

1 Timothy 1:5-7

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of charity and love in understanding and fulfilling the law, and the glory of the gospel that brings us to the eternal and unchanging glory of God.

Scripture: Psalm 38:5, Matthew 18:19, Matthew 24:12, John 3:20, Romans 10:4, Romans 13:3, 1 Corinthians 15:25, 2 Corinthians 2:15, Philippians 4:4, 1 Timothy 1:5

Topics: "Genuine Faith", "Spiritual Virtues"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of genuine love, faith, and a pure heart in following God's commandments, warning against the dangers of vain pursuits and false teachings driven by envy and a desire for power. He highlights the significance of using the law lawfully, directing believers to Christ for true fulfillment and righteousness. Chrysostom urges the congregation to seek the eternal glory of God's Gospel, which surpasses worldly pleasures and possessions, and to clothe themselves with virtues and spiritual fragrance that bring honor and joy in this life and the next.

Transcript

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

Nothing is so injurious to mankind as to undervalue friendship ; and not to cultivate it with the greatest care; as nothing, on the other hand, is so beneficial, as to pursue it to the utmost of our power. This Christ has shown, where He says, If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father Matthew 18:19; and again, Because iniquity shall abound, love shall wax cold. Matthew 24:12 It is this that has been the occasion of all heresies. For men, because they loved not their brethren, have envied those who were in high repute, and from envying, they have become eager for power, and from a love of power have introduced heresies. On this account Paul having said, that you might charge some that they teach no other doctrine, now shows that the manner in which this may be effected is by charity. As therefore when he says, Christ is the end of the Law Romans 10:4, that is, its fulfillment, and this is connected with the former, so this commandment is implied in love. The end of medicine is health, but where there is health, there is no need to make much ado; so where there is love, there is no need of much commanding. But what sort of love does he speak of? That which is sincere, which is not merely in words but which flows from the disposition, from sentiment, and sympathy. From a

pure heart, he says, either with respect to a right conversation, or sincere affection. For an impure life too produces divisions. For every one that does evil, hates the light. John 3:20 There is indeed a friendship even among the wicked. Robbers and murderers may love one another, but this is not from a good conscience, not from a pure but from an impure heart, not from faith unfeigned, but from that which is false and hypocritical. For faith points out the truth, and a sincere faith produces love, which he who truly believes in God cannot endure to lay aside.

Ver. 6. From which some having swerved have turned aside to vain jangling.

He has well said, swerved, for it requires skill, to shoot straight and not beside the mark, to have the direction of the Spirit. For there are many things to turn us aside from the right course, and we should look but to one object.

Ver. 7. Desiring to be teachers of the law.

Here we see another cause of evil, the love of power. Wherefore Christ said, Be not called Rabbi Matthew 23:8; and the Apostle again, For neither do they keep the law, but that they may glory in your flesh. Galatians 6:13 They desire pre-eminence, he means, and on that account disregard truth.

Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

Here he censures them, because they know not the end and aim of the Law, nor the period for which it was to have authority. But if it was from ignorance, why is it called a sin? Because it was incurred not only from their desiring to be teachers of the law, but from their not retaining love. Nay, and their very ignorance arose from these causes. For when the soul abandons itself to carnal things, the clearness of its vision is dimmed, and falling from love it drops into contentiousness, and the eye of the mind is blinded. For he that is possessed by any desire for these temporal things, intoxicated, as he is, with passion, cannot be an impartial judge of truth.

Not knowing whereof they affirm.

For it is probable that they spoke of the law, and enlarged on its purifications and other bodily rites. The Apostle then forbearing to censure these, as either nothing, or at best a shadow and figure of spiritual things, proceeds in a more engaging way to praise the law, calling the Decalogue here the law, and by means of it discarding the rest. For if even these precepts punish transgressors, and become useless to us, much more the others.

Ver. 8, 9. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man.

The law, he seems to say, is good, and again, not good. What then? If one use it not lawfully, is it not good? Nay even so it is good. But what he means is this; if any one fulfills it in his actions; for that is to use it lawfully as here intended. But when they expound it in their words, and neglect it in their deeds, that is using it unlawfully. For such an one uses it, but not to his own profit. And another way may be named besides. What is it? That the law, if you use it aright, sends you to Christ.

For since its aim is to justify man, and it fails to effect this, it remits us to Him who can do so. Another way again of using the law lawfully, is when we keep it, but as a thing superfluous. And how as a thing superfluous? As the bridle is properly used, not by the prancing horse that champs it, but by that which

wears it only for the sake of appearance, so he uses the law lawfully, who governs himself, though not as constrained by the letter of it. He uses the law lawfully who is conscious that he does not need it, for he who is already so virtuous that he fulfills it not from fear of it, but from a principle of virtue, uses it lawfully and safely: that is, if one so use it, not as being in fear of it, but having before his eyes rather the condemnation of conscience than the punishment hereafter.

Moreover he calls him a righteous man, who has attained unto virtue. He therefore uses the law lawfully, who does not require to be instructed by it. For as points in reading are set before children; but he who does what they direct, without their aid, from other knowledge, shows more skill, and is a better reader; so he who is above the law, is not under the schooling of the law. For he keeps it in a much higher degree, who fulfills it not from fear, but from a virtuous inclination; since he that fears punishment does not fulfill it in the same manner as he that aims at reward.

He that is under the law does it not as he that is above the law. For to live above the law is to use it lawfully. He uses it lawfully, and keeps it, who achieves things beyond the law, and who does not need its instructions. For the law, for the most part, is prohibition of evil; now this alone does not make a man righteous, but the performance of good actions besides. Hence those, who abstain from evil like slaves, do not come up to the mark of the law. For it was appointed for the punishment of transgression.

Such men indeed use it, but it is to dread its punishment. It is said, Will you not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good Romans 13:3: which implies, that the law threatens punishment only to the wicked. But of what use is the law to him whose actions deserve a crown? As the surgeon is of use only to him who has some hurt, and not to the sound and healthy man. But for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners. He calls the Jews lawless and disobedient too.

The law (he says) works wrath, that is, to the evil doers. But what to him who is deserving of reward? By the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20 What then with respect to the righteous? the law is not made, he says, for a righteous man. Wherefore? Because he is exempted from its punishment, and he waits not to learn from it what is his duty, since he has the grace of the Spirit within to direct him. For the law was given that men might be chastened by fear of its threatenings. But the tractable horse needs not the curb, nor the man that can dispense with instruction the schoolmaster.

But for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers. Thus he does not stop at the mention of sins in general, nor of these only, but goes over the several kinds of sin, to shame men, as it were, of being under the direction of the law; and having thus particularized some, he adds a reference to those omitted, though what he had enumerated were sufficient to withdraw men. Of whom then does he say these things? Of the Jews, for they were murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers: they were profane and unholy, for these too he means when he says, ungodly and sinners, and being such, the law was necessarily given to them. For did they not repeatedly worship idols? Did they not stone Moses? Were not their hands imbrued in the blood of their kindred? Do not the prophets constantly accuse them of these things? But to those who are instructed by a heavenly philosophy, these commandments are superfluous. For murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; for all the things which he had mentioned were the passions of a corrupted soul, and contrary, therefore, to sound doctrine.

Ver. 11. According to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

Thus the Law is still necessary for the confirmation of the Gospel, yet to those who obey it is unnecessary. And he calls the Gospel glorious. There were some who were ashamed of its persecutions, and of the sufferings of Christ, and so for the sake of these, as well as for others, he has called it the glorious Gospel, thus showing that the sufferings of Christ are our glory. And perhaps he glances too at the future. For if our present state is exposed to shame and reproach, it will not be so hereafter; and it is to things future, and not to things present, that the Gospel belongs. Why then did the Angel say, Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born a Saviour? Luke 2:10 Because He was born to be their Saviour, though His miracles did not commence from His birth. According to the Gospel, he says, of the blessed God. The glory he means is either that of the service of God, or, in that if present things are filled with its glory, yet much more will things future be so; when His enemies shall be put under His feet 1 Corinthians 15:25, when there shall be nothing opposed, when the just shall behold all those blessed things, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and which has not entered into the heart of man. 1 Corinthians 2:9 For I will say of our Saviour, that they also may be with Me, where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me. John 17:24

Moral. Let us then learn who these are, and let us esteem them blessed, considering what felicities they will then enjoy, of what light and glory they will then participate. The glory of this world is worthless and not enduring, or if it abides, it abides but till death, and after that is wholly extinguished. For his glory, it says, shall not descend after him. Psalm 49:17 And with many it lasts not even to the end of life. But no such thing is to be thought of in that glory; it abides, and will have no end. For such are the things of God, enduring, and above all change or end. For the glory of that state is not from without, but from within. I mean, it consists not in a multitude of servant, or of chariot, nor in costly garments. Independently of these things, the man himself is clothed with glory. Here, without these things, the man appears naked. In the baths, we see the illustrious, the undistinguished, and the base, alike bare. Often have the great been exposed to danger in public, being left on some occasion by their servants. But in that world men carry their glory about with them, and the Saints, like the Angels, wherever they appear, have their glory in themselves. Yea rather as the sun needs no vestures, and requires no foreign aid, but wherever he appears, his glory at once shines forth; so shall it then be.

Let us then pursue that glory, than which nothing is more venerable; and leave the glory of the world, as beyond anything worthless. Boast not of your clothing and raiment. Sirach 11:4 This was the advice given of old to the simple. Indeed the dancer, the harlot, the player, are arrayed in a gayer and more costly robe than you. And besides, this boasting were of that, which if but moths attack, they can rob you of its enjoyment. Do you see what an unstable thing it is, this glory of the present life?

Thou pridest yourself upon that which insects make and destroy. For Indian insects, it is said, spin those fine threads of which your robes are made. But rather seek a clothing woven from things above, an admirable and radiant vesture, raiment of real gold; of gold not dug by malefactors' hands out of the mine, but the produce of virtue. Let us clothe ourselves with a robe not the manufacture of poor men or slaves, but wrought by our Lord Himself. But your garments, you say, are in-wrought with gold!

And what is that to you? He that wrought it, not he that wears it, is the object of admiration, for there it is really due. It is not the frame on which the garment is stretched at the fuller's, but the maker of it, that is admired. Yet the block wears it, and has it bound on itself. And as that wears it, but not for use, even so do some of these women, for the benefit of the garment, to air it, they say, that it may not be moth-eaten! Is it

not then the extreme of folly to be solicitous about a thing so worthless, to do anything whatever, to risk your salvation for it, to make a mock at Hell, to set God at defiance, to overlook Christ hungering?

Talk not of the precious spices of India, Arabia, and Persia, the moist and the dry, the perfumes and ointments, so costly and so useless. Why, O woman, do you lavish perfumes upon a body full of impurity within? Why spend on what is offensive, as if one should waste perfumes upon dirt, or distill balms upon a brick. There is, if you desire it, a precious ointment and a fragrance, with which you might anoint your soul; not brought from Arabia, or Ethiopia, nor from Persia, but from heaven itself; purchased not by gold, but by a virtuous will, and by faith unfeigned.

Buy this perfume, the odor of which is able to fill the world. It was of this the Apostles savored. For we are (he says) a sweet savor, to some of death, to others of life. 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 And what means this? That it is as they say, that the swine is suffocated by perfumes! But this spiritual fragrance scented not only the bodies but the garments of the Apostles; and Paul's garments were so impregnated with it, that they cast out devils. What balmy leaf, what cassia, what myrrh so sweet or so efficacious as this perfume?

For if it put devils to flight, what could it not effect? With this ointment let us furnish ourselves. And the grace of the Spirit will provide it through almsgiving. Of these we shall savor, when we go into the other world. And as here, he that is perfumed with sweet odors draws upon himself the notice of all, and whether at the bath, or the assembly, or any other concourse of men, all follow him, and observe him; so, in that world, when souls come in that are fragrant with this spiritual savor, all arise and make room.

And even here devils and all vices are afraid to approach it, and cannot endure it, for it chokes them. Let us then not bear about us that perfume which is a mark of effeminacy, but this, which is a mark of manhood, which is truly admirable, which fills us with a holy confidence. This is a spice which is not the produce of the earth, but springs from virtue, which withers not, but blooms forever. This is it that renders those who possess it honorable. With this we are anointed at our Baptism, then we savor sweetly of it; but it must be by our care afterwards that we retain the savor. Of old the Priests were anointed with ointment, as an emblem of the virtue, the fragrance of which a Priest should diffuse around him.

But nothing is more offensive than the savor of sin, which made the Psalmist say, My wounds stink and are corrupt. Psalm 38:5 For sin is more foul than putrefaction itself. What, for instance, is more offensive than fornication? And if this is not perceived at the time of its commission, yet, after it is committed, its offensive nature, the impurity contracted in it, and the curse, and the abomination of it is perceived. So it is with all sin. Before it is committed it has something of pleasure, but after its commission, the pleasure ceases and fades away, and pain and shame succeed. But with righteousness it is the reverse. At the beginning it is attended with toil, but in the end with pleasure and repose. But even here, as in the one case the pleasure of sin is no pleasure, because of the expectation of disgrace and punishment, so in the other the toil is not felt as toil, by reason of the hope of reward. And what is the pleasure of drunkenness? The poor gratification of drinking, and hardly that. For when insensibility follows, and the man sees nothing that is before him, and is in a worse state than a madman, what enjoyment remains? Nay, one might well say there is no pleasure in fornication itself. For when passion has deprived the soul of its judgment, can there be any real delights? As well might we say that the itch is a pleasure! I should call that true pleasure, when the soul is not affected by passion, not agitated nor overpowered by the body. For what pleasure can it be to grind the teeth, to distort the eyes, to be irritated and inflamed beyond decency? But so far is it from being pleasant, that men hasten to escape from it, and when it is over are in pain. But if it were pleasure, they would wish not to escape from it, but to continue it. It has therefore only the name of

pleasure.

But not such are the pleasures enjoyed by us; they are truly delightful, they do not agitate nor inflame. They leave the soul free, and cheer and expand it. Such was the pleasure of Paul when he said, In this I rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice; and again, Rejoice in the Lord always. Philippians 1:18, and 4:4 For sinful pleasure is attended with shame and condemnation; it is indulged in secret, and is attended with infinite uneasiness. But from all these the true pleasure is exempt. This then let us pursue, that we may attain those good things to come, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, etc.

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