

John 13:20-31

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus teaches the disciples that loving one another is the root of all blessings and a safeguard, and that this love will be the distinguishing token of His disciples.

Scripture: Matthew 10:40, John 13:21-22, John 13:26-28, John 13:31-34

Topics: "Virtuous Living", "Christian Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of love as a distinguishing characteristic of disciples of Christ, emphasizing that love is the foundation of all virtues and the key to showing holiness. He explains how love surpasses miracles in demonstrating true discipleship and attracting others to the faith. Chrysostom highlights the significance of living a virtuous life, as it has a greater impact on unbelievers than performing miracles. He urges believers to prioritize love and virtuous living to be a shining example of Christ's teachings and to avoid causing stumbling blocks to those outside the faith.

Transcript

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receives whomsoever I send, receives Me: and He that receives Me, receives Him that sent Me.

1. Great is the recompense of care bestowed upon the servants of God, and of itself it yields to us its fruits. For, he that receives you, it says, receives Me, and he that receives Me, receives Him that sent Me. Matthew 10:40 Now what can be equal to the receiving Christ and His Father? But what kind of connection has this with what was said before? What has it in common with that which He had said, If you do these things happy are you, to add, He that receives you? A close connection, and very harmonious. Observe how. When they were about to go forth and to suffer many dreadful things, He comforts them in two ways; one derived from Himself, the other derived from others. For if, He says, you are truly wise, ever keeping Me in mind, and bearing about all both what I said, and what I did, you will easily endure terrible things. And not in this way only, but also from your enjoying great attention from all men. The first point He declared when He said, If you do these things happy are you; the second when He said, He that receives you receives Me. For He opened the houses of all men to them, so that both from the sound wisdom of their manners, and the zeal of those who would tend them, they might have twofold comfort. Then when He had given these directions to them as to men about to run through all the world, reflecting that the traitor was deprived of both of these things, and would enjoy neither of them, neither patience in toils, nor the service of kind entertainers, He again was troubled. And the Evangelist to signify this besides, and to

show that it was on his account that He was troubled, adds,

John 13:21

When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.

Again He brings fear on all by not mentioning (the traitor) by name.

John 13:22

But they are in doubt; although conscious to themselves of nothing evil; but they deemed the declaration of Christ more to be believed than their own thoughts. Wherefore they looked one on another. By laying the whole upon one, Jesus would have cut short their fear, but by adding, one of you, He troubled all. What then? The rest looked upon one another; but the ever fervent Peter beckons to John. Since he had been before rebuked, and when Christ desired to wash him would have hindered Him, and since he is everywhere found moved indeed by love, yet blamed; being on this account afraid, he neither kept quiet, nor did he speak, but wished to gain information by means of John.

But it is a question worth asking, why when all were distressed, and trembling, when their leader was afraid, John like one at ease leans on Jesus' bosom, and not only leans, but even (lies) on His breast? Nor is this the only thing worthy of enquiry, but that also which follows. What is that? What he says of himself, Whom Jesus loved. Why did no one else say this of himself? Yet the others were loved too. But he more than any. And if no other has said this about him, but he about himself, it is nothing wonderful.

Paul too does the same, when occasion calls, saying thus, I knew a man fourteen years ago; yet in fact he has gone through other no trifling praises of himself. Seems it to you a small thing that, when he had heard, Follow Me, he straightway left his nets, and his father, and followed; and that Christ took him alone with Peter into the mountain, Matthew 17:1, and another time again when He went into a house? Luke 8:51 What high praise also has he himself passed on Peter without concealment, telling us that Christ said, Peter, do you love Me more than these?

Luke 21:15, and everywhere he shows him warm, and nobly disposed towards himself; for instance, when he said, Lord, and what shall this man do? he spoke from great love. But why did no other say (this) concerning him? Because he would not himself have said it, unless he had come to this passage. For if after telling us that Peter beckoned to John to ask, he had added nothing more, he would have caused considerable doubt, and have compelled us to enquire into the reason. In order therefore himself to solve this difficulty, he says, He lay on the bosom of Jesus.

Do you think that you have learned a little thing when you have heard that he lay, and that their Master allowed such boldness to them? If you desire to know the cause of this, the action was of love; wherefore he says, Whom Jesus loved. I suppose also that John does this for another reason, as wishing to show that he was exempt from the charge and so he speaks openly and is confident. Again, why did he use these words, not at any other point of time, but only when the chief of the Apostles beckoned?

That you might not deem that Peter beckoned to him as being greater, he says that the thing took place because of the great love (which Jesus bore him). But why does he even lie on His bosom? They had not as yet formed any high surmises concerning Him; besides, in this way He calmed their despondency; for it is probable that at this time their faces were overclouded. If they were troubled in their souls, much more

would they be so in their countenances. Soothing them therefore by word and by the question, He makes a way beforehand, and allows him to lean on His breast.

Observe too his modesty; he mentions not his own name, but, whom He loved. As also Paul, when he said, I knew a man about fourteen years ago. Now for the first time Jesus convicted the traitor, but not even now by name; but how?

John 13:26

He it is, to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it.

Even the manner (of the rebuke) was calculated to put him to shame. He respected not the table, though he shared the bread; be it so; but the receiving the sop from His own hand, whom would not that have won over? Yet him it won not.

John 13:27

Then Satan entered into him.

Laughing at him for his shamelessness. As long as he belonged to the band of disciples he dared not spring upon him, but attacked him from without; but when Christ made him manifest and separated him, then he sprang upon him without fear. It was not fitting to keep within one of such a character, and who so long had remained incorrigible. Wherefore He henceforth cast him out, and then that other seized him when cut off, and he leaving them went forth by night.

Jesus says unto him, Friend, that you do, do quickly.

John 13:28

Now no man at the table knew with what intent He spoke this unto him.

3. Wonderful insensibility! How could it be that he was neither softened nor shamed; but rendered yet more shameless, went out. The do quickly, is not the expression of one commanding, nor advising, but of one reproaching, and showing him that He desired to correct him, but that since he was incorrigible, He let him go. And this, the Evangelist says, no man of those that sat at the table knew. Some one may perhaps find here a considerable difficulty, if, when the disciples had asked, Who is it? and He had answered, He to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it, they did not even so understand; unless indeed He spoke it secretly, so that no man should hear. For John on this very account, leaning by His breast, asked Him almost close to His ear, so that the traitor might not be made manifest; and Christ answered in like manner, so that not even then did He discover him. And though He spoke emphatically, Friend, that you do, do quickly, even so they understood not. But he spoke thus to show that the things were true which had been said by Him to the Jews concerning His death. For He had said to them, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again: and, No man takes it from Me. John 10:18 As long then as He would retain it, no man was able (to take it); but when He resigned it, then the action became easy. All this He implied when He said, That you do, do quickly. Yet not even then did He expose him, for perhaps the others might have torn him in pieces, or Peter might have killed him. On this account no man at the table knew. Not even John? Not even he: for he could not have expected that a disciple would arrive at such a pitch of wickedness. For since they were far from such iniquity themselves, they could not suspect such things concerning others. As before He had told them, I speak not of you all John 13:18, yet did not

reveal the person; so here, they thought that it was said concerning some other matter.

It was night, says the Evangelist, when he went out. Why tellest thou me the time? That you may learn his forwardness, that not even the time restrained him from his purpose. Yet not even did this make him quite manifest, for the others were at this time in confusion, occupied by fear and great distress, and they knew not the true reason of what had been said but supposed that He spoke thus, in order that Judas might give somewhat to the poor. For He cared greatly for the poor, teaching us also to bestow much diligence on this thing. But they thought this, not without a cause, but because he had the bag. Yet no one appears to have brought money to Him; that the female disciples nourished Him of their substance, it has said, but this it has nowhere intimated. Luke 8:3 But how did He who bade His disciples bear neither scrip, nor money, nor staff, Himself bear a bag to minister to the poor? That you may learn, that it behooves even him who is exceedingly needy and crucified, to be very careful on this point. For many things He did in the way of dispensation for our instruction. The disciples then thought that He said this, that Judas should give something to the poor; and not even this shamed him, His not being willing even to the last day to make him a public example. We too ought to do the like, and not parade the sins of our companions, though they be incurable. For even after this He gave a kiss to the man who came to betray Him, and endured, such an action as that was, and then proceeded to a thing of far greater daring, the Cross itself, to the death of shame, and there again He manifested His lovingkindness. And here He calls it glory, showing us that there is nothing so shameful and reproachful which makes not brighter him who goes to it, if it be done according to the will of God. At least after the going forth of Judas to the betraying, He says,

John 13:31

Now is the Son of Man glorified.

In this way rousing the dejected thoughts of the disciples, and persuading them not only not to despond, but even to rejoice. On this account He rebuked Peter at the first, because for one who has been in death to overcome death, is great glory. And this is what He said of Himself, When I am lifted up, then you shall know that I Am John 8:28; and again, Destroy this Temple John 2:19; and again, No sign shall be given unto you but the sign of Jonas. Matthew 12:39 For how can it be otherwise than great glory, the being able even after death to do greater things than before death? For in order that the Resurrection might be believed, the disciples did work greater things. But unless He had lived, and had been God, how could these men have wrought such things in His Name?

Ver. 32 . And God shall glorify Him.

What is, And God shall glorify Him in Himself? It is by means of Himself, not by means of another.

And shall straightway glorify Him.

4. That is, simultaneously with the Cross. For it will not be after much time, He says, nor will He wait for the distant season of the Resurrection, nor will He then show Him glorious, but straightway on the Cross itself His glories shall appear. And so the sun was darkened, the rocks rent; the veil of the temple was parted asunder, many bodies of saints that slept arose, the tomb had its seals, the guards sat by, and while a stone lay over the Body the Body rose; forty days passed by, and the Gift of the Spirit came, and they all straightway preached Him. This is, shall glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him; not by Angels or Archangels, not by any other power, but by Himself. But how did He also glorify Him by Himself? By doing all for the glory of the Son. Yet the Son did all. Do you see that He refers to the Father

the things done by Himself?

Ver. 33 . Little children, yet a little while I am with you -- and as I said to the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say to you.

He now begins words of sorrow after the supper. For when Judas went forth it was no longer evening, but night. But since they were about to come shortly, it was necessary to set all things before the disciples, that they might have them in remembrance; or rather, the Spirit recalled all to their minds. For it is likely that they would forget many things, as hearing for the first time, and being about to undergo such temptations. Men who were weighed down to sleep, (as another Evangelist says, Luke 22:45) who were possessed by despondency, as Christ says Himself, Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow has filled your hearts John 16:6, how could they retain all these things exactly? Why then were they spoken? It became no little gain to them with respect to their opinion of Christ, that in after times when reminded they certainly knew that they had long ago heard these things from Christ. But wherefore does He first cast down their souls, saying, Yet a little while I am with you? To the Jews indeed it was said with reason, but why do You place us in just the same class with those obstinate ones? He by no means did so. Why then said He, 'As I said to the Jews'? He reminded them that He did not now, because troubles were upon them, warn them of these things, but that He had foreknown them from the first, and that they were witnesses who had heard that He had said these things to the Jews. Wherefore He added also the word, little children, that when they heard, As I said to the Jews, they might not deem that the expression was used in like sense towards themselves. It was not then to depress but to comfort them that He thus spoke, that their dangers might not, by coming upon them suddenly, trouble them to excess.

Whither I go, you cannot come. He shows that His death is a removal, and a change for the better to a place which admits not corruptible bodies. This He says, both to excite their love towards Him, and to make it more fervent. You know that when we see any of our dearest friends departing from us, our affection is warmest, and the more so, when we see them going to a place to which it is not even possible for us to go. These things then He said, terrifying the Jews, but kindling longing in the disciples. Such is the place, that not only not they, but not even you, My best beloved, can come there. Here He shows also His Own dignity.

So now I say to you. Why now? In one way to them, to you in another way; that is, not with them. But when did the Jews seek Him, when the disciples? The disciples, when they fled the Jews, when they suffered miseries unendurable and surpassing all description at the capture of their city, when the wrath of God was borne down upon them from every side. To the Jews therefore He spoke then, because of their unbelief, but to you now, that troubles might not come upon you unexpected.

Ver. 34 . A new commandment I give unto you.

For since it was likely that they would be troubled when they heard these things, as though they were about to be deserted, He comforts them, investing them with that which was the root of all blessings and a safeguard, love. As though He had said, Grieve ye at My departure? Nay, if you love one another, you shall be the stronger. Why then said He not this? Because He said what profited them more than this.

Ver. 35 . By this shall all men know that you are My disciples.

5. By this He at the same time showed that the company should never be extinguished, when He gave them a distinguishing token. This He said when the traitor was cut off from them. But how calls He that a

new commandment which is contained also in the Old (covenant)? He made it new Himself by the manner; therefore He added, As I have loved you. I have not paid back to you a debt of good deeds first done by you, but Myself have begun, He says. And so ought you to benefit your dearest ones, though you owe them nothing; and omitting to speak of the miracles which they should do, He makes their characteristic, love. And why? Because it is this which chiefly shows men holy; it is the foundation of all virtue; by this mostly we are all even saved. For this, He says, is to be a disciple; so shall all men praise you, when they see you imitating My Love. What then? Do not miracles much more show this? By no means. For many will say, Lord, have we not in Your Name cast out devils? Matthew 7:22 And again, when they rejoice that the devils obey them, He says, Rejoice not that the devils obey you, but that your names are written in heaven. Luke 10:20 And this indeed brought over the world, because that was before it; had not that been, neither would this have endured. This then straightway made them perfect, the having all one heart and one soul. But had they separated one from the other, all things would have been lost.

Now He spoke this not to them only, but to all who should believe in Him; since even now, there is nothing else that causes the heathen to stumble, except that there is no love. But, says some one, they also urge against us the absence of miracles. But not in the same way. But where did the Apostles manifest their love? Do you see Peter and John inseparable from one another, and going up to the Temple? Acts 3:1 Do you see Paul disposed in a like way towards them, and do you doubt?

If they had gained the other blessings, much more had they the mother of them all. For this is a thing that springs from a virtuous soul; but where wickedness is, there the plant withers away. For when, it says, iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Matthew 24:12 And miracles do not so much attract the heathen as the mode of life; and nothing so much causes a right life as love. For those who wrought miracles they often even called deceivers; but they could have no hold upon a pure life.

While then the message of the Gospel was not yet spread abroad, miracles were with good reason marveled at, but now men must get to be admired by their lives. For nothing so raises respect in the heathen as virtue, nothing so offends them as vice. And with good reason. When one of them sees the greedy man, the plunderer, exhorting others to do the contrary, when he sees the man who was commanded to love even his enemies, treating his very kindred like brutes, he will say that the words are folly.

When he sees one trembling at death, how will he receive the accounts of immortality? When he sees us fond of rule, and slaves to the other passions, he will more firmly remain in his own doctrines, forming no high opinion of us. We, we are the cause of their remaining in their error. Their own doctrines they have long condemned, and in like manner they admire ours, but they are hindered by our mode of life. To follow wisdom in talk is easy, many among themselves have done this; but they require the proof by works.

Then let them look to the ancients of our profession. But about them they by no means believe; they enquire concerning those now living. For, show me, it says, your faith by your works James 2:18; but this is not the case; on the contrary, seeing us tear our neighbors worse than any wild beast, they call us the curse of the world. These things restrain the heathen, and suffer them not to come over to our side. So that we shall be punished for these also; not only for what we do amiss ourselves, but because the name of God is blasphemed.

How long shall we be given up to wealth, and luxury, and the other passions? For the future let us leave them. Hear what the Prophet says of certain foolish ones, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Isaiah 22:31 But in the present case we cannot even say this, so many gather round themselves what belongs to all. So chiding them also, the Prophet said, Will ye dwell alone upon the earth? Isaiah 5:8 Wherefore I fear lest some grievous thing come to pass, and we draw down upon us heavy vengeance from God.

And that this may not come to pass, let us be careful of all virtue, that we may obtain the future blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory now and forever, and world without end. Amen.

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