

Homily 9 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a virtuous life, following after charity, and preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Scripture: Psalm 34:7, Matthew 22:13, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 14:1, Ephesians 4:1

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of walking worthily of the calling we have received in Christ, emphasizing the virtues of lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearing one another in love to maintain unity. He highlights the honor of being a prisoner for Christ's sake and the power of Paul's chains as a means to touch hearts. Chrysostom encourages believers to bind themselves together in love, peace, and unity, avoiding selfishness, iniquity, and discord that can destroy relationships. He stresses the significance of following after charity and practicing love to attain the promised blessings through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Chapter IV. Verses 1-3

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you, to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Great has the power of Paul's chain been shown to be, and more glorious than miracles. It is not in vain then, as it should seem, nor without an object, that he here holds it forward, but as the means of all others most likely to touch them. And what says he? I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you, to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called. And how is that? with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.

It is not the being merely a prisoner that is honorable, but the being so for Christ's sake. Hence he says, in the Lord, i.e., the prisoner for Christ's sake. Nothing is equal to this. But now the chain is dragging me away still more from my subject, and pulling me back again, and I cannot bear to resist it, but am drawn along willingly -- yea, rather, with all my heart; and would that it were always my lot to be descanting on Paul's chain.

But now do not become drowsy: for I am yet desirous to solve that other question, which many raise, when they say, Why, if tribulation be a glory, how came Paul himself to say in his defense to Agrippa, I would to God that whether with little or with much not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds? Acts 26:29 He said not this, God forbid! As deeming the thing a matter to be deprecated; no; for had it been such, he would not have gloried in bonds, in imprisonments, in those other tribulations; and when writing elsewhere he says, Most gladly will I rather glory in my weaknesses. 2 Corinthians 12:9 But what is the case? This was itself a proof how great a thing he considered those bonds; for as in writing to the Corinthians he said, I fed you with milk, not with meat, for you were not yet able to bear it; 1 Corinthians 3:2 so also here. They before whom he spoke were not able to hear of the beauty, nor the comeliness, nor the blessing of those bonds. Hence it was he added, except these bonds. To the Hebrews however he spoke not thus, but exhorted them to be bound with Hebrews 13:3 them that were in bonds. And hence too did he himself rejoice in his bonds, and was bound, and was led with the prisoners into the inner prison. Mighty is the power of Paul's chain! A spectacle this, which may suffice for every other, to behold Paul bound, and led forth from his prison; to behold him bound, and sitting within it, what pleasure can come up to this? What would I not give for such a sight? Do ye see the emperors, the consuls, borne along in their chariots and arrayed in gold, and their bodyguard with every thing about them of gold? Their halberds of gold, their shields of gold, their raiment of gold, their horses with trappings of gold? How much more delightful than such a spectacle is his! I would rather see Paul once, going forth with the prisoners from his prison, than behold these ten thousand times over, parading along with all that retinue. When he was thus led forth, how many Angels, suppose ye, led the way before him? And to show that I speak no fiction, I will make the fact manifest to you from a certain ancient narrative.

Elisha the prophet, (perhaps ye know the man,) at the time 2 Kings 6:8-12 when the king of Syria was at war with the king of Israel, sitting at his own home, brought to light all the counsels which the king of Syria was taking in his chamber with them that were privy to his designs, and rendered the king's counsels of none effect, by telling beforehand his secrets, and not suffering the king of Israel to fall into the snares which he was laying. This sorely troubled the king; he was disheartened, and was reduced to greater perplexity, not knowing how to discover him who was disclosing all that passed, and plotting against him, and disappointing his schemes. Whilst therefore he was in this perplexity, and enquiring into the cause, one of his armor-bearers told him, that there was a certain prophet, one Elisha, dwelling in Samaria, who suffered not the king's designs to stand, but disclosed all that passed. The king imagined that he had discovered the whole matter. Sure, never was any one more miserably misled than he. When he ought to have honored the man, to have revered him, to have been awed that he really possessed so great power, as that, seated, as he was, so many furlongs off, he should know all that passed in the king's chamber, without any one at all to tell him; this indeed he did not, but being exasperated, and wholly carried away by his passion, he equips horsemen, and soldiers, and dispatches them to bring the prophet before him.

Now Elisha had a disciple as yet only on the threshold of prophecy, 2 Kings 6:13 ff. as yet far from being judged worthy of revelations of this kind. The king's soldiers arrived at the spot, as intending to bind the man, or rather the prophet.-- Again I am falling upon bonds, so entirely is this discourse interwoven with them.-- And when the disciple saw the host of soldiers, he was affrighted, and ran full of trembling to his master, and told him the calamity, as he thought, and informed him of the inevitable peril. The prophet smiled at him for fearing things not worthy to be feared, and bade him be of good cheer. The disciple, however, being as yet imperfect, did not listen to him, but being still amazed at the sight, remained in fear. Upon this, what did the prophet do? Lord, said he, open the eyes of this young man, and let him see that

they which are with us, are more than they which are with them; 2 Kings 6:16-17 and immediately he beheld the whole mountain, where the prophet then dwelt, filled with so great a multitude of horses and chariots of fire. Now these were nothing else than ranks of Angels. But if only for an occasion like this so great a band of Angels attended Elisha what must Paul have had? This is what the prophet David tells us. The Angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him. Psalm 34:7 And again; They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone. Psalm 91:2 And why do I speak of Angels? The Lord Himself was with him then as he went forth; for surely it cannot be that He was seen by Abraham, and yet was not with Paul. No, it was His own promise, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:20 And again, when He appeared to him, He said, Be not afraid, but speak, for I am with you, and no man shall set on you to harm you. 96 9, 10 Again, He stood by him in a dream, and said, Be of good cheer, for as you have testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. Acts 23:11

The saints, though they are at all times a glorious sight, and are full of abundant grace, yet are so, most of all, when they are in perils for Christ's sake, when they are prisoners; for as a brave soldier is at all times and of himself a pleasing spectacle to them that behold him, but most of all when he is standing, and in ranks at the king's side; thus also imagine to yourselves Paul, how great a thing it was to see him teaching in his bonds.

Shall I mention, in passing, a thought, which just at this moment occurs to me? The blessed martyr Babylas was bound, and he too for the very same cause as John also was, because he reprov'd a king in his transgression. This man when he was dying gave charge that his bonds should be laid with his body, and that the body should be buried bound; and to this day the fetters lie mingled with his ashes, so devoted was his affection for the bonds he had worn for Christ's sake. He was laid in chains of iron as the Prophet says of Joseph. Psalm 105:18 And even women have before now had trial of these bonds.

We however are not in bonds, nor am I recommending this, since now is not the time for them. But you, bind not your hands, but bind your heart and mind. There are yet other bonds, and they that wear not the one, shall have to wear the other. Hear what Christ says, Bind him hand and foot. Matthew 22:13 But God forbid we should have trial of those bonds! But of these may He grant us even to take our fill!

On these accounts he says, I, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called. But what is this calling? You were called as His body, it is said. You have Christ as your head; and though you were enemies, and had committed misdeeds out of number, yet has He raised you up with Him and made you to sit with Him. Ephesians 2:6 A high calling this, and to high privileges, not only in that we have been called from that former state, but in that we are called both to such privileges, and by such a method.

But how is it possible to walk worthily of it? With all lowliness. Such an one walks worthily. This is the basis of all virtue. If you be lowly, and bethink you what you are, and how you were saved, you will take this recollection as a motive to all virtue. You will neither be elated with bonds, nor with those very privileges which I mentioned, but as knowing that all is of grace, you will humble yourself. The lowly-minded man is able to be at once a generous and a grateful servant. For what have you, says he, that thou did not receive? 1 Corinthians 4:7 And again, hear his words, I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10

With all lowliness, says he; not that which is in words, nor that which is in actions only, but even in one's very bearing and tone of voice: not lowly towards one, and rude towards another; be lowly towards all men, be he friend or foe, be he great or small. This is lowliness. Even in your good deeds be lowly; for hear what Christ says, Blessed are the poor in spirit; Matthew 5:3 and He places this first in order. Wherefore also the Apostle himself says, With all lowliness, and meekness, and long-suffering. For it is possible for a man to be lowly, and yet quick and irritable, and thus all is to no purpose; for oftentimes he will be possessed by his anger, and ruin all.

Forbearing, he proceeds, one another in love.

How is it possible to forbear, if a man be passionate or censorious? He has told us therefore the manner: in love, says he. If you, he would say, are not forbearing to your neighbor, how shall God be forbearing to you? If you bear not with your fellow-servant, how shall the Master bear with you? Wherever there is love, all things are to be borne.

Giving diligence, says he, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Bind therefore your hands with moderation. Again that goodly name of bond. We had dismissed it, and it has of itself come back on us again. A goodly bond was that, and goodly is this one also, and that other is the fruit of this. Bind yourself to your brother. They bear all things lightly who are bound together in love. Bind yourself to him and him to you; you are lord of both, for whomsoever I may be desirous to make my friend, I can by means of kindness accomplish it.

Giving diligence, he says; a thing not to be done easily, and not in every one's power.

Giving diligence, he proceeds, to keep the unity of the Spirit. What is this unity of Spirit? In the human body there is a spirit which holds all together, though in different members. So is it also here; for to this end was the Spirit given, that He might unite those who are separated by race and by different manners; for old and young, rich and poor, child and youth, woman and man, and every soul become in a manner one, and more entirely so than if there were one body. For this spiritual relation is far higher than the other natural one, and the perfectness of the union more entire; because the conjunction of the soul is more perfect, inasmuch as it is both simple and uniform. And how then is this unity preserved? In the bond of peace. It is not possible for this to exist in enmity and discord. For whereas there is, says he, among you jealousy and strife, are you not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? 1 Corinthians 3:3 For as fire when it finds dry pieces of wood works up all together into one blazing pile, but when wet does not act at all nor unite them; so also it is here. Nothing that is of a cold nature can bring about this union, whereas any warm one for the most part can. Hence at least it is that the glow of charity is produced; by the bond of peace, he is desirous to bind us all together. For just in the same way, he would say, as if you would attach yourself to another, you can do it in no other way except by attaching him to yourself; and if you should wish to make the tie double, he must needs in turn attach himself to you; so also here he would have us tied one to another; not simply that we be at peace, not simply that we love one another, but that all should be only even one soul. A glorious bond is this; with this bond let us bind ourselves together with one another and unto God. This is a bond that bruises not, nor cramps the hands it binds, but it leaves them free, and gives them ample play, and greater courage than those which are at liberty. The strong if he be bound to the weak, will support him, and not allow him to perish: and if again he be tied to the indolent, him he will rather rouse and animate. Brother helped by brother, it is said, is as a strong city. This chain no distance of place can interrupt, neither heaven, nor earth, nor death, nor any thing else, but it is more powerful and strong than all things. This, though it issue from but one soul, is able to embrace

numbers at once; for hear what Paul says, You are not straitened in us, but you are straitened in your own affections; be ye also enlarged. 2 Corinthians 6:12

Now then, what impairs this bond? Love of money, passion for power, for glory, and the like, loosens them, and severs them asunder. How then are we to see that they be not cut asunder? If these tempers be got rid of, and none of those things which destroy charity come in by the way to trouble us. For hear what Christ says, Matthew 24:12 Because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. Nothing is so opposed to love as sin, and I mean not love towards God, but that towards our neighbor also. But how then, it may be said, are even robbers at peace? When are they, tell me? Not when they are acting in a spirit which is that of robbers; for if they fail to observe the rules of justice among those with whom they divide the spoil, and to render to every one his right, you will find them too in wars and broils. So that neither among the wicked is it possible to find peace: but where men are living in righteousness and virtue, you may find it every where. But again, are rivals ever at peace? Never. And whom then would you have me mention? The covetous man can never possibly be at peace with the covetous. So that were there not just and good persons, even though wronged by them, to stand between them, the whole race of them would be torn to pieces. When two wild beasts are famished, if there be not something put between them to consume, they will devour one another. The same would be the case with the covetous and the vicious. So that it is not possible there should be peace where virtue is not already put in practice beforehand. Let us form, if you please, a city entirely of covetous men, give them equal privileges, and let no one bear to be wronged, but let all wrong one another. Can that city possibly hold together? It is impossible. Again, is there peace among adulterers? No, not any two will you find of the same mind.

So then, to return, there is no other reason for this, than that love has waxed cold; and the cause again why love has waxed cold, is that iniquity abounds. For this leads to selfishness, and divides and severs the body, and relaxes it and rends it to pieces. But where virtue is, it does the reverse. Because the man that is virtuous is also above money; so that were there ten thousand such in poverty they would still be peaceable; while the covetous, where there are but two, can never be at peace. Thus then if we are virtuous, love will not perish, for virtue springs from love, and love from virtue. And how this is, I will tell you. The virtuous man does not value money above friendship, nor does he remember injuries, nor does wrong to his neighbor; he is not insolent, he endures all things nobly. Of these things love consists. Again, he who loves submits to all these things, and thus do they reciprocally produce one another. And this indeed, that love springs from virtue, appears from hence, because our Lord when He says, because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold, plainly tells us this. And that virtue springs from love, Paul tells us, saying, He that loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:10 So then a man must be one of the two, either very affectionate and much beloved, or else very virtuous; for he who has the one, of necessity possesses the other; and, on the contrary, he who knows not how to love, will therefore commit many evil actions; and he who commits evil actions, knows not what it is to love.

Moral. Let us therefore follow after charity; it is a safeguard which will not allow us to suffer any evil. Let us bind ourselves together. Let there be no deceit among us, no hollowness. For where friendship is, there nothing of the sort is found. This too another certain wise man tells us. Though you drew a sword at your friend, yet despair not: for there may be a returning again to favor. If you have opened your mouth against your friend, fear not; for there may be a reconciliation: except for upbraiding, or disclosing of secrets, or a treacherous wound: for for these things a friend will depart. Sirach 22:21-22 For disclosing, says he, of secrets. Now if we be all friends, there is no need of secrets; for as no man has any secret with himself and cannot conceal anything from himself, so neither will he from his friends. Where then no secrets exist,

separation arising from this is impossible. For no other reason have we secrets, than because we have not confidence in all men. So then it is the waxing cold of love, which has produced secrets. For what secret have you? Do you desire to wrong your neighbor? Or, are you hindering him from sharing some benefit, and on this account concealest it? But, no, perhaps it is none of these things. What then, is it that you are ashamed? If so, then this is a token of want of confidence. Now then if there be love, there will be no revealing of secrets, neither any upbraiding. For who, tell me, would ever upbraid his own soul? And suppose even such a thing were done, it would be for some good; for we upbraid children, we know, when we desire to make them feel. And so Christ too on that occasion began to upbraid the cities, saying, Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida! Luke 10:13 in order that He might deliver them from upbraidings. For nothing has such power to lay hold of the mind, or can more strongly arouse it, or brace it up when relaxed. Let us then never use upbraiding to one another merely for the sake of upbraiding. For what? Will you upbraid your friend on the score of money? Surely not, if at least you possess what you have in common. Will you then for his faults? No nor this, but you will rather in that case correct him. Or, as it goes on, for a treacherous wound; who in the world will kill himself, or who wound himself? No one.

Let us then follow after love; he says not simply let us love; but let us follow after love. 1 Corinthians 14:1 There is need of much eagerness: she is soon out of sight, she is most rapid in her flight; so many things are there in life which injure her. If we follow her, she will not outstrip us and get away, but we shall speedily recover her. The love of God is that which united earth to Heaven. It was the love of God that seated man upon the kingly throne. It was the love of God that manifested God upon earth. It was the love of God that made the Lord a servant. It was the love of God that caused the Beloved to be delivered up for His enemies, the Son for them that hated Him, the Lord for His servants, God for men, the free for slaves. Nor did it stop here, but called us to yet greater things. Yes, not only did it release us from our former evils, but promised, moreover, to bestow upon us other much greater blessings. For these things then let us give thanks to God, and follow after every virtue; and before all things, let us with all strictness practice love, that we may be counted worthy to attain the promised blessings; through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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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