

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of nurturing the Holy Spirit, discerning true prophecies, and living a life of holiness through prayer and community support.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:10, Ephesians 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:21-28

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Discerning Truth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not quenching the Spirit, emphasizing the need to preserve the gift of grace and avoid extinguishing it through impure living or neglect. He urges believers to be vigilant in guarding their hearts and minds from temptations that can dim the light of the Spirit, highlighting the significance of maintaining a pure and merciful soul to keep the Spirit burning brightly. Chrysostom also addresses the issue of false prophets and the need to discern true prophecies, encouraging believers to test all things, hold fast to what is good, and abstain from every form of evil to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Transcript

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. But prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

A thick mist, a darkness and cloud is spread over all the earth. And, showing this, the Apostle said, For we were once darkness. Ephesians 5:8 And again, You, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Since therefore there is, so to speak, a moonless night, and we walk in that night, God has given us a bright lamp, having kindled in our souls the grace of the Holy Spirit. But some who have received this light have rendered it more bright and shining, as, for instance, Paul and Peter, and all those Saints; while others have even extinguished it, as the five virgins, as those who have made shipwreck concerning the faith, as the fornicator of Corinth, as the Galatians who were perverted.

On this account Paul says, Quench not the Spirit, that is, the gift of grace, for it is his custom so to call the gift of the Spirit. But this an impure life extinguishes. For as any one, who has sprinkled both water and dust upon the light of our lamp, extinguishes it, and if he does not this, but only takes out the oil -- so it is also with the gift of grace. For if you have cast over it earthly things, and the cares of fluctuating matters, you have quenched the Spirit. And if you have done none of these things, but a temptation coming from some other quarter has vehemently assailed it, as some wind, and if the light be not strong, and it has not much oil, or you have not closed the opening, or have not shut the door, all is undone. But what is the

opening? As in the lamp, so is it also in us: it is the eye and the ear. Suffer not a violent blast of wickedness to fall upon these, since it would extinguish the lamp, but close them up with the fear of God. The mouth is the door. Shut it, and fasten it, that it may both give light, and repel the attack from without. For instance, has any one insulted and reviled you? Do you shut the mouth; for if you open it, you add force to the wind. Do you not see in houses, when two doors stand directly opposite, and there is a strong wind, if you shut one, and there is no opposite draught, the wind has no power, but the greater part of its force is abated? So also now, there are two doors, your mouth, and his who insults and affronts you; if you shut your mouth, and dost not allow a draught on the other side, you have quenched the whole blast; but if you open it, it will not be restrained. Let us not therefore quench it.

And the flame is often liable to be extinguished even when no temptation assails it. When the oil fails, when we do not alms, the Spirit is quenched. For it came to you as an alms from God. Then He sees this fruit not existing in you, and he abides not with an unmerciful soul. But the Spirit being quenched, you know what follows, as many of you as have walked on a road in a moonless night. And if it is difficult to walk by night in a road from land to land, how is it safe in the road that leads from earth to heaven? Do you not know how many demons there are in the intervening space, how many wild beasts, how many spirits of wickedness? If indeed we have that light, they will be able to do us no hurt; but if we extinguish it, they soon take us captive, they soon rob us of everything. Since even robbers first extinguish the lamp, and so plunder us. For they indeed see in this darkness, since they do the works of darkness: but we are unaccustomed to that light. Let us not then extinguish it. All evil doing extinguishes that light, whether reviling, or insolence, or whatever you can mention. For as in the case of fire, everything that is foreign to its nature is destructive of it, but that kindles it which is congenial to it; whatever is dry, whatever is warm, whatever is fiery, kindles the flame of the Spirit. Let us not therefore overlay it with anything cold or damp; for these things are destructive of it.

But there is also another explanation. There were among them many indeed who prophesied truly, but some prophesied falsely. This also he says in the Epistle to the Corinthians, that on this account He gave the discernings of spirits. 1 Corinthians 12:10 For the devil, of his vile craft, wished through this gift of grace to subvert everything pertaining to the Church. For since both the demon and the Spirit prophesied concerning the future, the one indeed uttering falsehood, and the other truth, and it was not possible from any quarter to receive a proof of one or the other, but each spoke without being called to account, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had done, but when the time came they were convicted, He gave also the discernings of spirits. Since therefore then also among the Thessalonians many were prophesying, glancing at whom he says, Neither by word, nor by epistle, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is now present 2 Thessalonians 2:2, he says this here. That is, do not, because there are false prophets among you, on their account prohibit also these, and turn away from them; quench them not, that is, despise not prophesyings.

Do you see that this is what he means by, Prove all things? Because he had said, Despise not prophesyings, lest they should think that he opened the pulpit to all, he says, Prove all things, that is, such as are really prophecies; and hold fast that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil; not from this or that, but from all; that you may by proof distinguish both the true things and the false, and abstain from the latter, and hold fast the former. For thus both the hatred of the one will be vehement and the love of the other arises, when we do all things not carelessly, nor without examination, but with careful investigation.

Ver. 23. And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Observe the affection of the Teacher. After the admonition he adds a prayer; not only that, but even introduces it in his letter. For we need both counsel and prayer. For this reason we also first giving you counsel, then offer prayers for you. And this the Initiated know. But Paul indeed did this with good reason, having great confidence towards God, whereas we are confounded with shame, and have no freedom of speech. But because we were appointed to this we do it, being unworthy even to stand in His presence, and to hold the place of the lowest disciples. But because grace works even through the unworthy, not for our own sakes but for theirs who are about to be benefited, we contribute our parts.

Sanctify you wholly, he says, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does he here call the spirit? The gift of grace. For if we depart hence having our lamps bright, we shall enter into the bridechamber. But if they are quenched, it will not be so. For this reason he says your spirit. For if that remains pure, the other remains also. And soul and body, he says. For neither the one nor the other then admits anything evil.

Ver. 24. Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do it.

Observe his humility. For, because he had prayed, Think not, he says, that this happens from my prayers, but from the purpose, with which He called you. For if He called you to salvation, and He is true, He will certainly save you, in that He wills it.

Ver. 25. Brethren, pray for us also.

Strange! What humility is here! But he indeed said this for the sake of humility, but we, not from humility, but for the sake of great benefit, and wishing to gain some great profit from you, say, Pray for us also. For although you do not receive any great or wonderful benefit from us, do it nevertheless for the sake of the honor and the title itself. Some one has had children, and even if they had not been benefited by him, nevertheless, because he has been their father, he perhaps sets this before them, saying, For one day I have not been called father by you. On this account we too say, Pray for us also. I am not merely saying this, but really desiring your prayers. For if I have become responsible for this presidency over you all, and shall have to render an account, much more ought I to have the benefit of your prayers. On your account my responsibilities are greater, therefore the help also from you should be greater.

Ver. 26. Salute all the brethren with a holy kiss.

Oh! What fervor! Oh! What mad passion is here! Because being absent he could not greet them with the kiss, he greets them through others, as when we say, Kiss him for me. So also do you yourselves retain the fire of love. For it does not admit of distances, but even through long intervening ways it extends itself, and is everywhere present.

Ver. 27. I adjure you by the Lord that this Epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

And this command is rather from love, and not so much in the way of teaching; that with them also, he means, I may be conversing.

Ver. 28. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

And he does not merely command, but adjures them, and this from a fervent mind, that even though they should despise him, for the sake of the adjuration they may practice what is commanded. For men had a great dread of that appeal, but now that too is trampled under foot. And often when a slave is scourged,

and adjures by God and His Christ, and says, So may you die a Christian, yet no one gives heed, no one regards it; but if he adjures him by his own son, immediately, though unwilling, and grinding his teeth, he gives up his anger. Again, another being dragged and led away through the middle of the market-place, in the presence both of Jews and Greeks, adjures him that leads him away with the most fearful adjurations, and no one regards it. What will not the Greeks say, when one of the faithful adjures a faithful man and a Christian, and no regard is paid to it, but we even despise him.

Will you allow me to tell you a certain story which I myself have heard? For I do not say it of my own invention, but having heard it from a person worthy of credit. There was a certain maid-servant united to a wicked man, a vile run-away slave; she, when her husband having committed many faults was about to be sold by her mistress; (for the offenses were too great for pardon, and the woman was a widow, and was not able to punish him who was the plague of her house, and therefore resolved to sell him; then considering that it was an unholy thing to separate the husband from the wife, the mistress, although the girl was useful, to avoid separating her from him, made up her mind to sell her also with him;) then the girl seeing herself in these straits, came to a venerable person who was intimate with her mistress, and who also told it to me, and clasping her knees, and with a thousand lamentations, besought her to entreat her mistress in her behalf; and having wasted many words, at last she added this also, as thereby especially to persuade her, laying on her a most awful adjuration, and the adjuration was this, So may thou see Christ at the Day of Judgment, as you neglect not my petition. And having so said, she departed. And she who had been entreated, upon the intrusion of some worldly care, such as happens in families, forgot the matter. Then suddenly late in the afternoon, the most awful adjuration came into her mind, and she felt great compunction, and she went and with great earnestness asked, and obtained her request. And that very night she suddenly saw the heavens opened, and Christ Himself. But she saw Him, as far as it was possible for a woman to see Him. Because she at all regarded the adjuration, because she was afraid, she was thought worthy of this vision.

And these things I have said, that we may not despise adjurations, especially when any entreat us for things that are good, as for alms, and for works of mercy. But now poor men, who have lost their feet, sit and see you hastening by, and when they cannot follow you with their feet, they expect to detain you, as with a kind of hook, by the fear of an adjuration, and stretching out their hands, they adjure you to give them only one or two pennies. But you hasten by, though adjured by your Lord. And if he adjure you by the eyes either of your husband, who is gone abroad, or of your son, or your daughter, immediately you yield, your mind is transported, you are warmed; but if he adjure you by your Lord, you hasten by. And I have known many women who, hearing indeed the name of Christ, have hastened by; but being commended for their beauty by those who came to them, have been melted and softened, and have stretched out their hand.

Yea thus they have reduced suffering and wretched beggars to this, even to deal in making sport! For when they do not touch their souls by uttering vehement and bitter words, they have recourse to this way by which they delight them exceedingly. And our great wickedness compels him that is in calamity or is straitened by hunger, to utter encomiums upon the beauty of those who pity him. And I wish this were all. But there is even another form worse than this. It compels the poor to be jugglers, and buffoons, and filthy jesters. For when he fastens on his fingers cups and bowls and cans, and plays on them as cymbals, and having a pipe, whistles on it those base and amorous melodies, and sings them at the top of his voice; and then many stand round, and some give him a piece of bread, some a penny, and others something else, and they detain him long, and both men and women are delighted; what is more grievous than this? Are

not these things deserving of much groaning? They are indeed trifling, and are considered trifling, but they engender great sins in our character. For when any obscene and sweet melody is uttered, it softens the mind, and corrupts the very soul itself. And the poor man indeed who calls upon God, and invokes a thousand blessings upon us, is not vouchsafed a word from you; but he who instead of these things introduces sportive sallies, is admired.

And what has now come into my mind to say to you, that I will utter. And what is this? When you are involved in poverty and sickness, if from no other quarter, at least from those who beg, who wander through the narrow streets, learn to give thanks to the Lord. For they, spending their whole life in begging, do not blaspheme, are not angry, nor impatient, but make the whole narrative of their beggary in thanksgiving, magnifying God, and calling Him merciful. He indeed that is perishing with hunger, calls Him merciful, but you who are living in plenty, if you cannot get the possessions of all, call Him cruel. How much better is he! How will he condemn us! God has sent the poor through the world, as common teachers in our calamities, and consolation under them. Have you suffered anything contrary to your wishes? Yet nothing like what that poor man suffers. You have lost an eye, but he both his. You have long labored under disease, but he has one that is incurable. You have lost your children, but he even the health of his own body. You have suffered a great loss, but you are not yet reduced to supplicate from others. Give thanks to God. You see them in the furnace of poverty, and begging indeed from all, but receiving from few. When you are weary of praying, and dost not receive, consider how often you have heard a poor man calling upon you, and hast not listened to him, and he has not been angry nor insulted you. And yet thou indeed actest thus from cruelty; but God from mercy even declines to hear. If therefore thou, yourself from cruelty not hearing your fellow-servant, expectest not to be found fault with, do you find fault with the Lord, who out of mercy does not hear His servant? Do you see how great the inequality, how great the injustice?

Let us consider these things constantly, those who are below us, those who are under greater calamities, and so we shall be able to be thankful to God. Life abounds with many such instances. And he who is sober, and willing to attend, gains no small instruction from the houses of prayer. For on this account the poor sit before the vestibule both in the churches and in the chapels of the Martyrs, that we may receive great benefit from the spectacle of these things. For consider, that when we enter into earthly palaces, we can see nothing of this kind; but men that are dignified and famous, and wealthy and intelligent, are everywhere hastening to and fro. But into the real palaces, I mean the Church, and the oratories of the Martyrs, enter the demoniacs, the maimed, the poor, the aged, the blind, and those whose limbs are distorted. And wherefore? That you may be instructed by the spectacle of these things; in the first place that if you have entered drawing after you any pride from without, having looked upon these, and laid aside your arrogance, and become contrite in heart, so you may go in, and hear the things that are said; for it is not possible that he who prays with an arrogant mind should be heard. That when you see an aged man, you may not be elated at your youth, for these old men were once young. That when you boast highly of your warfare, or your kingly power, you may consider that from these are sprung those who have become illustrious in kings' courts. That, when you presume upon your bodily health, taking heed to these, you may abate your lofty spirit. For the healthy man who continually enters here will not be highminded on account of his bodily health; and the sick man will receive no slight consolation.

But they do not sit here only on this account, but that they may also make you compassionate, and you may be inclined to pity; that you may admire the lovingkindness of God; for if God is not ashamed of them, but has set them in His vestibules, much less be thou ashamed; that you may not be highminded on

account of palaces upon earth. Be not ashamed, when called upon by a poor man; and if he should draw near, if he should catch your knees, shake him not off. For these are certain admirable dogs of the Royal Courts. For I do not call them dogs as dishonoring them -- far be it -- but even highly commending them. They guard the King's court. Therefore feed them. For the honor passes on to the King. There all is pride -- I speak of the palaces on earth -- here all is humility. You learn especially from the very vestibules that human beings are nothing. From the very persons who sit before them, you are taught that God delights not in riches. For their sitting and assembling there is all but an admonition, sending forth a clear voice regarding the nature of all men, and saying that human things are nothing, that they are shadow and smoke. If riches were a good, God would not have seated the poor before His own vestibule. And if He admits rich people also, wonder not for He admits them not on this account, that they may continue rich, but that they may be delivered from their encumbrance. For hear what Christ says to them, You cannot serve God and Mammon Matthew 6:24; and again, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven; and again, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 19:23-24 On this account He receives the rich, that they may hear these words, that they may long for the eternal riches, that they may covet things in heaven. And why do you wonder that He does not disdain to seat such at His vestibules? For He does not disdain to call them to His spiritual Table, and make them partakers of that Feast. But the maimed and the lame, the old man that is clothed in rags and filth, and has catarrh, comes to partake of that Table with the young and the beautiful, and with him even who is clothed in purple, and whose head is encircled with a diadem -- and is thought worthy of the spiritual Feast, and both enjoy the same benefits, and there is no difference.

Does then Christ not disdain to call them to His Table with the king (Emperor) -- for both are called together -- and you perhaps disdain even to be seen giving to the poor, or even conversing with them? Fie upon your haughtiness and pride! See that we suffer not the same with the rich man formerly. He disdained even to look upon Lazarus, and did not allow him to share his roof or shelter, but he was without, cast away at his gate, nor was he even vouchsafed a word from him. But see how, when fallen into straits, and in want of his help, he failed to obtain it. For if we are ashamed of those of whom Christ is not ashamed, we are ashamed of Christ, being ashamed of His friends. Let your table be filled with the maimed and the lame. Through them Christ comes, not through the rich. Perhaps you laugh at hearing this; therefore, that you may not think it is my word, hear Christ Himself speaking, that you may not laugh, but shudder: When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends nor your brethren, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbors; lest haply they also bid you again, and a recompense be made you. But when you make a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind; and you shall be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense you: for you shall be recompensed in the Resurrection of the just. Luke 14:12-14 And greater is your glory even here, if you love that. For from the former class of guests arise envy, and malice, and slanders, and revilings, and much fear lest anything unbecoming should occur. And you stand like a servant before his master, if those who are invited are your superiors, fearing their criticism and their lips. But in the case of these there is nothing of this sort, but whatever you bring them, they receive all with pleasure; and ample is the applause, brighter the glory, higher the admiration. All they that hear do not so much applaud the former, as the latter. But if you disbelieve, you who are rich, make the trial, you who invite generals and governors. Invite the poor, and fill your table from them, and see if you are not applauded by all, if you are not loved by all, if all do not hold you as a father. For of those feasts there is no advantage, but for these heaven is in store, and the good things of heaven -- of which may we all be partakers, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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