

Homily 40 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's journey to Syria is a testament to the power of faith and the importance of cultivating friendship and love in our lives.

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Brotherly Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of love and unity among believers, emphasizing the need to cultivate genuine friendships and prioritize charity above all else. He highlights the power of love to bring harmony, peace, and spiritual growth within the community of believers, urging them to put away resentment, envy, and rejoice in one another's well-being. Chrysostom encourages believers to prioritize building strong relationships, as friendship is a powerful force that can overcome divisions and strengthen the Church. He underscores the significance of love in reflecting the discipleship of Christ and calls for a deep commitment to fostering genuine friendships and unity among believers.

Transcript

Acts XVIII. 18

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

See how the Law was breaking up; see how they were bound by conscience. This, namely, was a Jewish custom, to shear their heads agreeably with a vow. But then there ought to be also a sacrifice Acts 21:26, which was not the case here. -- Having yet tarried: after the beating of Sosthenes. For it was necessary that he should yet tarry, and comfort them concerning these things. He sailed for Syria. Why does he desire again to come to Syria? It was there that the disciples were ordered to be called Christians Acts 11:26: there, that he had been commended to the grace of God Acts 14:26: there, that he had effected such things concerning the doctrine.

And with him Priscilla -- lo, a woman also -- and Aquila. But these he left at Ephesus. With good reason, namely, that they should teach. For having been with him so long time, they were learning many things: and yet he did not at present withdraw them from their custom as Jews. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem.

Therefore it was that he was hindered from coming into Asia, being impelled to what was of pressing moment. Thus observe him here, entreated (by them) to stay, but because he could not comply, being in haste to depart, he bade them farewell. However, he did not leave them without more ado, but with promise (to return): But I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. Acts 18:19-21 And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the Church, he went down to Antioch.

And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. Acts 18:22-23 He came again to those places which he had previously visited. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. Acts 18:24 Lo, even learned men are now urgent, and the disciples henceforth go abroad. Do you mark the spread of the preaching? This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the Spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. Acts 18:25-26 If this man knew only the baptism of John, how is it that he was fervent in the Spirit, for the Spirit was not given in that way? And if those after him needed the baptism of Christ, much more would he need it. Then what is to be said? For it is not without a meaning that the writer has strung the two incidents together.

It seems to me that this was one of the hundred and twenty who were baptized with the Apostles: or, if not so, then the same that took place in the case of Cornelius, took place also in the case of this man. But neither does he receive baptism. That expression, then, they expounded more perfectly, seems to me to be this, that he behooved also to be baptized. Because the other twelve knew nothing accurate, not even what related to Jesus. And it is likely that he did in fact receive baptism.

But if these (disciples) of John, after that baptism again received baptism, was this needful for the disciples also? And wherefore the need of water? These are very different from him, men who did not even know whether there were a Holy Ghost. He was fervent, then, in the Spirit, knowing only the baptism of John: but these expounded to him more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; who, when he had come, helped them much which had believed through grace.

Acts 18:27 He wished then also to depart into Achaia, and these also encouraged (him to do so), having also given him letters. Who when he had come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. Acts 18:28 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts -- meaning what we have read as to Cæsarea and the other places -- came to Ephesus, and having found certain disciples Acts 19:1, he said to them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since you believed?

And they said to him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said to them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. Acts 19:2-4 For that they did not even believe in Christ is plain from his saying, that they should believe in Him that was to come after him.

And he did not say, The baptism of John is nothing, but, It is incomplete. Nor does he add this (in so many words), but he taught them, and many received the Holy Ghost. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve Acts 19:5-7: so that it was likely they had the Spirit, but it did not appear. And all the men were about twelve.

(Recapitulation.) And they came to Ephesus, and there he left them Acts 18:19: for he did not wish to take them about with him, but left them at Ephesus. But they subsequently dwelt at Corinth, and he bears high testimony to them, and writing to the Romans, salutes them. Romans 16:3 Whence it seems to me that they afterwards went back to Rome, in the time of Nero, as having an attachment for those parts whence they had been expelled in the time of Claudius. But he himself went into the synagogue.

It seems to me that the faithful still assembled there, for they did not immediately withdraw them. And when they besought him to stay, he consented not Acts 18:20, 21, for he was hastening to Cæsarea. And having arrived at Cæsarea, etc., passing through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, confirming all the disciples. (v. 22, 23.) Through these regions also he merely passes again, just enough to establish them by his presence. And a certain Jew, Apollos by name, etc. Acts 18:24 For he was an awakened man, travelling in foreign parts for this very purpose.

Writing of him the Apostle said, Now concerning Apollos our brother. 1 Corinthians 16:12 (β) Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, etc. Acts 18:26 It was not for nothing that he left them at Ephesus, but for Apollos' sake, the Spirit so ordered it, that he might come with greater force to the attack (■ πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον) upon Corinth. What may be the reason that to him they did nothing, but Paul they assault? They knew that he was the leader, and great was the name of the man. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia Acts 18:27 i.e. in faith, he did all by faith; the brethren wrote, etc. nowhere envy, nowhere an evil eye.

Aquila teaches, or rather this man lets himself be taught. He was minded to depart, and they send letters. (a) For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, etc. Acts 18:28 Now by this, that he publicly convinced them, his boldness was shown: by the clearness of his arguing, his power was declared: by his convicting them out of the Scriptures, his skill (of learning). For neither boldness by itself contributes anything, where there is not power, nor power where there is not boldness.

He mightily convinced, it says. (β) And it came to pass, etc. Acts 19:1 But whence had those, being in Ephesus, the baptism of John? Probably they had been on a visit at Jerusalem at the time (of John's preaching), and did not even know Jesus. And he does not say to them, Do ye believe in Jesus? But what? Have ye received the Holy Ghost? Acts 19:2 He knew that they had not, but wishes themselves to say it, that having learned what they lack, they may ask. John verily baptized, etc.

Acts 19:4 From the baptism itself he (John) prophesies: and he leads them (to see) that this is the meaning of John's baptism. (a) That they should believe in Him that was to come: on what kind (of Person)? I indeed baptize you with water, but He that comes after me, shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Matthew 3:11 And when Paul, it says, had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied. Acts 19:6 (β) The gift is twofold: tongues and prophesyings.

Hence is shown an important doctrine, that the baptism of John is incomplete. And he does not say, Baptism of forgiveness, but, of repentance. What (is it) then? These had not the Spirit: they were not so fervent, not even instructed. And why did (Apollos) not receive baptism? (The case) seems to me to be

this: Great was the boldness of the man. He taught diligently the things concerning Jesus, but he needed more diligent teaching. Thus, though not knowing all, by his zeal he attracted the Holy Ghost, in the same manner as Cornelius and his company.

Perhaps it is the wish of many, Oh that we had the baptism of John now! But (if we had), many would still be careless of a life of virtue, and it might be thought that each for this, and not for the kingdom of heaven's sake, aimed at virtue. There would be many false prophets: for then they which are approved would not be very manifest. 1 Corinthians 11:19 As, blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed John 20:29, so they that (believe) without signs. Except, says (Christ), ye see signs, you will not believe.

John 4:48 For we lose nothing (by lack of miracles), if we will but take heed to ourselves. We have the sum and substance of the good things: through baptism we received remission of sins, sanctification, participation of the Spirit, adoption, eternal life. What would ye more? Signs? But they come to an end (■ λλ■ καταργε■ται). You have faith, hope, charity, the abiding things: these seek thou, these are greater than signs. Nothing is equal to charity. For greater than all, says he, is charity. cf. 1 Corinthians 13:5 But now, love is in jeopardy, for only its name is left behind, while the reality is nowhere (seen), but we are divided each from the other.

What then shall one do to reunite (ourselves)? For to find fault is easy, but how may one make friendship, this is the point to be studied; how we may bring together the scattered members. For be it so, that we have one Church, or one doctrine -- yet this is not the (main) consideration: no, the evil is, that in these we have not fellowship -- living peaceably, as the Apostle says, with all men Romans 12:18, on the contrary, we are at variance one with another. For be it that we are not having fights every day, yet look not thou to this, but (to this), that neither have we charity, genuine and unswerving.

There is need of bandages and oil. Let us bear it in mind, that charity is the cognizance of the disciples of Christ: that without this, all else avails nothing: that it is an easy task if we will. Yes, say you, we know all this, but how (to go to work) that it may be achieved? What (to do), that it may be effected? In what way, that we may love one another? First, let us put away the things which are subversive of charity, and then we shall establish this. Let none be resentful, none be envious, none rejoicing in (others') misfortunes: these are the things that hinder love; well then, the things that make it are of the other sort.

For it is not enough to put away the things that hinder; the things that establish must also be forthcoming. Now Sirach tells us the things that are subversive (of friendship), and does not go on to speak of the things which make union. Reproaching, he says, and revealing of a secret, and a treacherous wound. cf. Sirach 22:27 But in speaking of the men of those times, these things might well be named, seeing they were carnal: but in our case, God forbid they should be (even) named.

Not from these things do we bring our inducements for you, but from the others. For us, there is nothing good without friendship. Let there be good things without number, but what is the benefit -- be it wealth, be it luxury -- without friendship? No possession equal to this, even in matters of this life, just as there is nothing worse than men hating (us). Charity hides a multitude of sins 1 Peter 4:8: but enmity, even where sins are not, suspects them to be. It is not enough not to be an enemy; no, one must also love.

Bethink you, that Christ has bidden, and this is enough. Even affliction makes friendships, and draws (men) together. What then, say you, now, when there is no affliction? Say, how (are we to act) to become friends? Have ye not other friends, I ask? In what way are you their friends, how do ye continue such? For

a beginning, let none have any enemy: this (in itself) is not a small matter: let none envy; it is not possible to accuse the man who envies not. (b) How then shall we be warmly affected?

What makes love of persons? Beauty of person. Then let us also make our souls beautiful, and we shall be amiable one to another: for it is necessary, of course, not only to love, but also to be loved. Let us first achieve this point, that we may be loved, and the other will be easy. How to act that we may be loved? Let us become beautiful, and let us do this, that we may always have lovers. Let none make it his study to get money, to get slaves, to get houses, (so much) as to be loved, as to have a good name.

Better is a name than much wealth. For the one remains, the other perishes: and the one it is possible to acquire, the other impossible. For he that has got an evil character, will with difficulty lay it aside: but by means of his (good) name the poor man may quickly be rich. Let there be a man having ten thousand talents, and another a hundred friends; the latter is more rich in resources than the former. Then let us not merely do this, but let us work it as a kind of trade. And how can we? say you. A sweet mouth multiplies its friends, and a gracious tongue. Let us get a well-spoken mouth, and pure manners. It is not possible for a man to be such, and not to be known.

(a) We have one world that we all inhabit, with the same fruits we all are fed. But these are small matters: by the same Sacraments we partake of the same spiritual food. These surely are justifications of loving! (c) Mark how many (inducements and pleas) for friendship they that are without have excogitated; community of art or trade, neighborhood, relationships: but mightier than all these are the impulses and ties which are among us: this Table is calculated more (than all else) to shame us into friendliness.

But many of us who come thereto do not even know one another. The reason, it may be said, is that there are so many of them. By no means; it is only our own sluggish indifference. (Once) there were three thousand Acts 2:41-- there were five thousand Acts 4:4-- and yet they had all one soul: but now each knows not his brother, and is not ashamed to lay the blame on the number, because it is so great! Yet he that has many friends is invincible against all men: stronger he than any tyrant.

Not such the safety the tyrant has with his body-guards, as this man has with his friends. Moreover, this man is more glorious than he: for the tyrant is guarded by his own slaves, but this man by his peers: the tyrant, by men unwilling and afraid of him; this man by willing men and without fear. And here too is a wonderful thing to be seen -- many in one, and one in many. (a) Just as in an harp, the sounds are diverse, not the harmony, and they all together give out one harmony and symphony, (c) I could wish to bring you into such a city, were it possible, wherein (all) should be one soul: then should you see surpassing all harmony of harp and flute, the more harmonious symphony. (b) But the musician is the Might of Love: it is this that strikes out the sweet melody, (d) singing, (withal) a strain in which no note is out of tune.

This strain rejoices both Angels, and God the Lord of Angels; this strain rouses (to hear it) the whole audience that is in heaven; this even lulls (evil) passions-- it does not even suffer them to be raised, but deep is the stillness. For as in a theatre, when the band of musicians plays, all listen with a hush, and there is no noise there; so among friends, while Love strikes the chords, all the passions are still and laid to sleep, like wild beasts charmed and unnerved: just as, where hate is, there is all the contrary to this.

But let us say nothing just now about enmity; let us speak of friendship. Though thou let fall some casual hasty word, there is none to catch you up, but all forgive you; though thou do (some hasty thing), none puts upon it the worse construction, but all allowance is made: every one prompt to stretch out the hand to

him that is falling, every one wishing him to stand. A wall it is indeed impregnable, this friendship; a wall, which not the devil himself, much less men, can overpower.

It is not possible for that man to fall into danger who has gotten many friends. (Where love is) no room is there to get matter of anger, but only for pleasantness of feeling: no room is there to get matter of envying; none, to get occasion of resentment. Mark him, how in all things both spiritual and temporal, he accomplishes all with ease. What then, I pray you, can be equal to this man? Like a city walled on every side is this man, the other as a city unwalled.-- Great wisdom, to be able to be a creator of friendship!

Take away friendship, and you have taken away all, you have confounded all. But if the likeness of friendship have so great power, what must the reality itself be? Then let us, I beseech you, make to ourselves friends, and let each make this his art. But, lo! You will say, I do study this, but the other does not. All the greater the reward to you. True, say you, but the matter is more difficult. How, I ask? Lo! I testify and declare to you, that if but ten of you would knit yourselves together, and make this your work, as the Apostles made the preaching theirs, and the Prophets theirs the teaching, so we the making of friends, great would be the reward.

Let us make for ourselves royal portraits. For if this be the common badge of disciples, we do a greater work than if we should put ourselves into the power to raise the dead. The diadem and the purple mark the Emperor, and where these are not, though his apparel be all gold, the Emperor is not yet manifest. So now you are making known your lineage. Make men friends to yourself, and (friends) to others. There is none who being loved will wish to hate you. Let us learn the colors, with what ingredients they are mixed, with what (tints) this portrait is composed.

Let us be affable: let us not wait for our neighbors to move. Say not, if I see any person hanging back (for me to make the first advances), I become worse than he: but rather when you see this, forestall him, and extinguish his bad feeling. Do you see one diseased, and add to his malady? This, most of all, let us make sure of -- in honor to prefer one another, to account others better than one's self Romans 12:10, deem not this to be a lessening of yourself. If you prefer (another) in honor, you have honored yourself more, attracting to yourself a still higher extinction.

On all occasions let us yield the precedence to others. Let us bear nothing in mind of the evil done to us, but if any good has been done (let us remember only that). Nothing so makes a man a friend, as a gracious tongue, a mouth speaking good things, a soul free from self-elation, a contempt of vain-glory, a despising of honor. If we secure these things, we shall be able to become invincible to the snares of the Devil, and having with strictness accomplished the pursuit of virtue, to attain unto the good things promised to them that love Him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, dominion, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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