

Homily 60 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily emphasizes the importance of private reconciliation and the transformative power of love and forgiveness in the Christian community.

Scripture: Matthew 18:16

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Forgiveness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of addressing conflicts and offenses within the church community in a loving and reconciliatory manner. He emphasizes the need for individuals to humbly confront one another privately to seek reconciliation, with the goal of gaining back the offender. Chrysostom highlights the significance of forgiveness, correction, and seeking unity within the church, following the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 18. He stresses the value of genuine love for one another, rooted in Christ's love, which transcends worldly motives and sustains through trials and tribulations.

Transcript

Matt. XVIII. 15.

If your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he shall hear you, you have gained your brother.

For, since He had used vehement language against them that cause offense, and on every hand had moved them to fear; in order that the offended might not in this way on the other hand become supine, neither supposing all to be cast upon others, should be led on to another vice, soften in themselves, and desiring to be humored in everything, and run upon the shoal of pride; do you see how He again checks them also, and commands the telling of the faults to be between the two alone, lest by the testimony of the many he should render his accusation heavier, and the other, become excited to opposition, should continue incorrigible.

Wherefore He says, Between you and him alone, and, If he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. What is, If he shall hear you? If he shall condemn himself, if he shall be persuaded that he has done wrong.

You have gained your brother. He did not say, You have a sufficient revenge, but, You have gained your brother, to show that there is a common loss from the enmity. For He said not, He has gained himself only,

but, thou too hast gained him, whereby He showed that both the one and the other were losers before this, the one of his brother, the other of his own salvation.

This, when He sat on the mount also, He advised; at one time bringing him who has given the pain to him that had been pained, and saying, Be reconciled to your brother, rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, go away, be reconciled," etc.--R.]}-->and at another commanding him that had been wronged to forgive his neighbor. For He taught men to say, Forgive us our debts, like as we forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:12

But here He is devising another mode. For not him that gave the pain, does He now call upon, but him that was pained He brings to this one. For because this who has done the wrong would not easily come to make excuse, out of shame, and confusion of face, He draws that other to him, and not merely so, but in such way as also to correct what has been done. And He says not, Accuse, nor Charge him, nor Demand satisfaction, and an account, but, Tell him of his fault, says He. For he is held in a kind of stupor through anger and shame with which he is intoxicated; and thou, who art in health, must go your way to him that is ill, and make the tribunal private, and the remedy such as may be readily received. For to say, Tell him of his fault, is nothing else than Remind him of his error, tell him what you have suffered at his hand, which very thing, if it be done as it ought, is the part of one making excuse for him, and drawing him over earnestly to a reconciliation.

What then, if he should disobey, and be disposed to abide in hardness? Take with yourself yet one or two, that in the mouth of two witnesses every word may be established. For the more he is shameless, and bold, the more ought we to be active for his cure, not in anger and indignation. For the physician in like manner, when he sees the malady obstinate, does not give up nor grow impatient, but then makes the more preparation; which He commands us to do in this case too.

For since you appeared to be too weak alone, make yourself more powerful by this addition. For surely the two are sufficient to convict him that has sinned. Do you see how He seeks not the good of him that has been pained only, but of him also that has given the pain. For the person injured is this one who is taken captive by his passion, he it is that is diseased, and weak, and infirm. Wherefore He often sends the other to this one, now alone, and now with others; but if he continue in it, even with the church. For, Tell it, says He, to the Church. Matthew 18:17 For if He were seeking this one's advantage only, He would not have commanded to pardon, seventy times seven, one repenting. He would not so often have set so many over him to correct his passion; but if he had remained incorrigible after the first conference would have let him be; but now once, and twice, and thrice, He commands to attempt his cure, and now alone and now with two, now with more.

Wherefore, with respect to them that are without He says no such thing, but, If any one smite you, He says, on your right cheek, turn to him the other also, Matthew 5:39 but here not in such wise. For what Paul means, saying, What have I to do to judge them also that are without? 1 Corinthians 5:12 but the brethren he commands both to tell of their faults, and to avoid them, and to cut them off, not being obedient, that they may be ashamed; this Himself also does here, making these laws about the brethren; and He sets three over him for teachers and judges, to teach him the things that are done at the time of his drunkenness. For though it be himself that has said and done all those unreasonable things, yet he will need others to teach him this, like as the drunken man. For anger and sin is a more frantic thing than any drunkenness, and puts the soul in greater distraction.

Who, for instance, was wiser than David? Yet for all that, when he had sinned he perceived it not, his lust keeping in subjection all his reasoning powers, and like some smoke filling his soul. Therefore he stood in need of a lantern from the prophet, and of words calling to his mind what he had done. Wherefore here also He brings these to him that has sinned, to reason with him about the things he had done.

2. But for what reason does He command this one to tell him of his fault, and not another? Because this man he would endure more quietly, this, who has been wronged, who has been pained, who has been despitefully used. For one does not bear in the same way being told by another of one's fault concerning him that has been insulted, as by the insulted person himself, especially when this person is alone convicting him. For when he who should demand justice against him, even this one appears to be caring for his salvation, this will have more power than anything in the world to shame him.

Do you see how this is done not for the sake of just punishment, but of amendment? Therefore He does not at once command to take with him the two, but when himself has failed; and not even then does He send forth a multitude against him; but makes the addition no further than two, or even one; but when he has contemned these too, then and not till then He brings him out to the church.

So much earnestness does He show, that our neighbor's sins be not exposed by us. And indeed He might have commanded this from the first, but that this might not be, He did not command it, but after a first and second admonition He appoints this.

But what is, In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established? You have a sufficient testimony. His meaning is, that you have done all your part, that you have left undone none of the things which it pertained to you to do.

But if he shall neglect to hear them also, tell it to the church, that is, to the rulers of it; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to you as an heathen man and a publican. For after this such a one is incurably diseased.

But mark thou, I pray you, how everywhere He puts the publican for an example of the greatest wickedness. For above too He says, Do not even the publicans the same? Matthew 5:46 And further on again, Even the publicans and the harlots shall go before you into the Kingdom of Heaven, Matthew 21:31 that is, they who are utterly reprobated and condemned. Let them hearken, who are rushing upon unjust gains, who are counting up usuries upon usuries.

But why did He set him with these? To soothe the person wronged, and to alarm him. Is this only then the punishment? Nay, but hear also what follows. Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven. And He did not say to the ruler of the church, Bind such a man, but, If you bind, committing the whole matter to the person himself, who is aggrieved, and the bonds abide indissoluble. Therefore he will suffer the utmost ills; but not he who has brought him to account is to blame, but he who has not been willing to be persuaded.

Do you see how He has bound him down with twofold constraint, both by the vengeance here, and by the punishment hereafter? But these things has He threatened, that these circumstances may not arise, but that fearing, at once the being cast out of the church, and the danger from the bond, and the being bound in Heaven, he may become more gentle. And knowing these things, if not at the beginning, at any rate in the multitude of the tribunals he will put off his anger. Wherefore, I tell you, He has set over him a first, and a second, and a third court, so that though he should neglect to hear the first, he may yield to the second;

and even if he should reject that, he may fear the third; and though he should make no account of this, he may be dismayed at the vengeance to come, and at the sentence and judgment to proceed from God.

And again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18:19-20

Do you see how by another motive also He puts down our enmities, and takes away our petty dissensions, and draws us one to another, and this not from the punishment only which has been mentioned, but also from the good things which spring from charity? For having denounced those threats against contentiousness, He puts here the great rewards of concord, if at least they who are of one accord do even prevail with the Father, as touching the things they ask, and have Christ in the midst of them.

Are there then indeed nowhere two of one accord? Nay, in many places, perchance even everywhere. How then do they not obtain all things? Because many are causes of their failing. For either they often ask things inexpedient. And why do you marvel, if this is the case with some others, whereas it was so even with Paul, when he heard, My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is perfected in weakness. Or they are unworthy to be reckoned with them that heard these words, and contribute not their own part, but He seeks for such as are like them; therefore He says of you, of the virtuous, of them that show forth an angelic rule of life. Or they pray against them that have aggrieved them, seeking for redress and vengeance; and this kind of thing is forbidden, for, Pray, says He, for your enemies. Matthew 5:44 Or having sins unrepented they ask mercy, which thing it is impossible to receive, not only if themselves ask it, but although others having much confidence towards God entreat for them, like as even Jeremiah praying for the Jews did hear, Pray not thou for this people, because I will not hear you. Jeremiah 11:14

But if all things are there, and thou ask things expedient, and contribute all your own part, and exhibit an apostolic life, and have concord and love towards your neighbor, you will obtain on your entreaty; for the Lord is loving towards man.

3. Then because He had said, Of my Father, in order that He might show that it is Himself that gives, and not He who begot Him only, He added, For wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

What then? Are there not two or three gathered together in His name? There are indeed, but rarely. For not merely of the assembling does He speak, neither this does He require only; but most surely, as I said before also, the rest of virtue too together with this, and besides, even this itself He requires with great strictness. For what He says is like this, If any holds me the principal ground of his love to his neighbors, I will be with Him, if he be a virtuous man in other respects.

But now we see the more part having other motives of friendship. For one loves, because he is loved, another because he has been honored, a third because such a one has been useful to him in some other worldly matter, a fourth for some other like cause; but for Christ's sake it is a difficult thing to find any one loving his neighbor sincerely, and as he ought to love him. For the more part are bound one to another by their worldly affairs. But Paul did not love thus, but for Christ's sake; wherefore even when not loved in such wise as he loved, he did not cease his love, because he had planted a strong root of his affection; but not so our present state, but on inquiry we shall find with most men anything likely to produce friendship rather than this. And if any one bestowed on me power in so great a multitude to make this inquiry, I would show the more part bound one to another by worldly motives.

And this is evident from the causes that work enmity. For because they are bound one to another by these temporal motives, therefore they are neither fervent towards one another, nor constant, but insult, and loss of money, and envy, and love of vainglory, and every such thing coming upon them, severs the love-tie. For it finds not the root spiritual. Since if indeed it were such, no worldly thing would dissolve things spiritual. For love for Christ's sake is firm, and not to be broken, and impregnable, and nothing can tear it asunder; not calumnies, not dangers, not death, no other thing of this kind. For though he suffer ten thousand things, who thus loves; looking to the ground of his love, he will not desist. For he who loves because of being loved, should he meet with anything painful, puts an end to his love; but he who is bound by this, will never desist.

Wherefore Paul also said, Charity never fails. For what have you to say? That when honored he insults? That receiving benefits he was minded to slay you? But even this works upon you to love more, if you love for Christ's sake. For what things are in the rest subversive of love, these here become apt to produce it. How? First, because such a one is to you a cause of rewards; secondly, because he that is so disposed stands in need of more succor, and much attention. Therefore I say, he who thus loves inquires not about race, nor country, nor wealth, nor his love to himself, nor any other such matter, but though he be hated, though he be insulted, though he be slain, continues to love, having as a sufficient ground for love, Christ; wherefore also he stands steadfast, firm, not to be overthrown, looking unto Him.

For Christ too so loved his enemies, having loved the obstinate, the injurious, the blasphemers, them that hated Him, them that would not so much as see Him; them that were preferring wood and stones to Him, and with the highest love beyond which one cannot find another. For greater love has no man than this, He says, that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

And those even that crucified Him, and acted in so many instances with contumely against Him, see how He continues to treat with kindness. For even to His Father He speaks for them, saying, Forgive them, for they know not what they do. And He sent His disciples moreover, after these things, unto them.

This love then let us also imitate, unto this let us look, that being followers of Christ, we may attain both unto the good things here, and unto those to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might world without end. Amen.

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