

1 Timothy 5:11-15

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of marriage and children for the younger widows, and the need for the Church to support the true widows.

Scripture: Matthew 18:16, 1 Corinthians 2:9, 1 Corinthians 7:34, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 2:6, 1 Timothy 5:11-20

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Church Discipline"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of living a life of purpose and faithfulness, highlighting the dangers of idleness, gossip, and straying away from God's path. He emphasizes the significance of maintaining one's faith and fulfilling responsibilities, such as marriage, childbearing, and managing the household, to avoid falling into sinful behaviors and giving the adversary an opportunity to speak reproachfully. Chrysostom urges believers to work diligently, rebuke sin with severity, and honor those who labor in the word and doctrine, emphasizing the need for accountability and discipline within the church community.

Transcript

But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having condemnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Paul having discoursed much concerning widows, and having settled the age at which they were to be admitted, saying, Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, and having described the qualifications of a widow, If she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the Saints' feet, proceeds now to say, But the younger widows refuse. But concerning virgins, though the case of their falling is a much more gross one, he has said nothing of this kind, and rightly. For they had enrolled themselves on higher views, and the work with them proceeded from a greater elevation of mind. Therefore the receiving of strangers, and the washing of the Saints' feet, he has represented by attending upon the Lord without distraction 1 Corinthians 7:34-35, and by saying, The unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:34-35 And if he has not limited a particular age for them, it is most likely because that point is settled by what he has said in this case. But indeed, as I said, the choice of virginity proceeded from a higher purpose. Besides, in this case there had

been falls, and thus they had given occasion for his rule, but nothing of that kind had occurred among the virgins. For that some had already fallen away is plain, in that he says, When they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; and again, For some have already turned aside after Satan.

The younger widows refuse, for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; that is, when they have become scornful and luxurious. For as in the case of a just man, we might say, Let her depart, for she has become another's. He shows therefore that though they chose widowhood, it was not the choice of their judgment. So then a widow, by the state of widowhood, is espoused to Christ. For He has said, I am the defender of the widows and the father of the orphans. Psalm 68:5 He shows that they do not choose widowhood as they ought, but wax wanton: however he bears with them. Elsewhere indeed he says, I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2 After having given their names to Him, they will marry, he says, having condemnation, because they have cast off their first faith. By faith he means, fidelity to their covenant. As if he had said, They have been false to Christ, they have dishonored Him, and transgressed His covenant. And withal they learn to be idle.

Thus he commands not only men, but women also, to work. For idleness is the teacher of every sin. And not only are they exposed to this condemnation, but to other sins. If therefore it is unbecoming for a married woman to go from house to house, much more is it for a virgin. And not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, guide the house.

What then happens, when the care for the husband is withdrawn, and the care to please God does not constrain them? They naturally become idlers, tattlers, and busybodies. For he who does not attend to his own concerns will be meddling with those of others, even as he who minds his own business will take no account of and have no care about the affairs of another. And nothing is so unbecoming to a woman, as to busy herself in the concerns of others, and it is no less unbecoming to a man. This is a great sign of impudence and forwardness.

I will therefore, he says, (since they themselves wish it,) that the younger widows marry, bear children, guide the house.

This course is at least preferable to the other. They ought indeed to be concerned for the things of God, they ought to preserve their faith. But since they do not this, it is better to avoid a worse course. God is not dishonored by their marrying again, and they do not fall into those practices, which have been censured. From such a widowhood, no good could arise, but good may come out of this marriage. Hence the women will be able to correct that indolence and vanity of mind.

But why, since some have fallen away, does he not say that much care is to be taken of them, that they may not fall into the error he has mentioned? Why has he commanded them to marry? Because marriage is not forbidden, and it is a safeguard to them. Wherefore he adds, that they give none occasion, or handle, to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan. Such widows as these then he would have refused, not meaning that there should be no younger widows, but that there should be no adulteresses, that none should be idle, busy-bodies, speaking things that they ought not, that no occasion should be given to the adversary. Had nothing of this kind taken place, he would not have forbidden them.

Ver. 16. If any man or woman that believes have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the Church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

Observe how again he speaks of those as widows indeed, who are left destitute, and have no resource from any other quarter. It was better to have it so. For thus two great objects were attained. Those had an opportunity of doing good, while these were honorably maintained, and the Church not burdened. And he has well said, If any believer. For it is not fit that believing women should be maintained by unbelievers, lest they should seem to stand in need of them. And observe how persuasively he speaks; he has not said, let them maintain them expensively, but let them relieve them. That the Church, he says, may relieve them that are widows indeed. She therefore has the reward of this help also, for she that helps the Church, helps not her only, but those widows too whom the Church is thus enabled to maintain more bountifully. I will therefore that the younger widows-- do what? Live in luxury and pleasure? By no means; but -- marry, bear children, guide the house. That he may not be supposed to encourage them to live luxuriously, he adds, that they give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. They ought indeed to have been superior to the things of this world, but since they are not, let them abide in them at least upright.

Ver. 17, 18. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward.

The honor of which he here speaks is attention to them, and the supply of their necessities, as is shown by his adding, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain Deuteronomy 25:4; and, The laborer is worthy of his reward. Luke 10:7 So when he says, Honor widows, he means, support them in all that is necessary. Thus he says, That it may relieve those that are widows indeed; and again, Honor widows that are widows indeed, that is, who are in poverty, for the greater their poverty, the more truly are they widows. He alleges the Law, he alleges the words of Christ, both agreeing herein. For the Law says, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain. See how he would have the teacher labor! For there is not, indeed there is not, any other labor such as his. But this is from the Law. But how does he quote from Christ? The laborer is worthy of his reward. Let us not then look only to the reward, but to the terms of the commandment. The laborer, he says, is worthy of his reward. So that if any one lives in sloth and luxury, he is unworthy of it. Unless he is as the ox treading out the grain, and bearing the yoke, in spite of heat and thorns, and ceases not till he has carried the grain into the granary, he is not worthy. Therefore to teachers should be granted a supply of their necessities without grudging, that they may not faint nor be discouraged, nor by attention to inferior things deprive themselves of greater; that they may labor for spiritual things, paying no regard to worldly things. It was thus with the Levites; they had no worldly concerns, because the laity took care to provide for them, and their revenues were appointed by the law, as tythes, offerings of gold, first-fruits, vows, and many other things. And the law properly assigned these things to them, as seeking things present. But I shall say no more than that those who preside ought to have food and raiment, that they may not be distracted by care for these things. But what is double support? Double that of the widows, or of the deacons, or simply, liberal support. Let us not then think only of the double maintenance granted them, but of what is added, Those who rule well. And what is it to rule well? Let us hear Christ, Who says, The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. John 10:11 Thus to rule well is, from our concern for them, never to spare ourselves.

Especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. Where then are those who say that there is no occasion for the word and doctrine? Whereas he says to Timothy, Meditate upon these things; give

yourself wholly to them; and, Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine; for in doing this you shall save both yourself, and them that hear you. 1 Timothy 4:15-16 These are the men whom he wishes to be honored most of all, and he adds the reason, for they sustain great labor. For when one is neither watchful, nor diligent, but merely sits in his stall easy and unconcerned, while another wears himself out with anxiety and exertion, especially if he is ignorant of profane literature, ought not the latter to be honored above all others, who more than others gives himself up to such labors? For he is exposed to numberless tongues. One censures him, another praises him, a third mocks him, another finds fault with his memory and his composition, and it requires great strength of mind to endure all this. It is an important point, and contributes much to the edification of the Church, that the rulers of it should be apt to teach. If this be wanting, many things in the Church go to ruin. Therefore in addition to the qualifications of hospitality, moderation, and a blameless life, he enumerates this also, saying, Apt to teach. For why else indeed is he called a teacher? Some say that he may teach philosophy by the example of his life, so that all else is superfluous, and there is no need of verbal instruction in order to proficiency. But why then does Paul say, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine? For when doctrines are concerned, what life will answer the purpose? And of what word is he speaking? Not of pompous language, nor of discourse set off with external decorations, but that which possesses the mighty power of the Spirit, and abounds with wisdom and understanding. It needs not set phrases, but thoughts to give it utterance, not skill in composition, but power of mind.

Ver. 19. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

May we then receive an accusation against a younger man, or against any one at all without witnesses? Ought we not in all cases to come to our judgments with the greatest exactness? What then does he mean? Do not so, he means, with any, but especially in the case of an elder. For he speaks of an elder not with respect to office, but to age, since the young more easily fall into sin than their elders. And it is manifest from hence that the Church, and even the whole people of Asia, had been now entrusted to Timothy, which is the reason why he discourses with him concerning elders.

Ver. 20. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

Do not, he says, hastily cut them off, but carefully enquire into all the circumstances, and when you have thoroughly informed yourself, then proceed against the offender with rigor, that others may take warning. For as it is wrong to condemn hastily and rashly, so not to punish manifest offenses is to open the way to others, and embolden them to offend.

Rebuke, he says, to show that it is not to be done lightly, but with severity. For thus others will be deterred. How is it then that Christ says, Go and tell him his fault between him and you alone, if one sin against you. Matthew 18:15 But Christ Himself permits him to be censured in the Church. What then? Is it not a greater scandal, that one should be rebuked before all? How so? For it is a much greater scandal, that the offense should be known, and not the punishment. For as when sinners go unpunished, many commit crimes; so when they are punished, many are made better. God Himself acted in this manner. He brought forth Pharaoh, and punished him openly. And Nebuchadnezzar too, and many others, both cities and individuals, we see visited with punishment. Paul therefore would have all stand in awe of their Bishop, and sets him over all.

And because many judgments are formed upon suspicion, there ought, he says, to be witnesses, and men to convict the offender according to the ancient law. At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every

matter be established. Against an elder receive not an accusation. Deuteronomy 19:15 He does not say, do not condemn, but receive not an accusation, bring him not to judgment at all. But what if the two witnesses are false? This rarely happens, and it may be discovered upon examination on the trial. For since offenses are committed in secret, we ought to be satisfied with two witnesses, and this is sufficient proof of investigation.

But what if the offenses be notorious, and yet there are no witnesses, only a strong suspicion? It has been said above that he ought to have a good report of them which are without. 1 Timothy 3:7

Let us therefore love God with fear. The law indeed is not made for a righteous man; but since the greater part are virtuous from constraint rather than from choice, the principle of fear is of great advantage to them in eradicating their desires. Let us therefore listen to the threatenings of hell fire, that we may be benefited by the wholesome fear of it. For if God, intending to cast sinners into it, had not previously threatened them with it, many would have plunged into it.

For, if with this terror agitating our souls, some sin as readily as if there were no such thing in existence, what enormities should we not have committed, if it had not been declared and threatened? So that, as I have ever said, the threatenings of hell show the care of God for us no less than the promises of heaven. For the threat coöperates with the promise, and drives men into the kingdom by means of terror. Let us not think it a matter of cruelty, but of pity and mercy; of God's concern and love for us.

If in the days of Jonah the destruction of Nineveh had not been threatened, that destruction had not been averted. Nineveh would not have stood but for the threat, Nineveh shall be overthrown. Jonah 3:4 And if hell had not been threatened, we should all have fallen into hell. If the fire had not been denounced, no one would have escaped the fire. God declares that He will do that which He desires not to do, that He may do that which He desires to do. He wills not the death of a sinner, and therefore He threatens the sinner with death, that He may not have to inflict death.

And not only has He spoken the word, but He has exhibited the thing itself, that we may escape it. And lest it should be supposed to be a mere threat, He has manifested the reality of it by what He has already done on earth. Do you not see in the flood a symbol of hell, in that rain of all-destroying water an image of the all-devouring fire? For as it was in the days of Noah, He says, they were marrying and giving in marriage Matthew 24:38, so is it even now. It was then predicted long before it took place, and it is now predicted four hundred years or more beforehand: but no one heeds it.

It is looked upon as a mere fable, as a matter of derision; no one fears it, no one weeps or beats his breast at the thought of it. The stream of fire is boiling up, the flame is kindled, and we are laughing, taking our pleasure, and sinning without fear. No one even bears in mind That Day. No one considers that present things are passing away, and that they are but temporal, though events are every day crying out and uttering a fearful voice. The untimely deaths, the changes that take place in our lives, our own infirmities and diseases, fail to instruct us.

And not only in our own bodies are these changes visible, but in the elements themselves. Every day in our different ages we experience a kind of death, and in every case instability is the characteristic of things we see. Neither winter, nor summer, nor spring, nor autumn, is permanent; all are running, flying, and flowing past. Why should I speak of fading flowers, of dignities, of kings that are today, and tomorrow cease to be, of rich men, of magnificent houses, of night and day, of the sun and the moon?

For the moon wanes, and the sun is sometimes eclipsed, and often darkened with clouds? Of things visible, in short, is there anything that endures for ever? Nothing! No, nor anything in us but the soul, and that we neglect. Of things subject to change we take abundant care, as if they were permanent: but that which is to endure for ever we neglect, as if it were soon to pass away. Some one is enabled to perform mighty actions, but they shall last till tomorrow, and then he perishes, as we see in the instances of those who have had yet greater power, and are now to be seen no more.

Life is a dream, and a scene; and as on the stage when the scene is shifted the various pageants disappear, and as dreams flit away when the sunbeams rise, so here when the end comes, whether the universal or that of each one, all is dissolved and vanishes away. The tree that you have planted remains, and the house that you have built, it too stands on. But the planter and the builder go away, and perish. Yet these things happen without our regarding it, and we live on in luxury and pleasure, and are ever furnishing ourselves with such things, as if we were immortal.

Hear what Solomon says, who knew the present world by actual experience. I built me houses, I planted me vineyards, I made me gardens, and orchards and pools of water. I gathered me also silver and gold. I gat myself men-singers, and women-singers, and flocks, and herds. Ecclesiastes 2:4-5 There was no one who lived in greater luxury, or higher glory. There was no one so wise or so powerful, no one who saw all things so succeeding to his heart's desire. What then? He had no enjoyment from all these things. What after all does he say of it himself? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 12:8 Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him, and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth; and what is based upon a solid rock, where there is no old age, nor decline, but all things bloom and flourish, without decay, or waxing old, or approaching dissolution. Let us, I beseech you, love God with genuine affection, not from fear of hell, but from desire of the kingdom. For what is comparable to seeing Christ? Surely nothing! What to the enjoyment of those good things? Surely nothing! Well may there be nothing; for eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. 1 Corinthians 2:9 Let us be anxious to obtain those things, and let us despise all these. Are we not continually complaining that human life is nothing? Why are you solicitous for what is nothing? Why do you sustain such toils, for what is nothing? You see splendid houses, does the sight of them delude you? Look up to heaven. Raise your view from pillars of stone to that beautiful fabric, compared with which the others are as the works of ants and pismires. Learn philosophy from that spectacle, ascend to heavenly things, and look thence upon our splendid buildings, and see that they are nothing, the mere toys of little children. Do you see not how much finer, how much lighter, how much purer, how much more translucent, is the air the higher you ascend? There have they that do alms their mansions and their tabernacles. These that are here are dissolved at the resurrection, or rather before the resurrection destroyed by the stroke of time. Nay often in their most flourishing state and period an earthquake overthrows, or fire entirely ruins them. For not only the bodies of men, but their very buildings are liable to untimely deaths. Nay, sometimes things decayed by time stand firm under the shock of an earthquake, while glittering edifices, firmly fixed, and newly constructed, are struck but by lightning and perish. And this, I believe, is the interposition of God, that we may not take pride in our buildings.

Would you again have another ground for cheerfulness? Go to the public buildings, in which you share equally with others. For the most magnificent private houses, after all, are less splendid than the public edifices. There you may remain, as long as you please. They belong to you as much as to others, since they are common to you with others; they are common, and not private. But those, you say, delight you not. They delight you not, partly because you are familiar with them, and partly from your covetousness.

So the pleasantness is not in the beauty, but in the appropriating! So the pleasure is in greediness, and in the wish to make every man's goods your own! How long are we to be nailed to these things? How long are we to be fastened to the earth, and grovel, like worms, in the dirt? God has given us a body of earth, that we might carry it with us up to heaven, not that we should draw our soul down with it to earth. Earthy it is, but if we please, it may be heavenly. See how highly God has honored us, in committing to us so excellent a frame. I made heaven and earth, He says, and to you I give the power of creation. Make your earth heaven. For it is in your power. I am He that makes and transforms all things Amos 5:8, Septuagint, says God of Himself. And He has given to men a similar power; as a painter, being an affectionate father, teaches his own art to his son. I formed your body beautiful, he says, but I give you the power of forming something better. Make your soul beautiful. I said, Let the earth bring forth grass, and every fruitful tree. Genesis 1:11 Do thou also say, Let this earth bring forth its proper fruit, and what you will to produce will be produced. I make the summer and the cloud. I create the lightning and the wind. Amos 4:13; Psalm 74:17 I formed the dragon, that is, the devil, to make sport with him. Psalm 104:26 Nor have I grudged you the like power. You, if you will, can sport with him, and bind him as you would a sparrow. I make the sun to rise upon the evil and the good: do thou imitate Me, by imparting of that is yours to the good and the evil. When mocked I bear with it, and do good to those who mock Me: imitate Me, as you can. I do good, not to be requited; imitate Me, and do good, not to be repaid. I have lighted luminaries in the heavens. Do thou light others brighter than these, for you can, by enlightening those that are in error. For to know Me is a greater benefit than to behold the sun. You can not create a man, but you can make him just and acceptable to God. I formed his substance, do thou beautify his will. See how I love you, and have given you the power in the greater things.

Beloved, see how we are honored! Yet some are so unreasonable and so ungrateful as to say, Why are we endowed with free will? But how in all the particulars which we have mentioned could we have imitated God, if there had been no free will? I rule Angels, He says, and so do you, through Him who is the First-fruits. 1 Corinthians 15:23 I sit on a royal throne, and you are seated with Me in Him who is the First-fruits. As it is said, He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6 Through Him who is the First-fruits, Cherubim and Seraphim adore you, with all the heavenly host, principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Disparage not your body, to which such high honors appertain, that the unbodied Powers tremble at it.

But what shall I say? It is not in this way only that I have shown My love to you, but by what I have suffered. For you I was spit upon, I was scourged. I emptied myself of glory, I left My Father and came to you, who dost hate Me, and turn from Me, and art loath to hear My Name. I pursued you, I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I united and joined you to myself, eat Me, drink Me, I said. Above I hold you, and below I embrace you. Is it not enough for you that I have your First-fruits above? Does not this satisfy your affection? I descended below: I not only am mingled with you, I am entwined in you. I am masticated, broken into minute particles, that the interspersion, and commixture, and union may be more complete. Things united remain yet in their own limits, but I am interwoven with you. I would have no more any division between us. I will that we both be one.

Therefore knowing these things and remembering His abundant care for us, let us do all things which may prove us not unworthy of His great gift, which God grant that we may all obtain, through the grace and lovingkindness of Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom, etc.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/1-timothy-511-15/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net