

Homily 31 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 31 on Romans emphasizes the significance of names, the contributions of women, and the importance of personal commendation within the Christian community.

Scripture: Romans 16:5-7, Romans 16:12, Romans 16:16

Topics: "Christian Community", "Eternal Judgment"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of recognizing and honoring the contributions of various individuals in the Christian community, highlighting the virtues and labors of both men and women. He delves into the significance of names, genealogies, and the praises bestowed upon believers, showcasing the meticulous judgment of God in rewarding each according to their deeds. Chrysostom also addresses the existence of hell, urging believers to contemplate the consequences of sin and the necessity of accountability in the afterlife, emphasizing the need to strive for virtue and righteousness to avoid eternal punishment.

Transcript

Rom. XVI. 5

Salute my well-beloved Epenetus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia unto Christ.

I think that many even of those who have the appearance of being extremely good men, hasten over this part of the Epistle as superfluous, and having no great weight in it. And I think that the same befalls them in regard to the genealogy that is in the Gospel. For because it is a catalogue of names, they think they cannot get any great good from it. Yet the gold founders' people are careful even about the little fragments; while these pass over even such great cakes of gold.

That this then may not befall them, what I have already said were enough to lead them off from their listlessness. For that the gain even from this is no contemptible one, we have shown even from what was said on a former occasion, when we lifted up your soul by means of these addresses. We will endeavor then today also to mine in this same place. For it is possible even from bare names to find a great treasure. If, for instance, you were shown why Abraham was so called, why Sarah, why Israel, why Samuel, you would find even from this a great many real subjects of research.

And from times too, and from places, you may gather the same advantage. For the good man waxes rich even from these; but he that is slothful, does not gain even from the most evident things. Thus the very name of Adam teaches us no small wisdom, and that of his son, and of his wife, and most of the others. For names serve to remind us of several circumstances. They show at once God's benefits and women's thankfulness. For when they conceived by the gift of God, it was they who gave these names to the children.

But why are we now philosophizing about names, while meanings so important are neglected, and many do not so much as know the very names of the sacred books? Still even then we ought not to recede from an attention to things of this sort. For you ought, He says, to have put My money to the exchangers. Matthew 25:27 And therefore though there be nobody that listens to it, let us do our part, and show that there is nothing superfluous, nothing added at random in the Scriptures.

For if these names had no use, they would not then have been added to the Epistle, nor would Paul have written what he has written. But there are some even so low-minded, and empty, and unworthy of Heaven, as not to think that names only, but whole books of the Bible are of no use, as Leviticus, Joshua, and more besides. And in this way many of the simple ones have been for rejecting the Old Testament, and advancing on in the way, that results from this evil habit of mind, have likewise pruned away many parts of the New Testament also.

But of these men, as intoxicated and living to the flesh, we do not make much account. But if any be a lover of wisdom, and a friend to spiritual entertainments, let him be told that even the things which seem to be unimportant in Scripture, are not placed there at random and to no purpose, and that even the old laws have much to profit us. For it says, All these things are types (A.V. ensamples) and are written for our instruction. 1 Corinthians 10:11 Wherefore to Timothy too he says, Give heed to reading, to exhortation 1 Timothy 4:13, so urging him to the reading of the old books, though he was a man with so great a spirit in him, as to be able to drive out devils, and to raise the dead.

Let us now keep on with the subject in hand. Salute my well-beloved Epenetus. It is worth learning from this how he distributes to each the different praises. For this praise is no slight one, but even very great, and a proof of great excellence in him, that Paul should hold him beloved, Paul who had no idea of loving by favor, and not by cool judgment. Then another encomium comes, Who is the first-fruits of Achaia. For what he means is, either that he leaped forward before any one else, and became a believer (and this were no slight praise), or that he displayed more religious behavior than any other.

And on this account after saying, who is the first-fruits of Achaia, he does not hold his peace, but to prevent your suspecting it to be a glory of the world's, he added, unto Christ. Now if in civil matters, he that is first seems to be great and honorable, much more so in these. As then it was likely that they were of low extraction, he speaks of the true noble birth and pre-eminency, and gives him his honors from this. And he says, that he is the first-fruits, not of Corinth only, but of the whole nation, as having become as it were a door, and an entrance to the rest. And to such, the reward is no small one. For such an one will reap much recompense also from the achievements of others, in that he too contributed much toward them by beginning.

Ver. 6. Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us.

How is this? A woman again is honored and proclaimed victorious! Again are we men put to shame. Or rather, we are not put to shame only, but have even an honor conferred upon us. For an honor we have, in

that there are such women among us, but we are put to shame, in that we men are left so far behind by them. But if we come to know whence it comes, that they are so adorned, we too shall speedily overtake them. Whence then is their adorning? Let both men and women listen. It is not from bracelets, or from necklaces, nor from their eunuchs either, and their maid-servants, and gold-broidered dresses, but from their toils in behalf of the truth. For he says, who bestowed much labor on us, that is, not on herself only, nor upon her own advancement, (see p. 520) (for this many women of the present day do, by fasting, and sleeping on the floor), but upon others also, so carrying on the race Apostles and Evangelists ran. In what sense then does he say, I suffer not a woman to teach? 1 Timothy 2:12 He means to hinder her from publicly coming forward 1 Corinthians 14:35, and from the seat on the bema, not from the word of teaching. Since if this were the case, how would he have said to the woman that had an unbelieving husband, How do you know, O woman, if you shall save your husband? 1 Corinthians 7:16 Or how came he to allow her to admonish children, when he says, but she shall be saved by child-bearing if they continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety? 1 Timothy 2:15 How came Priscilla to instruct even Apollos? It was not then to cut in sunder private conversing for advantage that he said this, but that before all, and which it was the teacher's duty to give in the public assembly; or again, in case the husband be believing and thoroughly furnished, able also to instruct her. When she is the wiser, then he does not forbid her teaching and improving him. And he does not say, who taught much, but who bestowed much labor, because along with teaching (ἡ ἡμετέρα ἡμετέρα ἡμετέρα...) she performs other ministries besides, those in the way of dangers, in the way of money, in the way of travels. For the women of those days were more spirited than lions, sharing with the Apostles their labors for the Gospel's sake. In this way they went travelling with them, and also performed all other ministries. And even in Christ's day there followed Him women, which ministered unto Him of their substance Luke 8:3, and waited upon the Teacher.

Ver. 7. Salute Andronicus and Junia my kinsmen.

This also looks like an encomium. And what follows is much more so. And what sort is this of? And my fellow-prisoners. For this is the greatest honor, the noble proclamation. And where was Paul a prisoner, that he should call them my fellow-prisoners? A prisoner indeed he had not been, but he had suffered things worse than prisoners, in being not an alien only to his country and his family, but in wrestling with famine and continual death, and thousands of other things. For of a prisoner the only misfortune is this, that he is separated from his relations, and often has to be a slave instead of being free. But in this case one may mention temptations thick as snow-flakes, which this blessed person underwent by being carried and taken about, scourged, fettered, stoned, shipwrecked, with countless people plotting against him. And captives indeed have no further foe after they are led away, but they even experience great care from those who have taken them. But this man was continually in the midst of enemies, and saw spears on every side, and sharpened swords, and arrays, and battles. Since then it was likely that these shared many dangers with him, he calls them fellow-captives. As in another passage also, Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner. Colossians 4:10 Then another praise besides. Who are of note among the Apostles. And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even among these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! How great is the devotion (ἡ ἡμετέρα ἡμετέρα ἡμετέρα) of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle! But even here he does not stop, but adds another encomium besides, and says, Who were also in Christ before me.

For this too is a very great praise, that they sprang forth and came before others. But let me draw your attention to the holy soul, how untainted it is by vanity. For after glory such as his in kind and degree, he sets others before himself, and does not hide from us the fact of his having come after them, nor is ashamed of confessing this. And why are you surprised at his not being ashamed of this, when he shuns not even to parade before men his former life, calling himself a blasphemer, and a persecutor? 1 Timothy 1:13 Since then he was not able to set them before others on this score, he looked out himself, who had come in after others, and from this he did find means of bestowing a praise upon them by saying, Who were in Christ before me.

Ver. 8. Greet Amplias my beloved.

Here again he passes encomiums upon his person by his love. For the love of Paul was for God, carrying countless blessings with it. For if being loved by the king is a great thing, what a great encomium must it be to be beloved by Paul? For if he had not acquired great virtue, he would not have attracted his love? Since as for those who live in vice and transgressions he is accustomed (ἐχάρισμα) not only to abstain from loving them, but even to anathematize them. As when he says, If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed 1 Corinthians 16:22; and, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8

Ver. 9. Salute Urbane, my helper in the Lord.

This is a greater encomium than the other. For this even comprehends that. And Stachys, my beloved. This again is an honor of the same kind.

Ver. 10. Salute Apelles, approved in Christ.

There is no praise like this, being unblamable, and giving no handle in the things of God. For when he says, approved in Christ, he includes the whole list of virtues. And on what ground does he nowhere say my Lord such an one, my Master this? It is because these encomiums were greater than those. For those are mere titles of rank (ἐπίσημοι), but these are of virtue. And this same honor he paid them not at random, or as addressing several of inferior virtue with the high and great characters. For so far as he is addressing, and that too one along with another, and in the same letter, he honors them all alike. But by stating the praises particularly to each, he sets before us the virtue peculiar to each; so as neither to give birth to envy by honoring one and dishonoring another, nor to work in them listlessness and confusion, by giving them all the same dignity, though they did not deserve the same. See now how he again comes to the admirable women. For after saying, Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household,

Ver. 11. Salute Herodion my kinsman; greet them which be of the household of Narcissus;

Who, it is likely, were not so worthy as the afore-mentioned, on which account also he does not mention them all by name even, and after giving them the encomium which was suited to them, that of being faithful, (and this the meaning of,)

Which are in the Lord.

He again reverts to the women, and says,

Ver. 12. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord.

And in regard to the former woman, he says that she bestowed labor upon you, but of these that they are still laboring. And this is no small encomium, that they should be in work throughout, and should not only work, but labor even. But Persis he calls beloved too, to show that she is greater than these.

For he says, Salute my beloved Persis.

And of her great laborings he likewise bears testimony, and says, which labored much in the Lord.

So well does he know how to name each after his deserts, so making these more eager by not depriving them of any of their dues, but commending even the slightest pre-eminence, and making the others more virtuous, and inciting them to the same zeal, by his encomiums upon these.

Ver. 12. Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

Here again the good things are without any drawback, since the son and the mother are each of such a character, and the house is full of blessing, and the root agrees with the fruit; for he would not have simply said, his mother and mine, unless he had been bearing testimony to the woman for great virtue.

Ver. 14. Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.

Here do not be looking to how he starts them without any encomium, but how he did not reckon them, though far inferior, as it seems, to all, unworthy of being addressed by him. Or rather even this is no slight praise that he even calls them brethren, as also those that are after them he calls saints. For he says,

Ver. 15. Salute Philologus, and Julius, and Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them;

Which was the greatest dignity, and unspeakable height of honor. Then to prevent any jealousy rising from his addressing one in one way and another in another, and some by name and some with no distinction, and some with more points of praise, and some with fewer, he again mingles them in the equality of charity, and in the holy kiss, saying,

Ver. 16. Salute one another with an holy kiss.

To cast out of them, by this salutation, all arguing that confused them, and all grounds for little pride; that neither the great might despise the little, nor the little grudge at the greater, but that haughtiness and envy might be more driven away, when this kiss soothed down and levelled every one. And therefore he not only bids them salute in this way, but sends in like manner to them the greeting from the Churches. For there salute you, he says, not this or that person individually, but all of you in common,

The Churches of Christ.

You see that they are no small gains that we earn from these addresses, and what treasures we should have passed hastily over, unless in this part of the Epistle also we had examined it with accuracy, such, I mean, as was in our power. So if there be found any man of wisdom and spiritual, he will dive even deeper, and find a greater number of pearls. But since some have often made it a question wherefore it was that in this Epistle he addressed so many, which thing he has not done in any other Epistle, we might say that it is owing to his never having seen the Romans yet, that he does this.

And yet one may say, Well, he had not seen the Colossians either, and yet he did not do anything of the kind. But these were more honorable than others, and had come there from other cities, as to a safer and more royal city. Since then they were living in a foreign country, and they needed much provision for security, and some of them were of his acquaintance, but some too were there who had rendered him many important services, he with reason commends them by letters; for the glory of Paul was then not little, but so great, that even from his sending them letters, those who had the happiness to have an Epistle to them, gained much protection.

For men not only revered him, but were even afraid of him. Had this not been so, he would not have said, who had been a succorer of many, and of myself also. Romans 16:2 And again, I could wish that myself were accursed. Romans 9:3 And to Philemon he wrote and said, as Paul the aged, and a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Philippians 9 And to the Galatians, Behold, I Paul say unto you. Galatians 5:2 And, You received me even as Jesus Christ. Galatians 4:14 And writing to the Corinthians he said, Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come unto you. 1 Corinthians 4:18 And again, These things I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos, that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written. 1 Corinthians 4:6 Now from all these passages it is clear that all had a great opinion of him.

Wishing then that they should feel on easy terms, and be in honor, he addressed each of them, setting forth their praise to the best advantage he might. For one he calls beloved, another kinsman, another both, another fellow-prisoner, another fellow-worker, another approved, another elect. And of the women one he addresses by her title, for he does not call her servant of the Church in an undefined way (because if this were so he would have given Tryphena and Persis this name too), but this one as having the office of deaconess, and another as helper and assistant, another as mother, another from the labors she underwent, and some he addresses from the house they belonged to, some by the name of Brethren, some by the appellation of Saints.

And some he honors by the mere fact of addressing them, and some by addressing them by name, and some by calling them first-fruits, and some by their precedence in time, but more than all, Priscilla and Aquila. (Ἰ, ἰ̇ζά½οί, ἱεῖμῐ́á½τῐ̇ ἰ̇ ἰ̇. á¾ζῐ̇.) For even if all were believers, still all were not alike, but were different in their merits. Wherefore to lead them all to greater emulation, he keeps no man's encomiums concealed. For when they who labor more, do not receive the greater reward also, many become more listless.

On this ground even in the kingdom, the honors are not equal, nor among the disciples were all alike, but the three were pre-eminently above the rest. And among these three again there was a great difference. For this is a very exact method observed by God even to the last. Hence, one star differs from another star in glory, 1 Corinthians 15:41, it says. And yet all were Apostles and all are to sit on twelve thrones, and all left their goods, and all companied with Him; still it was the three He took.

And again, to these very three, He said it was possible (ἀλλά ἵνα ἴσῃς ὅτι ἰσχύει) that some might even be superior. For to sit, He says, on My right hand and on My left, is not mine to give, save to those for whom it is prepared. Mark 10:40 And He sets Peter before them, when He says, Lovest thou Me more than these? John 21:15 And John too was loved even above the rest. For there shall be a strict examination of all, and if you be but little better than your neighbor, if it be even an atom, or anything ever so little, God will not overlook even this.

And this even from of old one might see coming out. For even Lot was a righteous man, yet not so, as was Abraham; and Hezekiah again, yet not so as was David: and all the prophets, yet not so as was John.

Where then are they who with all this great exactness in view, yet will not allow that there is a hell? For if all the righteous are not to enjoy the same lot, if they exceed others even a little (for one star, it says, differs from another star in glory,) 1 Corinthians 15:41, how are sinners to be in the same lot with the righteous? Such a confusion as this even man would not make, much less God! But if you will, I will show you that even in the case of sinners, arguing from existing facts, there is this distinction, and exact just judgment.

Now consider; Adam sinned, and Eve sinned, and both transgressed, yet they were not equally sinful. And therefore neither were they equally punished. For the difference was so great that Paul said, Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. And yet the deceit was one. But still God's searching examination pointed out a difference so great, as that Paul should make this assertion. Again, Cain was punished, but Lamech, who committed a murder after him, did not suffer near so great a punishment.

And yet this was a murder, and that was a murder, and that so much the worse, because even by the example he had not become the better. But since the one neither killed his brother after exhortation, nor needed an accuser, nor shrunk from answering when God questioned him, but even without any accuser both pleaded again himself, and condemned himself more severely, he obtained pardon. But the other as having done the opposite was punished. See with what exactness God sifts the facts.

For this reason He punished those in the flood in one way, and those in Sodom in another; and the Israelites again, both those in Babylon, and those in Antiochus' time, in different ways: so showing that He keeps a strict account of our doings. And these were slaves for seventy years, and those for four hundred, but others again ate their children, and underwent countless other more grievous calamities, and even in this way were not freed, either they or those that were burnt alive in Sodom.

For it shall be more tolerable, He says, for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha, than for that city. Matthew 10:15 For if He has no care for us, either when we sin or when we do aright, perhaps there will be some reason in saying that there is no punishment. But since He is so exceedingly urgent about our not sinning, and adopts so many means to keep us in the right, it is very plain that He punishes the wicked, and also crowns those that do right. But let me beg you to consider the unfairness of the generality.

For they find fault with God because He so often long-suffering, overlooks so many that are impious, impure, or violent, without now suffering punishment. Again, if He threaten to punish them in the other world, they are vehement and pressing in their accusations. And yet if this be painful, they ought to accept and admire the other. But alas the folly! The unreasonable and asinine spirit! Alas the sin-loving soul, that gazes after vice! For it is from this that all these opinions have their birth.

And so if they who utter these things should be minded to lay hold upon virtue, they will presently find themselves satisfied concerning hell also, and will not doubt. And where (it is said) and in what place is this hell? For some fablers say that it is in the valley of Josaphat, thus drawing that which was said about a certain by-gone war, to apply to hell. But the Scripture does not say this. But in what place, pray, will it be? Somewhere as I think at least quite out of the pale of this world.

For as the prisons and mines are at a great distance from royal residences, so will hell be somewhere out of this world. Seek we not then to know where it is, but how we may escape it. Neither yet because God does not punish all here, therefore disbelieve things to come. For merciful and long-suffering He is: that is why he threatens, and does not cast us into it immediately. For I desire not, He says, the death of a sinner. Ezekiel 18:32 But if there is no death of a sinner, the words are but idle.

And I know indeed that there is nothing less pleasant to you than these words. But to me nothing is pleasanter. And would it were possible at our dinner, and our supper, and our baths, and everywhere, to be discoursing about hell. For we should not then feel the pain at the evils in this world, nor the pleasure of its good things. For what would you tell me was an evil? poverty? Disease? captivity? Maiming of the body? Why all these things are sport compared to the punishment there, even should you speak of those who are tormented with famine all their life long; or those who are maimed from their earliest days, and beg, even this is luxury compared to those other evils.

Let us then continually employ ourselves with talking about these things. For to remember hell prevents our falling into hell. Do you not hear St. Paul saying, Who shall suffer everlasting punishment from the face of the Lord? 2 Thessalonians 1:9 Do you not hear what Nero's character was, whom Paul even calls the Mystery of Antichrist? For the mystery of iniquity, he says, already works. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 What then? Is Nero to suffer nothing? Is Antichrist to suffer nothing?

Or the Devil nothing? Then he will always be Antichrist, and so the Devil. For from mischief they will not leave off, unless they be punished. Yea, you say, but that there is a hell everybody sees. But the unbelievers only are to fall into it. What is the reason, pray? It is because the believers acknowledge their Master. And what is this to the purpose? When their life is impure, they will on this ground be punished more severely than the unbelievers. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: but as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.

Romans 2:12 And, The servant that knew his master's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. Luke 12:47 But if there is no such thing as giving an account of one's life, and all this is said in a loose way then neither will the Devil have vengeance taken upon him. For he too knows God, and far more than men too, and all the demons know Him, and tremble, and own He is their Judge. If then there is no giving an account of our life, nor of evil deeds, then will they also clean escape.

These things are not so, surely they are not! Deceive not yourselves, beloved. For if there is no hell, how are the Apostles to judge the twelve tribes of Israel? How comes Paul to say, Do you not know that we shall judge Angels? How much more things of this life? 1 Corinthians 6:3 How came Christ to say, The men of Nineveh shall arise and condemn this generation Matthew 12:41; and, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment? Matthew 11:24 Why then make merry with things that are no subjects for merriment?

Why deceive yourself and put cheats upon your reason (ἵνα μὴ ἴσῃς ὅτι, om. ἰ. ἀντὶ τῆς ἰσχυροῦς... ἵνα μὴ ἴσῃς ὅτι...)? Why fight with the love of God toward man? For it was through this that He prepared it, and threatened, that we might not be cast into it, as having by this fear become better. And thus he that does away with speaking on these subjects does nothing else than thrust us into it, and drive us there by this deceit. Slacken not the hands of them then that labor for virtue, nor make the listlessness of them that sleep greater.

For if the many be persuaded that there is no hell, when will they leave off vice? Or when will right be seen? I do not say between sinners and righteous men, but between sinners and sinners? For why is it that one is punished here, and another not punished, though he does the same sins, or even far worse? For if there be no hell, you will have nothing to say in defense of this to those who make it an objection. Wherefore my advice is, that we leave off this trifling, and stop the mouths of those that are gainsayers upon these subjects.

For there will be an exact searching into the smallest things, both in the way of sins and in the way of good deeds, and we shall be punished for unchaste looks, and for idle words, and for mere reproachful words, and for drunkenness we shall render an account, as even for a cup of cold water we shall receive a reward, and a sigh only. Ecclesiastes 12:14 For it says, Set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry. Ezekiel 9:4 How then do you dare to say that He, who with so great exactness will search into our doings, threatened hell in bare words, and lightly?

Do not, I beseech you, do not with these vain hopes destroy yourself and those that are persuaded by you! For if you disbelieve our words, make enquiry of Jews and Gentiles, and all heretics. And all of them as with one mouth will answer that a judgment there shall be, and a retribution. And are men not enough? Ask the devils themselves, and you will hear them cry, Why have you come there to torment us before the time. Matthew 8:29 And putting all this together persuade your soul not to trifle idly, lest by experience thou come to know there is a hell, but from this you may be sobered, and so able to escape those tortures, and attain to the good things to come; whereof may we all partake by the grace and love towards man, etc.

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