

1 Timothy 6:13-16

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of keeping God's commandments, the dangers of wealth, and the pursuit of true freedom through virtue.

Topics: "Enduring Persecution", "Faithfulness To God"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of keeping God's commandments without spot or rebuke until the return of Jesus Christ, drawing inspiration from Christ's unwavering confession before Pontius Pilate. He urges Timothy to imitate Christ's example of enduring hardships and persecution for the sake of the Gospel, reminding him to hold fast to the faith and avoid distractions that lead away from the truth. Chrysostom highlights the eternal nature of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, dwelling in unapproachable light, deserving of everlasting honor and power.

Transcript

I give you charge in the sight of God, Who quickens all things, and before Christ Jesus, Who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man has seen, nor can see; to Whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.

Again he calls God to witness, as he had done a little before, at once to increase his disciple's awe, and to secure his safety, and to show that these were not human commandments, that receiving the commandment as from the Lord Himself, and ever bearing in mind the Witness before Whom he heard it, he may have it more fearfully impressed upon his mind.

I charge you, he says, before God, Who quickens all things.

Here is at once consolation in the dangers which awaited him, and a remembrance of the resurrection awakened in him.

And before Jesus Christ, Who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.

The exhortation again is derived from the example of his Master, and what he means is this; as He had done, so ought you to do, for for this cause He witnessed 1 Peter 2:21, that we might tread in His steps.

A good confession. What he does in his Epistle to the Hebrews, -- Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds Hebrews 12:2-3 -- that he now does to his disciple Timothy. As if he had said, Fear not death, since you are the servant of God, Who can give life to all things.

But to what good confession does he allude? To that which He made when Pilate asked, Are you a King? To this end, He said, was I born. And again, I came, that I might bear witness to the Truth. Behold, these have heard Me. John 18:37 He may mean this, or that when asked, Are you the Son of God? He answered, You say, that I am (the Son of God). Luke 22:70 And many other testimonies and confessions did He make.

Ver. 14. That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is, till your end, your departure hence, though he does not so express it, but that he may the more arouse him, says, till His appearing. But what is to keep the commandment without spot? To contract no defilement, either of doctrine or of life.

Ver. 15. Which in His times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, Who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto.

Of whom are these things said? Of the Father, or of the Son? Of the Son, undoubtedly: and it is said for the consolation of Timothy, that he may not fear nor stand in awe of the kings of the earth.

In His times, that is, the due and fitting times, that he may not be impatient, because it has not yet come. And whence is it manifest, that He will show it? Because He is the Potentate, the only Potentate. He then will show it, Who is blessed, nay blessedness itself; and this is said, to show that in that appearing there is nothing painful or uneasy.

But he says, only, either in contradistinction to men, or because He was unoriginated, or as we sometimes speak of a man whom we wish to extol.

Who only has immortality. What then? Has not the Son immortality? Is He not immortality itself? How should not He, who is of the same substance with the Father, have immortality?

Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. Is He then Himself one Light, and is there another in which He dwells? Is He then circumscribed by place? Think not of it. By this expression is represented the Incomprehensibleness of the Divine Nature. Thus he speaks of God, in the best way he is able. Observe, how when the tongue would utter something great, it fails in power.

Whom no man has seen nor can see. As, indeed, no one has seen the Son, nor can see Him.

To whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen. Thus properly, and much to the purpose, has he spoken of God. For as he had called Him to witness, he speaks much of that Witness, that his disciple may be in the greater awe. In these terms he ascribes glory to Him, and this is all we can do, or say. We must not enquire too curiously, who He is. If power everlasting is His, fear not. Yea though now it take not place, to Him is honor, to Him is power evermore.

Ver. 17. Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded.

He has well said, rich in this world. For there are others rich in the future world. And this advice he gives, knowing that nothing so generally produces pride and arrogance as wealth. To abate this, therefore, he immediately adds, Nor trust in uncertain riches; since that was the source of pride; inasmuch as he who hopes in God, is not elated. Why do you place your hopes upon what is instantly transferable? For such is wealth! And why do you hope on that of which you can not be confident? But you say, how can they avoid being high-minded? By considering the instability and uncertainty of riches, and that hope in God is infinitely more valuable; God being the Author of wealth itself.

Ver. 17. But in the living God, he says, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

This all things richly is justly spoken, in reference to the changes of the year, to air, light, water, and other gifts. For how richly and ungrudgingly are all these bestowed! If you seek riches, seek those that are stable and enduring, and which are the fruit of good works. He shows that this is his meaning by what follows.

Ver. 18. That they do good, he says, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

The first phrase refers to wealth, the second to charity. For to be willing to communicate, implies that they are sociable and kind.

Ver. 19. Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.

There nothing is uncertain, for the foundation being firm, there is no instability, all is firm, fixed, immovable, fast, and enduring.

Ver. 19. That they may lay hold, he says, on eternal life.

For the doing of good works can secure the enjoyment of eternal life.

Ver. 20. O Timothy, keep that which is committed to your trust.

Let it not suffer diminution. It is not your own. You are entrusted with the property of another, do not lessen it.

Ver. 20. Avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.

Well did he thus call it. For where there is not faith, there is not knowledge; when anything springs from our reasonings, it is not knowledge. Or perhaps he says this, because some then assumed the name of Gnostics, as knowing more than others.

Ver. 21. Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.

You see how again he commands Timothy not even to meet them. Avoiding opposition. There are therefore oppositions to which we ought not to vouchsafe an answer, because they turn men from faith, and do not suffer one to be firmly established or fixed in it. Let us not then pursue this science, but adhere to faith, that unshaken rock. For neither floods nor winds assailing will be able to harm us, since we stand on the rock immovable. Thus even in this life, if we choose Him, Who is truly the foundation, we stand, and

no harm assails us. For what can hurt him who has chosen the riches, the honor, the glory, the pleasure of the life to come? They are all firm, in them there is no variableness; all things here subject to reverse, and are for ever changing. For what would you have? glory? The Psalmist says, His glory shall not descend after him. Psalm 49:17 And often it abides not with him while he lives. But it is not so with virtue, all things which pertain to her are permanent. Here, he who obtains glory from his office, upon another succeeding to his office, becomes a private man and inglorious. The rich man is reduced to poverty by the attack of robbers, or the snares of sycophants and knaves. It is not so with Christians. The temperate man, if he take heed to himself, will not be robbed of his virtue. He who rules himself, cannot become a common man and a subject.

And that this rule is superior to any other, will appear upon examination. For of what advantage, tell me, is it to reign over nations of our fellow-men, and to be the slaves of our own passions? Or what are we the worse for having no one under our rule, if we are superior to the tyranny of the passions? That indeed is Freedom, that is Rule, that is Royalty and Sovereignty. The contrary is slavery, though a man be invested with countless diadems. For when a multitude of masters sway him from within, the love of money, the love of pleasure, and anger, and other passions, what avails his diadem? The tyranny of those passions is more severe, when not even his crown has power to deliver him from their subjection. As if one who had been a king should be reduced to slavery by barbarians, and they wishing to show their power the more absolutely, should not strip him of his purple robe and his diadem, but oblige him to work in them, and to perform all menial offices, to draw water, and to cook their food, that his disgrace and their honor might be the more apparent: so do our passions domineer over us more barbarously than any barbarians. For he that despises them can despise the barbarians too; but he that submits to them, will suffer more severely than from barbarians. The barbarian, when his power prevails, may afflict the body, but these passions torture the soul, and lacerate it all over. When the barbarian has prevailed, he delivers one to temporal death, but these to that which is to come. So that he alone is the free man, who has his freedom in himself; and he who submits to these unreasonable passions, is the slave.

No master, however inhuman, imposes such severe and inhuman commands. They say to him, in effect, Disgrace your soul without end or object -- offend your God -- be deaf to the claims of nature; though it be your father or your mother, be not ashamed to set yourself against them. Such are the commands of avarice. Sacrifice to me, she says, not calves, but men. The prophet indeed says, Sacrifice men, for the calves have failed. Hosea 13:2, Septuagint But avarice says, Sacrifice men, though there are yet calves. Sacrifice those who have never injured you, yea slay them, though they have been your benefactors. Or again, Be at war, and go about as the common enemy of all, of nature herself, and of God. Heap up gold, not that you may enjoy it, but that you may keep it, and work greater torture to yourself. For it is not possible that the lover of money should be able to enjoy it, since he fears lest his gold should be diminished, lest his hoards should fail. Be watchful, it says, be suspicious of every one, even domestics and friends. Have an eye to the goods of other men. Though you see the poor man perishing with hunger, give him nothing; but strip him, if it be possible, even of his skin. Break your oaths, lie, swear. Be an accuser, a false informer. Refuse not, if it be necessary, to rush into fire, to submit to a thousand deaths, to perish with hunger, to struggle with disease. Does not avarice impose these laws? Be offensive and impudent, shameless and bold, villainous and wicked, ungrateful, unfeeling, unfriendly, faithless, devoid of affection, a parricide, a beast rather than a man. Surpass the serpent in bitterness, the wolf in rapacity. Exceed in brutality even the beast, nay should it be necessary to proceed even to the malignity of the devil, refuse not. Be a stranger to your benefactor.

Does not avarice say all this, and is it not listened to? God on the contrary says, Be a friend to all, be gentle, beloved by all, give offense causelessly to no one. Honor your father and your mother. Win an honorable reputation. Be not a man, but an angel. Utter nothing immodest, nothing false, nor even think of it. Relieve the poor. Bring not trouble on yourself, by ravaging others. Be not bold nor insolent. God says this, but no one hearkens. Is not hell then justly threatened, and the fire, and the worm that dies not? How long are we thus to thrust ourselves down the precipice? How long are we to walk upon thorns, and pierce ourselves with nails, and be grateful for it? We subject ourselves to cruel tyrants, and refuse the gentle Master, who imposes nothing grievous, nor barbarous, nor burdensome, nor unprofitable, but all things such as are useful, and valuable, and beneficial. Let us then arouse ourselves, and be self-collected, and gather our forces. Let us love God as we ought, that we may obtain the blessings promised to those that love Him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, to the Father, etc.

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