

Homily 39 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's ministry in Athens was met with opposition, but he was led by the Spirit to Corinth, where he had success and established a church.

Scripture: Psalm 10:4, Acts 17:32, Acts 18:1, Acts 18:4, Acts 18:6, Acts 18:8, Acts 18:11, Acts 18:13, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 6:17

Topics: "Persecution And Suffering", "Christian Meekness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Paul's experiences in Athens and Corinth, highlighting how some mocked the resurrection of the dead while others believed, such as Dionysius the Areopagite and Damaris. Despite facing opposition and blasphemy, Paul continued to preach and reason in the synagogues, eventually moving to the Gentiles. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of meekness, silence, and long-suffering in the face of insults, drawing parallels between insults towards humans and insults towards God, urging the congregation to imitate Christ's response to abuse with patience and forbearance.

Transcript

Acts XVII. 32-34, XVIII. 1

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear you again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.

What can be the reason that, having persuaded (some so far as to say) that they would hear him again, and there being no dangers, Paul is so in haste to leave Athens? Probably he knew that he should do them no great good; moreover he was led by the Spirit to Corinth. (b) For the Athenians, although fond of hearing strange things, nevertheless did not attend (to him); for this was not their study, but only to be always having something to say; which was the cause that made them hold off from him.

But if this was their custom, how is it that they accuse him, he seems to be a setter forth of strange gods? Acts 17:18 Yes, but these were matters they did not at all know what to make of. Howbeit, he did convert both Dionysius the Areopagite, and some others. For those who were careful of (right) living, quickly received the word; but the others not so. It seemed to Paul sufficient to have cast the seeds of the

doctrines. (a) To Corinth then, as I said, he was led by the Spirit, in which city he was to abide. (c) And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, of Pontus by birth, lately come from Italy-- for the greater part of his life had been passed there -- and Priscilla his wife, because that Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome.

Acts 18:2 For though it was in the reign of Nero that the war against the Jews was consummated, yet from the time of Claudius and thenceforward it was fanning up, at a distance indeed, so that, were it but so, they might come to their senses, and from Rome they were now driven as common pests. This is why it is so ordered by Providence that Paul was led there as a prisoner, that he might not as a Jew be driven away, but as acting under military custody might even be guarded there. (Having found these,) he came to them, and because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and wrought: for by occupation they were tent-makers.

Acts 18:3 Lo, what a justification he found for dwelling in the same house with them! For because here, of all places, it was necessary that he should not receive, as he himself says, That wherein they glory, they may be found, even as we 2 Corinthians 11:12, it is providentially ordered that he there abides. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus had come from Macedonia, Paul was straitened in the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. (v. 4, 5.)

And when the Jews opposed and blasphemed, i.e. they tried to bear him down (■ πηρ■αζον), they set upon him -- What then does Paul? He separates from them, and in a very awful manner: and though he does not now say, It was need that the word should be spoken unto you, yet he darkly intimates it to them:-- and when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Acts 18:6 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. See how having again said, Henceforth -- for all that, he does not neglect them; so that it was to rouse them that he said this, and thereupon came to Justus, whose house was contiguous to the synagogue, so that even from this they might have jealousy, from the very proximity. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house.

This also was, of all things, enough to bring them over. And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not your peace: for I am with you, and no man shall set on you to hurt you: for I have much people in this city. Acts 18:8-10 See by how many reasons He persuades him, and how He puts last the reason which of all others most prevailed with him, I have much people in this city.

Then how was it, you may ask, that they set upon him? And yet, the writer tells us, they prevailed nothing, but brought him to the proconsul. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. And when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat. (v. 11, 12.) Do you mark why those men were ever contriving to give a public turn to the misdemeanors (they accused them of)?

Thus see here: (b) Saying, This fellow seduces men contrary to the law to worship God. And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said: If indeed it were any wrong-doing or wicked lewdness, O you Jews, reason would that I should bear with you. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your

law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment-seat. Acts 18:13-16 This Gallio seems to me to have been a sensible man. (a) Thus observe, when these had said, Against the law he seduces men to worship God, he cared for none of these things: and observe how he answers them: If indeed it were any matter affecting the city, any wrong-doing or wicked lewdness, etc. (c) Then all the Jews took Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat: and Gallio cared for none of these things Acts 18:17: but their beating him he did not take as an insult to himself. So petulant were the Jews. But let us look over again what has been said.

(Recapitulation.) And when they heard, Acts 17:32 what great and lofty doctrines, they did not even attend, but jeered at the Resurrection! For the natural man, it says, receives not the things of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 And so, it says, Paul went forth. Acts 17:33 How? Having persuaded some; derided by others. But certain men, it says, clave unto him, and believed, among whom was also Dionysius the Areopagite and some others. Acts 17:34 And after these things, etc. And having found a certain Jew by name Aquila, of Pontus by birth, lately come from Italy, because that Claudius had ordered all Jews to depart from Rome, he came to them, and because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers.

Acts 18:1-3 Being of Pontus, this Aquila * * * . Observe how, not in Jerusalem, nor near it (the crisis), was hasting to come, but at a greater distance. And with him he abides, and is not ashamed to abide, nay, for this very reason he does abide, as having a suitable lodging-place, for to him it was much more suitable than any king's palace. And smile not thou, beloved, to hear (of his occupation). For (it was good for him) even as to the athlete the palæstra is more useful than delicate carpets; so to the warrior the iron sword (is useful), not that of gold.

And wrought, though he preached. Let us be ashamed, who though we have no preaching to occupy us, live in idleness. And he disputed in the synagogue every sabbath day, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks Acts 18:4: but when they opposed and blasphemed he withdrew, by this expecting to draw them more. For wherefore having left that house did he come to live hard by the synagogue? Was it not for this? For it was not that he saw any danger here. But therefore it is that Paul having testified to them -- not teaches now, but testifies -- having shaken his garments, to terrify them not by word only but by action, said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads Acts 18:6: he speaks the more vehemently as having already persuaded many.

I, says he, am clean. Then we also are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them. From this time forth I will go to the Gentiles. So that also when he says, Henceforth let no man trouble me Galatians 6:17, he says it to terrify. For not so much did the punishment terrify, as this stung them. And having removed thence he came into the house of one named Justus, that worshipped God, whose house was contiguous to the synagogue Acts 18:7, and there abode, by this wishing to persuade them that he was in earnest (πρὸς τὴν ἑθνην πειλεῖτο) to go to the Gentiles.

Accordingly, mark immediately the ruler of the synagogue converted, and many others, when he had done this. Crispus the ruler of the synagogue believed in the Lord, with his whole house: and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.-- Acts 18:8 With his whole house: observe the converts in those times doing this with their entire household. This Crispus he means where he writes, I baptized none save Crispus and Gaius. 1 Corinthians 1:14 This (same) I take to be called Sosthenes -- (evidently) a believer, insomuch that he is beaten, and is always present with Paul.

And the Lord said in the night, etc. Now even the number (of the much people) persuaded him, but Christ's claiming them for His own (moved him) more. Yet He says also, Fear not: for the danger was become greater now, both because more believed, and also the ruler of the synagogue. This was enough to rouse him. Not that he was reprov'd as fearing; but that he should not suffer anything; I am with you, and none shall set upon you to hurt you. (v. 9, 10.) For He did not always permit them to suffer evil, that they might not become too weak.

For nothing so griev'd Paul, as men's unbelief and setting themselves (against the Truth): this was worse than the dangers. Therefore it is that (Christ) appears to him now. And he continued a year and six months, etc. Acts 18:11 After the year and six months, they set upon him. And when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, etc. (v. 12, 13), because they had no longer the use of their own laws. (c) And observe how prudent he is: for he does not say straightway, I care not, but, If, says he, it were a matter of wrong-doing or wicked lewdness, O you Jews, reason would that I should bear with you; but if it be a question of doctrine and words and of your law, see ye to it, for I do not choose to be a judge of such matters. (v. 14, 15.) (g) He taught them that not such are the matters which crave a judicial sentence, but they do all things out of order.

And he does not say, It is not my duty, but, I do not choose, that they may not trouble him again. Thus Pilate said in the case of Christ, Take ye Him, and judge him according to your law. John 18:31 But they were just like men drunken and mad. (d) And he drove them from the judgment-seat Acts 18:16-- he effectually closed the tribunal against them. Then all (the Jews) having seized Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things.

Acts 18:17. (a) This thing, of all others, set them on (to this violence)-- their persuasion that the governor would not even let himself down (to notice it). (e) It was a splendid victory. O the shame they were put to! (b) For it is one thing to have come off victorious from a controversy, and another for those to learn that he cared nothing for the affair. (f) And Gallio cared for none of these things: and yet the whole was meant as an insult to him! But, forsooth, as if they had received authority (they did this).

Why did he (Sosthenes), though he also had authority, not beat (them)? But they were (otherwise) trained: so that the judge should learn which party was more reasonable. This was no small benefit to those present -- both the reasonableness of these, and the audacity of those. (h) He was beaten, and said nothing.

This man let us also imitate: to them that beat us, let us return blow for blow, by meekness, by silence, by long-suffering. More grievous these wounds, greater this blow, and more heavy. For to show that it is not the receiving a blow in the body that is grievous, but the receiving it in the mind, we often smite people, but since it is in the way of friendship, they are even pleased: but if you smite any indifferent person in an insolent manner, you have pained him exceedingly, because you have touched his heart.

So let us smite their heart. But that meekness inflicts a greater blow than fierceness, come, let us prove, so far as that is possible, by words. For the sure proof indeed is by acts and by experience: but if you will, let us also make the enquiry by word, though indeed we have often made it already. Now in insults, nothing pains us so much, as the opinion pass'd by the spectators; for it is not the same thing to be insulted in public and in private, but those same insults we endure even with ease, when we suffer them in a solitary place, and with none by to witness them, or know of them.

So true is it that it is not the insult, as it is in itself, that mortifies us, but the having to suffer it in the sight of all men: since if one should do us honor in the sight of all men, and insult us in private, we shall notwithstanding even feel obliged to him. The pain then is not in the nature of the insult, but in the opinion of the beholders; that one may not seem to be contemptible. What then, if this opinion should be in our favor? Is not the man attempting to disgrace us himself more disgraced, when men give their opinion in our favor?

Say, whom do the bystanders despise? Him who insults, or him who being insulted keeps silence? Passion indeed suggests, that they despise him who is insulted: but let us look into it now while we are free from that excitement, in order that we may not be carried away when the time comes. Say, whom do we all condemn? Plainly the man who insults: and if he be an inferior, we shall say that he is even mad; if an equal, that he is foolish; if a superior, still we shall not approve of it.

For which man, I ask, is worthy of approval, the man who is excited, who is tossed with a tempest of passion, who is infuriated like a wild beast, who demeans himself in this sort against our common nature, or he who lives in a state of calm, in a haven of repose, and in virtuous equanimity? Is not the one like an angel, the other not even like a man? For the one cannot even bear his own evils, while the other bears even those of others also: here, the man cannot even endure himself; there, he endures another too: the one is in danger of shipwreck, the other sails in safety, his ship wafted along the favoring gales: for he has not suffered the squall of passion to catch his sails and overturn the bark of his understanding: but the breath of a soft and sweet air fanning upon it, the breath of forbearance, wafts it with much tranquillity into the haven of wise equanimity.

And like as when a ship is in danger of foundering, the sailors know not what they cast away, whether what they lay hands upon be their own or other men's property, but they throw overboard all the contents without discrimination, alike the precious and what is not such: but when the storm has ceased, then reckoning up all that they have thrown out, they shed tears, and are not sensible of the calm for the loss of what they have thrown overboard: so here, when passion blows hard, and the storm is raised, people in flinging out their words know not how to use order or fitness; but when the passion has ceased, then recalling to mind what kind of words they have given utterance to, they consider the loss and feel not the quiet, when they remember the words by which they have disgraced themselves, and sustained most grievous loss, not as to money, but as to character for moderation and gentleness.

Anger is a darkness. The fool, says Scripture, has said in his heart, There is no God. Psalm 13:1 Perhaps also of the angry man it is suitable to say the same, that the angry man has said, There is no God. For, says Scripture, Through the multitude of his anger he will not seek (after God). Psalm 10:4 For let what pious thought will enter in, (passion) thrusts and drives all out, flings all athwart. (b) When you are told, that he whom you abused uttered not one bitter word, do you not for this feel more pain than you have inflicted? (a) If you in your own mind do not feel more pain than he whom you have abused, abuse still; (but) though there be none to call you to account, the judgment of your conscience, having taken you privately, shall give you a thousand lashes, (when you think) how you poured out a flood of railings on one so meek, and humble, and forbearing.

We are forever saying these things, but we do not see them exhibited in works. You, a human being, insult your fellow-man? You, a servant, your fellow-servant? But why do I wonder at this, when many even insult God? Let this be a consolation to you when suffering insult. Are you insulted? God also is insulted. Are you reviled? God also was reviled. Are you treated with scorn? Why, so was our Master also. In these

things He shares with us, but not so in the contrary things. For He never insulted another unjustly: God forbid!

He never reviled, never did a wrong. So that we are those who share with Him, not ye. For to endure when insulted is God's part: to be merely abusive, is the part of the devil. See the two sides. You have a devil John 7:20 and 18:22, Christ was told: He received a blow on the face from the servant of the high-priest. They who wrongfully insult, are in the same class with these. For if Peter was even called Satan Matthew 16:23 for one word; much more shall these men, when they do the works of the Jews, be called, as those were called, children of the devil John 8:44, because they wrought the works of the devil.

You insult; who are you, I ask (that you do so)? Nay, rather the reason why you insult, is this, that you are nothing: no one that is human insults. So that what is said in quarrels, Who are you? ought to be put in the contrary way: Insult: for you are nothing. Instead of that the phrase is, Who are you, that you insult? A better man than you, is the answer. And yet it is just the contrary: but because we put the question amiss, therefore they answer amiss: so that the fault is ours. For as if we thought it was for great men to insult, therefore we ask, Who are you, that you insult? And therefore they make this answer.

But, on the contrary, we ought to say: Do you insult? Insult still: for you are nobody: whereas to those who do not insult this should be said: Who are you that you insult not?-- you have surpassed human nature. This is nobility, this is generosity, to speak nothing ungenerous, though a man may deserve to have it spoken to him. Tell me now, how many are there who are not worthy to be put to death? Nevertheless, the judge does not this in his own person, but interrogates them; and not this either, in his own person.

But if it is not to be suffered, that the judge, sitting in judgment, should (in his own person) speak with a criminal, but he does all by the intervention of a third person, much more is it our duty not to insult our equals in rank; for all the advantage we shall get of them will be, not so much to have disgraced them, as to be made to learn that we have disgraced ourselves. Well then, in the case of the wicked, this is why we must not insult (even them); in the case of the good there is another reason also because they do not deserve it: and for a third, because it is not right to be abusive.

But as things are, see what comes of it; the person abused is a man, and the person abusing is a man, and the spectators men. What then? Must the beasts come between them and settle matters? For only this is left. For when both the wrong-doers and those who delight in the wrong-doing are men, the part of reconciler is left for the beasts: for just as when the masters quarrel in a house, there is nothing left but for the servants to reconcile them -- even if this be not the result, for the nature of the thing demands this -- just so is it here.-- Are you abusive?

Well may you be so, for you are not even human. Insolence seemed to be a high-born thing; it seemed to belong to the great; whereas it belongs rather to slaves; but to give good words belongs to free men. For as to do ill is the part of those, so to suffer ill is the part of these.-- Just as if some slave should steal the master's property, some old hag -- such a thing as that is the abusive man. And like as some detestable thief and runaway, with studied purpose stealing in, looks all around him, wishing to filch something: so does this man, even as he, look narrowly at all on every side, studying how to throw out some (reproach).

Or perhaps we may set him forth by a different sort of example. Just as if one should steal filthy vessels out of a house, and bring them out in the presence of all men, the things purloined do not so disgrace the persons robbed, as they disgrace the thief himself: just so this man, by bringing out his words in the presence of all men, casts disgrace not on others but on himself by the words, in giving vent to this

language, and be-fouling both his tongue and his mind. For it is all one, when we quarrel with bad men, as if one for the sake of striking a man who is immersed in putrefying filth should defile himself by plunging his hands into the nastiness.

Therefore, reflecting on these things, let us flee the mischief thence accruing, and keep a clean tongue, that being clear from all abusiveness, we may be enabled with strictness to pass through the life present, and to attain unto the good things promised to those that love Him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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