

Colossians 4:5, 6

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in wisdom toward those who are not believers, and of sharing in the sufferings of others as a way of showing love and commitment to the body of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 10:16, Acts 17:22, Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 5:12, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:5, Hebrews 13:3

Topics: "Christian Witness", "Gracious Speech"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of walking in wisdom towards those outside the faith, redeeming the time and being gracious in speech. He emphasizes the need to be cautious and wise in interactions with non-believers, avoiding unnecessary conflicts and being mindful of how to respond to each person appropriately. Chrysostom encourages believers to be moderate, gracious, and bold in their speech, tailored to edify and build up others. He highlights the significance of supporting fellow believers, sharing in their joys, and refraining from envy, as it ultimately harms oneself and the body of Christ.

Transcript

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

What Christ said to His disciples, that does Paul also now advise. And what did Christ say? Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Matthew 10:16 That is, be upon your guard, giving them no handle against you. For therefore it is added, towards them that are without, in order that we may know that against our own members we have no need of so much caution as against those without. For where brethren are, there are both many allowances and kindnesses. There is indeed need of caution even here; but much more without, for it is not the same to be among enemies and foes, and among friends.

Then because he had alarmed them, see how again he encourages them; Redeeming, he says, the time: that is, the present time is short. Now this he said, not wishing them to be crafty, nor hypocrites, (for this is not a part of wisdom, but of senselessness,) but what? In matters wherein they harm you not, he means, give them no handle; as he says also, when writing to the Romans, Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, honor to whom honor. Romans 13:7 On account of the Preaching alone have thou war, he says, let this war have none other origin. For though they were to become our foes for other causes besides, yet neither shall we have a reward, and they will become

worse, and will seem to have just complaints against us. For instance, if we pay not the tribute, if we render not the honors that are due, if we be not lowly. Do you see not Paul, how submissive he is, where he was not likely to harm the Preaching. For hear him saying to Agrippa, I think myself happy, because I shall answer for myself this day before you, especially because I know you to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Acts 26:2-3 But had he thought it his duty to insult the ruler, he would have spoiled everything. And hear too those of blessed Peter's company, how gently they answer the Jews, saying, we must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29 And yet men who had renounced their own lives, might both have insulted, and have done anything whatever; but for this object they had renounced their lives, not that they might win vainglory, (for that way had been vainglorious,) but that they might preach and speak all things with boldness. That other course marks want of moderation.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt; that is, that this graciousness may not lapse into indifferentism. For it is possible to be simply agreeable, it is possible also to be so with due seemliness. That ye may know how ye ought to answer each one. So that one ought not to discourse alike to all, Greeks, I mean, and Brethren. By no means, for this were the very extreme of senselessness.

Ver. 7. All my affairs shall Tychicus make known unto you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord.

Admirable! How great is the wisdom of Paul! Observe, he does not put everything into his Epistles, but only things necessary and urgent. In the first place, being desirous of not drawing them out to a length; and secondly, to make his messenger more respected, by his having also somewhat to relate; thirdly, showing his own affection towards him; for he would not else have entrusted these communications to him. Then, there were things which ought not to be declared in writing. The beloved brother, he says. If beloved, he knew all, and he concealed nothing from him. And faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord. If faithful, he will speak no falsehood; if a fellow-servant, he has shared his trials, so that he has brought together from all sides the grounds of trustworthiness.

Ver. 8. Whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose.

Here he shows his great love, seeing that for this purpose he sent him, and this was the cause of his journey; and so when writing to the Thessalonians, he said, Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone, and sent Timothy our brother. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 And to the Ephesians he sends this very same person, and for the very same cause, That he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts. Ephesians 6:21-22 See what he says, not that you might know my estate, but that I might know yours. So in no place does he mention what is his own. He shows that they were in trials too, by the expression, comfort your hearts.

Ver. 9. With Onesimus, the beloved and faithful brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things that are done here.

Onesimus is the one about whom, writing to Philemon, he said, Whom I would fain have kept with me, that in your behalf he might minister unto me in the bonds of the Gospel: but without your mind I would do nothing. Philemon 1-3, 14 And he adds too the praise of their city, that they might not only not be ashamed, but even pride themselves on him. Who is one of you, he says. They shall make known unto you all things that are done here.

Ver. 10. Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner salutes you.

Nothing can surpass this praise. This is he that was brought up from Jerusalem with him. This man has said a greater thing than the prophets; for they call themselves strangers and foreigners, but this one calls himself even a prisoner. Just like a prisoner of war he was dragged up and down, and lay at every one's will to suffer evil of them, yea rather worse even than prisoners. For those indeed their enemies, after taking them, treat with much attention, having a care for them as their own property: but Paul, as though an enemy and a foe, all men dragged up and down, beating him, scourging, insulting, and maligning. This was a consolation to those also (to whom he wrote), when their master even is in such circumstances.

And Mark, the cousin of Barnabas; even this man he has praised still from his relationship, for Barnabas was a great man; touching whom you received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him. Why? Would they not have received him? Yes, but he means, with much attention; and this shows the man to be great. Whence they received these commandments, he does not say.

Ver. 11. And Jesus which is called Justus.

This man was probably a Corinthian. Next, he bestows a common praise on all, having already spoken that of each one in particular; who are of the circumcision: these only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me. After having said, fellow-prisoner; in order that he may not therewith depress the soul of his hearers, see how by this expression he rouses them up. Fellow-workers, he says, unto the kingdom of God. So that being partakers of the trials, they become partakers of the kingdom. Who have been a comfort to me. He shows them to be great persons, seeing that to Paul they have been a comfort.

But let us see the wisdom of Paul. Walk in wisdom, he says, towards them that are without, redeeming the time. Colossians 4:5 That is, the time is not yours, but theirs. Do not then wish to have your own way, but redeem the time. And he said not simply, Buy, but redeem, making it yours after another manner. For it were the part of excessive madness, to invent occasions of war and enmity. For over and above the undergoing of superfluous and profitless dangers, there is this additional harm, that the Greeks will not come over to us. For when you are among the brethren, reason is you should be bold; but when without, you ought not to be so.

Do you see how everywhere he speaks of those without, the Greeks? Wherefore also when writing to Timothy, he said, Moreover, he must have good testimony from them that are without. 1 Timothy 3:7 And again, For what have I to do with judging them that are without. 1 Corinthians 5:12 Walk in wisdom, he says, toward them that are without. For without, they are, even though they live in the same world with us, seeing they are without the kingdom, and the paternal mansion. And he comforts them withal, by calling the others without, as he said above, Your life is hid with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3

Then, he says, seek ye glory, then honors, then all those other things, but not so now, but give them up to those without. Next, lest you think that he is speaking of money, he adds, Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how ye ought to answer each one. That it may not be full of hypocrisy, for this is not grace, nor a seasoning with salt. For instance, if it be needful to pay court to any one without incurring danger, refuse not [to do so]; if the occasion require that thou discourse civilly, think not the doing so flattery, do everything that pertains to honor, so that piety be not injured.

Do you see not how Daniel pays court to an impious man? Do you see not the three children, how wisely they bore themselves, showing both courage, and boldness in speaking, and yet nothing rash nor galling, for so it had not been boldness, but vainglory. That ye may know, he says, how ye ought to answer every

man. For the ruler ought to be answered in one way, the ruled in another, the rich in one way, the poor in another. Wherefore? Because the souls of those who are rich, and in authority, are weaker, more inflammable, more fluctuating, so that towards them, one should use condescension; those of the poor, and the ruled, firmer and more intelligent, so that to these one should use greater boldness of speech; looking to one thing, their edification.

Not that because one is rich, another poor, the former is to be honored more, the latter less, but because of his weakness, let the former be supported, the latter not so: for instance, when there is no cause for it, do not call the Greek polluted, nor be insulting; but if you be asked concerning his doctrine, answer that it is polluted, and impious; but when none asks you, nor forces you to speak, it becomes you not causelessly to challenge to you his enmity. For what need is there to prepare for yourself gratuitous hostilities?

Again, if you are instructing any one; speak on the subject at present before you, otherwise be silent. If the speech be seasoned with salt, should it fall into a soul that is of loose texture, it will brace up its slackness; into one that is harsh, it will smooth its ruggedness. Let it be gracious, and so neither hard, nor yet weak, but let it have both sternness and pleasantness therewith. For if one be immoderately stern, he does more harm than good; and if he be immoderately complaisant, he gives more pain than pleasure, so that everywhere there ought to be moderation.

Be not downcast, and sour visaged, for this is offensive; nor yet be wholly relaxed, for this is open to contempt and treading under foot; but, like the bee, culling the virtue of each, of the one its cheerfulness, of the other its gravity, keep clear of the fault. For if a physician deals not with all bodies alike, much more ought not a teacher. And yet better will the body bear unsuitable medicines, than the soul language; for instance, a Greek comes to you, and becomes your friend; discourse not at all with him on this subject, until he have become a close friend, and after he has become so, do it gradually.

See, when Paul also had come to Athens, how he discoursed with them. He said not, O polluted, and all-polluted; but what? You men of Athens, in all things I perceive that you are somewhat superstitious. Acts 17:22 Again, when to insult was needful, he refused not; but with great vehemency he said to Elymas, O full of all guile and all villainy, son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness. For as to have insulted those had been senselessness, so not to have insulted this one had been softness. Again, are you brought unto a ruler on a matter of business, see that you render him the honors that are his due.

Ver. 9. They shall make known unto you, he says, all things that are done here. Why did you not come with them, says one? But what is, They shall make known unto you all things? My bonds, that is, and all the other things that detain me. I then, who pray to see them, who also send others, should not myself have remained behind, had not some great necessity detained me. And yet this is not the language of accusations -- yes, of vehement accusation. For the assuring them that he had both fallen into trials, and was bearing them nobly, is the part of one who was confirming the fact, and lifting up again their souls.

Ver. 9. With Onesimus, he says, the beloved, and faithful brother.

Paul calls a slave, brother: with reason; seeing that he styles himself the servant of the faithful. 2 Corinthians 4:5 Bring we down all of us our pride, tread we under foot our boastfulness. Paul names himself a slave, he that is worth the world, and ten thousands of heavens; and do you entertain high thoughts? He that seizes all things for spoil as he will, he that has the first place in the kingdom of heaven, he that was crowned, he that ascended into the third heaven, calls servants, brethren, and

fellow-servants. Where is your madness? Where is your arrogance?

So trustworthy was Onesimus become, as to be entrusted even with such things as these.

Ver. 10. And Mark, he says, the cousin of Barnabas, touching whom you received commandments, receive him. Perhaps they had received commandments from Barnabas.

Ver. 11. Who are of the circumcision. He represses the swelling pride of the Jews, and inspires the souls of these, [the Colossians,] because few of them were of the circumcision, the greater number of the Gentiles.

Men that have been, he says, a comfort unto me. He shows himself to be set in the midst of great trials. So that neither is this a small thing. When we comfort the Saints by presence, by words, by assiduous attendance, when we suffer adversity together with them, (for he says, as bound with those in bonds; Hebrews 13:3) when we make their sufferings ours, we shall also be partakers in their crowns. Have you not been dragged to the stadium? Have you not entered into the lists? It is another that strips himself, another that wrestles; but if you be so minded, you too shall be a sharer. Anoint him, become his favorer and partisan, from without the lists shout loudly for him, stir up his strength, refresh his spirit. It follows that the same things should be done in all other cases. For Paul stood not in need, but in order to stimulate them he said these things. Thou therefore in the case of all others, stop the mouths of those who would abuse such an one, procure favorers for him, receive him as he comes forth with great attention, so shall you be a sharer in his crowns, so, in his glory; and if you do no other thing, but only hast pleasure in what is done, even thus you share in no common degree, for you have contributed love, the sum of all good things.

For if they that weep seem to share in the grief of those in sorrow, and gratify them mightily, and remove the excess of their woe, much more do they also that rejoice with others, make their pleasure greater. For how great an evil it is not to have companions in sorrow, hear the Prophet saying, And I looked for one to lament with me, but there was none. Wherefore Paul also says, Rejoice with them that rejoice; and weep with them that weep. Romans 12:15 Increase their pleasure. If you see your brother in good esteem, say not, the esteem is his, why should I rejoice. These words are not those of a brother, but of an enemy. If you be so minded, it is not his, but yours. You have the power of making it greater, if you be not downcast, but pleased, if you be cheerful, if joyous. And that it is so, is evident from this; the envious envy not those only who are in good esteem, but those as well who rejoice at their good esteem, so conscious are they that these also are interested in that good esteem; and these are they who do glory most in it. For the other even blushes when praised exceedingly; but these with great pleasure pride themselves upon it. See ye not in the case of athletes, how the one is crowned, the other is not crowned; but the grief and the joy is among the favorers and disfavorers, these are they that leap, they that caper?

See how great a thing is the not envying. The toil is another's, the pleasure is yours; another wears the crown, and you caper, you are gay. For tell me, seeing it is another that has conquered, why do you leap? But they also know well, that what has been done is common. Therefore they do not accuse this man indeed, but they try to beat down the victory; and you hear them saying such words as these, (There) I expunged you, and, I beat you down. Although the deed was another's, still the praise is yours. But if in things without, not to envy, but to make another's good one's own, is so great a good, much more in the victory of the devil over us he breathes the more furiously, evidently because we are more pleased. Wicked though he is, and bitter, he well knows that this pleasure is great. Would you pain him? Be glad

and rejoice. Would you gladden him? Be sad-visaged. The pain he has from your brother's victory, you soothe by your sadness; you stand with him, severed from your brother, you work greater mischief than he. For it is not the same for one that is an enemy to do the deeds of an enemy, and for a friend to stand with an enemy; such an one is more detestable than an enemy. If your brother has gained good reputation either by speaking, or by brilliant or successful achievement, become a sharer in his reputation, show that he is a member of yours.

And how? says one, for the reputation is not mine. Never speak so. Compress your lips. If you had been near me, you that speakest on that wise, I would have even put my hand over your lips: lest the enemy should hear you. Oftentimes we have enmities with one another, and we discover them not to our enemies; do you then discover yours to the devil? Say not so, think not so; but the very reverse: he is one of my members, the glory passes on to the body. How then is it, says one, that those without are not so minded? Because of your fault: when they see you counting his pleasure not your own, they too count it not yours: were they to see you appropriating it, they dared not do so, but you would become equally illustrious with him. You have not gained reputation by speaking; but by sharing in his joy you have gained more renown than he. For if love be a great thing, and the sum of all, you have received the crown this gives; he, that for oratory, you, that for exceeding love; he displayed force of words, but thou by deeds hast cast down envy, hast trodden under foot the evil eye. So that in reason you ought rather to be crowned than he, your contest is the more brilliant; you have not only trodden under foot envy, but you have even done somewhat else. He has one crown only, but thou two, and those both brighter than his one. What are these? One, that which you won against envy, another, which you are encircled with by love. For the sharing in his joy is a proof not only of your being free from envy, but also of being rooted in love. Him oftentimes some human passion sorely disquiets, vainglory for instance; but you are free from every passion, for it is not of vainglory that you rejoice at another's good. Hath he righted up the Church, tell me? Has he increased the congregation? Praise him; again you have a twofold crown; you have struck down envy; you have enwreathed you with love. Yea, I implore and beseech you. Will you hear of a third crown even? Him, men below applaud, you, the Angels above. For it is not the same thing, to make a display of eloquence, and to rule the passions. This praise is for a season, that for ever; this, of men, that, of God; this man is crowned openly; but you are crowned in secret, where your Father sees. If it were possible to have peeled off the body and seen the soul of each, I would have shown you that this is more dignified than the other, more resplendent.

Tread we under foot the goads of envy, we advantage ourselves, beloved, ourselves shall we enwreath with the crown. He that envies another fights with God, not with him; for when he sees him to have grace, and is grieved, and wishes the Church pulled down, he fights not with him, but with God. For tell me, if one should adorn a king's daughter, and by his adorning and gracing her, gain for himself renown; and another person should wish her to be ill attired, and him to be unable to adorn her; against whom would he have been plotting mischief? Against the other? Or against her and her father? So too now, you that enviest, fightest with the Church, you war with God. For, since with the good repute of your brother is interwoven also the Church's profit, need is, that if the one be undone, the other shall be undone also. So that, in this regard also, you do a deed of Satan, seeing you plot mischief against the body of Christ. Are you pained at this man? Wrongly, when he has in nothing wronged you; yea, much rather, you are pained at Christ. Wherein has He wronged you, that you will not suffer His body to be decked with beauty? That you will not suffer His bride to be adorned? Consider, I pray you, the punishment, how sore. You gladden your enemies; and him too himself, the man in good esteem, whom through your envy you wish to grieve, thou dost the rather gladden; thou dost by your envy the rather show that he is in good esteem, for otherwise

you would not have envied him. You show the rather that you are in punishment.

I am ashamed indeed to exhort you from such motives, but seeing our weakness is so great, let us be instructed even from these, and free ourselves from this destructive passion. Grieveest thou that he is in good esteem? Then why do you swell that esteem by envying? Wishest thou to punish him? Why then do you show that you are pained? Why punish yourself before him, whom you would not have well esteemed? Thereafter double will be his pleasure, and your punishment; not only because you prove him to be great; but because you beget in him yet another pleasure, by punishing yourself; and again, at what you are pained, he is pleased, while you envy. See how we deal ourselves heavy blows without perceiving it! He is an enemy. And yet, why an enemy? What wrong has he done? Still, however, by this we make our enemy the more illustrious, and thereby punish ourselves the more. And herein again we punish ourselves, if we have discovered that he knows it. For perhaps he is not pleased, but we thinking him to be so, are again pained on that account. Cease then your envying. Why do you inflict wounds upon yourself?

Think we of these things, beloved; of those two crowns for them that envy not; of those praises from men, of those from God; of the evils that come of envying; and so shall we be able to quell the brute, and to be in good esteem before God, and to obtain the same things with those who are of good esteem. For perhaps we shall obtain them, and if we obtain them not, it will be for our advantage; still, even so, we shall be able, if we have lived to the glory of God, to obtain the good things promised to them that love Him, through the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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