

1 Timothy 4:1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and godliness, warning against the departure from faith and the consequences of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.

Scripture: Luke 16:19, Romans 5:5, 1 Timothy 4:1-4, 1 Timothy 4:6-8, 1 Timothy 4:10

Topics: "Apostasy", "Sound Doctrine"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of departing from the faith in the latter times, warning against seducing spirits and doctrines of demons that lead to hypocrisy and a seared conscience. He emphasizes the importance of adhering to the faith as a safe anchor, contrasting the restlessness of those who fall away. Chrysostom highlights the prophetic insight of Paul in predicting the departure from the faith and the introduction of harmful teachings. He addresses the issues of forbidding marriage and certain foods, stressing that all of God's creation is good and to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Transcript

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

As those who adhere to the faith are fixed on a safe anchor, so those who fall from the faith can nowhere rest; but after many wanderings to and fro, they are borne at last into the very gulf of perdition. And this he had shown before, saying, that some had already made shipwreck concerning the faith, and now he says, Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits. This is said of the Manichæans, the Encratites, and the Marcionites, and the whole of their tribe, that they should hereafter depart from the faith. Do you see that this departure from the faith is the cause of all the evils that follow!

But what is expressly? Plainly, clearly, and beyond doubt. Marvel not, he says, if some having departed from the faith still adhere to Judaism. There will be a time, when even those who have partaken of the faith will fall into a worse error, not only with respect to meats, but to marriages, and other such things, introducing the most pernicious notions. This refers not to the Jews, (for the latter times, and a departure from the faith, is not applicable to them;) but to the Manichees, and the founders of these sects. And he

calls them very justly, seducing spirits, since it was by these they were actuated in speaking such things. Speaking lies in hypocrisy. This implies that they utter not these falsehoods through ignorance and unknowingly, but as acting a part, knowing the truth, but having their conscience seared, that is, being men of evil lives.

But why does he speak only of these heretics? Christ had before said, Offenses must need come Matthew 18:7, and he had predicted the same in his parable of the sower, and of the springing up of the tares. But here admire with me the prophetic gift of Paul, who, before the times in which they were to appear, specifies the time itself. As if he had said, Do not wonder, if, at the commencement of the faith, some endeavor to bring in these pernicious doctrines; since, after it has been established for a length of time, many shall depart from the faith. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. Why then has he mentioned no other heresies? Though not particularized, they are implied by the expressions of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. But he did not wish to instill these things into the minds of men before the time; but that which had already commenced, the case of meats, he specifies. Which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. Why did he not say, by the unbelievers too? How by the unbelievers, when they exclude themselves from them by their own rules? But is not luxury forbidden? Certainly it is. But why? If good things are created to be received. Because He created bread, and yet too much is forbidden; and wine also, and yet excess is forbidden; and we are not commanded to avoid dainties as if they were unclean in themselves, but as they corrupt the soul by excess.

Ver. 4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.

If it be the creature of God, it is good. For all things, it is said, were very good. Genesis 1:31 By speaking thus of things eatable, he by anticipation impugns the heresy of those who introduce an uncreated matter, and assert that these things proceed from it. But if it is good, why is it sanctified by the word of God and prayers? For it must be unclean, if it is to be sanctified? Not so, here he is speaking to those who thought that some of these things were common; therefore he lays down two positions: first, that no creature of God is unclean: secondly, that if it had become so, you have a remedy, seal it, give thanks, and glorify God, and all the uncleanness passes away. Can we then so cleanse that which is offered to an idol? If you know not that it was so offered. But if, knowing this, you partake of it, you will be unclean; not because it was offered to an idol, but because contrary to an express command, you thereby communicate with devils. So that it is not unclean by nature, but becomes so through your wilful disobedience. What then, is not swine's flesh unclean? By no means, when it is received with thanksgiving, and with the seal; nor is anything else. It is your unthankful disposition to God that is unclean.

Ver. 6. If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto you have attained.

What are the things here meant? The same which he had before mentioned, that great is the mystery; that to abstain from meats is the doctrine of devils, that they are cleansed by the word of God and prayer.

Ver. 7. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself rather unto godliness.

Putting them in remembrance, he says; here you observe no authority; but all is condescension: he does not say commanding or enjoining, but reminding them: that is, suggest these things as matter of advice, and so enter into discourses with them concerning the faith, being nourished up, he says, meaning to imply constancy in application to these things.

For as we set before us day by day this bodily nourishment, so he means, let us be continually receiving discourses concerning the faith, and ever be nourished with them. What is this, being nourished up? Ruminating upon them; attending ever to the same things, and practicing ever the same, for it is no common nourishment that they supply.

But refuse profane and old wives' fables. By these are meant Jewish traditions, and he calls them fables, either because of their falsehood or their unseasonableness. For what is seasonable is useful, but what is unseasonable is not only useless but injurious. Suppose a man of adult age to be suckled by a nurse, would he not be ridiculous, because it is unseasonable? Profane and old wives' fables, he calls them, partly because of their obsolescence, and partly because they are impediments to faith. For to bring souls under fear, that are raised above these things, is an impious commandment. Exercise yourself unto godliness. That is, unto a pure faith and a moral life; for this is godliness. So then we need exercise.

Ver. 8. For bodily exercise profits little. This has by some been referred to fasting; but away with such a notion! For that is not a bodily but a spiritual exercise. If it were bodily it would nourish the body, whereas it wastes and makes it lean, so that it is not bodily. Hence he is not speaking of the discipline of the body. What we need, therefore, is the exercise of the soul. For the exercise of the body has no profit, but may benefit the body a little, but the exercise of godliness yields fruit and advantage both here and hereafter.

This is a faithful saying, that is, it is true that godliness is profitable both here and hereafter. Observe how everywhere he brings in this, he needs no demonstration, but simply declares it, for he was addressing Timothy.

So then even here, we have good hopes? For he who is conscious to himself of no evil, and who has been fruitful in good, rejoices even here: as the wicked man on the other hand is punished here as well as hereafter. He lives in perpetual fear, he can look no one in the face with confidence, he is pale, trembling, and full of anxiety. Is it not so with the fraudulent, and with thieves, who have no satisfaction even in what they possess? Is not the life of murderers and adulterers most wretched, who look upon the sun itself with suspicion? Is this to be called life? No; rather a horrid death!

Ver. 10. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe.

This in effect is to say, wherefore do we mortify ourselves, unless we expect future blessings? Have we endured so many evils, submitted to so many reproaches, suffered such insults and calumnies, and such numerous calamities in vain? For if we did not trust in the living God, on what account did we submit to these things? But if God is here the Saviour of the unbelieving, much more is He of the faithful hereafter. What salvation does he speak of? That to come? Who is the Saviour, he says, of all men, specially of them that believe. At present he is speaking of that which is here. But how is He the Saviour of the faithful? Had he not been so, they must long since have been destroyed, for all men have made war upon them. He calls him here to endure perils, that having God for his Saviour he may not faint nor need any aid from others, but willingly and with fortitude endure all things. Even those who eagerly grasp at worldly advantages, supported by the hope of gain, cheerfully undertake laborious enterprises.

It is then the last time. For in the latter times, he says, some shall depart from the faith. Forbidding to marry. And do not we forbid to marry? God forbid. We do not forbid those who wish to marry, but those who do not wish to marry, we exhort to virginity. It is one thing to forbid, and another to leave one to his own free choice. He that forbids, does it once for all, but he who recommends virginity as a higher state,

does not forbid marriage, because he prefers virginity.

Forbidding to marry, he says, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. It is well said, who know the truth. The former things then were a type. For nothing is unclean by nature, but it becomes so through the conscience of him that partakes of it. And what was the object of the prohibition of so many meats? To restrain excessive luxury. But had it been said, eat not for the sake of luxury, it would not have been borne. They were therefore shut up under the necessity of the law, that they might abstain from the stronger principle of fear. The fish was not forbidden, though it was manifestly more unclean than the swine. But they might have learned how pernicious luxury was from that saying of Moses, Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Deuteronomy 32:15 Another cause of these prohibitions might be, that being straitened for other food, they might be reduced to slaughter sheep and oxen; he therefore restrained them from other things, on account of Apis and the calf, which was an abomination, ungrateful, polluted, and profane.

Put them in remembrance of these things, meditate upon these things, for by the expression, nourished up in the words of faith and sound doctrine, is implied that he should not only recommend these things to others, but himself practice them. For he says, Nourished up in the words of faith, and of good doctrine, whereunto you have attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables. Why does he not say, abstain from them, but refuse? He thus intimates that they should be utterly rejected. His meaning is, that he should not enter into any disputation with the teachers of them, but recommend to his own people the things prescribed above. For nothing is to be gained by contending with perverse men, unless where it might have an injurious effect, if we were supposed from weakness to decline arguing with them.

But exercise yourself unto godliness, that is, unto a pure life, and the most virtuous conversation. He that exercises himself, even when it is not the season of contest, acts always as if he were contending, practices abstinence, endures all toils, is always anxious, endures much labor. Exercise yourself, he says, unto godliness; for bodily exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. And why, says one, does he mention this bodily exercise? To show by comparison the superiority of the other, in that the former is of no solid advantage, though it is attended with many toils, while the latter has a lasting and abundant good. As when he bids women adorn themselves, not with broidered hair, or gold, or costly array: but which becomes women possessing godliness; with good works. 1 Timothy 2:9-10

Moral. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach. Did Paul then suffer reproach, and are you impatient? Did Paul labor, and would you live luxuriously? But had he lived luxuriously, he would never have attained such great blessings. For if worldly goods, which are uncertain and perishable, are never gained by men without labor and pains, much less are spiritual. Well, says one, but some inherit them. Yet even when inherited they are not guarded and preserved without labor, and care, and trouble, no less than those have that have gained them. And I need not say that many who have toiled and endured hardships have been disappointed at the very entrance of the harbor, and an adverse wind has caused the wreck of their hopes, when they were upon the point of possession. But with us there is nothing like this. For it is God who promised, and that hope makes not ashamed. Romans 5:5 You who are conversant with worldly affairs, do you not know how many men, after infinite toils, have not enjoyed the fruit of their labors, either being previously cut off by death, or overtaken by misfortune, or assailed by disease, or ruined by false accusers, or some other cause, which amidst the variety of human casualties, has forced them to go with empty hands?

But do you not see the lucky men, says one, who with little labor acquire the good things of life? What good things? Money, houses, so many acres of land, trains of servants, heaps of gold and silver? Can you call these good things, and not hide your head for shame? A man called to the pursuit of heavenly wisdom, and gaping after worldly things, and calling them goods, which are of no value! If these things are good, then the possessors of them must be called good. For is not he good, who is the possessor of what is good? But when the possessors of these things are guilty of fraud and rapine, shall we call them good? For if wealth is a good, but is increased by grasping, the more it is increased, the more will its possessor be considered to be good. Is the grasping man then good? But if wealth is good, and increases by grasping, the more a man grasps, the better he must be. Is not this plainly a contradiction? But suppose the wealth is not gained wrongfully. And how is this possible? So destructive a passion is avarice, that to grow rich without injustice is impossible. This Christ declared, saying, Make to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness. Luke 16:19 But what if he succeeded to his father's inheritance? Then he received what had been gathered by injustice. For it was not from Adam that his ancestor inherited riches, but, of the many that were before him, some one must probably have unjustly taken and enjoyed the goods of others. What then? He says, did Abraham hold unrighteous wealth; and Job, that blameless, righteous, and faithful man, who feared God and eschewed evil? Theirs was a wealth that consisted not in gold and silver, nor in houses, but in cattle. Besides this, he was enriched by God. And the author of that book, relating what happened to that blessed man, mentions the loss of his camels, his mares and asses, but does not speak of treasures of gold or silver being taken away. The riches of Abraham too were his domestics. What then? Did he not buy them? No, for to this very point the Scripture says, that the three hundred and eighteen were born in his house. Genesis 19:14 He had also sheep and oxen. Whence then did he send gold to Rebekah? Genesis 24:22; 12:16 From the gifts which he received from Egypt without violence or wrong.

Tell me, then, whence are you rich? From whom did you receive it, and from whom he who transmitted it to you? From his father and his grandfather. But can you, ascending through many generations, show the acquisition just? It cannot be. The root and origin of it must have been injustice. Why? Because God in the beginning made not one man rich, and another poor. Nor did He afterwards take and show to one treasures of gold, and deny to the other the right of searching for it: but He left the earth free to all alike. Why then, if it is common, have you so many acres of land, while your neighbor has not a portion of it? It was transmitted to me by my father. And by whom to him? By his forefathers. But you must go back and find the original owner. Jacob had wealth, but it was earned as the hire of his labors.

But I will not urge this argument too closely. Let your riches be justly gained, and without rapine. For you are not responsible for the covetous acts of your father. Your wealth may be derived from rapine; but you were not the plunderer. Or granting that he did not obtain it by robbery, that his gold was cast up somewhere out of the earth. What then? Is wealth therefore good? By no means. At the same time it is not bad, he says, if its possessor be not covetous; it is not bad, if it be distributed to the poor, otherwise it is bad, it is ensnaring. But if he does not evil, though he does no good, it is not bad, he argues. True. But is not this an evil, that you alone should have the Lord's property, that you alone should enjoy what is common? Is not the earth God's, and the fullness thereof? If then our possessions belong to one common Lord, they belong also to our fellow-servants. The possessions of one Lord are all common. Do we not see this the settled rule in great houses? To all is given an equal portion of provisions, for it proceeds from the treasures of their Lord. And the house of the master is opened to all. The king's possessions are all common, as cities, market-places, and public walks. We all share them equally.

Mark the wise dispensation of God. That He might put mankind to shame, He has made certain things common, as the sun, air, earth, and water, the heaven, the sea, the light, the stars; whose benefits are dispensed equally to all as brethren. We are all formed with the same eyes, the same body, the same soul, the same structure in all respects, all things from the earth, all men from one man, and all in the same habitation. But these are not enough to shame us. Other things then (as we have said) He has made common, as baths, cities, market-places, walks. And observe, that concerning things that are common there is no contention, but all is peaceable. But when one attempts to possess himself of anything, to make it his own, then contention is introduced, as if nature herself were indignant, that when God brings us together in every way, we are eager to divide and separate ourselves by appropriating things, and by using those cold words mine and yours. Then there is contention and uneasiness. But where this is not, no strife or contention is bred. This state therefore is rather our inheritance, and more agreeable to nature. Why is it, that there is never a dispute about a market-place? Is it not because it is common to all? But about a house, and about property, men are always disputing. Things necessary are set before us in common; but even in the least things we do not observe a community. Yet those greater things He has opened freely to all, that we might thence be instructed to have these inferior things in common. Yet for all this, we are not instructed.

But as I said, how can he, who is rich, be a good man? When he distributes his riches, he is good, so that he is good when he has ceased to have it, when he gives it to others; but while he keeps it himself, he is not good. How then is that a good which being retained renders men evil, being parted with makes them good? Not therefore to have wealth, but to have it not, makes one appear to be good. Wealth therefore is not a good. But if, when you can receive it, you receive it not, again you are good.

If then we are good, when having it, we distribute it to others; or when offered to us we refuse it, and if we are not good, when we receive or gain it, how can it be a good thing in itself? Call it not therefore a good. You possess it not, because you think it a good, because you are anxious to possess it. Cleanse your mind, and rectify your judgment, and then you will be good. Learn what are really goods. What are they? Virtue and benevolence. These and not that, are truly good. According to this rule, the more charitable you are, the more good you will be considered. But if you are rich, you are no longer good. Let us therefore become thus good, that we may be really good, and may obtain the good things to come in Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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