

1 Corinthians 6:15-16

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of glorifying God in all aspects of life, recognizing the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, and avoiding vain glory and fornication.

Scripture: Daniel 3:17, Matthew 26:41, 1 Corinthians 6:17-19

Topics: "Body Of Christ", "Spiritual Purity"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of honoring our bodies as members of Christ, warning against the defilement that comes from immorality and the need to flee from sin. He emphasizes that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, urging believers to glorify God in both body and spirit. Chrysostom uses the example of the Three Children in the fiery furnace to illustrate the courage and faithfulness required to stand firm in the face of temptation and persecution, ultimately glorifying God through their actions.

Transcript

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? God forbid.

Having passed on from the fornicator to the covetous person, he comes back to the former from the latter, no longer henceforth discoursing with him but with the others who had not committed fornication. And in the act of securing them lest they fall into the same sins, he assails him again. For he that has committed sin, though you direct your words to another, is stung even in that way; his conscience being thoroughly awakened and scourging him.

Now the fear of punishment indeed was enough to keep them in chastity. But seeing that he does not wish by fear alone to set these matters right, he uses both threatenings and reasons.

Now upon that other occasion, having stated the sin, and prescribed the punishment, and pointed out the harm which intercourse with the fornicator brought upon all, he left off, and passed to the subject of covetousness: and having threatened the covetous and all the rest whom he mentioned with expulsion from the kingdom, he so concluded his discourse. But here he takes in hand the work of admonition in a yet more terrific manner. For as he that only punishes a sin and does nothing to point out its most extreme lawlessness, produces no such great effect by his chastisement: so again, he who only abashes and fails to terrify by his mode of punishing, does not very keenly hit men of hardened minds. Wherefore Paul does

both: here he abashes, saying, Do you not know that we shall judge angels? there again he terrifies, saying, Do you not know that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?

And in regard to the fornicator, he again uses this order of discourse. For having terrified him by what he had said before; first cutting him off and delivering him to Satan, and then reminding him of that day which is coming; he abashes him again by saying, Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? thenceforth speaking as to children of noble birth. For whereas he had said, Now the body is for the Lord, he indicates it more plainly now. And in another place as well he does this same thing, saying, 1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof. And the same figure he often employs, not with the same aim, but at one time to show His love, and at another to increase their fear. But here he has employed it to startle and fill them with alarm. Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? God forbid. Nothing can be apter to strike horror than this expression. He said not, Shall I take the members of Christ, and join them on to a harlot? but what? make them members of a harlot; which surely would strike more keenly.

Then he makes out how the fornicator becomes this, saying thus, Do you not know that he that is joined unto a harlot is one body? How is this evident? For the two, says He, shall become one.

1 Corinthians 6:17

But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

For the conjunction suffers the two no longer to be two, but makes them both one.

2. Now mark again, how he proceeds by means of the bare terms, conducting his accusation in the names of the harlot and of Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee fornication.

He said not, abstain from fornication, but Flee: that is, with all zeal make to yourselves deliverance from that evil. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. This is less than what went before; but since he had to speak of fornicators, he amplifies that guilt by topics drawn from all quarters, from greater things and smaller alike, making the charge heinous. And, in fact, that former topic was addressed to the more religious, but this to the weaker sort. For this also is characteristic of the wisdom of Paul, not only to allege the great things wherewith to abash men, but the lesser also, and the consideration of what is disgraceful and unseemly.

What then, say you, does not the murderer stain his hand? What, of the covetous person and the extortioner? I suppose it is plain to every one. But since it was not possible to mention anything worse than the fornicator, he amplifies the crime in another way, by saying that in the fornicator the entire body becomes defiled. For it is as polluted as if it had fallen into a vessel of filth, and been immersed in defilement. And this too is our way. For from covetousness and extortion no one would make haste to go into a bath, but as if nothing had happened returns to his house. Whereas from intercourse with a harlot, as having become altogether unclean, he goes to a bath. To such a degree does the conscience retain from this sin a kind of sense of unusual shame. Both however are bad, both covetousness and fornication; and both cast into hell. But as Paul does every thing with good management, so by whatever topics he had he magnified the sin of fornication.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

3. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? He did not merely say, of the Spirit, but, which is in you; which was the part of one who also was soothing. And again, explaining himself still further, he added, which you have from God. He mentioned Him that gave also, both exalting the hearer and putting him in fear, both by the magnitude of the deposit, and by the munificence of Him that made it.

And you are not your own. This is not only to abash, but even to force men towards virtue. For why, says he; doest thou what you will? You are not your own master. But these things he said, not to take away free-will. For so in saying, All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient, he does not take away our liberty. And here again, writing, You are not your own; he makes no infringement upon freedom of choice, but he leads away from vice and indicates the guardian care of the Lord. And therefore he added, For you were bought with a price.

But if I am not my own, upon what ground do you demand of me duties to be done? And why do you go on to say again, Glorify God therefore in your body and in your spirit, which are God's? What then is the meaning of, you are not your own? And what does he wish to prove thereby? To settle them in a state of security against sin, and against following the improper desires of the mind. For indeed we have many improper wishes: but we must repress them, for we can. And if we could not, exhortation would be in vain. Mark, accordingly, how he secures his ground. For having said, You are not your own, he adds not, But are under compulsion; but, You were bought with a price. Why do you say this? Surely on another ground, one might say perhaps, you should have persuaded men, pointing out that we have a Master. But this is common to the Greeks also together with us: whereas the expression, You were bought with a price. belongs to us peculiarly. For he reminds us of the greatness of the benefit and of the mode of our salvation, signifying that when we were alienated, we were bought: and not simply bought, but, with a price.

Glorify then, take up and bear, God in your body, and in your spirit. Now these things he says, that we may not only flee fornication in the body, but also in the spirit of our mind abstain from every wicked thought, and from driving away grace.

Which are God's. For as he had said your, he added therefore, which are God's: continually reminding us that all things belong to the Lord, both body and soul and spirit: For some say, that the words in the spirit mean the gracious Gift; for if That be in us, God is glorified. And this will be, if we have a clean heart.

But He has spoken of these things as God's, not only because He brought them into being, but also because, when they were alienated, He won them again a second time, paying as the price, the blood of the Son. Mark how He brought the whole to completion in Christ, how He raised us up into heaven. You are members of Christ, says he, you are a temple of the Spirit. Become not then members of a harlot: for it is not your body which is insulted; since it is not your body at all, but Christ's. And these things he spoke, both to make manifest His loving-kindness in that our body is His, and to withdraw us from all evil license. For if the body be another's, you have no authority, says he, to insult another's body; and especially when it is the Lord's; nor yet to pollute a temple of the Spirit. For if any one who invades a private house and makes his way revelling into it, must answer for it most severely; think what dreadful things he shall endure who makes a temple of the King a robber's lurking place.

Considering these things therefore, reverence thou Him that dwells within. For the Paraclete is He. Thrill before Him that is enfolded and cleaves unto you; for Christ is He. Have you indeed made yourself members of Christ? Think thus, and continue chaste; whose members they were, and Whose they have become. Erewhile they were members of an harlot, and Christ has made them members of His own Body. You have therefore henceforth no authority over them. Serve Him that has set you free.

For supposing you had a daughter, and in extreme madness had let her out to a procurer for hire, and made her live a harlot's life, and then a king's son were to pass by, and free her from that slavery, and join her in marriage to himself; you could have no power thenceforth to bring her into the brothel. For you gave her up once for all, and sold her. Such as this is our case also. We let out our own flesh for hire unto the Devil, that grievous procurer: Christ saw and set it free, and withdrew it from that evil tyranny; it is not then ours any more but His who delivered it. If you be willing to use it as a King's bride, there is none to hinder; but if you bring it where it was before, you will suffer just what they ought who are guilty of such outrages. Wherefore you should rather adorn instead of disgracing it. For you have no authority over the flesh in the wicked lusts, but in those things alone which God may enjoin. Let the thought enter your mind at least from what great outrage God has delivered it. For in truth never did any harlot expose herself so shamefully as our nature before this. For robberies, murders, and every wicked thought entered in and lay with the soul, and for a small and vulgar hire, the present pleasure. For the soul, being mixed up with all wicked devices and deeds, reaped this reward and no other.

However, in the time before this, bad though it were to be such as these, it was not so bad: but after heaven, after the King's courts, after partaking of the tremendous Mysteries, again to be contaminated, what pardon shall this have? Or, do you not think that the covetous too, and all those whom he recounted before, have the Devil to lie with them? And do you not judge that the women who beautify themselves for pollution have intercourse with him? Why, who shall gainsay this word? But if any be contentious, let him uncover the soul of the women who behave in this unseemly manner, and he will surely see that the wicked demon closely entwined with them. For it is hard, brethren, it is hard, perchance even impossible, when the body is thus beautified, for the soul to be beautified at the same time: but one must needs be neglected, while the other is cared for. For nature does not allow these to take place together.

4. Wherefore he says, He that is joined to a harlot is one body; but he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit. For such an one becomes thenceforth Spirit, although a body envelope him. For when nothing corporeal nor gross nor earthly is around him, the body does but merely envelope him; since the whole government of him is in the soul and the Spirit. In this way God is glorified. Wherefore both in the Prayer we are commanded to say, Hallowed be Your Name: and Christ says also, Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

So do the heavens also glorify Him, uttering no voice, but by the view of them attracting wonder and referring the glory unto the Great Artificer. So let us glorify Him also, or rather more than they. For we can if we will. For not so much do the heaven nor day nor night glorify God, as a holy soul. For as one that gazes upon the beauty of the heaven, says, Glory be to You, O God! How fair a work have you formed! so too when beholding virtue in any man: nay, and much more so in the latter instance. For from these works of creation all do not glorify God; but many even assert that the things which exist are self-moving: and others impute to demons the workmanship of the world and providence; and these indeed greatly and unpardonably err: but in regard to the virtue of man, no one shall have power to hold these shameless opinions, but shall assuredly glorify God when he sees him that serves Him living in goodness. For who shall help being astonished when one being a man, and partaking of our common nature, and living

among other men, like adamant yields not at all to the swarm of passions? When being in the midst of fire and iron and wild beasts, he is even harder than adamant and vanquishes all for the Word of godliness' sake? When he is injured, and blesses; when he is evil reported of, and praises; when he is despitefully used, and prays for those who injure him; when he is plotted against, and does good to those that fight with him and lay snares for him? For these things, and such as these, will glorify God far more than the heaven. For the Greeks when they behold the heavens feel no awe; but when they see a holy man exhibiting a severe course of life with all strictness, they shrink away and condemn themselves. Since when he that partakes of the same nature as themselves is so much above them, a great deal more so than the heaven is above the earth, even against their inclination they think that it is a Divine power which works these things. Wherefore He says, And glorify your Father which is in heaven.

5. Will you learn also from another place how by the life of His servants God is glorified, and how by miracles? Nebuchadnezzar once threw the Three Children into the furnace. Then when he saw that the fire had not prevailed over them, he says, Daniel 3:28. Septuagint. ἀλλὰ ἡμεῖς, ὅτι ἐκ τῆς φούρας ἐξῆλθον... added Blessed be God, who has sent His Angel, and delivered his servants out of the furnace, because they trusted in Him and have changed the word of the king. How do you say? Have you been despised, and do you admire those who have spit upon you? Yes, says he, and for this very reason, that I was despised. And of the marvel he gives this reason. So that not because of the miracle alone was glory given to God at that time, but also because of the purpose of those who have been thrown in. Now if any one would examine this point and the other, as they are in themselves, this will appear not less than that: for to persuade souls to brave a furnace is not less in respect of the wonder than to deliver from a furnace. For how can it be otherwise than astonishing for the Emperor of the world, with so many arms around him, and legions, and generals, and viceroys, and consuls, and land and sea subject to his sway, to be despised by captive children; for the bound to overcome the binder and conquer all that army? Neither was there any power in the king and his company to do what they would, no, not even with the furnaces for an ally. But they who were naked, and slaves, and strangers, and few, (for what number could be more contemptible than three?) being in chains, vanquished an innumerable army. For already now was death despised, since Christ was henceforth about to sojourn in the world. And as when the sun is on the point of rising, even before his rays appear the light of the day grows bright; so also when then the Sun of Righteousness was about to come, death henceforth began to withdraw himself. What could be more splendid than that theatre? What more conspicuous than that victory? What more signal than those new trophies of theirs?

The same thing is done in our time also. Even now is there a king of the Babylonish furnace, even now he kindles a flame fiercer than that. There is even now such an image, and one who gives command to admire it. At his side are satraps and soldiers and bewitching music. And many gaze in admiration upon this image, so varied, so great. For somewhat of the same kind of thing as that image is covetousness, which does not despise even iron, but unlike as the materials are whereof it is composed, it gives command to admire all, both brass and iron, and things much more ordinary than they.

But as these things are, so also even now are there some who are emulous of these children: who say, your gods we serve not, and your images we worship not; but both the furnace of poverty we endure and all other distress, for the sake of God's laws. And the wealthy for their part, even as those at that time, oftentimes, worship this image too and are burnt. But those who possess nothing despite even this, and although in poverty, are more in the dew than those who live in affluence. Even as at that time they who cast into the fire were burnt up; but those in the midst of it found themselves in dew as it were rain. Then also that tyrant was more burnt up with the flame, his wrath kindling him violently, than those children. As

to them, the fire had no power even to touch the ends of their hair: but more fiercely than that fire did wrath burn up his mind. For consider what a thing it was that with so many to look on, he should be scorned by captive children. And it was a sign that his taking their city also had not been through his own might, but by reason of the sin of the multitude among them. Since if he had not the power to overcome these men in chains, and that when they were cast into a furnace, how could he have overcome the Jews in regular warfare, had they been all such as these? From which it is plain that the sins of the multitude betrayed the city.

6. But mark also the children's freedom from vain-glory. For they did not leap into the furnace, but they kept beforehand the commandment of Christ where he says, Matthew 26:41 Pray that you enter not into temptation. Neither did they shrink when they were brought to it; but stood in the midst nobly, neither contending without a summons, nor yet when summoned playing the coward: but ready for everything, and noble, and full of all boldness of speech.

But let us hear also what they say, that from this also we may learn their lofty spirit. Daniel 3:17 There is a God in heaven able to deliver us: they take no care for themselves, but even when about to be burned the glory of God is all their thought. For what they say comes to this, Lest perchance if we are burnt you should charge God with weakness, we now declare unto you accurately our whole doctrine. There is a God in heaven, not such as this image here on earth, this lifeless and mute thing, but able to snatch even from the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Condemn him not then of weakness for permitting us to fall into it. So powerful is He that after our fall, He is able to snatch us out again out of the flame. But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up. Observe that they by a special dispensation are ignorant of the future: for if they had foreknown, there would have been nothing wonderful in their doing what they did. For what marvel is it if when they had a guarantee for safety, they defied all terrors? Then God indeed would have been glorified in that He was able to deliver from the furnace: but they would not have been wondered at, inasmuch as they would not have cast themselves into any dangers. For this cause He suffered them to be ignorant of the future that He might glorify them the more. And as they cautioned (ἀλλ' ἵνα μὴ ὀνειδίσῃς ἡμᾶς ὁ βασιλεὺς) the king that he was not to condemn God of weakness though they might be burnt, so God accomplished both purposes; the showing forth His own power and the causing the zeal of the children to appear more conspicuous.

From whence then arose their doubting and their not feeling confident that they should at all events be preserved? Because they esteemed themselves assuredly too mean, and unworthy of such a benefit. And to prove that I say not this upon conjecture; when they fell into the furnace, they bewailed themselves after this sort, saying, Daniel 4:6-10 We have sinned, we have done iniquity, we cannot open our mouth. And therefore they said, But if not. But if they did not plainly say this, namely, God is able to deliver us; but if he deliver us not, for our sin's sake He will not deliver us; wonder not at it. For they would have seemed to the barbarians to be sheltering the weakness of God under the pretext of their own sins. Wherefore His power only is what they speak of: the reason they allege not. And besides, they were well disciplined not to be over-curious about the judgments of God.

With these words then, they entered into the fire; and they neither cast insult upon the king, nor overturned the statue. For such should the courageous man be, temperate and mild; and that especially in dangers; that he may not seem to go forth to such contests in wrath and vain-glory; but with fortitude and self-possession. For whoever deals insolently undergoes the suspicion of those faults: but he that endures, and is forced into the struggle, and goes through the trial with meekness, is not only admired as brave, but his self-possession also and consideration cause him to be no less extolled. And this is what

they did at that time; showing forth all fortitude and gentleness, and doing nothing for reward nor for recompense or return. 'Though He be not willing 'so it stands' to deliver us, we will not serve your gods:' for we have already our recompense in that we are counted worthy to be kept from all impiety, and for that end to give our bodies to be burned.

We then also having already our recompense, (for indeed we have it in that we have been vouchsafed the full knowledge of Him, vouch-safed to be made members of Christ,) let us take care that we make them not members of an harlot. For with this most tremendous saying we must conclude our discourse, in order that having the fear of the threat in full efficacy, we may remain purer than gold, this fear helping to make us so. For so shall we be able, delivered from all fornication, to see Christ. Whom God grant us all to behold with boldness at that day, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ; to Whom be the glory, for evermore. Amen.

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