

Homily 3 on Galatians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the superiority of faith over the Law and the importance of remaining steadfast in belief in Christ's sacrifice.

Scripture: Galatians 3:1-2, Galatians 3:13-14, Galatians 3:22, Galatians 3:24, Galatians 3:26-29

Topics: "Faith Alone", "Law And Grace"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the transition from the Law to Faith, emphasizing the importance of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. He explains how the Law served as a tutor to lead people to Christ, highlighting the role of Faith in making believers sons of God and heirs according to the promise given to Abraham. Chrysostom illustrates the contrast between the Law and Faith, showing how Faith in Christ unites believers as one in Him, transcending all earthly distinctions and making them partakers of the divine nature.

Transcript

O foolish Galatians who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth, crucified?

Here he passes to another subject; in the former chapters he had shown himself not to be an Apostle of men, nor by men, nor in want of Apostolic instruction. Now, having established his authority as a teacher, he proceeds to discourse more confidently, and draws a comparison between faith and the Law. At the outset he said, I marvel that you are so quickly removing; Galatians 1:6 but here, O foolish Galatians; then, his indignation was in its birth, but now, after his refutation of the charges against himself, and his proofs, it bursts forth. Let not his calling them foolish surprise you; for it is not a transgression of Christ's command not to call one's brother a fool, but rather a strict observance of it. For it is not said simply, Whosoever shall say to his brother, You fool, Matthew 5:22 but, whosoever shall do so, without a cause. And who more fittingly than they could so be called, who after so great events, adhered to past things, as if nothing else had ever happened? If on this account Paul is to be called a reviler, Peter may likewise, on account of Annanias and Sapphira, be called a homicide; but as it would be wildness to do so in that case, much more in this. Moreover it is to be considered, that this vehemence is not used at the beginning, but after these evidences and proofs, which, rather than Paul himself, might now be held to administer the rebuke. For after he had shown that they rejected the faith, and made the death of Christ to be without a purpose, he introduces his reproof, which, even as it is, is less severe than they merited. Observe too how soon he stays his arm; for he adds not, Who has seduced you? Who has perverted you? Who has been

sophistical with you? But, Who has cast an envious eye on you? thus tempering his reprimand with somewhat of praise. For it implies that their previous course had excited jealousy, and that the present occurrence arose from the malignity of a demon, whose breath had blasted their prosperous estate.

And when you hear of jealousy in this place, and in the Gospel, of an evil eye, which means the same, you must not suppose that the glance of the eye has any natural power to injure those who look upon it. For the eye, that is, the organ itself, cannot be evil; but Christ in that place means jealousy by the term. To behold, simply, is the function of the eye, but to behold in an evil manner belongs to a mind depraved within. As through this sense the knowledge of visible objects enters the soul, and as jealousy is for the most part generated by wealth, and wealth and sovereignty and pomp are perceived by the eye, therefore he calls the eye evil; not as beholding merely, but as beholding enviously from some moral depravity. Therefore by the words, Who has looked enviously on you, he implies that the persons in question acted, not from concern, not to supply defects, but to mutilate what existed. For envy, far from supplying what is wanting, subtracts from what is complete, and vitiates the whole. And he speaks thus, not as if envy had any power of itself, but meaning, that the teachers of these doctrines did so from envious motives.

Ver. 1. Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth, crucified.

Yet was He not crucified in Galatia, but at Jerusalem. His reason for saying, among you, is to declare the power of faith to see events which are at a distance. He says not, crucified, but, openly set forth crucified, signifying that by the eye of faith they saw more distinctly than some who were present as spectators. For many of the latter received no benefit, but the former, who were not eye-witnesses, yet saw it by faith more clearly. These words convey both praise and blame; praise, for their implicit acceptance of the truth; blame, because Him whom they had seen, for their sakes, stripped naked, transfixed, nailed to the cross, spit upon, mocked, fed with vinegar, upbraided by thieves, pierced with a spear; (for all this is implied in the words, openly set forth, crucified,) Him had they left, and betaken themselves to the Law, unshamed by any of those sufferings. Here observe how Paul, leaving all mention of heaven, earth, and sea, every where preaches the power of Christ, bearing about as he did, and holding up His cross: for this is the sum of the Divine love toward us.

Ver. 2. This only would I learn from you, Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?

As you do not attend, says he, to long discourses, nor are willing to contemplate the magnitude of this Economy, I am desirous, (seeing your extreme ignorance,) to convince you by concise arguments and a summary method of proof. Before, he had convinced them by what he said to Peter; now, he encounters them entirely with arguments, drawn not from what had occurred elsewhere, but from what had happened among themselves. And his persuasives and proofs are adduced, not merely from what was given them in common with others, but from what was especially conferred on themselves. Therefore he says, This only would I learn from you, Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith. You have received, he says, the Holy Spirit, you have done many mighty works, you have effected miracles in raising the dead, in cleansing lepers, in prophesying, in speaking with tongues -- did the Law confer this great power upon you? Was it not rather Faith, seeing that, before, you could do no such things? Is it not then the height of madness for these who have received such benefits from Faith, to abandon it, and desert back to the Law which can offer you nothing of the same kind?

Ver. 3. Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now perfected in the flesh?

Here again he seasonably interposes a rebuke; time, he says, should have brought improvement; but, so far from advancing, you have even retrograded. Those who start from small beginnings make progress to higher things; you, who began with the high, have relapsed to the low. Even had your outset been carnal, your advance should have been spiritual, but now, after starting from things spiritual, you have ended your journey in that which is carnal; for to work miracles is spiritual, but to be circumcised is carnal. And after miracles you have passed to circumcision, after having apprehended the truth you have fallen back to types, after gazing on the sun you seek a candle, after having strong meat you run for milk. He says, made perfect, which means not initiated merely, but sacrificed, signifying that their teachers took and slew them like animals, while they resigned themselves to suffer what those teachers pleased. As if some captain, or distinguished man, after a thousand victories and trophies, were to subject himself to infamy as a deserter, and offer his body to be branded at the will of others.

Ver. 4. Did you suffer so many things in vain? if it be indeed in vain.

This remark is far more piercing than the former, for the remembrance of their miracles would not be so powerful as the exhibition of their contests and endurance of sufferings for Christ's sake. All that you have endured, says he, these men would strip you of, and would rob you of your crown. Then, lest he should dismay and unnerve, he proceeds not to a formal judgment, but subjoins, if it be indeed in vain; if you have but a mind to shake off drowsiness and recover yourselves, he says, it is not in vain. Where then be those who would cut off repentance? Here were men who had received the Spirit, worked miracles, become confessors, encountered a thousand perils and persecutions for Christ's sake, and after so many achievements had fallen from grace; nevertheless he says, if you have the purpose, you may recover yourselves.

Ver. 5. He therefore that supplies to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Have you been vouchsafed, he says, so great a gift, and achieved such wonders, because you observed the Law, or because you adhered to Faith? Plainly on account of Faith. Seeing that they played this argument to and fro, that apart from the Law, Faith had no force, he proves the contrary, viz., that if the Commandments be added, Faith no longer avails; for Faith then has efficacy when things from the Law are not added to it. You who would be justified by the Law, you are fallen away from grace: Galatians 5:4 This he says later, when his language has grown bolder, employing the vantage-ground by that time gained; meanwhile while gaining it, he argues from their past experience. For it was when you obeyed Faith, he says, not the Law, that you received the Spirit and wrought miracles.

And here, as the Law was the subject of discussion, he moots another special point of controversy, and very opportunely and with much cogency introduces a notice of Abraham.

Ver. 6. Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.

Even the miracles done by themselves, he says, declare the power of Faith, but I shall attempt if you will suffer me to draw my proofs from ancient narratives also. Then, as they made great account of the Patriarch, he brings his example forward, and shows that he too was justified by Faith. And if he who was before grace, was justified by Faith, although plentiful in works, much more we. For what loss was it to him, not being under the Law? None, for his faith sufficed unto righteousness. The Law did not then exist, he says, neither does it now exist, any more than then. In disproving the need of the Law, he introduces one who was justified before the Law, lest an objection should also be made to him; for as then it was not

yet given, so now, having been given, it was abrogated. And as they made much of their descent from Abraham, and feared lest, abandoning the Law, they should be considered strangers to his kin; Paul removes this fear by turning their argument against themselves, and proves that faith is especially concerned in connecting them with Abraham. He draws out this argument more at length in the Epistle to the Romans; however he urges it also here in, the words,

Ver. 7. Know therefore, that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham.

Which he proves by ancient testimony thus:

Ver. 8. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

If then those were Abraham's sons, not, who were related to him by blood, but who follow his faith, for this is the meaning of the words, In you all the nations, it is plain that the heathen are brought into kindred with him.

Hereby too is proved another important point. It perplexed them that the Law was the older, and Faith afterwards. Now he removes this notion by showing that Faith was anterior to the Law; as is evident from Abraham's case, who was justified before the giving of the Law. He shows too that late events fell out according to prophecy; The Scripture, says he, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham. Attend to this point. He Himself who gave the Law, had decreed, before He gave it, that the heathen should be justified by Faith. And he says not revealed, but, preached the Gospel, to signify that the patriarch was in joy at this method of justification, and in great desire for its accomplishment.

Further, they were possessed with another apprehension; it was written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the Law, to do them. Deuteronomy 27:26 And this he removes, with great skill and prudence, turning their argument against themselves, and showing that those who relinquish the Law are not only not cursed, but blessed; and they who keep it, not only not blessed but cursed. They said that he who kept not the Law was cursed, but he proves that he who kept it was cursed, and he who kept it not, blessed. Again, they said that he who adhered to Faith alone was cursed, but he shows that he who adhered to Faith alone, is blessed. And how does he prove all this? For it is no common thing which we have promised; wherefore it is necessary to give close attention to what follows. He had already shown this, by referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, In you shall all nations be blessed, Genesis 12:4 at a time, that is, when Faith existed, not the Law; so he adds by way of conclusion,

Ver. 9. So then they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham.

Then, that they might not turn round, and object that, true it was Abraham was justified by Faith, for the Law was not then given, but what instance would be found of Faith justifying after the delivery of the Law? He addresses himself to this, and proves more than they required: namely, not only that Faith was justifying, but that the Law brought its adherents under a curse. To be sure of this, listen to the very words of the Apostle.

Ver. 10. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse.

This is what he lays down, before proving it; and what is the proof? It is from the Law itself:--

Ver. 10, 11. For it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them. Now that no man is justified by the Law is evident.

For all have sinned, and are under the curse. However he does not say this yet, lest he should seem to lay it down of himself, but here again establishes his point by a text which concisely states both points; that no man has fulfilled the Law, (wherefore they are under the curse,) and, that Faith justifies. What then is the text? It is in the book of the prophet Habakkuk, The just shall live by faith, Habakkuk 2:4 which not only establishes the righteousness that is of Faith, but also that there is no salvation through the Law. As no one, he says, kept the Law, but all were under the curse, on account of transgression, an easy way was provided, that from Faith, which is in itself a strong proof that no man can be justified by the Law. For the prophet says not, The just shall live by the Law, but, by faith:

Ver. 12. And the Law is not of faith; but He that does them shall live in them.

For the Law requires not only Faith but works also, but grace saves and justifies by Faith. Ephesians 2:8

You see how he proves that they are under the curse who cleave to the Law, because it is impossible to fulfill it; next, how comes Faith to have this justifying power? For to this doctrine he already stood pledged, and now maintains it with great force of argument. The Law being too weak to lead man to righteousness, an effectual remedy was provided in Faith, which is the means of rendering that possible which was impossible by the Law. Romans 8:3 Now as the Scripture says, the just shall live by faith, thus repudiating salvation by the Law, and moreover as Abraham was justified by Faith, it is evident that its efficacy is very great. And it is also clear, that he who abides not by the Law is cursed, and that he who keeps to Faith is just. But, you may ask me, how I prove that this curse is not still of force? Abraham lived before the Law, but we, who once were subject to the yoke of bondage, have made ourselves liable to the curse; and who shall release us therefrom? Observe his ready answer to this; his former remark was sufficient; for, if a man be once justified, and has died to the Law and embraced a novel life, how can such a one be subject to the curse? However, this is not enough for him, so he begins with a fresh argument, as follows:--

Ver. 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.

In reality, the people were subject to another curse, which says, Cursed is every one that continues not in the things that are written in the book of the Law. Deuteronomy 27:26 To this curse, I say, people were subject, for no man had continued in, or was a keeper of, the whole Law; but Christ exchanged this curse for the other, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree. As then both he who hanged on a tree, and he who transgresses the Law, is cursed, and as it was necessary for him who is about to relieve from a curse himself to be free from it, but to receive another instead of it, therefore Christ took upon Him such another, and thereby relieved us from the curse. It was like an innocent man's undertaking to die for another sentenced to death, and so rescuing him from punishment. For Christ took upon Him not the curse of transgression, but the other curse, in order to remove that of others. For, He had done no violence neither was any deceit in His mouth. Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22 And as by dying He rescued from death those who were dying, so by taking upon Himself the curse, He delivered them from it.

Ver. 14. That upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham.

How on the Gentiles? It is said, In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: Genesis 22:18; 26:4 that is to say, in Christ. If this were said of the Jews, how would it be reasonable that they who were

themselves subject to the curse, on account of transgression, should become the authors of a blessing to others? An accursed person cannot impart to others that blessing of which he is himself deprived. Plainly then it all refers to Christ who was the Seed of Abraham, and through whom the Gentiles are blessed. And thus the promise of the Spirit is added, as Paul himself declares, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. As the grace of the Spirit could not possibly descend on the graceless and offending, they are first blessed the curse having been removed; then being justified by faith, they draw unto themselves the grace of the Spirit. Thus the Cross removed the curse, Faith brought in righteousness, righteousness drew on the grace of the Spirit.

Ver. 15. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it has been confirmed, no one makes it void or adds thereto.

To speak after the manner of men means to use human examples. Having founded his argument on the Scriptures, on the miracles wrought among themselves, on the sufferings of Christ, and on the Patriarch, he proceeds to common usages; and this he does invariably, in order to sweeten his discourse, and render it more acceptable and intelligible to the duller sort. Thus he argues with the Corinthians, Who feeds a flock, and eats not of the milk of the flock? Who plants a vineyard, and eats not the fruit thereof? 1 Corinthians 9:7 and again with the Hebrews, For a testament is of force where there has been death; for does it ever avail while he that made it lives? Hebrews 9:17 One may find him dwelling with pleasure on such arguments. In the Old Testament God does the same thing in many instances, as, Can a woman forget her sucking child? Isaiah 49:15 and again, Shall the clay say to him that fashions it, What do you make? Isaiah 45:9 and in Hosea, He represents a husband set at nought by his wife. Hosea 2:5 ff This use of human examples frequently occurs in types also, as when the prophet takes the girdle, Jeremiah 13:1-9 and goes down to the potter's house Jeremiah 18:1-6 The meaning of the present example is, that Faith is more ancient than the Law, which is later and only temporary, and delivered in order to pave the way for Faith. Hence he says, Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; above he had called them foolish, now he calls them brethren, at once chiding and encouraging them. Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it has been confirmed. If a man, says he, makes a covenant, does any one dare to come afterwards and overturn it, or subjoin anything to it? For this is the meaning of or adds thereto. Much less then when God makes a covenant; and with whom did God make a covenant?

Ver. 16, 17, 18. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed. He says not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of One, And to your seed, which is Christ. Now this I say, A covenant, confirmed before hand by God the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, does not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the Law, it is no more of promise: but God has granted it to Abraham by promise.

Thus God made a covenant with Abraham, promising that in his seed the blessing should come upon the heathen; and this blessing the Law cannot turn aside. As this example was not in all respects appropriate to the matter in hand, he introduces it thus, I speak after the manner of men, that nothing might be deduced from it derogatory to the majesty of God. But let us go to the bottom of this illustration. It was promised Abraham that by his seed the heathen should be blessed; and his seed according to the flesh is Christ; four hundred and thirty years after came the Law; now, if the Law bestows the blessings even life and righteousness, that promise is annulled. And so while no one annuls a man's covenant, the covenant of God after four hundred and thirty years is annulled; for if not that covenant but another instead of it bestows what is promised, then is it set aside, which is most unreasonable.

Ver. 19. What then is the Law? It was added because of transgressions.

This remark again is not superfluous; observe too how he glances round at every thing, as if he had an hundred eyes. Having exalted Faith, and proved its elder claims, that the Law may not be considered superfluous, he sets right this side of the doctrine also, and proves that the Law was not given without a view, but altogether profitably. Because of transgressions; that is to say, that the Jews might not be let live carelessly, and plunge into the depth of wickedness, but that the Law might be placed upon them as a bridle, guiding, regulating, and checking them from transgressing, if not all, at least some of the commandments. Not slight then was the advantage of the Law; but for how long?

Ver. 19. Till the seed should come to whom the promise has been made.

This is said of Christ; if then it was given until His advent, why do you protract it beyond its natural period?

Ver. 19. And it was ordained through Angels by the hand of a Mediator.

He either calls the priests Angels, or he declares that the Angels themselves ministered to the delivery of the Law. By Mediator here he means Christ, and shows that He was before it, and Himself the Giver of it.

Ver. 20. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

What can the heretics say to this? For as, according to them, the expression the Only True God excludes the Son from being true God, so here the phrase God is One, excludes Him from being God in any sense. But if, although the Father is called One God, the Son is nevertheless God, it is very plain that though the Father is called Very God, the Son is very God likewise. Now a mediator, says he, is between two parties; of whom then is Christ the Mediator? Plainly of God and of men. Observe, he says, that Christ also gave the Law; what therefore it was His to give, it is His to annul.

Ver. 21. Is the Law then against the promises of God?

For if the blessing is given in the seed of Abraham, but the Law brings in the curse, it must be contrary to the promises. This objection he meets, first, by a protest, in the words,

Ver. 21. God forbid:

And next he brings his proof;

Ver. 21. For if there had been a law given which could make alive verily righteousness would have been of the Law.

His meaning is as follows; If we had our hope of life in the Law, and our salvation depended on it, the objection might be valid. But if it save you, by means of Faith, though it brings you under the curse, you suffer nothing from it, gain no harm, in that Faith comes and sets all right. Had the promise been by the Law, you had reasonably feared lest, separating from the Law, you should separate from righteousness, but if it was given in order to shut up all, that is, to convince all and expose their individual sins, far from excluding you from the promises, it now aids you in obtaining them. This is shown by the words,

Ver. 22. Howbeit the scripture has shut up all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

As the Jews were not even conscious of their own sins, and in consequence did not even desire remission; the Law was given to probe their wounds, that they might long for a physician. And the word shut up means convinced and conviction held them in fear. You see then it is not only not against, but was given for the promises. Had it arrogated to itself the work and the authority, the objection would stand; but if its drift is something else, and it acted for that, how is it against the promises of God? Had the Law not been given, all would have been wrecked upon wickedness, and there would have been no Jews to listen to Christ; but now being given, it has effected two things; it has schooled its followers in a certain degree of virtue, and has pressed on them the knowledge of their own sins. And this especially made them more zealous to seek the Son, for those who disbelieved, disbelieved from having no sense of their own sins, as Paul shows; For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3

Ver. 23. But before faith came, we were kept inward under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

Here he clearly puts forward what I have stated: for the expressions we were kept and shut up, signify nothing else than the security given by the commandments of the Law; which like a fortress fenced them round with fear and a life conformable to itself, and so preserved them unto Faith.

Ver. 24. So that the Law has been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Now the Tutor is not opposed to the Preceptor, but cooperates with him, ridding the youth from all vice, and having all leisure to fit him for receiving instructions from his Preceptor. But when the youth's habits are formed, then the Tutor leaves him, as Paul says.

Ver. 25, 26. But now that faith has come which leads to perfect manhood we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Law then, as it was our tutor, and we were kept shut up under it, is not the adversary but the fellow-worker of grace; but if when grace has come, it continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary; for if it confines those who ought to go forward to grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night, kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only not benefit, it would injure us; and so does the Law, if it stands between us and greater benefits. Those then are the greatest traducers of the Law, who still keep it, just as the tutor makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure. Hence Paul says, But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. We are then no longer under a tutor, for you are all sons of God. Wonderful! see how mighty is the power of Faith, and how he unfolds as he proceeds! Before, he showed that it made them sons of the Patriarch, Know therefore, says he, that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham; now he proves that they are sons of God also, For you are all, says he, sons of God through faith, which is in Christ Jesus; by Faith, not by the Law. Then, when he has said this great and wonderful thing, he names also the mode of their adoption,

Ver. 27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ.

Why does he not say, For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have been born of God? for this was what directly went to prove that they were sons -- because he states it in a much more awful point of view; If Christ be the Son of God, and you have put on Him, thou who hast the Son within you, and art fashioned after His pattern, hast been brought into one kindred and nature with Him.

Ver. 28. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for you all are one in Christ Jesus.

See what an insatiable soul! For having said, We are all made children of God through Faith, he does not stop there, but tries to find something more exact, which may serve to convey a still closer oneness with Christ. Having said, you have put on Christ, even this does not suffice Him, but by way of penetrating more deeply into this union, he comments on it thus: You are all One in Christ Jesus, that is, you have all one form and one mould, even Christ's. What can be more awful than these words! He that was a Greek, or Jew, or bond-man yesterday, carries about with him the form, not of an Angel or Archangel, but of the Lord of all, yea displays in his own person the Christ.

Ver. 29. And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.

Here, you observe, he proves what he had before stated concerning the seed of Abraham -- that to him and to his seed the promises were given.

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