

Homily 3 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the wrath of God and the unrighteousness of men, highlighting the consequences of perverting the laws and serving the creature more than the Creator.

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Jeremiah 2:13, Daniel 6:24, John 16:33, Romans 1:18, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Corinthians 11:32

Topics: "Gods Wrath", "Steadfast Faith"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Romans 1:18, emphasizing the severity of God's wrath against ungodliness and unrighteousness, revealing how those who reject the truth are left to their own devices. He highlights the progression from knowing God to dishonoring Him, worshiping created things over the Creator, and the consequences of holding down the truth in unrighteousness. Chrysostom challenges believers to withstand insults and temptations, drawing examples from biblical figures like Daniel and encouraging a steadfast faith amidst trials.

Transcript

Rom. I. 18

For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.

Observe the discretion of Paul, how after encouraging by the gentler things, he turns his discourse to the more fearful. For after saying that the Gospel is the cause of salvation and of life, that it is the power of God, that it genders salvation and righteousness, he mentions what might well make them fear that were heedless of it. For since in general most men are not drawn so much by the promise of what is good as by the fear of what is painful, he draws them on both sides.

For this cause too did God not only promise a kingdom, but also threaten hell. And the Prophets spoke thus with the Jews, ever intermingling the evil with the good. For this cause too Paul thus varies his discourse, yet not any how, but he sets first the good things, and after the evil, to show that the former came of the guiding purpose of God, but the latter of the wickedness of the backsliding. And in this way the prophet puts the good first, saying, If you be willing and will obey me, you shall eat the good of the land: but if you be not willing and will not obey me, the sword shall devour you.

Isaiah 1:19-20 So here too does Paul conduct his discourse. But observe him; Christ, he means, came to bring forgiveness, righteousness, life, yet not in any way, but by the Cross, which is greatest too and wonderful, that He not only gave such things, but that He also suffered such things. If then ye insolently scorn the gifts, then will the penalties await you. And see how he raises his language, For the wrath of God, he says, is revealed from heaven. Whence does this appear?

If it be a believer who says this, we will tell him of the declarations of Christ, but if the unbeliever and the Grecian, him Paul silences, by what he says presently of the judgment of God, bringing an uncontrovertible demonstration from the things which were done by them. And this too is by far the most striking point in him, how he exhibits those who speak against the truth, as themselves bearing witness by the things which they do daily, and say, to the doctrines of the truth.

But of this in the sequel: but for the present, let us keep to what is set before us. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. And indeed even here this often takes place in famines and pestilences and wars: for each individually and all in common are punished. What will be the new thing then? That the chastisement will be greater, and common to all, and not by the same rules. For now what takes place is for correction; but then for vengeance. And this also St. Paul showed, when he said, We are chastened now, that we should not be condemned with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:32 And now indeed to many such things usually seem to come not of the wrath from above, but of the malice of man.

But then the punishment from God shall be manifest, when the Judge, sitting upon the fearful tribunal, shall command some to be dragged to the furnaces, and some to the outer darkness, and some to other inexorable and intolerable punishments. And why is it that he does not speak as plainly as this, the Son of God is coming with ten thousand angels, and will call each man to account, but says, that the wrath of God is revealed? His hearers were as yet novices, and therefore he draws them first by things quite allowed by them.

And besides what is here mentioned, he also seems to me to be aiming against the Greeks. And this is why he makes his beginning from this, but afterwards he introduces the subject of Christ's judgment.

Against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Here he shows that the ways of ungodliness are many, and that of truth, one. For error is a thing various and multiform and compound, but the truth is one. And after speaking of doctrines he speaks of life, mentioning the unrighteousness of men. For there be various kinds of unrighteousness also. One is in money affairs, as when any one deals unrighteously by his neighbor in these; and another in regard to women, when a man leaves his own wife, and breaks in upon the marriage of another. For St. Paul calls this also defrauding, saying thus, That no man go beyond or defraud his brother in the matter. 1 Thessalonians 4:6 Others again injure not the wife or property, but the reputation of their neighbor, and this too is unrighteousness. For a good name is better than great riches. Proverbs 22:1 But some say that this also is said of Paul about doctrines. Still there is nothing to prevent its having been said of both. But what it is to hold the truth in unrighteousness, learn from the sequel.

Ver. 19. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has showed it unto them.

But this glory they invested stocks and stones with. As then he which is entrusted with the goods of the king, and is ordered to spend them upon the king's glory, if he waste these upon robbers, and harlots, and witches, and make these splendid out of the king's stores, he is punished as having done the kingdom the greatest wrong. Thus they also who after having received the knowledge of God and of His glory, invested

idols therewith, held the truth in unrighteousness, and, at least as far as was in their power, dealt unrighteously by the knowledge, by not using it upon fitting objects. Now, has what was said become clear to you, or must one make it still clearer? Perhaps it were needful to say somewhat more. What then is it which is here said? The knowledge of Himself God placed in men from the beginning. But this knowledge they invested stocks and stones with, and so dealt unrighteously to the truth, as far at least as they might. For it abides unchanged, having its own glory immutable. And whence is it plain that He placed in them this knowledge, O Paul? Because, says he, that which may be known of Him is manifest in them. This, however, is an assertion, not a proof. But do thou make it good, and show me that the knowledge of God was plain to them, and that they willingly turned aside. Whence was it plain then? Did He send them a voice from above? By no means. But what was able to draw them to Him more than a voice, that He did, by putting before them the Creation, so that both wise, and unlearned, and Scythian, and barbarian, having through sight learned the beauty of the things which were seen, might mount up to God. Wherefore he says,

Ver. 20. For the invisible things of Him from the Creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made.

Which also the prophet said, The heavens declare the glory of God. Psalm 19:1 For what will the Greeks (i.e. Heathen) say in that day? That we were ignorant of You? Did ye then not hear the heaven sending forth a voice by the sight, while the well-ordered harmony of all things spoke out more clearly than a trumpet? Did ye not see the hours of night and day abiding unmoved continually, the goodly order of winter, spring, and the other seasons remaining both sure and unmoved, the tractableness (ἰμάτῃ ἀκίνητῳ ἡμέρας ἑξήκοντα δύο) of the sea amid all its turbulence and waves? All things abiding in order and by their beauty and their grandeur, preaching aloud of the Creator? For all these things and more than these does Paul sum up in saying, The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His eternal Power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. And yet it is not for this God has made these things, even if this came of it. For it was not to bereave them of all excuse, that He set before them so great a system of teaching, but that they might come to know Him. But by not having recognized Him they deprived themselves of every excuse, and then to show how they are bereaved of excuse, he says,

Ver. 21. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God.

This is the one greatest charge; and the second after it is their also worshipping idols, as Jeremy too in accusing them said, This people has committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living water, and have dug for themselves broken cisterns. Jeremiah 2:13 And then as a sign of their having known God, and not used their knowledge upon a fit object, he adduces this very thing, that they knew gods. Wherefore he adds, because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God. And he names the cause through which they fell into such senselessness. What then is it? They trusted everything to their reasonings. Still he does not word it so, but in a much sharper language, but became vain in their reasonings, and their foolish heart was darkened. For as in a night without a moon, if any one attempt to go by a strange road, or to sail over a strange sea, so far will he be from soon reaching his destination, that he will speedily be lost. Thus they, attempting to go the way leading to Heaven, and having destroyed the light from their own selves, and, in lieu of it, trusted themselves to the darkness of their own reasoning, and seeking in bodies for Him who is incorporeal, and in shapes for Him who has no shape, underwent a most rueful shipwreck. But beside what has been said, he names also another cause of their error, when he says,

neither was any scathe done to the bearings of His glory, but He abides continually blessed. For if it often happen, that man through philosophy would not feel the insults men offered him, much less would God, the imperishable and unalterable Nature, the unchangeable and immovable Glory.

For men are in this respect made like God, when they do not feel what is inflicted by them who would do them despite, and are neither insulted of others who insult them, nor beaten of them when beating them, nor made scorn of when they make scorn of them. And how in the nature of things can this be? It may be said. It is so, yea most certainly it is possible, when you are not vexed at what is done. And how, it may be said, is it possible not to be vexed? Nay rather, how is it possible to be vexed?

Tell me now, if your little child were to insult you, would you then reckon the insult an insult? What, but would you be vexed? Surely not. But and if you were to be vexed, would you not then be ridiculous? Thus too let us then get to feel disposed towards our neighbors, and then we shall have no sense of displeasure. For they that insult us are more senseless than children. Neither let us even seek to be free from insults, but when we are insulted to bear them. For this is the only secure honor.

But why so? Because this you are master of, but that, another person. Do you not see the adamant reverberating the blows it receives? But nature, you will say, gives it this property. Yet you too have it in your power to become by free choice such, as that happens to be by nature. How? Do you not know that the children in the furnace were not burned? And that Daniel in the den suffered no harm? This may even now come to pass. There stand by us too lions, anger and lust, with fearful teeth tearing asunder him that falls among them. (Plato Rep. viii.)

Become then like that (á¼" Î°Î¼Î½Î¼Î½ 3 manuscripts) Daniel, and let not these affections fasten their fangs into your soul. But that, you will say, was wholly of grace. Yes; because the acts of free-will led the way thereto. So that if we be willing to train ourselves to a like character, even now the grace is at hand. And even though the brutes be an hungered, yet will they not touch your sides. For if at the sight of a servant's body they were abashed, when they have seen the members of Christ, (and this is what we believers are,) how shall they do else than be still?

Yet if they be not still, it is owing to the fault of those cast among them. For indeed many spend largely upon these lions, by keeping harlots, breaking through marriages, taking vengeance upon enemies. And so before ever they come to the bottom of the den they get torn in pieces. Daniel 6:24 But with Daniel this did not so happen, neither yet would it with us, if we were so minded, but even a greater thing would take place than what then happened. For the lions hurt not him; and if we be sober-minded, then will they that hurt us even profit us.

Thus then did Paul grow bright out of those that thwarted him and plotted against him, thus Job out of the many scourges, thus Jeremy out of the miry pit, thus Noah out of the flood, thus Abel out of the treachery, thus Moses out of the bloodthirsty Jews, thus, Elisha, thus each of the worthies of old, not out of relaxedness and softness, but out of tribulations and trials, came to be attired with their bright crowns. Wherefore also Christ, inasmuch as He knew this to be the groundwork of a good report, said to His disciples, In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

John 16:33 What then, they will say, Have not many been turned to flight by these terrors? Yes, but that was not of the nature of temptation, but of their own remissness. But He that with the temptation makes also an escape, so that you may be able to bear it 1 Corinthians 10:13, may He stand by all of us, and reach forth His hand, that being gloriously proclaimed victorious we may attain to the everlasting crowns,

through the grace and love towards man (5 manuscripts add the rest and so Field passim) of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom, and with Whom, to the Father be glory, with the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

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