

Homily 18 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 18 on Ephesians emphasizes the transformation from darkness to light, the dangers of sin, and the call to live righteously while reproofing others in love.

Scripture: Jeremiah 38:4, Ezekiel 13:19, Ezekiel 18:4, Matthew 7:1, John 3:20, Romans 1:25, Romans 6:21, Ephesians 5:5-14

Topics: "Moral Purity", "Repentance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness, emphasizing that those who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God. He warns against being deceived by empty words and highlights the wrath of God upon the disobedient. Chrysostom urges believers to walk as children of light, to reprove unfruitful works of darkness, and to live in goodness, righteousness, and truth, pleasing the Lord. He stresses the importance of exposing sin and encouraging repentance to bring light into the darkness of wickedness.

Transcript

Ephesians 5:5, 6

For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, which is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.

There were, it is likely, in the time of our forefathers also, some who weakened the hands of the people Jeremiah 38:4, and brought into practice that which is mentioned by Ezekiel -- or rather who did the works of the false prophets, who profaned God among His people for handfuls of barley Ezekiel 13:19; a thing, by the way, done methinks by some even at this day. When, for example, we say that he who calls his brother a fool shall depart into hell-fire, others say, What? Is he that calls his brother a fool to depart into hell-fire? Impossible, say they. And again, when we say that the covetous man is an idolater, in this too again they make abatements, and say the expression is hyperbolic. And in this manner they underrate and explain away all the commandments. It was in allusion then to these that the blessed Paul, at this time when he wrote to the Ephesians, spoke thus, For this ye know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, which is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God; adding, let no man deceive you with empty words. Now empty words are those which for a while are gratifying, but are in nowise borne out in facts; because the whole case is a deception.

Because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.

Because of fornication, he means, because of covetousness, because of uncleanness, or both because of these things, and because of the deceit, inasmuch as there are deceivers. Sons of disobedience; he thus calls those who are utterly disobedient, those who disobey Him.

Ver. 7, 8. Be not ye, therefore, partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord.

Observe how wisely he urges them forward; first, from the thought of Christ, that you love one another, and do injury to no man; then, on the other hand, from the thought of punishment and hell-fire. For you were once darkness, says he, but are now light in the Lord. Which is what he says also in the Epistle to the Romans; What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof you are now ashamed? Romans 6:21, and reminds them of their former wickedness. That is to say, thinking what ye once were, and what you are now become, do not run back into your former wickedness, nor do despite to the grace Hebrews 10:29 of God.

You were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord!

Not, he says, by your own virtue, but through the grace of God has this accrued to you. That is to say, you also were sometime worthy of the same punishments, but now are so no more. Walk therefore as children of light. What is meant however by children of light, he adds afterwards.

Ver. 9, 10. For the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth, proving what is well-pleasing unto the Lord.

In all goodness, he says: this is opposed to the angry, and the bitter: and righteousness; this to the covetous: and truth; this to false pleasure: not those former things, he says, which I was mentioning, but their opposites. In all; that is, the fruit of the Spirit ought to be evinced in everything. Proving what is well-pleasing unto the Lord; so that those things are tokens of a childish and imperfect mind.

Ver. 11, 12, 13. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them. For the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of. But all things when they are reproved, are made manifest by the light.

He had said, you are light. Now the light reproveth by exposing the things which take place in the darkness. So that if you, says he, are virtuous, and conspicuous, the wicked will be unable to lie hidden. For just as when a candle is set, all are brought to light, and the thief cannot enter; so if your light shine, the wicked being discovered shall be caught. So then it is our duty to expose them. How then does our Lord say, Judge not, that you be not judged? Matthew 7:1-3 Paul did not say judge, he said reprove, that is, correct. And the words, Judge not, that you be not judged, He spoke with reference to very small errors. Indeed, He added, Why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in your own eye? But what Paul is saying is of this sort. As a wound, so long as it is imbedded and concealed outwardly, and runs beneath the surface, receives no attention, so also sin, as long as it is concealed, being as it were in darkness, is daringly committed in full security; but as soon as it is made manifest, becomes light; not indeed the sin itself, (for how could that be?) but the sinner. For when he has been brought out to light, when he has been admonished, when he has repented, when he has obtained pardon, have you not cleared away all his darkness? Have you not then healed his wound? Have you not

called his unfruitfulness into fruit? Either this is his meaning, or else what I said above, that your life being manifest, is light. For no one hides an irreproachable life; whereas things which are hidden, are hidden by darkness covering them.

Ver. 14. Wherefore he says, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon you.

By the sleeper and the dead, he means the man that is in sin; for he both exhales noisome odors like the dead, and is inactive like one that is asleep, and like him he sees nothing, but is dreaming, and forming fancies and illusions. Some indeed read, And you shall touch Christ; but others, And Christ shall shine upon you; and it is rather this latter. Depart from sin, and you shall be able to behold Christ. For every one that does ill, hates the light, and comes not to the light. John 3:20 He therefore that does it not, comes to the light.

Now he is not saying this with reference to the unbelievers only, for many of the faithful, no less than unbelievers, hold fast by wickedness; nay, some far more. Therefore to these also it is necessary to exclaim, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon you. To these it is fitting to say this also, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Matthew 22:32 If then he is not the God of the dead, let us live.

Now there are some who say that the words, the covetous man is an idolater, are hyperbolic. However, the statement is not hyperbolic, it is true. How, and in what way? Because the covetous man apostatizes from God, just as the idolater does. And lest you should imagine this is a bare assertion, there is a declaration of Christ which says, You cannot serve God and Mammon. Matthew 6:24 If then it is not possible to serve God and Mammon, they who serve Mammon have thrown themselves out of the service of God; and they who have denied His sovereignty, and serve lifeless gold, it is plain enough that they are idolaters. But I never made an idol, a man will say, nor set up an altar, nor sacrificed sheep, nor poured libations of wine; no, I came into the church, and lifted up my hands to the Only-begotten Son of God; I partake of the mysteries, I communicate in prayer, and in everything else which is a Christian's duty. How then, he will say, am I a worshiper of idols? Yes, and this is the very thing which is the most astonishing of all, that when you have had experience, and hast tasted the lovingkindness of God, and hast seen that the Lord is gracious Psalm 34:8, you should abandon Him who is gracious, and take to yourself a cruel tyrant, and should pretend to be serving Him, while in reality you have submitted yourself to the hard and galling yoke of covetousness. You have not yet told me of your own duty done, but only of your Master's gifts. For tell me, I beseech you, whence do we judge of a soldier? Is it when he is on duty guarding the king, and is fed by him, and called the king's own, or is it when he is minding his own affairs and interests? To pretend to be with him, and to be attentive to his interests, while he is advancing the cause of the enemy, we declare to be worse than if he breaks away from the king's service, and joins the enemy. Now then you are doing despite to God, just as an idolater does, not with your own mouth singly, but with the ten thousands of those whom you have wronged. Yet you will say, an idolater he is not. But surely, whenever they say, Oh! That Christian, that covetous fellow, then not only is he himself committing outrage by his own act, but he frequently forces those also whom he has wronged to use these words; and if they use them not, this is to be set to the account of their reverence.

Do we not see that such is the fact? What else is an idolater? Or does not he too worship passions, oftentimes not mastering his passions? I mean, for example, when we say that the pagan idolater worships idols, he will say, No, but it is Venus, or it is Mars. And if we say, Who is this Venus? The more

modest among them will say, It is pleasure. Or what is this Mars? It is wrath. And in the same way do you worship Mammon. If we say, Who is this Mammon? It is covetousness, and this you are worshiping. I worship it not, you will say. Why not? Because thou dost not bow yourself down? Nay, but as it is, you are far more a worshiper in your deeds and practices; for this is the higher kind of worship. And that you may understand this, look in the case of God; who more truly worship Him, they who merely stand up at the prayers, or they who do His will? Clearly enough, these latter. The same also is it with the worshipers of Mammon; they who do his will, they truly are his worshipers. However, they who worship the passions are oftentimes free from the passions. One may see a worshiper of Mars oftentimes governing his wrath. But this is not true of you; you make yourself a slave to your passion.

Yes, but you slay no sheep? No, you slay men, reasonable souls, some by famine, others by blasphemies. Nothing can be more frenzied than a sacrifice like this. Who ever beheld souls sacrificed? How accursed is the altar of covetousness! When you pass by this idol's altar here, you shall see it reeking with the blood of bullocks and goats; but when you shall pass by the altar of covetousness, you shall see it breathing the shocking odor of human blood. Stand here before it in this world, and you shall see, not the wings of birds burning, no vapor, no smoke exhaled, but the bodies of men perishing. For some throw themselves among precipices, others tie the halter, others thrust the dagger through their throat. Have you seen the cruel and inhuman sacrifices? Would you see yet more shocking ones than these? Then I will show you no longer the bodies of men, but the souls of men slaughtered in the other world. Yes, for it is possible for a soul to be slain with the slaughter peculiar to the soul; for as there is a death of the body, so is there also of the soul. The soul that sins, says the Prophet, it shall die. Ezekiel 18:4 The death of the soul, however, is not like the death of the body; it is far more shocking. For this bodily death, separating the soul and the body the one from the other, releases the one from many anxieties and toils, and transmits the other into a manifest abode: then when the body has been in time dissolved and crumbled away, it is again gathered together in incorruption, and receives back its own proper soul. Such we see is this bodily death. But that of the soul is awful and terrific. For this death, when dissolution takes place, does not let it pass, as the body does, but binds it down again to an imperishable body, and consigns it to the unquenchable fire. This then is the death of the soul. And as therefore there is a death of the soul, so is there also a slaughter of the soul. What is the slaughter of the body? It is the being turned into a corpse, the being stripped of the energy derived from the soul. What is the slaughter of the soul? It is its being made a corpse also. And how is the soul made a corpse? Because as the body then becomes a corpse when the soul leaves it destitute of its own vital energy, so also does the soul then become a corpse, when the Holy Spirit leaves it destitute of His spiritual energy.

Such for the most part are the slaughters made at the altar of covetousness. They are not satisfied, they do not stop at men's blood; no, the altar of covetousness is not glutted, unless it sacrifice the very soul itself also, unless it receive the souls of both, the sacrificer and the sacrificed. For he who sacrifices must first be sacrificed, and then he sacrifices; and the dead sacrifices him who is yet living. For when he utters blasphemies, when he reviles, when he is irritated, are not these so many incurable wounds of the soul?

You have seen that the expression is no hyperbole. Would you hear again another argument, to teach you how covetousness is idolatry, and more shocking than idolatry? Idolaters worship the creatures of God (for they worshipped, it is said, and served the creature rather than the Creator) Romans 1:25; but you are worshiping a creature of your own. For God made not covetousness but your own insatiable appetite invented it. And look at the madness and folly. They that worship idols, honor also the idols they worship; and if any one speak of them with disrespect or ridicule, they stand up in their defense; whereas thou, as if

in a sort of intoxication, art worshiping an object, which is so far from being free from accusation, that it is even full of impiety. So that thou, even more than they, excellest in wickedness. You can never have it to say as an excuse, that it is no evil. If even they are in the highest degree without excuse, yet are you in a far higher, who art forever censuring covetousness, and reviling those who devote themselves to it, and who yet does serve and obey it.

We will examine, if you please, whence idolatry took its rise. A certain wise man Wisdom 14:16 tells us, that a certain rich man afflicted with untimely mourning for his son, and having no consolation for his sorrow, consoled his passion in this way: having made a lifeless image of the dead, and constantly gazing at it, he seemed through the image to have his departed one still; while certain flatterers, whose God was their belly Philippians 3:19, treating the image with reverence in order to do him honor, carried on the custom into idolatry.

So then it took its rise from weakness of soul, from a senseless custom, from extravagance. But not so covetousness: from weakness of soul indeed it is, only that it is from a worse weakness. It is not that any one has lost a son, nor that he is seeking for consolation in sorrow, nor that he is drawn on by flatterers. But how is it? I will tell you. Cain in covetousness overreached God; what ought to have been given to Him, he kept to himself; what he should have kept himself, this he offered to Him; and thus the evil began even from God.

For if we are God's, much more are the first-fruits of our possessions. Again, men's violent passion for women arose from covetousness. They saw the daughters of men Genesis 6:2, and they rushed headlong into lust. And from hence again it went on to money; for the wish to have more than one's neighbor of this world's goods, arises from no other source, than from love waxing cold. The wish to have more than one's share arises from no other source than recklessness, misanthropy, and arrogance toward others.

Look at the earth, how wide is its extent? How far greater than we can use the expanse of the sky and the heaven? It is that He might put an end to your covetousness, that God has thus widely extended the bounds of the creation. And are you then still grasping and even thus? And do you hear that covetousness is idolatry, and not shudder even at this? Do you wish to inherit the earth? Then have you no inheritance in heaven. Are you eager to leave an inheritance to others, that you may rob yourself of it?

Tell me, if any one were to offer you power to possess all things, would you be unwilling? It is in your power now, if you will. Some, however, say, that they are grieved when they transmit the inheritance to others, and would fain have consumed it themselves, rather than see others become its masters. Nor do I acquit you of this weakness; for this too is characteristic of a weak soul. However, at least let as much as this be done. In your will leave Christ your heir. It were your duty indeed to do so in your lifetime, for this would show a right disposition.

Still, at all events, be a little generous, though it be but by necessity. For Christ indeed charged us to give to the poor with this object, to make us wise in our lifetime, to induce us to despise money, to teach us to look down upon earthly things. It is no contempt of money, as you think, to bestow it upon this man and upon that man when one dies, and is no longer master of it. You are then no longer giving of your own, but of absolute necessity: thanks to death, not to you. This is no act of affection, it is your loss. However, let it be done even thus; at least then give up your passion.

Moral. Consider how many acts of plunder, how many acts of covetousness, you have committed. Restore all fourfold. Thus plead your cause to God. Some, however, there are who are arrived at such a pitch of

madness and blindness, as not even then to comprehend their duty; but who go on acting in all cases, just as if they were taking pains to make the judgment of God yet heavier to themselves. This is the reason why our blessed Apostle writes and says, Walk as children of light. Now the covetous man of all others lives in darkness, and spreads great darkness over all things around.

And have no fellowship, he adds, with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them; for the things which are done by them in secret, it is a shame even to speak of; but all things when they are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. Hearken, I entreat you, all, as many of you as like not to be hated for nothing, but to be loved. What need is there to be hated? one says. A man commits a robbery, and do you not reprove him, but art afraid of his hatred? Though this, however, is not being hated for nothing. But do you justly convict him, and yet fear the hatred? Convict your brother, incur enmity for the love's sake which you owe to Christ, for the love's sake which you owe to your brother. Arrest him as he is on his road to the pit of destruction. For to admit him to our table, to treat him with civil speeches, with salutations, and with entertainments, these are no signal proofs of friendship. No, those I have mentioned are the boons which we must bestow upon our friends, that we may rescue their souls from the wrath of God. When we see them lying prostrate in the furnace of wickedness, let us raise them up. But, they say, it is of no use, he is incorrigible. However, do thou your duty, and then you have excused yourself to God. Hide not your talent. It is for this that you have speech, it is for this you have a mouth and a tongue, that you may correct your neighbor. It is dumb and reasonless creatures only that have no care for their neighbor, and take no account of others. But do you while calling God, Father, and your neighbor, brother, when you see him committing unnumbered wickednesses, do you prefer his good-will to his welfare? No, do not so, I entreat you. There is no evidence of friendship so true as never to overlook the sins of our brethren. Did you see them at enmity? Reconcile them. Did you see them guilty of covetousness? Check them. Did you see them wronged? Stand up in their defense. It is not on them, it is on yourself you are conferring the chief benefit. It is for this we are friends, that we may be of use one to another. A man will listen in a different spirit to a friend, and to any other chance person. A chance person he will regard perhaps with suspicion, and so in like manner will he a teacher, but not so a friend.

For, he says, the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of: but all things when they are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. What is it he means to say here? He means this. That some sins in this world are done in secret, and some also openly; but in the other it shall not be so. Now there is no one who is not conscious to himself of some sin. This is why he says, But all the things when they are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. What then? Is this again, it will be said, meant concerning idolatry? It is not; the argument is about our life and our sins. For everything that is made manifest, says he, is light.

Wherefore, I entreat you, be ye never backward to reprove, nor displeas'd at being reprov'd. For as long indeed as anything is carried on in the dark, it is carried on with greater security; but when it has many to witness what is done, it is brought to light. By all means then let us do all we can to chase away the deadness which is in our brethren, to scatter the darkness, and to attract to us the Sun of righteousness. For if there be many shining lights, the path of virtue will be easy to themselves, and they which are in darkness will be more easily detected, while the light is held forth and puts the darkness to flight. Whereas if it be the reverse, there is fear lest as the thick mist of darkness and of sin overpowers the light, and dispels its transparency, those shining lights themselves should be extinguish'd. Let us be then dispos'd to benefit one another, that one and all, we may offer up praise and glory to the God of lovingkindness, by the grace and lovingkindness of the only begotten Son with whom to the Father, together with the Holy

Ghost, be glory, strength, honor now and forever and forever. Amen.

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