

1 Corinthians 9:13-14

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of living from the Gospel, serving others with humility, and the adaptability required in ministry to effectively spread the message of Christ.

Topics: "Virtuous Living", "Selfless Service"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of living a life of virtue and selflessness, using the example of Paul's sacrificial service in proclaiming the Gospel without seeking personal gain. Chrysostom emphasizes the joy and freedom found in virtuous living, contrasting it with the burdens and emptiness of a life consumed by vice. He highlights the power of free will in choosing goodness over evil, and the inherent pleasure and peace that come from living a life of integrity and service to others. Chrysostom encourages his audience to embrace virtue, showing that true pleasure and fulfillment are found in selfless love, wisdom, and the pursuit of righteousness.

Transcript

Do you not know that they which minister about sacred things eat of the temple? And they which wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar? Even so did the Lord ordain that they which proclaim the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

He takes great care to show that the receiving was not forbidden. Whereupon having said so much before, he was not content but proceeds also to the Law, furnishing an example closer to the point than the former. For it was not the same thing to bring forward the oxen and to adduce the law expressly given concerning priests.

But consider, I pray, in this also the wisdom of Paul, how he mentions the matter in a way to give it dignity. For he did not say, They which minister about sacred things receive of those who offer them. But what? They eat of the temple: so that neither they who receive may be blamed nor they who give may be lifted up. Wherefore also what follows he has set down in the same way.

For neither did he say, They which wait upon the altar receive of them which sacrifice, but, have their portion with the altar. For the things offered now no longer belonged to those who offered them, but to the temple and the altar. And he said not, They receive the holy things, but, they eat of the temple, indicating again their moderation, and that it behooves them not to make money nor to be rich. And though he say that they have their portion with the altar, he does not speak of equal distribution but of relief given them

as their due. And yet the case of the Apostles was much stronger. For in the former instance the priesthood was an honor, but in the latter it was dangers and slaughters and violent deaths. Wherefore all the other examples together did not come up to the saying, If we sowed unto you spiritual things: since in saying, we sowed, he points out the storms, the danger, the snares, the unspeakable evils, which they endured in preaching. Nevertheless, though the superiority was so great, he was unwilling either to abase the things of the old law or to exalt the things which belong to himself: nay he even contracts his own, reckoning the superiority not from the dangers, but from the greatness of the gift. For he said not, if we have jeopardized ourselves or exposed ourselves to snares but if we sowed unto you spiritual things.

And the part of the priests, as far as possible, he exalts, saying, They which minister about sacred things, and they that wait upon the altar, thereby intending to point out their continual servitude and patience. Again, as he had spoken of the priests among the Jews, viz. both the Levites and the Chief Priests, so he has expressed each of the orders, both the inferior and the superior; the one by saying, they which minister about sacred things, and the other by saying, they which wait upon the altar. For not to all was one work commanded; but some were entrusted with the coarser, others with the more exalted offices. Comprehending therefore all these, lest any should say, why talk to us of the old law? Do you not know that ours is the time of more perfect commandments? after all those topics he placed that which is strongest of all, saying,

Even so did the Lord ordain that they who proclaim the Gospel should live of the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:14

Nor does he even here say that they are supported by men, but as in the case of the priests, of the temple and of the altar, so likewise here, of the Gospel; and as there he says, eat, so here, live, not make merchandize nor lay up treasures. For the laborer, says He, is worthy of his hire.

1 Corinthians 9:15

2. But I have used none of these things:

What then if you have not used them now, says one, but intendest to use them at a future time, and on this account sayest these things. Far from it; for he speedily corrected the notion, thus saying;

And I write not these things that it may be so done in my case.

And see with what vehemence he disavows and repels the thing:

For it were good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

And not once nor twice, but many times he uses this expression. For above he said, We did not use this right: and after this again, that I abuse not my right: and here, but I have used none of these things. These things; what things? The many examples. That is to say, many things giving me license; the soldier, the husbandman, the shepherd, the Apostles, the law, the things done by us unto you, the things done by you unto the others, the priests, the ordinance of Christ; by none of these have I been induced to abolish my own law, and to receive. And speak not to me of the past: (although I could say, that I have endured much even in past times on this account,) nevertheless I do not rest on it alone, but likewise concerning the future I pledge myself, that I would choose rather to die of hunger than be deprived of these crowns.

For it were good for me rather to die, says he, than that any man should make my glorying void.

He said not, that any man should abolish my law, but, my glorying. For lest any should say, he does it indeed but not cheerfully, but with lamentation and grief, willing to show the excess of his joy and the abundance of his zeal, he even calls the matter glorying. So far was he from vexing himself that he even glories, and chooses rather to die than to fall from this glorying. So much dearer to him even than life itself was that proceeding of his.

3. Next, he exalts it from another consideration also, and signifies that it was a great thing, not that he might show himself famous, (for far was he from that disposition,) but to signify that he rejoices, and with a view more abundantly to take away all suspicion. For on this account, as I before said, he also called it a glorying: and what says he?

1 Corinthians 9:16-18

For if I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward: but if not of my own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the Gospel.

What do you say? Tell me. If you preach the Gospel, it is nothing for you to glory of, but it is, if you make the Gospel of Christ without charge? Is this therefore greater than that? By no means; but in another point of view it has some advantage, inasmuch as the one is a command, but the other is a good deed of my own free-will: for what things are done beyond the commandment, have a great reward in this respect: but such as are in pursuance of a commandment, not so great: and so in this respect he says, the one is more than the other; not in the very nature of the thing. For what is equal to preaching; since it makes men vie even with the angels themselves. Nevertheless since the one is a commandment and a debt, the other a forwardness of free-will, in this respect this is more than that. Wherefore he says, explaining the same, what I just now mentioned:

For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, a stewardship is entrusted to me; taking the words of my own will and not of my own will, of its being committed or not committed to him. And thus we must understand the expression, for necessity is laid upon me; not as though he did anything of these things against his will, God forbid, but as though he were bound by the things commanded, and for contradistinction to the liberty in receiving before mentioned. Wherefore also Christ said to the disciples, Luke 17:10 When you have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants; for we have done that which was our duty to do.

What then is my reward? That when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel without charge. What then, tell me, has Peter no reward? Nay, who can ever have so great an one as he? And what shall we say of the other Apostles? How then said he, If I do this of my own will I have a reward, but if not of my own will, a stewardship is entrusted to me? Do you see here also his wisdom? For he said not, But if not of my own will, I have no reward, but, a stewardship is committed unto me: implying that even thus he has a reward, but such as he obtains who has performed what was commanded, not such as belongs to him who has of his own resources been generous and exceeded the commandment.

What then is the reward? That, when I preach the Gospel, says he, I may make the Gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the Gospel. See how throughout he uses the term right, intimating this, as I have often observed; that neither are they who receive worthy of blame. But he added, in the Gospel, partly to show the reasonableness of it, partly also to forbid our carrying the matter out into

every case. For the teacher ought to receive, but not the mere drone also.

1 Corinthians 9:19

4. For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more.

Here again he introduces another high step in advance. For a great thing it is even not to receive, but this which he is about to mention is much more than that. What then is it that he says? Not only have I not received, says he, not only have I not used this right, but I have even made myself a slave, and in a slavery manifold and universal. For not in money alone, but, which was much more than money, in employments many and various have I made good this same rule: and I have made myself a slave when I was subject to none, having no necessity in any respect, (for this is the meaning of, though I was free from all men;) and not to any single person have I been a slave, but to the whole world.

Wherefore also he subjoined, I brought myself under bondage to all. That is, To preach the Gospel I was commanded, and to proclaim the things committed to my trust; but the contriving and devising numberless things beside, all that was of my own zeal. For I was only under obligation to invest the money, whereas I did every thing in order to get a return for it, attempting more than was commanded. Thus doing as he did all things of free choice and zeal and love to Christ, he had an insatiable desire for the salvation of mankind. Wherefore also he used to overpass by a very great deal the lines marked out, in every way springing higher than the very heaven.

5. Next, having mentioned his servitude, he describes in what follows the various modes of it. And what are these?

1 Corinthians 9:20

And I became, says he, to the Jews as a Jew, that I might gain Jews. And how did this take place? When he circumcised that he might abolish circumcision. Wherefore he said not, a Jew, but, as a Jew, which was a wise arrangement. What do you say? The herald of the world and he who touched the very heavens and shone so bright in grace, does he all at once descend so low? Yea. For this is to ascend. For you are not to look to the fact only of his descending, but also to his raising up him that was bowed down and bringing him up to himself.

To them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. Either it is the explanation of what went before, or he hints at some other thing besides the former: calling those Jews, who were such originally and from the first: but under the law, the proselytes, or those who became believers and yet adhered to the law. For they were no longer as Jews, yet 'under the law.' And when was he under the law? When he shaved his head; when he offered sacrifice. Now these things were done, not because his mind changed, (since such conduct would have been wickedness,) but because his love condescended. For that he might bring over to this faith those who were really Jews, he became such himself not really, showing himself such only, but not such in fact nor doing these things from a mind so disposed. Indeed, how could he, zealous as he was to convert others also, and doing these things only in order that he might free others who did them from that degradation?

1 Corinthians 9:21

To them that are without law, as without law. These were neither Jews, nor Christians, nor Greeks; but 'outside of the Law,' as was Cornelius, and if there were any others like him. For among these also making

his appearance, he used to assume many of their ways. But some say that he hints at his discourse with the Athenians from the inscription on the altar, and that so he says, to them that are without law, as without law.

Then, lest any should think that the matter was a change of mind, he added, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ; i.e., so far from being without law, I am not simply under the Law, but I have that law which is much more exalted than the older one, viz. that of the Spirit and of grace. Wherefore also he adds, to Christ. Then again, having made them confident of his judgment, he states also the gain of such condescension, saying, that I might gain them that are without law. And every where he brings forward the cause of his condescension, and stops not even here, but says,

1 Corinthians 9:22

To the weak became I weak, that I might gain the weak: in this part coming to their case, with a view to which also all these things have been spoken. However, those were much greater things, but this more to the purpose; whence also he has placed it after them. Indeed he did the same thing likewise in his Epistle to the Romans, when he was finding fault about meats; and so in many other places.

Next, not to waste time by naming all severally, he says, I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

Do you see how far it is carried? I have become all things to all men, not expecting, however, to save all, but that I may save though it be but a few. And so great care and service have I undergone, as one naturally would who was about saving all, far however from hoping to gain all: which was truly magnanimous and a proof of burning zeal. Since likewise the sower sowed every where, and saved not all the seed, notwithstanding he did his part. And having mentioned the fewness of those who are saved, again, adding, by all means, he consoled those to whom this was a grief. For though it be not possible that all the seed should be saved, nevertheless it cannot be that all should perish. Wherefore he said, by all means, because one so ardently zealous must certainly have some success.

1 Corinthians 9:23

And I do all things for the Gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof.

That is, that I may seem also myself to have added some contribution of my own, and may partake of the crowns laid up for the faithful. For as he spoke of living of the Gospel, i.e., of the believers; so also here, that I may be a joint partaker in the Gospel, that I may be able to partake with them that have believed in the Gospel. Do you perceive his humility, how in the recompense of rewards he places himself as one of the many, though he had exceeded all in his labors? Whence it is evident that he would in his reward also. Nevertheless, he claims not to enjoy the first prize, but is content if so be he may partake with the others in the crowns laid up for them. But these things he said, not because he did this for any reward, but that hereby at least he might draw them on, and by these hopes might induce them to do all things for their brethren's sake. Do you see his wisdom! Do you see the excellency of his perfection? How he wrought beyond the things commanded, not receiving when it was lawful to receive. Do you see the exceeding greatness of his condescension? How he that was under law to Christ, and kept that highest law, to them that were without law, was as one without law, to the Jews, as a Jew, in either kind showing himself preeminent, and surpassing all.

6. This also do thou, and think not being eminent, that you lower yourself, when for your brother's sake you submit to some abasement. For this is not to fall, but to descend. For he who falls, lies prostrate, hardly to be raised up again; but he who descends shall also rise again with much advantage. As also Paul descended indeed alone, but ascended with the whole world: not acting a part, for he would not have sought the gain of them that are saved had he been acting. Since the hypocrite seeks men's perdition, and feigns, that he may receive, not that he may give. But the apostle not so: as a physician rather, as a teacher, as a father, the one to the sick, the other to the disciple, the third to the son, condescends for his correction, not for his hurt; so likewise did he.

To show that the things which have been stated were not pretence; in a case where he is not compelled to do or say any such thing but means to express his affection and his confidence; hear him saying, Romans 8:39 neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Do you see a love more ardent than fire? So let us also love Christ. For indeed it is easy, if we will. For neither was the Apostle such by nature. On this account, you see, his former life was recorded, so contrary to this, that we may learn that the work is one of choice, and that to the willing all things are easy.

Let us not then despair, but even though thou be a reviler, or covetous, or whatsoever you are, consider that Paul was 1 Timothy 13-16 a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious, and the chief of sinners, and suddenly rose to the very summit of virtue, and his former life proved no hindrance to him. And yet none with so great frenzy clings to vice as he did to the war against the Church. For at that time he put his very life into it; and because he had not ten thousand hands that he might stone Stephen with all of them, he was vexed. Notwithstanding, even thus he found how he might stone him with more hands, to wit, those of the false witnesses whose clothes he kept. And again, when he entered into houses like a wild beast and no otherwise did he rush in, haling, tearing men and women, filling all things with tumult and confusion and innumerable conflicts. For instance, so terrible was he that the Apostles, Acts 9:26 even after his most glorious change, did not yet venture to join themselves to him. Nevertheless, after all those things he became such as he was: for I need not say more.

7. Where now are they who build up the necessity of fate against the freedom of the will? Let them hear these things, and let their mouths be stopped. For there is nothing to hinder him that wills to become good, even though before he should be one of the vilest. And in fact we are more aptly disposed that way, inasmuch as virtue is agreeable to our nature, and vice contrary to it, even as sickness and health. For God has given us eyes, not that we may look wantonly, but that, admiring his handi-work, we may worship the Creator. And that this is the use of our eyes is evident from the things which are seen. For the lustre of the sun and of the sky we see from an immeasurable distance, but a woman's beauty one cannot discern so far off. Do you see that for this end our eye was chiefly given? Again, he made the ear that we should entertain not blasphemous words, but saving doctrines. Wherefore you see, when it receives any thing dissonant, both our soul shudders and our very body also. For, says one, Sirach 27:5 the talk of him that swears much makes the hair stand upright. And if we hear any thing cruel or merciless, again our flesh creeps; but if any thing decorous and kind, we even exult and rejoice. Again, if our mouth utter base words, it causes us to be ashamed and hide ourselves, but if grave words, it utters them with ease and all freedom. Now for those things which are according to nature no one would blush, but for those which are against nature. And the hands when they steal hide themselves, and seek excuses; but if they give alms, they even glory. So that if we will, we have from every side a great inclination towards virtue. But if you talk

to me of the pleasure which arises from vice, consider that this also is a thing which we reap more of from virtue. For to have a good conscience and to be looked up to by all and to entertain good hopes, is of all things most pleasant to him that has seen into the nature of pleasure, even as the reverse is of all things the most grievous to him that knows the nature of pain; such as to be reproached by all, to be accused by our own conscience, to tremble and fear both at the future and the present.

And that what I say may become more evident, let us suppose for argument's sake one man having a wife, yet defiling the marriage-bed of his neighbor and taking pleasure in this wicked robbery, enjoying his paramour. Then let us again oppose to him another who loves his own spouse. And that the victory may be greater and more evident, let the man who enjoys his own wife only, have a fancy also for the other, the adulteress, but restrain his passion and do nothing evil: (although neither is this pure chastity.) However, granting more than is necessary, that you may convince yourself how great is the pleasure of virtue, for this cause have we so framed our story.

Now then, having brought them together, let us ask them accordingly, whose is the pleasanter life: and you will hear the one glorying and exulting in the conquest over his lust: but the other -- or rather, there is no need to wait to be informed of any thing by him. For you shall see him, though he deny it times without number, more wretched than men in a prison. For he fears and suspects all, both his own wife and the husband of the adulteress and the adulteress herself, and domestics, and friends, and kinsmen, and walls, and shadows, and himself, and what is worst of all, he has his conscience crying out against him, barking aloud every day. But if he should also bring to mind the judgment-seat of God, he will not be able even to stand. And the pleasure is short: but the pain from it unceasing. For both at even, and in the night, in the desert and the city and every where, the accuser haunts him, pointing to a sharpened sword and the intolerable punishment, and with that terror consuming and wasting him. But the other, the chaste person, is free from all these things, and is at liberty, and with comfort looks upon his wife, his children, his friends, and meets all with unembarrassed eyes. Now if he that is enamored but is master of himself enjoy so great pleasure, he that indulges no such passion but is truly chaste, what harbor, what calm will be so sweet and serene as the mind which he will attain? And on this account you may see few adulterers but many chaste persons. But if the former were the pleasanter, it would be preferred by the greater number. And tell me not of the terror of the laws. For this is not that which restrains them, but the excessive unreasonableness, and the fact that the pains of it are more than the pleasures, and the sentence of conscience.

8. Such then is the adulterer. Now, if you please, let us bring before you the covetous, laying bare again another lawless passion. For him too we shall see afraid of the same things and unable to enjoy real pleasure: in that calling to mind both those whom he has wronged, and those who sympathize with them, and the public sentence of all concerning himself, he has ten thousand agitations.

And this is not his only vexation, but not even his beloved object can he enjoy. For such is the way of the covetous; not that they may enjoy do they possess, but that they may not enjoy. But if this seem to you a riddle, hear next what is yet worse than this and more perplexing; that not in this way only are they deprived of the pleasure of their goods, by their not venturing to use them as they would, but also by their never being filled with them but living in a continual thirst: than which what can be more grievous? But the just man is not so, but is delivered both from trembling and hatred and fear and this incurable thirst: and as all men curse the one, even so do all men conspire to bless the other: and as the one has no friend, so has the other no enemy.

What now, these things being so acknowledged, can be more unpleasing than vice or more pleasant than virtue? Nay, rather, though we should speak for ever, no one shall be able to represent in discourse either the pain of this, or the pleasure of the other, until we shall experience it. For then shall we find vice more bitter than gall, when we shall have fully tasted the honey of virtue. Not but vice is even now unpleasant, and disgusting, and burdensome, and this not even her very votaries gainsay; but when we withdraw from her, then do we more clearly discern the bitterness of her commands. But if the multitude run to her, it is no marvel; since children also oftentimes, choosing things less pleasant, despise those which are more delightful and the sick for a momentary gratification lose the perpetual and more certain joy. But this comes of the weakness and folly of those who are possessed with any fondness, not of the nature of the things. For it is the virtuous man who lives in pleasure; he who is rich indeed and free indeed.

But if any one would grant the rest to virtue -- liberty, security, freedom from cares, the fearing no man, the suspecting no man -- but would not grant it pleasure; to laugh, and that heartily, occurs to me, I confess, as the only course to be taken. For what else is pleasure, but freedom from care and fear and despondency, and the not being under the power of any? And who is in pleasure, tell me, the man in frenzy and convulsion, who is goaded by various lusts, and is not even himself; or he who is freed from all these waves, and is settled in the love of wisdom, as it were in a harbor? Is it not evident, the latter? But this would seem to be a thing peculiar to virtue. So that vice has merely the name of pleasure, but of the substance it is destitute. And before the enjoyment, it is madness, not pleasure: but after the enjoyment, straightway this also is extinguished. Now then if neither at the beginning nor afterwards can one discern the pleasure of it, when will it appear, and where?

And that you may more clearly understand what I say, let us try the force of the argument in an example. Now consider. One is enamored of a fair and lovely woman: this man as long as he cannot obtain his desire is like men beside themselves and frantic; but after that he has obtained it, he has quenched his appetite. If therefore neither at the beginning does he feel pleasure, (for the affair is madness,) nor in the end, (for by the indulgence of his lust he cools down his wild fancy,) where after all are we to find it? But our doings are not such, but both at the beginning they are freed from all disturbance, and to the end the pleasure remains in its bloom: nay rather there is no end of our pleasure, nor have our good things a limit, nor is this pleasure ever done away.

Upon all these considerations, then, if we love pleasure, let us lay hold on virtue that we may win good things both now and hereafter: unto which may we all attain, through the grace and mercy, etc.

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