

Philippians 1:8-11

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul prays for the Philippians' love to abound and be sincere, and rejoices in the preaching of Christ, even if it is done out of envy and strife.

Scripture: Romans 12:18, Romans 13:8, Philippians 1:8-9, Philippians 1:11-12, Philippians 1:14-15, Philippians 1:17-18

Topics: "Christian Living", "Righteousness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of love, discernment, and sincerity in the Christian life. He emphasizes the need for love to abound more and more, rooted in knowledge and discernment, to approve what is excellent and to live sincerely without offense. Chrysostom encourages believers to be filled with the fruits of righteousness through Jesus Christ, bringing glory and praise to God. He also highlights the positive impact of his own sufferings, showing how even in difficult circumstances, the Gospel can advance and believers can be emboldened to speak the word without fear.

Transcript

For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; that you may approve the things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and void of offense unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

He calls not God to witness as though he should be doubted, but does this from his great affection, and his exceeding persuasion and confidence; for after saying that they had fellowship with him, he adds this also, in the tender mercies of Christ, lest they should think that his longing for them was for this cause, and not simply for their own sake. And what mean these words, in the tender mercies of Christ? They stand for according to Christ. Because you are believers, because ye love Christ, because of the love that is according to Christ. He does not say love, but uses a still warmer expression, the tender mercies of Christ, as though he had said, having become as a father to you through the relationship which is in Christ. For this imparts to us bowels warm and glowing. For He gives such bowels to His true servants. In these bowels, says He, as though one should say, I love you with no natural bowels, but with warmer ones, namely, those of Christ. How I long after you all. I long after all, since you are all of this nature; I am unable in words to represent to you my longing; it is therefore impossible to tell. For this cause I leave it to God, whose range is in the heart, to know this. Now had he been flattering them, he would not have called God to witness, for this cannot be done without peril.

Ver. 9. And this, says he, I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more. For this is a good of which there is no satiety; for see, being so loved he wished to be loved still more, for he who loves the object of his love, is willing to stay at no point of love, for it is impossible there should be a measure of so noble a thing. Paul desires that the debt of love should always be owing; Owe no man any thing, save to love one another. Romans 13:8 The measure of love is, to stop nowhere; that your love, says he, may abound yet more and more. Consider the character of the expression, that it may abound yet more and more, he says, in knowledge and all discernment. He does not extol friendship merely, nor love merely, but such as comes of knowledge; that is, You should not apply the same love to all: for this comes not of love, but from want of feeling. What means he by in knowledge? He means, with judgment, with reason, with discrimination. There are who love without reason, simply and any how, whence it comes that such friendships are weak. He says, in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that is, the things that are profitable. This I say not for my own sake, says he, but for yours, for there is danger lest any one be spoiled by the love of the heretics; for all this he hints at, and see how he brings it in. Not for my own sake, says he, do I say this, but that you may be sincere, that is, that you receive no spurious doctrine under the pretence of love. How then, says he, If it be possible, live peaceably with all men? Live peaceably Romans 12:18, he says, not, Love so as to be harmed by that friendship; for he says, if your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you; that you may be sincere Matthew 5:29, that is, before God, and without offense, that is, before men, for many men's friendships are often a hurt to them. Even though it hurts you not, says he, still another may stumble thereat. Unto the day of Christ; i.e. that you may then be found pure, having caused no one to stumble.

Ver. 11. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are through Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God; i.e. holding, together with true doctrine, an upright life.

And not merely upright, but filled with the fruits of righteousness. For there is indeed a righteousness not according to Christ, as, for example, a moral life. Which are through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Do you see that I speak not of my own glory, but the righteousness of God; and oftentimes he calls mercy itself too righteousness; let not your love, he says, indirectly injure you, by hindering your perception of things profitable, and take heed lest you fall through your love to any one. For I would indeed that your love should be increased, but not so that you should be injured by it. And I would not that it should be simply of prejudice, but upon proof whether I speak well or no. He says not, that you may take up my opinion, but that you may prove it. He does not say outright, join not yourself to this or that man, but, I would that your love should have respect to what is profitable, not that you should be void of understanding. For it is a foolish thing if you work not righteousness for Christ's sake and through Him. Mark the words, through Him. Does he then use God as a mere assistant? Away with the thought. Not that I may receive praise, says he, but that God may be glorified.

Ver. 12, 13. Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the Gospel, so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole prætorian guard, and to all the rest.

It was likely they would grieve when they heard he was in bonds, and imagine that the preaching was at a stand. What then? He straightway destroys this suspicion. And this also shows his affection, that he declares the things which had happened to him, because they were anxious. What say you? You are in bonds! You are hindered! How then does the Gospel advance? He answers, so that my bonds in Christ became manifest in all the prætorium. This thing not only did not silence the rest, nor affright them, but contrariwise rather encouraged them. If then they who were near the dangers were not only nothing hurt,

but even received greater confidence, much more should you. Had he when in bonds taken it hardly, and held his peace, it were probable that they would be affected in like sort. But as he spoke more boldly when in bonds, he gave them more confidence than if he had not been bound. And how have his bonds turned to the progress of the Gospel? So God in His dispensation ordered, he means, that my bonds were not hid, my bonds which were in Christ, which were for Christ.

In the whole prætorium. For up to that time they so called the palace. And in the whole city, says he.

Ver. 14. And that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word without fear.

This shows that they were of good courage even before, and spoke with boldness, but much more now. If others then, says he, are of good courage through my bonds, much more am I; if I am the cause of confidence to others, much more to myself. And most of the brethren in the Lord. As it was a great thing to say, My bonds gave confidence to them, he therefore adds beforehand, in the Lord. Do you see how, even when he sees himself constrained to speak great things, he departs not from moderation? Are more abundantly bold, he says, to speak the word without fear; the words more abundantly show that they had already begun.

Ver. 15. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will.

And what this means is worth enquiry. Since Paul was under restraint, many of the unbelievers, willing to stir up more vehemently the persecution from the Emperor, themselves also preached Christ, in order that the Emperor's wrath might be increased at the spread of the Gospel, and all his anger might fall on the head of Paul. From my bonds then two lines of action have sprung. One party took great courage thereat; the other, from hope to work my destruction, set themselves to preach Christ; some of them through envy, that is, envying my reputation and constancy, and from desire of my destruction, and the spirit of strife, work with me; or that they themselves may be esteemed, and from the expectation that they will draw to themselves somewhat of my glory. And some also of good will, that is, without hypocrisy, with all earnestness.

Ver. 16. The one proclaim Christ of faction not sincerely.

That is, not with pure motives, nor from regard to the matter itself; but why? thinking to add affliction to my bonds. As they think that I shall thus fall into greater peril, they add affliction to affliction. O cruelty! O devilish instigation! They saw him in bonds, and cast into prison, and still they envied him. They would increase his calamities, and render him subject to greater anger: well said he, thinking, for it did not so turn out. They thought indeed to grieve me by this; but I rejoiced that the Gospel was furthered.

Ver. 17. But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the Gospel.

What means, that I am set for the defense of the Gospel? It is, They are preparing for the account which I must give to God, and assisting me.

What is meant by for the defense? I have been appointed to preach, I must give account, and answer for the work to which I have been appointed; they assist me, that my defense may be easy; for if there be found many who have been instructed and have believed, my defense will be easy. So it is possible to do a good work, from a motive which is not good. And not only is there no reward in store for such an action, but punishment. For as they preached Christ from a desire to involve the preacher of Christ in greater

perils, not only shall they receive no reward, but shall be subject to vengeance and punishment. And some of love. That is, they know that I must give account for the Gospel.

Ver. 18. What then? Only that every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

But see the wisdom of the Man. He did not vehemently accuse them, but mentioned the result; what difference does it make to me, says he, whether it be done in this or that way? Only that every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. He did not say, Let him be proclaimed, as some suppose, stating that he opens the way for the heresies, but, He is proclaimed. For in the first place he did not lay down the law and say, as if laying down the law, Let Him be proclaimed, but he reported what was taking place; secondly, if he even spoke as laying down the law, not even thus would he be opening the way for the heresies.

For let us examine the matter. For even if he gave permission to preach as they preached, not even thus was he opening the way for the heresies. How so? In that they preached healthfully; though the aim and purpose on which they acted was corrupted, still the preaching itself was not changed, and they were forced so to preach. And why? Because, had they preached otherwise than as Paul preached, had they taught otherwise than as he taught, they would not have increased the wrath of the Emperor. But now by furthering his preaching, by teaching in the same way, and making disciples as he did, they had power to exasperate the Emperor, when he saw the multitude of the disciples numerous. But then some wicked and senseless man, taking hold of this passage, says, Verily they would have done the contrary, they would have driven off those who had already believed, instead of making believers to abound, had they wished to annoy him. What shall we answer? That they looked to this thing only, how they might involve him in present danger, and leave him no escape; and thus they thought to grieve him, and to quench the Gospel, rather than in the other way.

By that other course they would have extinguished the wrath of the Emperor, they would have let him go at large and preach again; but by this course they thought that because of him all would be ruined, could they but destroy him. The many however could not have this intention, but certain bitter men alone.

Then and therein, says he, I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. What means, yea, I will rejoice? Even if this be done still more, he means. For they cooperate with me even against their will; and will receive punishment for their toil, while I, who contributed nothing thereto, shall receive reward. Is there anything beyond this villainy of the Devil, to contrive the punishment of the preaching, and vengeance for the toils? Do you see with how many evils he pierces through his own! How else would a hater and an enemy of their salvation have arranged all this? Do you see how he who wages war against the truth has no power, but rather wounds himself, as one who kicks against the goads?

Ver. 19. For I know, says he, that this shall turn to my salvation through your supplication, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Nothing is more villainous than the Devil. So does he everywhere involve his own in unprofitable toils, and rends them. Not only does he not suffer them to obtain the prizes, but he even subjects them to punishment.

For not only does he command them the preaching of the Gospel, but likewise fasting and virginity, in such sort as will not only deprive them of their reward, but will bring down heavy evil on those who pursue that course. Concerning whom he says elsewhere, also, Branded in their own conscience as with a hot

iron. 1 Timothy 4:2

Wherefore, I beseech you, let us give thanks to God for all things, since he has both lightened our toil, and increased our reward. For such as among them live in virginity enjoy not the rewards, which they do who among us live chastely in wedlock; but they who live as virgins among the heretics are subject to the condemnation of the fornicators. All this springs from their not acting with a right aim, but as accusing God's creatures, and His unspeakable Wisdom.

Let us not then be sluggish. God has placed before us contests within measure, having no toil. Yet let us not despise them for this. For if the heretics put themselves to the stretch in unprofitable toils, what excuse shall we have if we will not endure those which are less, and which have a greater reward? For which of Christ's ordinances is burdensome? Which is grievous? Are you unable to live a virgin life? You are permitted to marry. Are you unable to strip yourself of all you have? You are permitted to supply the needs of others from what you have. Let your abundance be a supply for their want. 2 Corinthians 8:14 These things indeed appear burdensome. What things? I mean to despise money, and to overcome the desires of the body. But His other commands require no cost, no violence. For tell me, what violence is there in speaking no ill, in simply abstaining from slander? What violence is there in envying not another man's goods? What violence in not being led away by vain-glory? To be tortured, and endure it, is the part of strength. The exercise of philosophy is the part of strength. To bear poverty through life is the part of strength. It is the part of strength to wrestle with hunger and thirst. Where none of these things are, but where you may enjoy your own, as becomes a Christian, without envying others, what violence is there?

From this source springs envy; nay, rather all evils spring from no other source than this, that we cleave to things present. For did you hold money and the glory of this world to be nought, you would not cast an evil eye on its possessors. But since you gape at these things, and idolize them, and are flattered by them, for this reason envy troubles you, and vain-glory; it all springs from idolizing the things of the present life. Are you envious because another man is rich? Nay, such an one is an object for pity and for tears. But you laugh and answer straight, I am the object for tears, not he! Thou also art an object for tears, not because you are poor, but because you think yourself wretched. For we weep for those who have nothing the matter, and are discontented, not because they have anything the matter, but because, without having, they think they have. For example: if any one, cured of a fever, still is restless and rolls about, lying in health on his bed, is he not more to be wept for than those in fever, not that he has a fever, for he has none, but because having no sickness he still thinks he has? And you are an object for tears just because you think yourself wretched, not for your poverty. For your poverty you are to be thought happy.

Why do you envy the rich man? Is it because he has subjected himself to many cares? To a harder slavery? Because he is bound like a dog, with ten thousand chains -- namely, his riches? Evening overtakes him, night overtakes him, but the season of rest is to him a time of trouble of anguish, of pain, of anxiety. There is a noise: he straightway jumps up. Has his neighbor been plundered? He who has lost nothing cares more for it than the loser. For that man has lost once, but having endured the pain he lays aside his care; but the other has it always with him. Night comes on, the haven of our ills, the solace of our woes, the medicine of our wounds. For they who are weighed down by excess of grief, often give no ear to their friends, to their relations, to their intimates -- oftentimes not even to a father when he would give comfort, but take their very words amiss; but when sleep bids them rest, none has the power to look him in the face. For worse than any burning does the bitterness of grief afflict our souls. And as the body, when parched and worn down by struggling against the violence of the sunbeams, is brought to a caravansary with many fountains, and the soothing of a gentle breeze, so does night hand over our soul to sleep. Yea,

rather, I should say, not night nor sleep does this, but God, who knows our toil-worn race, has wrought this, while we have no compassion on ourselves, but, as though at enmity with ourselves, have devised a tyranny more powerful than natural want of rest -- the sleeplessness which comes of wealth. For it is said, The anxieties of wealth drive away sleep. Sirach 31:1 See how great is the care of God. But He has not committed rest to our will, nor our need of sleep to choice, but has bound it up in the necessities of nature, that good may be done to us even against our wills. For to sleep is of nature. But we, as mighty haters of ourselves, like enemies and persecutors of others, have devised a tyranny greater than this necessity of nature that, namely, which comes of money. Has day dawned? Then such an one is in dread of the informers. Hath night overtaken him? He trembles at robbers. Is death at hand? The thought that he must leave his goods to others preys upon him worse than death. Hath he a son? His desires are increased; and then he fancies himself poor. Has he none? His pains are greater. Deemest thou him blessed who is unable to receive pleasure from any quarter? Can you envy him thus tempest-tossed, while you yourself are placed in the quiet haven of poverty? Of a truth this is the imperfection of human nature; that it bears not its good nobly, but casts insults on its very prosperity.

And all this on earth; but when we depart there, listen what the rich man, who was lord of innumerable goods, as you say (since for my part I call not these things good, but indifferent), listen to what this lord of innumerable goods says, and of what he stands in need: Father Abraham, he exclaims, send Lazarus, that with the tip of his finger he may drop water on my tongue, for I am scorched in this flame. For even if that rich man had endured none of the things I have mentioned, if he had passed his whole life without dread and care -- why say I his whole life? Rather that one moment (for it is a moment, our whole life is but one moment, compared with that eternity which has no end)-- if all things had turned out according to his desire; must he not be pitied for these words, yea, rather, for this state of things? Was not your table once deluged with wine? Now you are not master even of a drop of water, and that, too, in your greatest need. Did not you neglect that poor man full of sores? But now you ask a sight of him, and no one gives leave. He lay at your gate; but now in Abraham's bosom. You then lay under your lofty ceiling; but now in the fire of hell.

These things let the rich men hear. Yea, rather not the rich, but the pitiless. For not in that he was rich was he punished, but because he showed no pity; for it is possible that a man who is at the same time rich and pitiful, should meet with every good. And for this cause the rich man's eyes were fixed on no one else, but on him alone, who then begged his alms; that he might learn from memory of his former actions, that his punishment was just. Were there not ten thousand poor men who were righteous? But he, who then lay at his gate, alone is seen by him, to instruct him and us, how great a good it is to put no trust in riches. His poverty hindered not the one in obtaining the kingdom; his riches helped not the other to avoid hell. Where is the point at which a man is poor? Where is the point at which he is reduced to beggary? He is not, he is not poor, who has nought, but he who desires many things! He is not rich who has large possessions, but he who stands in need of nothing. For what profit is there to possess the whole world, and yet live in greater despondency than he who has nothing? Their dispositions make men rich and poor, not the abundance or the want of money. Would you, who are a poor man, become rich? You may have your will, and no one can hinder you. Despise the world's wealth, think it nought, as it is nought. Cast out the desire of wealth, and you are straightway rich. He is rich who does not desire to become rich; he who is unwilling to be poor, is the poor man. As he is the diseased man, who even in health bemoans his case, and not the man who bears his disease more lightly than perfect health, so also he is poor who cannot endure poverty, but in the midst of wealth thinks himself poorer than the poor; not he who bears his poverty more lightly than they their riches, for he is a richer man.

For tell me, wherefore do you fear poverty? Wherefore do you tremble? Is it not by reason of hunger? Is it not for thirst? Is it not for cold? Is it not indeed for these things? There is not, there is not any one who is ever destitute in these things! For look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any one trust in the Lord, and was forsaken? Or did any one hope in Him, and was made ashamed? Sirach 2:11

And again, Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them. Matthew 6:26 No one can readily point us out any one who has perished by hunger and cold. Wherefore then do you tremble at poverty? You can not say. For if you have necessaries enough, wherefore do you tremble at it? Because you have not a multitude of servants? This truly is to be quit of masters; this is continual happiness, this is freedom from care. Is it because your vessels, your couches, your furniture are not formed of silver? And what greater enjoyment than yours has he who possesses these things? None at all. The use is the same, whether they are of this or that material. Is it because you are not an object of fear to the many? May you never become so! For what pleasure is it that any should stand in dread and fear of you? Is it because you are afraid of others? But you can not be alarmed. For would you have no fear of the power? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise from the same. Romans 13:3 Does any say, It is because we are subject to contempt, and apt to suffer ill? It is not poverty but wickedness which causes this; for many poor men have quietly passed through life, while rulers, and the rich, and powerful, have ended their days more wretchedly than all evil doers, than bandits, than grave-robbers. For what poverty brings in your case, that does wealth in theirs. For that which they who would ill-treat you do through your contemptible estate, they do to him from envy and the evil eye they cast upon him, and the latter still more than the former, for this is the stronger craving to ill-treat another. He who envies does everything with all his might and main, while the despiser oftentimes has even pity on the despised; and his very poverty, and utter want of power, has often been the cause of his deliverance.

And sometimes by saying to him, A great deed it will be if you make away with such an one! If you slay one poor man, what vast advantage will you reap? we may thus soften down his anger. But envy sets itself against the rich, and ceases not until it has wrought its will, and has poured forth its venom. See you, neither poverty nor wealth is good in itself, but our own disposition. Let us bring it to a good tone, let us discipline it in true wisdom. If this be well affected, riches cannot cast us out of the kingdom, poverty will not make us come short. But we shall meekly bear our poverty, and receive no loss in respect to the enjoyment of future goods, nor even here on earth. But we shall both enjoy what is good on earth, and obtain the good things in heaven, which may we all obtain, through the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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