

John 14:15-31

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 14:15-31 emphasizes the necessity of love through obedience, the role of the Holy Spirit as Comforter, and the peace that comes from Christ's presence in our lives.

Scripture: John 14:15-17, John 14:26-27, John 14:30-31, Galatians 5:22, 2 Timothy 2:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Trinity"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of showing love for God through actions, not just words, by obeying His commandments. He explains the promise of another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will abide with believers forever, unlike the world which cannot receive Him. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Jesus asking the Father to send the Comforter, highlighting the difference in Person and connection of Substance within the Trinity. He reassures the disciples that the Spirit of truth will dwell within them, unlike Jesus' physical presence, and encourages them to keep His commandments as a sign of love for Him and the Father.

Transcript

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him.

1. We need everywhere works and actions, not a mere show of words. For to say and to promise is easy for any one, but to act is not equally easy. Why have I made these remarks? Because there are many at this time who say that they fear and love God, but in their works show the contrary; but God requires that love which is shown by works. Wherefore He said to the disciples, If you love Me, keep My commandments. For after He had told them, Whatsoever you shall ask, I will do it, that they might not deem the mere asking to be availing, He added, If you love Me, then, He says, I will do it. And since it was likely that they would be troubled when they heard that, I go to the Father, He tells them to be troubled now is not to love, to love is to obey My words. I have given you a commandment that you love one another, that you do so to each other as I have done to you; this is love, to obey these My words, and to yield to Him who is the object of your love.

And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter. Again His speech is one of condescension. For since it was probable, that they not yet knowing Him would eagerly seek His society, His discourse, His presence in the flesh, and would admit of no consolation when He was absent, what

says He? I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that is, Another like Me. Let those be ashamed who have the disease of Sabellius, who hold not the fitting opinion concerning the Spirit. For the marvel of this discourse is this, that it has stricken down contradictory heresies with the same blow. For by saying another, He shows the difference of Person, and by Paraclete, the connection of Substance. But why said He, I will ask the Father? Because had He said, I will send Him, they would not have so much believed and now the object is that He should be believed. For afterwards He declares that He Himself sends Him, saying, Receive the Holy Ghost John 20:22; but in this place He tells them that He asks the Father, so as to render His discourse credible to them. Since John says of Him, Of His fullness have all we received John 1:16; but what He had, how receives He from another? And again, He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Luke 3:16 But what had He more than the Apostles, if He was about to ask It of His Father in order to give It to others, when they often even without prayer appear to have done thus? And how, if It is sent according to request from the Father, does It descend of Itself? And how is that which is everywhere present sent by Another, that which divides to every man severally as He will 1 Corinthians 12:11, and which says with authority, Separate Me Paul and Barnabas? Acts 13:2 Those ministers were ministering unto God, yet still It called them authoritatively to Its own work; not that It called them to any different work, but in order to show Its power. What then, says some one, is, 'I will ask the Father?' (He says it) to show the time of Its coming. For when He had cleansed them by the sacrifice, then the Holy Ghost lighted upon them. And why, while He was with them, came it not? Because the sacrifice was not yet offered. But when afterwards sin had been loosed, and they were being sent forth to dangers, and were stripping themselves for the contest, then need was that the Anointer should come. But why did not the Spirit come immediately after the Resurrection? In order that being greatly desirous of It, they might receive It with great joy. For as long as Christ was with them, they were not in tribulation; but when He departed, being made defenseless and thrown into much fear, they would receive It with much readiness.

He remains with you. This shows that even after death It departs not. But lest when they heard of the Paraclete, they should imagine a second Incarnation, and expect to see It with their eyes, He sets them right by saying, Whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not. He will not be with you as I have been, but will dwell in your very souls; for this is the, shall be in you. He calls it the Spirit of truth; thus explaining the types in the Old Testament. That He may be with you. What is, may be with you? That which He says Himself, that I am with you. Matthew 28:20 Besides, He also implies something else, that the case of the Spirit shall not be the same as Mine, He shall never leave you. Whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not. Why, what is there belonging to the other Persons that is visible? Nothing; but He speaks here of knowledge; at least He adds, neither knows Him. For He is wont, in the case of exact knowledge, to call it sight; because sight is clearer than the other senses, by this He always represents exact knowledge. By world, He here speaks of the wicked, thus too comforting the disciples by giving to them a special gift. See in how many particulars He raised His discourse concerning It. He said, He is Another like Me; He said, He will not leave you; He said, Unto you alone He comes, as also did I; He said, that He remains in you; but not even so did He drive out their despondency. For they still sought Him and His society. To cure then this feeling, He says,

John 14:18

I will not leave you orphans, I will come unto you.

2. Fear not, He says, I said not that I would send you another Comforter, as though I were Myself withdrawing from you for ever; I said not that He remains with you, as though I should see you no more.

For I also Myself will come to you, I will not leave you orphans. Because when commencing He said, Little children, therefore He says also here, I will not leave you orphans. At first then He told them, You shall come whither I go; and, In My Father's house there are many mansions; but here, since that time was long, He gives them the Spirit; and when, not knowing what it could be of which He spoke, they were not sufficiently comforted, I will not leave you orphans, He says; for this they chiefly required. But since the, I will come to you, was the saying of one declaring a presence, observe how in order that they might not again seek for the same kind of presence as before, He did not clearly tell them this thing, but hinted at it; for having said,

John 14:19

Yet a little while, and the world sees Me not; He added, but you see Me.

As though He had said, I come indeed to you, but not in the same way as before, ever being with you day by day. And lest they should say, How then did You say to the Jews, Henceforth you shall not see Me? He solves the contradiction by saying, to you alone; for such also is the nature of the Spirit.

Because I live, you shall live also.

For the Cross does not finally separate us, but only hides for a little moment; and by life He seems to me to mean not the present only, but the future also.

John 14:20

At that day you shall know that am in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

With regard to the Father, these words refer to Essence; with regard to the disciples, to agreement of mind and help from God. And how, tell me, is this reasonable? says some one. And how, pray, is the contrary reasonable? For great and altogether boundless is the interval between Christ and the disciples. And if the same words are employed, marvel not; for the Scripture is often wont to use in different senses the same words, when applied to God and to men. Thus we are called gods, and sons of God, yet the word has not the same force when applied to us and to God. And the Son is called Image, and Glory; so are we, but great is the interval between us. Again, You are Christ's, and Christ is God's 1 Corinthians 3:23, but not in like manner as Christ is God's are we Christ's. But what is it that He says? When I am arisen, He says, you shall know that I am not separated from the Father, but have the same power with Him, and that I am with you continually, when facts proclaim the aid which comes to you from Me, when your enemies are kept down, and you speak boldly, when dangers are removed from your path, when the preaching of the Gospel flourishes day by day, when all yield and give ground to the word of true religion. As the Father has sent Me, so send I you. John 20:21 Do you see that here also the word has not the same force? For if we take it as though it had, the Apostles will differ in nothing from Christ. But why says He, Then you shall know? Because then they saw Him risen and conversing with them, then they learned the exact faith; for great was the power of the Spirit, which taught them all things.

John 14:21

He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me.

It is not enough merely to have them, we need also an exact keeping of them. But why does He frequently say the same thing to them? As, If you love Me, you will keep My commandments John 14:15; and, He

that has My commandments and keeps them; and, If any one hears My word and keeps it, he it is that loves Me -- he that hears not My words, loves Me not. John 14:24 I think that He alluded to their despondency; for since He had uttered many wise sayings to them concerning death, saying, He that hates his life in this world shall save it unto life eternal John 12:25; and, Unless a man take his cross and follow Me, he is not worthy of Me Matthew 10:38; and is about to say other things besides, rebuking them, He says, Think ye that you suffer sorrow from love? The not sorrowing would be a sign of love. And because He wished all along to establish this, as He went on He summed up His discourse in this same point; If you loved Me, He says, ye would have rejoiced, because -- I go to My Father John 14:28, but now you are in this state through cowardice. To be thus disposed towards death is not for those who remember My commandments; for you ought to be crucified, if you truly loved Me, for My word exhorts you not to be afraid of those that kill the body. Those that are such both the Father loves and I. And I will manifest Myself unto him. Then says Judas,

John 14:22

How is it that You will manifest Yourself unto us?

Do you see that their soul was close pressed with fear? For he was confounded and troubled, and thought that as we see dead men in a dream, so He also would be seen. In order therefore that they might not imagine this, hear what He says.

John 14:23

I and the Father will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.

All but saying, As the Father reveals Himself, so also do I. And not in this way only He removed the suspicion, but also by saying, We will make Our abode with him, a thing which does not belong to dreams. But observe, I pray you, the disciple confounded, and not daring to say plainly what he desired to say. For he said not, Woe to us, that Thou diest, and will come to us as the dead come; he spoke not thus; but, How is it that You will show Yourself to us, and not unto the world? Jesus then says, that I accept you, because ye keep My commandments. In order that they might not, when they should see Him afterwards, deem Him to be an apparition, therefore He says these things beforehand. And that they might not deem that He would appear to them so as I have said, He tells them also the reason, Because ye keep My commandments; He says that the Spirit also will appear in like manner. Now if after having companied with Him so long time, they cannot yet endure that Essence, or rather cannot even imagine It, what would have been their case had He appeared thus to them at the first? On this account also He ate with them, that the action might not seem to be an illusion. For if they thought this when they saw Him walking on the waters, although His wonted form was seen by them, and He was not far distant, what would they have imagined had they suddenly seen Him arisen whom they had seen taken and swathed? Wherefore He continually tells them that He will appear, and why He will appear, and how, that they may not suppose Him to be an apparition.

John 14:24

He that loves Me not keeps not My sayings; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me.

So that he that hears not these sayings not only does not love Me, but neither does he love the Father. For if this is the sure proof of love, the hearing the commandments, and these are of the Father, he that hears them loves not the Son only, but the Father also. And how is the word 'yours' and 'not yours'? This means, I speak not without the Father, nor say anything of Myself contrary to what seems good to Him.

John 14:25

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

Since these sayings were not clear, and since some they did not understand, and doubted about the greater number, in order that they might not be again confused, and say, What commands? He released them from all their perplexity, saying,

John 14:26

The Comforter, whom the Father shall send in My Name, He shall teach you.

Perhaps these things are not clear to you now, but 'He' is a clear teacher of them. And the, remains with you John 14:17, is the expression of One implying that Himself will depart. Then that they may not be grieved, He says, that as long as He should remain with them and the Spirit should not come, they would be unable to comprehend anything great or sublime. And this He said to prepare them to bear nobly His departure, as that which was to be the cause of great blessings to them. He continually calls Him Comforter, because of the afflictions which then possessed them. And since even after hearing these things they were troubled, when they thought of the sorrows, the wars, His departure, see how He calms them again by saying,

John 14:27

Peace I leave to you.

All but saying, What are you harmed by the trouble of the world, provided ye be at peace with Me? For this peace is not of the same kind as that. The one is external, is often mischievous and unprofitable, and is no advantage to those who possess it; but I give you peace of such a kind that you be at peace with one another, which thing renders you stronger. And because He said again, I leave, which was the expression of One departing, and enough to confound them, therefore He again says,

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Do you see that they were affected partly by loving affection, partly by fear?

John 14:28

You have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again unto you. If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father; for My Father is greater than I.

4. And what joy would this bring to them? What consolation? What then mean the words? They did not yet know concerning the Resurrection, nor had they right opinion concerning Him; (for how could they, who did not even know that He would rise again?) but they thought that the Father was mighty. He says then, that If you are fearful for Me, as not able to defend Myself, and if you are not confident that I shall see you again after the Crucifixion, yet when you heard that I go to the Father, you ought then to have rejoiced

because I go away to One that is greater, and able to undo all dangers. You have heard how I said to you. Why has He put this? Because, He says, I am so firmly confident about the things which come to pass, that I even foretell them, so far am I from fearing. This also is the meaning of what follows.

John 14:29

And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it has come to pass, you might believe that I Am.

As though He had said, You would not have known, had I not told you. And I should not have told you, had I not been confident. Do you see that the speech is one of condescension? For when He says, Think ye that I cannot pray to the Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of Angels Matthew 26:53, He speaks to the secret thoughts of the hearers; since no one, even in the height of madness, would say that He was not able to help Himself, but needed Angels; but because they thought of Him as a man, therefore He spoke of twelve legions of Angels. Yet in truth He did but ask those who came to take Him a question, and cast them backwards. John 18:6 (If any one say that the Father is greater, inasmuch as He is the cause of the Son, we will not contradict this. But this does not by any means make the Son to be of a different Essence.) But what He says, is of this kind: As long as I am here, it is natural that you should deem that I am in danger; but when I have gone 'there,' be confident that I am in safety; for Him none will be able to overcome. All these words were addressed to the weakness of the disciples, for, I Myself am confident, and care not for death. On this account, He said, I have told you these things before they come to pass; but since, He says, you are not yet able to receive the saying concerning them, I bring you comfort even from the Father, whom you entitle great. Having thus consoled them, He again tells them sorrowful things,

John 14:30

Hereafter I will not talk with you. Wherefore? For the ruler of this world comes, and has nothing in Me.

By ruler of this world, He means the devil, calling wicked men also by the same name. For he rules not heaven and earth, since he would have been subverted, and cast down all things, but he rules over those who give themselves up to him. Wherefore He calls him, the ruler of the darkness of this world, in this place again calling evil deeds, darkness. What then, does the devil slay You? By no means; he has nothing in Me. How then do they kill You? Because I will it, and,

John 14:31

'That the world may know that I love the Father.'

For being not subject, He says, to death, nor a debtor to it, I endure it through My love to the Father. This He says, that He may again rouse their souls, and that they may learn that not unwillingly but willingly He goes to this thing, and that He does it despising the devil. It was not enough for Him to have said, Yet a little while I am with you John 7:33, but He continually handles this painful subject, (with good reason,) until He should make it acceptable to them, by weaving along with it pleasant things. Wherefore at one time He says, I go, and I come again; and, That where I there ye may be also; and, You cannot follow Me now, but afterwards you shall follow Me; and, I go to the Father; and, The Father is greater than I; and, Before it come to pass, I have told you; and, I do not suffer these things from constraint, but from love for the Father. So that they might consider, that the action could not be destructive nor hurtful, if at least He

who greatly loved Him, and was greatly loved by Him, so willed. On this account, while intermingling these pleasant words, He continually uttered the painful ones also, practicing their minds. For both the, remains with you John 16:7, and, My departure is expedient for you, were expressions of One giving comfort. For this reason He spoke by anticipation ten thousand sayings concerning the Spirit, the, Is in you, and, The world cannot receive, and, He shall bring all things to your remembrance, and, Spirit of truth, and, Holy Spirit, and, Comforter, and that It is expedient for you, in order that they might not despond, as though there would be none to stand before and help them. It is expedient, He says, showing that It would make them spiritual.

5. This at least, we see, was what took place. For they who now trembled and feared, after they had received the Spirit sprang into the midst of dangers, and stripped themselves for the contest against steel, and fire, and wild beasts, and seas, and every kind of punishment; and they, the unlettered and ignorant, discoursed so boldly as to astonish their hearers. For the Spirit made them men of iron instead of men of clay, gave them wings, and allowed them to be cast down by nothing human.

For such is that grace; if it find despondency, it disperses it; if evil desires, it consumes them; if cowardice, it casts it out, and does not allow one who has partaken of it to be afterwards mere man, but as it were removing him to heaven itself, causes him to image to himself all that is there. Acts 4:32, and 2:46 On this account no one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own, but they continued in prayer, in praise, and in singleness of heart. For this the Holy Spirit most requires, for the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace -- faith, meekness.

Galatians 5:22-23 And yet spiritual persons often grieve, says some one. But that sorrow is sweeter than joy. Cain was sorrowful, but with the sorrow of the world; Paul was sorrowful, but with godly sorrow. Everything that is spiritual brings the greatest gain, just as everything that is worldly the utmost loss. Let us then draw to us the invincible aid of the Spirit, by keeping the commandments, and then we shall be nothing inferior to the Angels. For neither are they therefore of this character, because they are incorporeal, for were this the case, no incorporeal being would have become wicked, but the will is in every case the cause of all.

Wherefore among incorporeal beings some have been found worse than men or things irrational, and among those having bodies some better than the incorporeal. All just men, for instance, whatever were their righteous deeds, did them while dwelling on earth, and having bodies. For they dwelt on earth as those who were pilgrims and strangers; but in heaven, as citizens. Then say not thou either, I am clothed with flesh, I cannot get the mastery, nor undertake the toils which are for the sake of virtue.

Do not accuse the Creator. For if the wearing the flesh make virtue impossible, then the fault is not ours. But that it does not make it impossible, the band of saints has shown. A nature of flesh did not prevent Paul from becoming what he was, nor Peter from receiving the keys of heaven; and Enoch also, having worn flesh, was translated, and not found. So also Elias was caught up with the flesh. Abraham also with Isaac and his grandson shone brightly, having the flesh; and Joseph in the flesh struggled against that abandoned woman.

But why speak I of the flesh? For though thou place a chain upon the flesh, no harm is done. Though I am bound, says Paul, yet the word of God is not bound. 2 Timothy 2:9 And why speak I of bonds and chains? Add to these the prison, and bars, yet neither are these any hindrance to virtue; at least so Paul has instructed us. For the bond of the soul is not iron but cowardice, and the desire of wealth, and the ten

thousand passions. These bind us, though our body be free. But, says some one, these have their origin from the body.

An excuse this, and a false pretense. For had they been produced from the body, all would have undergone them. For as we cannot escape weariness, and sleep, and hunger, and thirst, since they belong to our nature; so too these, if they were of the same kind, would not allow any one to be exempt from their tyranny; but since many escape them, it is clear that such things are the faults of a careless soul. Let us then put a stop to this, and not accuse the body, but subdue it to the soul, that having it under command, we may enjoy the everlasting good things, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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