

2 Corinthians 5:11

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of living a life that is pleasing to God, motivated by love and a desire to be reconciled to Him.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:12-21

Topics: "Fear Of God", "Reconciliation Through Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the fear of the Lord and the importance of living a life free from suspicion and offense, emphasizing the need to be vigilant and zealous in our actions. He highlights the role of the Apostles as ministers of reconciliation, entrusted with the task of beseeching others to be reconciled to God through Christ. Chrysostom delves into the concept of being a new creation in Christ, urging believers to live not for themselves but for Him who died and rose again for their sake.

Transcript

Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men but we are made manifest unto God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

Knowing therefore, he says, these things, that terrible seat of judgment, we do every thing so as not to give you a handle nor offense, nor any false suspicion of evil practice against us. Do you see the strictness of life, and zeal of a watchful soul? 'For we are not only open to accusation,' he says 'if we commit any evil deed; but even if we do not commit, yet are suspected, and having it in our power to repel the suspicion, brave it, we are punished.'

2 Corinthians 5:12

We are not again commending ourselves unto you, but speak as giving you occasion of glorying in our behalf.

See how he is continually obviating the suspicion of appearing to praise himself. For nothing is so offensive to the hearers as for any one to say great and marvellous things about himself. Since then he was compelled in what he said to fall upon that subject, he uses a corrective, saying, 'we do this for your sakes, not for ours, that you may have somewhat to glory of, not that we may.' And not even this absolutely, but because of the false Apostles. Wherefore also he added, To answer them that glory in appearance, and not in heart. Do you see how he has detached them from them, and drawn them to

himself; having shown that even the Corinthians themselves are longing to get hold of some occasion, whereby they may have it in their power to speak on their behalf and to defend them unto their accusers. For, says he, 'we say these things not that we may boast, but that you may have wherein to speak freely on our behalf;' which is the language of one testifying to their great love: 'and not that you may boast merely: but that you may not be drawn aside.' But this he does not say explicitly, but manages his words otherwise and in a gentler form, and without dealing them a blow, saying,

That ye may have somewhat to glory towards those which glory in appearance. But neither this does he bid them do absolutely, when no cause exists, but when they extol themselves; for in all things he looks out for the fitting occasion. He does not then do this in order to show himself to be illustrious, but to stop those men who were using the thing improperly and to the injury of these. But what is in appearance? In what is seen, in what is for display. For of such sort were they, doing every thing out of a love of honor, while they were both empty inwardly and wore indeed an appearance of piety and of venerable seeming, but of good works were destitute.

2 Corinthians 5:13

2. For whether we are beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you.

And if, says he, we have uttered any great thing, (for this is what he here calls being beside himself, as therefore in other places also he calls it folly 2 Corinthians 11:1, 17, 21) for God's sake we do this, lest ye thinking us to be worthless should despise us and perish; or if again any modest and lowly thing, it is for your sakes that you may learn to be lowly-minded. Or else, again, he means this. If any one thinks us to be mad, we seek for our reward from God, for Whose sake we are of this suspected; but if he thinks us sober, let him reap the advantage of our soberness. And again, in another way. Does any one say we are mad? For God's sake are we in such sort mad. Wherefore also he subjoins;

2 Corinthians 5:14

For the love of God constrains us, because we thus judge.

'For not the fear of things to come only,' he says, 'but also those which have already happened allow us not to be slothful nor to slumber; but stir us up and impel us to these our labors on your behalf.' And what are those things which have already happened?

That if one died for all, then all died. 'Surely then it was because all were lost,' says he. For except all were dead, He had not died for all. For here the opportunities of salvation exist; but there are found no longer. Therefore, he says, The love of God constrains us, and allows us not to be at rest. For it comes of extreme wretchedness and is worse than hell itself, that when He has set forth an act so mighty, any should be found after so great an instance of His provident care reaping no benefit. For great was the excess of that love, both to die for a world of such extent, and dying for it when in such a state.

2 Corinthians 5:15

That they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again.

If therefore we ought not to live unto ourselves, 'be not troubled,' says he, 'nor be confounded when dangers and deaths assail you.' And he assigns besides an indubitable argument by which he shows that

the thing is a debt. For if through Him we live who were dead; to Him we ought to live through Whom we live. And what is said appears indeed to be one thing, but if any one accurately examine it, it is two: one that we live by Him, another that He died for us: either of which even by itself is enough to make us liable; but when even both are united consider how great the debt is. Yea, rather, there are three things here. For the First-fruits also for your sake He raised up, and led up to heaven: wherefore also he added, Who for our sakes died and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:16

3. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh.

For if all died and all rose again; and in such sort died as the tyranny of sin condemned them; but rose again through the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; Titus 3:5 he says with reason, we know none of the faithful after the flesh. For what if even they be in the flesh? Yet is that fleshly life destroyed, and we are born again by the Spirit, and have learned another deportment and rule and life and condition, that, namely, in the heavens. And again of this itself he shows Christ to be the Author. Wherefore also he added,

Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more.

What then? Tell me. Did He put away the flesh, and is He now not with that body? Away with the thought, for He is even now clothed in flesh; for this Jesus Who is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come. So? How? In flesh, with His body. How then does he say, Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth no more? Acts 1:11 For in us indeed after the flesh is being in sins, and not after the flesh not being in sins; but in Christ, after the flesh is His being subject to the affections of nature, such as to thirst, to hunger, to weariness, to sleep. For He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. 1 Peter 2:22 Wherefore He also said, Which of you convicts Me of sin? John 8:46 and again, The prince of this world comes, and he has nothing in Me. John 14:30 And not after the flesh is being thenceforward freed even from these things, not the being without flesh. For with this also He comes to judge the world, His being impassible and pure. Whereunto we also shall advance when our body has been fashioned like His glorious body. Philippians 3:21

2 Corinthians 5:17

4. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.

For seeing he had exhorted unto virtue from His love, he now leads them on to this from what has been actually done for them; wherefore also he added, If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. If any, says he, have believed in Him, he has come to another creation, for he has been born again by the Spirit. So that for this cause also, he says, we ought to live unto Him, not because we are not our own only, nor because He died for us only, nor because He raised up our First-fruits only, but because we have also come unto another life. See how many just grounds he urges for a life of virtue. For on this account he also calls the reformation by a grosser name, in order to show the transition and the change to be great. Then following out farther what he had said, and showing how it is a new creation, he adds, The old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

What old things? He means either sins and impieties, or else all the Judaical observances. Yea rather, he means both the one and the other. Behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:18

But all things are of God.

Nothing of ourselves. For remission of sins and adoption and unspeakable glory are given to us by Him. For he exhorts them no longer from the things to come only, but even from those now present. For consider. He said, that we shall be raised again, and go on unto incorruption, and have an eternal house; but since present things have more force to persuade than things to come, with those who believe not in these as they ought to believe, he shows how great things they have even already received, and being themselves what. What then being, received they them? Dead all; (for he says, all died; and, He died for all; so loved He all alike;) inveterate all, and grown old in their vices. But behold, both a new soul, (for it was cleansed,) and a new body, and a new worship, and promises new, and covenant, and life, and table, and dress, and all things new absolutely. For instead of the Jerusalem below we have received that mother city which is above Galatians 4:26; and instead of a material temple have seen a spiritual temple; instead of tables of stone, fleshy ones; instead of circumcision, baptism; instead of the manna, the Lord's body; instead of water from a rock, blood from His side; instead of Moses' or Aaron's rod, the Cross; instead of the promised [land] , the kingdom of heaven; instead of a thousand priests, One High Priest; instead of a lamb without reason , a Spiritual Lamb. With these and such like things in his thought he said, all things are new. But all these things are of God, by Christ, and His free gift. Wherefore also he added,

Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation.

For from Him are all the good things. For He that made us friends is Himself also the cause of the other things which God has given to His friends. For He rendered not these things unto us, allowing us to continue enemies, but having made us friends unto Himself. But when I say that Christ is the cause of our reconciliation, I say the Father is so also: when I say that the Father gave, I say the Son gave also. For all things were made by Him; John 1:3 and of this too He is the Author. For we ran not unto Him, but He Himself called us. How called He us? By the sacrifice of Christ.

And gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation.

Here again he sets forth the dignity of the Apostles; showing how great a thing was committed to their hands, and the surpassing greatness of the love of God. For even when they would not hear the Ambassador that came, He was not exasperated nor left them to themselves, but continues to exhort them both in His own person and by others. Who can be fittingly amazed at this solicitude? The Son Who came to reconcile, His True and Only-Begotten, was slain, yet not even so did the Father turn away from His murderers; nor say, I sent My Son as an Ambassador, but they not only would not hear Him, but even slew and crucified Him, it is meet henceforth to leave them to themselves: but quite the contrary, when the Son departed, He entrusted the business to us; for he says, gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:19

5. To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses.

Do you see love surpassing all expression, all conception? Who was the aggrieved one? Himself. Who first sought the reconciliation? Himself. 'And yet,' says one, 'He sent the Son, He did not come Himself.' The Son indeed it was He sent; still not He alone besought, but both with Him and by Him the Father;

wherefore he said, that, God was reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ: that is, by Christ. For seeing he had said, Who gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; he here used a corrective, saying, Think not that we act of our own authority in the business: we are ministers; and He that does the whole is God, Who reconciled the world by the Only-Begotten. And how did He reconcile it unto Himself? For this is the marvel, not that it was made a friend only, but also by this way a friend. This way? What way? Forgiving them their sins; for in no other way was it possible. Wherefore also he added, Not reckoning unto them their trespasses. For had it been His pleasure to require an account of the things we had transgressed in, we should all have perished; for all died. But nevertheless though our sins were so great, He not only did not require satisfaction, but even became reconciled; He not only forgave, but He did not even reckon. So ought we also to forgive our enemies, that ourselves too may obtain the like forgiveness.

And having committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

For neither have we come now on any odious office; but to make all men friends with God. For He says, 'Since they were not persuaded by Me, do ye continue beseeching until you have persuaded them.' Wherefore also he added,

2 Corinthians 5:20

We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.

Do you see how he has extolled the thing by introducing Christ thus in the form of a suppliant ; yea rather not Christ only, but even the Father? For what he says is this: 'The Father sent the Son to beseech, and to be His Ambassador unto mankind. When then He was slain and gone, we succeeded to the embassy; and in His stead and the Father's we beseech you. So greatly does He prize mankind that He gave up even the Son, and that knowing He would be slain, and made us Apostles for your sakes; so that he said with reason, All things are for your sakes. 2 Corinthians 4:15 We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, that is, instead of Christ; for we have succeeded to His functions.' But if this appears to you a great thing, hear also what follows wherein he shows that they do this not in His stead only, but also in stead of the Father. For therefore he also added, As though God were entreating by us. 'For not by the Son Himself only does He beseech, but also by us who have succeeded to the office of the Son. Think not therefore,' he says, 'that by us you are entreated; Christ Himself, the Father Himself of Christ, beseeches you by us. What can come up to this excess [of goodness]? He was outraged who had conferred innumerable benefits; having been outraged, He not only exacted not justice, but even gave His son that we might be reconciled. They that received Him were not reconciled, but even slew Him. Again, He sent other ambassadors to beseech, and though these are sent, it is Himself that entreats. And what does He entreat? Be reconciled unto God. And he said not, 'Reconcile God to yourselves;' for it is not He that bears enmity, but you; for God never bears enmity. Urging moreover his cause, like an ambassador on his mission, he says,

2 Corinthians 5:21

For Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our account.

'I say nothing of what has gone before, that you have outraged Him, Him that had done you no wrong, Him that had done you good, that He exacted not justice, that He is first to beseech, though first outraged; let none of these things be set down at present. Ought ye not in justice to be reconciled for this one thing only

that He has done to you now?' And what has He done? Him that knew no sin He made to be sin, for you. For had He achieved nothing but done only this, think how great a thing it were to give His Son for those that had outraged Him. But now He has both well achieved mighty things, and besides, has suffered Him that did no wrong to be punished for those who had done wrong. But he did not say this: but mentioned that which is far greater than this. What then is this? Him that knew no sin, he says, Him that was righteousness itself, He made sin, that is suffered as a sinner to be condemned, as one cursed to die. For cursed is he that hangs on a tree. Galatians 3:13 For to die thus was far greater than to die; and this he also elsewhere implying, says, Becoming obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross. Philippians 2:8 For this thing carried with it not only punishment, but also disgrace. Reflect therefore how great things He bestowed on you. For a great thing indeed it were for even a sinner to die for any one whatever; but when He who undergoes this both is righteous and dies for sinners; and not dies only, but even as one cursed; and not as cursed [dies] only, but thereby freely bestows upon us those great goods which we never looked for; (for he says, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him;) what words, what thought shall be adequate to realize these things? 'For the righteous,' says he, 'He made a sinner; that He might make the sinners righteous.' Yea rather, he said not even so, but what was greater far; for the word he employed is not the habit, but the quality itself. For he said not made [Him] a sinner, but sin; not, 'Him that had not sinned' only, but that had not even known sin; that we also might become, he did not say 'righteous,' but, righteousness, and, the righteousness of God. For this is [the righteousness] of God when we are justified not by works, (in which case it were necessary that not a spot even should be found,) but by grace, in which case all sin is done away. And this at the same time that it suffers us not to be lifted up, (seeing the whole is the free gift of God,) teaches us also the greatness of that which is given. For that which was before was a righteousness of the Law and of works, but this is the righteousness of God.

6. Reflecting then on these things, let us fear these words more than hell; let us reverence the things [they express] more than the kingdom, and let us not deem it grievous to be punished, but to sin. For were He not to punish us, we ought to take vengeance on ourselves, who have been so ungrateful towards our Benefactor. Now he that has an object of affection, has often even slain himself, when unsuccessful in his love; and though successful, if he has been guilty of a fault towards her, counts it not fit that he should even live; and shall not we, when we outrage One so loving and gentle, cast ourselves into the fire of hell?

Shall I say something strange, and marvellous, and to many perhaps incredible? To one who has understanding and loves the Lord as it behooves to love Him, there will be greater comfort if punished after provoking One so loving, than if not punished. And this one may see by the common practice. For he that has wronged his dearest friend feels then the greatest relief, when he has wreaked vengeance on himself and suffered evil. And accordingly David said, I the shepherd have sinned, and I the shepherd have done amiss; and these the flock, what have they done?

Let Your hand be upon me, and upon my father's house. 2 Samuel 24:17. Septuagint And when he lost Absalom he wreaked the extremest vengeance upon himself, although he was not the injurer but the injured; but nevertheless, because he loved the departed exceedingly, he racked himself with anguish, in this manner comforting himself. Let us therefore also, when we sin against Him Whom we ought not to sin against, take vengeance on ourselves. See you not those who have lost true-born children, that they therefore both beat themselves and tear their hair, because to punish themselves for the sake of those they loved carries comfort with it.

But if, when we have caused no harm to those dearest to us, to suffer because of what has befallen them brings consolation; when we ourselves are the persons who have given provocation and wrong, will it not

much rather be a relief to us to suffer the penalty and will not the being unpunished punish? Every one in a manner will see this. If any love Christ as it behooves to love Him, he knows what I say; how, even when He forgives, he will not endure to go unpunished; for you undergo the severest punishment in having provoked Him.

And I know indeed that I am speaking what will not be believed by the many; but nevertheless it is so as I have said. If then we love Christ as it behooves to love Him, we shall punish ourselves when we sin. For to those who love any whomsoever, not the suffering somewhat because they have provoked the beloved one is unpleasing; but above all, that they have provoked the person loved. And if this last when angered does not punish, he has tortured his lover more; but if he exacts satisfaction, he has comforted him rather.

Let us therefore not fear hell, but offending God; for it is more grievous than that when He turns away in wrath: this is worse than all, this heavier than all. And that you may learn what a thing it is, consider this which I say. If one that was himself a king, beholding a robber and malefactor under punishment, gave his well-beloved son, his only-begotten and true, to be slain; and transferred the death and the guilt as well, from him to his son, (who was himself of no such character,) that he might both save the condemned man and clear him from his evil reputation ; and then if, having subsequently promoted him to great dignity, he had yet, after thus saving him and advancing him to that glory unspeakable, been outraged by the person that had received such treatment: would not that man, if he had any sense, have chosen ten thousand deaths rather than appear guilty of so great ingratitude?

This then let us also now consider with ourselves, and groan bitterly for the provocations we have offered our Benefactor; nor let us therefore presume, because though outraged He bears it with long-suffering; but rather for this very reason be full of remorse. For among men too, when one that has been smitten on the right cheek offers the left also, he more avenges himself than if he gave ten thousand blows; and when one that has been reviled, not only reviles not again but even blesses, he has stricken [his adversary] more heavily, than if he rained upon him ten thousand reproaches.

Now if in the case of men we feel ashamed when offering insults we meet with long-suffering; much rather, in respect to God, ought they to be afraid who go on continually sinning yet suffer no calamity. For, even for evil unto their own heads is the unspeakable punishment treasured up for them. These things then bearing in mind, let us above all things be afraid of sin; for this is punishment, this is hell, this is ten thousand ills. And let us not only be afraid of, but also flee from it, and strive to please God continually; for this is the kingdom, this is life, this is ten thousand goods.

So shall we also even here obtain already the kingdom and the good things to come; whereunto may we all attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ; with Whom to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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