he says, are of the noble sort and have suffered, much, I do marvel. Surely this was enough to recover and lead them back to their first expressions. He alludes to it also in the middle of the Epistle, Did you suffer so many things in vain? If it be indeed in vain. Galatians 3:4 You are removing; he says not, you are removed, that is, I will not believe or suppose that your seduction is complete; this is the language of one about to recover them, which further on he expresses yet more clearly in the words, I have confidence to you-ward in the Lord that you will be none otherwise minded. Galatians 5:10

From Him that called you in the grace of Christ.

The calling is from the Father, but the cause of it is the Son. He it is who has brought about reconciliation and bestowed it as a gift, for we were not saved by works in righteousness: or I should rather say that these blessings proceed from Both; as He says, Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine. John 17:10 He says not you are removing from the Gospel but from God who called you, a more frightful expression, and more likely to affect them. Their seducers did not act abruptly but gradually, and while they removed them from the faith in fact, left names unchanged. It is the policy of Satan not to set his snares in open view; had they urged them to fall away from Christ, they would have been shunned as deceivers and corrupters, but suffering them so far to continue in the faith, and putting upon their error the name of the Gospel, without fear they undermined the building employing the terms which they used as a sort of curtain to conceal the destroyers themselves. As therefore they gave the name of Gospel to this their imposture, he contends against the very name, and boldly says, unto a different Gospel,--

Ver. 7. Which is not another Gospel.

And justly, for there is not another. Nevertheless the Marcionites are misled by this phrase, as diseased persons are injured even by healthy food, for they have seized upon it, and exclaim, So Paul himself has declared there is no other Gospel. For they do not allow all the Evangelists, but one only, and him mutilated and confused according to their pleasure. Their explanation of the words, according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, Romans 16:25 is sufficiently ridiculous; nevertheless, for the sake of those who are easily seduced, it is necessary to refute it. We assert, therefore, that, although a thousand Gospels were written, if the contents of all were the same, they would still be one, and their unity no wise infringed by the number of writers. So, on the other hand, if there were one writer only, but he were to contradict himself, the unity of the things written would be destroyed. For the oneness of a work depends not on the number of its authors, but on the agreement or contradictoriness of its contents. Whence it is clear that the four Gospels are one Gospel; for, as the four say the same thing, its oneness is preserved by the harmony of the contents, and not impaired by the difference of persons. And Paul is not now speaking of the number but of the discrepancy of the things spoken. With justice might they lay hold

of this expression, if the Gospels of Matthew and Luke differed in the signification of their contents, and in their doctrinal accuracy; but as they are one and the same, let them cease being senseless and pretending to be ignorant of these things which are plain to the very children.

Ver. 7. Only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ.

That is to say, you will not recognize another Gospel, so long as your mind is sane, so long as your vision remains healthy, and free from distorted and imaginary phantoms. For as the disordered eye mistakes the object presented to it, so does the mind when made turbid by the confusion of evil thoughts. Thus the madman confounds objects; but this insanity is more dangerous than a physical malady, for it works injury not in the regions of sense, but of the mind; it creates confusion not in the organ of bodily vision, but in the eye of the understanding.

And would pervert the Gospel of Christ. They had, in fact, only introduced one or two commandments, circumcision and the observance of days, but he says that the Gospel was subverted, in order to show that a slight adulteration vitiates the whole. For as he who but partially pares away the image on a royal coin renders the whole spurious, so he who swerves ever so little from the pure faith, soon proceeds from this to graver errors, and becomes entirely corrupted. Where then are those who charge us with being contentious in separating from heretics, and say that there is no real difference between us except what arises from our ambition?

Let them hear Paul's assertion, that those who had but slightly innovated, subverted the Gospel. Not to say that the Son of God is a created Being, is a small matter. Know you not that even under the elder covenant, a man who gathered sticks on the sabbath, and transgressed a single commandment, and that not a great one, was punished with death? Numbers 15:32-36 and that Uzzah, who supported the Ark when on the point of being overturned, was struck suddenly dead, because he had intruded upon an office which did not pertain to him? 2 Samuel 6:6-7 Wherefore if to transgress the sabbath, and to touch the falling Ark, drew down the wrath of God so signally as to deprive the offender of even a momentary respite, shall he who corrupts unutterably awful doctrines find excuse and pardon?

Assuredly not. A want of zeal in small matters is the cause of all our calamities; and because slight errors escape fitting correction, greater ones creep in. As in the body, a neglect of wounds generates fever, mortification, and death; so in the soul, slight evils overlooked open the door to graver ones. It is accounted a trivial fault that one man should neglect fasting; that another, who is established in the pure faith, dissembling on account of circumstances, should surrender his bold profession of it, neither is this anything great or dreadful; that a third should be irritated, and threaten to depart from the true faith, is excused on the plea of passion and resentment.

Thus a thousand similar errors are daily introduced into the Church, and we have become a laughing-stock to Jews and Greeks, seeing that the Church is divided into a thousand parties. But if a proper rebuke had at first been given to those who attempted slight perversions, and a deflection from the divine oracles, such a pestilence would not have been generated, nor such a storm have seized upon the Churches. You will now understand why Paul calls circumcision a subversion of the Gospel.

There are many among us now, who fast on the same day as the Jews, and keep the sabbaths in the same manner; and we endure it nobly or rather ignobly and basely. And why do I speak of Jews seeing that many Gentile customs are observed by some among us; omens, auguries, presages, distinctions of days, a curious attention to the circumstances of their children's birth, and, as soon as they are born,

tablets with impious inscriptions are placed upon their unhappy heads, thereby teaching them from the first to lay aside virtuous endeavors, and drawing part of them at least under the false domination of fate.

But if Christ in no way profits those that are circumcised, what shall faith hereafter avail to the salvation of those who have introduced such corruptions? Although circumcision was given by God, yet Paul used every effort to abolish it, because its unseasonable observance was injurious to the Gospel. If then he was so earnest against the undue maintenance of Jewish customs, what excuse can we have for not abrogating Gentile ones? Hence our affairs are now in confusion and trouble, hence have our learners being filled with pride, reversed the order of things throwing every thing into confusion, and their discipline having been neglected by us their governors, they spurn our reproof however gentle.

And yet if their superiors were even more worthless and full of numberless evils, it would not be right for the disciple to disobey. It is said of the Jewish doctors, that as they sat in Moses' seat, their disciples were bound to obey them, though their works were so evil, that the Lord forbid His disciples to imitate them. What excuse therefore is there for those who insult and trample on men, rulers of the Church, and living, by the grace of God, holy lives? If it be unlawful for us to judge each other, much more is it to judge our teachers.

Ver. 8, 9. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.

See the Apostle's wisdom; to obviate the objection that he was prompted by vainglory to applaud his own doctrine, he includes himself also in his anathema; and as they betook themselves to authority, that of James and John, he mentions angels also saying, Tell me not of James and John; if one of the most exalted angels of heaven corrupt the Gospel, let him be anathema. The phrase of heaven is purposely added, because priests are also called angels. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger [angel] of the Lord of hosts. Malachi 2:7 Lest therefore it should be thought that priests are here meant, by the term angels, he points out the celestial intelligences by the addition, from heaven. And he says not, if they preach a contrary Gospel, or subvert the whole of the true one, let them be anathema; but, if they even slightly vary, or incidentally disturb, my doctrine. As we have said before, so say I now again. That his words might not seem to be spoken in anger, or with exaggeration, or with recklessness he now repeats them. Sentiments may perhaps change, when an expression has been called forth by anger, but to repeat it a second time proves that it is spoken advisedly, and was previously approved by the judgment. When Abraham was requested to send Lazarus, he replied, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them: if they hear them not, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead. Luke 16:31 And Christ introduces Abraham thus speaking, to show that He would have the Scriptures accounted more worthy of credence, even than one raised from the dead: Paul too, (and when I say Paul, I mean Christ, who directed his mind,) prefers them before an angel come down from heaven. And justly, for the angels, though mighty, are but servants and ministers, but the Scriptures were all written and sent, not by servants, but by God the Lord of all. He says, if any man preach another Gospel to you than that which we have preached -- not if this or that man: and herein appears his prudence, and care of giving offense, for what needed there still any mention of names, when he had used such extensive terms as to embrace all, both in heaven and earth? In that he anathemized evangelists and angels, he included every dignity, and his mention of himself included every intimacy and affinity. Tell me not, he exclaims, that my fellow apostles and colleagues have so spoken; I spare not myself if I preach such doctrine. And he says this not as condemning the Apostles for swerving from the message they were commissioned to deliver; far from it, (for he says, whether we or they thus preach;) but

to show, that in the discussion of truth the dignity of persons is not to be considered.

Ver. 10. For am I now persuading men: or God? or am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

Granting, says he, that I might deceive you by these doctrines, could I deceive God, who knows my yet unuttered thoughts, and to please whom is my unceasing endeavor? See here the Apostolical spirit, the Evangelical loftiness! So too he writes to the Corinthians, For we are not again commending ourselves unto you, but speak as giving you occasion of glorying; 2 Corinthians 5:12 and again, But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment. 1 Corinthians 4:3 For since he is compelled to justify himself to his disciples, being their teacher, he submits to it; but he is grieved at it, not on account of chagrin, far from it, but on account of the instability of the minds of those led away and on account of not being fully trusted by them. Wherefore Paul now speaks, as it were, thus:-- Is my account to be rendered to you? Shall I be judged by men? My account is to God, and all my acts are with a view to that inquisition, nor am I so miserably abandoned as to pervert my doctrine, seeing that I am to justify what I preach before the Lord of all.

He thus expressed himself, as much with a view of withstanding their opinions, as in self-defense; for it becomes disciples to obey, not to judge, their master. But now, says he, that the order is reversed, and you sit as judges, know that I am but little concerned to defend myself before you; all, I do for God's sake, and in order that I may answer to Him concerning my doctrine. He who wishes to persuade men, is led to act tortuously and insincerely, and to employ deceit and falsehood, in order to engage the assent of his hearers. But he who addresses himself to God, and desires to please Him, needs simplicity and purity of mind, for God cannot be deceived. Whence it is plain that I have thus written to you not from the love of rule, or to gain disciples, or to receive honor at your hands. My endeavor has been to please God, not man. Were it otherwise, I should still consort with the Jews, still persecute the Church, I who have cast off my country altogether, my companions, my friends, my kindred, and all my reputation, and taken in exchange for these, persecution, enmity, strife, and daily-impending death, have given a signal proof that I speak not from love of human applause. This he says, being about to narrate his former life, and sudden conversion, and to demonstrate clearly that it was sincere. And that they might not be elevated by a notion that he did this by way of self-vindication to them, he premises, For do I now persuade men? He well knew how, on a fitting occasion, to correct his disciples, in a grave and lofty tone: assuredly he had other sources whence to demonstrate the truth of his preaching -- by signs and miracles, by dangers, by prisons, by daily deaths, by hunger and thirst, by nakedness, and the like. Now however that he is speaking not of false apostles, but of the true, who had shared these very perils, he employs another method. For when his discourse was pointed towards false apostles, he institutes a comparison by bringing forward his endurance of danger, saying, Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. 2 Corinthians 11:23 But now he speaks of his former manner of life and says,

Ver. 11, 12. For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the Gospel which was preached by me that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.

You observe how sedulously he affirms that he was taught of Christ, who Himself, without human intervention, condescended to reveal to him all knowledge. And if he were asked for his proof that God Himself thus immediately revealed to him these ineffable mysteries, he would instance his former manner

of life, arguing that his conversion would not have been so sudden, had it not been by Divine revelation. For when men have been vehement and eager on the contrary side, their conviction, if it is effected by human means, requires much time and ingenuity. It is clear therefore that he, whose conversion is sudden, and who has been sobered in the very height of his madness, must have been vouchsafed a Divine revelation and teaching, and so have at once arrived at complete sanity. On this account he is obliged to relate his former life, and to call the Galatians as witnesses of past events. That the Only-Begotten Son of God had Himself from heaven vouchsafed to call me, says he, you who were not present, could not know, but that I was a persecutor you do know. For my violence even reached your ears, and the distance between Palestine and Galatia is so great, that the report would not have extended there, had not my acts exceeded all bounds and endurance. Wherefore he says,

Ver. 13. For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and made havoc of it.

Observe how he shrinks not from aggravating each point; not saying simply that he persecuted but beyond measure, and not only persecuted but made havoc of it, which signifies an attempt to extinguish, to pull down, to destroy, to annihilate, the Church.

Ver. 14. And I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

To obviate the notion that his persecution arose from passion, vain-glory, or enmity, he shows that he was actuated by zeal, not indeed according to knowledge, Romans 10:2 still by a zealous admiration of the traditions of his fathers. This is his argument; -- if my efforts against the Church sprung not from human motives, but from religious though mistaken zeal, why should I be actuated by vain-glory, now that I am contending for the Church, and have embraced the truth? If it was not this motive, but a godly zeal, which possessed me when I was in error, much more now that I have come to know the truth, ought I to be free from such a suspicion. As soon as I passed over to the doctrines of the Church I shook off my Jewish prejudices, manifesting on that side a zeal still more ardent; and this is a proof that my conversion is sincere, and that the zeal which possesses me is from above. What other inducement could I have to make such a change, and to barter honor for contempt, repose for peril, security for distress? None surely but the love of truth.

Ver. 15, 16. But when it was the good pleasure of God, Who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.

Here his object is to show, that it was by some secret providence that he was left for a time to himself. For if he was set apart from his mother's womb to be an Apostle and to be called to that ministry, yet was not actually called till that juncture, which summons he instantly obeyed, it is evident that God had some hidden reason for this delay. What this purpose was, you are perhaps eager to learn from me, and primarily, why he was not called with the twelve. But in order not to protract this discourse by digressing from that which is more pressing, I must entreat your love not to require all things from me, but to search for it by yourselves, and to beg of God to reveal it to you. Moreover I partly discussed this subject when I discoursed before you on the change of his name from Saul to Paul; which, if you have forgotten, you will fully gather from a perusal of that volume. At present let us pursue the thread of our discourse, and consider the proof he now adduces that no natural event had befallen him -- that God Himself had

providentially ordered the occurrence.

And called me through His grace.

God indeed says that He called him on account of his excellent capacity, as He said to Ananias, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, Acts 9:15 that is to say, capable of service, and the accomplishment of great deeds. God gives this as the reason for his call. But he himself everywhere ascribes it to grace, and to God's inexpressible mercy, as in the words, Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, not that I was sufficient or even serviceable, but that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering, for an ensample of them which should hereafter believe in Him unto eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:16 Behold his overflowing humility; I obtained mercy, says he, that no one might despair, when the worst of men had shared His bounty. For this is the force of the words, that He might show forth all His long-suffering for an ensample of them which should hereafter believe in Him.

To reveal His Son in me.

Christ says in another place, No one knows who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son wills to reveal Him. Luke 10:22 You observe that the Father reveals the Son, and the Son the Father; so it is as to Their glory, the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father the Son; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, and, as I have glorified You. John 17:1-4 But why does he say, to reveal His Son in me, and not to me? it is to signify, that he had not only been instructed in the faith by words, but that he was richly endowed with the Spirit -- that the revelation had enlightened his whole soul, and that he had Christ speaking within him.

That I might preach Him among the Gentiles. For not only his faith, but his election to the Apostolic office proceeded from God. The object, says he, of His thus specially revealing Himself to me, was not only that I might myself behold Him, but that I might also manifest Him to others. And he says not merely, others, but, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, thus touching beforehand on that great ground of his defense which lay in the respective characters of the disciples; for it was necessary to preach differently to the Jews and to the heathen.

Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.

Here he alludes to the Apostles, naming them after their physical nature; however, that he may have meant to include all mankind, I shall not deny.

Ver. 17. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me.

These words weighed by themselves seem to breath an arrogant spirit, and to be foreign to the Apostolic temper. For to give one's suffrage for one's self, and to admit no man to share one's counsel, is a sign of folly. It is said, Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him; Proverbs 26:12 and, Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Isaiah 5:21 and Paul himself in another place, Be not wise in your own conceits.

Romans 12:16 Surely one who had been thus taught, and had thus admonished others, would not fall into such an error, even were he an ordinary man; much less then Paul himself. Nevertheless, as I said, this expression nakedly considered may easily prove a snare and offense to many hearers. But if the cause of it is subjoined, all will applaud and admire the speaker. This then let us do; for it is not the right course to weigh the mere words, nor examine the language by itself, as many errors will be the consequence, but to

attend to the intention of the writer.

And unless we pursue this method in our own discourses, and examine into the mind of the speaker, we shall make many enemies, and every thing will be thrown into disorder. Nor is this confined to words, but the same result will follow, if this rule is not observed in actions. For surgeons often cut and break certain of the bones; so do robbers; yet it would be miserable indeed not to be able to distinguish one from the other. Again, homicides and martyrs, when tortured, suffer the same pangs, yet is the difference between them great.

Unless we attend to this rule, we shall not be able to discriminate in these matters; but shall call Elijah and Samuel and Phineas homicides, and Abraham a son-slayer; that is, if we go about to scrutinize the bare facts, without taking into account the intention of the agents. Let us then inquire into the intention of Paul in thus writing, let us consider his scope, and general deportment towards the Apostles, that we may arrive at his present meaning. Neither formerly, nor in this case, did he speak with a view of disparaging the Apostles or of extolling himself, (how so?

When he included himself under his anathema?) but always in order to guard the integrity of the Gospel. Since the troublers of the Church said that they ought to obey the Apostles who suffered these observances, and not Paul who forbade them, and hence the Judaizing heresy had gradually crept in, it was necessary for him manfully to resist them, from a desire of repressing the arrogance of those who improperly exalted themselves, and not of speaking ill of the Apostles. And therefore he says, I conferred not with flesh and blood; for it would have been extremely absurd for one who had been taught by God, afterwards to refer himself to men.

For it is right that he who learns from men should in turn take men as his counsellors. But he to whom that divine and blessed voice had been vouchsafed, and who had been fully instructed by Him that possesses all the treasures of wisdom, wherefore should he afterwards confer with men? It were meet that he should teach, not be taught by them. Therefore he thus spoke, not arrogantly, but to exhibit the dignity of his own commission. Neither went I up, says he, to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me.

Because they were continually repeating that the Apostles were before him, and were called before him, he says, I went not up to them. Had it been needful for him to communicate with them, He, who revealed to him his commission, would have given him this injunction. Is it true, however, that he did not go up there? nay, he went up, and not merely so, but in order to learn somewhat of them. When a question arose on our present subject in the city of Antioch, in the Church which had from the beginning shown so much zeal, and it was discussed whether the Gentile believers ought to be circumcised, or were under no necessity to undergo the rite, this very Paul himself and Silas went up.

How is it then that he says, I went not up, nor conferred? First, because he went not up of his own accord, but was sent by others; next, because he came not to learn, but to bring others over. For he was from the first of that opinion, which the Apostles subsequently ratified, that circumcision was unnecessary. But when these persons deemed him unworthy of credit and applied to those at Jerusalem he went up not to be farther instructed, but to convince the gain-sayers that those at Jerusalem agreed with him.

Thus he perceived from the first the fitting line of conduct, and needed no teacher, but, primarily and before any discussion, maintained without wavering what the Apostles, after much discussion, Acts 15:2-7 subsequently ratified. This Luke shows by his own account, that Paul argued much at length with them on this subject before he went to Jerusalem. But since the brethren chose to be informed on this subject, by

those at Jerusalem, he went up on their own account, not on his own.

And his expression, I went not up, signifies that he neither went at the outset of his teaching, nor for the purpose of being instructed. Both are implied by the phrase, Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. He says not, I conferred, merely, but, immediately; and his subsequent journey was not to gain any additional instruction.

Ver. 17. But I went away into Arabia.

Behold a fervent soul! He longed to occupy regions not yet tilled, but lying in a wild state. Had he remained with the Apostles, as he had nothing to learn, his preaching would have been straitened, for it behooved them to spread the word every where. Thus this blessed man, fervent in spirit, straightway undertook to teach wild barbarians, choosing a life full of battle and labor. Having said, I went into Arabia, he adds, and again I returned unto Damascus. Here observe his humility; he speaks not of his successes, nor of whom or of how many he instructed. Yet such was his zeal immediately on his baptism, that he confounded the Jews, and so exasperated them, that they and the Greeks lay in wait for him with a view to kill him. This would not have been the case, had he not greatly added to the numbers of the faithful; since they were vanquished in doctrine, they had recourse to murder, which was a manifest sign of Paul's superiority. But Christ suffered him not to be put to death, preserving him for his mission. Of these successes, however, he says nothing, and so in all his discourses, his motive is not ambition, nor to be honored more highly than the Apostles, nor because he is mortified at being lightly esteemed, but it is a fear lest any detriment should accrue to his mission. For he calls himself, one born out of due time, and, the first of sinners, and the last of the Apostles, and, not meet to be called an Apostle. And this he said, who had labored more than all of them; which is real humility; for he who, conscious of no excellence, speaks humbly of himself, is candid but not humble; but to say so after such trophies, is to be practised in self-control.

Ver. 17. And again I returned unto Damascus.

But what great things did he not probably achieve in this city? For he tells us that the governor under Aretas the king set guards about the whole of it, hoping to entrap this blessed man. Which is a proof of the strongest kind that he was violently persecuted by the Jews. Here, however, he says nothing of this, but mentioning his arrival and departure is silent concerning the events which there occurred, nor would he have mentioned them in the place I have referred to, 2 Corinthians 11:32 had not circumstances required their narration.

Ver. 18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas.

What can be more lowly than such a soul? After such successes, wanting nothing of Peter, not even his assent, but being of equal dignity with him, (for at present I will say no more,) he comes to him as his elder and superior. And the only object of this journey was to visit Peter; thus he pays due respect to the Apostles, and esteems himself not only not their better but not their equal. Which is plain from this journey, for Paul was induced to visit Peter by the same feeling from which many of our brethren sojourn with holy men: or rather by a humbler feeling for they do so for their own benefit, but this blessed man, not for his own instruction or correction, but merely for the sake of beholding and honoring Peter by his presence. He says, to visit Peter; he does not say to see, (■ δε■v,) but to visit and survey, (■ στορ■σαι,) a word which those, who seek to become acquainted with great and splendid cities, apply to themselves. Worthy of such trouble did he consider the very sight of Peter; and this appears from the Acts of the Apostles also. Acts 21:17-18 etc. For on his arrival at Jerusalem, on another occasion, after having converted many Gentiles,

and, with labors far surpassing the rest, reformed and brought to Christ Pamphylia, Lycaonia, Cilicia, and all nations in that quarter of the world, he first addresses himself with great humility to James, as to his elder and superior. Next he submits to his counsel, and that counsel contrary to this Epistle. You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of them which have believed; therefore shave your head, and purify yourself. Acts 21:20 ff. Accordingly he shaved his head, and observed all the Jewish ceremonies; for where the Gospel was not affected, he was the humblest of all men. But where by such humility he saw any injured, he gave up that undue exercise of it, for that was no longer to be humble but to outrage and destroy the disciples.

Ver. 18. And tarried with him fifteen days.

To take a journey on account of him was a mark of respect; but to remain so many days, of friendship and the most earnest affection.

Ver. 19. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother.

See what great friends he was with Peter especially; on his account he left his home, and with him he tarried. This I frequently repeat, and desire you to remember, that no one, when he hears what this Apostle seems to have spoken against Peter, may conceive a suspicion of him. He premises this, that when he says, I resisted Peter, no one may suppose that these words imply enmity and contention; for he honored and loved his person more than all and took this journey for his sake only, not for any of the others. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James. I saw him merely, I did not learn from him, he means. But observe how honorably he mentions him, he says not James merely, but adds this illustrious title, so free is he from all envy. Had he only wished to point out whom he meant, he might have shown this by another appellation, and called him the son of Cleophas, as the Evangelist does. But as he considered that he had a share in the august titles of the Apostles, he exalts himself by honoring James; and this he does by calling him the Lord's brother, although he was not by birth His brother, but only so reputed. Yet this did not deter him from giving the title; and in many other instances he displays towards all the Apostles that noble disposition, which beseemed him.

Ver. 20. Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

Observe throughout the transparent humility of this holy soul; his earnestness in his own vindication is as great as if he had to render an account of his deeds, and was pleading for his life in a court of justice.

Ver. 21. Then I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

After his interview with Peter, he resumes his preaching and the task which lay before him, avoiding Judæa, both because of his mission being to the Gentiles, and of his unwillingness to build upon another man's foundation. Wherefore there was not even a chance meeting, as appears from what follows.

Ver. 22, 23. And I was still unknown by face unto the Churches of Judæa; but they only heard say, he that once persecuted us now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc.

What modesty in thus again mentioning the facts of his persecuting and laying waste the Church, and in thus making infamous his former life, while he passes over the illustrious deeds he was about to achieve! He might have told, had he wished it, all his successes, but he mentions none of these and stepping with one word over a vast expanse, he says merely, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and, they had heard, that he, which once persecuted us, now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc. The

purpose of the words, I was unknown to the Churches of Judæa, is to show, that so far from preaching to them the necessity of circumcision, he was not known to them even by sight.

Ver. 24. And they glorified God in me. See here again how accurately he observes the rule of his humility; he says not, they admired me, they applauded or were astonished at me, but ascribes all to Divine grace by the words, they glorified God in me.

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