

# Homily 12 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

---

*We are no longer under the Law, but under God's power and grace, and we serve in the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter.*

**Topics:** "Sin And Righteousness", "Christian Holiness"

---

## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of avoiding sin and embracing righteousness, highlighting the power of the Law to reveal the depth of sinfulness in humanity and the need for grace to overcome it. He emphasizes the need to yield to righteousness and holiness, showing that while sin may take occasion by the commandment, the Law itself is holy, just, and good. Chrysostom encourages believers to resist the temptations of vice by avoiding the initial steps that lead to sin, and to embrace the virtues of patience, endurance, and forgiveness, even in the face of affronts and injustices, as a means to overcome evil and receive blessings.

---

## Transcript

Rom. VI. 19

I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members (so 4 manuscripts Sav. the members of your flesh) servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

Since he had required great strictness of life, charging us to be dead to the world, and to have died unto wickedness, and to abide with no notion towards the workings of sin, and seemed to be saying something great and burdensome, and too much for human nature; through a desire to show that he is not making any exorbitant demand, nor even as much as might be expected of one who enjoyed so great a gift, but one quite moderate and light, he proves it from contraries, and says, I speak after the manner of men, as much as to say, Going by human reasonings; by such as one usually meets with. For he signifies either this, or the moderateness of it, by the term applied, after the manner of men. For elsewhere he uses the same word. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man 1 Corinthians 10:13, that is, moderate and small. For as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. And truly the masters are very different ones, but still it is an equal amount of servitude that I ask. For men ought to give a much larger one, and so much the larger as this is a greater and better mastership than the other. Nevertheless I make no greater demand because of the infirmity, and that, he does not say of your free

will or readiness of spirit, but of your flesh, so making what he says the less severe. And yet on one side there is uncleanness, on the other holiness: on the one iniquity, and on the other righteousness. And who is so wretched, he says, and in such straits as not to spend as much earnestness upon the service of Christ, as upon that of sin and the devil? Hear then what follows, and you will see clearly that we do not even spend this little. For when (stated in this naked way) it does not seem credible or easy to admit, and nobody would endure to hear that he does not serve Christ so much as he did serve the devil, he proves it by what follows, and renders it credible by bringing that slavery before us, and saying how they did serve him.

Ver. 20. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness.

Now what he says is somewhat of this kind, When ye lived in wickedness, and impiety, and the worst of evils, the state of compliance ye lived in was such that you did absolutely no good thing at all. For this is, you were free from righteousness. That is you were not subject to it, but estranged from it wholly. For you did not even so much as divide the manner of servitude between righteousness and sin, but gave yourselves wholly up to wickedness. Now, therefore, since you have come over to righteousness, give yourselves wholly up to virtue, doing nothing at all of vice, that the measure you give may be at least equal. And yet it is not the mastership only that is so different, but in the servitude itself there is a vast difference. And this too he unfolds with great perspicuity, and shows what conditions they served upon then, and what now. And as yet he says nothing of the harm accruing from the thing, but hitherto speaks of the shame.

Ver. 21. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof you are now ashamed?

So great was the slavery, that even the recollection of it now makes you ashamed; but if the recollection makes one ashamed, the reality would much more. And so you gained now in two ways, in having been freed from the shame; and also in having come to know the condition you were in; just as then you were injured in two ways, in doing things deserving shame, and in not even knowing to be ashamed. And this is worse than the former. Yet still ye kept in a state of servitude. Having then proved most abundantly the harm of what took place then from the shame of it, he comes to the thing in question. Now what is this thing? For the end of those things is death. Since then shame seems to be no such serious evil, he comes to what is very fearful, I mean death; though in good truth what he had before mentioned were enough. For consider how exceeding great the mischief must be, inasmuch as, even when freed from the vengeance due to it, they could not get free of the shame. What wages then, he says, do you expect from the reality, when from the bare recollection, and that too when you are freed from the vengeance, you hide your face and blush, though under such grace as you are! But God's side is far otherwise.

Ver. 22. For now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Of the former, the fruit was shame, even after the being set free. Of these the fruit is holiness, and where holiness is, there is all confidence. But of those things the end is death, and of these everlasting life. Do you see how he points out some things as already given, and some as existing in hope, and from what are given he draws proof of the others also, that is from the holiness of the life. For to prevent your saying (i.e. as an objection) everything lies in hope, he points out that you have already reaped fruits, first the being freed from wickedness, and such evils as the very recollection of puts one to shame; second, the being made a servant unto righteousness; a third, the enjoying of holiness; a fourth, the obtaining of life, and life

too not for a season, but everlasting. Yet with all these, he says, do but serve as you served it. For though the master is far preferable, and the service also has many advantages, and the rewards too for which you are serving, still I make no further demand. Next, since he had mentioned arms and a king, he keeps on with the metaphor in these words:

Ver. 23. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

After speaking of the wages of sin, in the case of the blessings, he has not kept to the same order (τάξις, rank or relation): for he does not say, the wages of good deeds, but the gift of God; to show, that it was not of themselves that they were freed, nor was it a due they received, neither yet a return, nor a recompense of labors, but by grace all these things came about. And so there was a superiority for this cause also, in that He did not free them only, or change their condition for a better, but that He did it without any labor or trouble upon their part: and that He not only freed them, but also gave them much more than before, and that through His Son. And the whole of this he has interposed as having discussed the subject of grace, and being on the point of overthrowing the Law next. That these things then might not both make them rather listless, he inserted the part about strictness of life, using every opportunity of rousing the hearer to the practice of virtue. For when he calls death the wages of sin, he alarms them again, and secures them against dangers to come. For the words he uses to remind them of their former estate, he also employs so as to make them thankful, and more secure against any inroads of temptations. Here then he brings the hortatory part to a stop, and proceeds with the doctrines again, speaking on this wise.

Chap. vii. ver. 1. Do you not know, brethren, for I speak to them that know the Law.

Since then he had said, we are dead to sin, he here shows that not sin only, but also the Law, has no dominion over them. But if the Law has none, much less has sin: and to render his language palatable, he uses a human example to make this plain by. And he seems to be stating one point, but he sets down at once two arguments for his proposition. One, that when a husband is dead, the woman is no longer subject to her husband, and there is nothing to prevent her becoming the wife of another man: and the other, that in the present case it is not the husband only that is dead but the wife also. So that one may enjoy liberty in two ways. Now if when the husband is dead, she is freed from his power, when the woman is shown to be dead also, she is much more at liberty. For if the one event frees her from his power, much more does the concurrence of both. As he is about to proceed then to a proof of these points, he starts with an encomium of the hearers, in these words, Do you not know, brethren, for I speak to them that know the Law, that is, I am saying a thing that is quite agreed upon, and clear, and to men too that know all these things accurately,

How that the Law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

He does not say, husband or wife, but man, which name is common to either creature; For he that is dead, he says, is freed (Gr. justified) from sin. The Law then is given for the living, but to the dead it ceases to be ordained (or to give commands). Do you observe how he sets forth a twofold freedom? Next, after hinting this at the commencement, he carries on what he has to say by way of proof, in the woman's case, in the following way.

Ver. 2, 3. For the woman which has an husband is bound by the Law to her husband, so long as he lives: but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the Law of her husband. So then, if while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she is called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

He keeps continually upon this point, and that with great exactness, since he feels quite sure of the proof grounded on it: and in the husband's place he puts the Law, but in the woman's, all believers. Then he adds the conclusion in such way, that it does not tally with the premiss; for what the context would require would be, and so, my brethren, the Law does not rule over you, for it is dead. But he does not say so, but only in the premiss hinted it, and in the inference, afterwards, to prevent what he says being distasteful, he brings the woman in as dead by saying,

Wherefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the Law.

As then the one or the other event gives rise to the same freedom, what is there to prevent his showing favor to the Law without any harm being done to the cause? For the woman which has an husband is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives. What has become now (3 manuscripts then) of those that speak evil of the Law? Let them hear, how even when forced upon it, he does not bereave it of its dignity, but speaks great things of its power; if while it is alive the Jew is bound, and they are to be called adulterers who transgress it, and leave it while it is alive. But if they let go of it after it has died, this is not to be wondered at. For in human affairs no one is found fault with for doing this: but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. You see how in the example he points out the Law as dead, but in the inference he does not do so. So then if it be while her husband lives, the woman is called an adulteress. See how he dwells upon the accusations of those who transgress the Law, while it is yet living. But since he had put an end to it, he afterwards favors it with perfect security, without doing any harm hereby to the faith. For if while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she is called an adulteress. Thus it would have been natural to say next, you also, my brethren, now the Law is dead, will not be judged guilty of adultery, if you become married to another husband. Yet he does not use these words, but what? You have become dead to the Law; if you have been made dead, you are no longer under the Law. For if, when the husband is dead, the woman is no longer liable to it, much more when herself is dead also she is freed from the former. Do you note the wisdom of Paul, how he points out that the Law itself designs that we should be divorced from it, and married to another? For there is nothing, he means, against your living with another husband, now the former is dead; for how should there be, since when the husband was alive it allowed this to her who had a writing of divorcement? But this he does not set down, as it was rather a charge against the woman; for although this had been granted, still it was not cleared of blame. Matthew 19:7-8 For in cases where he has gained the victory by requisite and accredited proofs, he does not go into questions beyond the purpose; not being captious. The marvel then is this, that it is the Law itself that acquits us who are divorced from it of any charge, and so the mind of it was that we should become Christ's. For it is dead itself, and we are dead; and the grounds of its power over us are removed in a twofold way. But he is not content with this alone, but also adds the reason of it. For he has not set down death without special purpose, but brings the cross in again, which had wrought these things, and in this way too he puts us under an engagement. For you have not been freed merely, he means, but it was through the Lord's death. For he says,

You have become dead to the Law by the Body of Christ.

Now it is not on this only he grounds his exhortation, but also on the superiority of this second husband. And so he proceeds: that you should be married to another, even to Him Who is raised from the dead.

Then to prevent their saying, If we do not choose to live with another husband, what then? For the Law does not indeed make an adulteress of the widow who lives in a second marriage, but for all that it does not force her to live in it. Now that they may not say this, he shows that from benefits already conferred, it

is binding on us to choose it: and this he lays down more clearly in other passages, where he says, You are not your own; and, You are bought with a price; and, Be not ye the servants of men 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 7:23; and again, One died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them. 2 Corinthians 5:15 This is then what he here alludes to in the words, By the Body. And next he exhorts to better hopes, saying, That we should bring forth fruit unto God. For then, he means, you brought forth fruit unto death, but now unto God.

Ver. 5. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the Law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

You see then the gain to be got from the former husband! And he does not say when we were in the Law, so in every passage shrinking from giving a handle to heretics; but when we were in the flesh, that is, in evil deeds, in a carnal life. What he says then is, not that they were in the flesh before, but now they went about without any bodies; but by saying what he does, he neither says that the Law is the cause of sins, nor yet frees it from odium. For it held the rank of a bitter accuser, by making their sins bare: since that, which enjoins more to him who is not minded to obey at all, makes the offense greater. And this is why he does not say, the motions of sins which were produced by the Law, but which were through the Law Romans 2:27, without adding any produced, but simply through the Law, that is to say, which through the Law were made apparent, were made known. Next that he might not accuse the flesh either; he does not say which the members wrought, but which did work (or were wrought) in our members, to show that the origin of the mischief was elsewhere, from the thoughts which wrought in us, not from the members which had them working in them. For the soul ranks as a performer, and the fabric of the flesh as a lyre, sounding as the performer obliges it. So the discordant tune is to be ascribed not to the latter, but to the former sooner than to the latter.

Ver. 6. But now, he says, we are delivered from the Law. (κατηργηθημεν, made of no effect.)

See how he again in this place spares the flesh and the Law. For he does not say that the Law was made of no effect, or that the flesh was made of no effect, but that we were made of no effect (i.e., were delivered). And how were we delivered? Why by the old man, who was held down by sin, being dead and buried. For this is what he sets forth in the words, being dead to that, wherein we were held. As if he had said, the chain by which we were held down was deadened and broken through, so that that which held down, namely sin, held down no more.

But do not fall back or grow listless. For you have been freed with a view to being servants again, though not in the same way, but in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. Now what does he mean here? For it is necessary to disclose it here, that when we come upon the passage, we may not be perplexed with it. When then Adam sinned (he means), and his body became liable to death and sufferings, it received also many physical losses, and the horse became less active and less obedient.

But Christ, when He came, made it more nimble for us through baptism, rousing it with the wing of the Spirit. And for this reason the marks for the race, which they of old time had to run, are not the same as ours. Since then the race was not so easy as it is now. For this reason, He desires them to be clear not from murder only, as He did them of old time, but from anger also; nor is it adultery only that He bids them keep clear of, but even the unchaste look; and to be exempt not from false swearing only, but even from true.

Matthew 5:21-33 And with their friends He orders them to love their enemies also. And in all other duties, He gives us a longer ground to run over, and if we do but obey, threatens us with hell, so showing that the things in question are not matters of free-will offering for the combatants, as celibacy and poverty are, but are binding upon us absolutely to fulfil. For they belong to necessary and urgent requisites, and the man who does not do them is to be punished to the utmost.

This is why He said, Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20 But he that does not see the kingdom, shall certainly fall into hell. For this cause Paul too says, Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the Law, but under grace. And here again, that you should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. For it is not the letter that condemns, that is the old Law, but the Spirit that helps.

And for this reason among the ancients, if any were found practising virginity, it was quite astonishing. But now the thing is scattered over every part of the world. And death in those times some few men did with difficulty despise, but now in villages and cities there are hosts of martyrs without number, consisting not of men only, but even of women. And next having done with this, he again meets an objection which is rising, and as he meets it, gives confirmation to his own object.

And so he does not introduce the solution of it as main argument, but by way of opposing this; that by the exigency of meeting it, he may get a plea for saying what he wishes, and make his accusation not so unpalatable. Having then said, in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter, he proceeds.

Ver. 7. What then? Is the Law sin? God forbid.

Even before this he had been saying, that the motions of sins, which were by the Law did work in our members Romans 7:5: and, sin shall have no dominion over you, for you are not under the Law. Romans 6:14 And that where no law is, there is no transgression. Romans 4:15 And, but the Law came in, that the offense might abound Romans 5:20; and, the Law works wrath. Romans 4:15 Now as all these things seem to bring the Law into disrepute, in order to correct the suspicion arising from them, he supposes also an objection, and says, What then, is the Law sin? God forbid. Before the proof he uses this adjuration to conciliate the hearer, and by way of soothing any who was troubled at it. For so, when he had heard this, and felt assured of the speaker's disposition, he would join with him in investigating the seeming perplexity, and feel no suspicions of him. Wherefore he has put the objection, associating the other with him. Hence, he does not say, What am I to say? But What shall we say then? As though a deliberation and a judgment were before them, and a general meeting called together, and the objection came forward not of himself, but in the course of discussion, and from real circumstances of the case. For that the letter kills, he means, no one will deny, or that the Spirit gives life 2 Corinthians 3:6; this is plain too, and nobody will dispute it. If then these are confessedly truths, what are we to say about the Law? That it is sin? God forbid. Explain the difficulty then. Do you see how he supposes the opponent to be present, and having assumed the dignity of the teacher, he comes to the explaining of it. Now what is this? Sin, he says, the Law is not. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the Law. Notice the reach of his wisdom! What the Law is not, he has set down by way of objection, so that by removing this, and thereby doing the Jew a pleasure, he may persuade him to accept the less alternative. And what is this? Why that I had not known sin, but by the Law. For I had not known lust, except the Law had said, You shall not covet.

Do you observe, how by degrees he shows it to be not an accuser of sin only, but in a measure its producer? Yet not from any fault of its own, but from that of the froward Jews, he proves it was, that this happened. For he has taken good heed to stop the mouths of the Manichees, that accuse the Law; and so after saying, Nay, I had not known sin, but by the Law; and, I had not known lust, except the Law had said, You shall not covet; he adds,

Ver. 8. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.

Do you see how he has cleared it of all blame? For sin, he says, taking occasion by the commandment, it was, and not the Law, that increased the concupiscence, and the reverse of the Law's intent was brought about. This came of weakness, and not of any badness. For when we desire a thing, and then are hindered of it, the flame of the desire is but increased. Now this came not of the Law; for it hindered us (3 manuscripts endeavored) of itself to keep us off from it; but sin, that is, your own listlessness and bad disposition, used what was good for the reverse.

But this is no fault in the physician, but in the patient who applies the medicine wrongly. For the reason of the Law being given was, not to inflame concupiscence, but to extinguish it, though the reverse came of it. Yet the blame attaches not to it, but to us. Since if a person had a fever, and wanted to take cold drink when it was not good for him, and one were not to let him take his fill of it, and so increase his lust after this ruinous pleasure, one could not deservedly be found fault with.

For the physician's business is simply prohibiting it, but the restraining himself is the patient's. And what if sin did take occasion from it? Surely there are many bad men who by good precepts grow in their own wickedness. For this was the way in which the devil ruined Judas, by plunging him into avarice, and making him steal what belonged to the poor. However it was not the being entrusted with the bag that brought this to pass, but the wickedness of his own spirit. And Eve, by bringing Adam to eat from the tree, threw him out of Paradise.

But neither in that case was the tree the cause, even if it was through it that the occasion took place. But if he treats the discussion about the Law with somewhat of vehemence, do not feel surprise. For Paul is making a stand against the present exigency, and suffers not his language to give a handle even to those that suspected otherwise, but takes great pains to make the present statement correct. Do not then sift what he is now going on to say (4 manuscripts here saying) by itself, but put beside it the purpose by which he is led on to speak of these things, and reckon for the madness of the Jews, and their vigorous spirit of contention, which as he desires earnestly to do away with, he seems to bear violently (πολλὰς πνεύματος) against the Law, not to find fault with it, but to unnerve their vigor.

For if it is any reproach to the Law that sin takes occasion by it, this will be found to be the case in the New Testament also. For in the New Testament there are thousands of laws, and about many more (far more, Field) important matters. And one may see the same come to pass there also, not with regard to covetousness lust, as Romans 7:7 only, but to all wickedness generally. For He says, if I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, John 15:22 Here then sin finds a footing in this fact, and so the greater punishment.

And again when Paul discourses about grace, he says, Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be counted worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God. Hebrews 10:29 Has not then the worse punishment its origin from hence, from the greater benefit? And the reason why he says the Greeks were without excuse was, because being honored with the gift of reason, and having gotten a knowledge

of the beauty of the creation, and having been placed in a fair way for being led by it to the Creator, they did not so use the wisdom of God, as it was their duty.

Do you see that to the wicked in all cases occasions of greater punishment result from good things? But we shall not in this accuse the benefits of God, but rather upon this even admire them the more: but we shall throw the blame on the spirit of those who abuse the blessings to contrary purpose. Let this then be our line with regard to the Law also. But this is easy and feasible -- the other is what is a difficulty. How is it that he says I had not known lust except the Law had said, You shall not covet?

Now if man had not known lust, before he received the Law, what was the reason for the flood, or the burning of Sodom? What does he mean then? He means vehement lust: and this is why he did not say, lust, but all manner of concupiscence, intimating, in that, its vehemency. And what, it will be said, is the good of the Law, if it adds to the disorder? None; but much mischief even. Yet the charge is not against the Law, but the listlessness of those who received it. For sin wrought it, though by the Law.

But this was not the purpose of the Law, nay, the very opposite, Sin then became stronger, he says, and violent. But this again is no charge against the Law but against their obstinacy. For without the Law sin is dead. That is, was not so ascertainable. For even those before the Law knew that they had sinned, but they came to a more exact knowledge of it after the giving of the Law. And for this reason they were liable to a greater accusation: since it was not the same thing to have nature to accuse them, and besides nature the Law, which told them distinctly every charge.

Ver. 9. For I was alive without the Law once.

When, pray, was that? Before Moses. See how he sets himself to show that it, both by the things it did, and the things it did not do, weighed down human nature. For when I was alive without the Law, he means, I was not so much condemned.

But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

This seems indeed to be an accusing of the Law. But if any one will look closely at it, it will be seen to be even an encomium of it. For it did not give existence to sin that before was not, but only pointed out what had escaped notice. And this is even a praise of the Law, if at least before it they had been sinning without perceiving it. But when this came, if they gained nothing besides from it, at all events this they were distinctly made acquainted with, the fact that they had been sinning. And this is no small point, with a view to getting free from wickedness. Now if they did not get free, this has nothing to do with the Law; which framed everything with a view to this end, but the accusation lies wholly against their spirit, which was perverse beyond all supposition. For what took place was not the natural thing -- their being injured by things profitable. And this is why he says And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. He does not say, it was made, or it brought forth death, but was found, so explaining the novel and unusual kind of discrepancy, and making the whole fall upon their own pate. For if, he says, you would know the aim of it, it led to life, and was given with this view. But if death was the issue of this, the fault is with them that received the commandment, and not of this, which was leading them to life. And this is a point on which he has thrown fresh light by what follows.

Ver. 11. For sin taking occasion by the commandment deceived me, and by it slew me.

You observe how he everywhere keeps to sin, and entirely clears the Law of accusation. And so he proceeds as follows.

Ver. 12. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

But, if you be so minded, we will bring before you the language of those who wrest these declarations. For this will make our own statements clearer. For there are some that say, that he is not here saying what he does of the Law of Moses, but some take it of the law of nature; some, of the commandment given in Paradise. Yet surely Paul's object everywhere is to annul this Law, but he has not any question with those. And with much reason; for it was through a fear and a horror of this that the Jews obstinately opposed grace. But it does not appear that he has ever called the commandment in Paradise Law at all; no, nor yet any other writer. Now to make this plainer from what he has really said, let us follow out his words, retracing the argument a little. Having then spoken to them about strictness of conversation, he goes on to say, Do you not know, brethren, how that the Law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? Wherefore you have become dead to the Law. Therefore if these things are said about the natural law, we are found to be without the natural law. And if this be true, we are more senseless than the creatures which are without reason. Yet this is not so, certainly. For with regard to the law in Paradise, there is no need to be contentious, lest we should be taking up a superfluous trouble, by entering the lists against things men have made up their minds upon. In what sense then does he say, I should not have known sin but by the Law? He is speaking, not of absolute want of knowledge, but of the more accurate knowledge. For if this were said of the law of nature, how would what follows suit? For I was alive, he says, without the Law once. Now neither Adam, nor any body else, can be shown ever to have lived without the law of nature. For as soon as God formed him, He put into him that law of nature, making it to dwell by him as a security to the whole kind (Gr. Nature, see p. 365). And besides this, it does not appear that he has anywhere called the law of nature a commandment. But this he calls as well a commandment, and that just and holy, as a spiritual law. But the law of nature was not given to us by the Spirit. For barbarians, as well as Greeks and other men, have this law. Hence it is plain, that it is the Mosaic Law that he is speaking of above, as well as afterwards, and in all the passages. For this cause also he calls it holy, saying, Wherefore the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. For even though the Jews have been unclean since the Law, and unjust and covetous, this does not destroy the virtue of the Law, even as their unbelief does not make the faith of God of none effect. So from all these things it is plain, that it is of the Law of Moses that he here speaks.

Ver. 13. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin that it might appear sin. (4 manuscripts om. ■.)

That is, that it might be shown what great evil sin is, namely, a listless will, an inclinableness to the worse side, the actual doing (3 manuscripts om. this clause), and the perverted judgment. For this is the cause of all the evils; but he amplifies it by pointing out the exceeding grace of Christ, and teaching them what an evil He freed the human race from, which, by the medicines used to cure it, had become worse, and was increased by the preventives. Wherefore he goes on to say: That sin, by the commandment, might become exceeding sinful. Do you see how these things are woven together everywhere? By the very means he uses to accuse sin, he again shows the excellency of the Law. Neither is it a small point which he has gained by showing what an evil sin is, and unfolding the whole of its poison, and bringing it to view. For this is what he shows, by saying, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. That is, that it may be made clear what an evil sin is, what a ruinous thing. And this is what was shown by the commandment. Hereby he also shows the preëminence of grace above the Law, the preëminence above,

not the conflict with, the Law. For do not look to this fact, that those who received it were the worse for it; but consider the other, that the Law had not only no design of drawing wickedness out to greater lengths, but even seriously aimed at hewing down what already existed. But if it had no strength, give to it indeed a crown for its intention, but adore more highly the power of Christ, which abolished, cut away: and plucked up the very roots an evil so manifold and so hard to be overthrown. But when you hear me speak of sin, do not think of it as a substantial power, but evil doing, as it comes upon men and goes from them continually, and which, before it takes place, has no being, and when it has taken place, vanishes again. This then was why the Law was given. Now no law is ever given to put an end to things natural, but in order to correct a way of acting purposely wicked. And this the lawgivers that are without too are aware of, and all mankind in general. For it is the evils from viciousness alone that they are for setting right, and they do not undertake to extirpate those allotted us along with our nature; since this they cannot do. For things natural remain unalterable (Arist. Eth. b. 2, c. 1), as we have told you frequently in other discourses also.

And so let us leave these contests, and again practise ourselves in exhortation. Or rather, this last part belongs to those contests. For if we cast out wickedness, we should bring virtue in also: and by these means we shall clearly teach that wickedness is no natural evil, and shall be able easily to stop the mouths of them that enquire for the origin of evil, not by means of words only, but of actions also, since we share the same nature with them, but are freed from their wickedness.

For let us not be looking at the laboriousness of virtue, but at the possibility of succeeding in it. But if we be in earnest, it will be at once light and palatable to us. But if you tell me of the pleasure of vice, tell out its end too. For it issues in death, even as virtue leads us to life. Or if you think fit let us rather scrutinize them both even before their end; for we shall see that vice has a great deal of pain attached to it, and virtue great pleasure. For what pray is so painful as a bad conscience?

Or what more pleasing than a good hope? For there is nothing, assuredly there is nothing, which is used to cut us so deep, and press so hard on us, as the expectation of evil: nothing that so keeps us up, and all but gives us wings, as a good conscience. And this we may get a knowledge of even by what takes place before our eyes. For they that dwell in a prison, and are in expectation of sentence against them, let them have the enjoyment of luxury repeated beyond count, live a more afflicting life than those that go a begging by the by-roads, yet with nothing upon their consciences to trouble them.

For the expectation of a dreadful end will not let them perceive those pleasures which they have in their hands. And why do I speak of prisoners? Why, as for those that are living out of prison, and have a good fortune, yet have a bad conscience about them, handicraftsmen that work for their bread, and spend the whole day amid their labor, are in a far better plight than they. And for this reason too we say, How miserable the gladiators are (though seeing them as we do in taverns, drunken, luxurious, gormandizing), and call them the most miserable of men, because the calamity of the end which they must expect is too great to admit of comparison with that pleasure.

Now if to them a life of this sort seems to be pleasing, remember what I am continually telling you, that it is no such marvel that a man who lives in vice should not flee from the misery and pain of vice. For see how a thing so detestable as that, yet seems to be delectable to those who practice it. Yet we do not on this account say, how happy they are, for this is just the very reason why we think them pitiable, because they have no notion of the evils they are among. And what would you say of adulterers, who for a little pleasure undergo at once a disgraceful slavery, and a loss of money, and a perpetual fear (Hor.

Sat. II. vii. 58-67), and in fact the very life of a Cain, or rather one that is even much worse than his; filled with fears for the present, and trembling for the future, and suspecting alike friend and foe, and those that know about it, and those that know nothing? Neither when they go to sleep are they quit of this struggle, their bad conscience shaping out for them dreams that abound with sundry terrors, and in this way horrifying them. Far otherwise is the chaste man, seeing he passes the present life unshackled and at full liberty.

Weigh then against the little pleasure, the sundry fluctuations of these terrors, and with the short labor of continency, the calm of an entire life; and you will find the latter has more of pleasantness than the former. But as for the man that is set upon plundering and laying hands upon other men's goods, tell me if he has not to undergo countless pains in the way of running about, fawning upon slaves, freemen, doorkeepers; alarming and threatening, acting shamelessly, watching, trembling, in agony, suspecting everything.

Far otherwise is the man that holds riches in contempt, for he too enjoys pleasure in abundance, and lives with no fear, and in perfect security. And if any one were to go through the other instances of vice, he would find much trouble, and many rocks. But what is of greater importance is, that in the case of virtue the difficulties come first, and the pleasant part afterwards, so the trouble is even thus alleviated. But in the case of vice, the reverse. After the pleasure, the pains and the punishments, so that by these besides the pleasure is done away.

For as he who waits for the crown, perceives nothing of present annoyance, so he that has to expect the punishments after the pleasures has no power of gathering in a gladness that is unalloyed, since the fear puts everything in confusion. Or rather if any one were to scrutinize the thing with care, even before the punishment which follows upon these things, he would find that even at the very moment when vice is boldly entered upon, a great deal of pain is felt. And, if you think fit, let us just examine this in the case of those who plunder other men's goods.

Or those who in any way get together money, and setting aside the fears, and dangers, and trembling, and agony, and care, and all these things, let us suppose the case of a man, who has got rich without any annoyance, and feels sure about maintaining his present fortune (which he has no means of doing, still for all that let it be assumed for argument's sake). What sort of pleasure then is he to gather in from having so much about him? On the contrary, it is just this very thing that will not let him be glad-hearted.

For as long as ever he desires other things besides, he is still upon the rack. Because desire gives pleasure at the time it has come to a stand. If thirsty, for instance, we feel refreshed, when we have drunk as much as we wish; but so long as we keep thirsty, even if we were to have exhausted all the fountains in the world, our torment were but growing greater; even if we were to drink up ten thousand rivers, our state of punishment were more distressing. And thou also, if you were to receive the goods of the whole world, and still to covet, would make your punishment the greater, the more things you had tasted of.

Fancy not then, that from having gathered a great sum together you shall have anything of pleasure, but rather by declining to be rich. But if you covet to be rich you will be always under the scourge. For this is a kind of love that does not reach its aim; and the longer journey you have gone, the further off you keep from the end.

Is not this a paradox then, a derangement, a madness in the extreme? Let us then forsake this first of evils, or rather let us not even touch this covetousness at all. Yet, if we have touched it, let us spring away from its first motions (προοιμῶν). For this is the advice the writer of the Proverbs gives us, when he

speaks about the harlot: Spring away, he says, tarry not, neither go thou near to the door of her house Proverbs 5:8: this same thing I would say to you about the love of money.

For if by entering gradually you fall into this ocean of madness, you will not be able to get up out of it with ease, and as if you were in whirlpools, struggle as often as ever you may, it will not be easy for you to get clear; so after falling into this far worse abyss of covetousness, you will destroy your own self, with all that belongs to you. Acts 8:20 And so my advice is that we be on our watch against the beginning, and avoid little evils, for the great ones are gendered by these.

For he who gets into a way of saying at every sin, This matters nothing! will little by little ruin himself entirely. At all events it is this which has introduced vice; which has opened the doors to the robber (5 manuscripts devil), which has thrown down the walls of cities, this saying at each sin, This matters nothing! Thus in the case of the body too, the greatest of diseases grow up, when trifling ones are made light of. If Esau had not first been a traitor to his birthright, he would not have become unworthy of the blessings.

If he had not rendered himself unworthy of the blessings, he would not have had the desire of going on to fratricide. If Cain had not fallen in love with the first place, but had left that to God, he would not have had the second place. Again, when he had the second place, if he had listened to the advice, he would not have travailed with the murder. Again, if after doing the murder he had come to repentance, when God called him, and had not answered in an irreverent way, he would not have had to suffer the subsequent evils.

But if those before the Law did owing to this listlessness come to the very bottom of misery, only consider what is to become of us, who are called to a greater contest, unless we take strict heed unto ourselves, and make speed to quench the sparks of evil deeds before the whole pile is kindled. Take an instance of my meaning. Are you in the habit of false swearing? Do not stop at this only, but away with all swearing, and you will have no further need of trouble. For it is far harder for a man that swears to keep from false swearing, than to abstain from swearing altogether.

Are you an insulting and abusive person? A striker too? Lay down as a law for yourself not to be angry or brawl in the least, and with the root the fruit also will be gotten rid of. Are you lustful and dissipated? Make it your rule again not even to look at a woman Job 31:1, or to go up into the theatre, or to trouble yourself with the beauty of other people whom you see about. For it is far easier not even to look at a woman of good figure, than after looking and taking in the lust, to thrust out the perturbation that comes thereof, the struggle being easier in the preliminaries (προοιμιοις).

Or rather we have no need of a struggle at all if we do not throw the gates open to the enemy, or take in the seeds of mischief (κακας). And this is why Christ chastised the man who looks unchastely upon a woman Matthew 5:28, that He might free us from greater labor, before the adversary became strong, bidding us cast him out of the house while he may be cast out even with ease. For what need to have superfluous trouble, and to get entangled with the enemies, when without entanglement we may erect the trophy, and before the wrestling seize upon the prize?

For it is not so great a trouble not to look upon beautiful women, as it is while looking to restrain one's self. Or rather the first would be no trouble at all, but immense toil and labor comes on after looking. Since then this trouble is less (most manuscripts add, to the incontinent), or rather there is no labor at all, nor trouble, but the greater gain, why do we take pains to plunge into an ocean of countless evils? And farther, he who

does not look upon a woman, will overcome such lust not only with greater ease, but with a higher purity, as he on the other hand who does look, gets free with more trouble, and not without a kind of stain, that is, if he does get free at all.

For he that does not take a view of the beautiful figure, is pure also from the lust that might result. But he who lusts to look, after first laying his reason low, and polluting it in countless ways, has then to cast out the stain that came of the lust, that is, if he do cast it out. This then is why Christ, to prevent our suffering in this way, did not prohibit murder only, but wrath; not adultery only, but an unchaste look even: not perjury only, but all swearing whatsoever.

Nor does he make the measure of virtue stop here, but after having given these laws, He proceeds to a still greater degree. For after keeping us far away from murder, and bidding us to be clear of wrath, He bids us be ready even to suffer ill, and not to be prepared to suffer no more than what he who attacks us pleases, but even to go further, and to get the better of his utmost madness by the overflowingness of our own Christian spirit (τῷ οὐκ ἐκαστος φηγοσοφίας). For what He says is not, If a man smite you on your right cheek, bear it nobly and hold your peace; but He adds to this the yielding to him the other too.

For He says, Turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:39 This then is the brilliant victory, to yield him even more than what he wishes, and to go beyond the bounds of his evil desire by the profuseness of one's own patient endurance. For in this way you will put a stop to his madness, and also receive from the second act again the reward of the first, besides putting a stop to wrath against him. See you, how in all cases it is we that have it in our power not to suffer ill, and not they that inflict it?

Or rather it is not the not suffering ill alone, but even the having benefits (Sav. conj. παθεῖν εἶναι, so 2 manuscripts) done us that we have in our own power. And this is the truest wonder, that we are so far from being injured, if we be right-minded, that we are even benefited, and that too by the very things that we suffer unjustly at the hands of others. Reflect then; has such an one done you an affront? You have the power of making this affront redound to your honor. For if you do an affront in return, you only increase the disgrace.

But if you bless him that did you the affront, you will see that all men give you victory, and proclaim your praise. Do you see how by the things wherein we are wronged, we get good done unto us if we be so minded? This one may see happening in the case of money matters, of blows, and the same in everything else. For if we requite them with the opposite, we are but twining a double crown about us, one for the ills we have suffered, as well as one for the good we are doing. Whenever then a person comes and tells you that such an one has done you an affront, and keeps continually speaking ill of you to everybody, praise the man to those who tell you of him.

For thus even if you wish to avenge yourself, you will have the power of inflicting punishment. For those who hear you, be they ever so foolish, will praise you, and hate him as fiercer than any brute beast, because he, without being at all wronged, caused you pain, but you, even when suffering wrong, requited him with the opposite. And so you will have it in your power to prove that all that he said was to no purpose. For he who feels the tooth of slander, gives by his vexation a proof that he is conscious of the truth of what is said.

But he who smiles at it, by this very thing acquits himself of all suspicion with those who are present. Consider then how many good things you cull together from the affair. First, you rid yourself of all vexation and trouble. Secondly (rather this should come first), even if you have sins, you put them off, as the

Publican did by bearing the Pharisee's accusation meekly. Besides, you will by this practice make your soul heroic (Gr. philosophic), and will enjoy endless praises from all men, and will divest yourself of any suspicion arising from what is said.

But even if you are desirous of taking revenge upon the man, this too will follow in full measure, both by God's punishing him for what he has said, and before that punishment by your heroic conduct standing to him in the place of a mortal blow. For there is nothing that cuts those who affront us so much to the heart, as for us who are affronted to smile at the affront. As then from behaving with Christian heroism so many honors will accrue to us, so from being little-minded just the opposite will befall us in everything.

For we disgrace ourselves, and also seem to those present to be guilty of the things mentioned, and fill our soul with perturbation, and give our enemy pleasure, and provoke God, and add to our former sins. Taking then all this into consideration, let us flee from the abyss of a little mind (μικροψυχία), and take refuge in the port of patient endurance (μακροθυμία), that here we may at once find rest unto our souls Matthew 11:29, as Christ also set forth, and may attain to the good things to come, by the grace and love toward man, etc.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-12-on-romans/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**