

1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and honoring church leaders, and responding to those who have wronged us with forgiveness and love.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:27, Luke 19:8, Romans 14:1, Philippians 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:15-17, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of respecting and supporting leaders in the church, acknowledging the challenges they face in guiding and admonishing the congregation. He highlights the need to show gratitude and love towards those who labor among us, urging believers to be at peace with one another. Chrysostom also addresses the responsibility of leaders to admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, and support the weak, emphasizing the importance of patience and kindness towards all. He stresses the significance of not retaliating with evil, but always pursuing good and giving thanks, aligning with God's will. Chrysostom concludes by urging both the rich and the poor to refrain from covetousness and injustice, emphasizing the importance of contentment and generosity.

Transcript

But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

It must needs happen that a ruler should have many occasions of enmities. As physicians are compelled to give much trouble to the sick, preparing for them both diet and medicines that are not pleasant indeed, but attended with benefit; and as fathers are often annoying to their children: so also are teachers, and much more. For the physician, though he be odious to the sick man, yet has the relations and friends on good terms with him, nay, and often the sick man himself. And a father also, both from the force of nature and from external laws, exercises his dominion over his son with great ease; and if he should chastise and chide his son against his will, there is no one to prevent him, nor will the son himself be able to raise a look against him. But in the case of the Priest there is a great difficulty. For in the first place, he ought to be ruling people willing to obey, and thankful to him for his rule; but it is not possible that this should soon come to pass. For he who is convicted and reprov'd, be he what he may, is sure to cease from being thankful, and to become an enemy. In like manner he will act who is advised, and he who is admonished

and he who is exhorted. If therefore I should say, empty out wealth on the needy, I say what is offensive and burdensome. If I say, chastise your anger, quench your wrath, check your inordinate desire, cut off a small portion of your luxury, all is burdensome and offensive. And if I should punish one who is slothful, or should remove him from the Church, or exclude him from the public prayers, he grieves, not because he is deprived of these things, but because of the public disgrace. For this is an aggravation of the evil, that, being interdicted from spiritual things, we grieve not on account of our deprivation of these great blessings, but because of our disgrace in the sight of others. We do not shudder at, do not dread, the thing itself.

For this reason Paul from one end to the other discourses largely concerning these persons. And Christ indeed has subjected them with so strict a necessity, that He says, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. All things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works. Matthew 23:2-3 And again, when He healed the leper, He said, Go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

Matthew 8:4 And yet You say, You make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves. Matthew 23:15 For this reason I said, answers He, Do not the things which they do. Therefore he has shut out all excuse from him that is under rule. In his Epistle to Timothy also this Apostle said, Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor. 1 Timothy 5:17 And in his Epistle to the Hebrews also he said, Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them. Hebrews 13:17 And here again, But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord.

For since he had said, build each other up, lest they should think that he raised them to the rank of teachers, he has added, See, however, that I gave leave to you also to edify one another, for it is not possible for a teacher to say everything. Them that labor among you, he says, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And how, he says, is it not absurd? If a man stand up for you before a man, you do anything, you confess yourself much indebted; but he stands up for you before God, and thou dost not own the favor.

And how does he stand up for me? You say, Because he prays for you, because he ministers to you the spiritual gift that is by Baptism, he visits, he advises and admonishes you, he comes at midnight if you call for him; he is nothing else than the constant subject of your mouth, and he bears your injurious speeches. What necessity had he? Has he done well or ill? Thou indeed hast a wife, and livest luxuriously, and chooseth a life of commerce. But from this the Priest has hindered himself by his occupation; his life is no other than to be employed about the Church.

And to esteem them, he says, exceeding highly in love for their work's sake; be at peace with them. Do you see how well he is aware that unpleasant feelings arise? He does not merely say love, but very highly, as children love their fathers. For through them you were begotten by that eternal generation: through them you have obtained the kingdom: through their hands all things are done, through them the gates of heaven are opened to you. Let no one raise divisions, let no one be contentious.

He who loves Christ, whatever the Priest may be, will love him, because through him he has obtained the awful Mysteries. Tell me, if wishing to see a palace resplendent with much gold, and radiant with the brightness of precious stones, you could find him who had the key, and he being called upon immediately opened it, and admitted you within, would you not prefer him above all men? Would you not love him as dearly as your eyes? Would you not kiss him? This man has opened heaven to you, and thou dost not kiss him, nor pay him court.

If you have a wife, do you not love him above all, who procured her for you? So if you love Christ, if you love the kingdom of heaven, acknowledge through whom you obtained it. On this account he says, for their work's sake, be at peace with them.

Ver. 14. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be long suffering toward all.

Here he addresses those who have rule. Admonish, he says, the disorderly, not of imperiousness, he says, nor of self-will rebuke them, but with admonition. Encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all. For he who is rebuked with harshness, despairing of himself, becomes more bold in contempt. On this account it is necessary by admonition to render the medicine sweet. But who are the disorderly? All those who do what is contrary to the will of God. For this order of the Church is more harmonious than the order of an army; so that the reviler is disorderly, the drunkard is disorderly, and the covetous, and all who sin; for they walk not orderly in their rank, but out of the line, wherefore also they are overthrown. But there is also another kind of evils, not such as this indeed, but itself also a vice, little mindedness. For this is destructive equally with sloth. He who cannot bear an insult is feeble-minded. He who cannot endure trial is feeble-minded. This is he who is sown upon the rock. There is also another sort, that of weakness. Support the weak, he says; now weakness occurs in regard to faith. But observe how he does not permit them to be despised. And elsewhere also in his Epistles he says, Receive those who are weak in the faith. Romans 14:1 For in our bodies too we do not suffer the weak member to perish. Be long-suffering toward all, he says. Even toward the disorderly? Yes, certainly. For there is no medicine equal to this, especially for the teacher, none so suitable to those who are under rule. It can quite shame and put out of countenance him that is fiercer and more shameless than all men.

Ver. 15. See that none render unto any one evil for evil.

If we ought not to render evil for evil, much less evil for good; much less, when evil has not been previously done, to render evil, Such an one, you say, is a bad man, and has aggrieved me, and done me much injury. Do you wish to revenge yourself upon him? Do not retaliate. Leave him unpunished. Well, is this the stopping-place? By no means;

But always follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all.

This is the higher philosophy, not only not to requite evil with evil, but to render good for evil. For this is truly revenge that brings harm to him and advantage to yourself, or rather great advantage even to him, if he will. And that you may not think that this is said with respect to the faithful, therefore he has said, both one toward another and toward all.

Ver. 16. Rejoice always.

This is said with respect to the temptations that bring in affliction. Hear ye, as many as have fallen into poverty, or into distressing circumstances. For from these joy is engendered. For when we possess such a soul that we take revenge on no one, but do good to all, whence, tell me, will the sting of grief be able to enter into us? For he who so rejoices in suffering evil, as to requite even with benefits him that has done him evil, whence can he afterwards suffer grief? And how, you say, is this possible? It is possible, if we will. Then also he shows the way.

Ver. 17, 18. Pray without ceasing; In every thing giving thanks: for this is the will of God.

Always to give thanks, this is a mark of a philosophic soul. Have you suffered any evil? But if you will, it is no evil. Give thanks to God, and the evil is changed into good. Say thou also as Job said, Blessed be the name of the Lord forever. Job 1:21 For tell me, what such great thing have you suffered? Has disease befallen you? Yet it is nothing strange. For our body is mortal, and liable to suffer. Has a want of possessions overtaken you? But these also are things to be acquired, and again to be lost, and that abide here. But is it plots and false accusations of enemies? But it is not we that are injured by these, but they who are the authors of them. For the soul, he says, that sins, itself shall also die. Ezekiel 18:4 And he has not sinned who suffers the evil, but he who has done the evil.

Upon him therefore that is dead you ought not to take revenge, but to pray for him that you may deliver him from death. Do you not see how the bee dies upon the sting? By that animal God instructs us not to grieve our neighbors. For we ourselves receive death first. For by striking them perhaps we have pained them for a little time, but we ourselves shall not live any longer, even as that animal will not. And yet the Scripture commends it, saying that it is a worker, whose work kings and private men make use of for their health. Sirach 11:3 But this does not preserve it from dying, but it must needs perish. And if its other excellence does not deliver it when it does injury, much less will it us.

For indeed it is the part of the fiercest beasts, when no one has injured you, to begin the injury, or rather not even of beasts. For they, if you permit them to feed in the wilderness, and dost not by straitening them reduce them to necessity, will never harm you, nor come near you, nor bite you, but will go their own way.

But you being a rational man, honored with so much rule and honor and glory, do not even imitate the beasts in your conduct to your fellow-creature, but you injure your brother, and devour him. And how will you be able to excuse yourself? Do you not hear Paul saying, Why not rather take wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? Nay, but you yourselves do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. 1 Corinthians 6:7-8 Do you see that suffering wrong consists in doing wrong, but that to suffer wrongfully is to receive a benefit? For tell me, if any one were to revile his rulers, if he were to insult those in power, whom does he injure? Himself, or them? Clearly himself. Then he who insults a ruler insults not him, but himself -- and he that insults a Christian does he not through him insult Christ? By no means, you say. What do you say? He that casts a stone at the images of the king (Emperor), at whom does he cast a stone? Is it not at himself? Then does he who casts a stone at the image of an earthly king, cast a stone at himself, and does not he who insults the image of God (for man is the image of God) injure himself?

How long shall we love riches? For I shall not cease exclaiming against them: for they are the cause of everything. How long do we not get our fill of this insatiable desire? What is the good of gold? I am astonished at the thing! There is some enchantment in the business, that gold and silver should be so highly valued among us. For our own souls indeed we have no regard, but those lifeless images engross much attention. Whence is it that this disease has invaded the world? Who shall be able to effect its destruction? What reason can cut off this evil beast, and destroy it with utter destruction? The desire is deep sown in the minds of men, even of those who seem to be religious. Let us be put to shame by the commands of the Gospel. Words only lie there in Scripture, they are nowhere shown by works.

And what is the specious plea of the many? I have children, one says, and I am afraid lest I myself be reduced to the extremity of hunger and want, lest I should stand in need of others. I am ashamed to beg. For that reason therefore do you cause others to beg? I cannot, you say, endure hunger. For that reason do you expose others to hunger? Do you know what a dreadful thing it is to beg, how dreadful to be perishing by hunger? Spare also your brethren! Are you ashamed, tell me, to be hungry, and are you not

ashamed to rob? Are you afraid to perish by hunger, and not afraid to destroy others? And yet to be hungry is neither a disgrace nor a crime; but to cast others into such a state brings not only disgrace, but extreme punishment.

All these are pretenses, words, trifles. For that it is not on account of your children that you act thus, they testify who indeed have no children, nor will have, but who yet toil and harass themselves, and are busy in acquiring wealth, as much as if they had innumerable children to leave it to. It is not the care for his children that makes a man covetous, but a disease of the soul. On this account many even who have not children are mad about riches, and others living with a great number of children even despise what they have. They will accuse you in that Day. For if the necessities of children compelled men to accumulate riches, they also must necessarily have the same longing, the same lust. And if they have not, it is not from the number of children that we are thus mad, but from the love of money. And who are they, you say, who having children, yet despise riches? Many, and in many places. And if you will allow me, I will speak also of instances among the ancients.

Had not Jacob twelve children? Did he not lead the life of a hireling? Was he not wronged by his kinsman? And did he not often disappoint him? And did his number of children ever compel him to have recourse to any dishonest counsel? What was the case with Abraham? With Isaac, had he not also many other children? What then? Did he not possess all he had for the benefit of strangers? Do you see, how he not only did not do wrong, but even gave up his possessions, not only doing good, but choosing to be wronged by his nephew? For to endure being robbed for the sake of God is a much greater thing than to do good. Why? Because the one is the fruit of the soul and of free choice, whence also it is easily performed: but the other is injurious treatment and violence. And a man will more easily throw away ten thousand talents voluntarily, and will not think that he has suffered any harm, than he will bear meekly being robbed of three pence against his will. So that this rather is philosophy of soul. And this, we see, happened in the case of Abraham. For Lot, it is said, beheld all the plain; and it was well watered as the garden of God, and he chose it. Genesis 13:10-11 And Abraham said nothing against it. Do you see, that he not only did not wrong him, but he was even wronged by him? Why, O man, do you accuse your own children? God did not give us children for this end, that we should seize the possessions of others. Take care, lest in saying this thou provoke God. For if you say that your children are the causes of your grasping and your avarice, I fear lest you be deprived of them, as injuring and ensnaring you. God has given you children that they may support your old age, that they may learn virtue from you.

For God on this account has willed that mankind should thus be held together, providing for two most important objects: on the one hand, appointing fathers to be teachers, and on the other, implanting great love. For if men were merely to come into being, no one would have any relation towards any other. For if now, when there are the relations of fathers, and children, and grandchildren, many do not regard many, much more would it then be the case. On this account God has given you children. Do not therefore accuse the children.

But if they who have children have no excuse, what can they say for themselves, who having no children wear themselves out about the acquisition of riches? But they have a saying for themselves, which is destitute of all excuse. And what is this? That, instead of children we may have, they say, may have our riches as a memorial. This is truly ridiculous. Instead of children, one says, my house becomes the immortal memorial of my glory. Not of your glory, O man, will it be the memorial, but of your covetousness. Do you not see how many now as they pass the magnificent houses say one to another, What frauds, what robberies such an one committed, that he might build this house, and now he has become dust and

ashes, and his house has passed into the inheritance of others! It is not of your glory then that you leave a memorial, but of your covetousness. And your body indeed is concealed in the earth, but thou dost not permit the memorial of your covetousness to be concealed, as it might have been by length of time, but causest it to be turned up and disinterred through your house. For as long as this stands, bearing your name, and called such an one's, certainly the mouths of all too must needs be opened against you. Do you see that it is better to have nothing than to sustain such an accusation?

And these things indeed here. But what shall we do There? Tell me, having so much at our disposal here, if we have imparted to no one of our possessions, or at least very little; how shall we put off our dishonest gains? For he that wishes to put off covetous gain, does not give a little out of a great deal, but many times more than he has robbed, and he ceases from robbing. Hear what Zacchæus says, And for as many things as I have taken wrongfully, I restore fourfold. Luke 19:8 But you, taking wrongfully ten thousand talents, if you give a few drachmas, thinkest you have restored the whole, and art affected as if you had given more. And even this grudgingly. Why? Because you ought both to have restored these, and to have added other out of your own private possessions. For as the thief is not excused when he gives back only what he has stolen, but often he has added even his life; and often he compounds upon restoring many times as much: so also should the covetous man. For the covetous man also is a thief and a robber, far worse than the other, by how much he is also more tyrannical. He indeed by being concealed, and by making his attack in the night, cuts off much of the audacity of the attempt, as if he were ashamed, and feared to sin. But the other having no sense of shame, with open face in the middle of the market-place steals the property of all, being at once a thief and a tyrant. He does not break through walls, nor extinguish the lamp, nor open a chest, nor tear off seals. But what? He does things more insolent than these, in the sight of those who are injured he carries things out by the door, he with confidence opens everything, he compels them to expose all their possessions themselves. Such is the excess of his violence. This man is more wicked than those, inasmuch as he is more shameless and tyrannical. For he that has suffered by fraud is indeed grieved, but he has no small consolation, that he who injured him was afraid of him. But he who together with the injury he suffers is also despised, will not be able to endure the violence. For the ridicule is greater. Tell me, if one committed adultery with a woman in secret, and another committed it in the sight of her husband, who grieved him the most, and was most apt to wound him. For he indeed, together with the wrong he has done, treated him also with contempt. But the former, if he did nothing else, showed at least that he feared him whom he injured. So also in the case of money. He that takes it secretly, does him honor in this respect, that he does it secretly; but he who robs publicly and openly, together with the loss adds also the shame.

Let us therefore, both poor and rich, cease from taking the property of others. For my present discourse is not only to the rich, but to the poor also. For they too rob those who are poorer than themselves. And artisans who are better off, and more powerful, outsell the poorer and more distressed, tradesmen outsell tradesmen, and so all who are engaged in the market-place. So that I wish from every side to take away injustice. For the injury consists not in the measure of the things plundered and stolen, but in the purpose of him that steals. And that these are more thieves and defrauders, who do not despise little gains, I know and remember that I have before told you, if you also remember it. But let us not be over exact. Let them be equally bad with the rich. Let us instruct our mind not to covet greater things, not to aim at more than we have. And in heavenly things let our desire of more never be satiated, but let each be ever coveting more. But upon earth let every one be for what is needful and sufficient, and seek nothing more, that so he may be able to obtain the real goods, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, strength, honor, now and always, and world

without end. Amen.

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