

1 Timothy 3:1-4

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the essential qualities and responsibilities of a Bishop in guiding the Church with integrity and virtue.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Timothy 3:6-7, Titus 1:6

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Pastoral Ministry"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the qualities of a Bishop, emphasizing the importance of being blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, hospitable, and apt to teach. He highlights the need for a Bishop to be a good manager of his own household, ruling well and having his children in subjection with gravity. Chrysostom warns against appointing novices or new converts as Bishops, stressing the importance of having a good reputation even among those outside the Church to avoid falling into the snare of the devil.

Transcript

If a man desire the office of a Bishop, he desires a good work. A Bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.

As now proceeding to discourse of the Episcopal office, he sets out with showing what sort of a person a Bishop ought to be. And here he does not do it as in the course of his exhortation to Timothy, but addresses all, and instructs others through him. And what says he? If a man desire the office of a Bishop, I do not blame him, for it is a work of protection. If any one has this desire, so that he does not covet the dominion and authority, but wishes to protect the Church, I blame him not. For he desires a good work. Even Moses desired the office, though not the power, and his desire exposed him to that taunt, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Acts 7:27; Exodus 2:14 If any one, then, desire it in this way, let him desire it. For the Episcopate is so called from having the oversight of all.

A Bishop then, he says, must be blameless, the husband of one wife. This he does not lay down as a rule, as if he must not be without one, but as prohibiting his having more than one. For even the Jews were allowed to contract second marriages, and even to have two wives at one time. For marriage is honorable, Hebrews 13:4 Some however say, that this is said that he should be the husband of one wife. Blameless. Every virtue is implied in this word; so that if any one be conscious to himself of any sins, he does not well to desire an office for which his own actions have disqualified him. For such an one ought to be ruled, and

not to rule others. For he who bears rule should be brighter than any luminary; his life should be unspotted, so that all should look up to him, and make his life the model of their own. But in employing this exhortation, he had no common object in view. For he too was about to appoint Bishops, (which also he exhorts Titus to do in his Epistle to him,) and as it was probable that many would desire that office, therefore he urges these admonitions. Vigilant, he says, that is, circumspect, having a thousand eyes about him, quicksighted, not having the eyes of his mind dimmed. For many things occur which permit not a man to see clearly, to see things as they are. For care and troubles, and a load of business on all sides press upon him. He must therefore be vigilant, not only over his own concerns, but over those of others. He must be well awake, he must be fervent in spirit, and, as it were, breathe fire; he must labor and attend upon his duty by day and by night, even more than a general upon his army; he must be careful and concerned for all. Sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality. Because these qualities are possessed by most of those who are under their rule, (for in these respects they ought to be equal to those who rule over them,) he, to show what is peculiar to the Bishops, adds, apt to teach. For this is not required of him that is ruled, but is most essential to him who has this rule committed to him.

Not given to wine: here he does not so much mean intemperate, as insolent and impudent. No striker: this too does not mean a striker with the hands. What means then no striker? Because there are some who unseasonably smite the consciences of their brethren, it seems to be said with reference to them. Not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient: not a brawler, not covetous; one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. If then he who is married cares for the things of the world 1 Corinthians 7:33, and a Bishop ought not to care for the things of the world, why does he say the husband of one wife? Some indeed think that he says this with reference to one who remains free from a wife. But if otherwise, he that has a wife may be as though he had none. 1 Corinthians 7:29 For that liberty was then properly granted, as suited to the nature of the circumstances then existing. And it is very possible, if a man will, so to regulate his conduct. For as riches make it difficult to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, yet rich men have often entered in, so it is with marriage. But why does he say, speaking of a Bishop, that he should be not given to wine, hospitable, when he should name greater things? Why said he not that he should be an Angel, not subject to human passions? Where are those great qualities of which Christ speaks, which even those under their rule ought to possess? To be crucified to the world, to be always ready to lay down their lives, as Christ said. The good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep John 10:11; and again, He that takes not his cross and follows after me, is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:38 But not given to wine, he says; a good prospect indeed, if such are the things of which a Bishop is to be admonished! Why has he not said that he ought to be already raised above the world? But do you demand less of the Bishop, than even of those in the world? For to these he says, Mortify your members which are upon the earth Colossians 3:5, and He that is dead, is freed from sin. Romans 6:7 They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh; and Christ again says, Whosoever forsakes not all that he has, he is not worthy of Me. Luke 15:33 Why are not these things required by Paul? Plainly because few could be found of such a character, and there was need of many Bishops, that one might preside in every city.

But because the Churches were to be exposed to attacks, he requires not that superior and highly exalted virtue, but a moderate degree of it; for to be sober, of good behavior, and temperate, were qualities common to many. Having his children in subjection with all gravity. This is necessary, that an example might be exhibited in his own house. For who would believe that he who had not his own son in subjection, would keep a stranger under command? One that rules well his own house. Even those who are without say this, that he who is a good manager of a house will be a good statesman. For the Church is, as it were, a small household, and as in a house there are children and wife and domestics, and the man has

rule over them all; just so in the Church there are women, children, servants. And if he that presides in the Church has partners in his power, so has the man a partner, that is, his wife. Ought the Church to provide for her widows and virgins? So there are in a family servants, and daughters, to be provided for. And, in fact, it is easier to rule the house; therefore he asks, if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?

Ver. 6. Not a novice. He does not say, not a young man, but not a new convert. For he had said, I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:6 Wishing them to point out such an one, he used this word. For, otherwise, what hindered him from saying, Not a young man? For if youth only was an objection, why did he himself appoint Timothy, a young man? (and this he proves by saying to him, Let no man despise your youth.) 1 Timothy 4:12 Because he was aware of his great virtue, and his great strictness of life. Knowing which he writes, From a child you have learned the holy Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:15 And that he practiced intense fasting is proved by the words, Use a little wine for your frequent infirmities; which he wrote to him among other things, as, if he had not known of such good works of his, he would not have written, nor given any such charge to his disciple. But as there were many then who came over from the Heathen, and were baptized, he says, Do not immediately advance to a station of dignity a novice, that is, one of these new converts. For, if before he had well been a disciple, he should at once be made a Teacher, he would be lifted up into insolence. If before he had learned to be under rule, he should be appointed one of the rulers, he would be puffed up: therefore he adds, Lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil, that is, into the same condemnation which Satan incurred by his pride.

Ver. 7. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

This is rightly said, as he was certain to be reproached by them, and for the same reason perhaps he said, the husband of one wife, though elsewhere he says, I would that all men were even as I myself! 1 Corinthians 7:7, that is, practicing continency. That he may not therefore confine them within too narrow a limit, by requiring an over-strict conversation, he is satisfied to prescribe moderate virtue. For it was necessary to appoint one to preside in every city, as he writes to Titus, That you should ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you. Titus 1:5 But what if he should have a good report, and fair reputation, and not be worthy of it? In the first place this would not easily happen. It is much for good men to obtain a good report among their enemies. But, in fact, he has not left this to stand by itself; a good report also, he says, that is, besides other qualities. What then, if they should speak evil of him without a cause from envy, especially as they were Heathens? This was not to be expected. For even they will reverence a man of blameless life. Why then does he say, speaking of himself, Through evil report and good report? 2 Corinthians 6:6 Because it was not his life that they assailed, but his preaching. Therefore he says, through evil report. They were slandered as deceivers and impostors, on account of their preaching, and this because they could not attack their moral characters and lives. For why did no one say of the Apostles, that they were fornicators, unclean, or covetous persons, but that they were deceivers, which relates to their preaching only? Must it not be that their lives were irreproachable? It is manifest.

Therefore so let us too live, and no enemy, no unbeliever, will be able to speak evil of us. For he whose life is virtuous, is revered even by them. For truth stops the mouths even of enemies.

But how does he fall into a snare? By falling often into the same sins, as those who are without. For if he be such a character, the evil one soon lays another snare for him, and they soon effect his destruction. But

if he should have a good report from his enemies, much more will he have it from his friends. For that it is not likely that he, whose life is blameless, should be ill-reported of, we may infer from the words of Christ; Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. 440 v. 16 But what if one be falsely accused, and from peculiar circumstances be slandered? Well this is a possible case; but even such an one ought not to be promoted. For the result is much to be feared. Therefore it is said he should have a good report, for your good works are to shine. As therefore no one will say that the sun is dark, not even the blind, (for he will be ashamed to oppose the opinion of all,) so him that is of remarkable goodness no one will blame. And though, on account of his doctrines, the Heathen will often slander him, yet they will not attack his virtuous life, but will join with others in admiring and revering it.

Moral. Let us then so live, that the name of God be not blasphemed. Let us not, on the one hand, look to human reputation; nor on the other, subject ourselves to an evil report, but on both sides let us observe moderation; as he says, Among whom you shine as lights in the world. Philippians 2:15 For on this account He left us here, that we may be as luminaries. that we may be appointed Teachers of others, that we may be as leaven; that we may converse as angels among men, as men with children, as spiritual with natural men, that they may profit by us, that we may be as seed, and may bring forth much fruit. There were no need of words, if we so shone forth in our lives, there were no need of Teachers, did we but exhibit works. There would be no Heathen, if we were such Christians as we ought to be. If we kept the commandments of Christ, if we suffered injury, if we allowed advantage to be taken of us, if being reviled we blessed, if being ill-treated we did good 1 Corinthians 4:12; if this were the general practice among us, no one would be so brutal as not to become a convert to godliness. And to show this; Paul was but one man, yet how many did he draw after him? If we were all such as he, how many worlds might we not have drawn to us? Behold, Christians are more numerous than Heathens. And in other arts, one man can teach a hundred boys together; but here, where there are many more teachers, and many more than the learners, no one is brought over. For those who are taught, look to the virtue of their teachers: and when they see us manifesting the same desires, pursuing the same objects, power and honor, how can they admire Christianity? They see our lives open to reproach, our souls worldly. We admire wealth equally with them, and even more. We have the same horror of death, the same dread of poverty, the same impatience of disease, we are equally fond of glory and of rule. We harass ourselves to death from our love of money, and serve the time. How then can they believe? From miracles? But these are no longer wrought. From our conversation? It has become corrupt. From charity? Not a trace of it is anywhere to be seen. Therefore we shall have to give an account not only of our own sins, but of the injury done by them to others.

Let us then return to a sound mind; let us watch, and show forth a heavenly conversation upon earth. Let us say, Our conversation is in heaven Philippians 3:20, and let us upon earth maintain the contest. There have been great men, it may be said, among us, but how, says the Greek, shall I believe it? For I do not see anything like it in your conduct. If this is to be said, we too have had our philosophers, men admirable for their lives. But show me another Paul, or a John: you cannot. Would he not then laugh at us for reasoning in this manner? Would he not continue to sit still in ignorance, seeing that the wisdom we profess is in words, not in works? For now for a single halfpenny you are ready to slay or be slain! For a handful of earth you raise lawsuit after lawsuit! For the death of a child you turn all upside down: I omit other things that might make us weep; your auguries, your omens, your superstitious observances, your casting of nativities, your signs, your amulets, your divinations, your incantations, your magic arts. These are crying sins, enough to provoke the anger of God; that after He has sent His own Son, you should

venture on such things as these.

What then can we do but weep? For hardly is a small portion of the world in the way of salvation, and they who are perishing hear it, and rejoice that they are not destined to suffer alone, but in company with numbers. But what cause is this for joy? That very joy will subject them to punishment. For do not think that it is there as here, that to have companions in suffering affords consolation. And whence is this manifest? I will make it clear. Suppose that a man were commanded to be burnt, and that he saw his own son burning with him, and that the smell of his scorched flesh rose to his nostrils; would it not be of itself death to him? No doubt. And I will tell you how it is. If those who are not suffering, yet seeing those things are benumbed and faint with terror, much more will they be so affected, who are themselves sufferers. Wonder not at this. Hear a certain wise one saying, Are you become weak as we? Are you become like us? Isaiah 14:10 For human nature is disposed to sympathy, and the affections of others move us to pity. Will then a father seeing His son in the same condemnation, or a husband his wife, or a man his fellow-man, receive consolation, and not rather an aggravation of his sufferings? Are not we in such case the more overcome? But there, you say, there are no such feelings. I know there are not; but there are others much more wretched. For there will be wailing inconsolable, all witnessing each other's torments. Do they who are furnishing derive comfort in their distress from the participation of others? It is no consolation surely to see a son, a father, a wife, or grandchildren, suffering the same punishment. If one sees friends in such a case, is it any comfort? None! None! It rather adds to the intensity of our own sufferings! Besides, there are evils, which by reason of their severity cannot be mitigated by being common. If two men were together thrown into the fire, would they comfort one another? Tell me; if we have ever been attacked by a violent fever, have we not found that all consolation has failed us? For there are calamities, so overwhelming as to leave no room for comfort in the soul. When a wife has lost her husband, is it a lessening of her grief to number up the many who have suffered the like loss? Let us not therefore be supported by any such hope, rather let us find our sole consolation in repenting of our sins, in pursuing the good path that leads to Heaven, that we may obtain the kingdom of Heaven, by the grace and lovingkindness of Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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