

Homily 22 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 22 on Ephesians emphasizes the importance of serving with fear and trembling, but also with good-will and from the heart, and the promise of reward for good service.

Scripture: Romans 8:38, Romans 16:20, 2 Corinthians 2:11, 2 Corinthians 11:14, Ephesians 6:10, Ephesians 6:12-13, 2 Thessalonians 2:7

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Victory In Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the spiritual warfare believers face, emphasizing the need to be strong in the Lord and to put on the whole armor of God to stand against the devil's schemes. He highlights that the battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of wickedness, urging believers to be vigilant and to resist the temptations of the enemy. Chrysostom encourages believers to trample the power of the devil by living a life free from sin and to engage in a relentless war against evil, knowing that victory comes through faith in Christ and obedience to God's will.

Transcript

Ephesians 6:5-8

Servants, be obedient unto them that, according to the flesh, are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers: but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that whatsoever good thing each one does, the same shall he receive again from the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Thus then it is not husband only, nor wife, nor children, but virtuous servants also that contribute to the organization and protection of a house. Therefore the blessed Paul has not overlooked this department even. He comes to it, however, in the last place, because it is last in dignity and rank. Still he addresses much discourse also to them, no longer in the same tone as to children, but in a far more advanced way, inasmuch as he does not hold out to these the promise in this world, but in that which is to come. Knowing, says he, that whatsoever good or evil thing each one does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, and thus at once instructs them to love wisdom. For though they be inferior to the children in dignity, still in mind they are superior to them.

Servants, says he, be obedient to them that, according to the flesh, are your masters.

Thus at once he raises up, at once soothes the wounded soul. Be not grieved, he seems to say, that you are inferior to the wife and the children. Slavery is nothing but a name. The mastership is according to the flesh, brief and temporary; for whatever is of the flesh, is transitory.

With fear, he adds, and trembling.

You see that he does not require the same fear from slaves as from wives: for in that case he simply said, and let the wife see that she fear her husband; whereas in this case he heightens the expression, with fear, he says, and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. This is what he constantly says. What do you mean, blessed Paul? He is a brother, or rather he has become a brother, he enjoys the same privileges, he belongs to the same body. Yea, more, he is the brother, not of his own master only, but also of the Son of God, he is partaker of all the same privileges; yet do you say, obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling? Yes, for this very reason, he would say, I say it. For if I charge free men to submit themselves one to another in the fear of God -- as he said above, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ;-- if I charge moreover the wife to fear and reverence her husband, although she is his equal; much more must I so speak to the servant. It is no sign of low birth, rather it is the truest nobility, to understand how to lower ourselves, to be modest and unassuming, and to give way to our neighbor. And the free have served the free with much fear and trembling.

In singleness of heart, he says.

And it is well said, since it is possible to serve with fear and trembling, and yet not of good will, but in just any way that may be possible. Many servants in many instances secretly cheat their masters. And this cheating accordingly he does away, by saying, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ, not in the way of eye-service as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men. Do you see how many words he requires, in order to implant this good principle, with goodwill, I mean, and from the heart? That other service, with fear and trembling I mean, we see many rendering to their masters, and the master's threat goes far to secure that. But show, says he, that you serve as the servant of Christ, not of man. Make the right action your own, not one of compulsion. Just as in the words which follow, he persuades and instructs the man who is ill-treated by another to make the right action his own, and the work of his own free choice. Because inasmuch as the man that smites the cheek, is not supposed to come to that act in consequence of any intention in the person struck, but only of his own individual malice, what says He? Turn to him the other also Matthew 5:39; to show him that in submitting to the first thou were not unwilling. For he that is lavish in suffering wrong, makes that his own which is not his own act, by suffering himself to be smitten on the other cheek also, and not merely by enduring the first blow. For this latter will have perhaps the appearance even of cowardice; but that of a high philosophy.-- Thus you will show that it was for the sake of wisdom that you bore the first blow also. And so in the present case, show here too, that you bear this slavery also willingly. The man-pleaser then is no servant of Christ. The servant of Christ is not a man-pleaser. Galatians 1:10 For who that is the servant of God, makes it his object to please men? And who that pleases men, can be a servant of God?

From the heart, says he, with good-will doing service. For since it is possible to do service even with singleness of heart and not wrongfully, and yet not with all one's might, but only so far as fulfilling one's bounden duty, therefore he says, do it with alacrity, not of necessity, upon principle, not upon constraint. If thus thou do service, you are no slave; if you do it upon principle, if with good-will, if from the heart, and if for Christ's sake. For this is the servitude that even Paul, the free man, serves, and exclaims, For we

preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5 Look how he divests your slavery of its meanness. For just in the same way as the man who has been robbed, if he gives still more to him who has taken, is not ranked among those robbed, but rather among liberal givers; not among those who suffer evil, but among those who do good; and rather clothes the other with disgrace by his liberality, than is clothed with disgrace by being robbed -- so, I say, in this case, by his generosity he will appear at once more high-minded, and by showing that he does not feel the wrong, will put the other to shame.

Let us then do service to our masters for Christ's sake, knowing, he continues, that whatsoever good thing each one does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. For inasmuch as it was probable that many masters, as being unbelievers, would have no sense of shame, and would make no return to their slaves for their obedience, observe how he has given them encouragement, so that they may have no misgiving about the remuneration, but may have full confidence respecting the recompense. For as they who receive a benefit, when they make no return, make God a debtor to their benefactors; so, I say, do masters also, if, when well-treated by you, they fail to requite you, requite you the more, by rendering God your debtor.

Ver. 9. And ye masters, he continues, do the same things unto them.

The same things. What are these? With good-will do service. However he does not actually say, do service, though by saying, the same things, he plainly shows this to be his meaning. For the master himself is a servant. Not as men-pleasers, he means, and with fear and trembling: that is, toward God, fearing lest He one day accuse you for your negligence toward your slaves.

And forbear threatening; be not irritating, he means, nor oppressive.

Knowing that both their Master and yours is in Heaven. Thyest. 607:-- Quicquid a vobis minor extimescit Major hoc vobis dominus minatur. Omne sub regno graviore regnum est.--G.A.]}-->

Ah! How mighty a Master does he hint at here! How startling the suggestion! It is this. With what measure you measure, it shall be measured unto you again Matthew 7:2; lest you hear the sentence, Thou wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt. Matthew 18:32

And there is no respect of persons, he says, with Him.

Think not, he would say, that what is done towards a servant, He will therefore forgive, because done to a servant. Heathen laws indeed as being the laws of men, recognize a difference between these kinds of offenses. But the law of the common Lord and Master of all, as doing good to all alike, and dispensing the same rights to all, knows no such difference.

But should any one ask, whence is slavery, and why it has found entrance into human life, (and many I know are both glad to ask such questions, and desirous to be informed of them,) I will tell you. Slavery is the fruit of covetousness, of degradation, of savagery; since Noah, we know, had no servant, nor had Abel, nor Seth, no, nor they who came after them. The thing was the fruit of sin, of rebellion against parents. Let children hearken to this, that whenever they are undutiful to their parents, they deserve to be servants. Such a child strips himself of his nobility of birth; for he who rebels against his father is no longer a son; and if he who rebels against his father is not a son, how shall he be a son who rebels against our true Father? He has departed from his nobility of birth, he has done outrage to nature. Then come also

wars, and battles, and take their prisoners. Well, but Abraham, you will say, had servants. Yes, but he used them not as servants.

Observe how everything depends upon the head; the wife, by telling him to love her; the children, by telling him to bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord; the servants, by the words, knowing that both their Master and yours is in Heaven. So, says he, you also in like manner, as being yourselves servants, shall be kind and indulgent. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

But if, before considering this next, you have a mind to hearken, I shall make the same remarks concerning servants, as I have also made before concerning children. Teach them to be religious, and everything else will follow of necessity. But now, when any one is going to the theater, or going off to the bath, he drags all his servants after him; but when he goes to church, not for a moment; nor does he compel them to attend and hear. Now how shall your servant listen, when thou his master art attending to other things? Have you purchased, have you bought your slave? Before all things enjoin him what God would have him do, to be gentle towards his fellow-servants, and to make much account of virtue.

Every one's house is a city; and every man is a prince in his own house. That the house of the rich is of this character, is plain enough, where there are both lands, and stewards, and rulers over rulers. But I say that the house of the poor also is a city. Because here too there are offices of authority; for instance, the husband has authority over the wife, the wife over the servants, the servants again over their own wives; again the wives and the husbands over the children. Does he not seem to you to be, as it were, a sort of king, having so many authorities under his own authority? And that it were meet that he should be more skilled both in domestic and general government than all the rest? For he who knows how to manage these in their several relations, will know how to select the fittest men for offices, yes, and will choose excellent ones. And thus the wife will be a second king in the house, lacking only the diadem; and he who knows how to choose this king, will excellently regulate all the rest.

Ver. 10. Finally, says he, be strong in the Lord.

Whenever the discourse is about to conclude, he always employs this turn. Said I not well from the first, that every man's house is a camp in itself? For look, having disposed of the several offices, he proceeds to arm them, and to lead them out to war. If no one usurps the other's office, but every one remains at his post, all will be well ordered.

Be strong, says he, in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

That is, in the hope which we have in Him, by means of His aid. For as he had enjoined many duties, which were necessary to be done, fear not, he seems to say, cast your hope upon the Lord, and He will make all easy.

Ver. 11. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

He says not, against the fightings, nor against the hostilities, but against the wiles. For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, nor openly, but by wiles. What is meant by wiles? To use wiles, is to deceive and to take by artifice or contrivance; a thing which takes place both in the case of the arts, and by words, and actions, and stratagems, in the case of those who seduce us. I mean something like this. The Devil never proposes to us sins in their proper colors; he does not speak of idolatry, but he sets it off in another dress,

using wiles, that is, making his discourse plausible, employing disguises. Now therefore the Apostle is by this means both rousing the soldiers, and making them vigilant, by persuading and instructing them, that our conflict is with one skilled in the arts of war, and with one who wars not simply, nor directly, but with much wiliness. And first then he arouses the disciples from the consideration of the Devil's skill; but in the second place, from his nature, and the number of his forces. It is not from any desire to dispirit the soldiers that stand under him, but to arouse, and to awaken them, that he mentions these stratagems, and prepares them to be vigilant; for had he merely detailed their power, and there stopped his discourse, he must have dispirited them. But now, whereas both before and after this, he shows that it is possible to overcome such an enemy, he rather raises their courage; for the more clearly the strength of our adversaries is stated on our part to our own people, so much the more earnest will it render our soldiers.

Ver. 12. For our wrestling is not, says he, against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness, in the heavenly places.

Having stimulated them by the character of the conflict, he next goes on to arouse them also by the prizes set before them. For what is his argument? Having said that the enemies are fierce, he adds further, that they despoil us of vast blessings. What are these? The conflict lies in the heavenlies; the struggle is not about riches, not about glory, but about our being enslaved. And thus is the enmity irreconcilable. The strife and the conflict are fiercer when for vast interests at stake; for the expression in the heavenlies is equivalent to, for the heavenly things. It is not that they may gain anything by the conquest, but that they may despoil us. As if one were to say, In what does the contract lie? In gold. The word in, means, in behalf of; the word in, also means, on account of. Observe how the power of the enemy startles us; how it makes us all circumspection, to know that the hazard is on behalf of vast interests, and the victory for the sake of great rewards. For he is doing his best to cast us out of Heaven.

He speaks of certain principalities, and powers, and world rulers of this darkness. What darkness? Is it that of night? No, but of wickedness. For you were, says he, once darkness Ephesians 5:8; so naming that wickedness which is in this present life; for beyond it, it will have no place, not in Heaven, nor in the world to come.

World-rulers he calls them, not as having the mastery over the world, but the Scripture is wont to call wicked practices the world, as, for example, where Christ says, They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world. John 17:16 What then, were they not of the world? Were they not clothed with flesh? Were they not of those who are in the world? And again; The world hates Me, but you it cannot hate. John 7:7 Where again He calls wicked practices by this name. Thus the Apostle here by the world means wicked men, and the evil spirits have more special power over them. Against the spiritual hosts of wickedness, says he, in the heavenly places. Principalities, and powers, he speaks of; just as in the heavenly places there are thrones and dominions, principalities and powers. Colossians 1:16

Ver. 13. Wherefore, says he, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

By evil day he means the present life, and calls it too this present evil world Galatians 1:4, from the evils which are done in it. It is as much as to say, Always be armed. And again, having done all, says he; that is, both passions, and vile lusts, and all things else that trouble us. He speaks not merely of doing the deed, but of completing it, so as not only to slay, but to stand also after we have slain. For many who have

gained this victory, have fallen again. Having done, says he, all; not having done one, but not the other. For even after the victory, we must stand. An enemy may be struck, but things that are struck revive again if we do not stand. But if after having fallen they rise up again, so long as we stand, they are fallen. So long as we waver not, the adversary rises not again.

Let us put on the whole armor of God. Do you see how he banishes all fear? For if it be possible to do all, and to stand, his describing in detail the power of the enemy does not create cowardice and fear, but it shakes off indolence. That ye may be able, he says, to withstand in the evil day. And he further gives them encouragement too from the time; the time, he seems to say, is short; so that you must needs stand; faint not when the slaughter is achieved.

Moral. If then it is a warfare, if such are the forces arrayed against us, if the principalities are incorporeal, if they are rulers of the world, if they are the spiritual hosts of wickedness, how, tell me, can you live in self-indulgence? How can you be dissolute? How if we are unarmed, shall we be able to overcome? These words let every one repeat to himself every day, whenever he is under the influence of anger, or of lust, whenever he is aiming, and all to no profit, after this languid life.

Let him hearken to the blessed Paul, saying to him, Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers. A harder warfare this than that which is matter of sense, a fiercer conflict. Think how long time this enemy is wrestling, for what it is that he is fighting, and be more guarded than ever. Nay, a man will say, but as he is the devil, he ought to have been removed out of the way, and then all had been saved. These are the pretenses to which some of your indolent ones in self-defense give utterance.

When you ought to be thankful, O man, that, if you have a mind, you have the victory over such a foe, you are on the contrary even discontented, and givest utterance to the words of some sluggish and sleepy soldier. You know the points of attack, if you choose. Reconnoiter on all sides, fortify yourself. Not against the devil alone is the conflict, but also against his powers. How then, you may say, are we to wrestle with the darkness? By becoming light. How with the spiritual hosts of wickedness?

By becoming good. For wickedness is contrary to good, and light drives away darkness. But if we ourselves too be darkness, we shall inevitably be taken captive. How then shall we overcome them? If, what they are by nature, that we become by choice, free from flesh and blood, thus shall we vanquish them. For once it was probable that the disciples would have many persecutors, imagine not, he would say, that it is they who war with you. They that really war with you, are the spirits that work in them.

Against them is our conflict. Two things he provides for by these considerations; he renders them in themselves more courageous and he lets loose their wrath against those who war against them. And wherefore is our conflict against these? Since we have also an invincible ally, the grace of the Spirit. We have been taught an art, such as shall enable us to wrestle not against men, but against spirits. Nay, if we have a mind, neither shall we wrestle at all; for it is because we choose it, that there is a struggle, since so great is the power of Him that dwells in us, as that He said, Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.

Luke 10:19 All power has He given us, both of wrestling and of not wrestling. It is because we are slothful, that we have to wrestle with them; for that Paul wrestled not, hear what he says himself, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35 And again hear his words, God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

Romans 16:20 For he had him under his subjection; whence also he said, I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

Acts 16:18 And this is not the language of one wrestling; for he that wrestles has not yet conquered, and he that has conquered no longer wrestles; he has subdued, has taken his captive. And so Peter again wrestled not with the devil, but he did that which was better than wrestling. In the case of the faithful, the obedient, the catechumens, they prevailed over him to vast advantage and over his powers. Hence too was it that the blessed Paul said, For we are not ignorant of his devices 2 Corinthians 2:11, which was the way moreover in which he especially overcame him; and again hear his words, And no marvel -- if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness. 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 So well knew he every part of the conflict, and nothing escaped him. Again, For the mystery of lawlessness, says he, does already work. 2 Thessalonians 2:7

But against us is the struggle; for hearken again to him, saying, I am persuaded, that neither angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ. Romans 8:38 He says not simply, from Christ, but, from the love of Christ. For many there are who are united forsooth to Christ, and who yet love Him not. Not only, says he, shall you not persuade me to deny Him, but, not even to love Him less.

And if the powers above had not strength to do this, who else should move him? Not, however, that he says this, as though they were actually attempting it, but upon the supposition; wherefore also he said, I am persuaded. So then he did not wrestle, yet nevertheless he fears his artifices; for hear what he says, I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3 True, you will say, but he uses this word touching himself also, where he says, For I fear lest, by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

How then are you persuaded that no one shall separate you? Perceivest thou that the expression is that of lowliness and of humility? For he already dwelt in Heaven. And hence also it was that he said, For I know nothing against myself 1 Corinthians 4:4; and again, I have finished the course. 2 Timothy 4:7 So that it was not with regard to these matters that the devil placed obstacles in his way, but with reference to the interests of the disciples. And why forsooth? Because in these points he was not himself sole master, but also their own will.

There the devil prevailed in some cases; nay, neither there was it over him that he prevailed, but over the indolence of persons who took no heed. If indeed, whether from slothfulness, or anything else of the sort, he had failed to fulfill his own duty, then had the devil prevailed over him; but if he himself on his part did all he could, and they obeyed not it was not over him he prevailed, but over their disobedience; and the disease prevailed not over the physician, but over the unruliness of the patient; for, when the physician takes every precaution, and the patient undoes all, the patient is defeated, not the physician.

Thus then in no instance did he prevail over Paul. But in our own case, it is matter for contentment that we should be so much as able to wrestle. For the Romans indeed this is not what he asks, but what? He shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Romans 16:20 And for these Ephesians he invokes, Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Ephesians 3:20 He that wrestles is still held fast, but it is enough for him that he has not fallen. When we depart hence, then, and not till then, will the glorious victory be achieved.

For instance, take the case of some evil lust. The extraordinary thing would be, not even to entertain it, but to stifle it. If, however, this be not possible, then though we may have to wrestle with it, and retain it to the last, yet if we depart still wrestling, we are conquerors. For the case is not the same here as it is with wrestlers; for there if you throw not your antagonist, you have not conquered; but here if you be not thrown, you have conquered; if you are not thrown, you have thrown him; and with reason, because there both strive for the victory, and when the one is thrown, the other is crowned; here, however, it is not thus, but the devil is striving for our defeat; when then I strip him of that upon which he is bent, I am conqueror.

For it is not to overthrow us, but to make us share his overthrow that he is eager. Already then am I conqueror, for he is already cast down, and in a state of ruin; and his victory consists not in being himself crowned, but in effecting my ruin; so that though I overthrow him not, yet if I be not overthrown, I have conquered. What then is a glorious victory? It is, over and above, to trample him underfoot, as Paul did, by regarding the things of this present world as nothing.

Let us too imitate him, and strive to become above them, and nowhere to give him a hold upon us. Wealth, possessions, vain-glory, give him a hold. And oftentimes indeed this has roused him, and oftentimes exasperated him. But what need is there of wrestling? What need of engaging with him? He who is engaged in the act of wrestling has the issue in uncertainty, whether he may not be himself defeated and captured. Whereas he that tramples him under foot, has the victory certain.

Oh then, let us trample under foot the power of the devil; let us trample under foot our sins, I mean everything that pertains to this life, wrath, lust, vain-glory, every passion; that when we depart to that world, we may not be convicted of betraying that power which God has given us; for thus shall we attain also the blessings that are to come. But if in this we are unfaithful, who will entrust us with those things which are greater? If we were not able to trample down one who had fallen, who had been disgraced, who had been despised, who was lying beneath our feet, how shall the Father give us a Father's rewards? If we subdue not one so placed in subjection to us, what confidence shall we have to enter into our Father's house? For, tell me, suppose you had a son, and, that he, disregarding the well-disposed part of your household, should associate with them that have distressed you, with them that have been expelled his father's house, with them that spend their time at the gaming table, and that he should go on so doing to the very last; will he not be disinherited? It is plain enough he will. And so too shall we; if, disregarding the Angels who have well pleased our Father and whom He has set over us, we have our conversation with the devil, inevitably we shall be disinherited, which God forbid; but let us engage in the war we have to wage with him.

If any one has an enemy, if any one has been wronged by him, if any one is exasperated, let him collect together all that wrath, all that fierceness, and pour it out upon the head of the devil. Here wrath is a good thing, here anger is profitable, here revenge is praiseworthy, for just as among the heathen, revenge is a vice, so truly here is revenge a virtue. So then if you have any failings, rid yourself of them here. And if you are not able yourself to put them away, do it, though with your members also. Hath any one struck you? Bear malice against the devil, and never relinquish your hatred towards him. Or again, has no one struck you? Yet bear him malice still, because he insulted, because he offended your Lord and Master, because he injures and wars against your brethren. With him be ever at enmity, ever implacable, ever merciless. Thus shall he be humbled, thus despicable, thus shall he be an easy prey. If we are fierce towards him, he shall never be fierce towards us. If we are compliant, then he will be fierce; it is not with him as it is with our brethren. He is the foe and enemy, both of life and salvation, both ours and his own. If he loves not himself, how shall he be able to love us? Let us then put ourselves in array and wound him, having for our

mighty confederate the Lord Jesus Christ, who can both render us impregnable to his snares, and worthy of the good things to come; which God grant that we may all attain, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, together with the Holy Ghost, be unto the Father, glory, might, and honor, now and ever, and throughout all ages. Amen.

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