

1 Timothy 6:2-7

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the dangers of pride and ignorance, and the importance of godliness and contentment, while warning against the love of money and the consequences of covetousness.

Topics: "Wealth And Greed", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of teaching and exhorting based on the words of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of godliness, warning against pride and the pursuit of wealth as a form of godliness. He highlights the need for humility, servanthood, and contentment, reminding believers that they brought nothing into the world and will take nothing out. Chrysostom urges believers to flee from the love of money, which leads to many sorrows and pierces the soul with evil desires, advocating instead for righteousness, faith, love, patience, and meekness.

Transcript

These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw yourself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

A teacher has need not only of authority, but of gentleness, and not only of gentleness, but of authority. And all these the blessed Paul teaches, at one time saying, These things command and teach 1 Timothy 4:11; at another, These things teach and exhort. For if physicians entreat the sick, not for the benefit of their own health, but that they may relieve their sickness, and restore their prostrate strength, much more ought we to observe this method, of entreating those whom we teach. For the blessed Paul does not refuse to be their servant: We preach not ourselves, he says; but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake 2 Corinthians 4:5; and again, All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos. 1 Corinthians 3:12 And in this service he serves with alacrity, for it is not slavery, but superior to freedom. For He says, Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin. John 8:34

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing. Presumption therefore arises not from knowledge, but from knowing nothing. For he that knows the doctrines of

godliness is also the most disposed to moderation. He who knows sound words, is not unsound. For what inflammation is in the body, that pride is in the soul. And as we do not in the first case say that the inflamed part is sound, so neither do we here consider the arrogant. It is possible then to be knowing, and yet to know nothing. For he that knows not what he ought to know, knows nothing. And that pride arises from knowing nothing is manifest from hence. Christ made Himself of no reputation Philippians 2:7, he therefore who knows this will not be high-minded. Man has nothing except from God, therefore he will not be high-minded. For what have you that thou did not receive? 1 Corinthians 4:7 He washed the feet of His disciples, how can he who knows this be setting himself up? Therefore He says, When you have done all, say we are unprofitable servants. Luke 17:10 The publican was accepted only from his humility, the Pharisee perished by his boastfulness. He who is puffed up knows none of these things. Again, Christ Himself says, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite me? John 18:23

Doting about questions. To question then is to dote. And strifes of words; this is justly said. For when the soul is fevered with reasonings, and stormy, then it questions, but when it is in a sound state, it does not question, but receives the faith. But from questionings and strifes of words nothing can be discovered. For when the things which faith only promises are received by an inquisitive spirit, it neither demonstrates them, nor suffers us to understand them. If one should close his eyes, he would not be able to find anything he sought: or if, again with his eyes open, he should bury himself, and exclude the sun, he would be unable to find anything, thus seeking. So without faith nothing can be discerned, but contentions must needs arise. Whereof come railings, evil surmisings; that is, erroneous opinions and doctrines arising from questionings. For when we begin to question, then we surmise concerning God things that we ought not.

Perverse disputings, that is, leisure or conversation, or he may mean intercommunication, and that as infected sheep by contact communicate disease to the sound, so do these bad men.

Destitute of the truth, thinking that gain is godliness. Observe what evils are produced by strifes of words. The love of gain, ignorance, and pride; for pride is engendered by ignorance.

From such withdraw yourself. He does not say, engage and contend with them, but withdraw yourself, turn away from them; as elsewhere he says, A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject. Titus 3:10 He shows that they do not so much err from ignorance, as they owe their ignorance to their indolence. Those who are contentious for the sake of money you will never persuade. They are only to be persuaded, so long as you give, and even so you will never satisfy their desires. For it is said, The covetous man's eye is not satisfied with a portion. Sirach 14:9 From such then, as being incorrigible, it is right to turn away. And if he who had much obligation to fight for the truth, is advised not to engage in contention with such men, much more should we avoid it, who are in the situation of disciples.

Having said, They think that godliness is a means of gain, he adds: But godliness with contentment is great gain, not when it possesses wealth, but when it has it not. For that he may not despond on account of his poverty, he encourages and revives his spirit. They think, he says, that godliness is a means of gain, and so it is; only not in their way, but in a much higher. Then having demolished theirs he extols the other. For that worldly gain is nothing, is manifest, because it is left behind, and does not attend us, or go along with us at our departure. Whence is this plain? Because we had nothing when we came into this world, therefore we shall have nothing when we depart from it. For nature came naked into the world, and naked she will go out of it. Therefore we want no superfluities; if we brought nothing with us, and shall take nothing away with us.

Ver. 8. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.

Such things, and so much ought we to eat, as will suffice to nourish us, and such things should we put on, as will cover us, and clothe our nakedness, and nothing more; and a common garment will answer this purpose. Then he urges them from the consideration of things here, saying,

Ver. 9. But they that will be rich; not those that are rich, but those who wish to be. For a man may have money and make a good use of it, not overvaluing it, but bestowing it upon the poor. Such therefore he does not blame, but the covetous.

They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

He has justly said, they drown men, since they cannot be raised from that depth. In destruction and perdition.

Ver. 10. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Two things he mentions, and that which to them might seem the more weighty he places last, their many sorrows. And to learn how true this is, the only way is to sojourn with the rich, to see how many are their sorrows, how bitter their complaints.

Ver. 11. But you, O man of God.

This is a title of great dignity. For we are all men of God, but the righteous peculiarly so, not by right of creation only, but by that of appropriation. If then you are a man of God, seek not superfluous things, which lead you not to God, but

Flee these things, and follow after righteousness. Both expressions are emphatic; he does not say turn from one, and approach the other, but flee these things, pursue righteousness, so as not to be covetous.

Godliness, that is, soundness in doctrines.

Faith, which is opposed to questionings.

Love, patience, meekness.

Ver. 12. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Lo, there is your reward, whereunto you are also called, and hast professed a good profession, in hope of eternal life, before many witnesses.

That is, do not put that confidence to shame. Why do you labor to no profit? But what is the temptation and snare, which he says, those that would be rich fall into? It causes them to err from the faith, it involves them in dangers, it renders them less intrepid. Foolish desires, he says. And is it not a foolish desire, when men like to keep idiots and dwarfs, not from benevolent motives, but for their pleasure, when they have receptacles for fishes in their halls, when they bring up wild beasts, when they give their time to dogs, and dress up horses, and are as fond of them as of their children? All these things are foolish and superfluous, nowise necessary, nowise useful.

Foolish and hurtful lusts! What are hurtful lusts? When men live unlawfully, when they desire what is their neighbor's, when they do their utmost in luxury, when they long for drunkenness, when they desire the murder and destruction of others. From these desires many have aimed at tyranny, and perished. Surely to labor with such views is both foolish and hurtful. And well has he said, They have erred from the faith. Covetousness attracting their eyes to herself, and gradually stealing away their minds, suffers them not to see their way. For as one walking on the straight road, with his mind intent on something else, proceeds on his way indeed, but, often without knowing it, passes by the very city to which he was hastening, his feet plying on at random and to no purpose: such like a thing is covetousness. They have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Do you see what he means by that word pierced? What he means to express by the allusion is this. Desires are thorns, and as when one touches thorns, he gores his hand, and gets him wounds, so he that falls into these lusts will be wounded by them, and pierce his soul with griefs. And what cares and troubles attend those who are thus pierced, it is not possible to express. Therefore he says, Flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. For meekness springs from love.

Ver. 12. Fight the good fight.

Here he commends his boldness and manliness, that before all he confidently made profession, and he reminds him of his early instruction.

Lay hold on eternal life.

There is need not only of profession, but of patience also to persevere in that profession, and of vehement contention, and of numberless toils, that you be not overthrown. For many are the stumbling-blocks, and impediments, therefore the way is strait and narrow. Matthew 7:14 It is necessary therefore to be self-collected, and well girt on every side. All around appear pleasures attracting the eyes of the soul. Those of beauty, of wealth, of luxury, of indolence, of glory, of revenge, of power, of dominion, and these are all fair and lovely in appearance, and able to captivate those who are unsteady, and who do not love the truth. For truth has but a severe and uninviting countenance. And why? Because the pleasures that she promises are all future, whereas the others hold out present honors and delights, and repose; though all are false and counterfeit. To these therefore adhere gross, effeminate, unmanly minds, indisposed to the toils of virtue. As in the games of the heathens, he who does not earnestly covet the crown, may from the first give himself up to revellings and drunkenness, and so do in fact the cowardly and unmanly combatants, while those who look steadfastly to the crown sustain blows without number. For they are supported and roused to action by the hope of future reward.

Moral. Let us then flee from this root of all evils, and we shall escape them all. The love of money, he says, is the root; thus says Paul, or rather Christ by Paul, and let us see how this is. The actual experience of the world testifies it. For what evil is not caused by wealth, or rather not by wealth, but by the wicked will of those who know not how to use it? For it is possible to use wealth in well doing, and even through means of it to inherit the kingdom. But now what was given us for the relief of the poor, to make amends for our past sins, to win a good report, and to please God, this we employ against the poor and wretched, or rather against our own souls, and to the high displeasure of God. For as for the other, a man robs him of his wealth, and reduces him to poverty, but himself to death; and him he causes to pine in penury here, but himself in that eternal punishment. Are they equal sufferers, think you?

What evils then does it not cause! What fraudulent practices, what robberies! What miseries, enmities, contentions, battles! Does it not stretch forth its hand even to the dead, nay, to fathers, and brethren? Do not they who are possessed by this passion violate the laws of nature, and the commandments of God? In short everything? Is it not this that renders our courts of justice necessary? Take away therefore the love of money, and you put an end to war, to battle, to enmity, to strife and contention. Such men ought therefore to be banished from the world, as wolves and pests. For as opposing and violent winds, sweeping over a calm sea, stir it up from its foundations, and mingle the sands of the deep with the waves above, so the lovers of wealth confound and unsettle everything. The covetous man never knows a friend: a friend, did I say? He knows not God Himself, driven mad, as he is, by the passion of avarice. Do you not see the Titans going forth sword in hand? This is a representation of madness. But the lovers of money do not counterfeit, they are really mad, and beside themselves; and if you could lay bare their souls, you would find them armed in this way not with one or two swords, but with thousands, acknowledging no one, but turning their rage against all; flying and snarling at all, slaughtering not dogs, but the souls of men, and uttering blasphemies against heaven itself. By these men all things are subverted, and ruined by their madness after wealth.

For whom indeed, whom I should accuse, I know not! It is a plague that so seizes all, some more, some less, but all in a degree. Like a fire catching a wood, that desolates and destroys all around, this passion has laid waste the world. Kings, magistrates, private persons, the poor, women, men, children, are all alike affected by it. As if a gross darkness had overspread the earth, no one is in his sober senses. Yet we hear, both in public and private, many declamations against covetousness, but no one is mended by them.

What then is to be done? How shall we extinguish this flame? For though it has risen up to heaven itself, it is to be extinguished. We have only to be willing, and we shall be able to master the conflagration. For as by our will it has got head, so it may be brought under by our will. Did not our own choice cause it, and will not the same choice avail to extinguish it? Only let us be willing. But how shall that willingness be engendered? If we consider the vanity and the unprofitableness of wealth, that it cannot depart hence with us, that even here it forsakes us, and that while it remains behind, it inflicts upon us wounds that depart along with us. If we see that there are riches There, compared to which the wealth of this world is more despicable than dung. If we consider that it is attended with numberless dangers, with pleasure that is temporary, pleasure mingled with sorrow. If we contemplate aright the true riches of eternal life, we shall be able to despise worldly wealth. If we remember that it profits nothing either to glory, or health, or any other thing; but on the contrary drowns men in destruction and perdition. If you consider that here you are rich, and hast many under you, but that when you depart hence, you will go naked and solitary. If we often represent these things to ourselves, and listen to them from others, there will perhaps be a return to a sound mind, and a deliverance from this dreadful punishment.

Is a pearl beautiful? Yet consider, it is but sea water, and was once cast away in the bosom of the deep. Are gold and silver beautiful? Yet they were and are but dust and ashes. Are silken vestments beautiful? Yet they are nothing but the spinning of worms. This beauty is but in opinion, in human prejudice, not in the nature of the things. For that which possesses beauty from nature, need not any to point it out. If you see a coin of brass that is but gilded over, you admire it at first, fancying that it is gold; but when the cheat is shown to you by one who understands it, your wonder vanishes with the deceit. The beauty therefore was not in the nature of the thing. Neither is it in silver; you may admire tin for silver, as you admired brass for gold, and you need some one to inform you what you should admire. Thus our eyes are not sufficient to discern the difference. It is not so with flowers, which are much more beautiful. If you see a rose, you need

no one to inform you, you can of yourself distinguish an anemone, and a violet, or a lily, and every other flower. It is nothing therefore but prejudice. And to show, that this destructive passion is but a prejudice; tell me, if the Emperor were pleased to ordain that silver should be of more value than gold, would you not transfer your love and admiration to the former? Thus we are everywhere under the influence of covetousness and opinion. And that it is so, and that a thing is valued for its rarity, and not for its nature, appears hence. The fruits that are held cheap among us are in high esteem among the Cappadocians, and among the Serians even more valuable than the most precious among us, from which country these garments are brought; and many such instances might be given in Arabia and India, where spices are produced, and where precious stones are found. Such preference therefore is nothing but prejudice, and human opinion. We act not from judgment, but at random, and as accident determines. But let us recover from this intoxication, let us fix our view upon that which is truly beautiful, beautiful in its own nature, upon godliness and righteousness; that we may obtain the promised blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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