

Homily 15 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

God's love and providence work together to bring good out of all things, even seemingly painful ones, and make us more than conquerors through His power.

Topics: "Gods Love", "Divine Providence"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the unwavering love of God towards those who love Him, emphasizing that all things, even tribulations and hardships, work together for good for those who are faithful. He highlights the power of God to transform seemingly painful situations into blessings and the need for genuine love for God to experience His providence. Chrysostom encourages believers to trust in God's love and providence, even in the face of trials and persecutions, knowing that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ.

Transcript

Rom. VIII. 28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Here he seems to me to have mooted this whole topic with a view to those who were in danger; or, rather, not this only, but also what was said a little before this. For the words, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us; and those, that the whole creation groans; and the saying, that we are saved by hope; and the phrase, we with patience wait for; and that, we know not what we should pray for as we ought; are all of them said to these.

For he instructs them not to choose just what they may think, themselves, to be useful, but what the Spirit may suggest; for many things that seem to one's self profitable, do sometimes even cause much harm. Quiet, for instance, and freedom from dangers, and living out of fear, seemed to be advantageous for them. And what wonder if they did to them, since to the blessed Paul himself this seemed to be so? Still he came afterwards to know that the opposite to all these are the things advantageous, and when he came to know it, he was content.

So he that besought the Lord thrice to be freed from hazards, when once he heard Him say, My grace is sufficient for you, for My Power is perfected in weakness 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, was afterwards delighted at being persecuted, and insulted, and having irreparable ills done him. For, I glory, he says, in persecutions,

in insults (Eng. V. reproaches), in necessities. 2 Corinthians 12:10 And this was his reason for saying, For we know not what we should pray for as we ought. And he exhorted all men to give up these matters to the Spirit.

For the Holy Spirit is very mindful of us, and this is the will of God. Having then cheered them by all methods, he proceeds to what we have heard today, putting forward a reason strong enough to reclaim them. For he says, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Now when he speaks of all things, he mentions even the things that seem painful. For should even tribulation, or poverty, or imprisonment, or famines, or deaths, or anything else whatsoever come upon us, God is able to change all these things into the opposite.

For this is quite an instance of His unspeakable power, His making things seemingly painful to be lightsome to us, and turning them into that which is helpful to us. And so he does not say, that them that love God, no grievance approaches, but, that it works together for good, that is to say, that He uses the grievous things themselves to make the persons so plotted against approved. And this is a much greater thing than hindering the approach of such grievances, or stopping them when they have come.

And this is what He did even with the furnace at Babylon. For He did not either prevent their falling into it, or extinguish the flame after those saints were cast into it, but let it burn on, and made them by this very flame greater objects of wonder, and with the Apostles too He wrought other like wonders continually. Mark 16:18 For if men who have learned to be philosophic can use the things of nature to the opposite of their intention, and appear even when living in poverty in easier circumstances than the rich, and shine through disgrace: much more will God work for those that love Him both these and also greater things by far.

For one needs only one thing, a genuine love of Him, and all things follow that. As then things seemingly harmful do good to these, so do even things profitable harm those who love Him not. For instance, the exhibition of miracles and wisdom in His teaching only injured the Jews, as did the rightness of doctrine; and for the former they called Him a possessed person John 8:48, for the other one that would be equal to God John 5:18: and because of the miracles (ib. 11:47, 53), they even went about to kill Him.

But the thief when crucified, when nailed to the Cross, and reviled, and suffering ills unnumbered, not only was not hurt, but even gained the greatest good therefrom. See how for those who love God all things work together for good. After mentioning then this great blessing, one which far exceeds man's nature, since to many this seemed even past belief, he draws a proof of it from past blessings, in these words, to them who are called according to His purpose. Now consider, he means, from the calling, for instance, what I have just said.

Why then did He not from the first call all? Or why not Paul himself as soon as the rest? Does it not seem that the deferring was harmful? But it was still by the event shown to be for the best. The purpose he here mentions, however, that he might not ascribe everything to the calling; since in this way both Greeks and Jews would be sure to cavil. For if the calling alone were sufficient, how came it that all were not saved? Hence he says, that it is not the calling alone, but the purpose of those called too, that works the salvation. For the calling was not forced upon them, nor compulsory. All then were called, but all did not obey the call.

Ver. 29. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the Image of His Son.

See what superb honor! For what the Only-begotten was by Nature, this they also have become by grace. And still he was not satisfied with this calling of them conformed thereto, but even adds another point, that He might be the first-born. And even here he does not come to a pause, but again after this he proceeds to mention another point, Among many brethren. So wishing to use all means of setting the relationship in a clear light. Now all these things you are to take as said of the Incarnation. For according to the Godhead He is Only-begotten. See, what great things He has given unto us! Doubt not then about the future. For he shows even upon other grounds His concern for us by saying, that things were fore-ordered in this way from the beginning. For men have to derive from things their conceptions about them, but to God these things have been long determined upon, and from of old He bare good-will toward us ($\text{ἰὸν ἁΐς ἡμῶν... ὅτι ἠγάπαμεν αὐτοὺς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς}$), he says.

Ver. 30. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified.

Now He justified them by the regeneration of the laver. And whom He justified, them He also glorified by the gift, by the adoption.

Ver. 31. What shall we then say to these things?

As if he should say, Let me then hear no more about the dangers and the malicious devices from every quarter. For even if some disbelieve the things to come, still they have not a word to say against the good things that have already taken place; as, for instance, the friendship of God towards you from the first, the justifying, the glory. And yet these things He gave you by means seemingly distressing. And those things which you thought to be disgracing, the Cross, scourges, bonds, these are what have set the whole world aright. As then by what Himself suffered, though of aspect forbidding in man's eye, even by these He effected the liberty and salvation of the whole race; so also is He wont to do in regard to those things which you endure, turning your sufferings unto glory and renown for you. If God be for us, who can be against us?

Why, it may be said, who is there that is not against us? Why the world is against us, both kings and peoples, both relations and countrymen. Yet these that be against us, so far are they from thwarting us at all, that even without their will they become to us the causes of crowns, and procurers of countless blessings, in that God's wisdom turns their plots unto our salvation and glory. See how really no one is against us! For it was this which gave new lustre to Job, the fact that the devil was in arms against him. For the devil moved at once friends against him, his wife against him, and wounds, and servants, and a thousand other machinations. And it turned out that none of them was against him on the whole. And yet this was no great thing to him, though it was great in itself, but what is a far greater thing is, that it turned out that they were all for him. For since God was for him, even things seemingly against him all became for him. And this happened with the Apostles also, inasmuch as both the Jews, and they of the Gentiles, and false brethren, and rulers, and peoples, and famines, and poverty, and ten thousand things were against them; and yet nothing was against them. For the things which made them the most bright and conspicuous, and great in the sight both of God and of men, were these. Just reflect then what a word Paul has uttered about the faithful, and those who are truly (ἀληθινῶς) crucified, such as not even the Emperor with his diadem can achieve. For against him there are abundance of barbarians that arm themselves, and of enemies that invade, and of bodyguards that plot, and of subjects many that oftentimes are ever and anon rebelling, and thousands of other things. But against the faithful who takes good heed unto God's laws, neither man, nor devil, nor anything besides, can stand! For if you take away

his money, you have become the procurer of a reward to him. If you speak ill of him, by the evil report he gains fresh lustre in God's sight. If you cast him into starvation, the more will his glory and his reward be. If (what seems the most severe stroke of all) you give him over to death, you are twining a crown of martyrdom about him. What then is equivalent to this way of life, being that against which nothing can be done, but even they that seem to devise mischief are no less of service to him than benefactors? This is why he says, If God be for us, who can be against us? Next, not being satisfied with what he had already said, the greatest sign of His love for us, and that which he always is dwelling over, that he sets down here also; I mean, the slaying of His Son. For He did not only justify us, he means, and glorify us, and make us conformed to that Image, but not even His Son did He spare for you. And therefore he proceeds to say,

Ver. 32. He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

And here the words he uses are high-wrought (ἵνα μὴ ἀπολάβῃ ὁ υἱὸς τὸν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ) and exceedingly warm, to show his love. How then is He to neglect us, in whose behalf He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all? For reflect what goodness it is not to spare even His own Son, but to give Him up, and to give Him up for all, and those worthless, and unfeeling, and enemies, and blasphemers. How then shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? What he means then is much as follows; If He gave His own Son, and not merely gave Him, but gave Him to death, why doubt any more about the rest, since you have the Master? Why be dubious about the chattels, when you have the Lord? For He that gave the greater thing to His enemies, how shall He do else than give the lesser things to His friends?

Ver. 33. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

Here he is against those who say, that faith is no profit, and will not believe the complete change. (i.e. in baptism see p. 349.) And see how swiftly he stops their mouths, by the worthiness of Him that elected. He does not say, Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's servants? Or of God's faithful ones? But of God's elect? And election is a sign of virtue. For if when a horse-breaker has selected colts fit for the race, no one can find fault with them, but he would get laughed at who should find fault; much more when God selects souls are they that lay any charge against them deserving of laughter.

It is God that justifies.

Ver. 34. Who is He that condemns?

He does not say, it is God that forgave our sins, but what is much greater, It is God that justifies. For when the Judge's sentence declares us just, and a Judge such as that too, what signifies the accuser? Hence neither is it right to fear temptations, for God is for us, and has shown it by what He has done; nor again Jewish triflings, for He has both elected and justified us, and the wondrous thing is that it was also by the death of His Son that He did so. Who then is to condemn us, since God crowns us, and Christ was put to death for us, and not only was put to death, but also after this intercedes for us?

For, It is Christ, he says, that died, yea rather, that is risen from the dead, Who is at the right hand of God, Who also makes intercession for us.

For though seen now in His own dignity, He has not left caring for us, but even makes intercession for us, and still keeps up the same love. For He was not contented with being put to death alone. And this is a sign for the most part of very great love, to be doing not only what falls to His lot, but also to address

Another on this behalf. For this is all he meant to signify by the interceding, using a way of speaking better suited to man, and more condescending, that he might point out love. Since unless we take the words, He spared not, also with the same understanding, many inconsistencies will come of it. And that you may see that such is the point he is aiming at, after first saying, that He is at the Right Hand, he next proceeds to say, that He makes intercession for us, when he had shown an equality of honor and rank, so that hence it may appear that the Intercession is not a sign of inferiority, but of love only. For being Life itself (Î±½Î¿,Î¿Î¿Î¿Î¿) Psalm 36:9, and a Well of good things of every kind, and with the same power as the Father, both to raise up the dead and to quicken them, and do all besides that He does, how could He need to be a suppliant in order to help us? John 5:19-36 He that of His own power set free those who were given over and condemned, even from that condemnation; and made them righteous, and sons, and led them to the very highest honors, and brought to pass things which had never been hoped for: how should He, after having achieved all this, and having shown our nature on the King's throne, require to be a suppliant to do the easier things? Acts 7:55; Hebrews 10:12; Revelation 7:17 You see how it is shown by every argument, that there is no other reason for his having mentioned intercession, save to show the warmth and vigorousness of His love for us; for the Father also is represented to us as beseeching men to be reconciled to Him. For we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. 2 Corinthians 5:20 Still, though God beseeches, and men are ambassadors in Christ's stead to men, we do not understand on that account anything done unworthy of that dignity; but one thing only do we gather from all that is told us, namely, the intenseness of the love. This then let us do here also. If then the Spirit even makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, and Christ died and intercedes for us, and the Father spared not His own Son for you, and elected you, and justified you, why be afraid any more? Or why tremble when enjoying such great love, and having such great interest taken in you? In this way then, after showing His great providence over us from the first, he afterwards brings out what comes next in a bold style, and does not say, you ought also to love Him, but, as if grown enthusiastic at this unspeakable Providence over us, he says,

Ver. 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

And he does not say of God, so indifferent is it to him whether he mentions the Name of Christ or of God. Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Observe the blessed Paul's judgment. For he does not mention the things that we are daily getting taken by, love of money and desire of glory and the thralldom of anger, but things that are far more enthralling than these, and of power to put a force upon nature itself, and to wrench open the sternness of the resolution many times even against our will, are what he puts down here, tribulations and distresses. For even if the things mentioned are easy to tell up, still each single word has in it thousands of lines of temptation. For when he says, tribulation, he mentions prisons and bonds, and calumnies, and banishments, and all the other hardships, so in one word running through an ocean of dangers without stint, and exhibiting to us, in fact by a single word, all the evils that men meet with. Yet still he dares them all! Wherefore he brings them forward in the shape of questions, as if it was incontrovertible that nothing could move a person so beloved, and who had enjoyed so much providence over him. Then that this might not seem as if he had forgotten himself, he brings in the Prophet also, who declared this before, a long while ago and says,

Ver. 36. For Your sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Psalm 43:22

That is, we are exposed to all to be evil entreated of them. But yet against so many and so great dangers and these recent horrors, the object of our conflicts is given as a sufficient consolation, or rather not

sufficient only, but even much more. For it is not for men, nor for any other of the things of this life that we suffer, but for the King (he says) of the universe. But this is not the only crown, for he encircles them with another besides, and that varied and manifold. Since then, as they were men they could not have deaths without number to undergo, he shows that in this way the prize is none the less. For even if by nature it were fated to die once, by choice God has granted us to suffer this every day, if we be so minded. Whence it is plain that we shall depart with as many crowns as we have lived days, or rather with many more. For it is possible in a day to die not once alone or twice, but many times. For he who is always ready unto this, keeps continually receiving a full reward. This then is what the Psalmist (ἐν ᾧ ἡμέραν ὅλην, i.e., i.) hints at, when he says, all the day. And for this reason the Apostle also brought him before them to rouse them up the more. For if, he means, those in the old dispensation, who had the land as their reward, and the other things which come to a close along with this life, did so look down upon the present life and the temptations and dangers of it, what pardon should we find if we deal so languidly after the promise of Heaven, and the Kingdom above, and its unutterable blessings, so as not to come even up to the same measure as they? And this he does not say indeed, but leaves it to his hearers' consciences, and is satisfied with the quotation alone. He shows too that their bodies become a sacrifice, and that we must not be disturbed or troubled at God having so ordered it. And he exhorts them in other ways besides. For to prevent any from saying that he is merely philosophizing here before having any experience of realities, he adds, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, meaning the daily deaths of the Apostles. You see his courage and his goodness. For as they, he means, when slaughtered make no resistance, so neither do we. But since the feebleness of the mind of man, even after so great things, was afraid of the multitude of temptations, see how he again rouses the hearer, and gives him a lofty and exulting spirit, by saying,

Ver. 37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

For what is indeed wonderful is this, not that we are conquerors only, but that we are so by the very things meant as plots against us. And we are not merely conquerors, but we are more than conquerors, that is, are so with ease, without toil and labor. For without undergoing the real things, by only setting our mind aright, we raise our trophies against our enemies. And with good reason. For it is God that strives together with us. Do not then be doubtful, if though beaten we get the better of our beaters, if driven out we overcome our persecutors, if dying we put the living to fight. For when you take the power and also the love of God into account, there is nothing to prevent these wondrous and strange things from coming to pass, and that victory the most advantageous should shine upon us. For they did not merely conquer, but in a wondrous way, and so that one might learn that those who plotted against them had a war not against men, but against that invincible Might. See the Jews then with these among them, and at a loss quite, and saying, What are we to do to these men? Acts 4:16 For it is marvellous indeed, that though they had hold of them and had got them liable to their courts, and imprisoned them and beat them, they were yet at a loss and in perplexity, as they got overcome by the very things whereby they expected to conquer. And neither kings nor people, nor ranks of demons, nor the devil himself, had power to get the better of them, but were all overcome at a very great disadvantage, finding that all they planned against them became for them. And therefore he says, we are more than conquerors. For this was a new rule of victory for men to prevail by their adversaries, and in no instance to be overcome, but to go forth to these struggles as if they themselves had the issue in their own hands.

Ver. 38, 39. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These are great things here mentioned. But the reason we do not enter into them is, because we have not so great love. Yet still though they are great, as he wished to show that they were nothing beside the love wherewith he was loved of God; after it he then places his own, lest he should seem to be saying great things about himself. And what he says is somewhat of this kind. Why speak, he means, of things present, and evils inherited in this life? For even if a person were to tell me of things to come, and of powers; of things, such as death and life; of powers, such as angels and archangels, and all the superior orders of beings; even these would be little to me compared with the love of Christ. For even if a person were to threaten me with that future death to which there is no death, to separate me from Christ, nor if he promised the life without end, would I agree to it. Why mention kings here below and consuls? And this one or that? For if you tell me of angels, or all the powers above, or all existing things, or all that are to come, they are all small to me, both those in the earth, and those in heaven, and those under the earth, and those above heaven, compared to this charm. Then as though these were not enough to set before them the strong desire which he had, he gives a being to others again of like magnitude, and says, nor any other creation. And what he means is nearly this, even if there were any other creation as great as the visible, and as great as the intelligible, none of them could part me from that love. This he says not as if the Angels attempted it, or the other Powers, far from it, but as wishing to show quite to the utmost the charm he had toward Christ. For Christ he loved not for the things of Christ, but for His sake the things that were His, and to Him alone he looked, and one thing he feared, and that was falling from his love for Him. For this thing was in itself more dreadful than hell, as to abide in it was more desirable than the Kingdom.

What then should we now deserve, when he is found not to esteem even the things in Heaven as compared with the desire for Christ, and we set more store by things of mire and clay than by Christ? And he out of desire of Him would take up with falling into hell, and being banished from the Kingdom, if the choice between the two were put to him: but we are not even above the present life. Are we worthy then to touch his very shoes, when we have come to be so far short of his largeness of mind?

For he for Christ's sake does not think anything even of a kingdom; but we think slightly of Himself, but things of His we make great account of. And would it were of things of His. But now it is not even this; but with a Kingdom held out to us, we let that alone, and keep pursuing shadows and dreams all our days. And yet God in His love toward man and exceeding gentleness, has done the same as if an affectionate father should, on his son's becoming disinclined to a continual stay with him, manage to bring this about in another way.

For since we have not the right feeling of desire after Him, He keeps putting various other things before us, so as to hold us to Himself. Yet not even for this do we abide with Him, but we keep springing off to childish playthings. Not so Paul, but like a noble spirited child, who is open and attached to his father, he seeks only after the Father's presence, and other things he sets not so much store by; or rather, it is much more than a child. For he does not value the Father and things that are His at the same rate, but when he looks to the Father, he counts them nothing, but would choose rather to be chastised and beaten, so he was with Him, than to be apart from Him and indulge his ease.

Let us then shudder, all of us that do not even feel above money for the sake of Christ, or rather such of us as do not feel above it for our own sakes. For it was Paul alone who suffered in good earnest all things for Christ's sake, not for the sake of the kingdom, or his own honor, but owing to his affection to Him. But as for us, neither Christ nor the things of Christ draw us from the things of this life; but as serpents, or snakes, or swine, or even as all of them at once, so do we keep dragging on in the mire.

For wherein are we better than those brutes, when with so many and such great examples before us we still keep bowing down, and have not the heart to look up to Heaven for ever so little a time? Yet did God give up even His Son. But you will not so much as share your bread with Him, Who was given up for you, Who was slain for you. The Father for your sake spared not Him, and this too when He was indeed His Son, but you do not look upon Him even when pining with starvation, and this too when you should but spend of His own, and spend it too for your own good!

What can be worse than such a breach of law as this? He was given up for you, He was slain for you, He goes about in hunger for you, it is of His own you should give, that you may yourself get the gain, and still you do not give! What sort of stone is there than which these are not more senseless, who in despite of such great inducements, continue in this diabolical cruel-heartedness? For He was not satisfied even with death and the Cross only, but He took up with becoming poor also, and a stranger, and a beggar, and naked, and being thrown into prison, and undergoing sickness, that so at least He might call you off.

If you will not requite Me, He says, as having suffered for you, show mercy on Me for My poverty. And if you are not minded to pity Me for My poverty, do for My disease be moved, for My imprisonment be softened. And if even these things make you not charitable, for the easiness of the request comply with Me. For it is no costly gift I ask, but bread and lodging, and words of comfort; but if even after this you still continue unsubdued, still for the Kingdom's sake be improved for the rewards which I have promised.

Have you then no regard even for these? Yet still for very nature's sake be softened at seeing Me naked, and remember that nakedness wherewith I was naked on the Cross for you; or, if not this, yet that wherewith I am now naked through the poor. I was then bound for you, nay, still am so for you, that whether moved by the former ground or the latter, you might be minded to show some pity. I fasted for you, again I am hungry for you. I was thirsty when hanging on the Cross, I am thirsty also through the poor, that by the former as also by the latter I may draw you to Myself, and make you charitable to your own salvation.

Hence also of you that owest Me the requital of benefits without number, I make not demand as of one that owes, but crown you as one that favors Me, and a kingdom do I give you for these small things. For I do not say so much as put an end to My poverty, or give Me riches, and yet I did become poor for you; yet still I ask for bread and clothing, and a small solace for My hunger. And if I be thrown into prison, I do not insist upon your loosing My bonds and setting Me free, but one thing only do I seek after, that you would visit Me, Who was (or am) bound for you, and I shall have received favor enough, and for this only will I give you Heaven.

And yet I delivered you from most galling bonds, but for Me it is quite enough, if you will but visit Me when in prison. For I am able indeed to crown you even without all this; yet I would fain be a debtor to you, that the crown may give you some feeling of confidence. This is why, though I am able to support Myself, I come about begging, and stand beside your door, and stretch out Mine hand, since My wish is to be supported by you. For I love you exceedingly, and so desire to eat at your table, which is the way with those that love a person.

And I glory John 15:8 in this. And when the whole world are spectators, then am I to herald you forth, and in the hearing of all men to display you as My supporter. Yet we, when we are supported by any one, feel ashamed, and cover our faces; but He, as loving us exceedingly, even if we hold our peace, will then tell out what we did with much praise, and is not ashamed to say, that when Himself was naked we clothed

Him, and fed Him when hungry. Let us then lay all these things to heart, and not be contented with passing mere praises upon them, but let us even accomplish what I have been speaking of.

For what is the good of these applauses and clamors? I demand one thing only of you, and that is the display of them in real action, the obedience of deeds. This is my praise, this your gain, this gives me more lustre than a diadem. When you have left the Church then, this is the crown that you should make for me and for you, through the hand of the poor; that both in the present life we may be nourished with a goodly hope, and after we have departed to the life to come, we may attain to those good things without number, to which may all of us attain by the grace and love toward man, etc.

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