

2 Timothy 3:1-4

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of faith and works, and warns against the dangers of false teachers and the persecution of the righteous.

Scripture: Genesis 3:5, John 15:15, 2 Timothy 3:1-14

Topics: "End Times", "Perseverance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the signs of the last days, warning about the perilous times to come with people being lovers of themselves, covetous, proud, and disobedient. He emphasizes the prevalence of deceivers throughout history, from the devil's deception in the Garden of Eden to the false prophets in biblical times. Chrysostom encourages believers to stay strong in the face of persecution, reminding them that those who live godly lives will face trials but should continue in faith. He highlights the importance of knowing and holding firm to the holy Scriptures, which have the power to make one wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Transcript

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

If any now takes offense at the existence of heretics, let him remember that it was so from the beginning, the devil always setting up error by the side of truth. God from the beginning promised good, the devil came too with a promise. God planted Paradise, the devil deceived, saying, You shall be as gods. Genesis 3:5 For as he could show nothing in actions, he made the more promises in words. Such is the character of deceivers. After this were Cain and Abel, then the sons of Seth and the daughters of men; afterwards Ham and Japhet, Abraham and Pharaoh, Jacob and Esau; and so it is even to the end, Moses and the magicians, the Prophets and the false prophets, the Apostles and the false apostles, Christ and Antichrist. Thus it was then, both before and at that time. Then there was Theudas, then Simon, then were the Apostles, then too this party of Hermogenes and Philetus. In short, there was no time when falsehood was not set up in opposition to truth. Let us not therefore be distressed. That it would be so, was foretold from the beginning. Therefore he says, Know that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful,

unholy, without natural affection. The unthankful then is unholy, and this is natural, for what will he be to others, who is not grateful to his benefactor? The unthankful man is a truce-breaker, he is without natural affection.

False accusers, that is, slanderers. For those who are conscious that they have no good in themselves, while they commit many sins and offenses, find consolation in defaming the characters of others.

Incontinent, with respect both to their tongue and their appetite, and everything else.

Fierce, hence their inhumanity and cruelty, when any one is covetous, selfish, ungrateful, licentious.

Despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady. Traitors, betrayers of friendship; heady, having no steadiness; high-minded, filled with arrogance. Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Ver. 5. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

In the Epistle to the Romans, he says somewhat on this wise, Having the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law Romans 2:20, where he speaks in commendation of it: but here he speaks of this sin as an evil beyond all other defects. And why is this? Because he does not use the words in the same signification. For an image is often taken to signify a likeness; but sometimes a thing without life, and worthless. Thus he says himself in his Epistle to the Corinthians, A man ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God. 1 Corinthians 11:7 But the Prophet says, Man walks in an image. Psalm 39:9, Septuagint And the Scripture sometimes takes a lion to represent royalty, as, He couched as a lion, and as a lion's cub, who shall raise him up? Genesis 49:9, Septuagint And sometimes to signify rapacity, as, a ravening and a roaring lion. Psalm 22:13 And we ourselves do the same. For as things are compounded and varied in themselves, they are fitly adduced for various images and examples. As when we would express our admiration of a beautiful woman, we say, she is like a picture; and when we admire a painting, we say that it speaks, that it breathes. But we do not mean to express the same thing, but in one case to mark likeness, in the other beauty. So here with respect to form, in the one passage, it means a model, or representation, a doctrine, or pattern of godliness; in the other, something that is lifeless, a mere appearance, show, and hypocrisy. Faith therefore, without works, is fitly called a mere form without the power. For as a fair and florid body, when it has no strength, is like a painted figure, so is a right faith apart from works. For let us suppose any one to be covetous, a traitor, heady, and yet to believe aright; of what advantage is it, if he wants all the qualities becoming a Christian, if he does not the works that characterize godliness, but outdoes the Greeks in impiety, when he is a mischief to those with whom he associates, causes God to be blasphemed, and the doctrine to be slandered by his evil deeds?

From such turn away, he says. But how is this, if men are to be so in the latter times? There were probably then such, in some degree at least, though not to the same excess. But, in truth, through him he warns all to turn away from such characters.

Ver. 6. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with various lust.

Ver. 7. Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Do you see them employing the artifice of that old deceiver, the weapons which the devil used against Adam? Entering into houses, he says. Observe how he shows their impudence by this expression, their dishonorable ways, their deceitfulness. Leading captive silly women, so that he who is easy to be

deceived is a silly woman, and nothing like a man: for to be deceived is the part of silly women. Laden with sins. See whence arises their persuasion, from their sins, from their being conscious to themselves of nothing good! And with great propriety has he said laden. For this expression marks the multitude of their sins, and their state of disorder and confusion; led away with various lusts. He does not accuse nature, for it is not women simply, but such women as these, that he blames. And why various lusts? By that are implied their various faults, their luxury, their disorderly conduct, their wantonness. Divers lust, he says, that is, of glory, of wealth, of pleasure, of self-will, of honor: and perchance other vile desires are implied.

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. He does not say thus to excuse, but to threaten them severely; for their understanding was callous, because they had weighed themselves down with lusts and sins.

Ver. 8. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth.

Who are these? The magicians in the time of Moses. But how is it their names are nowhere else introduced? Either they were handed down by tradition, or it is probable that Paul knew them by inspiration.

Men of corrupt minds, he says, reprobate concerning the faith.

Ver. 9. But they shall proceed no further; for their folly shall be manifested unto all men, as theirs also was.

They shall proceed no further; how then does he say elsewhere, They will increase unto more ungodliness? 2 Timothy 2:16 He there means, that beginning to innovate and to deceive, they will not pause in their error, but will always invent new deceits and corrupt doctrines, for error is never stationary. But here he says, that they shall not be able to deceive, nor carry men away with them, for however at first they may seem to impose upon them, they will soon and easily be detected. For that he is speaking to this effect appears from what follows. For their folly shall be manifest unto all. Whence? Every way -- as theirs also was. For if errors flourish at first, they do not continue to the end, for so it is with things that are not fair by nature, but fair in appearance; they flourish for a time, and then are detected, and come to nought. But not such are our doctrines, and of these you are a witness, for in our doctrines there is no deceit, for who would choose to die for a deceit?

Ver. 10. But you have fully known my doctrine. Wherefore be strong; for thou were not merely present, but followed closely. Here he seems to imply that the period had been long, in that he says, You have followed up my doctrine; this refers to his discourse. Manner of life; this to his conduct. Purpose; this to his zeal, and the firmness of his soul. I did not say these things, he says, and not do them; nor was I a philosopher in words only. Faith, longsuffering. He means, how none of these things troubled me. Charity, which those men had not; patience, nor yet this. Towards the heretics, he means, I show much longsuffering; patience, that under persecution.

Ver. 11. Persecutions, afflictions.

There are two things that disquiet a teacher, the number of heretics, and men's wanting fortitude to endure sufferings. And yet he has said much about these, that such always have been, and always will be, and no age will be free from them, and that they will not be able to injure us, and that in the world there are vessels of gold and of silver. You see how he proceeds to discourse about his afflictions, which came upon me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.

Why has he selected these instances out of many? Because the rest was known to Timothy, and these perhaps were new events, and he does not mention the former ones, for he is not enumerating them particularly, for he is not actuated by ambition or vainglory, but he recounts them for the consolation of his disciple, not from ostentation. And here he speaks of Antioch in Pisidia, and Lystra, whence Timothy himself was. What persecutions I endured. There was twofold matter of consolation, that I displayed a generous zeal, and that I was not forsaken. It cannot be said, that God abandoned me, but He rendered my crown more radiant.

What persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Ver. 12. Yea, and all those that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

But why, he says, should I speak only of myself? Each one that will live godly will be persecuted. Here he calls afflictions and sorrows, persecutions, for it is not possible that a man pursuing the course of virtue should not be exposed to grief, tribulation, and temptations. For how can he escape it who is treading in the strait and narrow way, and who has heard, that in the world you shall have tribulation? John 16:33 If Job in his time said, The life of man upon earth is a state of trial Job 7:1, Septuagint; how much more was it so in those days?

Ver. 13. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Let none of these things, he says, disturb you, if they are in prosperity, and thou in trials. Such is the nature of the case. From my own instance you may learn that it is impossible for man, in his warfare with the wicked, not to be exposed to tribulation. One cannot be in combat and live luxuriously, one cannot be wrestling and feasting. Let none therefore of those who are contending seek for ease or joyous living. Again, the present state is contest, warfare, tribulation, straits, and trials, and the very scene of conflicts. The season for rest is not now, this is the time for toil and labor. No one who has just stripped and anointed himself thinks of ease. If you think of ease, why did you strip, or prepare to fight? But do I not maintain the fight? you say. What, when you do not conquer your desires, nor resist the evil bias of nature?

Ver. 14. But continue thou in the things that you have learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; And that from a child you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which in Christ Jesus.

What is this? As the prophet David exhorted, saying, Be not thou envious against the workers of iniquity Psalm 37:1, so Paul exhorts, Continue thou in the things which you have learned, and not simply learned, but hast been assured of, that is, hast believed. And what have I believed? That this is the Life. And if you see things happening contrary to your belief, be not troubled. The same happened to Abraham, yet he was not affected at it. He had heard, In Isaac shall your seed be called Genesis 21:12; and he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, yet he was not troubled nor dismayed. Let no one be offended because of the wicked. This the Scripture taught from the beginning.

What then, if the good be in prosperity, and the wicked be punished? The one is likely to happen, the other not so. For the wicked will possibly be punished, but the good cannot always be rejoicing. No one was equal to Paul, yet he passed all his life in afflictions, in tears and groanings night and day. For the space of three years, he says, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:31 And again: That which comes upon me daily. 1 Corinthians 11:28 He did not rejoice today, and grieve tomorrow, but he

ceased not daily to grieve. How then does he say, Evil men shall wax worse and worse? He has not said, they shall find rest, but they shall wax worse and worse. Their progress is for the worse. He has not said, they shall be in prosperity. But if they are punished, they are punished that you may not suppose their sins are unavenged. For since we are not deterred from wickedness by the fear of hell, in very tenderness He rouses us from our insensibility, and awakens us. If no wicked man was ever punished, no one would believe that God presides over human affairs. If all were punished, no one would expect a future resurrection, since all had received their due here. On this account He both punishes, and forbears to punish. On this account the righteous suffer tribulation here, because they are sojourners, and strangers, and are in a foreign country. The just therefore endure these things for the purpose of trial. For hear what God said to Job: Do you think that I have warned you otherwise, than that you might appear just? Job 40:3, Septuagint But sinners when they endure any affliction suffer but the punishment of their sins. Under all circumstances, therefore, whether afflictive or otherwise, let us give thanks to God. For both are beneficial. He does nothing in hatred or enmity to us, but all things from care and consideration for us.

Knowing that from a child you have known the sacred writings. The holy Scriptures he calls sacred writings. In these you were nurtured, so that through them your faith ought to be firm and unshaken. For the root was laid deep, and nourished by length of time, nor will anything subvert it.

And speaking of the holy Scriptures, he has added, Which are able to make you wise, that is, they will not suffer you to have any foolish feeling, such as most men have. For he who knows the Scriptures as he ought, is not offended at anything that happens; he endures all things manfully, referring them partly to faith, and to the incomprehensible nature of the divine dispensation, and partly knowing reasons for them, and finding examples in the Scriptures. Since it is a great sign of knowledge not to be curious about everything, nor to wish to know all things. And if you will allow me, I will explain myself by an example. Let us suppose a river, or rather rivers (I ask no allowance, I only speak of what rivers really are,) all are not of the same depth. Some have a shallow bed, others one deep enough to drown one unacquainted with it. In one part there are whirlpools, and not in another. It is good therefore to forbear to make trial of all, and it is no small proof of knowledge not to wish to sound all the depths: whereas he that would venture on every part of the river, is really most ignorant of the peculiar nature of rivers, and will often be in danger of perishing, from venturing into the deeper parts with the same boldness with which he crossed the shallows. So it is in the things of God. He that will know all things, and ventures to intrude into everything, he it is that is most ignorant what God is. And of rivers indeed, the greater part is safe, and the depths and whirlpools few, but with respect to the things of God, the greater part is hidden, and it is not possible to trace out His works. Why then are you bent on drowning yourself in those depths?

Know this, however, that God dispenses all things, that He provides for all, that we are free agents, that some things He works, and some things He permits; that He wills nothing evil to be done; that all things are not done by His will, but some by ours also; all evil things by ours alone, all good things by our will conjointly with His influence; and that nothing is without His knowledge. Therefore He works all things. Thou then knowing this can reckon what things are good, what are evil, and what are indifferent. Thus virtue is good, vice is evil; but riches and poverty, life and death, are things indifferent. If you know this, you will know thereby, that the righteous are afflicted that they may be crowned, the wicked, that they may receive the punishment of their sins. But all sinners are not punished here, lest the generality should disbelieve the Resurrection; nor all the righteous afflicted, lest men should think that vice, and not virtue, is approved. These are the rules and limits. Bring what you will to the test of these, and you will not be perplexed with doubt. For as there is among calculators the number of six thousand, to which all things

can be reduced, and everything can be divided and multiplied in the scale of six thousand, and this is known to all who are acquainted with arithmetic; so he who knows those rules, which I will briefly recapitulate, will never be offended. And what are these? That virtue is a good, vice an evil; that diseases, poverty, ill-treatment, false accusations, and the like, are things indifferent; that the righteous are afflicted here, or if ever they are in prosperity, it is that virtue may not appear odious; that the wicked enjoy pleasure now that hereafter they may be punished, or if they are sometimes visited, it is that vice may not seem to be approved, nor their actions to go unpunished; that all are not punished, lest there should be a disbelief of the time of resurrection; that even of the good, some who have done bad actions are quit of them here; and of the wicked, some have good ones, and are rewarded for them here, that their wickedness may be punished hereafter Matthew 6:5; that the works of God are for the most part incomprehensible, and that the difference between us and Him is greater than can be expressed. If we reason on these grounds, nothing will be able to trouble or perplex us. If we listen to the Scriptures continually, we shall find many such examples.

Which are able, he says, to make you wise unto salvation.

For the Scriptures suggest to us what is to be done, and what is not to be done. For hear this blessed one elsewhere saying, You are confident that you yourself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes. Romans 2:19-20 You see that the Law is the light of them which are in darkness; and if that which shows the letter, the letter which kills, is light, what then is the Spirit which quickens? If the Old Covenant is light, what is the New, which contains so many, and so great revelations? Where the difference is as great, as if any one should open heaven to those who only know the earth, and make all things there visible. There we learn concerning hell, heaven, and judgment. Let us not believe in things irrational. They are nothing but imposture. What, you say, when what they foretell comes to pass? It is because you believe it, if it does come to pass. The impostor has taken you captive. Your life is in his power, he manages you as he will. If a captain of robbers should have under his power and disposal the son of a king, who had fled to him, preferring the desert, and his lawless company, would he be able to pronounce whether he would live or die? Assuredly he would, not because he knows the future, but because he is the disposer of his life or death, the youth having put himself in his power. For according to his own pleasure, he may either kill him, or spare his life, as he has become subject to him, and it is equally at his disposal to say whether you shall be rich or poor. The greater part of the world have delivered themselves up into the hands of the devil.

And furthermore, it contributes much to favor the pretenses of these deceivers, that a man has accustomed himself to believe in them. For no one takes notice of their failures, but their lucky conjectures are observed. But if these men have any power of prognosticating, bring them to me, a believer. I say not this, as magnifying myself, (for it is no great honor to be superior to these things,) and indeed I am deep-laden with sins; but with respect to these matters, I will not be humble-minded; by the grace of God I despise them all. Bring me this pretender to magic; let him, if he has any power of prognosticating, tell me what will happen to me tomorrow. But he will not tell me. For I am under the power of the King, and he has no claim to my allegiance or submission. I am far from his holes and caverns. I war under the king. But some one committed theft, you say, and this man discovered it. This is not always true, certainly, but for the most part absurdities and falsehoods. For they know nothing. If indeed they know anything, they ought rather to speak of their own concerns, how the numerous offerings to their idols have been stolen, how so much of their gold has been melted. Why have they not informed their Priests? Even for the sake of money, they have not been able to give information when their idol-temples have been burnt, and many

have perished with them. Why do they not provide for their own safety? But it is altogether a matter of chance, if they have predicted anything. With us there are prophets, and they do not fail. They do not speak truth in one instance and falsehood in another, but always declare the truth; for this is the privilege of foreknowledge.

Cease, then, from this madness, I beseech you, if at least you believe in Christ; and if you believe not, why do you expose yourselves? Why do you deceive? How long will you halt on both your hips? 1 Kings 18:21, Septuagint Why do you go to them? Why enquire of them? The instant you go to them, the instant you enquire, you put yourself in slavery to them. For you enquire, as if you believed. No, you say, I do not enquire, as believing, but making trial of them. But to make trial, whether they speak the truth, is the part not of one who believes that they are false, but of one who still doubts. Wherefore then do you enquire what will happen? For if they answered, This will happen, but do so and so, and you will escape it; even in that case you ought by no means to be an idolater; yet your madness were not so great. But if they foretell future events, he that listens to them will gain nothing more than unavailing sorrow. The event does not happen, but he suffers the uneasiness, and torments, himself.

If it were for our good, God would not have grudged us this foreknowledge. He who has revealed to us things in heaven, would not have envied us. For, All things, He says, that I have heard of the Father I have made known unto you; and, I call you not servants, but friends. You are my friends. John 15:15 Why then did He not make these things known unto us? Because He would not have us concerned about them. And as a proof that He does not envy us this knowledge, such things were revealed to the ancients, because they were babes, even about an ass, and the like. But to us, because He would not have us concerned about such things, He has not cared to reveal them. But what do we learn? Things which they never knew, for little indeed were all those things of old. But what we are taught is this, that we shall rise again, that we shall be immortal, and incorruptible, that our life shall have no end, that all things will pass away, that we shall be caught up in the clouds, that the wicked shall suffer punishment, and numberless other things, and in all these there is no falsehood. Is it not better to know these than to hear that the ass that was lost is found? Lo, you have gotten your ass! Lo, you have found him! What is your gain? Will he not soon be lost again some other way? For if he leave you not, at least you will lose him in your death. But the things which I have mentioned, if we will but hold them fast, we shall retain perpetually. These therefore let us pursue. To these stable and enduring goods let us attach ourselves. Let us not give heed to soothsayers, fortune-tellers, and jugglers, but to God who knows all things certainly, whose knowledge is universal. Thus we shall know all that it befits us to know, and shall obtain all good things, through the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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