

Homily 25 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving and caring for those who are weak in faith, and not judging or despising them, but rather showing patience and understanding.

Scripture: Romans 14:1-10

Topics: "Judging Others", "Repentance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of not judging one another based on differing beliefs and practices, particularly in the context of observing dietary laws. He emphasizes the need for mutual respect and understanding among believers, urging them to avoid causing stumbling blocks for others. Chrysostom highlights the accountability each individual has before God and warns against the dangers of leading others astray. He stresses the eternal consequences of our actions and the necessity of repentance and forgiveness in light of God's judgment.

Transcript

Romans XIV. 1, 2

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believes that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eats herbs.

I Am aware that to most what is here said is a difficulty. And therefore I must first give the subject of the whole of this passage, and what he wishes to correct in writing this. What does he wish to correct then? There were many of the Jews which believed, who adhered of conscience to the Law, and after their believing, still kept to the observance of meats, as not having courage yet to quit the service of the Law entirely. Then that they might not be observed if they kept from swine's flesh only, they abstained in consequence from all flesh, and ate herbs only, that what they were doing might have more the appearance of a fast than of observance of the Law.

Others again were farther advanced, (ἰσχυροὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ) and kept up no one thing of the kind, who became to those, who did keep them, distressing and offensive, by reproaching them, accusing them, driving them to despondency. Therefore the blessed Paul, out of fear lest, from a wish to be right about a trifle, they should overthrow the whole, and from a wish to bring them to indifferency about what they ate, should put them in a fair way for deserting the faith, and out of a zeal to put everything right at once, before the fit opportunity had come, should do mischief on vital points, so by this continual rebuking setting

them adrift from their agreement in (ἀ½ ἰ¼ἰζἰ»ἰζἰῖἰἰ, ἰμἰ¼ῖ,) Christ, and so they should remain not righted in either respect: observe what great judgment he uses and how he concerns himself with both interests with his customary wisdom.

For neither does he venture to say to those who rebuke, You are doing amiss, that he may not seem to be confirming the other in their observances; nor again, You are doing right, lest he should make them the more vehement accusers: but he makes his rebuke to square with each. And in appearance he is rebuking the stronger, but he pours forth all he has to say against the other in his address to these. For the kind of correction most likely to be less grating is, when a person addresses some one else, while he is striking a blow at a different person, since this does not permit the person rebuked to fly into a passion, and introduces the medicine of correction unperceived.

See now with what judgment he does this, and how well-timed he is with it. For after saying, make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, then he proceeds to the discussion of these points, that he might not seem to be speaking in defense of those who were the rebukers, and were for eating of anything. For the weaker part ever requires more forethought. Wherefore he aims his blow against the strong, immediately saying as follows, Him that is weak in the faith.

You see one blow immediately given to him. For by calling him weak (ἀ¼€ ἰfἰ, ἰμἰ½ἰζἰ ἀ½•ἰ½ἰ, ἰἰ), he points out that he is not healthy (ἀ¼,, ἰἰἰ%ἰfἰ, ἰζἰ½). Then he adds next, receive, and point out again that he requires much attention. And this is a sign of extreme debility. Not to doubtful disputations. See, he has laid on a third stripe. For here he makes it appear that his error is of such a nature, that even those who do not transgress in the same manner, and who nevertheless admit him to their affection, and are earnestly bent upon curing him, are at doubt.

You see how in appearance he is conversing with these, but is rebuking others secretly and without giving offense. Then by placing them beside each other, one he gives encomiums, the other accusations. For he goes on to say, One believes that he may eat all things, commending him on the score of his faith. Another who is weak, eats herbs, disparaging this one again, on the score of his weakness. Then since the blow he had given was deadly (ἰῖἰἰἰἰἰἰἰἰἰἰἰ, used hyperbolically), he comforts him again in these words,

Ver. 3. Let not him that eats, despise him that eats not.

He does not say, let him alone, nor does he say, do not blame him, nor yet, do not set him right; but do not reproach him, do not despise him, to show they were doing a thing perfectly ridiculous. But of this he speaks in other words. Let not him which eats not, judge him that eats. For as the more advanced made light of these, as of little faith, and falsely healed, and spurious, and still Judaizers, so they too judged these as law-breakers, or as given to gluttony. And of these it is likely that many were of the Gentiles too. Wherefore he proceeds, for God has received him. But in the other's case he does not say this. And yet to be despised was the eater's share, as a glutton, but to be judged, his that did not eat, as of little faith. But he has made them change places, to show that he not only does not deserve to be despised, but that he can even despise. But do I condemn him? He means. By no means. For this is why he proceeds, for God has received him. Why then do you speak to him of the law, as to a transgressor? For God has received him: that is, has shown His unspeakable grace about him, and has freed him from all charges against him; then again he turns to the strong.

Ver. 4. Who are you that judgest another man's servant?

He still keeps to the same subject. And what he means is about this. The thing is not concerned with fundamentals. For the thing requisite is, if this person and the other are acting for God's sake, the thing requisite is (these words are repeated 3 manuscripts), if both terminate in thanksgiving. For indeed both this man and that give thanks to God. If then both do give thanks to God, the difference is no great one. But let me draw your notice to the way in which here also he aims unawares a blow at the Judaizers. For if the thing required be this, the giving of thanks, it is plain enough that he which eats it is that gives thanks, and not he which eats not. For how should he, while he still holds to the Law? As then he told the Galatians, As many of you as are justified by the Law are fallen from grace Galatians 5:4; so here he hints it only, but does not unfold it so much. For as yet it was not time to do so. But for the present he bears with it (see p. 337): but by what follows he gives it a further opening. For where he says,

Ver. 7, 8. For none of us lives unto himself, and no man dies unto himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord, by this too he makes the same clearer. For how can he that lives unto the Law, be living unto Christ? But this is not the only thing that he effects by this, he also holds back the person who was in so much haste for their being set right, and persuades him to be patient, by showing that it is impossible for God to despise them, but that in due time He will set them right. What is the force then of none of us lives to himself? It means, We are not free, we have a Master who also would have us live, and wills not that we die, and to whom both of these are of more interest than to us. For by what is here said he shows that he has a greater concern for us than we have ourselves, and considers more than we do, as well our life to be wealth, as our death to be a loss. For we do not die to ourselves alone, but to our Master also, if we do die. But by death here he means that from the faith. However, this were enough to convince us that He takes care for us, in that it is to Him we live, and to Him we die. Still he is not satisfied with saying this, but proceeds further. For after saying, Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's, and passing from that death to the physical one, that he may not give an appearance of harshness to his language, he gives another very great indication of His care for us. Now of what kind is this?

Ver. 9. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.

And so let us at least convince you, that He is thoughtful for our salvation. For had He not had this great care for us, where were the need of the Dispensation (or Incarnation, ἵνα ἡμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ ζωοποιηθῶμεν)? He then that has shown so much anxiety about our becoming His, as to take the form of a servant, and to die, will He despise us after we have become so? This cannot be so, assuredly it cannot! Nor would He choose to waste so much pains. For to this end (he says) he also died, as if any one were to say, Such an one will not have the heart to despise his servant. For he minded his own purse. Cf. Exodus 21:21 For indeed we are not so much in love with money, as is He with our salvation. Wherefore it was not money, but His own Blood that He gave as bail for us. And for this cause He would not have the heart to give them up, for whom He had laid down so great a price. See too how he shows that His power also is unspeakable. For he says, to this end He both died and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living. And above he said, for whether we live or die, we are His. See what a wide extended Mastery! see what unconquerable might! see what exact providence over us! For tell me not, he means, of the living. Even for the departed He takes care. But if He does of the departed, it is quite plain that He does of the living also. For He has not omitted any point for this Mastery, making out for Himself more claims than men do, and especially beside all other things in order to take care of us. For a man puts down money, and for this clings strongly to his own slave. But He Himself paid down His death; and the salvation of one who was

purchased at so great a price, and the Mastery over whom He had gained with so much anxiety and trouble, He is not likely to count of no value. But this he says to make the Judaizer abashed, and to persuade him to call to mind the greatness of the benefit, and how that when dead he had come to be alive, and that there was nothing that he gained from the Law, and how that it would be the last degree of unfeelingness, to leave Him Who had shown so much care toward him, and run away back to the Law. After attacking him then sufficiently, he relaxes again, and says,

Ver. 10. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nought your brother?

And so he seems to be setting them upon a level, but from that he has said, he shows that the difference between them is great. First then by the appellation of brother he does away with disputatiousness, and then also by calling that awful day to their mind. For after saying, Why do you set at nought your brother? he proceeds, For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

And he seems indeed to be again rebuking the more advanced in saying this, but he is putting the mind of the Judaizer to confusion by not only calling for his reverence to the benefit that had been done him, but also making him afraid of the punishment to come. For we shall all, he says, stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Ver. 11, 12. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

See how he again puts his mind into confusion, while he seems to be rebuking the other. For he intimates some such thing, as if he had said, How does it affect you? Are you to be punished for him? But this he does not say, but hints at it by putting it in a milder form, and saying, For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ: and, So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. And he introduces the prophet in witness of the subjection of all to Him, yea a subjection extended even to those in the Old Testament, and of all absolutely. For he does not barely say every one shall worship, but shall confess, that is, shall give an account of what he has done. Be in anxiety then as seeing the Master of all sitting on his judgment-seat, and do not make schisms and divisions in the Church, by breaking away from grace, and running over to the Law. For the Law also is His. And why say I so of the Law? Even those in the Law and those before the Law are His. And it is not the Law that will demand an account of you, but Christ, of you and of all the human race. See how he has released us from the fear of the Law. Then that he may not seem to be saying this to frighten them for the occasion, but to have come to it in the course he had proposed himself, he again keeps to the same subject, and says,

Ver. 13. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

This does not apply to one less than the other: wherefore it may well fit with both, both the advanced man that was offended at the observance of meats, and the unadvanced that stumbled at the vehement rebuke given him. But consider, I pray you, the great punishment we shall suffer, if we give offense at all. For if in a case where the thing was against law, yet, as they rebuked unseasonably, he forbade their doing it, in order that a brother might not be made to offend and stumble; when we give an offense without having anything to set right even, what treatment shall we deserve?

For if not saving others be a crime (and that it is so, he who buried the talent proves), what will be the effect of giving him offense also? But what if he gives himself the offense, you may say, by being weak?

Why this is just why you ought to be patient. For if he were strong, then he would not require so much attention. But now, since he is of the feebler sort, he does on this ground need considerable care. Let us then yield him this, and in all respects bear his burdens, as it is not of our own sins only that we shall have to give an account, but for those also wherein we cause others to offend.

For if that account, were even by itself hard to pass, when these be added too, how are we to be saved? And let us not suppose, that if we can find accomplices in our sins, that will be an excuse; as this will prove an addition to our punishment. Since the serpent too was punished more than the woman, as was the woman likewise more than the man 1 Timothy 2:14; and Jezebel also was punished more severely than Ahab, who had seized the vineyard; for it was she that devised the whole matter, and caused the king to offend. 1 Kings 21:23-29 And therefore thou, when you are the author of destruction to others, will suffer more severely than those who have been subverted by you.

For sinning is not so ruinous as leading others also into the same. Wherefore he speaks of those who not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:32 And so when we see any sinning, let us, so far from thrusting them on, even pull them back from the pit of iniquity, that we may not have to be punished for the ruin of others besides ourselves. And let us be continually in mind of the awful judgment-seat, of the stream of fire, of the chains never to be loosed, of the darkness with no light, the gnashing of teeth, and the venomous worm.

Ah, but God is merciful! Are these then mere words? And was not that rich man punished for despising Lazarus? Are not the foolish virgins cast out of the Bride-chamber? Do not they who did not feed Him go away into the fire prepared for the devil? Matthew 25:41 Will not he that has soiled garments be bound hand and foot Matthew 22:13, and go to ruin? Will, not he that demanded the hundred pence to be paid, be given over to the tormentors? Is not that said of the adulterers true, that their worm shall not die, nor their fire be quenched?

Mark 9:43 Are these but mere threats then? Yea, it is answered. And from what source pray do you venture to make such an assertion, and that too when you pass judgment of your own opinion? Why, I shall be able to prove the contrary, both from what He said, and from what He did. See John 5:22 For if you will not believe by the punishments that are to come, at least believe by those that have happened already. For what have happened, and have come forth into reality, surely are not threats and words.

Who then was it that flooded the whole world, and affected that baleful wreck, and the utter destruction of our whole race! Who was it that after this hurled those thunders and lightnings upon the land of Sodom? Who that drowned all Egypt in the sea? Who that consumed the six hundred thousand men in the wilderness? Who that burnt up the synagogue of Abiram? Who that bade the earth open her mouth for the company of Core and Dathan, and swallow them up? Who that carried off the threescore and ten thousand at one sweep in David's time?

Shall I mention also those that were punished individually! Cain, who was given up to a continual vengeance? (the son of) Charmi, who was stoned with his whole family? Or him, that suffered the same thing for gathering sticks on the sabbath? The forty children who were consumed by those beasts, and obtained no pardon even on the score of their age? And if you would see these same things even after the times of grace, just consider what great suffering the Jews had, how the women ate their children, some roasting them, and some consuming them in other ways: how after being given up to irremediable famine, and wars varied and severe, they threw all previous catastrophes into the shade by the exceeding

greatness of their own calamities.

For that it was Christ Who did these things unto them, hear Him declaring as much, both by parables, and clearly and explicitly. By parables, as when He says, But those that would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them Luke 19:27; and by that of the vineyard, and that of the marriage. But clearly and explicitly, as when He threatens that they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into the nations, and there shall be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, at the roaring of the sea and waves; men's hearts failing them for fear. (ib. 21:24, 25, 26.)

And there shall be tribulation, such as there never was, no, nor ever shall be. Matthew 24:21 And what a punishment Ananias too and Sapphira suffered, for the theft of a few pieces of money, you all know. Do you see not the daily calamities also? Or have these too not taken place? Do you see not now men that are pining with famine? Those that suffer elephantiasis, or are maimed in body? Those that live in constant poverty, those that suffer countless irreparable evils? Now then will it be reasonable for some to be punished, and some not?

For if God be not unjust (and unjust He is not), thou also will assuredly suffer punishment, if you sin. But if because He is merciful He does not punish, then ought not these either to have been punished. But now because of these words of yours, God even here punishes many, that when you believe not the words of the threatening, the deeds of vengeance ye may at least believe.

And since things of old do not affright you so much, by things which happen in every generation, He corrects those that in every generation are growing listless. And what is the reason, it may be said, why He does not punish all here? That He may give the others an interval for repentance. Why then does He not take vengeance upon all in the next world? It is lest many should disbelieve in His providence. How many robbers are there who have been taken, and how many that have left this life unpunished?

Where is the mercy of God then? It is my turn now to ask of you. For supposing no one at all had vengeance taken upon him, then you might have taken refuge in this. But now that some are punished, and some are not, though they be the worse sinners, how can it be reasonable that there be not the same punishments for the same sins? How can those punished appear to be else than wronged? What reason is there then why all are not punished here? Hear His own defense for these things.

For when some had died by the falling of a tower on them: He said to those who raised a question upon this, Suppose ye that they were sinners above all men? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, you shall all likewise perish Luke 13:4-5; so exhorting us not to feel confident when others suffer punishment, and we ourselves, though we have committed many transgressions, do not. For except we change our conduct, we assuredly shall suffer. And how, it may be said, is it that we are to be punished without end for sinning a short time here?

How, I ask, is it that in this world, those who in a short moment of time have done one murder, are condemned to constant punishment in the mines? But it is not God that does this, it may be said. How then came He to keep the man with a palsy for thirty and eight years in so great punishments? For that it was for sins that He punished him, hear what He says, Behold, you are made whole, sin no more. John 5:14 Still it is said, he found a release. But the case is not so with the other life.

For that there, there will never be any release, hear from His own mouth, Their worm will not die, nor their fire be quenched. Mark 9:44 And these shall go into everlasting life, but these into everlasting punishment.

Matthew 25:46 Now if the life be eternal, the punishment is eternal. Do you see not how severely He threatened the Jews? Then have the things threatened come to pass, or were those that were told them a mere talk? One stone shall not remain upon another. Luke 21:6 And has it remained?

But what, when He says, There shall be tribulation such as has not been? Matthew 24:21 Has it not come then? Read the history of Josephus, and you will not be able to draw your breath even, at only hearing what they suffered for their doings. This I say, not that I may pain you, but that I may make you secure, and lest by having humored you overmuch, I should but make a way for the endurance of sorer punishments. For why, pray, do you not deem it right you should be punished for sinning?

Hath He not told you all beforehand? Hath He not threatened you? Not come to your aid? not done things even without number for your salvation's sake? Gave He you not the laver of Regeneration, and forgave He not all your former sins? Hath He not after this forgiveness, and the laver, also given you the succor of repentance if you sin? Hath He not made the way to forgiveness of sins, even after all this, easy to you? Hear then what He has enjoined: If you forgive your neighbor, I also will forgive you Matthew 6:14, He says.

What hardship is there in this? If you judge the cause of the fatherless, and see that the widow have right, come and let us converse together, He says, and if your sins be as purple, I will make them white as snow. Isaiah 1:17-18 What labor is there here? Tell your sins, that you may be justified. Isaiah 43:26, Septuagint What hardship is there in this? Redeem your sins with alms. Daniel 4:24 What toilsomeness is there in this? The Publican said, Be merciful to me a sinner, and went down home justified.

Luke 18:13-14 What labor is it to imitate the Publican? And will you not be persuaded even after this that there is punishment and vengeance? At that rate you will deny that even the devil is punished. For, Depart, He says, into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41 Now if there be no hell, then neither is he punished. But if he is punished, it is plain that we shall also. For we also have disobeyed, even if it be not in the same way. And how do you come not to be afraid to speak such daring things?

For when you say that God is merciful, and does not punish, if He should punish he will be found in your case to be no longer merciful. See then unto what language the devil leads you? And what are the monks that have taken up with the mountains, and yield examples of such manifold self-denial, to go away without their crown? For if the wicked are not to be punished, and there is no recompense made to any one, some one else will say, perhaps, that neither are the good crowned.

Nay, it will be said, For this is suitable with God, that there should be a kingdom only, and not a hell. Well then, shall the whoremonger, and the adulterer, and the man who has done evils unnumbered, enjoy the same advantages with the man who has exhibited soberness and holiness, and Paul is to stand with Nero, or rather even the devil with Paul? For if there be no hell and yet there will be a Resurrection of all, then the wicked will attain to the same good things! And who would say this?

Who even of men that were quite crazed? Or rather, which of the devils even would say this? For even they confess that there is a hell. Wherefore also they cried out and said, Have You come hither to torment us before the time? Matthew 8:29

How then do you come not to fear and tremble, when even the devils confess what yourself art denying? Or how is it that thou dost not see who is the teacher of these evil doctrines? For he who deceived the first

man, and under the pretext of greater hopes, threw them out even of the blessings they had in possession, he it is who now suggests the saying and fancying of these things. And for this reason he persuades some to suspect there is no hell, that he may thrust them into hell.

As God on the other hand threatens hell, and made hell ready, that by coming to know of it you might so live as not to fall into hell. And yet if, when there is a hell, the devil persuades you to these things, how came the devils to confess it, if it did not exist, whose aim and desire it is that we should not suspect anything of the kind, that through fearlessness we might become the more listless, and so fall with them into that fire? How then (it will be said) came they to confess it?

It was through their not bearing the compulsion laid upon them. Taking all these things into consideration then, let those who talk in this way leave off deceiving both themselves and others since even for these words of theirs they will be punished for detracting (ἀποκρίσει, ἀποκρίσει,) from those awful things, and relaxing the vigor of many who are minded to be in earnest, and do not even do as much as those barbarians, for they, though they were ignorant of everything, when they heard that the city was to be destroyed, were so far from disbelieving, that they even groaned, and girded themselves with sackcloth, and were confounded, and did not cease to use every means until they had allayed the wrath.

Jonah 3:5 But do you, who hast had so great experience of facts and of teaching, make light of what is told you? The contrary then will be your fate. For as they through fear of the words had not to undergo the vengeance in act, so thou who despisest the threatening by words, will have to undergo the punishment in very deed. And if now what you are told seems a fable to you, it will not, however, seem so when the very things convince you, in that Day. Have you never noticed what He did even in this world?

How when He met with two thieves, He counted them not worthy of the same estate, but one He led into the Kingdom, and the other He sent away into Hell? And why speak I of a robber and murderer? For even the Apostle He did not spare, when he had become a traitor, but even when He saw him rushing to the halter, and hanging, and bursting asunder in the midst (for he did burst asunder, and all his bowels gushed out) Acts 1:18, still when He foresaw all these things, He let him suffer all the same, giving you from the present a proof of all that is in the other world also.

Do not then cheat yourselves, through being persuaded of the devil. These devices are his. For if both judges, and masters, and teachers, and savages, respect the good, and punish the evil, with what reason is the contrary to be the case with God, while the good man and he who is not so are deemed worthy of the same estate? And when will they leave off their wickedness? For they who now are expecting punishment, and are among so many terrors, those from the judges and from the laws, and yet do not for this depart from iniquity; when on their departing this life they are to lay aside even this fear, and are not only not to be cast into hell, but are even to obtain a kingdom; when will they leave doing wickedly?

Is this then mercy, pray? To add to wickedness, to set up rewards for iniquity, to count the sober and the unchastened, the faithful and the irreligious, Paul and the devil, to have the same deserts? But how long am I to be trifling? Wherefore I exhort you to get you free from this madness, and having grown to be your own masters, persuade your souls to fear and to tremble, that they may at once be saved from the hell to come, and may, after passing the life in this world soberly, attain unto the good things to come by the grace and love towards man, etc.

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