

Homily 17 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's heart's desire is for the Jews to be saved, and he rebukes them for their zeal without knowledge and ignorance of God's righteousness.

Scripture: Romans 10:1-4, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:11

Topics: "Seeking God's Glory", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of seeking glory and praise from men, highlighting the emptiness and destructiveness of vanity, which leads to covetousness, haughtiness, and a loss of true reward. He emphasizes the importance of seeking glory from God alone, as demonstrated by Paul's exhortation to glory only in the cross of Christ. Chrysostom urges his listeners to avoid the pitfalls of vanity by focusing on spiritual virtues, rejecting worldly acclaim, and striving for the eternal glory that comes from God.

Transcript

Rom. X. 1

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is, that they might be saved.

He is now going again to rebuke them more vehemently than before. Wherefore he again does away with every suspicion of hatred, and makes a great effort beforehand to correct misapprehension. Do not then, he says, mind words or accusations, but observe that it is not in any hostile spirit that I say this. For it is not likely that the same person should desire their salvation, and not desire it only, but even pray for it, and yet should also hate them, and feel aversion to them. For here he calls his exceeding desire, and the prayer which he makes (εὐδοκᾶν), heart's desire. For it is not the being freed from punishment only, but that they may also be saved, that he makes so great a point of, and prays for. Nor is it from this only, but also from the sequel that he shows the goodwill that he has towards them. For from what is open to him, as far as he can, he forces his way, and is contentious to find out some shadow at least of an excuse for them. And he has not the power, being overcome by the nature of the facts.

Ver. 2. For I bear them record, says he, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Ought not this then to be a ground for pardoning and not for accusing them? For if it is not of man that they are separated, but through zeal, they deserved to be pitied rather than punished. But observe how adroitly

he favors them in the word, and yet shows their unseasonable obstinacy.

Ver. 3. For they being ignorant, he says, of God's righteousness.

Again the word would lead to pardon. But the sequel to stronger accusation, and such as does away with defense of any kind.

And going about, he says, to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

And these things he says to show, that it was from a petulancy and love of power that they erred, rather than from ignorance, and that not even this righteousness from the deeds of the Law did they establish. Matthew 21:38; John 12:19, 42 For saying going about to establish is what one would do to show this. And in plain words indeed he has not stated this (for he has not said, that they fell short of both righteousnesses), but he has given a hint of it in a very judicious manner, and with the wisdom so befitting him. For if they are still going about to establish that, it is very plain that they have not yet established it. If they have not submitted themselves to this, they have fallen short of this also. But he calls it their own righteousness, either because the Law was no longer of force, or because it was one of trouble and toil. But this he calls God's righteousness, that from faith, because it comes entirely from the grace from above, and because men are justified in this case, not by labors, but by the gift of God. But they that evermore resisted the Holy Ghost, and vexatiously tried to be justified by the Law, came not over to the faith. But as they did not come over to the faith, nor receive the righteousness thereupon ensuing, and were not able to be justified by the Law either, they were thrown out of all resources.

Ver. 4. For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believes.

See the judgment of Paul. For as he had spoken of a righteousness, and a righteousness, lest they of the Jews which believed should seem to have the one but be excluded from the other, and to be accused of lawlessness (for even these there was no less cause to fear about as being still newly come in), and lest Jews should again expect to achieve it, and should say, Though we have not at present fulfilled it, yet we certainly will fulfil it, see what ground he takes. He shows that there is but one righteousness, and that has its full issue in this, and that he that has taken to himself this, the one by faith, has fulfilled that also. But he that rejects this, falls short as well of that also. For if Christ be the end of the Law, he that has not Christ, even if he seem to have that righteousness, has it not. But he that has Christ, even though he have not fulfilled the Law aright, has received the whole. For the end of the physician's art is health. As then he that can make whole, even though he has not the physician's art, has everything; but he that knows not how to heal, though he seem to be a follower of the art, comes short of everything: so is it in the case of the Law and of faith. He that has this has the end of that likewise, but he that is without this is an alien from both. For what was the object of the Law? To make man righteous. But it had not the power, for no one fulfilled it. This then was the end of the Law and to this it looked throughout, and for this all its parts were made, its feasts, and commandments, and sacrifices, and all besides, that man might be justified. But this end Christ gave a fuller accomplishment of through faith. Be not then afraid, he says, as if transgressing the Law in having come over to the faith. For then do you transgress it, when for it thou dost not believe Christ. If you believe in Him, then you have fulfilled it also, and much more than it commanded. For you have received a much greater righteousness. Next, since this was an assertion, he again brings proof of it from the Scriptures.

Ver. 5. For Moses, he says, describes the righteousness which is of the Law.

What he means is this. Moses shows us the righteousness ensuing from the Law, what sort it is of, and whence. What sort is it then of, and what does it consist in? In fulfilling the commandments. He (R.T. the man), that does these things, He says, shall live by (or in), them. Leviticus 18:5 And there is no other way of becoming righteous in the Law save by fulfilling the whole of it. But this has not been possible for any one, and therefore this righteousness has failed them. (διαπ■πτωκεν). But tell us, Paul, of the other righteousness also, that which is of grace. What is that then, and of what does it consist? Hear the words in which he gives a clear sketch of it. For after he had refuted the other, he next goes on to this, and says,

Ver. 6, 7, 8, 9. But the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven (that is, to bring Christ down from above): or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what says it? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach. That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

To prevent the Jews then from saying, How came they who had not found the lesser righteousness to find the greater? He gives a reason there was no answering, that this way was easier than that. For that requires the fulfilment of all things (for when you do all, then you shall live); but the righteousness which is of faith does not say this, but what?

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. Then again that we may not seem to be making it contemptible by showing it to be easy and cheap, observe how he expands his account of it. For he does not come immediately to the words just given, but what does he say? But the righteousness which is of faith says on this wise; Say not in your heart, Who shall go up into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down); or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

For as to the virtue manifested in works there is opposed a listlessness, which relaxes our labors, and it requires a very wakeful soul not to yield to it: thus, when one is required to believe, there are reasonings which confuse and make havoc of the minds of most men, and it wants a soul of some vigor to shake them thoroughly off. And this is just why he brings the same before one. And as he did in Abraham's case, so he does here also. For having there shown that he was justified by faith, lest he should seem to have gotten so great a crown by a mere chance, as if it were a thing of no account, to extol the nature of faith, he says, Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations.

And being not weak in faith, he considered his own body now dead, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform Romans 4:18-21: so he showed that there is need of vigor, and a lofty soul, that takes in things beyond expectation, and stumbles not at appearances. This then he does here also, and shows that it requires a wise mind, and a spirit heavenly (Gr. heaven-reaching) and great.

And he does not say merely, Say not, but, Say not in your heart, that is, do not so much as think of doubting and saying with yourself, And how can this be? You see that this is a chief characteristic of faith, to leave all the consequences of this lower world, and so to seek for that which is above nature, and to cast out the feebleness of calculation, and so to accept everything from the Power of God. The Jews, however, did not merely assert this, but that it was not possible to be justified by faith.

But himself turns even what had taken place to another account, that having shown the thing to be so great, that even after it had taken place it required faith, he might seem with good reason to bestow a crown on these: and he uses the words which are found in the Old Testament, being always at pains to keep quite clear of the charges of love of novelties, and of opposition to it. For this, which he here says of faith, Moses says to them of the commandment, so showing that they had enjoyed at God's hand a great benefit.

For there is no need to say, he means, that one must go up to heaven, or cross a great sea, and then receive the commandments, but things so great and grand has God made of easy access to us. And what means the phrase, The Word is near you? That is, It is easy. For in your mind and in your tongue is your salvation. There is no long journey to go, no seas to sail over, no mountains to pass, to get saved. But if you be not minded to cross so much as the threshold, you may even while you sit at home be saved.

For in your mouth and in your heart is the source of salvation. And then on another score also he makes the word of faith easy, and says, that God raised Him from the dead. For just reflect upon the worthiness of the Worker, and you will no longer see any difficulty in the thing. That He is Lord then, is plain from the resurrection. And this he said at the beginning even of the Epistle. Which was declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead.

Romans 1:4 But that the resurrection is easy too, has been shown even to those who are very unbelieving, from the might of the Worker of it. Since then the righteousness is greater, and light and easy to receive, is it not a sign of the utmost contentiousness to leave what is light and easy, and set about impossibilities? For they could not say that it was a thing they declined as burdensome. See then how he deprives them of all excuse. For what do they deserve to have said in their defense, who choose what is burdensome and impracticable, and pass by what is light, and able to save them, and to give them those things which the Law could not give?

All this can come only from a contentious spirit, which is in a state of rebellion against God. For the Law is galling (■ παχθ■ς), but grace is easy. The Law, though they dispute never so much, does not save; Grace yields the righteousness resulting from itself, and that from the Law likewise. What plea then is to rescue them, since they are disposed to be contentious against this, but cling to that to no purpose whatever? Then, since he had made a strong assertion, he again confirms it from the Scripture.

Ver. 11-13. For the Scripture says, he proceeds, Whosoever believes in Him, shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.

You see how he produces witnesses, whether to the faith, or to the confession of it. For the words, Every one that believes, point out the faith. But the words, Whosoever shall call upon, set forth confession. Then again to proclaim the universality of the grace, and to lay their boasting low, what he had before demonstrated at length, he here briefly recalls to their memory, showing again that there is no difference between the Jew and the uncircumcised. For there is, he says, no difference between the Jew and the Greek.

And what he had said about the Father, when he was arguing this point, that he says here about the Son. For as before he said in asserting this, Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also: seeing it is one God Romans 3:29-30:-- So he says here also, For the same Lord over all is rich unto all (and upon all). Romans 3:22 You see how he sets Him forth as exceedingly

desiring our salvation, since He even reckons this to be riches to Himself; so that they are not even now to despair, or fancy that, provided they would repent, they were unpardonable.

For He who considers it as riches to Himself to save us, will not cease to be rich. Since even this is riches, the fact of the gift being shed forth unto all. For since what distresses him the most was, that they, who were in the enjoyment of a prerogative over the whole world, should now by the faith be degraded from these thrones, and be no wit better off than others, he brings the Prophets in constantly as foretelling, that they would have equal honor with them. For whosoever, he says, believes in Him shall not be ashamed Isaiah 28:16; and, Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.

Joel 2:32 And the whosoever is put in all cases, that they might not say anything in reply. But there is nothing worse than vainglory. For it was this, this most especially, which proved their ruin. Whence Christ also said to them, How can you believe, which receive glory one of another, and seek not the glory which comes of God only? John 5:44 This, with ruin, exposes men also to much ridicule and before the punishment in the other world involves them in ills unnumbered in this.

And if it seem good, that you may learn this clearly, leaving for the present the heavens which that puts us out of, and the hell which it thrusts us into, let us investigate the whole matter as here before us. What then can be more wasteful than this? What more disgraceful, or more offensive? For that this disorder is a wasteful one is plain from the people who spend to no purpose whatsoever on theatres, horse-races, and other such irrelevant expenditures: from those that build the fine and expensive houses, and fit up everything in a useless style of extravagance, on which I must not enter in this discourse.

But that a person diseased in this way must needs be extravagant, and expensive, and rapacious, and covetous, anybody can see. For that he may have food to give the brute, he thrusts his hand into the substance of others. And why do I talk of substance? It is not money only but souls also that this fire devours, and it works not death here only, but also hereafter. For vanity is the mother of hell, and greatly kindles that fire, and the venomous worm. One may see that it has power even over the dead.

And what can be worse than this? For the other passions are put an end to by death, but this even after death shows its force, and strives to display its nature even in the dead corpse. For when men give orders on their death-bed to raise to them fine monuments, which will waste all their substance, and take pains to lay out beforehand a vast extravagance in their funeral, and in their lifetime insult the poor that come to them for a penny and a single loaf, but when they are dead give a rich banquet to the worm, why seek any more exorbitant thralldom to the disease?

From this mischief also irregular loves are conceived. For there are many whom it is not the beauty of the appearance, nor the desire of lying with her, but the wish to boast that I have made conquest of such an one, has even drawn into adultery. And why need I mention the other mischiefs that spring of this? For I had rather be long (3 manuscripts διηνεκ■ς) the slave of ten thousand savages, than of vanity once. For even they do not put such commands upon their captives, as this vice lays upon its votaries.

Because it says, Be thou every one's slave, be he nobler or be he lower than yourself. Despise your soul, neglect virtue, laugh at freedom, immolate your salvation, and if you do any good thing, do it not to please God, but to display it to the many, that for these things you may even lose your crown. And if you give alms, or if you fast, undergo the pains, but take care to lose the gain. What can be more cruel than these commands? Hence grudging bears sway, hence haughtiness, hence covetousness, the mother of evils.

For the swarm of domestics, and the black servants liveried in gold, and the hangers on, and the flatterers, and the silver-tinselled chariots, and the other absurdities greater than these, are not had for any pleasure's sake or necessity, but for mere vanity. Yes, one will say, but that this affliction is an evil, anybody can see; but how we are to keep quite clear of it, this is what you should tell us. Well then, in the first place, if you persuade yourself that this disorder is a baneful one, you will have made a very good beginning towards correcting it.

For when a man is sick, he speedily sends for the physician, if he be first made acquainted with the fact that he is sick. But if you seek for another way besides to escape from hence, look to God continually, and be content with glory from Him; and if you find the passion tickling you, and stirring you to tell your well-doings to your fellow-servants, bethink yourself next, that after telling them you gain nothing. Quench the absurd desire, and say to your soul, Lo, you have been so long big with your own well-doings to tell them, and you have not had the courage to keep them to yourself, but hast blabbed them out to all.

What good then have you gotten from this? None at all, but loss to the utmost, and avoidance of all that had been gathered together with much labor. And besides this, consider another thing also, which is, that most men's opinion is perverted, and not perverted only, but that it withers away so soon.

For supposing they do admire you for the time, when the occasion has gone by they will have forgotten it all, and have taken away from you the crown God had given, and have been unable to secure to you that from themselves. And yet if this were abiding, it were a most miserable thing to exchange that for this. But when even this has gone, what defense shall we be able to make for betraying the abiding one for the sake of the unabiding one, for losing such blessings for the sake of credit with a few?

And indeed even if they who praise were numerous, even for this they were to be pitied, and the more so the more numerous those who do it. But if you are surprised at what I have said, hear Christ giving His sentence in this way, Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you. Luke 6:26 And so indeed it should seem. For if in every art you look to the workmen (δημιουργους) in it to be judges of it, how come you to trust the proving of virtue to the many, and not most of all to Him Who knows it more surely than any, and is best able to applaud and to crown it?

This saying then, let us inscribe both on our walls and our doors and our mind, and let us keep constantly saying to ourselves, Woe unto us, when all men speak well of us. For even they that so speak slander one afterward as a vain person, and fond of honor, and covetous of their good word. But God does not so. But when He sees you coveting the glory that comes of Him, then He will praise you most, and respect (θαυμάσει om. in most manuscripts) you, and proclaim you conqueror.

Not so man; but, when he finds you slavish instead of free, by gratifying you often by bare words with false praise, he snatches from you your true meed, and makes you more of a menial than a purchased slave. For those last men get to obey them after their orders, but thou even without orders makest yourself a slave. For thou dost not even wait to hear something from them, but if you merely know wherein you may gratify them, even without their command you do all. What hell then should we not deserve, for giving the wicked pleasure, and courting their service before they give orders, while we will not hearken to God, even when He every day commands and exhorts us?

And yet if you are covetous of glory and praise, avoid the praise that comes of men, and then you will attain to glory. Turn aside from fair speeches, and then you will obtain praises without number both from God and from men. For there is no one we are used to give so much glory to, as the man who looks down

upon glory, or to praise and respect so much as the man who thinks scorn of getting respected and praised. And if we do so, much more will the God of the universe. And when He glorifies you and praises you, what man can be more justly pronounced blessed?

For there is not a greater difference between glory and disgrace, than between the glory from above and that of men. Or rather, there is a much greater, yea an infinite difference. For if this, even when it does not get put beside any other, is but a base and uncomely one, when we come to scrutinize it by the other's side, just consider how great its baseness will be found to be! For as a prostitute stands at her place and lets herself out to any one, so are they that be slaves of vanity.

Or rather, these be more base than she. For that sort of women do in many instances treat those enamoured of them with scorn. But you prostitute yourself to everybody, whether runaway slaves, or thieves, or cut-purses (for it is of these and such as these that the play-houses that applaud you consist), and those whom as individuals you hold to be nothing worth, when in a body, you honor more than your own salvation and show yourself less worthy of honor than any of them. For how can you be else than less worthy, when you stand in need of the good word of others, and fancy that you have not enough by yourself, unless you receive the glory that comes of others?

Do you not perceive, pray, beside what I have said, that as you are an object of notice, and known to every body, if you should commit a fault, you will have accusers unnumbered; but if unknown, you will remain in security? Yes, a man may say, but then if I do well I shall have admirers unnumbered. Now the fearful thing is, that it is not only when you sin, but even when you do aright, that the disorder of vanity does you mischief, in the former case subverting thousands, in the present bereaving you entirely of your reward.

It is then a sad thing, and replete with disgrace of every kind, to be in love with glory even in civil matters. But when even in spiritual you are in the same plight what excuse is there left remaining for you, when you are not minded to yield God even as much honor as you have yourself from your servants? For even the slave looks to the eyes of his master Psalm 123:2, and the hireling to his employer, who is to pay him wages, and the disciple to his master. But you do just the contrary.

Having left the God that hired you, even your Master, you look to your fellow-servants; and this knowing that God remembers your well-doings even after this life, but man only for the present. And when you have spectators assembled in Heaven, you are gathering together spectators upon earth. And where the wrestler struggles, there he would be honored; but thou, while your wrestling is above, art anxious to gain you a crown below. And what can be worse than madness like this?

But let us look, if it seem proper, at the crowns also. For one is formed by haughtiness, and a second by grudging against another, and a third by dissimulation and flattery, another again by wealth, and another by servile obsequiousness. And like as children at their childish play put crowns of grass upon one another, and many a time laugh at him that is crowned behind his back; thus now also they that pass their praises upon you, many a time joke by themselves at their putting the grass upon us.

And would it were grass only! But now the crown is laden with much mischief, and ruins all our well-doings. Taking then the vileness of it into consideration, flee from the damage entailed. For how many would you have to praise you? A hundred? Or twice, or thrice, or four times as many? Or rather, if you please, put them at ten times or twenty times as many, and let there be two or four thousand, or if you will, even ten thousand to applaud you. Still these be no better than so many daws cawing from above. Or

rather taking the assemblage of the angels into consideration, these will seem more vile than even worms, and their good word of not so much solidity as a cobweb, or a smoke, or a dream.

Hear then how Paul, who saw through these things thoroughly, is so far from seeking after them, that he even deprecates them, in the words, But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ. Galatians 6:14 This glory then be thou also emulous of, that you may not provoke the Master, because in so doing you are insulting God, and not yourself alone. For if you even were a painter, and had some pupil, and he were to omit showing you his practice of the art, but set forth his painting publicly just to any body that chanted to observe it, you would not take it quietly.

But if this even with your fellow-servants were an insult, how much more with the Master! But if you have a mind to learn on other grounds to feel scorn for the thing, be of a lofty mind, laugh at appearances, increase your love of real glory, be filled with a spiritual temper, say to your soul as Paul did, Do you not know that we shall judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:3 and having by this roused it up, go on to rebuke it, and say, You who judges the angels, will you let yourself be judged of off-scourings, and be praised with dancers, and mimics, and gladiators, and horse-drivers?

For these men do follow after applause of this sort. But do thou poise your wing high above the din of these, and emulate that citizen of the wilderness, John, and learn how he was above regarding the multitude, and did not turn him to look at flatterers, but when he saw all the dwellers in Palestine poured forth about him, and wondering, and astonished at him, he was not puffed up with such honor as this, but rose up against them, and discoursing to his great concourse as if to one youth, he thus rebuked them and said, You serpents, you generation of vipers!

Matthew 3:7 Yet it was for him that they had run together, and left the cities, in order to see that holy personage, and still none of these things unnerved him. For he was far above glory, and free from all vanity. So also Stephen, when he saw the same people again, not honoring him, but mad upon him, and gnashing their teeth, being lifted above their wrath, said, You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. Acts 7:51 Thus also Elias, when those armies were present, and the king, and all the people, said, How long halt ye upon both your hips? 1 Kings 18:21, Septuagint, true sense of halt.

But we flatter all, court all, with this servile obsequiousness buying their honor. Wherefore all things are turned upside down, and for this favor the business of Christianity is betrayed, and everything neglected for the opinion of the generality. Let us then banish this passion, and then we shall have a right notion of liberty, and of the haven, and the calm. For the vain man is ever like persons in a storm, trembling, and fearing, and serving a thousand masters. But he that is clear of this thralldom, is like men in havens, enjoying a liberty untainted.

Not so that person, but as many acquaintances as he has, so many masters has he, and he is forced to be a slave to all of them. How then are we to get free from this hard bondage? It is by growing enamoured of another glory, which is really glory. For as with those that are enamoured of persons, the sight of some handsomer one does by its being seen take them off from the first: so with those that court the glory which comes from us men, the glory from heaven, if it gleams on them, has power to lead them off from this.

Let us then look to this, and become thoroughly acquainted with it, that by feeling admiration of its beauty, we may shun the hideousness of the other, and have the benefit of much pleasure by enjoying this continually. Which may we all attain to by the grace and love toward man, etc.

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