

2 Corinthians 5:1

by St. John Chrysostom

We should live according to God's will, be well pleasing unto Him, and avoid sin and transgression, lest we face the punishment of hell.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:3

Topics: "Suffering For Christ", "Eternal Judgment"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of enduring trials and afflictions, highlighting the benefits of suffering for the sake of Christ. He emphasizes the transformation of the inward man through persecution, leading to a better inheritance and eternal glory. Chrysostom encourages believers to eagerly seek incorruptible bodies and to be well pleasing to God, knowing that they will be judged for their actions. He vividly describes the judgment-seat of Christ and the consequences of both receiving good and bad rewards based on one's deeds, urging listeners to choose virtue and righteousness to attain the promised eternal blessings.

Transcript

For we know, that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.

Again he arouses their zeal because many trials drew on. For it was likely that they, in consequence of his absence, were weaker in respect to this [need]. What then says he? One ought not to wonder that we suffer affliction; nor to be confounded, for we even reap many gains thereby. And some of these he mentioned before; for instance, that we bear about the dying of Jesus, and present the greatest proof of His power: for he says, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God: and we exhibit a clear proof of the Resurrection, for, says he, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

But since along with these things he said that our inward man is thus made better also; for though our outward man is decaying, says he, yet the inward man is renewed day by day; showing again that this being scourged and persecuted is proportionately useful, he adds, that when this is done thoroughly, then the countless good things will spring up for those who have endured these things. For lest when you hear that your outward man perishes, you should grieve; he says, that when this is completely effected, then most of all shall you rejoice and shall come unto a better inheritance.

So that not only ought not one to grieve at its perishing now in part, but even earnestly to seek for the completion of that destruction, for this most conducts you to immortality. Wherefore also he added, For we know, that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved: we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For since he is urging again the doctrine of the Resurrection in respect to which they were particularly unsound; he calls in aid the judgment of his hearers also, and so establishes it; not however in the same way as before, but, as it were, arriving at it out of another subject: (for they had been already corrected:) and says, We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Some indeed say that the 'earthly house' is this world; But I should maintain that he alludes rather to the body. But observe, I pray, how by the terms [he uses,] he shows the superiority of the future things to the present. For having said earthly he has opposed to it the heavenly; having said, house of tabernacle, thereby declaring both that it is easily taken to pieces and is temporary, he has opposed to it the eternal, for the name tabernacle often times denotes temporariness.

Wherefore He says, In My Father's house are many abiding places. John 14:2 But if He anywhere also calls the resting places of the saints tabernacles; He calls them not tabernacles simply, but adds an epithet; for he said not, that they may receive you into their tabernacles, but into the eternal tabernacles. Luke 16:9 Moreover also in that he said, not made with hands, he alluded to that which was made with hands. What then? Is the body made with hands? By no means; but he either alludes to the houses here that are made with hands, or if not this, then he called the body which is not made with hands, 'a house of tabernacle.' For he has not used the term in antithesis and contradistinction to this, but to heighten those eulogies and swell those commendations.

2 Corinthians 5:2

2. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven.

What habitation? Tell me. The incorruptible body. And why do we groan now? Because that is far better. And from heaven he calls it because of its incorruptibleness. For it is not surely that a body will come down to us from above: but by this expression he signifies the grace which is sent from thence. So far then ought we to be from grieving at these trials which are in part that we ought to seek even for their fullness, as if he had said: Groanest thou, that you are persecuted, that this your man is decaying? Groan that this is not done unto excess and that it perishes not entirely. Do you see how he has turned round what was said to the contrary; having proved that they ought to groan that those things were not done fully; for which because they were done partially; they groaned. Therefore he henceforth calls it not a tabernacle, but a house, and with great reason. For a tabernacle indeed is easily taken to pieces; but a house abides continually.

2 Corinthians 5:3

If so be that being unclothed we shall not be found naked.

That is, even if we have put off the body, we shall not be presented there without a body, but even with the same one made incorruptible. But some read, and it deserves very much to be adopted, If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For lest all should be confident because of the Resurrection, he says, If so be that being clothed, that is, having obtained incorruption and an incorruptible body, we shall not be found naked of glory and safety. As he also said in the former Epistle; We shall all be raised; but

each in his own order. And, There are celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 (ib. 40.) For the Resurrection indeed is common to all, but the glory is not common; but some shall rise in honor and others in dishonor, and some to a kingdom but others to punishment. This surely he signified here also, when he said; If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

2 Corinthians 5:4

3. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon. Here again he has utterly and manifestly stopped the mouths of the heretics, showing that he is not speaking absolutely of a body differing in identity, but of corruption and incorruption: 'For we do not therefore groan,' says he, 'that we may be delivered from the body: for of this we do not wish to be unclothed; but we hasten to be delivered from the corruption that is in it.' Wherefore he says, 'we wish not to be unclothed of the body, but that it should be clothed upon with incorruption.' Then he also interprets it [thus,] That what is mortal may be swallowed up of life. For since putting off the body appeared to many a grievous thing; and he was contradicting the judgments of all, when he said, we groan, not wishing to be set free from it; ('for if,' says one, 'the soul in being separated from it so suffers and laments, how do you say that we groan because we are not separated from it?') lest then this should be urged against him, he says, 'Neither do I assert that we therefore groan, that we may put it off; (for no one puts it off without pain, seeing that Christ says even of Peter, 'They shall carry you, and lead you whither you would not; John 21:18) but that we may have it clothed upon with incorruption.' For it is in this respect that we are burdened by the body; not because it is a body, but because we are encompassed with a corruptible body and liable to suffering, for it is this that also causes us pain. But the life when it arrives destroys and uses up the corruption; the corruption, I say, not the body. 'And how comes this to pass?' says one. Inquire not; God does it; be not too curious. Wherefore also he added,

2 Corinthians 5:5

Now he that has wrought us for this very thing is God.

Hereby he shows that these things were prefigured from the first. For not now was this decreed: but when at the first He fashioned us from earth and created Adam; for not for this created He him, that he should die, but that He might make him even immortal. Then as showing the credibility of this and furnishing the proof of it, he added,

Who also gave the earnest of the Spirit. For even then He fashioned us for this; and now He has wrought unto this by baptism, and has furnished us with no light security thereof, the Holy Spirit. And he continually calls It an earnest, wishing to prove God to be a debtor of the whole, and thereby also to make what he says more credible unto the grosser sort.

2 Corinthians 5:6

4. Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing.

The word of good courage is used with reference to the persecutions, the plottings, and the continual deaths: as if he had said, 'Does any vex and persecute and slay you? Be not cast down, for your good all is done. Be not afraid: but of good courage. For that which you groan and grieve for, that you are in bondage to corruption, he removes from henceforward out of the way, and frees you the sooner from this bondage.' Wherefore also he says, Being therefore always of good courage, not in the seasons of rest

only, but also in those of tribulation; and knowing,

2 Corinthians 5:7-8

That while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.

That which is greater than all he has put last, for to be with Christ is better, than receiving an incorruptible [body.] But what he means is this: 'He quenches not our life that wars against and kills us; be not afraid; be of good courage even when hewn in pieces. For not only does he set you free from corruption and a burden, but he also sends you quickly to the Lord.' Wherefore neither did he say, while we 'are' in the body: as of those who are in a foreign and strange land. Knowing therefore that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: we are of good courage, I say, and willing to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Do you see how keeping back what was painful, the names of death and the end, he has employed instead of them such as excite great longing, calling them presence with God; and passing over those things which are accounted to be sweet, the things of life, he has expressed them by painful names, calling the life here an absence from the Lord? Now this he did, both that no one might fondly linger among present things, but rather be weary of them; and that none when about to die might be disquieted, but might even rejoice as departing unto greater goods. Then that none might say on hearing that we are absent from the Lord, 'Why do you speak thus? Are we then estranged from Him while we are here?' he in anticipation corrected such a thought, saying, For we walk by faith, not by sight. Even here indeed we know Him, but not so clearly. As he says also elsewhere, 1 Corinthians 13:12 in a mirror, and darkly.

We are of good courage, I say, and willing. Wonderful! To what has he brought round the discourse? To an extreme desire of death, having shown the grievous to be pleasurable, and the pleasurable grievous. For by the term, we are willing he means, 'we are desirous.' Of what are we desirous? Of being absent from the body, and at home with the Lord. And thus he does perpetually, (as I showed also before) turning round the objection of his opponents unto the very contrary.

2 Corinthians 5:9

Wherefore also we make it our aim whether at home or absent, to be well pleasing unto him.

'For what we seek for is this,' says he, 'whether we be there or here, to live according to His will; for this is the principal thing. So that by this you have the kingdom already in possession without a probation.' For lest when they had arrived at so great a desire of being there, they should again be disquieted at its being so long first, in this he gives them already the chief of those good things. And what is this? To be well pleasing. For as to depart is not absolutely good, but to do so in [God's] favor, which is what makes departing also become a good; so to remain here is not absolutely grievous, but to remain offending Him. Deem not then that departure from the body is enough; for virtue is always necessary. For as when he spoke of a Resurrection, he allowed [them] not by it alone to be of good courage, saying, If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked; so also having showed a departure, lest you should think that this is enough to save you, he added that it is needful that we be well pleasing.

5. Seeing then he has persuaded them by many good things, henceforth he alarms them also by those of gloomier aspect. For our interest consists both in the attainment of the good things and the avoidance of the evil things, in other words, hell and the kingdom. But since this, the avoiding of punishment, is the

more forcible motive; for where penalty reaches only to the not receiving good things, the most will bear this contentedly; but if it also extend to the suffering of evil, do so no longer: (for they ought, indeed, to consider the former intolerable, but from the weakness and grovelling nature of the many, the latter appears to them more hard to bear:) since then (I say) the giving of the good things does not so arouse the general hearer as the threat of the punishments, he is obliged to conclude with this, saying,

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat.

Then having alarmed and shaken the hearer by the mention of that judgment-seat, he has not even here set down the woeful without the good things, but has mingled something of pleasure, saying,

That each one may receive the things done in the body, as many as he has done, whether it be good or bad.

By saying these words, he both revives those who have done virtuously and are persecuted with those hopes, and makes those who have fallen back more earnest by that fear. And he thus confirmed his words touching the resurrection of the body. 'For surely,' says he, 'that which has ministered to the one and to the other shall not stand excluded from the recompenses: but along with the soul shall in the one case be punished, in the other crowned.' But some of the heretics say, that it is another body that is raised. How so? Tell me. Did one sin, and is another punished? Did one do virtuously, and is another crowned? And what will you answer to Paul, saying, We would not be unclothed, but clothed upon? And how is that which is mortal swallowed up of life? For he said not, that the mortal or corruptible body should be swallowed up of the incorruptible body; but that corruption [should be swallowed up] of life. For then this happens when the same body is raised; but if, giving up that body, He should prepare another, no longer is corruption swallowed up but continues dominant. Therefore this is not so; but this corruptible, that is to say the body, must put on incorruption. For the body is in a middle state, being at present in this and hereafter to be in that; and for this reason in this first, because it is impossible for the incorruption to be dissolved. For neither does corruption inherit incorruption, says he, (for, how is it [then] incorruption?) but on the contrary, corruption is swallowed up of life: for this indeed survives the other, but not the other this. For as wax is melted by fire but itself does not melt the fire: so also does corruption melt and vanish away under incorruption, but is never able itself to get the better of incorruption.

6. Let us then hear the voice of Paul, saying, that we must stand at the judgment-seat of Christ; and let us picture to ourselves that court of justice, and imagine it to be present now and the reckoning to be required. For I will speak of it more at large. For Paul, seeing that he was discoursing on affliction, and he had no mind to afflict them again, did not dwell on the subject; but having in brief expressed its austerity, Each one shall receive according to what he has done, he quickly passed on. Let us then imagine it to be present now, and reckon each one of us with his own conscience, and account the Judge to be already present, and everything to be revealed and brought forth. For we must not merely stand, but also be manifested. Do you not blush? Are you not astonished? But if now, when the reality is not yet present, but is granted in supposition merely and imaged in thought; if now [I say] we perish conscience-struck; what shall we do when [it] shall arrive, when the whole world shall be present, when angels and archangels, when ranks upon ranks, and all hurrying at once, and some caught up on the clouds, and an array full of trembling; when there shall be the trumpets, one upon another, [when] those unceasing voices?

For suppose there were no hell, yet in the midst of so great brightness to be rejected and to go away dishonored -- how great the punishment! For if even now, when the Emperor rides in and his train with him, we contemplating each one of us our own poverty, derive not so much pleasure from the spectacle, as we endure dejection at having no share in what is going on about the Emperor, nor being near the Sovereign; what will it be then? Or do you think it is a light punishment, not to be ranked in that company, not to be counted worthy of that unutterable glory, from that assemblage and those untold good things, to be cast forth some-where far and distant?

But when there is also darkness, and gnashing of teeth, and chains indissoluble, and an undying worm, and fire unquenchable, and affliction, and straitness, and tongues scorching like the rich man's; and we wail, and none hears; and we groan and gnash our teeth for anguish, and none regards; and we look all round, and no where is there any to comfort us; where shall we rank those that are in this condition? What is there more miserable than are those souls? What more pitiable?

For if, when we enter a prison and see its inmates, some squalid, some chained and famishing, some again shut up in darkness, we are moved with compassion, we shudder, we use all diligence that we may never be cast into that place; how will it be with us, when we are led and dragged away into the torture-dungeons themselves of hell? For not of iron are those chains, but of fire that is never quenched; nor are they that are set over us our fellows whom it is often possible even to mollify; but angels whom one may not so much as look in the face, exceedingly enraged at our insults to their Master.

Nor is it given, as here, to see some bringing in money, some food, some words of comfort, and to meet with consolation; but all is irremissible there: and though it should be Noah, or Job, or Daniel, and he should see his own kindred punished, he dares not succor. For even natural sympathy too comes then to be done away. For since it happens that there are righteous fathers of wicked children, and [righteous] children of [wicked] fathers; that so their pleasure may be unalloyed, and those who enjoy the good things may not be moved with sorrow through the constraining force of sympathy, even this sympathy, I affirm, is extinguished, and themselves are indignant together with the Master against their own bowels.

For if the common run of men, when they see their own children vicious, disown and cut them off from that relationship; much rather will the righteous then. Therefore let no one hope for good things, if he have not wrought any good thing, even though he have ten thousand righteous ancestors. For each one shall receive the things done in the body according to what he has done. Here he seems to me to be alluding also to them that commit fornication: and to raise up as a wall unto them the fear of that world, not however to them alone; but also to all that in any wise transgress.

7. Let us hear then, us also. And if you have the fire of lust, set against it that other fire, and this will presently be quenched and gone. And if you purpose to utter some harsh sounding [speech], think of the gnashing of teeth, and the fear will be a bridle to you. And if you purpose to plunder, hear the Judge commanding, and saying, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness, Matthew 22:13 and you will cast out this lust also. And if you are drunken, and surfeitest continually, hear the rich man saying, 'Send Lazarus, that with the tip of his finger he may cool this scorching tongue;' Luke 16:24 yet not obtaining this; and you will hold yourself aloof from that distemper. But if you love luxury, think of the affliction and the straitness there, and you will not think at all of this. If again you are harsh and cruel, bethink you of those virgins who when their lamps had gone out missed so of the bridal chamber, and you will quickly become humane. Or sluggish are you, and remiss? Consider him that hid the talent, and you will be more vehement than fire. Or does desire of your neighbor's substance devour you? Think of the

worm that dies not, and you will easily both put away from you this disease, and in all other things will do virtuously. For He has enjoined nothing irksome or oppressive. Whence then do His injunctions appear irksome to us? From our own slothfulness. For as if we labor diligently, even what appears intolerable will be light and easy; so if we are slothful, even things tolerable will seem to us difficult.

Considering then all these things, let us think not of the luxurious, but what is their end; here indeed filth and obesity, there the worm and fire: not of the rapacious, but what is their end; cares here, and fears, and anxieties; there chains indissoluble: not of the lovers of glory, but what these things bring forth; here slavery and dissemblings, and there both loss intolerable and perpetual burnings. For if we thus discourse with ourselves, and if with these and such like things we charm perpetually our evil lusts, quickly shall we both cast out the love of the present things, and kindle that of the things to come. Let us therefore kindle it and make it blaze. For if the conception of them, although a faint sort of one, affords so great pleasure; think how great the gladness, the manifest experience itself shall bring us. Blessed, and thrice blessed, yea, thrice blessed many times, are they who enjoy those good things; just as, consequently, pitiable and thrice wretched are they Who endure the opposite of these. That then we may be not of these but those, let us choose virtue. For so shall we attain unto the good things to come as well; which may all we attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ; by Whom, and with Whom, to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, and honor, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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