

Homily 6 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the unity and peace found in Christ, highlighting the transformation of believers into fellow citizens of God's household through grace.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:17, Ephesians 3:1-3, Ephesians 3:6

Topics: "Church Unity", "Salvation In Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the unity and peace brought by Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles, emphasizing that through Him, all believers have access to the Father in one Spirit. He highlights the transformation from strangers to fellow citizens with the saints, being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. Chrysostom explains the mystery revealed to him by God, that Gentiles are now fellow heirs, members of the body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

Transcript

Chapter II. Verses 17-22

And He came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were near, for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father. So then you are no more strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone. In whom each several building, fitly framed together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

He sent not, says the Apostle, by the hand of another, nor did He announce these tidings to us by means of any other, but Himself did it in His own person. He sent not Angel nor Archangel on the mission, because to repair so many and vast mischiefs and to declare what had been wrought was in the power of none other, but required His own coming. The Lord then took upon Himself the rank of a servant, nay, almost of a minister, and came, and preached peace to you, says he, that were far off, and to them that were near. To the Jews, he means, who as compared with ourselves were near. For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father.

Peace, says he, that peace which is towards God. He has reconciled us. For the Lord Himself also says, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. John 14:27 And again, Be of good cheer, I have

overcome the world. John 16:33 And again, Whatsoever you shall ask in my name that will I do. John 14:14 And again, For the Father loves you. John 16:27 These are so many evidences of peace. But how towards the Gentiles? Because through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father, not ye less, and they more, but all by one and the same grace. The wrath He appeased by His death, and has made us meet for the Father's love through the Spirit. Mark again, the in means by or through. By Himself and the Spirit that is, He has brought us unto the Father. So then you are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints.

Perceive ye that it is not with the Jews simply, no, but with those saintly and great men, such as Abraham, and Moses, and Elias? It is for the self-same city with these we are enrolled, for that we declare ourselves. For they that say such things, says he, make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. Hebrews 11:14 No longer are we strangers from the saints, nor foreigners. For they who shall not attain to heavenly blessings, are foreigners. For the Son, says Christ, abides forever. John 8:35

And of the household, he continues, of God.

The very thing which they at the first had, by means of so many toils and troubles, has been for you accomplished by the grace of God. Behold the hope of your calling.

Being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

Observe how he blends all together, the Gentiles, the Jews, the Apostles, the Prophets, and Christ, and illustrates the union sometimes from the body, and sometimes from the building: built, says he, upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets; that is, the Apostles and Prophets are a foundation, and he places the Apostles first, though they are in order of time last, doubtless to represent and express this, that both the one and the other are alike a foundation, and that the whole is one building, and that there is one root. Consider, that the Gentiles have the Patriarchs as a foundation. He here speaks more strongly of that point than he does when he speaks of a grafting in. There he rather attaches them on. Then he adds, that He who binds the whole together in Christ. For the chief corner-stone binds together both the walls, and the foundations.

In whom each several building.

Mark, how he knits it all together, and represents Him at one time, as holding down the whole body from above, and welding it together; at another time, as supporting the building from below, and being, as it were, a root, or base. And whereas he had used the expression, He created in Himself of the two one new man; Ephesians 2:15 by this he clearly shows us, that by Himself Christ knits together the two walls: and again, that in Him it was created. And He is the first-born, says he, of all creation, that is, He Himself supports all things.

In whom each several building, fitly framed together.

Whether you speak of the roof, or of the walls, or of any other part whatsoever, He it is supports the whole. Thus he elsewhere calls Him a foundation. For other foundations, says he, can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 In whom each several building, he says, fitly framed together. Here he displays the perfectness of it, and indicates that one cannot otherwise have place in it, unless by living with great exactness. It grows says he into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also, he adds, are built together. He is speaking continuously: Into a holy temple, for a habitation of God in the

Spirit. What then is the object of this building? It is that God may dwell in this temple. For each of you severally is a temple, and all of you together are a temple. And He dwells in you as in the body of Christ, and as in a Spiritual temple. He does not use the word which means our coming to God, (προσδοξ) but which implies God's bringing us to Himself, (προσαγωγ) for we came not out of ourselves, but we were brought near by Him. No one, says Christ, comes unto the Father but by Me. And again, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. John 14:6

He joins them with the Saints and again returns to his former image, nowhere suffering them to be disunited from Christ. Doubtless then, this is a building that shall go on until His coming. Doubtless it was for this reason that Paul said, As a wise master builder, I laid a foundation. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 And again that Christ is the foundation. What then means all this? You observe that the comparisons have all referred to the subject-matters, and that we must not expound them to the very letter. The Apostle speaks from analogy as Christ does, where He calls the Father an husbandman, John 15:1 and Himself a root. Revelation 22:16

Chap. iii. ver. 1. For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles.

He has mentioned Christ's great and affectionate care; he now passes on to his own, insignificant indeed as it is, and a very nothing in comparison with that, and yet this is enough to engage them to himself. For this cause, says he, am I also bound. For if my Lord was crucified for your sakes, much more am I bound. He not only was bound Himself, but allows His servants to be bound also --for you Gentiles. It is full of emphasis; not only do we no longer loathe you, but we are even bound, says he, for your sakes and of this exceeding grace am I partaker.

Ver. 2. If so be that you have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God, which was given me to you-ward.

He alludes to the prediction addressed to Ananias concerning him at Damascus, when the Lord said, Go your way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles and Kings. Acts 9:15

By dispensation of grace, he means the revelation made to him. As much as to say, I learned it not from man. Galatians 1:12 He vouchsafed to reveal it even to me, though but an individual for your sakes. For Himself said to me, says he, Depart, for I will send you forth far hence unto the Gentiles. Acts 22:21 If so be that you have heard for a dispensation it was, a mighty one; to call one, uninfluenced from any other quarter, immediately from above, and to say, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? and to strike him blind with that ineffable light! if so be that you have heard, says he, of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward.

Ver. 3. How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words.

Perhaps he had informed them of it by some persons, or had not long before been writing to them. Here he is pointing out that the whole is of God, that we have contributed nothing. For what? I ask, was not Paul himself, the wonderful, he that was so versed in the law, he that was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel according to the most perfect manner, was not he saved by grace? With good reason too does he call this a mystery, for a mystery it is, to raise the Gentiles in a moment to a higher rank than the Jews. As I wrote afore, says he, in few words, i.e., briefly,

Ver. 4. Whereby, when you read, you can perceive.

Amazing! So then he wrote not the whole, nor so much as he should have written. But here the nature of the subject prevented it. Elsewhere, as in the case of the Hebrews Hebrews 5:11 and the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 3:2 the incapacity of the hearers. Whereby, when you read, you can perceive, says he, my understanding in the mystery of Christ, i.e., how I knew, how I understood either such things as God has spoken, or else, that Christ sits at the right hand of God; and then too the dignity, in that God has not dealt so with any nation. Psalm 147:20 And then to explain what nation this is with whom God has thus dealt, he adds,

Ver. 5. Which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it has now been revealed unto His holy Apostles and Prophets in the Spirit.

What then, tell me, did not the Prophets know it? How then does Christ say, that Moses and the Prophets wrote these things concerning Me? And again, If you believed Moses, you would believe Me. John 5:46 And again, You search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them you have eternal life, and these are they which bear witness of me. John 5:39 His meaning is this, either that it was not revealed unto all men, for he adds, which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it has now been revealed; or else, that it was not thus made known by the very facts and realities themselves, as it has now been revealed unto His holy Apostles and Prophets in the Spirit. For reflect. Peter, had he not been instructed by the Spirit, never would have gone to the Gentiles. For hear what he says, Then has God given unto them the Holy Ghost, as well as unto us. Acts 10:47 That it was by the Spirit that God chose that they should receive the grace. The Prophets then spoke, yet they knew it not thus perfectly; so far from it, that not even did the Apostles, after they had heard it. So far did it surpass all human calculation, and the common expectation.

Ver. 6. That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body and fellow partakers.

What is this; fellow-heirs, and fellow-partakers of the promise, and fellow-members of the body? This last is the great thing, that they should be one body; this exceeding closeness of relation to Him. For that they were to be called indeed, that they knew, but that it was so great, as yet they knew not. This therefore he calls the mystery. Of the promise. The Israelites were partakers, and the Gentiles also were fellow-partakers of the promise of God.

In Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

That is, by His being sent unto them also, and by their believing; for it is not said they are fellow-heirs simply, but through the Gospel. However, this indeed, is nothing so great, it is in fact a small thing, and it discloses to us another and greater thing, that not only men knew not this, but that neither Angels nor Archangels, nor any other created power, knew it. For it was a mystery, and was not revealed. That ye can perceive, he says, my understanding. This alludes, perhaps, to what he said to them in the Acts, that he had some knowledge that the Gentiles also were called. This, he says, is his own knowledge, the knowledge of the mystery, which he had mentioned, viz., that Christ will in Himself make of the two one new man. For by revelation he was instructed, both he and Peter, that they must not spurn the Gentiles; and this he states in his defense.

Ver. 7. Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of His power.

He had said, I am a prisoner; but now again he says, that all is of God, as he says, according to the gift of His grace; for according to the power of the gift is the dignity of this privilege. But the gift would not have been enough, had it not also implanted in him power.

Moral. For a work indeed it was of power, of mighty power, and such as no human diligence was equal to. For he brought three qualifications to the preaching of the word, a zeal fervent and venturous, a soul ready to undergo any possible hardship, and knowledge and wisdom combined. For his love of enterprise, his blamelessness of life, had availed nothing, had he not also received the power of the Spirit. And look at it as seen first in himself, or rather hear his own words. That our ministration be not blamed. 2 Corinthians 6:3 And again, For our exhortation, is not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile, nor a cloke of covetousness. 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5 Thus you have seen his blamelessness. And again, For we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 2 Corinthians 8:21 Then again, besides these; I protest by that glorying in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 1 Corinthians 15:31 And again; Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution? Romans 8:35 And again; In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in watchings. 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 Then again, his prudence and management; To the Jews I became as a Jew, to them that are without law as without law, to them that are under the law as under the law. 1 Corinthians 9:20 He shaves his head also, Acts 21:24-26 and does numberless things of the sort. But the crown of all is in the power of the Holy Ghost. For I will not dare to speak, says he, of any things save those which Christ wrought through me. Romans 15:18 And again, For what is there wherein you were made inferior to the rest of the Churches? 2 Corinthians 12:13 And again, For in nothing was I behind the very chiefest Apostles though I am nothing. 2 Corinthians 12:11 Without these things, the work had been impossible.

It was not then by his miracles that men were made believers; no, it was not the miracles that did this, nor was it upon the ground of these that he claimed his high pretension, but upon those other grounds. For a man must be alike irreproachable in conduct, prudent and discreet in his dealings with others, regardless of danger, and apt to teach. It was by these qualifications that the greater part of his success was achieved. Where there were these, there was no need of miracles. At least we see he was successful in numberless such cases, quite antecedently to the use of miracles. But, now-a-days, we without any of these would fain command all things. Yet if one of them be separated from the other, it henceforth becomes useless. What is the advantage of a man's being ever so regardless of danger, if his life be open to censure. For if the light that is in you be darkness, says Christ, how great is that darkness? Matthew 6:23 Again, what the advantage of a man's being of an irreproachable life, if he is sluggish and indolent? For, he that does not take his cross, and follow after Me, says He, is not worthy of Me; Matthew 10:38 and so, The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 Again, what is the advantage of being both these, unless a man is at the same time prudent and discreet in knowing how he ought to answer each one? Colossians 4:6 Even if miracles be not in our power, yet both these qualities are in our power. Still however, notwithstanding Paul contributed so much from himself, yet did he attribute all to grace. This is the act of a grateful servant. And we should never so much as have heard of his good deeds, had he not been brought to a necessity of declaring them.

And are we worthy then so much as even to mention the name of Paul? He, who had moreover grace to aid him, yet was not satisfied, but contributed to the work ten thousand perils; while we, who are destitute of that source of confidence, whence, tell me, do we expect either to preserve those who are committed to our charge, or to gain those who are not come to the fold -- men, as we are, who have been making a

study of self-indulgence, who are searching the world over for ease, and who are unable, or rather who are unwilling, to endure even the very shadow of danger, and are as far distant from his wisdom as heaven is from earth? Hence it is too that they who are under us are at so great a distance behind the men of those days; because the disciples of those days were better than the teachers of these, isolated as they were in the midst of the populace, and of tyrants, and having all men on all sides their enemies, and yet not in the slightest degree dragged down or yielding. Hear at least what he says to the Philippians, Philippians 1:29 Because to you it has been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in his behalf. And again to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judæa. And again in writing to the Hebrews Hebrews 10:34 he said, And ye took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions. And to the Colossians Colossians 3:3 he testifies, saying, For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. And indeed to these very Ephesians he bears witness of many perils and dangers. And again in writing to the Galatians, Galatians 3:4 he says, Did ye suffer so many things in vain? If it be indeed in vain. And you see them too, all employed in doing good. Hence it was that both grace wrought effectually in those days, hence also that they lived in good works. Hear, moreover, what he writes to the Corinthians, against whom he brings charges out of number; yet does he not bear even them record, where he says, Yea, what zeal it wrought in you, yea, what longing! 1 Corinthians 7:11 And again, in how many points does he bear them record on this subject? These things one shall not see now-a-days, even in teachers. They are all gone and perished. And the cause is, that love has waxed cold, that sinners go unpunished; (for hear what he says writing to Timothy, 1 Timothy 5:20 Them that sin, reprove in the sight of all;) it is that the rulers are in a sickly state; for if the head be not sound, how can the rest of the body maintain its vigor? But mark how great is the present disorder. They, who were living virtuously, and who under any circumstance might have confidence, have taken possession of the tops of the mountains, and have escaped out of the world, separating themselves as from an enemy and an alien and not from a body to which they belonged.

Plagues too, teeming with untold mischiefs, have lighted upon the Churches. The chief offices have become saleable. Hence numberless evils are springing, and there is no one to redress, no one to reprove them. Nay, the disorder has assumed a sort of method and consistency. Has a man done wrong, and been arraigned for it? His effort is not to prove himself guiltless, but to find if possible accomplices in his crimes. What is to become of us? Since hell is our threatened portion. Believe me, had not God stored up punishment for us there, you would see every day tragedies deeper than the disasters of the Jews. What then? However let no one take offense, for I mention no names; suppose some one were to come into this church to present you that are here at this moment, those that are now with me, and to make inquisition of them; or rather not now, but suppose on Easter day any one, endued with such a spirit, as to have a thorough knowledge of the things they had been doing, should narrowly examine all that came to Communion, and were being washed [in Baptism] after they had attended the mysteries; many things would be discovered more shocking than the Jewish horrors. He would find persons who practise augury, who make use of charms, and omens and incantations, and who have committed fornication, adulterers, drunkards, and revilers -- covetous, I am unwilling to add, lest I should hurt the feelings of any of those who are standing here. What more? Suppose any one should make scrutiny into all the communicants in the world, what kind of transgression is there which he would not detect? And what if he examined those in authority? Would he not find them eagerly bent upon gain? Making traffic of high places? envious, malignant, vainglorious, gluttonous, and slaves to money?

Where then there is such impiety as this going on, what dreadful calamity must we not expect? And to be assured how sore vengeance they incur who are guilty of such sins as these, consider the examples of

old. One single man, a common soldier, stole the sacred property, and all were smitten. You know, doubtless, the history I mean? I am speaking of Acham the son of Carmi, the man who stole the consecrated spoil. Joshua 7:1-26 The time too when the Prophet spoke, was a time when their country was full of soothsayers, like that of the Philistines. Isaiah 2:6 Whereas now there are evils out of number at the full, and not one fears. Oh, henceforth let us take the alarm. God is accustomed to punish the righteous also with the wicked; such was the case with Daniel, and with the three holy Children, such has been the case with ten thousand others, such is the case in the wars that are taking place even at the present day. For the one indeed, whatever burden of sins they have upon them, by this means lay aside even that; but not so the other.

On account of all these things, let us take heed to ourselves. Do ye not see these wars? Do ye not hear of these disasters? Do ye learn no lesson from these things? Nations and whole cities are swallowed up and destroyed, and myriads as many again are enslaved to the barbarians.

If hell bring us not to our senses, yet let these things. What, are these too mere threats, are they not facts that have already taken place? Great is the punishment they have suffered, yet a greater still shall we suffer, who are not brought to our senses even by their fate. Is this discourse wearing? I am aware it is myself, but if we attend to it, it has its advantage; because this it has not, the quality of an address to please -- nay more, nor ever shall have, but ever those topics which may avail to humble and to chasten the soul. For these will be to us the ground-work of those blessings to come hereafter, to which God grant that we may all attain, in Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost be glory and might and honor, now and henceforth, and forever and ever. Amen.

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