

Homily 1 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the divine calling and significance of Paul's apostleship, the nature of the Gospel, and the unity of believers in Christ.

Scripture: Romans 1:1-7

Topics: "Apostle Paul", "Divine Ordination"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the introduction of Paul's letter to the Romans, emphasizing Paul's humility as a servant of Jesus Christ and his calling as an Apostle to spread the Gospel of God. Paul's reference to being separated for the Gospel highlights the divine ordination of his ministry, connecting it to the prophecies in the Holy Scriptures. The sermon delves into the significance of Jesus Christ being declared the Son of God through His resurrection, demonstrating His power and holiness. Paul's message of grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is a reminder of the blessings and sanctification available to all believers.

Transcript

Romans 1:1-2

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, (which He promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.)

Moses having written five books, has nowhere put his own name to them, neither have they who after him put together the history of events after him, no nor yet has Matthew, nor John, nor Mark, nor Luke; but the blessed Paul everywhere in his Epistles sets his own name. Now why was this? Because they were writing to people, who were present, and it had been superfluous to show themselves when they were present. But this man sent his writings from afar and in the form of a letter, for which cause also the addition of the name was necessary. But if in the Epistle to the Hebrews he does not do the same, this too is after his own wise judgment. For since they felt prejudiced against him, lest on hearing the name at the outstart, they should stop up all admission to his discourse, he subtly won their attention by concealing the name. But if some Prophets and Solomon have put their names, this I leave as a subject for you to look further into hereafter, why some of them wished to put it so, and some not. For you are not to learn everything from me, but to take pains yourselves also and enquire further, lest ye become more dull-witted.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. Why did God change his name, and call him Paul who was Saul? It was, that he might not even in this respect come short of the Apostles, but that that preëminence which the chief of the Disciples had, he might also acquire Mark 3:16; and have whereon to ground a closer union with them. And he calls himself, the servant of Christ, yet not merely this; for there be many sorts of servitude. One owing to the Creation, according to which it says, for all are Your servants Psalm 119:91; and according to which it says, Nebuchadnezzar, My servant Jeremiah 25:9, for the work is the servant of Him which made it. Another kind is that from the faith, of which it says, But God be thanked that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from a pure heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you: being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness. Romans 6:17-18 Another is that from civil subjection (πολιτείας), after which it says, Moses my servant is dead Joshua 1:2; and indeed all the Jews were servants, but Moses in a special way as shining most brightly in the community. Since then, in all the forms of the marvellous servitude, Paul was a servant, this he puts in the room of the greatest title of dignity, saying, a servant of Jesus Christ. And the Names appertaining to the dispensation he sets forth, going on upwards from the lowest. For with the Name Jesus, did the Angel come from Heaven when He was conceived of the Virgin, and Christ He is called from being anointed, which also itself belonged to the flesh. And with what oil, it may be asked, was He anointed? It was not with oil that He was anointed, but with the Spirit. And Scripture has instances of calling such Christs: inasmuch as the Spirit is the chief point in the unction, and that for which the oil is used. And where does it call those Christs who are not anointed with oil? Touch not, it says, Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm Psalm 105:15, but at that time the institution of anointing with oil did not yet even exist.

Called an Apostle. He styles himself called in all his Epistles, so showing his own candor (εὐγνωμοσύνην), and that it was not of his own seeking that he found, but that when called he came near and obeyed. And the faithful, he styles, called to be saints, but while they had been called so far as to be believers, he had besides a different thing committed to his hands, namely, the Apostleship, a thing full of countless blessings, and at once greater than and comprehensive of, all the gifts.

And what more need one say of it, than that whatsoever Christ was doing when present, this he committed to their hands when He departed. Which also Paul cries aloud, speaking thereof and magnifying the dignity of the Apostles' office; We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us; i.e. in Christ's stead. Separated to the Gospel of God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 For as in a house, each one is set apart for various works; thus also in the Church, there be various distributions of ministrations. And herein he seems to me to hint, that he was not appointed by lot only, but that of old and from the first he was ordained to this office; which also Jeremy says, that God spoke concerning himself, Before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you, I ordained you a prophet unto the nations. Jeremiah 1:5 For in that he was writing to a vainglorious city, and one every way puffed up, he therefore uses every mode of showing that his election was of God. For he Himself called him, and Himself separated him. And he does this, that he may make the Epistle deserve credit, and meet an easy reception. To the Gospel of God. Not Matthew then alone is an Evangelist, nor Mark, as neither was this man alone an Apostle, but they also; even if he be said preëminently to be this, and they that. And he calls it the Gospel, not for those good things only which have been brought to pass, but also for those which are to come. And how comes he to say, that the Gospel of God is preached by himself? For he says, separated to the Gospel of God -- for the Father was manifest, even before the Gospels. Yet even if He were manifest, it was to the Jews only, and not even to all of these as were fitting. For neither did they know Him to be a Father, and many things did they conceive unworthily of Him. Wherefore also Christ says, The true worshippers shall come, and that the Father seeks such to worship Him. John 4:23 But it was afterwards that He Himself with the Son was

unveiled to the whole world, which Christ also spoke of beforehand, and said, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent. John 17:3 But he calls it the Gospel of God, to cheer the hearer at the outstart. For he came not with tidings to make the countenance sad, as did the prophets with their accusations, and charges, and reproofs, but with glad tidings, even the Gospel of God; countless treasures of abiding and unchangeable blessings.

Ver. 2. Which He promised afore by His Prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

For the Lord, says he, shall give the word to them that proclaim glad tidings with great power Psalm 68:12, Septuagint; and again, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace. Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15 See here both the name of the Gospel expressly and the temper of it, laid down in the Old Testament. For, we do not proclaim it by words only, he means, but also by acts done; since neither was it human, but both divine and unspeakable, and transcending all nature. Now since they have laid against it the charge of novelty also, He shows it to be older than the Greeks, and described aforetime in the Prophets. And if He gave it not from the beginning because of those that were unwilling to receive it, still, they that were willing did hear it. Your father Abraham, He says, rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad. John 8:56 How then comes He to say, Many prophets desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them? Matthew 13:17 He means not so, as you see and hear, the Flesh itself, and the very miracles before your eyes. But let me beg you to look and see what a very long time ago these things were foretold. For when God is about to do openly some great things, He announces them of a long time before, to practise men's hearing for the reception of them when they come.

In the Holy Scriptures. Because the Prophets not only spoke, but also writ what they spoke; nor did they write only, but also shadowed them forth by actions, as Abraham when he led up Isaac, and Moses when he lifted up the Serpent, and when he spread out his hands against Amalek, and when he offered the Paschal Lamb.

Ver. 3. Concerning His Son which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh.

What dost, you, O Paul, that after lifting up our souls so, and elevating them, and causing great and unutterable things to pass in show before them, and speaking of the Gospel, and that too the Gospel of God, and bringing in the chorus of the Prophets, and showing the whole of them heralding forth many years before those things which were to come: why do you again bring us down to David? Are you conversing, oh tell me, of some man, and giving him Jesse's son for a father? And wherein are these things worthy of what you have just spoken of? Yea, they are fully worthy. For our discourse is not, says he, of any bare man. Such was my reason for adding, according to the flesh; as hinting that there is also a Generation of the Same after the Spirit. And why did he begin from that and not from this the higher? It is because that was what Matthew, and Luke, and Mark, began from. For he who would lead men by the hand to Heaven, must needs lead them upwards from below. So too was the actual dispensation ordered. First, that is, they saw Him a man upon earth, and then they understood Him to be God. In the same direction then, as He Himself had framed His teaching, did His disciple also shape out the way which leads there. Therefore the generation according to the flesh is in his language placed first in order, not because it was first, but because he was for leading the hearer from this up to that.

Ver. 4. And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, even Jesus Christ.

What is said has been made obscure by the close-folding of the words, and so it is necessary to divide it. What then is it, which he says? We preach, says he, Him Who was made of David. But this is plain. Whence then is it plain, that this incarnate Person was also the Son of God? First, it is so from the prophets; wherefore he says, Which He had promised afore by the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Romans 1:2 And this way of demonstration is no weak one. And next also from the very way of His Generation: which also he sets forth by saying, of the seed of David according to the flesh: for He broke the rule of nature. Thirdly, from the miracles which He did, yielding a demonstration of much power, for in power means this. Fourthly, from the Spirit which He gave to them that believe upon Him, and through which He made them all holy, wherefore he says, according to the Spirit of holiness. For it was of God only to grant such gifts. Fifthly, from the Resurrection; for He first and He alone raised Himself: and this Himself too said to be above all a miracle sufficient to stop the mouths even of them that behaved shamelessly. For, Destroy this Temple, He says, and in three days I will raise it up John 19; and, When you have lifted Me up from the earth, then shall you know that I am He John 8:28; and again, This generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of Jonas. Matthew 12:39 What then is the being declared? being shown, being manifested, being judged, being confessed, by the feeling and suffrage of all; by Prophets, by the marvelous Birth after the Flesh, by the power which was in the miracles, by the Spirit, through which He gave sanctification, by the Resurrection, whereby He put an end to the tyranny of death.

Ver. 5. By Whom we have received grace and Apostleship for obedience to the faith.

See the candor of the servant. He wishes nothing to be his own, but all his Master's. And indeed it was the Spirit that gave this. Wherefore He says, I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth John 16:12: and again, Separate Me Paul and Barnabas. Acts 13:2 And in the Epistle to the Corinthians, he says, that to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge 1 Corinthians 12:8-11; and that It divides all as It wills.

And in addressing the Milesians, he says, Over which the Holy Ghost has made you shepherds and overseers. Acts 20:28 You see, he calls the things of the Spirit, the Son's, and the things of the Son, the Spirit's. Grace and Apostleship; that is, it is not we that have achieved for ourselves, that we should become Apostles. For it was not by having toiled much and labored that we had this dignity allotted to us, but we received grace, and the successful result is a part of the heavenly gift.

For obedience to the faith. So it was not the Apostles that achieved it, but grace that paved the way before them. For it was their part to go about and preach, but to persuade was of God, Who wrought in them. As also Luke says, that He opened their heart Acts 16:14; and again, To whom it was given to hear the word of God. To obedience; he says not, to questioning and parade (κατασκευάζειν) of argument but to obedience. For we were not sent, he means, to argue, but to give those things which we had trusted to our hands.

For when the Master declares anything, they that hear should not be nice and curious handlers of what is told them, but receivers only; for this is why the Apostles were sent, to speak what they had heard, not to add anything from their own stock, and that we for our part should believe-- that we should believe what?-- concerning His Name. Not that we should be curious about the essence, but that we should believe in the Name; for this it was which also wrought the miracles.

For it says, in the Name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk. Acts 3:6 And this too requires faith, neither can one grasp anything of these things by reasoning (λογισμὸν καταλαβεῖν). Among all nations, among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ. What? Did Paul preach then to all the nations? Now that he ran through the whole space from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and from thence again went forth to the very ends of the earth, is plain from what he writes to the Romans; but even if he did not come to all, yet still what he says is not false, for he speaks not of himself alone, but of the twelve Apostles, and all who declared the word after them.

And in another sense, one should not see any fault to find with the phrase, if about himself, when one considers his ready mind, and how that after death he ceases not to preach in all parts of the world. And consider how he extols the gift, and shows that it is great and much more lofty than the former, since the old things were with one nation, but this gift drew sea and land to itself. And attend to this too, how free the mind of Paul is from all flattery; for when conversing with the Romans, who were seated as it were upon a sort of summit of the whole world, he attaches no more to them than to the other nations, nor does he on the score of their being then in power and ruling, say, that they have in spiritual things also any advantage.

But as (he means) we preach to all the nations, so do we to you, numbering them with Scythians and Thracians: for if he did not wish to show this, it were superfluous to say Among whom are you also. And this he does to take down their high spirit (κενὸν τὸ φροσημα) and to prostrate the swelling vanity of their minds, and to teach them to honor others alike to themselves: and so he proceeds to speak upon this very point.

Ver. 6. Among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ.

That is, along with whom you also are: and he does not say, that he called the others with you, but you with the others. For if in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free, much less is there king and private man. For even you were called and did not come over of yourselves.

Ver. 7. To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

See how continually he puts the word called, saying, called to be an Apostle; among whom you also are called; to all that be in Rome, called: and this he does not out of superfluity of words, but out of a wish to remind them of the benefit. For since among them which believed, it was likely that there would be some of the consuls (πρωτων; Ben. consulares) and rulers as well as poor and common men, casting aside the inequality of ranks, he writes to them all under one appellation. But if in things which are more needful and which are spiritual, all things are set forth as common both to slaves and to free, for instance, the love from God, the calling, the Gospel, the adoption, the grace, the peace, the sanctification, all things else, how could it be other than the uttermost folly, whom God had joined together, and made to be of equal honor in the greater things, those to divide on account of things on earth? On this ground, I presume, from the very outstart, this blessed Apostle, after casting out this mischievous disease, conducts them to the mother of blessings, humble-mindedness. This made servants better, since they learned that they should take no harm from their servitude, while they had the true freedom; this would incline masters to be gentle, as being instructed that they have no advantage in being free, unless the goods of faith have the first place given them. And that you may learn that he was not doing this to work confusion, by dashing all things, but still knew the best distinction, he wrote not simply to all that were in Rome, but with a definition added, beloved of God. For this is the best discrimination, and shows whence the sanctification was. Whence

then was the sanctification? From Love. For after saying, beloved, then he proceeds, called to be saints, showing that it is from this that the fount of all blessings is. But saints he calls all the faithful. Grace unto you and peace.

Oh address, that brings countless blessings to us! This also Christ bade the Apostles to use as their first word when entering into houses. Luke 10:5 Wherefore it is from this that Paul also in all places takes his beginning, from grace and peace; for it was no small war which Christ put an end to, but indeed one varying and of every kind and of a long season (τοις ἅλῳν καὶ ταντοδαπῶν); and this not from our labors, but through His grace. Since then love presented us with grace, and grace with peace, having set them down in the due order of an address, he prays over them that they may abide perpetual and unmoved, so that no other war may again be blown into flame, and beseeches Him that gave, to keep these things firmly settled, saying as follows, Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. See in this passage, the from is common to the Son and the Father, and this is equivalent to of whom. For he did not say, Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ; but, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Strange! How mighty is the love of God! We which were enemies and disgraced, have all at once become saints and sons. For when he calls Him Father, he shows them to be sons; and when he says sons, he has unveiled the whole treasure of blessings.

Let us then keep showing a conversation worthy of the gift, and hold on in peace and holiness. For other dignities are but for a time, and are brought to an end along with this life present, and may be bought with money (whence one might say they are not dignities at all but names of dignities only, having their strength in the investiture of fine array and the servility of attendants), but this as having been given of God, the gift of sanctification and adoption, is not broken through even by death, but even here makes men conspicuous, and also departs with us upon our journey to the life to come. For he that holds on in the adoption, and keeps an exact watch upon his holiness, is much brighter and more happy even than he that is arrayed with the diadem itself, and has the purple; and has the delight of abundant peace in the present life and is nurtured up with goodly hopes, and has no ground for worry and disturbance, but enjoys constant pleasure; for as for good spirits and joy, it is not greatness of power, not abundance of wealth, not pomp of authority, not strength of body, not sumptuousness of the table, not the adorning of dresses, nor any other of the things in man's reach that ordinarily produces them, but spiritual success, and a good conscience alone. And he that has this cleansed, even though he be clad in rags and struggling with famine, is of better spirits than they that live so softly. So too he that is conscious of wicked deeds, even though he may gather to himself all men's goods, is the most wretched of all men. For this cause Paul, living in continual hunger and nakedness, and being scourged every day was joyful, and went more softly than they that were then emperors. But Ahab though a king, and indulging in a sumptuous luxury, when he had done that one sin, groaned and was out of spirits, and his countenance was fallen both before the sin and after the sin. If then we wish to enjoy pleasure, above all things else let us shun wickedness, and follow after virtue; since it is not in the nature of things for one to have a share thereof on any other terms, even if we were mounted upon the king's throne itself. Wherefore also Paul says, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. Galatians 5:22 This fruit then let us keep growing by us, that we may be in the fruition of joy here, and may obtain the kingdom to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom and with Whom, be glory to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, now and always, even unto all ages. Amen.

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