

2 Timothy 2:11-14

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faithfulness to God, the consequences of denying Him, and the need to rightly divide the word of truth in order to achieve eternal life.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:11, 2 Timothy 2:15-19

Topics: "Faithfulness In Suffering", "False Teachings"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of faithfulness and endurance in the face of suffering, denial, and disbelief, highlighting the promise of eternal life for those who are dead with Christ and the consequences of denying Him. He urges believers to strive for righteousness, to rightly handle the word of truth, and to avoid being swayed by profane novelties of speech that can lead to ungodliness and the subversion of faith. Chrysostom warns against false teachings like those of Hymeneus and Philetus, who claimed the resurrection had already occurred, causing the faith of some to be overthrown.

Transcript

It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: if we believe not, yet He abides faithful: He cannot deny Himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

Many of the weaker sort of men give up the effort of faith, and do not endure the deferring of their hope. They seek things present, and form from these their judgment of the future. When therefore their lot here was death, torments, and chains, and yet he says, they shall come to eternal life, they would not have believed, but would have said, What do you say? When I live, I die; and when I die, I live? You promise nothing on earth, and do you give it in heaven? Little things you do not bestow; and do you offer great things? That none therefore may argue thus, he places beyond doubt the proof of these things, laying it down beforehand already, and giving certain signs. For, remember, he says, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead; that is, rose again after death. And now showing the same thing he says, It is a faithful saying, that he who has attained a heavenly life, will attain eternal life also. Whence is it faithful? Because, he says, If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. For say, shall we partake with Him in things laborious and painful; and shall we not in things beneficial? But not even a man would act thus, nor, if one had chosen to suffer affliction and death with him, would he refuse to him a share in his rest, if he had attained it. But how are we dead with Him? This death he means both of that in the Laver, and that in

sufferings. For he says, Bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus 2 Corinthians 4:10; and, We are buried with Him by baptism into death Romans 6:4; and, Our old man is crucified with Him; and, We have been planted together in the likeness of His death. Romans 6:5-6 But he also speaks here of death by trials: and that more especially, for he was also suffering trials when he wrote it. And this is what he says, If we have suffered death on His account, shall we not live on His account? This is not to be doubted. 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him,' not absolutely, we shall reign, but if we suffer, showing that it is not enough to die once, (the blessed man himself died daily,) but there was need of much patient endurance; and especially Timothy had need of it. For tell me not, he says, of your first sufferings, but that you continue to suffer.

Then on the other side he exhorts him, not from the good, but from the evil. For if wicked men were to partake of the same things, this would be no consolation. And if having endured they were to reign with Him, but not having endured were not indeed to reign with Him, but were to suffer no worse evil, though this were terrible, yet it would not be enough to affect most men with concern. Wherefore he speaks of something more dreadful still. If we deny Him, He will also deny us. So then there is a retribution not of good things only, but of the contrary. And consider what it is probable that he will suffer, who is denied in that kingdom. Whosoever shall deny Me, him will I also deny. Matthew 10:33 And the retribution is not equal, though it seems so expressed. For we who deny Him are men, but He who denies us is God; and how great is the distance between God and man, it is needless to say.

Besides, we injure ourselves; Him we cannot injure. And to show this, he has added, If we believe not, He abides faithful: He cannot deny Himself: that is, if we believe not that He rose again, He is not injured by it. He is faithful and unshaken, whether we say so or not. If then He is not at all injured by our denying Him, it is for nothing else than for our benefit that He desires our confession. For He abides the same, whether we deny Him or not. He cannot deny Himself, that is, His own Being. We may say that He is not; though such is not the fact. It is not in His nature, it is not possible for Him not to be, that is, to go into nonentity. His subsistence always abides, always is. Let us not therefore be so affected, as if we could gratify or could injure Him. But lest any one should think that Timothy needed this advice, he has added,

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. It is an overawing thing to call God to witness what we say, for if no one would dare to set at nought the testimony of man when appealed to, much less when the appeal is to God. If any one, for instance, entering into a contract, or making his will, chooses to call witnesses worthy of credit, would any transfer the things to those who are not included? Surely not. And even if he wishes it, yet fearing the credibility of the witnesses, he avoids it. What is charging them before the Lord? He calls God to witness both what was said, and what was done.

That they strive not about words to no profit; and not merely so, but to the subverting of the hearers. Not only is there no gain from it, but much harm. Of these things then put them in remembrance, and if they despise you, God will judge them. But why does he admonish them not to strive about words? He knows that it is a dainty thing, and that the human soul is ever prone to contend and to dispute about words. To guard against this, he has not only charged them not to strive about words, but to render his discourse more alarming, he adds, to the subverting of the hearers.

Ver. 15. Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Everywhere this not being ashamed! And why is he ever so careful to guard him against shame? Because it was natural for many to be ashamed both of Paul himself, as being a tent-maker, and of the preaching, since its teachers perished. For Christ had been crucified, himself was about to be beheaded, Peter was crucified with his head downwards, and these things they suffered from audacious and despicable men. Because such men were in power, he says, Be not ashamed; that is, fear not to do anything tending to godliness, though it be necessary to submit to slavery or any other suffering. For how does any one become approved? By being a workman that needs not to be ashamed. As the workman is not ashamed of any work, so neither should he be ashamed who labors in the Gospel. He should submit to anything.

Rightly dividing the word of truth.

This he has well said. For many distort it, and pervert it in every way, and many additions are made to it. He has not said directing it, but rightly dividing, that is, cut away what is spurious, with much vehemence assail it, and extirpate it. With the sword of the Spirit cut off from your preaching, as from a thong, whatever is superfluous and foreign to it.

Ver. 16. And shun profane novelties of speech.

For they will not stop there. For when anything new has been introduced, it is ever producing innovations, and the error of him who has once left the safe harbor is infinite, and never stops.

For they will increase unto more ungodliness, he says,

Ver. 17. And their word will eat as does a canker.

It is an evil not to be restrained, not curable by any medicine, it destroys the whole frame. He shows that novelty of doctrine is a disease, and worse than a disease. And here he implies that they are incorrigible, and that they erred not weakly but willfully.

Of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus,

Ver. 18. Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some.

He has well said, They will increase unto more ungodliness. For it appears indeed to be a solitary evil, but see what evils spring out of it. For if the Resurrection is already past, not only do we suffer loss in being deprived of that great glory, but because judgment is taken away, and retribution also. For if the Resurrection is past, retribution also is past. The good therefore have reaped persecutions and afflictions, and the wicked have not been punished, nay verily, they live in great pleasure. It were better to say that there is no resurrection, than that it is already past.

And overthrow, he says, the faith of some.

Of some, not of all. For if there is no resurrection, faith is subverted. Our preaching is vain, nor is Christ risen; and if He is not risen, neither was He born, nor has He ascended into heaven. Observe how this error, while it seems to oppose the doctrine of the Resurrection, draws after it many other evils. What then, says one, ought we to do nothing for those who are subverted?

Ver. 19. Nevertheless, he says, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are His. And, Let every one that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

He shows that even before they were subverted, they were not firm. For otherwise, they would not have been overthrown at the first attack, as Adam was firm before the commandment. For those who are fixed not only are not harmed through deceivers, but are even admired.

And he calls it sure, and a foundation; so ought we to adhere to the faith; having this seal, The Lord knows them that are His. What is this? He has taken it from Deuteronomy; that is, Firm souls stand fixed and immovable. But whence are they manifest? From having these characters inscribed upon their actions, from their being known by God, and not perishing with the world, and from their departing from iniquity.

Let every one, he says, that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

These are the distinguishing marks of the foundation. As a foundation is shown to be firm, and as letters are inscribed upon a stone that the letters may be significant. But these letters are shown by works, Having, he says, this seal fixed thereon, Let every one that names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. Thus if any one is unrighteous, he is not of the foundation. So that this too is of the seal, not to do iniquity.

Moral. Let us not therefore put off from us the royal seal and token, that we may not be of those who are not sealed, that we may not be unsound, that we may be firmly grounded, that we may be of the foundation, and not carried to and fro. This marks them that are of God, that they depart from iniquity. For how can any one be of God Who is just, if he does iniquity, if by his works he opposes Him, if he insults Him by his misdeeds? Again we are speaking against injustice, and again we have many that are hostile to us. For this affection, like a tyrant, has seized upon the souls of all, and, what is worse, not by necessity nor violence, but by persuasion and gentle insinuation, and they are grateful for their slavery. And this is indeed the misery; for if they were held by constraint and not by love, they would soon depart. And whence is it, that a thing which is most bitter, appears to be sweet? Whence is it that righteousness, which is a most sweet thing, becomes bitter? It is the fault of our senses. Thus some have thought honey bitter, and have taken with pleasure other things that were noxious. And the cause is not in the nature of things, but in the perverseness of the sufferers. The judging faculty of the soul is disordered. Just as a balance, if its beam be unsteady, moves round, and does not show accurately the weight of things placed in it; so the soul, if it has not the beam of its own thoughts fixed, and firmly riveted to the law of God, being carried round and drawn down, will not be able to judge aright of actions.

For if any one will examine carefully, he will perceive the great bitterness of injustice, not to those who suffer it, but to those who practice it, and to these more than to the others. And let us not speak of things future, but for the present of things here. Hath it not battles, judgments, condemnation, ill will, abuse? What is more bitter than these? Hath it not enmities, and wars, and accusations? What is more bitter than these? Hath it not conscience continually scourging and gnawing us? If it were possible, I could wish to draw out from the body the soul of the unrighteous man, and you would see it pale and trembling, ashamed, hiding its head, anxiously fearful, and self-condemned. For should we sink down into the very depths of wickedness, the judging faculty of the mind is not destroyed, but remains unbribed. And no one pursues injustice thinking it to be good, but he invents excuses, and has recourse to every artifice of words to shift off the accusation. But he cannot get it off his conscience. Here indeed the speciousness of words, the corruption of rulers, and multitudes of flatterers, is often able to throw justice into the shade, but within, the conscience has nothing of this sort, there are no flatterers there, no wealth to corrupt the judge. For the faculty of judging is naturally implanted in us by God, and what comes from God cannot be so corrupted. But uneasy slumbers, thick-coming fancies, and the frequent recollections of guilt, destroy our

repose. Has any one, for instance, unjustly deprived another of his house? Not only is he that is robbed rendered unhappy, but the man who robbed him. If he is persuaded of a future judgment, (if indeed any one is so persuaded,) he groans exceedingly, and is in misery. But if he believes not in futurity, yet he blushes for shame; or rather there is no man, whether Greek, Jew, or heretic, who is not afraid of a judgment to come.

And although he is not a philosopher with respect to futurity; yet he fears and trembles at what may befall him here, lest he may have some retribution in his property, his children, his family, or his life. For many such visitations God inflicts. For since the doctrine of the Resurrection is not sufficient to bring all men to reason, He affords even here many proofs of His righteous judgment, and exhibits them to the world. One who has gained wrongfully is without children, another falls in war, another is maimed in his body, another loses his son. He considers these things, on these his imagination dwells, and he lives in continual fear.

Know you not what the unrighteous suffer? Is there no bitterness in these things? And were there nothing of this sort, do not all condemn him, and hate and abhor him, and think him less rational than a beast, even those who are themselves unrighteous? For if they condemn themselves, much more do they condemn another, calling him rapacious, fraudulent, a pestilent fellow. What pleasure then can he enjoy? He has only the heavier care and anxiety to preserve his gains, and the being more anxious and troubled. For the more wealth any one gets about him, the more painful watchfulness does he store up for himself. Then what are the curses of those whom he has wronged, their pleadings against him? And what, if sickness should befall him? For it is impossible for one, who has fallen into sickness, however atheistically he may be inclined, not to be anxious about these things, not to be thoughtful, when he is unable to do anything. For as long as we are here, the soul enjoying itself, does not tolerate painful thoughts: but when it is about to take its flight from the body, then a greater fear constrains it, as entering into the very portals of judgment. Even robbers, while they are in prison, live without fear, but when they are brought to the very curtain of the court, they sink with terror. For when the fear of death is urgent, like a fire consuming all things besides, it obliges the soul to philosophize, and to take thought for futurity. The desire of wealth, the love of gain, and of bodily pleasures, no longer possesses it. These things passing away like clouds, leave the judging faculty clear, and grief entering in softens the hard heart. For nothing is so opposite to philosophy, as a life of pleasure; nor, on the other hand, is anything so favorable to philosophy as affliction. Consider what the covetous man will then be. For, an hour of affliction, it is said, makes a man forget much pleasure. Sirach 2:27 What will then be his state, when he considers those whom he has robbed, and injured, and defrauded, when he sees others reaping the fruits of his grasping, and himself going to pay the penalty? For it cannot, indeed it cannot be, that when fallen into sickness he should not reflect upon these things. For often the soul of itself is distracted with agony and terror. What a bitterness is this, tell me! And with every sickness these things must be endured. And what will he not suffer when he sees others punished or put to death?

These things await him here. And as to what he must undergo hereafter, it is not possible to say what punishment, what vengeance, what torments, what racks are reserved for him There. These things we declare. He that has ears to hear, let him hear. Luke 8:8 We are for ever discoursing of these things, not willingly, but of necessity. For we could wish there were no obligation to mention such things at all. But since it must be, we would at least, by a little medicine, deliver you from your disease, and restore you to health. But while you remain in this sickness, it would show a mean and weak spirit, not to say cruelty and inhumanity, to desist from the healing treatment. For if when physicians despair of our bodies, we beseech them not to neglect us, not to cease to our last breath applying whatever is in their power, shall we not

much more exhort ourselves? For perhaps when we have come to the very gates of Hell, the vestibule of wickedness itself, it may be possible to recover, to renew our strength, to lay hold on eternal life! How many, who have heard ten times and remained insensible, have afterwards at one hearing been converted! Or rather, not at one hearing; for though they seemed insensible at the ten discourses, yet they gained something, and afterwards showed all at once abundant fruit. For as a tree may receive ten strokes, and not fall; then afterwards be brought down all at once by a single blow: yet it is not done by that one blow, but by the ten which made that last successful. And this is known to him who sees the root, though he who takes his view of the trunk above knows it not. So it is in this case. And thus often, when physicians have applied many remedies, no benefit is perceived; but afterwards some one comes in and effects an entire cure. Yet it is not the work of him alone, but of these who have already reduced the disorder. So that, if now we do not bring forth the fruits of hearing the word, yet hereafter we shall. For that we shall bring them forth, I am fully persuaded. For it is not, indeed it is not possible that such eager desire, such a love of hearing, should fail of its effect. God forbid! But may we all, having become worthy of the admonitions of Christ, obtain the everlasting blessings, etc.

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