

1 Timothy 5:21-23

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of impartiality, responsibility in leadership, and the relationship between service to God and to others in his sermon on 1 Timothy 5:21-23.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:21-24, 1 Timothy 6:1

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of impartiality and purity in observing God's commands, urging Timothy to avoid showing favoritism and to maintain a blameless conduct. He highlights the seriousness of ordinations, cautioning against hasty decisions and reminding Timothy of the responsibility he bears for the sins of those he appoints. Chrysostom also addresses the need for self-discipline and moderation, advising Timothy to take care of his health and infirmities. Through various examples and teachings, he underscores the significance of obedience, humility, and faithful service to both earthly masters and the ultimate Master, God.

Transcript

I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that you observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep yourself pure. Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Having spoken of Bishops and Deacons, of men, and women, of widows and elders, and of all others, and having shown how great was the authority of a Bishop, now he was speaking of judgment, he has added, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that you observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Thus fearfully he charges him. For though Timothy was his beloved son, he did not therefore stand in awe of him. For as he was not ashamed to say of himself, Lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away 1 Corinthians 9:27; much less would he be afraid or ashamed in the case of Timothy. He called the Father and the Son to witness. But wherefore the elect Angels? From great moderation, as Moses said, I call heaven and earth to witness Deuteronomy 4:26; and again, Hear ye, O mountains, and strong foundations of the earth. Micah 6:2 He calls the Father and the Son to witness what he has said, making his appeal to Them against that future Day, that if anything should be done that ought not to be done, he was clear from the guilt of it.

That thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. That is, that you deal impartially and equally between those who are upon trial and are to be judged by you, that no one may pre-occupy your mind, or gain you over to his side beforehand.

But who are the elect Angels? It is because there are some not elect. As Jacob calls to witness God and the heap Genesis 31:45, so we often take at once superior and inferior persons to witness; so great a thing is testimony. As if he had said, I call to witness God and His Son and His servants, that I have charged you: so before them I charge you. He impresses Timothy with fear; after which he adds, what was most vital, and bears most on the maintenance of the Church, the matter of Ordinations. Lay hands, he says, suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins. What is suddenly? Not upon a first, nor a second, nor a third trial, but after frequent and strict examination and circumspection. For it is an affair of no common peril. For you will be responsible for the sins committed by him, as well his past as his future sins, because you have delegated to him this power. For if you overlook the past unduly, you are answerable for the future also, as being the cause of them, by placing him in that station, and of the past too, for not leaving him to mourn over them, and to be in compunction. For as you are a partaker of his good actions, so are you of his sins.

Keep yourself pure. This he says with reference to chastity.

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your often infirmities. If one who had practiced fasting to such an extent, and used only water, so long that he had brought on infirmities and frequent infirmities, is thus commanded to be chaste, and does not refuse the admonition, much less ought we to be offended when we receive an admonition from any one. But why did not Paul restore strength to his stomach? Not because he could not -- for he whose garment had raised the dead was clearly able to do this too -- but because he had a design of importance in withholding such aid. What then was his purpose? That even now, if we see great and virtuous men afflicted with infirmities, we may not be offended, for this was a profitable visitation. If indeed to Paul himself a messenger of Satan was sent that he should not be exalted above measure 2 Corinthians 12:11, much more might it be so with Timothy. For the miracles he wrought were enough to have rendered him arrogant. For this reason he is left to be subject to the rules of medicine, that he may be humbled, and others may not be offended, but may learn that they who performed such excellent actions were men of the same nature as themselves. In other respects also Timothy seems to have been subject to disease, which is implied by that expression, Your often infirmities, as well of other parts as of the stomach. He does not however allow him to indulge freely in wine, but as much as was for health and not for luxury.

Ver. 24. Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some they follow after.

In speaking of ordination, he had said, Be not partaker of other men's sins. But what, he might say, if I be ignorant of them? Why, some men's sins are open beforehand, going before them to judgment, and some they follow after. Some men's, he means, are manifest, because they, go before, while others' are unknown, because they follow after.

Ver. 25. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

Chap. vi. ver. 1. Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their masters worthy of all honor, that the Name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.

Let them count them worthy of all honor, he says; for do not suppose, because you are a believer, that you are therefore a free man: since your freedom is to serve the more faithfully. For if the unbeliever sees slaves conducting themselves insolently on account of their faith, he will blaspheme, as if the Doctrine produced insubordination. But when he sees them obedient, he will be more inclined to believe, and will rather attend to our words. But God, and the Gospel we preach, will be blasphemed, if they are disobedient. But what if their own master be an unbeliever? Even in that case they ought to submit, for God's Name's sake.

Ver. 2. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved partakers of the benefit.

As though he had said, If you are thought worthy of so great a benefit, as to have your masters for your brethren, on this account you ought more especially to submit.

Going before to judgment. This he had said, implying that of evil actions here some are concealed, and some are not; but there neither the good nor the bad can be concealed. And what is that going before to judgment? When one commits offenses that already condemn him, or when he is incorrigible, and when one thinks to set him right and cannot succeed. What then? What is the use of mentioning this? Because if here any escape detection, they will not hereafter. There all things are laid open; and this is the greatest consolation to those who do well.

Then because he had said, Do nothing by partiality, as if under the necessity of interpreting it, he adds, As many servants as are under the yoke. But you will say, What has a Bishop to do with this? Much surely, for it is his office to exhort and to teach these too. And here he makes excellent regulations with respect to them. For we see him everywhere commanding the servants rather than their masters, showing them the ways of submission, and treating them with great regard. He exhorts them therefore to submit with great meekness. But the masters he recommends to forbear the use of terror. Forbearing threatening Ephesians 6:9, he says. And why does he thus command? In the case of unbelievers, naturally, because it would have been unreasonable to address those who would pay no heed to him; but where believers were concerned, what was his reason? Because masters contribute greater benefits to their servants, than servants to their masters. For the former furnish the money to purchase for them sufficient food and clothing; and bestow much care upon them in other respects, so that the masters pay them the larger service, which is here intimated, when he says, they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. They suffer much toil and trouble for your repose, ought they not in return to receive much honor from their servants?

Moral. But if he exhorts servants to render such implicit obedience, consider what ought to be our disposition towards our Master, who brought us into existence out of nothing, and who feeds and clothes us. If in no other way then, let us render Him service at least as our servants render it to us. Do not they order their whole lives to afford rest to their masters, and is it not their work and their life to take care of their concerns? Are they not all day long engaged in their masters' work, and only a small portion of the evening in their own? But we, on the contrary, are ever engaged in our own affairs, in our Master's hardly at all, and that too, though He needs not our services, as masters need those of their servants, but those very acts redound to our own benefit. In their case the master is benefited by the ministry of the servant, but in ours the ministry of the servant profits not the Master, but is beneficial on the other hand to the servant. As the Psalmist says, My goods are nothing unto You. Psalm 16:2 For say, what advantage is it to God, that I am just, or what injury, that I am unjust? Is not His nature incorruptible, incapable of injury,

superior to all suffering? Servants having nothing of their own, all is their masters', however rich they may be. But we have many things of our own.

And it is not merely so great honor, that we enjoy from the King of the universe. What master ever gave his own son for his servant? No one, but all would rather choose to give their servants for their sons. Here on the contrary, He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, for His enemies who hated Him. Servants, though very hard service is exacted of them, are not impatient; at least, not the well-disposed. But how many times do we utter discontent? The master promises to his servants nothing like what God promises to us; but what? Freedom here, which is often worse than bondage; for it is often embittered by famine beyond slavery itself. Yet this is their greatest boon. But with God there is nothing temporal, nothing mortal; but what? Would you learn? Listen then, He says, Henceforth I call you not servants. You are my friends. John 15:13-14

Beloved, let us be ashamed, let us fear. Let us only serve our Master, as our servants serve us. Rather not even the smallest portion of service do we render! Necessity makes them philosophers. They have only food and lodging; but we, possessing much and expecting more, insult our Benefactor with our luxury. If from nothing else, from them at least let us learn the rules of philosophy. The Scripture is wont to send men not even to servants, but to irrational creatures, as when it bids us imitate the bee and the ant. But I advise you but to imitate servants: only so much as they do from fear of their masters, let us do from the fear of God; for I cannot find that you do even this. They receive many insults from fear of us, and endure them in silence with the patience of philosophers. Justly or unjustly they are exposed to our violence, and they do not resist, but entreat us, though often they have done nothing wrong. They are contented to receive no more and often less than they need; with straw for their bed, and only bread for their food, they do not complain or murmur at their hard living, but through fear of us are restrained from impatience. When they are entrusted with money, they restore it all. For I am not speaking of the worthless, but of the moderately good. If we threaten them, they are at once awed.

Is not this philosophy? For say not they are under necessity, when you too are under a necessity in the fear of hell. And yet do you not learn wisdom, nor render to God as much honor, as you receive from your servants. Of your servants each has the apartment assigned to him by your rules, and he does not invade that of his neighbor, nor do any injury from a desire of more than he has. This forbearance the fear of their master enforces among domestics, and seldom will you see a servant robbing or injuring a fellow-servant. But among free men it is quite the reverse. We bite and devour one another. We fear not our Master: we rob and plunder our fellow-servants, we strike them in His very sight. This the servant will not do; if he strikes, it is not when his master sees him; if he reviles, it is not when his master hears him. But we dare do anything, though God sees and hears it all.

The fear of their master is ever before their eyes, the fear of our Master never before ours. Hence the subversion of all order, hence all is confusion and destruction. And we never take into consideration the offenses we have committed, but if our servants do amiss, we call them to a rigorous account for everything, even to the least misdemeanor. I say not this to make servants remiss, but to chide our supineness, to rouse us from our sloth, that we may serve our God with as much zeal as servants do their master; our Maker, as faithfully as our fellow-creatures serve us, from whom they have received no such gift. For they too are free by nature. To them also it was said, Let them have dominion over the fishes. Genesis 1:26 For this slavery is not from nature: it is the result of some particular cause, or circumstances. Yet, notwithstanding, they pay us great honor; and we with great strictness exact services from them, while to God we hardly render the smallest portion, though the advantage of it would redound to

ourselves. For the more zealously we serve God, the greater gainers we shall be. Let us not then deprive ourselves of such important benefits. For God is self-sufficient, and wants nothing; the recompense and the advantage reverts altogether to us. Let us therefore, I beseech you, be so affected, as serving not God but ourselves, and with fear and trembling let us serve Him, that we may obtain the promised blessings, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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