

Philippians 2:1-4

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and love in the church, and encourages listeners to cultivate humility and lowliness of mind by recognizing God's sovereignty and following the example of Jesus.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, Psalm 51:16, Daniel 2:30, Acts 3:12, 1 Corinthians 4:3, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Philippians 2:2-4

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Humility In Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of unity, love, and humility among believers, emphasizing the need to have the same mind, love one another, and be of one accord. He urges against selfish ambition, vainglory, and factionalism, highlighting the significance of considering others better than oneself. Chrysostom stresses that true joy is found in fulfilling the joy of others through compassion, love, and tender mercies, ultimately reflecting the love and fellowship in Christ.

Transcript

If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfil ye my joy, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory; but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.

There is nothing better, there is nothing more affectionate, than a spiritual teacher; such an one surpasses the kindness of any natural father. Do but consider, how this blessed one entreats the Philippians concerning the things which were to their own advantage. What says he, in exhorting them concerning concord, that cause of all good things? See how earnestly, how vehemently, with how much sympathy he speaks, If there be therefore any comfort in Christ, that is, if you have any comfort in Christ, as if he had said, If you make any account of me, if you have any care of me, if you have ever received good at my hands, do this. This mode of earnestness we use when we claim a matter which we prefer to everything else. For if we did not prefer it to everything, we should not wish to receive in it our recompense for all things, nor say that through it all is represented. We indeed remind men of our carnal claims; for example, if a father were to say, If you have any reverence for your father, if any remembrance of my care in nourishing you, if any affection towards me, if any memory of the honor you have received of me, if any of my kindness, be not at enmity with your brother; that is, for all those things, this is what I ask in return.

But Paul does not so; he calls to our remembrance no carnal, but all of them spiritual benefits. That is, if you wish to give me any comfort in my temptations, and encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if you wish to show any communion in the Spirit, if you have any tender mercies and compassions, fulfil ye my joy. If any tender mercies and compassions. Paul speaks of the concord of his disciples as compassion towards himself, thus showing that the danger was extreme, if they were not of one mind. If I can obtain comfort from you, if I can obtain any consolation from our love, if I can communicate with you in the Spirit, if I can have fellowship with you in the Lord, if I can find mercy and compassion at your hands, show by your love the return of all this. All this have I gained, if you love one another.

Ver. 2. Fulfil ye my joy.

That the exhortation might not seem to be made to people who were still deficient, see how he says not, do me joy, but fulfil my joy; that is, You have begun to plant it in me, you have already given me some portion of peacefulness, but I desire to arrive at its fullness? Say, what would you? That we deliver you from dangers? That we supply somewhat to your need? Not so, but that you be of the same mind, having the same love, in which you have begun, being of one accord, of one mind. Just see, how often he repeats the same thing by reason of his great affection! That ye be of the same mind, or rather, that you be of one mind. For this is more than the same.

Having the same love. That is, let it not be simply about faith alone, but also in all other things; for there is such a thing as to be of the same mind, and yet not to have love. Having the same love, that is, love and be loved alike; do not thou enjoy much love, and show less love, so as to be covetous even in this matter; but do not suffer it in yourself. Of one accord, he adds, that is, appropriating with one soul, the bodies of all, not in substance, for that is impossible, but in purpose and intention. Let all things proceed as from one soul. What means of one accord? He shows when he says of one mind. Let your mind be one, as if from one soul.

Ver. 3. Doing nothing through faction.

He finally demands this of them, and tells them the way how this may be. Doing nothing through faction or vainglory. This, as I always say, is the cause of all evil. Hence come fightings and contentions. Hence come envyings and strifes. Hence it is that love waxes cold, when we love the praise of men, when we are slaves to the honor which is paid by the many, for it is not possible for a man to be the slave of praise, and also a true servant of God. How then shall we flee vainglory? For you have not yet told us the way. Listen then to what follows.

But in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself. Oh how full of true wisdom, how universal a gathering-word of our salvation is the lesson he has put forth! If you deem, he means, that another is greater than yourself, and persuadest yourself so, yea more, if you not only sayest it, but art fully assured of it, then you assign him the honor, and if you assign him the honor, you will not be displeased at seeing him honored by another. Do not then think him simply greater than yourself, but better, which is a very great superiority, and thou dost not think it strange nor be pained thereby, if you see him honored. Yea, though he treat you with scorn, thou dost bear it nobly, for you have esteemed him greater than yourself. Though he revile you, thou dost submit. Though he treat you ill, you bear it in silence. For when once the soul is fully assured that he is greater, it falls not into anger when it is ill-treated by him, nor yet into envy, for no one would envy those who are very far above himself, for all things belong to his superiority.

Here then he instructs the one party to be thus minded. But when he too, who enjoys such honor from you, is thus affected toward you, consider what a double wall there is erected of gentle forbearance [comp. Philip. iv. 5.]; for when you esteem him thus worthy of honor, and he you likewise, no painful thing can possibly arise; for if this conduct when shown by one is sufficient to destroy all strife, who shall break down the safeguard, when it is shown by both? Not even the Devil himself. The defense is threefold, and fourfold, yea manifold, for humanity is the cause of all good; and that you may learn this, listen to the prophet, saying, Had you desired sacrifice, I would have given it: You will not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifice for God is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise. Psalm 51:16-17 Not simply humility, but intense humility. As in the case of bodily substances, that which is broken will not rise against that which is solid, but, how many ills soever it may suffer, will perish itself rather than attack the other, so too the soul, even if constantly suffering ill, will choose rather to die, than to avenge itself by attack.

How long shall we be puffed up thus ridiculously? For as we laugh, when we see children drawing themselves up, and looking haughty, or when we see them picking up stones and throwing them, thus too the haughtiness of men belongs to a puerile intellect, and an unformed mind. Why are earth and ashes proud? Sirach 10:9 Are you highminded, O man? And why? Tell me what is the gain? Whence are you highminded against those of your own kind? Do you not share the same nature? The same life? Have you not received like honor from God? But you are wise? You ought to be thankful, not to be puffed up. Haughtiness is the first act of ingratitude, for it denies the gift of grace. He that is puffed up, is puffed up as if he had excelled by his own strength, and he who thinks he has thus excelled is ungrateful toward Him who bestowed that honor. Have you any good? Be thankful to Him who gave it. Listen to what Joseph said, and what Daniel. For when the king of Egypt sent for him, and in the presence of all his host asked him concerning that matter in which the Egyptians, who were most learned in these things, had forsaken the field, when he was on the point of carrying off everything from them, and of appearing wiser than the astrologers, the enchanters, the magicians, and all the wise men of those times, and that from captivity and servitude, and he but a youth (and his glory was thus greater, for it is not the same thing to shine when known, and contrary to expectation, so that its being unlooked for rendered him the more admirable); what then, when he came before Pharaoh? Was it Yea, I know? But what? When no one urged it on him, he said from his own excellent spirit, Do not interpretations belong to God? Behold he straightway glorified his Master, therefore he was glorified. And this also is no small thing. For that God had revealed it to him was a far greater thing than if he had himself excelled. For he showed that his words were worthy of credit, and it was a very great proof of his intimacy with God. There is no one thing so good as to be the intimate friend of God. For if, says the Scripture, he [Abraham] was justified by works, he has whereof to glory, but not toward God. Romans 4:2 For if he who has been vouchsafed grace makes his boast in God, that he is loved of Him, because his sins are forgiven, he too that works has whereof to boast, but not before God, as the other (for it is a proof of our excessive weakness); he who has received wisdom of God, how much more admirable is he? He glorifies God and is glorified of Him, for He says, Them that honor Me, I will honor. 1 Samuel 2:30

Again, listen to him who descended from Joseph, than whom no one was wiser. Are you wiser, says he, than Daniel? Ezekiel 28:3 This Daniel then, when all the wise men that were in Babylon, and the astrologers moreover, the prophets, the magicians, the enchanters, yea when the whole of their wisdom was not only coming to be convicted, but to be wholly destroyed (for their being destroyed was a clear proof that they had deceived before), this Daniel coming forward, and preparing to solve the king's question, does not take the honor to himself, but first ascribes the whole to God, and says, But as for me,

O king, it is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have beyond all men. Daniel 2:30 And the king worshipped him, and commanded that they should offer an oblation. Daniel 2:46 Do you see his humility? Do you see his excellent spirit? Do you see this habit of lowliness? Listen also to the Apostles, saying at one time, "Why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man to walk? Acts 3:12 And again, We are men of like passions with you. Acts 14:15 Now if they thus refused the honors paid them, men who by reason of the humility and power of Christ wrought greater deeds than Christ (for He says, He that believes in Me shall do greater works than those that I do John 14:12, abr), shall not we wretched and miserable men do so, who cannot even beat away gnats, much less devils? Who have not power to benefit a single man, much less the whole world, and yet think so much of ourselves that the Devil himself is not like us?

There is nothing so foreign to a Christian soul as haughtiness. Haughtiness, I say, not boldness nor courage, for these are congenial. But these are one thing, and that another; so too humility is one thing, and meanness, flattery, and adulation another.

I will now, if you wish, give you examples of all these qualities. For these things which are contraries, seem in some way to be placed near together, as the tares to the wheat, and the thorns to the rose. But while babes might easily be deceived, they who are men in truth, and are skilled in spiritual husbandry, know how to separate what is really good from the bad. Let me then lay before you examples of these qualities from the Scriptures. What is flattery, and meanness, and adulation? Ziba flattered David out of season, and falsely slandered his master. 2 Samuel 16:1-3 Much more did Ahitophel flatter Absalom. 2 Samuel 17:1-4 But David was not so, but he was humble. For the deceitful are flatterers, as when they say, O king, live forever. Daniel 2:4 Again, what flatterers the magicians are.

We shall find much to exemplify this in the case of Paul in the Acts. When he disputed with the Jews he did not flatter them, but was humble-minded (for he knew how to speak boldly), as when he says, I, brethren, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers, yet was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem. Acts 28:17

That these were the words of humility, listen how he rebukes them in what follows, Well spoke the Holy Ghost, By hearing you shall hear, and shall in nowise understand, and seeing you shall see, and in nowise perceive. Acts 28:25

Do you see his courage? Behold also the courage of John the Baptist, which he used before Herod; when he said, It is not lawful for you to have your brother Philip's wife. Mark 6:18 This was boldness, this was courage. Not so the words of Shimei, when he said, Begone, thou man of blood 2 Samuel 16:7, and yet he too spoke with boldness; but this is not courage, but audacity, and insolence, and an unbridled tongue. Jezebel too reproached Jehu, when she said, The slayer of his master 2 Kings 9:31, but this was audacity, not boldness. Elias too reproached, but this was boldness and courage; I do not trouble Israel, but you and your father's house. 1 Kings 18:18 Again, Elias spoke with boldness to the whole people, saying, How long will you go lame on both your thighs? 1 Kings 18:21, Septuagint Thus to rebuke was boldness and courage. This too the prophets did, but that other was audacity.

Would you see words both of humility and not of flattery, listen to Paul, saying, But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified. 1 Corinthians 4:3-4 This is of a spirit that becomes a Christian; and again, Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbor, go to law before the

unrighteous, and not before the saints? 1 Corinthians 6:1

Would you see the flattery of the foolish Jews? Listen to them, saying, We have no king but CÃsar. John 19:15 Would you see humility? Listen to Paul again, when he says, For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5 Would you see both flattery and audacity? Audacity 1 Samuel 25:10 in the case of Nabal, and flattery 1 Samuel 23:20 in that of the Ziphites? For in their purpose they betrayed David. Would you see wisdom 1 Samuel 26:5-12 and not flattery, that of David, how he gat Saul into his power, and yet spared him? Would you see the flattery of those who murdered Mephibosheth, whom also David slew? In fine, and as it were in outline, to sum up all, audacity is shown when one is enraged, and insults another for no just cause, either to avenge himself, or in some unjust way is audacious; but boldness and courage are when we dare to face perils and deaths, and despise friendships and enmities for the sake of what is pleasing to God. Again, flattery and meanness are when one courts another not for any right end, but hunting after some of the things of this life; but humility, when one does this for the sake of things pleasing to God, and descends from his own proper station that he may perform something great and admirable. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them. For to know them is not enough. For Scripture says, Not the hearers of a law, but the doers of a law shall be justified. Romans 2:13 Yea, knowledge itself condemns, when it is without action and deeds of virtue. Wherefore that we may escape the condemnation, let us follow after the practice, that we may obtain those good things that are promised to us, by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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