

Homily 19 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul explains that God's election of Israel was not based on their merits, but on His sovereign choice, and that their rejection was due to their unbelief and stubbornness, which led to their spiritual slumber and punishment.

Scripture: Romans 11:7-36

Topics: "Gods Wisdom", "Faith And Mercy"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge, highlighting the unsearchable nature of His judgments and ways. He emphasizes the importance of faith and mercy, showing how God's plan includes both Jews and Gentiles, with salvation offered to all through belief. Chrysostom encourages humility, compassion, and a focus on spiritual relationships rather than earthly ties, urging believers to imitate God's love and mercy in their actions.

Transcript

Rom. XI. 7

What then? Israel has not obtained that, which he seeks for; but the election has obtained it and the rest were blinded.

He had said that God did not cast off His people; and to show in what sense He had not cast them off, he takes refuge in the Prophets again. And having shown by them that the more part of the Jews were lost, that he might not seem to be again bringing forward an accusation of his own, and to make his discourse offensive, and to be attacking them as enemies, he takes refuge in David and Isaiah, and says,

Ver. 8. According as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber. Isaiah 29:10

Or rather we should go back to the beginning of his argument. Having then mentioned the state of things in Elijah's time, and shown what grace is, he proceeds, What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for. Now this is as much what an accuser would say, as what one who was putting a question. For the Jew, he means, is inconsistent with himself when he seeks for righteousness, which he will not accept. Then to leave them with no excuse, he shows, from those who have accepted it, their unfeeling spirit, as he says, But the election has obtained it, and they are the condemnation of the others. And this is what Christ says, But if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Wherefore they shall be your judges. Luke 11:19 For to prevent any one from accusing the nature of the thing, and

not their own temper, he points out those who had obtained it. Hence he uses the word with great propriety, to show at once the grace from above and the zeal of these. For it is not to deny free-will that he speaks of their having obtained (as by chance, Gr. ἀπὸ ἰσχυροῦ καὶ χάριτος) it, but to show the greatness of the good things, and that the greater part was of grace, though not the whole. For we too are in the habit of saying, so and so chanced to get (same word), so and so met with, when the gain has been a great one. Because it is not by man's labors, but by God's gift, that the greater part was brought about.

And the rest was blinded.

See how he has been bold enough to tell with his own voice the casting off of the rest. For he had indeed spoken of it already, but it was by bringing the prophets in as accusers. But from this point he declares it in his own person. Still even here he is not content with his own declaration, but brings Isaiah the prophet in again. For after saying, were blinded, he proceeds; according as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber. Now whence came this blinding? He had indeed mentioned the causes of it before, and turned it all upon their own heads, to show that it was from their unseasonable obstinacy that they had to bear this. And now he speaks of it too. For when he says, Eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, he is but finding fault with their contentious spirit. For when they had eyes to see the miracles, and were possessed of ears to hear that marvellous Teaching, they never used these as were fitting. And the He gave, do not imagine to mean here an agency, but a permission only. But slumber (ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ἀμετανοήτος, lit. piercing) is a name he here gives to the habit of soul inclinable to the worse, when incurably and unchangeably so. For in another passage David says, that my glory may sing unto You, and I may not be put to slumber Psalm 30:12, Septuagint: that is, I may not alter, may not be changed. For as a man who is hushed to slumber in a state of pious fear would not easily be made to change his side; so too he that is slumbering in wickedness would not change with facility. For to be hushed to slumber here is nothing else but to be fixed and riveted to a thing. In pointing then to the incurable and unchangeable character of their spirit, he calls it a spirit of slumber. Then to show that for this unbelief they will be most severely punished, he brings the Prophet forward again, threatening the very things which in the event came to pass.

Ver. 9. Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block. Psalm 69:22-23

That is, let their comforts and all their good things change and perish, and let them be open to attack from any one. And to show that this is in punishment for sins that they suffer this, he adds, and a recompense unto them.

Ver. 10. Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and bow down their back always.

Do these things then still require any interpreting? Are they not plain even to those ever so senseless? And before our words, the very issue of facts has anticipated us in bearing witness to what was said. For at what time have they ever been so open to attacks? At what time such an easy prey? At what time has He so bowed down their backs? At what time have they been set under such bondage? And what is more, there is not to be any unloosing from these terrors. And this the prophet has also hinted.

For he does not say only, bow Thou down their back, but, forever bow Thou down. But if you are disposed to dispute, O Jew, about the issue, from what has gone before learn also the present case. Thou went down to Egypt; and two hundred years passed, and God freed you speedily from that bondage, and that though thou were irreligious, and went whoring with the most baneful whoredom. You were freed from Egypt, and you worshipped the calf, you sacrificed your sons to Baalpeor, you defiled the temple, you

by saying, But rather through their fall salvation has come unto the Gentiles. But we must not take what is here said literally, but get acquainted with the spirit and object of the speaker, and what he aimed to compass. Which thing I ever entreat of your love. For if with this in our minds we take up what is here said, we shall not find a difficulty in any part of it. For his present anxiety is to remove from those of the Gentiles the haughtiness which might spring in them from what he had said. For in this way they too were more likely to continue unshaken in the faith, when they had learned to be reasonable, as also those of the Jews were, when quit of despair, more likely to come with readiness to grace. Having regard then to this object of his, let us so listen to all that is said on this passage. What does he say then? And whence does he show that their fall was not irremediable, nor their rejection final? He argues from the Gentiles, saying as follows:

Through their fall salvation has come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

This language is not his own only, but in the Gospels too the parables mean this. For He who made a marriage feast for His Son, when the guests would not come, called those in the highways. Matthew 22:9. And He who planted the Vineyard, when the husbandmen slew the Heir, let out His Vineyard to others. Matthew 21:38, etc And without any parable, He Himself said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Matthew 15:24 And to the Syrophœnician woman, when she persevered, He said somewhat further besides.

It is not meet, He says, to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs. Matthew 15:26 And Paul to those of the Jews that raised a sedition, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you: but seeing ye judge yourselves unworthy, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. Acts 13:46 And throughout it is clear that the natural course of things was this, that they should be the first to come in, and then those of the Gentiles; but since they disbelieved, the order was reversed; and their unbelief and fall caused these to be brought in first.

Hence it is that he says, through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. But if he mentions what the course of things issued in, as if the chief design of Providence, do not feel surprised. For he wishes to solace their down-stricken souls, and his meaning is about this. Jesus came to them; they did not receive Him, though He did countless miracles, but crucified Him. Hence He drew the Gentiles to Him, that the honor they had, by cutting them to the heart for their insensibility might at least out of a moroseness against others persuade them to come over.

For they ought to have been first admitted, and then we. And this was why he said, For it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. Romans 1:16 But as they had started off, we the last became first. See then how great honors he gathers for them even from this. One that he says, we were then called, when they were not willing; a second that he says, the reason of our being called was not that we only might be saved, but that they also, growing jealous at our salvation, might become better.

What does he say then? That if it were not for the Jews' sake, we should not have been called and saved at all? We should not before them, but in the regular order. Wherefore also when He was speaking to the disciples, He did not say barely, Go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel Matthew 10:6, but, Go rather to the sheep, to show that to those parts also they must come after these. And Paul again says not, It was necessary that the word of God should have been spoken unto you, but should first have been spoken unto you Acts 13:46, to show that in the second place it must be to us also.

And this was both done and said, that they might not be able, shameless though they were, to pretend that they were overlooked, and that was why they did not believe. This then was why Christ, though he knew all things before, yet came to them first.

Ver. 12. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?

Here he is speaking to gratify them. For even if these had fallen a thousand times, the Gentiles would not have been saved unless they had shown faith. As the Jews likewise would not have perished unless they had been unbelieving and disputatious. But as I said, he is solacing them now they are laid low, giving them so much the more ground to be confident of their salvation if they altered. For if when they stumbled, he says, so many enjoyed salvation, and when they were cast out so many were called, just consider what will be the case when they return. But he does not put it thus, When they return. Now he does not say how much more their return, or their altering, or their well-doing, but how much more their fullness, that is, when they are all about coming in. And this he said to show that then also grace and God's gift will do the larger part, or almost the whole.

Ver. 13, 14. For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office; if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Again he endeavors much to get himself clear of untoward suspicion. And he seems to be blaming the Gentiles, and to be humbling their conceits, yet he gives a gentle provocation to the Jew also. And indeed he goes round about seeking to veil and allay this great ruin of theirs. But he finds no means of doing it, owing to the nature of the facts. For from what he had said, they deserved but the greater condemnation, when those who were far short of them had taken the good things prepared for them. This is why then he passes from the Jews to those of the Gentiles, and puts in between his discourse the part about them, as wishing to show that he is saying all these things in order to instruct them to be reasonable. For I praise you, he means, for these two reasons; one, because I am necessitated to do so as being your commissioned minister; the other, that through you I may save others. And he does not say, my brethren, my kinsmen; but, my flesh. And next, when pointing out their disputatious spirit, he does not say, if by any means I may persuade, but, provoke to jealousy and save; and here again not all, but, some of them. So hard were they! And even amid his rebuke he shows again the Gentiles honored, for they are causes of their salvation, and not in the same way. For they became purveyors of blessings to them through unbelief, but these to the Jews by faith. Hence the estate of the Gentiles seems to be at once equal and superior. For what will you say, O Jew? That if we had not been cast out, he would not have been called so soon? This the man of the Gentiles may say too, If I had not been saved, you would not have been moved to jealousy. But if you would know wherein we have the advantage, I save you by believing, but it is by stumbling that you have afforded us an access before yourself. Then perceiving again that he had touched them to the quick, resuming his former argument, he says,

Ver. 15. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?

Yet this again condemns them, since, while others gained by their sins, they did not profit by other men's well doings. But if he asserts that to be their doing which necessarily happened, be not surprised: since (as I have said several times) it is to humble these, and to exhort the other, that he throws his address into

deserve, when after the Gentile had been able to do what was contrary to nature, you are not able to do that which is according to nature, but hast given up even this? Then as he had said contrary to nature, and, were grafted in, that you may not suppose the Jew to have the advantage, he again corrects this by saying that he also is grafted in. How much more shall these, says he, which be the natural branches be grafted into their own olive-tree? And again, God is able to graft them in. And before this he says, that if they abide not still in unbelief, they shall be also grafted in. And when you hear that he keeps speaking of according to nature, and contrary to nature, do not suppose that he means the nature that is unchangeable, but he tells us in these words of the probable and the consecutive, and on the other hand of the improbable. For the good things and the bad are not such as are by nature, but by temper and determination alone. And consider also how inoffensive he is. For after saying that thou also will be cut off, if you dost not abide in the faith, and these will be grafted in, if they abide not still in unbelief, he leaves that of harsh aspect, and insists on that of kindlier sound, and in it he ends, putting great hopes before the Jews if they were minded not to abide so. Wherefore he goes on to say,

Ver. 25. For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise your own conceits.

Meaning by mystery here, that which is unknown and unutterable, and has much of wonder and much of what one should not expect about it. As in another passage too he says, Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:51 What then is the mystery?

That blindness in part has happened unto Israel. Here again he levels a blow at the Jew, while seeming to take down the Gentile. But his meaning is nearly this, and he had said it before, that the unbelief is not universal, but only in part. As when he says, But if any has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but in part 2 Corinthians 2:5: And, so here too he says what he had said above, God has not cast off His people whom He foreknew Romans 11:2: and again, What then? Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid Romans 11:11: This then he says here also; that it is not the whole people that is pulled up, but many have already believed, and more are likely to believe. Then as he had promised a great thing, he adduces the prophet in evidence, speaking as follows. Now it is not for the fact of a blindness having happened that he quotes the passage (for every one could see that), but that they shall believe and be saved, he brings Isaiah to witness, who cries aloud and says,

Ver. 26. There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Isaiah 59:20

Then to give the mark that fixes its sense to salvation, to prevent any one from drawing it aside and attaching it to times gone by, he says,

Ver. 27. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Not when they are circumcised, not when they sacrifice, not when they do the other deeds of the Law, but when they attain to the forgiveness of sins. If then this has been promised, but has never yet happened in their case, nor have they ever enjoyed the remission of sins by baptism, certainly it will come to pass. Hence he proceeds,

Ver. 29. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

And even this is not all he says to solace them, for he uses what had already come about. And what came in of consequence, that he states as chiefly intended, putting it in these words,

Ver. 28. As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

That the Gentile then might not be puffed up, and say, I am standing, do not tell me of what would have been, but what has been, he uses this consideration to bring him down, and says, As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes. For when you were called they became more captious. Nevertheless God has not even now cut short the calling of you, but He waits for all the Gentiles that are to believe to come in, and then they also shall come. Then he does them another kind favor, by saying, As touching election, they are beloved for the fathers sakes. And what is this? For wherein they are enemies, punishment is theirs: but wherein they are beloved, the virtue of their ancestors has no influence on them, if they do not believe. Nevertheless, as I said, he ceases not to solace them with words, that he may bring them over. Wherefore by way of fresh proof for his former assertion, he says,

Ver. 30-32. For as you in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they may also obtain mercy. For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.

He shows here that those of the Gentiles were called first. Then, as they would not come, the Jews were elected, and the same result occurred again. For when the Jews would not believe, again the Gentiles were brought over. And he does not stop here, nor does he draw the whole to a conclusion at their rejection, but at their having mercy shown them again. See how much he gives to those of the Gentiles, as much as he did to the Jews before. For when you, he would say, in times past did not obey, being of the Gentiles, then the Jews came in. Again, when these did not obey, you have come. However, they will not perish forever. For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that is, has convinced them, has shown them disobedient; not that they may remain in disobedience, but that He may save the one by the captiousness of the other, these by those and those by these. Now consider; you were disobedient, and they were saved. Again, they have been disobedient, and you have been saved. Yet you have not been so saved as to be put away again, as the Jews were, but so as to draw them over through jealousy while you abide.

Ver. 33. Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments!

Here after going back to former times, and looking back to God's original dispensation of things whereby the world has existed up to the present time, and having considered what special provision He had made for all occurrences, he is stricken with awe, and cries aloud, so making his hearers feel confident that certainly that will come to pass which he says. For he would not have cried aloud and been awe-struck, unless this was quite sure to come to pass. That it is a depth then, he knows: but how great, he knows not. For the language is that of a person wondering, not of one that knew the whole. But admiring and being awe-struck at the goodness, so far forth as in him lay, he heralds it forth by two intensive words, riches and depth, and then is awestruck at His having had both the will and the power to do all this, and by opposites effecting opposites. How unsearchable are His judgments. For they are not only impossible to be comprehended, but even to be searched. And His ways past finding out; that is, His dispensations for these also are not only impossible to be known, but even to be sought into. For even I, he means, have not found out the whole, but a little part, not all. For He alone knows His own clearly. Wherefore he

proceeds:

Ver. 34, 35. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

What he means is nearly this: that though He is so wise, yet He has not His Wisdom from any other, but is Himself the Fountain of good things. And though He has done so great things, and made us so great presents, yet it was not by borrowing from any other that He gave them, but by making them spring forth from Himself; nor as owing any a return for having received from him, but as always being Himself the first to do the benefits; for this is a chief mark of riches, to overflow abundantly, and yet need no aid. Wherefore he proceeds to say, For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things. Himself devised, Himself created, Himself works together (Vulg. $\text{ἑἰς ἑαυτὸν ἰσχυρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἰσχυρὸς}$, manuscripts $\text{ἑἰς ἑαυτὸν ἰσχυρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἰσχυρὸς}$). For He is rich, and needs not to receive from another. And wise, and needs no counsellor. Why speak I of a counsellor? To know the things of Him is no one able, save Himself alone, the Rich and Wise One. For it is proof of much riches that He should make them of the Gentiles thus well supplied; and of much wisdom that He should constitute the inferiors of the Jews their teachers. Then as he was awe-struck he offers up thanksgiving also in the word, To Whom be glory forever. Amen.

For when he tells of any great and unutterable thing of this kind, he ends in wonder with a doxology. And this he does in regard to the Son also. For in that passage also he went on to the very same thing that he does here. Of whom is Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all God blessed forever. Amen. Romans 9:5

Him then let us also imitate, and let us glorify God in all things, by a heedful way of life, and let us not feel confidence in the virtues of our ancestry, knowing the example that has been made of the Jews. For this is not, certainly it is not, the relationship of Christians, for theirs is the kinsmanship of the Spirit. So the Scythian becomes Abraham's son: and his son on the other hand more of an alien to him than the Scythian. Let us not then feel confidence in the well-doings of our fathers (most manuscripts of others), but if you have a parent who is a marvel even, fancy not that this will be enough to save you, or to get you honor and glory, unless you have the relationship of character to him.

So too if you have a bad one, do not think that you will be condemned on this account, or be put to shame if at least you order your own doings aright. For what can be less honorable than the Gentiles? Still in faith they soon became related to the Saints. Or what more nearly connected than the Jews? Yet still by unbelief they were made aliens. For that relationship is of nature and necessity, after which we are all relations. For of Adam we all sprung, and none can be more a relation than another, both as regards Adam and as regards Noah, and as regards the earth, the common mother of all.

But the relationship worthy of honors, is that which does distinguish us from the wicked. For it is not possible for all to be relations in this way, but those of the same character only. Nor do we call them brothers who come of the same labor with ourselves, but those who display the same zeal. In this way Christ gives men the name of children of God, and so on the other hand children of the devil, and so too children of disobedience, of hell, and of perdition likewise. So Timothy was Paul's son from goodness and was called my own son 1 Timothy 1:2: but of his sister's son we do not know even the name.

And yet the one was by nature related to him, and still that availed him not. But the other being both by nature and country far removed from him (as being a native of Lystra), still became most nearly related. Let us then also become the sons of the Saints, or rather let us become even God's sons. For that it is

possible to become sons of God, hear what he says, Be therefore perfect, as your father which is in Heaven. Matthew 5:48 This is why we call Him Father in prayer, and that not only to remind ourselves of the grace, but also of virtue, that we may not do anything unworthy of such a relationship.

And how it may be said is it possible to be a son of God? By being free from all passions, and showing gentleness to them that affront and wrong us. For your Father is so to them that blaspheme Him. Wherefore, though He says various things at various times, yet in no case does He say that you may be like your Father, but when He says, Pray for them that despitefully use you, do good to them that hate you Matthew 5:44, then He brings in this as the reward. For there is nothing that brings us so near to God, and makes us so like Him, as this well-doing.

Therefore Paul also, when he says, Be followers of God Ephesians 5:1, means them to be so in this respect. For we have need of all good deeds, chiefly however of love to man and gentleness, since we need so much of His love to man ourselves. For we commit many transgressions every day. Wherefore also we have need to show much mercy. But much and little is not measured by the quantity of things given, but by the amount of the givers' means. Let not then the rich be high-minded, nor the poor dejected as giving so little, for the latter often gives more than the former.

We must not then make ourselves miserable because we are poor, since it makes almsgiving the easier for us. For he that has got much together is seized with haughtiness, as well as a greater affection to that (or lust beyond that) he has. But he that has but a little is quit of either of these domineering passions: hence he finds more occasions for doing well. For this man will go cheerfully into a prison-house, and will visit the sick, and will give a cup of cold water. But the other will not take upon him any office of this sort, as pampered up (ἰτῆ»ἰμῖῖ¼ἰ±ἰῖ%ἰ½) by his riches.

Be not then out of heart at your poverty. For your poverty makes your traffic for heaven the easier to you. And if you have nothing, but have a compassionating soul, even this will be laid up as a reward for you. Hence too Paul bade us weep with them that weep Romans 12:15, and exhorted us to be to prisoners as though bound with them. Hebrews 13:3 For it is not to them that weep only that it yields some solace that there be many that compassionate them, but to them who are in other afflicting circumstances.

For there are cases where conversation has as much power to recover him that is cast down as money. For this then God exhorts us to give money to them that ask, not merely with a view to relieve their poverty, but that He may teach us to compassionate the misfortunes of our neighbors. For this also the covetous man is odious, in that he not only disregards men in a beggared state, but because he gets himself trained (ἰ¼€ ἰ»ἰμῖῖῖἰμῖῖ,ἰ±ἰῖ) for cruelty and great inhumanity. And so he that, for their sakes, thinks little of money, is even on this account an object of love, that he is merciful and kind to man.

And Christ, when He blesses the merciful, blesses and praises not those only that give the alms of money, but those also who have the will to do so. Let us then be so inclinable to mercy, and all other blessings will follow, for he that has a spirit of love and mercy, if he have money, will give it away, or if he see any in distress, will weep and bewail it; if he fall in with a person wronged, will stand up for him; if he sees one spitefully entreated, will reach out his hand to him.

For as he has that treasure-house of blessings, a loving and merciful soul, he will make it a fountain for all his brethren's needs, and will enjoy all the rewards that are laid up with God (Field with 4 manuscripts ἰ,ἰ¼» ἰ,ἰμῖῖ¼»). That we then may attain to these, let us of all things frame our souls accordingly. For so, while in this world, we shall do good deeds without number, and shall enjoy the crowns to come. To which

may we all attain by the grace and love toward man, etc.

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