

# Homily 7 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Paul's humility and commission to preach to the Gentiles are examples of the surpassing lowliness of God's plan to reveal His wisdom and glory through the Church.*

**Topics:** "Humility Of Paul", "Gods Wisdom"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the surpassing lowliness of Paul, who humbly acknowledges himself as less than the least of all saints, despite his great deeds, to emphasize the grace given to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul reveals the mystery hidden in God, now made known through the Church to principalities and powers in heavenly places, showcasing the manifold wisdom of God. He prays for the Ephesians to be strengthened by the Spirit, rooted in love, and filled with the fullness of God, urging them to comprehend the immeasurable love of Christ.

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## Transcript

Chapter III. Verses 8-11

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from all ages has been hid in God, who created all things: to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

They who go to the physician's have not merely to go there and nothing further; they have to learn how to treat themselves, and to apply remedies. And so with us then who come here, we must not do this and nothing else, we must learn our lesson, the surpassing lowliness of Paul. What? When he was about to speak of the vastness of the grace of God, hear what he says, Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given. Lowliness indeed it was even to bewail his former sins, although blotted out, and to make mention of them, and to hold himself within his true measure as where he calls himself a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; 1 Timothy 1:13 yet nothing was equal to this: for formerly, says he, such was I; and again he calls himself, one born out of due time. 1 Corinthians 15:8 But that after so many great and good deeds and at that time he should thus humble himself, and call himself less than the least of all, this is indeed great and surpassing moderation. To one who am less than the least of all saints; he says not, than the Apostles. So that that expression is less strong than this before us. There his words are, I am not meet to be called an Apostle. 1 Corinthians 15:9 Here he says that he is even less

than the least of all saints; to me, says he, who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given. What grace? To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from all ages has been hid in God, who created all things, to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, might be made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God. True, to man it was not revealed; and are you enlightening Angels and Archangels and Principalities and Powers? I am, says he. For it was hid in God, even in God who created all things. And do you venture to utter this? I do, says he. But whence has this been made manifest to the Angels? By the Church. Again he says, not merely the manifold (ποικιλος) but the much-manifold (πολυποικιλος) wisdom, that is, the multiplied and varied. What then is this? Did not Angels know it? No, nothing of it; for if Principalities knew it not, much less could Angels ever have known it. What then? Did not even Archangels know it? No, nor even they. But whence were they going to know it? Who was to reveal it? When we were taught it, then were they also by us. For hear what the Angel says to Joseph; You shall call His Name Jesus, for it is He that shall save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

Paul himself was sent to the Gentiles, the other Apostles to the Circumcision. So that the more marvellous and astonishing commission was given, says he, to me, who am less than the least. And this too was of grace, that he that was least should have the greatest things entrusted to him; that he should be made the herald of these tidings. For he that is made a herald of the greater tidings, is in this way great.

To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

If His riches are unsearchable, and that too after his appearing, much more is His essence. If it is still a mystery, much more was it before it was made known; for a mystery he calls it on this account, because neither did the Angels know it, nor was it manifest to any one else.

And to make all men see, says he, what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages has been hid in God, who created all things.

Angels knew only this, that The Lord's portion was His people. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 And again it is said, The Prince of Persia withstood me. Daniel 10:13 So that it is nothing to be wondered at that they were ignorant of this; for if they were ignorant of the circumstances of the return from the Captivity, much more would they be of these things. For this is the gospel. It is He that shall save, it says, His people. Matthew 1:21 Not a word about the Gentiles. But what concerns the Gentiles the Spirit reveals. That they were called indeed, the Angels knew, but that it was to the same privileges as Israel, yea, even to sit upon the throne of God, this, who would ever have expected? Who would ever have believed?

Which has been hid, says he, in God.

This dispensation, however, he more clearly unfolds in the Epistle to the Romans. In God, he continues, who created all things by Jesus Christ. And he does well to say by Jesus Christ; forasmuch as He who created all things by Him, reveals also this by Him; for He has made nothing without Him; for without Him, it is said, was not any thing made. John 1:30

In speaking of principalities and powers, he speaks both of those above and those beneath.

According to the eternal purpose. It has been now, he means, brought to pass, but not now decreed, it had been planned beforehand from the very first. According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in

Christ Jesus our Lord. That is, according to the eternal foreknowledge; foreknowing the things to come, i.e., he means the ages to come; for He knew what was to be, and thus decreed it. According to the purpose of the ages, of those, perhaps, which He has made by Christ Jesus, because it was by Christ that every thing was made.

Ver. 12. In whom we have, says he, boldness, and access in confidence through our faith in him.

Have access, not as prisoners, he says, nor yet, as persons candidates for pardon, nor as sinners; for, says he, we have even boldness with confidence, that is, accompanied with cheerful trust; arising from what source? through our faith in Him.

Ver. 13. Wherefore I ask that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which are your glory.

How is it for them? How is it their glory? It is because God so loved them, as to give even the Son for them, and to afflict His servants for them: for it was in order that they might attain so many blessings, that Paul was in prison. Surely this was from God's exceeding love towards them: it is what God also says concerning the Prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth. Hosea 6:5 But how was it that they fainted, when another was afflicted? He means, they were troubled, were distressed. This also he says when writing to the Thessalonians, that no man be moved by these afflictions. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 For not only ought we not to grieve, but we ought even to rejoice. If you find consolation in the forewarning, we tell you beforehand that here we have tribulation. And why pray? Because thus has the Lord ordered.

Ver. 14, 15. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

He here shows the spirit of his prayer for them. He does not say simply, I pray, but manifests the supplication to be heartfelt, by the bowing of the knees.

From whom every family.

That is, no longer, he means, reckoned, according to the number of Angels, but according to Him who has created the tribes both in heaven above and in earth beneath, not as the Jewish.

Ver. 16, 17. That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Mark with what insatiable earnestness he invokes these blessings upon them, that they may not be tossed about. But how shall this be effected? By the Holy Spirit in your inward man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. How again shall this be?

Ver. 18, 19. To the end that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Thus is his prayer now again, the very same as when he began. For what were his words in the beginning? That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give unto you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. And now again he says the same. That ye may

be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; i.e., to know perfectly the mystery which has been providentially ordered in our behalf: and the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; that is, too, the immensity of the love of God, and how it extends every where. And he outlines it by the visible dimensions of solid bodies, pointing as it were to a man. He comprehends the upper and under and sides. I have thus spoken indeed, he would say, yet is it not for any words of mine to teach you these things; that must be the work of the Holy Spirit. By His might, says he, is it that you must be strengthened against the trials that await you, and in order to remain unshaken; so that there is no other way to be strengthened but by the Holy Ghost, both on account of trials and carnal reasonings.

But how does Christ dwell in the hearts? Hear what Christ Himself says, I and my Father will come unto him, and make our abode with him. John 14:23 He dwells in those hearts that are faithful, in those that are rooted in His love, those that remain firm and unshaken.

That ye may be thoroughly strong, says he; so that there is great strength needed.

That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

What he means is this. Although the love of Christ lies above the reach of all human knowledge, yet shall you know it, if you shall have Christ dwelling in you, yea, not only shall know from Him this, but shall even be filled unto all the fullness of God; meaning by the fullness of God, either the knowledge how God is worshipped in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or else urging them thus to use every effort, in order to be filled with all virtue, of which God is full.

Ver. 20. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

That God has done abundantly above all that we ask or think, is evident from what the Apostle himself has written. For I indeed, says he, pray, but He of Himself, even without any prayer of mine, will do works greater than all we ask, not simply greater, nor abundantly greater, but exceeding abundantly. And this is evident from the power, that works in us: for neither did we ever ask these things, nor did we expect them.

Ver. 21. Unto Him be the glory, he concludes, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, unto all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Well does he close the discourse with prayer and doxology; for right were it that He, who has bestowed upon us such vast gifts, should be glorified and blessed, so that this is even a proper part of our amazement at His mercies, to give glory for the things advanced to us at God's hands through Jesus Christ.

The glory in the Church. Well might he say this, forasmuch as the Church alone can last on to eternity.

It seems necessary to state what are meant by families. (πατρία■) Here on earth, indeed there are families that is races sprung from one parent stock; but in heaven how can this be, where none is born of another? Surely then, by families, he means either the assemblies and orders of heavenly beings; as also we find it written in Scripture, the family of Amattari: 1 Samuel 10:21. See Septuagint or else that it is from Him from whom earthly fathers have their name of father.

However, he does not ask the whole of God, but demands of them also faith and love, and not simply love, but love rooted and grounded, so that neither any blasts can shake it, nor any thing else overturn it. He had said, that tribulations are glory, and if mine are so to you, he would say, much more will your own be: so that to be afflicted is no token of men being forsaken, for He who has wrought so great things for us, never would do this.

Again, if in order to understand the love of God, it was necessary for Paul to pray, and there was need of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who by following mere reasonings shall understand the nature of Christ? And why is it a difficult thing to learn that God loves us? Beloved, it is extremely difficult. For some know not even this; wherefore, they even say, numberless evils come to be in the world; and others know not the extent of this love. Nor, indeed, is Paul seeking to know its extent, nor with any view to measure it; for how could he? But only to understand this, that it is transcendent, and great. And this very thing, he says, he is able to show, even from the knowledge which has been vouchsafed to us.

However, what is higher than the being strengthened with might, in order to have Christ within? Vast are the things we ask, says he, yet is He able to do above even them, so that not only does He love us, but does so intensely. Be it our care therefore, beloved, to understand the love of God. A great thing indeed is this; nothing is so beneficial to us, nothing so deeply touches us: more availing this to convince our souls than the fear of hell itself. Whence then shall we understand it? Both from the sources now mentioned, and from the things which happen every day. For from what motive have these things been done for us? From what necessity on His part? None whatever. Over and over again he lays down love as the cause. But the highest degree of love is that where men receive a benefit, without any prior service on their part to call for it.

Moral. And let us then be followers of Him; let us do good to our enemies, to them that hate us, let us draw near to those who turn their backs upon us. This renders us like God. For if you love them that love you, says Christ, what reward will you have? Do not even the Gentiles the same. Matthew 5:46 But what is a sure proof of love? To love him that hates you. I wish to give you some example, (pardon me,) and since I find it not among them that are spiritual, I shall quote an instance from them that are without. See ye not those lovers? How many insults are wreaked upon them by their mistresses, how many artifices practised, how many punishments inflicted: yet they are enchained to them, they burn for them, and love them better than their own souls, passing whole nights before their thresholds. From them let us take our example, not indeed to love such as those --women, I mean, that are harlots; no, but thus to love our enemies. For tell me, do not harlots treat their lovers with greater insolence than all the enemies in the world, and squander away their substance, and cast insult in their face, and impose upon them more servile tasks than upon their own menials? And yet still they desist not, though no one has so great an enemy in any one, as the lover in his mistress. Yea, this beloved one disdains, and reviles, and oftentimes maltreats him, and the more she is loved, the more she scorns him. And what can be more brutal than a spirit like this? Yet notwithstanding he loves her still.

But possibly we shall find love like this in spiritual characters also, not in those of our day, (for it has waxed cold,) Matthew 24:12 but in those great and glorious men of old. Moses, the blessed Moses, surpassed even those that love with human passion. How, and in what way? First, he gave up the court, and the luxury, and the retinue, and the glory attending it, and chose rather to be with the Israelites. Yet is this not only what no one else would ever have done, but would have even been ashamed, were another to have discovered him, of being found to be a kinsman of men, who were slaves and not only slaves, but were looked upon as even execrable. Yet was he not only not ashamed of his kindred, but with all his spirit

defended them, and threw himself into dangers for their sake. Acts 7:24 How? Seeing, it is said, one doing an injury to one of them, he defended him that suffered the injury, and slew him that inflicted it. But this is not as yet for the sake of enemies. Great indeed is this act of itself, but not so great as what comes afterwards. The next day, then, he saw the same thing taking place, and when he saw him whom he had defended doing his neighbor wrong, he admonished him to desist from his wrong-doing. But he said, with great ingratitude, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Acts 7:27 Who would not have taken fire at these words? Had then the former act been that of passion and frenzy, then would he have smitten and killed this man also; for surely he on whose behalf it was done, never would have informed against him. But because they were brethren, it is said, he spoke thus. When he [the Hebrew] was being wronged, he uttered no such word Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Why did you not say this yesterday? Moses would say, Your injustice, and your cruelty, these make me a ruler and a judge.

But now, mark, how that some, in fact, say as much even to God Himself. Whenever they are wronged indeed, they would have Him a God of vengeance, and complain of His long suffering; but when themselves do wrong, not for a moment.

However, what could be more bitter than words like these? And yet notwithstanding, after this, when he was sent to that ungrateful, to that thankless race, he went, and shrunk not back. Yea, and after those miracles, and after the wonders wrought by his hand, oftentimes they sought to stone him to death and he escaped out of their hands. They kept murmuring too incessantly, and yet still, notwithstanding, so passionately did he love them, as to say unto God, when they committed that heinous sin, Yet now if You will forgive, forgive their sin; and if not, blot even me also out of the book which You have written. Exodus 32:32 Fain would I perish, says he, with them, rather than without them be saved. Here, verily, is love even to madness, verily, unbounded love. What do you say, Moses? Are you regardless of Heaven? I am, says he, for I love those who have wronged me. Prayest thou to be blotted out? Yea, says he, what can I do, for it is love? And what again after these things? Hear what the Scripture says elsewhere; And it went ill with Moses for their sakes. Psalm 106:32 How often did they wax wanton? How often did they reject both himself and his brother? How often did they seek to return back to Egypt? And yet after all these things did he burn, yea, was beside himself with love for them, and was ready to suffer for their sakes.

Thus ought a man to love his enemies; by lamentation, by unwearied endurance, by doing everything, by showing all favor, to aim at their salvation.

And what again, tell me, did Paul? Did he not ask even to be accursed in their stead? Romans 9:3 But the great pattern we must of necessity derive from the Lord, for thus does He also Himself, where he says, For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, Matthew 5:45 adducing the example from His Father; but we from Christ Himself. He came unto them, in His Incarnation, I mean, He became a servant for their sakes, He humbled Himself, He emptied Himself, He took the form of a servant. Philippians 2:7-8 And when He came unto them, He went not Himself aside into any way of the Gentiles, Matthew 10:5 and gave the same charge to His disciples, and not only so, but He went about healing all manner of disease, and all manner of sickness. Matthew 4:23 And what then? All the rest indeed were astonished, and marvelled, and said, Whence, then, has this man all these things? Matthew 13:56 But these, the objects of His beneficence, these said, He has a devil, John 10:20 and blasphemous, John 10:36 and is mad, and is a deceiver, John 7:12 and Matthew 27:63 Did he therefore cast them away? No, in no wise, but when He heard these sayings, He even yet more signally bestowed His benefits upon them, and went straightway to them that were about to crucify Him, to the intent that He might but only save them. And after He was crucified, what were His words? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 Both

cruelly treated before this, and cruelly treated after this, even to the very latest breath, for them He did every thing, in their behalf He prayed. Yea, and after the Cross itself, what did He not do for their sakes? Did He not send Apostles? Did He not work miracles? Did He not shake the whole world?

Thus is it we ought to love our enemies, thus to imitate Christ. Thus did Paul. Stoned, suffering unnumbered cruelties, yet did he all things for their good. Hear his own words. My heart's desire and my supplication to God is for them that they may be saved. Romans 10:1-2 And again; For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God. And again; If you, being a wild olive tree wast grafted in, how much more shall these be grafted into their own olive tree? Romans 11:24 How tender, do you think, must be the affection from which these expressions proceed, how vast the benevolence? It is impossible to express it, impossible.

Thus is it we ought to love our enemies. This is to love God, Who has enjoined it, Who has given it as His law. To imitate Him is to love our enemy. Consider it is not your enemy you are benefiting, but yourself; you are not loving him, but art obeying God. Knowing therefore these things, let us confirm our love one to another, that we may perform this duty perfectly, and attain those good things that are promised in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, and honor, now, and for ever and ever. Amen.

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