

Homily 27 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, obedience, and unity in Christ, and encourages listeners to love one another, even their enemies.

Scripture: John 13:35, Romans 15:1-7

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Selfless Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of unity and love among believers, emphasizing the need to bear with the weaknesses of others and to please our neighbors for their edification. He highlights Christ's example of selflessness and endurance of reproach, urging believers to imitate Him in loving even those who may hate them. Chrysostom encourages a spirit of patience, comfort, and hope through the Scriptures, praying for God to grant unity and like-mindedness among believers to glorify God together.

Transcript

Rom. XIV. 25-27

Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and (manuscripts τὴν which Sav. omits) by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, to Him be glory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is always a custom with Paul to conclude his exhortation with prayers and doxologies. For he knows that the thing is one of no slight importance. And it is out of affectionateness and caution that he is in the habit of doing this. For it is the character of a teacher devoted to his children, and to God, not to instruct them in words only, but by prayer too to bring upon his teaching the assistance which is from God. And this he does here also. But the connection is as follows: To Him that is of power to establish you, be glory forever.

Amen. For he again clings to those weak brethren, and to them he directs his discourse. For when he was rebuking, he made all share his rebuke; but now, when he is praying, it is for these that he wears the attitude of a suppliant. And after saying, to establish, he proceeds to give the mode of it, according to my Gospel; and this was what one would do to show that as yet they were not firmly fixed, but stood, though with wavering. Then to give a trustworthiness to what he says, he proceeds, and the preaching of Jesus Christ; that is, which He Himself preached.

But if He preached it, the doctrines are not ours, but the laws are of Him. And afterwards, in discussing the nature of the preaching, He shows that this gift is one of much benefit, and of much honor; and this he first proves from the person of the declarer thereof, and then likewise from the things declared. For it was glad tidings. Besides, from His not having made anything of them known to any before us. And this he intimates in the words, according to the revelation of the mystery.

And this is a sign of the greatest friendliness, to make us share in the mysteries, and no one before us. Which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest. For it had been determined long ago, but was only manifested now. How was it made manifest? By the Scriptures of the Prophets. Here again he is releasing the weak person from fear. For what do you fear? Is it lest thou depart from the Law? This the Law wishes, this it foretold from of old. But if you pry into the cause of its being made manifest now, you are doing a thing not safe to do, in being curious about the mysteries of God, and calling Him to account.

For we ought not with things of this nature to act as busybodies, but to be well pleased and content with them. Wherefore that he might himself put a check upon a spirit of this sort, he adds, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for the obedience of faith. For faith requires obedience, and not curiosity. And when God commands, one ought to be obedient, not curious. Then he uses another argument to encourage them, saying made known to all nations. That is, it is not thou alone but the whole world that is of this Creed, as having had not man, but God for a Teacher.

Wherefore also he adds, through Jesus Christ. But it was not only made known, but also confirmed. Now both are His work. And on this ground too the way it is to be read is, Now to Him that is of power to establish you through Jesus Christ; and, as I was saying, he ascribes them both to Him; or rather, not both of these only, but the glory belonging (or ascribed, Gr. $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\iota$) to the Father also. And this too is why he said, to Whom be glory forever, Amen. And he uses a doxology again through awe at the incomprehensibleness of these mysteries.

For even now they have appeared, there is no such thing as comprehending them by reasonings, but it is by faith we must come to a knowledge of them, for in no other way can we. He well says, To the only wise God. For if you will only reflect how He brought the nations in, and blended them with those who in olden time had wrought well, how He saved those who were desperate, how He brought men not worthy of the earth up to heaven, and brought those who had fallen from the present life into that undying and unalterable life, and made those who were trampled down by devils to vie with Angels, and opened Paradise, and put a stop to all the old evils, and this too in a short time and by an easy and compendious way, then will you learn His wisdom -- when you see that which neither Angels nor Archangels knew, they of the Gentiles learned on a sudden through Jesus. (2 manuscripts add then will you know His power.)

Right then is it to admire His wisdom, and to give Him glory! But you keep dwelling over little things, still sitting under the shadow. And this is not much like one that gives glory. For he who has no confidence in Him, and no trust in the faith, does not bear testimony to the grandeur of His doings. But he himself offers glory up in their behalf, in order to bring them also to the same zeal. But when you hear him say, to the only wise God, think not that this is said in disparagement of the Son.

For if all these things whereby His wisdom is made apparent were done or made, see John 1:3 by Christ, and without Him no single one, it is quite plain that he is equal in wisdom also. What then is the reason of his saying only? To set Him in contrast with every created being. After giving the doxology then, he again

goes from prayer to exhortation, directing his discourse against the stronger, and saying as follows:

Chap. xv. ver. 1. We then that are strong, ought -- it is we ought, not we are so kind as to. What is it we ought to do?-- to bear the infirmities of the weak.

See how he has roused their attention by his praises, not only by calling them powerful, but also by putting them alongside of himself. And not by this only, but by the advantage of the thing he again allures them, and by its not being burdensome. For thou, he says, art powerful, and art no whit the worse for condescending. But to him the hazard is of the last consequence, if he is not borne with. And he does not say the infirm, but the infirmities of the weak, so drawing him and bending him to mercy. As in another place too he says, You that are spiritual restore such an one. Galatians 6:1 Are you become powerful? Render a return to God for making you so. But render it you will if you set the weakness of the sickly right. For we too were weak, but by grace we have become powerful. And this we are to do not in this case only, but also in the case of those who are weak in other respects. As, for instance, if any be passionate, or insolent, or has any such like failing bear with him. And how is this to be? Listen to what comes next. For after saying we ought to bear, he adds, and not to please ourselves.

Ver. 2. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

But what he says is this. Are you powerful? Let the weak have trial of your power. Let him come to know your strength; please him. And he does not barely say please, but for his good, and not barely for his good, lest the advanced person should say, See I am drawing him to his good! But he adds, to edification. And so if you be rich or be in power, please not yourself, but the poor and the needy, because in this way you will at once have true glory to enjoy, and be doing much service. For glory from things of the world soon flies away, but that from things of the Spirit is abiding, if you do it to edification. Wherefore of all men he requires this. For it is not this and that person that is to do it, but each of you. Then since it was a great thing he had commanded them, and had bidden them even relax their own perfectness in order to set right the other's weakness; he again introduces Christ, in the following words:

Ver. 3. For even Christ pleased not Himself.

And this he always does. For when he was upon the subject of alms, he brought Him forward and said, You know the grace of the Lord, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. 2 Corinthians 8:9 And when he was exhorting to charity, it was from Him that he exhorted in the words As Christ also loved us. Ephesians 5:25 And when he was giving advice about bearing shame and dangers, he took refuge in Him and said, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame. Hebrews 12:2. So in this passage too he shows how He also did this, and how the prophet proclaimed it from of old. Wherefore also he proceeds:

The reproaches of them that reproached You fell upon Me. Psalm 69:9 But what is the import of, He pleased not Himself? He had power not to have been reproached, power not to have suffered what He did suffer, had He been minded to look to His own things. But yet He was not so minded. But through looking to our good He neglected His own. And why did he not say, He emptied Himself? Philippians 2:7 It is because this was not the only thing he wished to point out, that He became man, but that He was also ill-treated, and obtained a bad reputation with many, being looked upon as weak. For it says, If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. Matthew 27:40. And, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. Matthew 27:42. Hence he mentions a circumstance which was available for his present subject, and proves much more than he undertook to do; for he shows that it was not Christ alone that was reproached,

but the Father also. For the reproaches of them that reproached You fell, he says, upon Me. But what he says is nearly this, What has happened is no new or strange thing. For they in the Old Testament who came to have a habit of reproaching Him, they also raved against His Son. But these things were written that we should not imitate them. And then he supplies (Gr. anoints) them for a patient endurance of temptations.

Ver. 4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime, he says, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.

That is, that we might not fall away, (for there are sundry conflicts within and without), that being nerved and comforted by the Scriptures, we might exhibit patience, that by living in patience we might abide in hope. For these things are productive of each other, patience of hope, and hope of patience. And both of them are brought about by the Scriptures. Then he again brings his discourse into the form of prayer, and says,

Ver. 5. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus.

For since he had given his own advice, and had also urged the example of Christ, he added the testimony of the Scriptures also, to show that with the Scripture Himself gives patience also. And this is why he said, Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus. For this is what love would do, be minded toward another even as toward himself. Then to show again that it is not mere love that he requires, he adds, according to Christ Jesus. And this he does, in all places, because there is also another sort of love. And what is the advantage of their agreeing?

Ver. 6. That ye may with one mind, he says, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He does not say merely with one mouth, but bids us do it with one will also. See how he has united the whole body into one, and how he concludes his address again with a doxology, whereby he gives the utmost inducement to unanimity and concord. Then again from this point he keeps to the same exhortation as before, and says,

Ver. 7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

The example again is as before, and the gain unspeakable. For this is a thing that does God special glory, the being closely united. And so if even against your will (Field being grieved for His sake, after Savile, but against manuscripts) and for His sake, thou be at variance with your brother, consider that by putting an end to your anger you are glorifying your Master, and if not on your brother's account, for this at all events be reconciled to him: or rather for this first. For Christ also insists upon this upon all possible grounds, and when addressing His Father he said, By this shall all men know that You have sent Me, if they be one. John 17:21

Let us obey then, and knit ourselves to one another. For in this place it is not any longer the weak, but all that he is rousing. And were a man minded to break with you, do not thou break also. Nor give utterance to that cold saying, Him I love that loves me; if my right eye does not love me, I tear it out. For these are satanical sayings, and fit for publicans, and the little spirit of the Gentiles. But thou that art called to a greater citizenship, and are enrolled in the books of Heaven, art liable to greater laws.

Do not speak in this way, but when he is not minded to love you, then display the more love, that you may draw him to you. For he is a member; and when by any force a member is sundered from the body, we do everything to unite it again, and then pay more attention to it. For the reward is the greater then, when one draws to one a person not minded to love. For if He bids us invite to supper those that cannot make us any recompense, that what goes for recompense may be the greater, much more ought we to do this in regard to friendship.

Now he that is loved and loves, does pay you a recompense. But he that is loved and loves not, has made God a debtor to you in his own room. And besides, when he loves you he needs not much pains; but when he loves you not, then he stands in need of your assistance. Make not then the cause for painstaking a cause for listlessness; and say not, because he is sick, that is the reason I take no care of him (for a sickness indeed the dulling of love is), but do thou warm again that which has become chilled.

But suppose he will not be warmed, what then? is the reply. Continue to do your own part. What if he grow more perverse? He is but procuring to you so much greater return, and shows you so much the greater imitator of Christ. For if the loving one another was to be the characteristic of disciples (For hereby, He says, shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another), John 13:35 consider how great an one loving one that hates us must be. For your Master loved those that hated Him, and called them to Him; and the weaker they were, the greater the care He showed them; and He cried and said, They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Matthew 9:12 And He deemed publicans and sinners worthy of the same table with Him. And as great as was the dishonor wherewith the Jewish people treated Him, so great was the honor and concern He showed for them, yea, and much greater. Him do thou also emulate: for this good work is no light one, but one without which not even he that is a martyr can please God much, as Paul says. Say not then, I get hated, and that is why I do not love. For this is why you ought to love most.

And besides, it is not in the nature of things for a man who loves to be soon hated, but brute as a person may be, he loves them that love him. For this He says the heathens and the publicans do. Matthew 5:46 But if every one loves those that love him, who is there that would not love those who love while they are hated? Display then this conduct, and cease not to use this word, Hate me as much as you may, I will not leave off loving you, and then you will humble his quarrelsomeness, and cast out all coldness.

For this disorder comes either from excessive heat (φλεγμονή, inflammation), or from coldness; but both of these is the might of love wont to correct by its warmth. Did you never see those who indulge a base love beaten, spit upon, called names, ill-treated in a thousand ways by those fornicatresses? What then? Do the insults break off this love? In no wise: they even kindle it the more. And yet they who do these things, besides being harlots, are of a disreputable and low grade.

But they who submit to it, have often illustrious ancestors to count up, and much other nobility to boast of. Yet still none of these things break the tie, nor keep them aloof from her whom they love. And are we not ashamed then to find what great power the love of the devil (v. p. 520) and the demons has, and not to be able to display as much in the love according to God? Do you not perceive that this is a very great weapon against the devil? Do you not see, that that wicked demon stands by, dragging to himself the man you hate, and desiring to snatch away the member?

And do you run by, and give up the prize of the conflict? For your brother, lying between you, is the prize. And if you get the better, you receive a crown; but if you are listless, you go away without a crown. Cease

then to give utterance to that satanical saying, if my eye hates me, I cannot see it. For nothing is more shameful than this saying, and yet the generality lay it down for a sign of a noble spirit. But nothing is more ignoble than all this, nothing more senseless, nothing more foolish.

Therefore I am indeed quite grieved that the doings of vice are held to be those of virtue, that looking down on men, and despising them, should seem to be honorable and dignified. And this is the devil's greatest snare, to invest iniquity with a good repute, whereby it becomes hard to blot out. For I have often heard men taking credit to themselves at their not going near those who are averse to them. And yet your Master found a glory in this. How often do not men despise (δι■πτύσαν) Him?

How often show aversion to Him? Yet He ceases not to run unto them. Say not then that I cannot bear to come near those that hate me, but say, that I cannot bear to despise (διαπτ■σαι) those that despise me. This is the language of Christ's disciple, as the other is of the devil's. This makes men honorable and glorious, as the other does shameful and ridiculous. It is on this ground we feel admiration for Moses, because even when God said, Let Me alone, that I may destroy them in Mine anger, Exodus 32:10 he could not bear to despise those who had so often shown aversion to him, but said, If you will forgive them their trespass, forgive it; else blot out me also.

Exodus 32:32 This was owing to his being a friend of God, and a copyer of Him. And let us not pride ourselves in things for which we ought to hide our faces. Nor let us use the language of these lewd fellows, that are the scum of men, I know how to scorn (καταπτ■σαι, spit at) thousands. But even if another use it, let us laugh him down, and stop his mouth for taking a delight in what he ought to feel ashamed of. What say you, pray, do you scorn a man that believes, whom when unbelieving Christ scorned not?

Why do I say scorned not? Why He had such love towards him, when he was vile and unsightly, as even to die for him. He then so loved, and that such a person, and do you now, when he has been made fair and admirable, scorn him; now he is made a member of Christ, and has been made your Master's body? Do you not consider what you are uttering, nor perceive what you are venturing to do? He has Christ as a Head, and a Table, and a Garment, and Life, and Light, and a Bridegroom, and He is everything to him, and do you dare to say, this fellow I despise? and not this only, but thousands of others along with him?

Stay you, O man, and cease from your madness; get to know your brother. Learn that these be words of unreasonableness, and frenzy, and say on the contrary, though he despise me ten thousand times, yet will I never stand aloof from him. In this way you will both gain your brother, and will live to the glory of God, and will share the good things to come. To which God grant that we may all attain, by the grace and love toward man, etc.

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