

# Homily 19 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 19 on Ephesians emphasizes the importance of living wisely, being filled with the Spirit, and maintaining a spirit of thanksgiving amidst life's challenges.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 31:6, Isaiah 49:15, Matthew 7:9, Matthew 10:16, Romans 13:7, 1 Corinthians 12:18, Ephesians 5:15, Philippians 4:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Living"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of walking wisely in a world filled with evil, emphasizing the need to understand the will of the Lord and to redeem the time. He highlights the dangers of anger, the significance of being filled with the Spirit, and the necessity of giving thanks in all circumstances. Chrysostom urges believers to subject themselves to one another in the fear of Christ, promoting humility and mutual service as the path to true freedom and love.

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## Transcript

Ephesians 5:15, 16, 17

Look then carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

He is still cleansing away the root of bitterness, still cutting off the very groundwork of anger. For what is he saying? Look carefully how ye walk. They are sheep in the midst of wolves, and he charges them to be also as doves. For you shall be harmless, says he, as doves. Matthew 10:16 Forasmuch then as they were both among wolves, and were besides commanded not to defend themselves, but to suffer evil, they needed this admonition. Not indeed but that the former was sufficient to render them stronger; but now that there is besides the addition of the two, reflect how exceedingly it is heightened. Observe then here also, how carefully he secures them, by saying, Look how ye walk. Whole cities were at war with them; yea, this war made its way also into houses. They were divided, father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother. What then? Whence these divisions? They heard Christ say, He that loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:37 Lest therefore they should think that he was without reason introducing wars and fightings, (since there was likely to be much anger produced, if they on their part were to retaliate,) to prevent this, he says, See carefully how ye walk. That is to say, Except the Gospel message, give no other handle on any score whatever, for the hatred which you will incur. Let this be the only ground of hatred. Let no one have any

other charge to make against you; but show all deference and obedience, whenever it does no harm to the message, whenever it does not stand in the way of godliness. For it is said, Render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom. Romans 13:7 For when among the rest of the world they shall see us forbearing, they will be put to shame.

Not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time.

It is not from any wish that you should be artful, and versatile, that he gives this advice. But what he means is this. The time is not yours. At present you are strangers, and sojourners, and foreigners, and aliens; seek not honors, seek not glory, seek not authority, nor revenge; bear all things, and in this way, redeem the time; give up many things, anything they may require. Imagine now, I say, a man had a magnificent house, and persons were to make their way in, on purpose to murder him, and he were to give a large sum, and thus to rescue himself. Then we should say, he has redeemed himself. So also have you a large house, and a true faith in your keeping. They will come to take all away. Give whatever they may demand, only preserve the principal thing, I mean the faith.

Because the days, says he, are evil.

What is the evil of the day? The evil of the day ought to belong to the day. What is the evil of a body? Disease. And what again the evil of the soul? Wickedness. What is the evil of water? Bitterness. And the evil of each particular thing, is with reference to that nature of it which is affected by the evil. If then there is an evil in the day, it ought to belong to the day, to the hours, to the day-light. So also Christ says, Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Matthew 6:34 And from this expression we shall understand the other. In what sense then does he call the days evil? In what sense the time evil? It is not the essence of the thing, not the things as so created, but it is the things transacted in them. In the same way as we are in the habit of saying, I have passed a disagreeable and wretched day. And yet how could it be disagreeable, except from the circumstances which took place in it? Now the events which take place in it are, good things from God, but evil things from bad men. So then of the evils which happen in the times, men are the creators, and hence it is that the times are said to be evil. And thus we also call the times evil.

Ver. 17, 18. Wherefore, he adds, be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is; and be not drunk with wine, wherein is riot.

For indeed intemperance in this renders men passionate and violent, and hot-headed, and irritable and savage. Wine has been given us for cheerfulness, not for drunkenness. Whereas now it appears to be an unmanly and contemptible thing for a man not to get drunk. And what sort of hope then is there of salvation? What? Contemptible, tell me, not to get drunk, where to get drunk ought of all things in the world to be most contemptible? For it is of all things right for even a private individual to keep himself far from drunkenness; but how much more so for a soldier, a man who lives among swords, and bloodshed, and slaughter: much more, I say, for the soldier, when his temper is sharpened by other causes also, by power, by authority, by being constantly in the midst of stratagems and battles. Would you know where wine is good? Hear what the Scripture says, Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul. Proverbs 31:6 And justly, because it can mitigate asperity and gloominess, and drive away clouds from the brow. Wine makes glad the heart of man Psalm 104:15, says the Psalmist. How then does wine produce drunkenness? For it cannot be that one and the same thing should work opposite effects. Drunkenness then surely does not arise from wine, but from intemperance. Wine is bestowed upon us for no other purpose than for bodily health; but this purpose also is thwarted by

immoderate use. But hear moreover what our blessed Apostle writes and says to Timothy, Use a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your frequent infirmities.

This is the reason why God has formed our bodies in moderate proportions, and so as to be satisfied with a little, from thence at once instructing us that He has made us adapted to another life. And that life He would fain have bestowed upon us even from the very beginning; but since we rendered ourselves unworthy of it, He deferred it; and in the time during which He deferred it, not even in that does He allow us immoderate indulgence; for a little cup of wine and a single loaf is enough to satisfy a man's hunger. And man the lord of all the brute creation has He formed so as to require less food in proportion than they, and his body small; thereby declaring to us nothing else than this, that we are hastening onward to another life. Be not drunk, says he, with wine, wherein is riot; for it does not save but it destroys; and that, not the body only, but the soul also.

Ver. 18, 19, 20, 21. But be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God even the Father; subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.

Do you wish, he says, to be cheerful, do you wish to employ the day? I give you spiritual drink; for drunkenness even cuts off the articulate sound of our tongue; it makes us lisp and stammer, and distorts the eyes, and the whole frame together. Learn to sing psalms, and you shall see the delightfulness of the employment. For they who sing psalms are filled with the Holy Spirit, as they who sing satanic songs are filled with an unclean spirit.

What is meant by with your hearts to the Lord? It means, with close attention and understanding. For they who do not attend closely, merely sing, uttering the words, while their heart is roaming elsewhere.

Always, he says, giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ unto God even the Father, subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.

That is, let your requests be made known unto God, with thanksgiving Philippians 4:6; for there is nothing so pleasing to God, as for a man to be thankful. But we shall be best able to give thanks unto God, by withdrawing our souls from the things before mentioned, and by thoroughly cleansing them by the means he has told us.

But be filled, says he, with the Spirit.

And is then this Spirit within us? Yes, indeed, within us. For when we have driven away lying, and bitterness, and fornication, and uncleanness, and covetousness, from our souls, when we have become kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, when there is no jesting, when we have rendered ourselves worthy of it, what is there to hinder the Holy Spirit from coming and lighting upon us? And not only will He come unto us, but He will fill our hearts; and when we have so great a light kindled within us, then will the way of virtue be no longer difficult to attain, but will be easy and simple.

Giving thanks always, he says, for all things.

What then? Are we to give thanks for everything that befalls us? Yes; be it even disease, be it even penury. For if a certain wise man gave this advice in the Old Testament, and said, Whatsoever is brought upon you take cheerfully, and be patient when you are changed to a low estate Sirach 2:4; much more

ought this to be the case in the New. Yes, even though thou know not the word, give thanks. For this is thanksgiving. But if you give thanks when you are in comfort and in affluence, in success and in prosperity, there is nothing great, nothing wonderful in that.

What is required is, for a man to give thanks when he is in afflictions, in anguish, in discouragements. Utter no word in preference to this, Lord, I thank you. And why do I speak of the afflictions of this world? It is our duty to give God thanks, even for hell itself, for the torments and punishments of the next world. For surely it is a thing beneficial to those who attend to it, when the dread of hell is laid like a bridle on our hearts. Let us therefore give thanks not only for blessings which we see, but also for those which we see not, and for those which we receive against our will.

For many are the blessings He bestows upon us, without our desire, without our knowledge. And if you believe me not, I will at once proceed to make the case clear to you. For consider, I pray, do not the impious and unbelieving Gentiles ascribe everything to the sun and to their idols? But what then? Does He not bestow blessings even upon them? Is it not the work of His providence, that they both have life, and health, and children, and the like? And again they that are called Marcionites, and the Manichees, do they not even blaspheme Him?

But what then? Does He not bestow blessings on them every day? Now if He bestows blessings on them that know them not, much more does he bestow them upon us. For what else is the peculiar work of God if it be not this, to do good to all mankind, alike by chastisements and by enjoyments? Let us not then give thanks only when we are in prosperity, for there is nothing great in this. And this the devil also well knows, and therefore he said, Does Job fear God for nought? Have You not made an hedge about him and about all that he has on every side?

Touch all that he has; no doubt, he will renounce You to Your face! Job 1:10-11 However, that cursed one gained no advantage; and God forbid he should gain any advantage of us either; but whenever we are either in penury, or in sicknesses, or in disasters, then let us increase our thanksgiving; thanksgiving, I mean, not in words, nor in tongue, but in deeds and works, in mind and in heart. Let us give thanks unto Him with all our souls. For He loves us more than our parents; and wide as is the difference between evil and goodness, so great is the difference between the love of God and that of our fathers.

And these are not my words, but those of Christ Himself Who loves us. And hear what He Himself says, What man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Matthew 7:9-11 And again, bear what He says also elsewhere: Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?

Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget you, says the Lord. Isaiah 49:15 For if He loves us not, wherefore did He create us? Had He any necessity? Do we supply to Him any ministry and service? Needs He anything that we can render? Hear what the Prophet says; I have said to the Lord, You are my Lord, I have no good beyond You. Psalm 16:2

The ungrateful, however, and unfeeling say, that this were worthy of God's goodness, that there should be an equality among all. Tell me, ungrateful mortal, what sort of things are they which you deny to be of God's goodness, and what equality do you mean? Such an one, you will say, has been a cripple from his childhood; another is mad, and is possessed; another has arrived at extreme old age, and has spent his whole life in poverty; another in the most painful diseases: are these works of Providence? One man is

deaf, another dumb, another poor, while another, impious, yea, utterly impious, and full of ten thousand vices, enjoys wealth, and keeps concubines, and parasites, and is owner of a splendid mansion, and lives an idle life. And many instances of the sort they string together, and weave a long account of complaint against the providence of God.

What then are we to say to them? Now if they were Greeks, and were to tell us that the universe is governed by some one or other, we should in turn address to them the self-same words, What then, are things without a providence? How then is it that you reverence gods, and worship genii and heroes? For if there is a providence, some one or other superintends the whole. But if any, whether Christians or Heathen, should be impatient at this, and be wavering, what shall we say to them?

Why, could so many good things, tell me, arise of themselves? The daily light? The beautiful order and the forethought that exist in all things? The mazy dances of the stars? The equable course of nights and days? The regular gradation of nature in vegetables, and animals, and men? Who, tell me, is it that orders these? If there were no superintending Being, but all things combined together of themselves, who then was it that made this vault revolve, so beautiful, so vast, I mean the sky, and set it upon the earth, nay more, upon the waters?

Who is it that gives the fruitful seasons? Who implanted so great power in seeds and vegetables? For that which is accidental is necessarily disorderly; whereas that which is orderly implies design. For which, tell me, of the things around us that are accidental, is not full of great disorder, and of great tumult and confusion? Nor do I speak of things accidental only, but of those also which imply some agent, but an unskillful agent. For example, let there be timber and stone, and let there be lime withal; and let a man unskilled in building take them, and begin building, and set hard to work; will he not spoil and destroy everything?

Again, take a vessel without a pilot, containing everything which a vessel ought to contain, without a shipwright; I do not say that it is unequipped and unfinished, but though well equipped, it will not be able to sail. And could the vast extent of earth standing on the waters, tell me, ever stand so firmly, and so long a time, without some power to hold it together? And can these views have any reason? Is it not the extreme of absurdity to conceive such a notion? And if the earth supports the heaven, behold another burden still; but if the heaven also is borne upon the waters, there arises again another question.

Or rather not another question, for it is the work of providence. For things which are borne upon the water ought not to be made convex, but concave. Wherefore? Because the whole body of anything which is concave is immersed in the waters, as is the case with a ship; whereas of the convex the body is entirely above, and only the rim rests upon the surface; so that it requires a resisting body, hard, and able to sustain it, in order to bear the burden imposed. But does the atmosphere then support the heaven?

Why, that is far softer, and more yielding even than water, and cannot sustain anything, no, not the very lightest things, much less so vast a bulk. In fine, if we chose to follow out the argument of providence, both generally and in detail, time itself would fail us. For I will now ask him who would start those questions above mentioned, are these things the result of providence, or of the want of providence? And if he shall say, that they are not from providence, then again I will ask, how then did they arise? But no, he will never be able to give any account at all. And do you not know that?

Much more then is it your duty not to question, not to be over curious, in those things which concern man. And why not? Because man is nobler than all these, and these were made for his sake, not he for their

sake. If then you know not so much as the skill and contrivance that are visible in His providence, how shall you be able to know the reasons, where he himself is the subject? Tell me, I pray, why did God form him so small, so far below the height of heaven, as that he should even doubt of the things which appear above him? Why are the northern and southern climes uninhabitable? Tell me, I say, why is the night made longer in winter and shorter in summer? Why are the degrees of cold and heat such as they are? Why is the body mortal? And ten thousand questions besides I will ask you, and if you will, will never cease asking. And in one and all you will surely be at a loss to answer. And thus is this of all things most providential, that the reasons of things are kept secret from us. For surely, one would have imagined man to be the cause of all things, were there not this to humble our understanding.

But such an one, you will say, is poor, and poverty is an evil. And what is it to be sick, and what is it to be crippled? Oh, man, they are nothing. One thing alone is evil, that is to sin; this is the only thing we ought to search to the bottom. And yet we omit to search into the causes of what are really evils, and busy ourselves about other things. Why is it that not one of us ever examines why he has sinned? To sin -- is it then in my power, or is it not in my power? And why need I go round about me for a number of reasons? I will seek for the matter within myself. Now then did I ever master my wrath? Did I ever master my anger, either through shame, or through fear of man? Then whenever I discover this done, I shall discover that to sin is in my own power. No one examines these matters, no one busies himself about them. But only according to Job, Man in a way altogether different swims upon words. For why does it concern you, if such an one is blind, or such an one poor? God has not commanded you to look to this, but to what you yourself art doing. For if on the one hand you doubt that there is any power superintending the world, you are of all men the most senseless; but if you are persuaded of this, why doubt that it is our duty to please God?

Giving thanks always, he says, for all things to God.

Go to the physician's, and you will see him, whenever a man is discovered to have a wound, using the knife and the cautery. But no, in your case, I say not so much as this; but go to the carpenter's. And yet thou dost not examine his reasons, although you understand not one of the things which are done there, and many things will appear to you to be difficulties; as, for instance, when he hollows the wood, when he alters its outward shape. Nay, I would bring you to a more intelligible craft still, for instance, that of the painter, and there your head will swim. For tell me, does he not seem to be doing what he does, at random? For what do his lines mean, and the turns and bends of the lines? But when he puts on the colors, then the beauty of the art will become conspicuous. Yet still, not even then will you be able to attain to any accurate understanding of it. But why do I speak of carpenters, and painters, our fellow-servants? Tell me, how does the bee frame her comb, and then shall you speak about God also. Master the handiwork of the ant, the spider, and the swallow, and then shall you speak about God also. Tell me these things. But no, you never can. Will you not cease then, O man, your vain enquiries? For vain indeed they are. Will you not cease busying yourself in vain about many things? Nothing so wise as this ignorance, where they that profess they know nothing are wisest of all, and they that spend overmuch labor on these questions, the most foolish of all. So that to profess knowledge is not everywhere a sign of wisdom, but sometimes of folly also. For tell me, suppose there were two men, and one of them should profess to stretch out his lines, and to measure the expanse that intervenes between the earth and heaven, and the other were to laugh at him, and declare that he did not understand it, tell me, I pray, which should we laugh at, him that said he knew, or him that knew not? Evidently, the man that said that he knew. He that is ignorant, therefore, is wiser than he that professes to know. And what again? If any one were to profess

to tell us how many cups of water the sea contains, and another should profess his ignorance, is not the ignorance here again wiser than the knowledge? Surely, vastly so. And why so? Because that knowledge itself is but intense ignorance. For he indeed who says that he is ignorant, knows something. And what is that? That it is incomprehensible to man. Yes, and this is no small portion of knowledge. Whereas he that says he knows, he of all others knows not what he says he knows, and is for this very reason utterly ridiculous.

Moral. Alas! How many things are there to teach us to bridle this unseasonable impertinence and idle curiosity; and yet we refrain not, but are curious about the lives of others; as, why one is a cripple, and why another is poor. And so by this way of reasoning we shall fall into another sort of trifling which is endless, as, why such an one is a woman? And, why all are not men? Why there is such a thing as an ass? Why an ox? Why a dog? Why a wolf? Why a stone? Why wood? And thus the argument will run out to an interminable length.

This in truth is the reason, why God has marked out limits to our knowledge, and has laid them deep in nature. And mark, now, the excess of this busy curiosity. For though we look up to so great a height as from earth to heaven, and are not at all affected by it; yet as soon as ever we go up to the top of a lofty tower, and have a mind to stoop over a little, and look down, a sort of giddiness and dizziness immediately seizes us. Now, tell me the reason of this. No, you could never find out a reason for it.

Why is it that the eye possesses greater power than other senses, and is caught by more distant objects? And one might see it by comparison with the case of hearing. For no one will ever be able to shout so loudly, as to fill the air as far as the eye can reach, nor to hear at so great a distance. Why are not all the members of equal honor? Why have not all received one function and one place? Paul also searched into these questions; or rather he did not search into them, for he was wise; but where he comes by chance upon this topic, he says, Each one of them, has God set even as it has pleased Him. 1 Corinthians 12:18 He assigns the whole to His will.

And so then let us only give thanks for all things. Wherefore, says he, give thanks for all things. This is the part of a well-disposed, of a wise, of an intelligent servant; the opposite is that of a tattler, and an idler, and a busy-body. Do we not see among servants, that those among them who are worthless and good for nothing, are both tattlers, and triflers and that they pry into the concerns of their masters, which they are desirous to conceal: whereas the intelligent and well-disposed look to one thing only, how they may fulfill their service.

He that says much, does nothing: as he that does much, never says a word out of season. Hence Paul said, where he wrote concerning widows, And they learn not only to be idle, but tattlers also. 1 Timothy 5:13 Tell me, now, which is the widest difference, between our age and that of children, or between God and men? Between ourselves compared with gnats, or God compared with us? Plainly between God and us. Why then do you busy yourself to such an extent in all these questions?

Give thanks for all things. But what, say you, if a heathen should ask the question? How am I to answer him? He desires to learn from me whether there is a Providence, for he himself denies that there is any being thus exercising foresight. Turn round then, and ask him the same question yourself. He will deny therefore that there is a Providence. Yet that there is a Providence, is plain from what you have said; but that it is incomprehensible, is plain from those things whereof we cannot discover the reason.

For if in things where men are the disposers, we oftentimes do not understand the method of the disposition, and in truth many of them appear to us inconsistent, and yet at the same time we acquiesce, how much more will this be so in the case of God? However, with God nothing either is inconsistent, or appears so to the faithful. Wherefore let us give thanks for all things, let us give Him glory for all things.

Subjecting yourselves one to another, he says, in the fear of Christ. For if you submit yourself for a ruler's sake, or for money's sake, or from respectfulness, much more from the fear of Christ. Let there be an interchange of service and submission. For then will there be no such thing as slavish service. Let not one sit down in the rank of a freeman, and the other in the rank of a slave; rather it were better that both masters and slaves be servants to one another -- far better to be a slave in this way than free in any other; as will be evident from hence. Suppose the case of a man who should have an hundred slaves, and he should in no way serve them; and suppose again a different case, of an hundred friends, all waiting upon one another. Which will lead the happier life? Which with the greater pleasure, with the more enjoyment? In the one case there is no anger, no provocation, no wrath, nor anything else of the kind whatever; in the other all is fear and apprehension. In the one case too the whole is forced, in the other is of free choice. In the one case they serve one another because they are forced to do so, in the other with mutual gratification. Thus does God will it to be; for this He washed His disciples' feet. Nay more, if you have a mind to examine the matter nicely, there is indeed on the part of masters a return of service. For what if pride suffer not that return of service to appear? Yet if the slave on the one hand render his bodily service, and thou maintain that body, and supply it with food and clothing and shoes, this is an exchange of service: because unless thou render your service as well, neither will he render his, but will be free, and no law will compel him to do it if he is not supported. If this then is the case with servants, where is the absurdity, if it should also become the case with free men. Subjecting yourselves in the fear, says he, of Christ. How great then the obligation, when we shall also have a reward. But he does not choose to submit himself to you? However do thou submit yourself; not simply yield, but submit yourself. Entertain this feeling towards all, as if all were your masters. For thus shall you soon have all as your slaves, enslaved to you with the most abject slavery. For you will then more surely make them yours, when without receiving anything of theirs, thou of yourself renderest them of your own. This is subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ, in order that we may subdue all the passions, be servants of God, and preserve the love we owe to one another. And then shall we be able also to be counted worthy of the lovingkindness which comes of God, through the grace and mercies of His only-begotten Son, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, honor, now and forever and ever. Amen.

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