

1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 emphasizes the transformative faith of the Thessalonians and the deep bond of love that should characterize Christian relationships.

Topics: "Genuine Faith", "Selfless Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the powerful impact of genuine faith and love in spreading the word of the Lord, using the example of the Macedonian believers who turned from idols to serve the living God. He emphasizes the selfless and sacrificial nature of true friendship, comparing it to the love and devotion we should have towards God and one another. Chrysostom highlights the importance of not seeking personal gain, glory, or flattery in our service to God, but rather being willing to give of ourselves wholeheartedly for the sake of others, just as Christ did for us.

Transcript

For from you has sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come.

As a sweet-smelling ointment keeps not its fragrance shut up in itself, but diffuses it afar, and scenting the air with its perfume, so conveys it also to the senses of the neighbors; so too illustrious and admirable men do not shut up their virtue within themselves, but by their good report benefit many, and render them better. Which also then happened. Wherefore he said, So that you became ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you, he says, has sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth. You have filled, therefore, all your neighbors with instruction, and the world with wonder. For this is meant by the expression, in every place. And he has not said, your faith is reported abroad, but has sounded out; as every place near is filled with the sound of a loud trumpet, so the report of your manfulness is loud, and sounding even like that, is sufficient to fill the world, and to fall with equal sound upon all that are round about. For great actions are more loudly celebrated there, where they have taken place; afar off indeed they are celebrated, but not so much.

But in your case it was not so, but the sound of good report was spread abroad in every part of the earth. And whence know we, says one, that the words were not hyperbolic? For this nation of the Macedonians, before the coming of Christ, was renowned, and celebrated everywhere more than the Romans. And the Romans were admired on this account, that they took them captive. For the actions of the Macedonian king exceeded all report, who, setting out from a little city indeed, yet subdued the world. Wherefore also the Prophet saw him, a winged leopard, showing his swiftness, his vehemence, his fiery nature, his suddenly in a manner flying over the whole world with the trophies of his victory. And they say, that hearing from a certain philosopher, that there were infinite worlds, he groaned bitterly, that when they were numberless, he had not conquered even one. So high-minded was he, and high-souled, and celebrated everywhere. And with the fame of the king the glory of the nation also kept pace. For he was called Alexander, the Macedonian. So that what took place there was also naturally much talked of. For nothing can be concealed that relates to the illustrious. The Macedonians then were not inferior to the Romans.

And this has also arisen from their vehemence. For as if he were speaking of something living, he introduces the word gone forth; so vehement and energetic was their faith. So that we need not to speak anything, says he, for they themselves report concerning us what entering in we had unto you. They do not wait to hear from us, but those who were not present, and have not seen, anticipate those who were present, and have seen your good deeds. So manifest were they everywhere made by report. We shall not therefore need, by relating your actions, to bring them to equal zeal. For the things which they ought to have heard from, us, these they themselves talk of, anticipating us. And yet in the case of such there is frequently envy, but the exceeding greatness of the thing conquered even this, and they are the heralds of your conflicts. And though left behind, not even so are they silenced, but they are beforehand with us. And being such, it is not possible for them to disbelieve our report.

What means, What manner of entering in we had unto you? That it was full of dangers, and numberless deaths, but that none of these things troubled you. But as if nothing had happened, so you adhered to us; as if you had suffered no evil, but had enjoyed infinite good, so you received us after these things. For this was the second entering. They went to BerÅ"ia, they were persecuted, and when they came after this they so received them, as though they had been honored by these also, so that they even laid down their lives for them. The expression, What manner of entering in we had, is complicated, and contains an encomium both of them and of themselves. But he himself has turned this to their advantage. And how, he says, you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God; that is, that you did it readily, that you did it with much eagerness, that it did not require much labor to make you. In order to serve, says he, a living and true God.

Here also he introduced an exhortation, which is the part of one who would make his discourse less offensive. And to wait, he says, for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come. And to wait, he says, for His Son from heaven; Him that was crucified, Him that was buried; to wait for Him from heaven. And how from heaven? Whom He raised from the dead. You see all things at the same time; both the Resurrection, and the Ascension, and the second Coming, the Judgment, the retribution of the just, the punishment of the wicked. Jesus, he says, which delivers us from the wrath to come. This is at once comfort, and exhortation, and encouragement. For if He raised Him from the dead, and He is in heaven, and thence will come, (and you believed in Him; for if you had not believed in Him, you would not have suffered so much), this of itself is sufficient comfort. These shall suffer punishment, which he says in his second epistle, and you will have no small

consolation.

And to wait, he says, for His Son from heaven. The terrible things are in hand, but the good things are in the future, when Christ shall come from heaven. See how much hope is required, in that He who was crucified has been raised, that He has been taken up into heaven, that He will come to judge the quick and the dead.

Chap. 2:1, 2. For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it has not been found vain: but having suffered before, and been shamefully entreated, as you know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God in much conflict.

Great indeed were your actions also, but yet neither did we have recourse to human speech. But what he says above, that also he repeats here, that from both sides is shown what was the nature of the Preaching, from the miracles, and from the resolution of the preachers, and from the zeal and fervor of those who received it. For yourselves, he says, know our entering in unto you, that it has not been found vain, that is, that it was not according to man, nor of any common kind. For being fresh from great dangers, and deaths, and stripes, we immediately fell into dangers. But, he says, having suffered before, and been shamefully entreated; as you know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God. Do you see how again he refers the whole to God? To speak unto you, says he, the Gospel of God in much conflict. It is not possible to say, that there indeed we were in danger, but here we are not; yourselves also know, how great was the danger, with how much contention we were among you. Which also he says in his Epistle to the Corinthians; And I was with you in weakness, and in labor, and in fear, and in much trembling. 1 Corinthians 2:3

Ver. 3, 4. For our exhortation is not of error nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God which proves our hearts.

Do you see that, as I said, from their perseverance he makes a proof that the Preaching is divine? For, if it were not so, if it were a deceit, we should not have endured so many dangers, which allowed us not even to take breath. You were in tribulation, we were in tribulation. What then was it? Unless somewhat of things future had excited us, unless we had been persuaded that there is a good hope, we should not have been filled with the more alacrity by suffering. For who would have chosen for the sake of what we have here to endure so many sufferings, and to live a life of anxiety, and full of dangers? For whom would they persuade? For are not these things of themselves enough to trouble the disciples, when they see their teachers in dangers? But this was not your case.

For our exhortation, that is, our teaching, is not of error. The matter, he says, is not guile nor deceit, that we should give it up. It is not for things abominable, as the tricks of jugglers and sorcerers. And of uncleanness, says he, nor in guile, nor for any insurrection, like what Theudas did. But even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God. Do you see, that it is not vainglory? But God, he says, which proves our hearts. We do nothing for the sake of pleasing men, he says. For on whose account should we do these things? Then having praised them, he says, Not as wishing to please men, nor seeking the honors that are from men, he adds, But as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the Gospel. Unless He had seen that we were free from every worldly consideration, He would not have chosen us. As therefore He approved us, such we remain, as having been approved of God. Whence did he approve us, and entrust us with the Gospel? We appeared

to God approved, so we remain. It is a proof of our virtue, that we are entrusted with the Gospel; if there had been anything bad in us, God would not have approved us. But the expression that He approved us, does not here imply search. But what we do upon proving, that he does without proving. That is, as he found us proof, and trusted us, so we speak; as it is reasonable that those should, who are approved and entrusted to be worthy of the Gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, that is, not on your account do we do all these things. Because previously he had praised them, that he might not bring his speech under suspicion, he says,

Ver. 5, 6. For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; nor seeking glory of men, neither from you, nor from others, when we might have been burdensome, as Apostles of Christ.

For neither at any time, he says, were we found using words of flattery; that is, we did not flatter, which is the part of deceivers, who wish to get possession and to domineer. No one can say that we flattered in order to rule, nor that we had recourse to it for the sake of wealth. Of this, which was manifest, he afterwards calls them to be witnesses. Whether we flattered, he says, you know. But as to what was uncertain, namely, whether it were in the way of covetousness, he calls God to witness. Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you, nor from others, when we might have been burdensome, as Apostles of Christ; that is, not seeking after honors either, nor boasting ourselves, nor requiring attendance of guards. And yet even if we had done this, we should have done nothing out of character. For if persons sent forth by kings are nevertheless in honor, much more might we be. And he has not said, that we were dishonored, nor that we did not enjoy honors, which would have been to reproach them, but we did not seek them. We therefore, who, when we might have sought them, sought them not, even when the preaching required it, how should we do anything for the sake of glory? And yet even if we had sought them, not even in that case would there have been any blame. For it is fit that those men who are sent forth from God, as ambassadors now coming from heaven, should enjoy great honor.

But with an excess of forbearance we do none of these things, that we may stop the mouths of the adversaries. And it cannot be said, that to you we act thus, but not so others. For thus also he said in his Epistle to the Corinthians: For you bear with a man if he brings you into bondage, if he devours you, if he takes you captive, if he exalts himself, if he smites you on the face. 2 Corinthians 11:20 And again, His bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account. 2 Corinthians 10:10 And again, Forgive me this wrong. 2 Corinthians 12:13 He shows there also that he was exceeding humble from his suffering so many things. But here he also says concerning money, when we might have been burdensome, as Apostles of Christ.

Ver. 7, 8. But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherishes her own children: even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you had become very dear to us.

But we were gentle, he says; we exhibited nothing that was offensive or troublesome, nothing displeasing, or boastful. And the expression in the midst of you, is as if one should say, we were as one of you, not taking the higher lot. As when a nurse cherishes her own children. So ought the teacher to be. Does the nurse flatter that she may obtain glory? Does she ask money of her little children? Is she offensive or burdensome to them? Are they not more indulgent to them than mothers? Here he shows his affection. Even so, being affectionately desirous of you, he says, we are so bound to you, he says, and we not only take nothing of you, but if it be necessary even to impart to you our souls, we should not have refused. Tell

me, then, is this of a human view? And who is so foolish as to say this? We were well pleased to impart to you, he says, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls. So that this is greater than the other. And what is the gain? For from the Gospel is gain, but to give our souls, is with respect to difficulty a greater thing than that. For merely to preach is not the same thing as to give the soul. For that indeed is more precious, but the latter is a matter of more difficulty. We were willing, he says, if it were possible, even to spend our souls upon you. And this we should have been willing to do; for if we had not been willing, we should not have endured the necessity. Since then he praised, and does praise, on this account he says, that, not seeking money, nor flattering you, nor desiring glory, do we do this. For observe; they had contended much, and so ought to be praised and admired even extraordinarily, that they might be more firm; the praise was suspicious. On this account he says all these things, by way of repelling the suspicion. And he also mentions the dangers. And again, that he may not be thought to speak of the dangers on this account, as if laboring for them, and claiming to be honored by them, therefore again, as he had to mention the dangers, he added, Because you had become very dear to us; we would willingly have given our souls for you, because we were vehemently attached to you. The Gospel indeed we proclaim, because God commanded it; but so much do we love you, that, if it were possible, we would have given even our souls.

He who loves, ought so to love, that if he were asked even for his soul, and it were possible, he would not refuse it. I do not say if he were asked, but so that he would even run to present him with the gift. For nothing, nothing can be sweeter than such love; nothing will fall out there that is grievous. Truly a faithful friend is the medicine of life. Sirach 6:16 Truly a faithful friend is a strong defense. Sirach 6:14 For what will not a genuine friend perform? What pleasure will he not afford? What benefit? What security? Though you should name infinite treasures, none of them is comparable to a genuine friend. And first let us speak of the great delight of friendship itself. A friend rejoices at seeing his friend, and expands with joy. He is knit to him with an union of soul that affords unspeakable pleasure. And if he only calls him to remembrance, he is roused in mind, and transported.

I speak of genuine friends, men of one soul, who would even die for each other, who love fervently. Do not, thinking of those who barely love, who are table-companions, mere nominal friends, suppose that my discourse is refuted. If any one has a friend such as I speak of, he will acknowledge the truth of my words. He, though he sees his friend every day, is not satiated. For him he prays for the same things as for himself. I know one, who calling upon holy men in behalf of his friend, besought them to pray first for him, and then for himself. So dear a thing is a good friend, that times and places are loved on his account. For as bodies that are luminous spread their radiance to the neighboring places, so also friends leave a grace of their own in the places to which they have come. And oftentimes in the absence of friends, as we have stood on those places, we have wept, and remembering the days which we passed together, have sighed. It is not possible to represent by speech, how great a pleasure the intercourse with friends affords. But those only know, who have experience. From a friend we may both ask a favor, and receive one without suspicion. When they enjoin anything upon us, then we feel indebted to them; but when they are slow to do this, then we are sorrowful. We have nothing which is not theirs. Often despising all things here, on their account we are not willing to depart hence; and they are more longed for by us than the light.

For, in good truth, a friend is more to be longed for than the light; I speak of a genuine one. And wonder not: for it were better for us that the sun should be extinguished, than that we should be deprived of friends; better to live in darkness, than to be without friends. And I will tell you why. Because many who see the sun are in darkness, but they can never be even in tribulation, who abound in friends. I speak of

spiritual friends, who prefer nothing to friendship. Such was Paul, who would willingly have given his own soul, even though not asked, nay would have plunged into hell for them. With so ardent a disposition ought we to love.

I wish to give you an example of friendship. Friends, that is, friends according to Christ, surpass fathers and sons. For tell me not of friends of the present day, since this good thing also has past away with others. But consider, in the time of the Apostles, I speak not of the chief men, but of the believers themselves generally; all, he says, were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that anything of the things which he possessed was his own...and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need. Acts 4:32-35 There were then no such words as mine and yours. This is friendship, that a man should not consider his goods his own, but his neighbor's, that his possessions belong to another; that he should be as careful of his friend's soul, as of his own; and the friend likewise.

And where is it possible, somebody says, that such an one should be found? Because we have not the will; for it is possible. If it were not possible, neither would Christ have commanded it; he would not have discoursed so much concerning love. A great thing is friendship, and how great, no one can learn, and no discourse represent, but experience itself. It is this that has caused the heresies. This makes the Greeks to be Greeks. He who loves does not wish to command, nor to rule, but is rather obliged when he is ruled and commanded. He wishes rather to bestow a favor than to receive one, for he loves, and is so affected, as not having satisfied his desire. He is not so much gratified when good is done to him, as when he is doing good. For he wishes to oblige, rather than to be indebted to him; or rather he wishes both to be beholden to him, and to have him his debtor. And he wishes both to bestow favors, and not to seem to bestow them, but himself to be the debtor. I think that perhaps many of you do not understand what has been said. He wishes to be the first in bestowing benefits, and not to seem to be the first, but to be returning a kindness. Which God also has done in the case of men. He purposed to give His own Son for us; but that He might not seem to bestow a favor, but to be indebted to us, He commanded Abraham to offer his son, that while doing a great kindness, He might seem to do nothing great.

For when indeed there is no love, we both upbraid men with our kindnesses and we exaggerate little ones; but when there is love, we both conceal them and wish to make the great appear small, that we may not seem to have our friend for a debtor, but ourselves to be debtors to him, in having him our debtor. I know that the greater part do not understand what is said, and the cause is, that I am speaking of a thing which now dwells in heaven. As therefore if I were speaking of any plant growing in India, of which no one had ever had any experience, no speech would avail to represent it, though I should utter ten thousand words: so also now whatever things I say, I say in vain, for no one will be able to understand me. This is a plant that is planted in heaven, having for its branches not heavy-clustered pearls, but a virtuous life, much more acceptable than they. What pleasure would you speak of, the foul and the honorable? But that of friendship excels them all, though you should speak of the sweetness of honey. For that satiates, but a friend never does, so long as he is a friend; nay, the desire of him rather increases, and such pleasure never admits of satiety. And a friend is sweeter than the present life. Many therefore after the death of their friends have not wished to live any longer. With a friend one would bear even banishment; but without a friend would not choose to inhabit even his own country. With a friend even poverty is tolerable, but without him both health and riches are intolerable. He has another self: I am straitened, because I cannot instance by an example. For I should in that case make it appear that what has been said is much less than it ought to be.

And these things indeed are so here. But from God the reward of friendship is so great, that it cannot be expressed. He gives a reward, that we may love one another, the thing for which we owe a reward. Pray, He says, and receive a reward, for that for which we owe a reward, because we ask for good things. For that which you ask, He says, receive a reward. Fast, and receive a reward. Be virtuous, and receive a reward, though you rather owe a reward. But as fathers, when they have made their children virtuous, then further give them a reward; for they are debtors, because they have afforded them a pleasure; so also God acts. Receive a reward, He says, if you be virtuous, for you delight your Father, and for this I owe you a reward. But if you be evil, not so: for you provoke Him that begot you. Let us not then provoke God, but let us delight Him, that we may obtain the kingdom of Heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be the glory and the strength, world without end. Amen.

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