

1 Timothy 1:15, 16

by St. John Chrysostom

We must believe in the gifts of God and glorify Him in our body and spirit by living a life of virtue and modesty.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, Romans 3:23, Romans 5:20, Romans 8:18, 1 Timothy 1:15

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Faith Salvation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the incredible mercy and longsuffering of Jesus Christ to save sinners, using himself as an example of God's extraordinary kindness and forgiveness. He emphasizes the importance of faith in salvation, contrasting it with the disbelief and objections faced by those who struggle to comprehend God's grace towards sinners. Chrysostom highlights the need for believers to trust in God's mercy and not to despair, as demonstrated through the humility and gratitude of Paul, who considered himself the chief of sinners yet received mercy as a pattern for future believers to have hope in eternal life.

Transcript

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in Him to life everlasting.

The favors of God so far exceed human hope and expectation, that often they are not believed. For God has bestowed upon us such things as the mind of man never looked for, never thought of. It is for this reason that the Apostles spend much discourse in securing a belief of the gifts that are granted us of God. For as men, upon receiving some great good, ask themselves if it is not a dream, as not believing it; so it is with respect to the gifts of God. What then was it that was thought incredible? That those who were enemies, and sinners, neither justified by the law, nor by works, should immediately through faith alone be advanced to the highest favor. Upon this head accordingly Paul has discoursed at length in his Epistle to the Romans, and here again at length. This is a faithful saying, he says, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

As the Jews were chiefly attracted by this, he persuades them not to give heed to the law, since they could not attain salvation by it without faith. Against this he contends; for it seemed to them incredible, that a man who had mis-spent all his former life in vain and wicked actions, should afterwards be saved by his faith alone. On this account he says, It is a saying to be believed. But some not only disbelieved but even objected, as the Greeks do now. Let us then do evil, that good may come. This was the consequence they

drew in derision of our faith, from his words, Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Romans 3:8, and 5:20 So when we discourse to them of Hell they say, How can this be worthy of God? When man has found his servant offending, he forgives it, and thinks him worthy of pardon and does God punish eternally? And when we speak of the Laver, and of the remission of sins through it, this too they say is unworthy of God, that he who has committed offenses without number should have his sins remitted. What perverseness of mind is this, what a spirit of contention does it manifest! Surely if forgiveness is an evil, punishment is a good; but if punishment is an evil, remission of it is a good. I speak according to their notions, for according to ours, both are good. This I shall show at another time, for the present would not suffice for a matter so deep, and which requires to be elaborately argued. I must lay it before your Charity at a fitting season. At present let us proceed with our proposed subject. This is a faithful saying, he says. But why is it to be believed?

This appears both from what precedes and from what follows. Observe how he prepares us for this assertion, and how he then dwells upon it. For he has previously declared that He showed mercy to me a blasphemer and a persecutor; this was in the way of preparation. And not only did He show mercy, but He accounted me faithful. So far should we be, he means, from disbelieving that He showed mercy. For no one, who should see a prisoner admitted into a palace, could doubt whether he obtained mercy. And this was visibly the situation of Paul, for he makes himself the example. Nor is he ashamed to call himself a sinner, but rather delights in it, as he thus can best demonstrate the miracle of God's regard for him, and that He had thought him worthy of such extraordinary kindness.

But how is it, that he here calls himself a sinner, nay, the chief of sinners, whereas he elsewhere asserts that he was touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless? Philippians 3:6 Because with respect to the righteousness which God has wrought, the justification which is really sought, even those who are righteous in the law are sinners, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 Therefore he does not say righteousness simply, but the righteousness which is in the law. As a man that has acquired wealth, with respect to himself appears rich, but upon a comparison with the treasures of kings is very poor and the chief of the poor; so it is in this case. Compared with Angels, even righteous men are sinners; and if Paul, who wrought the righteousness that is in the law, was the chief of sinners, what other man can be called righteous? For he says not this to condemn his own life as impure, let not this be imagined; but comparing his own legal righteousness with the righteousness of God, he shows it to be nothing worth, and not only so, but he proves those who possess it to be sinners.

Ver. 16. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in Him to life everlasting.

See how he further humbles and depreciates himself, by naming a fresh and less creditable reason. For that he obtained mercy on account of his ignorance, does not so much imply that he who obtained mercy was a sinner, or under deep condemnation; but to say that he obtained mercy in order that no sinner hereafter might despair of finding mercy, but that each might feel sure of obtaining the like favor, this is an excess of humiliation, such that even in calling himself the chief of sinners, a blasphemer and a persecutor, and one not meet to be called an Apostle, he had said nothing like it. This will appear by an example. Suppose a populous city, all whose inhabitants were wicked, some more so, and some less, but all deserving of condemnation; and let one among that multitude be more deserving of punishment than all the rest, and guilty of every kind of wickedness. If it were declared that the king was willing to pardon all, it would not be so readily believed, as if they were to see this most wicked wretch actually pardoned. There could then be no longer any doubt. This is what Paul says, that God, willing to give men full assurance that

He pardons all their transgressions, chose, as the object of His mercy, him who was more a sinner than any; for when I obtained mercy, he argues, there could be no doubt of others: as familiarly speaking we might say, If God pardons such an one, he will never punish anybody; and thus he shows that he himself, though unworthy of pardon, for the sake of others' salvation, first obtained that pardon. Therefore, he says, since I am saved, let no one doubt of salvation. And observe the humility of this blessed man; he says not, that in me he might show forth His longsuffering, but all longsuffering; as if he had said, greater longsuffering He could not show in any case than in mine, nor find a sinner that so required all His pardon, all His long-suffering; not a part only, like those who are only partially sinners, but all His longsuffering.

For a pattern to those who should hereafter believe. This is said for comfort, for encouragement. But because he had spoken highly of the Son, and of the great love which He has manifested, lest he should be thought to exclude the Father from this, he ascribes the glory to Him also.

Ver. 17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

For these things, then, we glorify not the Son only, but the Father. Here let us argue with the heretics. Speaking of the Father, he says, To the only God. Is the Son then not God? The only immortal. Is the Son then not immortal? Or does He not possess that Himself, which hereafter He will give to us? Yes, they say, He is God and immortal, but not such as the Father. What then? Is He of inferior essence, and therefore of inferior immortality? What then is a greater and a less immortality? For immortality is nothing else than the not being subject to destruction. For there is a greater and a less glory; but immortality does not admit of being greater or less: as neither is there a greater and a less health. For a thing must either be destructible, or altogether indestructible. Are we men then immortal even as He? God forbid! Surely not! Why? Because He has it by nature, but we adventitiously. Why then do you make the difference? Because the Father, he says, is made such as He is by no other: but the Son is what He is, from the Father. This we also confess, not denying that the Son is generated from the Father incorruptibly. And we glorify the Father, he means, for having generated the Son, such as He is. Thus you see the Father is most glorified, when the Son has done great things. For the glory of the Son is referred again to Him. And since He generated Him omnipotent and such as He is in Himself, it is not more the glory of the Son than of the Father, that He is self-sufficient, and self-maintained, and free from infirmity. It has been said of the Son, By whom He made the worlds. Hebrews 1:2 Now there is a distinction observed among us between creation and workmanship. For one works and toils and executes, another rules; and why? Because he that executes is the inferior. But it is not so there; nor is the sovereignty with One, the workmanship with the Other. For when we hear, By whom He made the worlds, we do not exclude the Father from creation. Nor when we say, To the King immortal, do we deny dominion to the Son. For these are common to the One and the Other, and each belongs to Both. The Father created, in that He begot the creating Son; the Son rules, as being Lord of all things created. For He does not work for hire, nor in obedience to others, as workmen do among us, but from His own goodness and love for mankind. But has the Son ever been seen? No one can affirm this. What means then, To the King immortal, invisible, the only wise God? Or when it is said, There is no other name whereby we must be saved: and again, There is salvation in no other? Acts 4:12

To Him be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Now honor and glory are not mere words; and since He has honored us not by words only, but by what He has done for us, so let us honor Him by works and deeds. Yet this honor touches us, while that reaches

not Him, for He needs not the honor that comes from us, we do need that which is from Him.

In honoring Him, therefore, we do honor to ourselves. He who opens his eyes to gaze on the light of the sun, receives delight himself, as he admires the beauty of the star, but does no favor to that luminary, nor increases its splendor, for it continues what it was; much more is this true with respect to God. He who admires and honors God does so to his own salvation, and highest benefit; and how? Because he follows after virtue, and is honored by Him. For them that honor Me, He says, I will honor. 1 Samuel 4:30 How then is He honored, if He enjoys no advantage from our honor? Just as He is said to hunger and thirst. For He assumes everything that is ours, that He may in anywise attract us to Him. He is said to receive honors, and even insults, that we may be afraid. But with all this we are not attracted towards Him!

Moral. Let us then glorify God, and bear God both in our body and in our spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:20 And how is one to glorify Him in the body? Says one, and how in the spirit? The soul is here called the spirit to distinguish it from the body. But how may we glorify Him in the body and in the spirit? He glorifies Him in the body, who does not commit adultery or fornication, who avoids gluttony and drunkenness, who does not affect a showy exterior, who makes such provision for himself as is sufficient for health only: and so the woman, who does not perfume nor paint her person, but is satisfied to be such as God made her, and adds no device of her own.

For why do you add your own embellishments to the work which God made? Is not His workmanship sufficient for you? Or do you endeavor to add grace to it, as if forsooth you were the better artist? It is not for yourself, but to attract crowds of lovers, that you thus adornest your person, and insultest your Creator. And do not say, What can I do? It is no wish of my own, but I must do it for my husband. I cannot win his love except I consent to this. God made you beautiful, that He might be admired even in your beauty, and not that He might be insulted.

Do not therefore make Him so ill a return, but requite Him with modesty and chastity. God made you beautiful, that He might increase the trials of your modesty. For it is much harder for one that is lovely to be modest, than for one who has no such attractions, for which to be courted. Why does the Scripture tell us, that Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored Genesis 39:6, but that we might the more admire his modesty coupled with beauty? Has God made you beautiful? Why do you make yourself otherwise?

For as though one should overlay a golden statue with a daubing of mire, so it is with those women that use paints. Thou besmearest yourself with red and white earth! But the homely, you say, may fairly have recourse to this. And why? To hide their ugliness? It is a vain attempt. For when was the natural appearance improved upon by that which is studied and artificial? And why should you be troubled at your want of beauty, since it is no reproach? For hear the saying of the Wise Man, Commend not a man for his beauty, neither abhor a man for his outward appearance.

Sirach 11:2 Let God be rather admired, the best Artificer, and not man, who has no merit in being made such as he is. What are the advantages, tell me, of beauty? None. It exposes its possessor to greater trials, mishaps, perils, and suspicions. She that wants it escapes suspicion; she that possesses it, except she practice a great and extraordinary reserve, incurs an evil report, and what is worse than all, the suspicion of her husband, who takes less pleasure in beholding her beauty, than he suffers pain from jealousy.

And her beauty fades in his sight from familiarity, while she suffers in her character from the imputation of weakness, dissipation, and wantonness, and her very soul becomes degraded and full of haughtiness. To

these evils personal beauty is exposed. But she who has not this attraction, escapes unmolested. The dogs do not assail her; she is like a lamb, reposing in a secure pasture, where no wolf intrudes to harass her, because the shepherd is at hand to protect her.

The real superiority is, not that one is fair, and the other homely, but it is a superiority that one, even if she is not fair, is unchaste, and the other is not wicked. Tell me wherein is the perfection of eyes? Is it in their being soft, and rolling, and round, and dark, or in their clearness and quicksightedness. Is it the perfection of a lamp to be elegantly formed, and finely turned, or to shine brightly, and to enlighten the whole house? We cannot say it is not this, for the other is indifferent, and this the real object. Accordingly we often say to the maid whose charge it is, You have made a bad lamp of it. So entirely is it the use of a lamp to give light. So it matters not what is the appearance of the eye, while it performs its office with full efficiency. We call the eye bad, which is dim or disordered, and which, when open, does not see. For that is bad, which does not perform its proper office -- and this is the fault of eyes. And for a nose, tell me, when is it a good one? When it is straight, and polished on either side, and finely proportioned? Or when it is quick to receive odors, and transmit them to the brain? Any one can answer this.

Come now, let us illustrate this by an example -- as of grippers, I mean the instruments so called; we say those are well-made, which are able to take up and hold things, not those which are only handsomely and elegantly shaped. So those are good teeth which are fit for the service of dividing and chewing our food, not those which are beautifully set. And applying the same reasoning to other parts of the body, we shall call those members beautiful, which are sound, and perform their proper functions aright. So we think any instrument, or plant, or animal good, not because of its form or color, but because it answers its purpose. And he is thought a good servant, who is useful and ready for our service, not one who is comely but dissolute. I trust you now understand how it is in your power to be beautiful.

And since the greatest and most important benefits are equally enjoyed by all, we are under no disadvantage. Whether we are beautiful or not, we alike behold this universe, the sun, the moon, and the stars; we breathe the same air, we partake alike of water, and the fruits of the earth. And if we may say what will sound strange, the homely are more healthy than the beautiful. For these, to preserve their beauty, engage in no labor, but give themselves up to indolence and delicate living, by which their bodily energies are impaired; while the others, having no such care, spend all their attention simply and entirely on active pursuits.

Let us then glorify God, and take and bear Him in our body. 1 Corinthians 6:20 Let us not affect a beautiful appearance; that care is vain and unprofitable. Let us not teach our husbands to admire the mere outward form; for if such be your adornment, his very habit of viewing your face will make him easy to be captivated by a harlot. But if you teach him to love good manners, and modesty, he will not be ready to wander, for he will see no attractions in a harlot, in whom those qualities are not found, but the reverse. Neither teach him to be captivated by laughter, nor by a loose dress, lest you prepare a poison against yourself. Accustom him to delight in modesty, and this you will do, if your attire be modest. But if you have a flaunting air, an unsteady manner, how can you address him in a serious strain? And who will not hold you in contempt and derision?

But how is it possible to glorify God in our spirit? By practicing virtue, by adorning the soul. For such embellishment is not forbidden. Thus we glorify God, when we are good in every respect, and we shall be glorified by Him in a much higher degree in that great day. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18 Of which that

we may all be partakers, God grant, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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