

1 Timothy 4:11-14

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of command and teach, the role of a teacher, reading and doctrine, the gift of prophecy, and honoring widows, all of which are essential for spiritual growth and salvation.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:11, 1 Timothy 4:13-16

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Christian Leadership"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of commanding and teaching in the ministry, urging Timothy to be an example of believers in various aspects of life. He advises Timothy to give attention to reading, exhortation, and doctrine until his return. Chrysostom highlights the significance of not neglecting the spiritual gifts given by God and the need to meditate on and fully dedicate oneself to them for personal and communal growth.

Transcript

These things command and teach. Let no man despise your youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

In some cases it is necessary to command, in others to teach; if therefore you command in those cases where teaching is required, you will become ridiculous. Again, if you teach where you ought to command, you are exposed to the same reproach. For instance, it is not proper to teach a man not to be wicked, but to command; to forbid it with all authority. Not to profess Judaism, should be a command, but teaching is required, when you would lead men to part with their possessions, to profess virginity, or when you would discourse of faith. Therefore Paul mentions both: Command and teach. When a man uses amulets, or does anything of that kind, knowing it to be wrong, he requires only a command; but he who does it ignorantly, is to be taught his error. Let no one despise your youth.

Observe that it becomes a priest to command and to speak authoritatively, and not always to teach. But because, from a common prejudice, youth is apt to be despised, therefore he says, Let no man despise your youth. For a teacher ought not to be exposed to contempt. But if he is not to be despised, what room is there for meekness and moderation? Indeed the contempt that he falls into personally he ought to bear; for teaching is commended by longsuffering. But not so, where others are concerned; for this is not meekness, but coldness. If a man revenge insults, and ill language, and injuries offered to himself, you

justly blame him. But where the salvation of others is concerned, command, and interpose with authority. This is not a case for moderation, but for authority, lest the public good suffer. He enjoins one or the other as the case may require. Let no one despise you on account of your youth. For as long as your life is a counterpoise, you will not be despised for your youth, but even the more admired: therefore he proceeds to say,

But be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity. In all things showing yourself an example of good works: that is, be yourself a pattern of a Christian life, as a model set before others, as a living law, as a rule and standard of good living, for such ought a teacher to be. In word, that he may speak with facility, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in true purity, in temperance.

Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Even Timothy is commanded to apply to reading. Let us then be instructed not to neglect the study of the sacred writings. Again, observe, he says, Till I come. Mark how he consoles him, for being as it were an orphan, when separated from him, it was natural that he should require such comfort. Till I come, he says, give attendance to reading the divine writings, to exhortation of one another, to teaching of all.

Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given you by prophecy.

Here he calls teaching prophecy.

With the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. He speaks not here of Presbyters, but of Bishops. For Presbyters cannot be supposed to have ordained a Bishop.

Ver. 15. Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them.

Observe how often he gives him counsel concerning the same things, thus showing that a teacher ought above all things to be attentive to these points.

Ver. 16. Take heed, he says, unto yourself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them. That is, take heed to yourself, and teach others also.

For in so doing you shall both save yourself and them that hear you.

It is well said, You shall save yourself. For he that is nourished up in the words of sound doctrine, first receives the benefit of it himself. From admonishing others, he is touched with compunction himself. For these things are not said to Timothy only, but to all. And if such advice is addressed to him, who raised the dead, what shall be said to us? Christ also shows the duty of teachers, when He says, The kingdom of heaven is like an householder, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old. Matthew 13:52 And the blessed Paul gives the same advice, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Romans 15:4 This he practiced above all men, being brought up in the law of his fathers, at the feet of Gamaliel, whence he would afterwards naturally apply to reading: for he who exhorted others would himself first follow the advice he gave. Hence we find him continually appealing to the testimony of the prophets, and searching into their writings. Paul then applies to reading, for it is no slight advantage that is to be reaped from the Scriptures. But we are indolent, and we hear with carelessness and indifference. What punishment do we not deserve!

That your profiting may appear, he says, to all.

Thus he would have him appear great and admirable in this respect also, showing that this was still necessary for him, for he wished that his profiting should appear not only in his life, but in the word of doctrine.

Chap. v. ver. 1. Rebuke not an elder.

Is he now speaking of the order? I think not, but of any elderly man. What then if he should need correction? Do not rebuke him, but address him as you would a father offending.

Ver. 1. The elder women as mothers, the younger men as brethren; the younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Rebuke is in its own nature offensive, particularly when it is addressed to an old man, and when it proceeds from a young man too, there is a threefold show of forwardness. By the manner and the mildness of it, therefore, he would soften it. For it is possible to reprove without offense, if one will only make a point of this: it requires great discretion, but it may be done.

The younger men as brethren. Why does he recommend this too here? With a view to the high spirit natural to young men, whence it is proper to soften reproof to them also with moderation.

The younger women as sisters; he adds, with all purity. Tell me not, he means, of merely avoiding sinful intercourse with them. There should not be even a suspicion. For since intimacy with young women is always suspicious, and yet a Bishop cannot always avoid it, he shows by adding these words, that all purity is required in such intimacy. But does Paul give this advice to Timothy? Yes, he says, for I am speaking to the world through him. But if Timothy was thus advised, let others consider what sort of conduct is required of them, that they should give no ground for suspicion, no shadow of pretext, to those who wish to calumniate.

Ver. 3. Honor widows, that are widows indeed.

Why does he say nothing of virginity, nor command us to honor virgins? Perhaps there were not yet any professing that state, or they might have fallen from it. For some, he says, are already turned aside after Satan. 1 Timothy 5:15 For a woman may have lost her husband, and yet not be truly a widow. As in order to be a virgin, it is not enough to be a stranger to marriage, but many other things are necessary, as blamelessness and perseverance; so the loss of a husband does not constitute a widow, but patience, with chastity and separation from all men. Such widows he justly bids us honor, or rather support. For they need support, being left desolate, and having no husband to stand up for them. Their state appears to the multitude despicable and inauspicious. Therefore he wishes them to receive the greater honor from the Priest, and the more so, because they are worthy of it.

Ver. 4. But if any widow have children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents.

Observe the discretion of Paul; how often he urges men from human considerations. For he does not here lay down any great and lofty motive, but one that is easy to be understood: to requite their parents. How? For bringing them up and educating them. As if he should say, You have received from them great care. They are departed. You can not requite them. For thou did not bring them forth, nor nourish them. Requite them in their descendants, repay the debt through the children. Let them learn first to show piety at home. Here he more simply exhorts them to acts of kindness; then to excite them the more, he adds,

For that is good and acceptable before God. And as he had spoken of those who are widows indeed, he declares who is indeed a widow.

Ver. 5. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

She who being a widow has not made choice of a worldly life, is a widow indeed; she who trusts in God as she ought, and continues instant in prayer night and day, is a widow indeed. Not that she, who has children, is not a widow indeed. For he commends her who brings up children as she ought. But if any one has not children, he means, she is desolate, and her he consoles, saying, that she is most truly a widow, who has lost not only the consolation of a husband, but that arising from children, yet she has God in the place of all. She is not the worse for not having children, but He fills up her need with consolation, in that she is without children. What he says amounts to this. Grieve not, when it is said that a widow ought to bring up children, as if, because you have no children your worth were on that account inferior. You are a widow indeed, whereas she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

But since many who have children choose the state of widowhood, not to cut off the occasions of a worldly life, but rather to enhance them, that they may do what they will with the greater license, and indulge the more freely in worldly lusts: therefore he says, She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. Ought not a widow then to live in pleasure? Surely not. If then when nature and age is weak, a life of pleasure is not allowable, but leads to death, eternal death; what have men to say, who live a life of pleasure? But he says with reason, She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. But that you may see this, let us now see what is the state of the dead, and what of the living, and in which shall we place such an one? The living perform the works of life, of that future life, which is truly life. And Christ has declared what are the works of that future life, with which we ought always to be occupied. Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and you gave me meat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. Matthew 25:34-35 The living differ from the dead, not only in that they behold the sun, and breathe the air, but in that they are doing some good. For if this be wanting, the living are not better than the dead. That you may learn this, hear how it is possible that even the dead should live. For it is said, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Matthew 22:32 But this again you say is a riddle. Let us therefore solve them both. A man who lives in pleasure, is dead while he lives. For he lives only to his belly. In his other senses he lives not. He sees not what he ought to see, he hears not what he ought to hear, he speaks not what he ought to speak. Nor does he perform the actions of the living. But as he who is stretched upon a bed, with his eyes closed, and his eyelids fast, perceives nothing that is passing; so it is with this man, or rather not so, but worse. For the one is equally insensible to things good and evil, but the latter is sensible to things evil only, but as insensible as the former to things good. Thus he is dead. For nothing relating to the life to come moves or affects him. For intemperance, taking him into her own bosom, as into some dark and dismal cavern, full of all uncleanness, causes him to dwell altogether in darkness, like the dead. For when all his time is spent between feasting and drunkenness, is he not dead, and buried in darkness? Even in the morning when he seems to be sober, he is not sober in reality, since he has not yet rid and cleansed himself of yesterday's excess and is still longing for a repetition, and in that his evening and noon he passes in revels, and all the night, and most of the morning in deep sleep.

Is he then to be numbered with the living? Who can describe that storm that comes of luxury, that assails his soul and body? For as a sky continually clouded admits not the sunbeams to shine through it, so the fumes of luxury and wine enveloping his brain, as if it were some rock, and casting over it a thick mist, suffer not reason to exert itself, but overspread the drunken man with profound darkness. With him who is

thus affected, how great must be the storm within, how violent the tumult. As when a flood of water has risen, and has surmounted the entrances of the workshops, we see all the inmates in confusion, and using tubs and pitchers and sponges, and many other contrivances to bale it out, that it may not both undermine the building, and spoil all that is contained in it: so it is when luxury overwhelms the soul; its reasonings within are disturbed. What is already collected, cannot be discharged, and by the introduction of more, a violent storm is raised. For look not at the cheerful and merry countenance, but examine the interior, and you will see it full of deep dejection. If it were possible to bring the soul into view, and to behold it with our bodily eyes, that of the luxurious would seem depressed, mournful, miserable, and wasted with leanness; for the more the body grows sleek and gross, the more lean and weakly is the soul; and the more one is pampered, the more is the other hampered. As, when the pupil of the eye has the external coats over it too thick, it cannot put forth the power of vision, and look out, because the light is excluded by the thick covering, and darkness often ensues; so when the body is constantly full fed, the soul must be invested with grossness. But the dead rot, and are corrupted, you say; and an unwholesome moisture distills from them. So in her that lives in pleasure, may be seen rheums, and phlegm, catarrh, hiccough, vomitings, eructations, and the like, which, as too unseemly, I forbear to name. For such is the dominion of luxury, that it makes one endure things, which we do not even think proper to mention.

But you still ask, how is the body dissolved while it yet eats and drinks? Surely this is no sign of human life, since creatures without reason too eat and drink. Where the soul lies dead, what do eating and drinking avail? The dead body, that is invested with a flowery garment, is not benefited by it, and when a blooming body invests a dead soul, the soul is not benefited. For when its whole discourse is of cooks, and caterers, and confectioners, and it utters nothing pious, is it not dead? For let us consider what is man? The Heathens say that he is a rational animal, mortal, capable of intelligence and knowledge. But let us not take our definition from them, but whence? From the sacred writings. Where then has the Scripture given a definition of man? Hear its words. There was a man perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil. Job 1:2 This was indeed a man! Again, another says, Man is great, and the merciful man is precious. Proverbs 20:6, Septuagint Those who answer not to this description, though they partake of mind, and are never so capable of knowledge, the Scripture refuses to acknowledge them as men, but calls them dogs, and horses, and serpents, and foxes, and wolves, and if there be any animals more contemptible. If such then is man, he that lives in pleasure is not a man; for how can he be, who never thinks of anything that he ought? Luxury and sobriety cannot exist together: they are destructive of one another. Even the Heathens say,

A heavy paunch bears not a subtle mind.

Such as these the Scripture calls men without souls. My Spirit (it is said) shall not always abide in these men, because they are flesh. Genesis 6:3, Septuagint Yet they had a soul, but because it was dead in them, He calls them flesh. For as in the case of the virtuous, though they have a body, we say, he is all soul, he is all spirit, so the reverse is said of those who are otherwise. So Paul also said of those, who did not fulfill the works of the flesh, You are not in the flesh. Romans 8:9 Thus those who live in luxury are not in the soul or in the spirit.

Moral. She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. Hear this, you women, that pass your time in revels and intemperance, and who neglect the poor, pining and perishing with hunger, while you are destroying yourself with continual luxury. Thus you are the causes of two deaths, of those who are dying of want, and of your own, both through ill measure. But if out of your fullness you tempered their want, you would save two lives. Why do you thus gorge your own body with excess, and waste that of the poor with

want; why pamper this above measure, and stint that too beyond measure?

Consider what comes of food, into what it is changed. Are you not disgusted at its being named? Why then be eager for such accumulations? The increase of luxury is but the multiplication of dung! For nature has her limits, and what is beyond these is not nourishment, but injury, and the increase of ordure. Nourish the body, but do not destroy it. Food is called nourishment, to show that its design is not to injure the body, but to nourish it. For this reason perhaps food passes into excrement, that we may not be lovers of luxury.

For if it were not so, if it were not useless and injurious to the body, we should not cease from devouring one another. If the belly received as much as it pleased, digested it, and conveyed it to the body, we should see wars and battles innumerable. Even now when part of our food passes into ordure, part into blood, part into spurious and useless phlegm, we are nevertheless so addicted to luxury, that we spend perhaps whole estates on a meal. What should we not do, if this were not the end of luxury?

The more luxuriously we live, the more noisome are the odors with which we are filled. The body is like a swollen bottle, running out every way. The eructations are such as to pain the head of a bystander. From the heat of fermentation within, vapors are sent forth, as from a furnace, if bystanders are pained, what, think you, is the brain within continually suffering, assailed by these fumes? To say nothing of the channels of the heated and obstructed blood, of those reservoirs, the liver and the spleen, and of the canals by which the fœces are discharged.

The drains in our streets we take care to keep unobstructed. We cleanse our sewers with poles and drags, that they may not be stopped, or overflow, but the canals of our bodies we do not keep clear, but obstruct and choke them up, and when the filth rises to the very throne of the king, I mean the brain, we do not regard it, treating it not like a worthy king, but like an unclean brute. God has purposely removed to a distance those unclean members, that we might not receive offense from them.

But we suffer it not to be so, and spoil all by our excess. And other evils might be mentioned. To obstruct the sewers is to breed a pestilence; but if a stench from without is pestilential, that which is pent up within the body, and cannot find a vent, what disorders must it not produce both to body and soul? Some have strangely complained, wondering why God has ordained that we should bear a load of ordure with us. But they themselves increase the load. God designed thus to detach us from luxury, and to persuade us not to attach ourselves to worldly things.

But you are not thus to be persuaded to cease from gluttony, but though it is but as far as the throat, and as long as the hour of eating, nay not even so long, that the pleasure abides, you continue in your indulgence. Is it not true that as soon as it has passed the palate and the throat, the pleasure ceases? For the sense of it is in the taste, and after that is gratified, a nausea succeeds, the stomach not digesting the food, or not without much difficulty. Justly then is it said, that she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

For the luxurious soul is unable to hear or to see anything. It becomes weak, ignoble, unmanly, illiberal, cowardly, full of impudence, servility, ignorance, rage, violence, and all kinds of evil, and destitute of the opposite virtues. Therefore he says,

Ver. 7. These things give in charge, that they may be blameless.

He does not leave it to their choice. Command them, he says, not to be luxurious, assuming it to be confessedly an evil, as not holding it lawful or admissible for the luxurious to partake of the Holy Mysteries. These things command, he says, that they may be blameless. Thus you see it is reckoned among sins. For if it were a matter of choice, though it were left undone, we might still be blameless. Therefore in obedience to Paul, let us command the luxurious widow not to have place in the list of widows. For if a soldier, who frequents the bath, the theater, the busy scenes of life, is judged to desert his duty, much more the widows. Let us then not seek our rest here, that we may find it hereafter. Let us not live in pleasure here, that we may hereafter enjoy true pleasure, true delight, which brings no evil with it, but infinite good. Of which God grant that we may all be partakers, in Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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