

Homily 6 on Galatians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 6 on Galatians emphasizes the importance of mutual support, humility, and the transformative power of the cross in the Christian life.

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-2, Galatians 6:15, Galatians 6:17-18

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Christian Community"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of restoring those who have stumbled in sin with gentleness and meekness, cautioning against arrogance and urging self-examination to avoid hypocrisy. He encourages believers to bear one another's burdens, fulfilling the law of Christ through mutual support and endurance. Chrysostom highlights the insignificance of external practices like circumcision compared to being a new creation in Christ, calling for a focus on spiritual transformation. He concludes with a prayer for the grace of Jesus Christ to be with the believers' spirits, sealing his exhortation with blessings and a reminder of the importance of grace and the indwelling Spirit.

Transcript

Verse 1

Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass.

Forasmuch as under cover of a rebuke they gratified their private feelings, and professing to do so for faults which had been committed, were advancing their own ambition, he says, Brethren, if a man be overtaken. He said not if a man commit but if he be overtaken that is, if he be carried away.

You which are spiritual restore such a one,

He says not chastise nor judge, but set right. Nor does he stop here, but in order to show that it behooved them to be very gentle towards those who had lost their footing, he subjoins,

In a spirit of meekness.

He says not, in meekness, but, in a spirit of meekness, signifying thereby that this is acceptable to the Spirit, and that to be able to administer correction with mildness is a spiritual gift. Then, to prevent the one being unduly exalted by having to correct the other, puts him under the same fear, saying,

Looking to yourself, lest you also be tempted.

For as rich men convey contributions to the indigent, that in case they should be themselves involved in poverty they may receive the same bounty, so ought we also to do. And therefore he states this cogent reason, in these words, looking to yourself, lest you also be tempted. He apologizes for the offender, first, by saying if you be overtaken; next, by employing a term indicative of great infirmity ; lastly, by the words lest you also be tempted, thus arrainging the malice of the devil rather than the remissness of the soul.

Ver. 2. Bear one another's burdens.

It being impossible for man to be without failings, he exhorts them not to scrutinize severely the offenses of others, but even to bear their failings, that their own may in turn be borne by others. As, in the building of a house, all the stones hold not the same position, but one is fitted for a corner but not for the foundations, another for the foundations, and not for the corner so too is it in the body of the Church. The same thing holds in the frame of our own flesh; notwithstanding which, the one member bears with the other, and we do not require every thing from each, but what each contributes in common constitutes both the body and the building.

Ver. 2. And so fulfil the law of Christ.

He says not fulfil, but, complete ; that is, make it up all of you in common, by the things wherein you bear with one another. For example, this man is irascible, you are dull-tempered; bear therefore with his vehemence that he in turn may bear with your sluggishness; and thus neither will he transgress, being supported by you, nor will you offend in the points where your defects lie, because of your brother's forbearing with you. So do you by reaching forth a hand one to another when about to fall, fulfil the Law in common, each completing what is wanting in his neighbor by his own endurance. But if you do not thus, but each of you will investigate the faults of his neighbor, nothing will ever be performed by you as it ought. For as in the case of the body, if one were to exact the same function from every member of it, the body could never consist, so must there be great strife among brethren if we were to require all things from all.

Ver. 3. For if a man thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Here again he reflects on their arrogance. He that thinks himself to be something is nothing, and exhibits at the outset a proof of his worthlessness by such a disposition.

Ver. 4. But let each man prove his own work.

Here he shows that we ought to be scrutinizers of our lives, and this not lightly, but carefully to weigh our actions; as for example, if you have performed a good deed, consider whether it was not from vain glory, or through necessity, or malevolence, or with hypocrisy, or from some other human motive. For as gold appears to be bright before it is placed in the furnace, but when committed to the fire, is closely proved, and all that is spurious is separated from what is genuine, so too our works, if closely examined, will be distinctly made manifest, and we shall perceive that we have exposed ourselves to much censure.

Ver. 4. And then shall he have his glorying in regard of himself alone and not of his neighbor.

This he says, not as laying down a rule, but in the way of concession; and his meaning is this, -- Boasting is senseless, but if you will boast, boast not against your neighbor, as the Pharisee did. For he that is so instructed will speedily give up boasting altogether; and therefore he concedes a part that he may

gradually extirpate the whole. He that is wont to boast with reference to himself only, and not against others, will soon reform this failing also. For he that does not consider himself better than others, for this is the meaning of not in regard of his neighbor, but becomes elated by examining himself by himself, will afterwards cease to be so. And that you may be sure this is what he desires to establish, observe how he checks him by fear, saying above, let every man prove his own work, and adding here,

Ver. 5. For each man shall bear his own burden.

He appears to state a reason prohibitory of boasting against another; but at the same time he corrects the boaster, to that he may no more entertain high thoughts of himself by bringing to his remembrance his own errors, and pressing upon his conscience the idea of a burden, and of being heavily laden.

Ver. 6. But let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things.

Here he proceeds to discourse concerning Teachers, to the effect that they ought to be tended with great assiduity by their disciples. Now what is the reason that Christ so commanded? For this law, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 9:14 is laid down in the New Testament; and likewise in the Old, Numbers 31:47; 35:1-8 many revenues accrued to the Levites from the people; what is the reason, I say, that He so ordained? Was it not for the sake of laying a foundation beforehand of lowliness and love? For inasmuch as the dignity of a teacher oftentimes elates him who possesses it, He, in order to repress his spirit, has imposed on him the necessity of requiring aid at the hands of his disciples. And to these in turn he has given means of cultivating kindly feelings, by training them, through the kindness required of them to their Teacher, in gentleness towards others also. By this means no slight affection is generated on both sides. Were not the cause of this what I have stated it to be, why should He, who fed the dull-minded Jews with manna, have reduced the Apostles to the necessity of asking for aid? Is it not manifest He aimed at the great benefits of humility and love, and that those who were under teaching might not be ashamed of Teachers who were in appearance despicable? To ask for aid bears the semblance of disgrace, but it ceased to be so, when their Teachers with all boldness urged their claim, so that their disciples derived from hence no small benefit, taught hereby to despise all appearances. Wherefore he says, But let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things, that is, let him show to him all generosity; this he implies by the words, in all good things. Let the disciple, says he, keep nothing to himself, but have every thing in common, for what he receives is better than what he gives -- as much better as heavenly are better than earthly things. This he expresses in another place, If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things? 1 Corinthians 9:11 Wherefore he gives the procedure the name of a communication, showing that an interchange takes place. Hereby too love is greatly fostered and confirmed. If the teacher asks merely for competency, he does not by receiving it derogate from his own dignity. For this is praiseworthy, so assiduously to apply to the Word, as to require the aid of others, and to be in manifold poverty, and to be regardless of all the means of subsistence. But if he exceed the due measure, he injures his dignity, not by mere receiving, but by receiving too much. Then, lest the vice of the Teacher should render the disciple more remiss in this matter, and he should frequently pass him by, though poor, on account of his conduct, he proceeds to say,

Ver. 9. And let us not be weary in well doing.

And here he points out the difference between ambition of this kind, and in temporal affairs, by saying, Be not deceived ; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows

unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life. As in the case of seeds, one who sows pulse cannot reap grain, for what is sown and what is reaped must both be of one kind, so is it in actions, he that plants in the flesh, wantonness, drunkenness, or inordinate desire, shall reap the fruits of these things. And what are these fruits? Punishment, retribution, shame, derision, destruction. For of sumptuous tables and viands the end is no other than destruction; for they both perish themselves, and destroy the body too. But the fruit of the Spirit is of a nature not similar but contrary in all respects to these. For consider; have you sown almsgiving? The treasures of heaven and eternal glory await you: have you sown temperance? honor and reward, and the applause of Angels, and a crown from the Judge await you.

Ver. 9, 10. And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. So then as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, especially toward them that are of the household of faith.

Lest any one should suppose that their Teachers were to be cared for and supported, but that others might be neglected, he makes his discourse general, and opens the door of this charitable zeal to all; nay, he carries it to such a height, as to command us to show mercy both to Jews and Greeks, in the proper gradation indeed, but still to show mercy. And what is this gradation? It consists in bestowing greater care upon the faithful. His endeavor here is the same as in his other Epistles; he discourses not merely of showing mercy, but of doing it with zeal and perseverance, for the expressions of sowing and of not fainting imply this. Then, having exacted a great work, he places its reward close at hand, and makes mention of a new and wondrous harvest. Among husbandmen, not only the sower but also the reaper endures much labor, having to struggle with drought and dust and grievous toil, but in this case none of these exist, as he shows by the words, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. By this means he stimulates and draws them on; and he also urges and presses them forward by another motive, saying, As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good. As it is not always in our power to sow, so neither is it to show mercy; for when we have been carried hence, though we may desire it a thousand times, we shall be able to effect nothing more. To this argument of ours the Ten Virgins Matthew 25:1 ff. bear witness, who although they wished it a thousand times, yet were shut out from the bridegroom, because they brought with them no bountiful charity. And so does the rich man who neglected Lazarus Luke 16:19 for he, being destitute of this succor, although he wept and made many entreaties, won no compassion from the Patriarch, or any one else, but continued destitute of all forgiveness, and tormented with perpetual fire. Therefore he says, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, hereby especially also setting them free from the narrow-mindedness of the Jews. For the whole of their benevolence was confined to their own race, but the rule of life which Grace gives invites both land and sea to the board of charity, only it shows a greater care for its own household.

Ver. 11, 12. See with how large letters I have written unto you with my own hand. As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised.

Observe what grief possesses his blessed soul. As those who are oppressed with some sorrow, who have lost one of their own kindred, and suffered an unexpected calamity, rest neither by night nor day, because their grief besieges their soul, so the blessed Paul, after a short moral discourse, returns again to that former subject which chiefly disturbed his mind, saying as follows: see with how large letters I have written unto you with my own hand. By this he signifies that he had written the whole letter himself, which was a proof of great sincerity. In his other Epistles he himself only dictated, another wrote, as is plain from the Epistle to the Romans, for at its close it is said, I Tertius, who write the Epistle, salute you; Romans 16:22

but in this instance he wrote the whole himself. And this he did by necessity, not from affection merely, but in order to remove an injurious suspicion. Being charged with acts wherein he had no part, and being reported to preach Circumcision yet to pretend to preach it not, he was compelled to write the Epistle with his own hand, thus laying up beforehand a written testimony. By the expression what sized, he appears to me to signify, not the magnitude, but, the misshapen appearance of the letters, as if he had said, Although not well skilled in writing, I have been compelled to write with my own hand to stop the mouth of these traducers.

Ver. 12, 13. As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the Law; but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Here he shows that they suffered this, not willingly but of necessity, and affords them an opportunity of retreat, almost speaking in their defense, and exhorting them to abandon their teachers with all speed. What is the meaning of to make a fair show in the flesh? it means, to be esteemed by men. As they were reviled by the Jews for deserting the customs of their fathers, they desire, says he, to injure you, that they may not have this charged against them, but vindicate themselves by means of your flesh. His object here is to show that they did not so act from respect to God; it is as if he said, This procedure is not founded in piety, all this is done through human ambition; in order that the unbelievers may be gratified by the mutilation of the faithful, they choose to offend God that they may please men; for this is the meaning of, to make a fair show in the flesh. Then, as a proof that for another reason too they are unpardonable, he again convinces them that, not only in order to please others, but for their own vain glory, they had enjoined this. Wherefore he adds, that they may glory in your flesh, as if they had disciples, and were teachers. And what is the proof of this? For not even they themselves, he says, keep the Law; even if they did keep it, they would incur grave censure, but now their very purpose is corrupt.

Ver. 14. But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Truly this symbol is thought despicable; but it is so in the world's reckoning, and among men; in Heaven and among the faithful it is the highest glory. Poverty too is despicable, but it is our boast; and to be cheaply thought of by the public is a matter of laughter to them, but we are elated by it. So too is the Cross our boast. He does not say, I boast not, nor, I will not boast, but, Far be it from me that I should, as if he abominated it as absurd, and invoked the aid of God in order to his success therein. And what is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me the slave, the enemy, the unfeeling one; yea He so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this! If servants who only receive praise from their masters, to whom they are akin by nature, are elated thereby, how must we not boast when the Master who is very God is not ashamed of the Cross which was endured for us. Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for your sake, and will you be ashamed to confess His infinite solicitude? It is as if a prisoner who had not been ashamed of his King, should, after that King had come to the prison and himself loosed the chains, become ashamed of him on that account. Yet this would be the height of madness, for this very fact would be a special ground for boasting.

Ver. 14. Through which the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

What he here calls the world is not the heaven nor the earth, but the affairs of life, the praise of men, retinues, glory, wealth, and all such things as have a show of splendor. To me these things are dead.

Such an one it behooves a Christian to be, and always to use this language. Nor was he content with the former putting to death, but added another, saying, and I unto the world, thus implying a double putting to death, and saying, They are dead to me, and I to them, neither can they captivate and overcome me, for they are dead once for all, nor can I desire them, for I too am dead to them. Nothing can be more blessed than this putting to death, for it is the foundation of the blessed life.

Ver. 15, 16. For neither is circumcision any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Observe the power of the Cross, to what a pitch it has raised him! not only has it put to death for him all mundane affairs, but has set him far above the Old Dispensation. What can be comparable to this power? For the Cross has persuaded him, who was willing to be slain and to slay others for the sake of circumcision, to leave it on a level with uncircumcision, and to seek for things strange and marvellous and above the heavens. This our rule of life he calls a new creature, both on account of what is past, and of what is to come; of what is past, because our soul, which had grown old with the oldness of sin, has been all at once renewed by baptism, as if it had been created again. Wherefore we require a new and heavenly rule of life. And of things to come, because both the heaven and the earth, and all the creation, shall with our bodies be translated into incorruption. Tell me not then, he says, of circumcision, which now avails nothing; (for how shall it appear, when all things have undergone such a change?) but seek the new things of grace. For they who pursue these things shall enjoy peace and amity, and may properly be called by the name of Israel. While they who hold contrary sentiments, although they be descended from him (Israel) and bear his appellation, have yet fallen away from all these things, both the relationship and the name itself. But it is in their power to be true Israelites, who keep this rule, who desist from the old ways, and follow after grace.

Ver. 17. From henceforth let no man trouble me.

This he says not as though he were wearied or overpowered; he who chose to do and suffer all for his disciples' sake; he who said, Be instant in season, out of season; 2 Timothy 4:2 he who said, If perhaps God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil; 2 Timothy 2:25-26 how shall he now become relaxed and fall back? Wherefore does he say this? It is to gird up their slothful mind, and to impress them with deeper fear, and to ratify the laws enacted by himself, and to restrain their perpetual fluctuations.

Ver. 17. For I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.

He says not, I have, but, I bear, like a man priding himself on trophies and royal ensigns. Although on a second thought it seems a disgrace, yet does this man vaunt of his wounds, and like military standard-bearers, so does he exult in bearing about these wounds. And why does he say this? More clearly by those wounds than by any argument, than by any language, do I vindicate myself, says he. For these wounds utter a voice louder than a trumpet against my opponents, and against those who say that I play the hypocrite in my teaching, and speak what may please men. For no one who saw a soldier retiring from the battle bathed in blood and with a thousand wounds, would dare to accuse him of cowardice and treachery, seeing that he bears on his body the proofs of his valor, and so ought you, he says, to judge of me. And if any one desire to hear my defense, and to learn my sentiments, let him consider my wounds, which afford a stronger proof than these words and letters. At the outset of his Epistle he evinced his sincerity by the suddenness of his conversion, at its close he proves it by the perils which attended his

conversion. That it might not be objected that he had changed his course with upright intentions, but that he had not continued in the same purpose, he produces his trials, his dangers, his stripes as witnesses that he had so continued.

Then having clearly justified himself in every particular, and proved that he had spoken nothing from anger or malevolence, but had preserved his affection towards them unimpaired, he again establishes this same point by concluding his discourse with a prayer teeming with a thousand blessings, in these words;

Ver. 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

By this last word he has sealed all that preceded it. He says not merely, with you, as elsewhere, but, with your spirit, thus withdrawing them from carnal things, and displaying throughout the beneficence of God, and reminding them of the grace which they enjoyed, whereby he was able to recall them from all their judaizing errors. For to have received the Spirit came not of the poverty of the Law, but of the righteousness which is by Faith, and to preserve it when obtained came not from Circumcision but from Grace. On this account he concluded his exhortation with a prayer, reminding them of grace and the Spirit, and at the same time addressing them as brethren, and supplicating God that they might continue to enjoy these blessings, thus providing for them a twofold security. For both prayer and teaching, tended to the same thing and together became to them as a double wall. For teaching, reminding them of what benefits they enjoyed, the rather kept them in the doctrine of the Church; and prayer, invoking grace, and exhorting to an enduring constancy, permitted not the Spirit to depart from them. And He abiding in them, all the error of such doctrines as they held was shaken off like dust.

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