

Homily 2 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

God's plan is to predestinate us according to His will, and to bring us to the praise of His glory, through Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Topics: "Predestination", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the predestination and foreordination of believers according to God's purpose, highlighting the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge. He explains that believers are chosen and made a heritage not by chance but according to God's deliberate choice and purpose. Chrysostom underscores the sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit as a special forecast of their inheritance, pointing out the earnest of their redemption and the need for faith and good works. He warns against returning to sin after experiencing God's goodness, urging believers to live in accordance with God's will for the praise of His glory.

Transcript

Chapter I. Verses 11-14

In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of his will.

Paul earnestly endeavors on all occasions to display the unspeakable loving-kindness of God towards us, to the utmost of his power. For that it is impossible to do so adequately, hear his own words. O! The depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out. Romans 11:33 Still, notwithstanding, so far as it is possible, he does display it. What then is this which he is saying; In whom also we were made a heritage, being predestinated? Above he used the word, He chose us; here he says, we were made a heritage. But inasmuch as a lot is a matter of chance, not of deliberate choice, nor of virtue, (for it is closely allied to ignorance and accident, and oftentimes passing over the virtuous, brings forward the worthless into notice,) observe how he corrects this very point: having been foreordained, says he, according to the purpose of Him who works all things. That is to say, not merely have we been made a heritage, as, again, we have not merely been chosen, (for it is God who chooses,) and so neither have we merely been allotted, (for it is God who allots,) but it is according to a purpose. This is what he says also in the Epistle to the Romans, Romans 8:28-30 To them that are called according to His purpose; and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them he also glorified. Having first used the expression, to them that are called according to a

purpose, and at the same time wishing to declare their privilege compared with the rest of mankind, he speaks also of inheritance by lot, yet so as not to divest them of free will. That point then, which more properly belongs to happy fortune, is the very point he insists upon. For this inheritance by lot depends not on virtue, but, as one might say, on fortuitous circumstances. It is as though he had said, lots were cast, and He has chosen us; but the whole is of deliberate choice. Men predestinated, that is to say, having chosen them to Himself, He has separated. He saw us, as it were, chosen by lot before we were born. For marvellous is the foreknowledge of God, and acquainted with all things before their beginning.

But mark now how on all occasions he takes pains to point out, that it is not the result of any change of purpose, but that these matters had been thus modeled from the very first, so that we are in no wise inferior to the Jews in this respect; and how, in consequence, he does every thing with this view. How then is it that Christ Himself says, I was not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Matthew 15:24 And said again to his disciples, Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans. Matthew 10:5 And Paul again himself says, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. Acts 13:46 These expressions, I say, are used with this design, that no one may suppose that this work came to pass incidentally only. According to the purpose, he says, of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will. That is to say, He had no after workings; having modeled all things from the very first, thus he leads forward all things according to the counsel of His will. So that it was not merely because the Jews did not listen that He called the Gentiles, nor was it of mere necessity, nor was it on any inducement arising from them.

Ver. 12, 13. To the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ. In whom you also having heard the word of the truth, the Gospel of your salvation.

That is to say, through whom. Observe how he on all occasions speaks of Christ, as the Author of all things, and in no case gives Him the title of a subordinate agent, or a minister. And so again, elsewhere, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he says, that God, having of old time spoken unto the Fathers in the prophets, has at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, Hebrews 1:1 that is through His Son.

The word of truth, he says, no longer that of the type, nor of the image.

The Gospel of your salvation. And well does he call it the Gospel of salvation, intimating in the one word a contrast to the law, in the other, a contrast with punishment to come. For what is the message, but the Gospel of salvation, which forbears to destroy those that are worthy of destruction.

Ver. 14. In whom having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance.

Here again, the word sealed, is an indication of special forecast. He does not speak of our being predestinated only, nor of our being allotted, but further, of our being sealed. For just as though one were to make those who should fall to his lot manifest, so also did God separate them for believing, and sealed them for the allotment of the things to come.

You see how, in process of time, He makes them objects of wonder. So long as they were in His foreknowledge, they were manifest to no one, but when they were sealed, they became manifest, though not in the same way as we are; for they will be manifest except a few. The Israelites also were sealed, but that was by circumcision, like the brutes and reasonless creatures. We too are sealed, but it is as sons,

with the Spirit.

But what is meant by, with the Spirit of promise? Doubtless it means that we have received that Spirit according to promise. For there are two promises, the one by the prophets, the other from the Son.

By the Prophets.-- Hearken to the words of Joel; I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, Joel 2:28 And hearken again to the words of Christ; But you shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts 1:8 And truly, the Apostle means, He ought, as God, to have been believed; however, he does not ground his affirmation upon this, but examines it like a case where man is concerned, speaking much as he does in the Epistle to the Hebrews; Hebrews 6:18 where he says, That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement. Thus here also he makes the things already bestowed a sure token of the promise of those which are yet to come. For this reason he further calls it an earnest, Cf. also 2 Corinthians 1:22 for an earnest is a part of the whole. He has purchased what we are most concerned in, our salvation; and has given us an earnest in the mean while. Why then did He not give the whole at once? Because neither have we, on our part, done the whole of our work. We have believed. This is a beginning; and He too on His part has given an earnest. When we show our faith by our works, then He will add the rest. Nay, more, He has given yet another pledge, His own blood, and has promised another still. In the same way as in case of war between nation and nation they give hostages: just so has God also given His Son as a pledge of peace and solemn treaties, and, further, the Holy Spirit also which is from Him. For they, that are indeed partakers of the Spirit, know that He is the earnest of our inheritance. Such an one was Paul, who already had here a foretaste of the blessings there. And this is why he was so eager, and yearned to be released from things below, and groaned within himself. He transferred his whole mind there, and saw every thing with different eyes. You have no part in the reality, and therefore failest to understand the description. Were we all partakers of the Spirit, as we ought to be partakers, then should we behold Heaven, and the order of things that is there.

It is an earnest, however, of what? Of

Ver. 14. The redemption of God's own possession.

For our absolute redemption takes place then. For now we have our life in the world, we are liable to many human accidents, and are living among ungodly men. But our absolute redemption will be then, when there shall be no sins, no human sufferings, when we shall not be indiscriminately mixed with all kinds of people.

At present, however, there is but an earnest, because at present we are far distant from these blessings. Yet is our citizenship not upon earth; even now we are out of the pale of the things that are here below. Yes, we are sojourners even now.

Ver. 14. Unto the praise of His glory.

This he adds in immediate connection. And why? Because it would serve to give those who heard it full assurance. Were it for our sake only, he means to say, that God did this, there might be some room for misgiving. But if it be for His own sake, and in order to display His goodness, he assigns, as a sort of witness, a reason why these things never possibly could be otherwise. We find the same language

everywhere applied to the case of the Israelites. Do Thou this for us for Your Name's sake; Psalm 109:21 and again, God Himself said, I do it for My own sake; Isaiah 48:11 and so Moses, Do it, if for nothing else, yet for the glory of Your Name. This gives those who hear it full assurance; it relieves them to be told, that whatever He promises, for His own goodness' sake He will most surely perform.

Moral. Let not the hearing, however, make us too much at our ease; for although He does it for His own sake, yet notwithstanding He requires a duty on our part. If He says, Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed, 1 Samuel 2:30 let us reflect that there is that which He requires of us also. True, it is the praise of His glory to save those that are enemies, but those who, after being made friends, continue His friends. So that if they were to return back to their former state of enmity, all were vain and to no purpose. There is not another Baptism, nor is there a second reconciliation again, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment which shall devour the adversaries. Hebrews 10:27 If we intend at the same time to be always at enmity with Him and yet to claim forgiveness at His hand, we shall never cease to be at enmity, and to be wanton, to grow in depravity, and to be blind to the Sun of Righteousness which has risen. Do you not see the ray that shall open your eyes? Render them then good and sound and quicksighted. He has showed you the true light; if you shun it, and runnest back again into the darkness, what shall be your excuse? What sort of allowance shall be made for you? None from that moment. For this is a mark of unspeakable enmity. When indeed you knew not God, then if you were at enmity with Him, you had, be it how it might, some excuse. But when you have tasted the goodness and the honey, if you again abandonest them, and turnest to your own vomit, what else are you doing but bringing forward evidence of excessive hatred and contempt? 'Nay,' you will say, 'but I am constrained to it by nature. I love Christ indeed, but I am constrained by nature.' If you are under the power and force of constraint, you will have allowance made; but if you yield from indolence, not for a moment.

Now then, come, let us examine this very question, whether sins are the effect of force and constraint, or of indolence and great carelessness. The law says, You shall not kill. What sort of force, what sort of violence, is there here? Violence indeed must one use to force himself to kill, for who among us would as a matter of choice plunge his sword into the throat of his neighbor, and stain his hand with blood? Not one. You see then that, on the contrary, sin is more properly matter of violence and constraint. For God has implanted in our nature a charm, which binds us to love one another. Every beast (it says) loves his like, and every man loves his neighbor. Sirach 13:15 Do you see that we have from our nature seeds which tend to virtue; whereas those of vice are contrary to nature? And if these latter predominate, this is but an evidence of our exceeding indolence.

Again, what is adultery? What sort of necessity is there to bring us to this? Doubtless, it will be said, the tyranny of lust. But why, tell me, should this be? What, is it not in every one's power to have his own wife, and thus to put a stop to this tyranny? True, he will say, but a sort of passion for my neighbor's wife seizes hold on me. Here the question is no longer one of necessity. Passion is no matter of necessity, no one loves of necessity, but of deliberate choice and free will. Indulgence of nature, indeed, is perhaps matter of necessity, but to love one woman rather than another is no matter of necessity. Nor is the point with you natural desire, but vanity, and wantonness, and unbounded licentiousness. For which is according to reason, that a man should have an espoused wife, and her the mother of his children, or one not acknowledged? Do you not know that it is intimacy that breeds attachment. This, therefore, is not the fault of nature. Blame not natural desire. Natural desire was bestowed with a view to marriage; it was given with a view to the procreation of children, not with a view to adultery and corruption. The laws, too, know how to make allowance for those sins which are of necessity, -- or rather nothing is sin when it arises from

necessity but all sin rises from wantonness. God has not so framed man's nature as that he should have any necessity to sin, since were this the case, there would be no such thing as punishment. We ourselves exact no account of things done of necessity and by constraint, much less would God, so full of mercy and loving-kindness.

Again, what is stealing? Is it matter of necessity? Yes, a man will say, because poverty causes this. Poverty, however, rather compels us to work, not to steal. Poverty, therefore, has in fact the contrary effect. Theft is the effect of idleness; whereas poverty produces usually not idleness, but a love of labor. So that this sin is the effect of indolence, as you may learn from hence. Which, I ask, is the more difficult, the more distasteful, to wander about at night without sleep, to break open houses, and walk about in the dark, and to have one's life in one's hand, and to be always prepared for murder, and to be shivering and dead with fear; or to be attending to one's daily task, in full enjoyment of safety and security? This last is the easier task; and it is because this is easier, that the majority practise it rather than the other. You see then that it is virtue which is according to nature, and vice which is against nature, in the same way as disease and health are.

What, again, are falsehood and perjury? What necessity can they possibly imply? None whatever, nor any compulsion; it is a matter to which we proceed voluntarily. We are distrusted, it will be said. True, distrusted we are, because we choose it. For we might, if we would, be trusted more upon our character, than upon our oath. Why, tell me, is it that we do not trust some, no, not on their oath, while we deem others trustworthy even independently of oaths. Do you see that there is no need of oaths in any case? 'When such an one speaks,' we say, 'I believe him, even without any oath, but you, no, not with your oaths.' Thus then an oath is unnecessary; and is in fact an evidence rather of distrust than of confidence. For where a man is over ready to take his oath, he does not leave us to entertain any great idea of his scrupulousness. So that the man who is most constant in his use of oaths, has on no occasion any necessity for using one, and he who never uses one on any occasion, has in himself the full benefit of its use. Some one says there is a necessity for an oath, to produce confidence; but we see that they are the more readily trusted who abstain from taking oaths.

But again, if one is a man of violence, is this a matter of necessity? Yes, he will say, because his passion carries him away, and burns within him, and does not let the soul be at rest. Man, to act with violence is not the effect of anger, but of littleness of mind. Were it the effect of anger, all men, whenever they were angry, would never cease committing acts of violence. We have anger given us, not that we may commit acts of violence on our neighbors, but that we may correct those that are in sin, that we may bestir ourselves, that we may not be sluggish. Anger is implanted in us as a sort of sting, to make us gnash with our teeth against the devil, to make us vehement against him, not to set us in array against each other. We have arms, not to make us at war among ourselves, but that we may employ our whole armor against the enemy. Are you prone to anger? Be so against your own sins: chastise your soul, scourge your conscience, be a severe judge, and merciless in your sentence against your own sins. This is the way to turn anger to account. It was for this that God implanted it within us.

But again, is plunder a matter of necessity? No, in no wise. Tell me, what manner of necessity is there to be grasping: what manner of compulsion? Poverty, a man will say, causes it, and the fear of being without common necessities. Now this is the very reason why you ought not to be grasping. Wealth so gotten has no security in it. You are doing the very same thing as a man would do, who, if he were asked why he laid the foundation of his house in the sand, should say, he did it because of the frost and rain.

Whereas this would be the very reason why he should not lay it in the sand. They are the very foundations which the rain, and blasts, and wind, most quickly overturn. So that if you would be wealthy, never be rapacious; if you would transmit wealth to your children, get righteous wealth, at least, if any there be that is such. Because this abides, and remains firm, whereas that which is not such, quickly wastes and perishes. Tell me, have you a mind to be rich, and do you take the goods of others?

Surely this is not wealth: wealth consists in possessing what is your own. He that is in possession of the goods of others, never can be a wealthy man; since at that rate even your very silk venders, who receive their goods as a consignment from others, would be the wealthiest and the richest of men. Though for the time, indeed, it is theirs, still we do not call them wealthy. And why forsooth? Because they are in possession of what belongs to others. For though the piece itself happens to be theirs, still the money it is worth is not theirs.

Nay, and even if the money is in their hands, still this is not wealth. Now, if consignments thus given render not men more wealthy because we so soon resign them, how can those which arise from rapine render them wealthy? However, if at any rate you desire to be wealthy, (for the matter is not one of necessity,) what greater good is it that you would fain enjoy? Is it a longer life? Yet, surely men of this character quickly become short-lived. Oftentimes they pay as the penalty of plunder and rapaciousness, an untimely death; and not only suffer as a penalty the loss of the enjoyment of their gains, but go out of life having gained but little, and hell to boot.

Oftentimes too they die of diseases, which are the fruits of self-indulgence, and of toil, and of anxiety. Fain would I understand why it is that wealth is so eagerly pursued by mankind. Why surely for this reason has God set a limit and a boundary to our nature, that we may have no need to go on seeking wealth beyond it. For instance He has commanded us, to clothe the body in one, or perhaps in two garments; and there is no need of any more to cover us. Where is the good of ten thousand changes of raiment, and those moth-eaten?

The stomach has its appointed bound, and any thing given beyond this, will of necessity destroy the whole man. Where then is the use of your herds, and flocks, and cutting up of flesh? We require but one roof to shelter us. Where then is the use of your vast ground-plots, and costly buildings? Do you strip the poor, that vultures and jackdaws may have where to dwell? And what a hell do not these things deserve? Many are frequently raising edifices that glisten with pillars and costly marbles, in places which they never so much as saw.

What scheme is there indeed that they have not adopted? Yet neither themselves reap the benefit, nor any one else. The desolateness does not allow them to get away there; and yet not even thus do they desist. You see that these things are not done for profit's-sake, but in all these cases folly, and absurdity, and vainglory, is the motive. And this, I beseech you to avoid, that we may be enabled to avoid also every other evil, and may obtain those good things which are promised to them that love Him, in our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, strength, honor forever. Amen.

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