

Homily 5 on Second Thessalonians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of God's faithfulness, human cooperation, and the necessity of living a disciplined Christian life in his homily on Second Thessalonians.

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:5

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of living a virtuous life and being obedient to God's commandments. He encourages believers to imitate the example set by Paul and to work diligently, not being idle or disorderly. Chrysostom highlights the need for cooperation between God's grace and human effort, stressing the significance of prayer, good works, and patience in enduring trials. He urges individuals to be mindful of their actions, to be diligent in their work, and to maintain peace and love in all circumstances.

Transcript

2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you that you both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ.

Neither ought we, having committed everything to the prayers of the Saints, to be idle ourselves, and run into wickedness, and to lay hold of nothing; nor again when working good to despise that succor. For great indeed are the things which prayer for us can effect, but it is when we ourselves also work. For this reason Paul also, praying for them, and again giving them assurance from the promise, says, But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from the evil one. For if He has chosen you to salvation, He does not deceive you, nor suffer you utterly to perish. But that he may not by these means lead them to sloth, and lest they thinking the whole to be of God should themselves sleep, see how he also demands coöperation from them, saying, And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that you both do and will do the things which we command you. The Lord indeed, he says, is faithful, and having promised to save will certainly save; but as He promised. And how did He promise? If we be willing, and hear Him; not simply (hearing), nor like stocks and stones, being inactive.

And he has well introduced the words, We have confidence in the Lord, that is, we trust to His lovingkindness. Again he brings them down, making everything depend thereupon. For if he had said, We have confidence in you, the commendation indeed was great, but it would not have taught them to make all things dependent upon God. And if he had said, We have confidence in the Lord, that He will preserve you, and had not added as touching you, and, that you do and will do the things which we command you, he would have made them more slothful, by casting everything upon the power of God. For it becomes us indeed to cast everything upon Him, yet working also ourselves, embarked in the labors and the conflicts. And he shows that even if our virtue alone were sufficient to save, yet nevertheless it ought to be persevering, and to abide with us until we come to our latest breath.

But the Lord, he says, direct your hearts into the love of God, and the patience of Christ.

Again he commends them, and prays, showing his concern for them. For when he is about to enter upon reproof, he previously smooths down their minds, by saying, I am confident that you will hear, and by requesting prayers from them, and by again invoking upon them infinite blessings.

But the Lord, he says, direct your hearts into the love of God. For there are many things that turn us aside from love, and there are many paths that draw us away from thence. In the first place the path of Mammon, laying, as it were, certain shameless hands upon our soul, and tenaciously holding it in its grasp, draws and drags us thence even against our will. Then vainglory and often afflictions and temptations, turn us aside. For this reason we need, as a certain wind, the assistance of God, that our sail may be impelled, as by some strong wind, to the love of God. For tell me not, I love Him, even more than myself. These are words. Show it to me by your works, if you love Him more than yourself. Love Him more than money, and then I shall believe that you love Him even more than yourself. But you who despisest not riches for the sake of God, how will you despise yourself? But why do I say riches? Thou who despisest not covetousness, which you ought to do even without the commandments of God, how will you despise yourself?

And into the patience of Christ, he says. What is into the patience? That we should endure even as He endured, or that we should do those things, or that with patience also we should wait for Him, that is, that we should be prepared. For since He has promised many things, and Himself is coming to judge the quick and the dead, let us wait for Him, and let us be patient. But wherever he speaks of patience, he of course implies affliction. For this is to love God; to endure, and not to be troubled.

Ver. 6. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly and not after the tradition which they received of us.

That is, it is not we that say these things, but Christ, for that is the meaning of in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; equivalent to through Christ. Showing the fearfulness of the message, he says, through Christ. Christ therefore commanded us in no case to be idle. That you withdraw yourselves, he says, from every brother. Tell me not of the rich, tell me not of the poor, tell me not of the holy. This is disorder. That walks, he says, that is, lives. And not after the tradition which they received from me. Tradition, he says, which is through works. And this he always calls properly tradition.

Ver. 7, 8. For yourselves know how you ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat bread for nought at any man's hand.

And yet even if they had eaten, it would not have been for nought. For the laborer, he says, is worthy of his hire. Luke 10:7

But in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you. Not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you that you should imitate us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, If any will not work, neither let him eat.

See how in the former Epistle indeed he discourses somewhat more mildly concerning these things; as when he says, We beseech you, brethren -- that you would abound more and more -- and that you study 1 Thessalonians 4:1-11-- and nowhere does he say, we command, nor in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was fearful and implied danger, but that you abound, he says, and study, which are the words of one exhorting to virtue; that you may walk honestly (becomingly), he says. 1 Thessalonians 4:12 But here is nothing of this kind, but if any one will not work, says he, neither let him eat. For if Paul, not being under a necessity, and having a right to be idle, and having undertaken so great a work, did nevertheless work, and not merely work, but night and day, so that he was able even to assist others -- much more ought others to do this.

Ver. 11. For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies.

This indeed he says here; but there, in the first Epistle, he says, that you may walk honestly towards them that are without. On what account? Perhaps there was as yet no such thing. For upon another occasion also admonishing, he says, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 But the expression, walk honestly has no reference to disorder; wherefore he added, that you may have need of nothing. 1 Thessalonians 4:12 And here he sets down another necessity, for thus doing what was honorable and good towards all. (For as he proceeds, he says, be not weary in well doing.) For certainly he that is idle and yet able to work must needs be a busybody. But alms are given to those only who are not able to support themselves by the work of their own hands, or who teach, and are wholly occupied in the business of teaching. For you shall not muzzle the ox, he says, when he treads out the grain. Deuteronomy 25:4 And the laborer is worthy of his hire. 1 Timothy 5:18, and Luke 10:7 So that neither is he idle, but receives the reward of work and great work too. But to pray and fast, being idle, is not the work of the hands. For the work that he is here speaking of is the work of the hands. And that you may not suspect any such thing, he has added,

That work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because he had touched them severely, wishing to render his discourse more mild, he adds, through the Lord, again what is authoritative and fearful.

That with quietness, he says, they work, and eat their own bread.

For why has he not said, But if they are not disorderly let them be maintained by you; but requires both, that they be quiet, and that they work? That they may eat their own bread, says he, not that of another.

Ver. 13. But you, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

See how immediately the fatherly heart was overcome. He was not able to carry out his reproof farther, but again pitied them. And see with what discretion! He has not said, But pardon them, until they are amended; but what? But you, be not weary in well doing. Withdraw yourselves, he says, from them, and

reprove them; do not, however, suffer them to perish with hunger. What then, he says, if having abundance from us, he should remain idle? In that case, he says, I have spoken of a mild remedy, that you withdraw yourselves from him, that is, do not partake with him in free conversation; show that you are angry. This is no little matter. For such is the reproof that is given to a brother, if we wish really to amend him. We are not ignorant of the methods of reproof. For tell me, if you had a brother in the flesh, would you then overlook him pining with hunger? Truly I think not; but perhaps you would even correct him.

Ver. 14. And if any man obeys not our word by this Epistle.

He has not said, He that disobeys, disobeys me, but note that man. This is no slight chastisement. Have no company with him. Then again he says, that he may be ashamed. And he does not permit them to proceed farther. For as he had said, if any does not work neither let him eat fearing lest they should perish by hunger, he has added, But in doing good, be not weary. Thus having said, Withdraw yourselves, and have no company with him, then fearing lest this very thing might cut him off from the brotherhood -- for he who gives himself up to despair will quickly be lost if he is not admitted to freedom of conversation -- he has added,

Ver. 15. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

By this he shows that he has assigned a heavy punishment against him, in depriving him of freedom of conversation.

For if to be a receiver even with many others is worthy of disgrace, when they even reprove while they offer it, and withdraw themselves, how great is the reproach, quite sufficient to sting the soul. For if only giving rather tardily, and with murmuring, they inflame the receivers -- for tell me not of impudent beggars, but of the faithful -- if they were to reprove while they give, what would they not do? To what punishment would it not be equal? We do not do so, but as if we had been greatly injured, we so insult and turn away from those who beg of us. Thou dost not give, but why do you also grieve him? Admonish them, he says, as brethren, do not insult them as enemies. He who admonishes his brother, does it not publicly. He does not make an open show of the insult, but he does it privately and with much address, and grieving, as hurt, and weeping and lamenting. Let us bestow therefore with the disposition of a brother, let us admonish with the good will of a brother, not as if we grieved at giving, but as if we grieved for his transgressing the commandment. Since what is the advantage? For if, even after giving, you insult, you destroy the pleasure of giving. But when you do not give and yet insult, what wrong do you not do to that wretched and unfortunate man? He came to you, to receive pity from you, but he goes away having received a deadly blow, and weeps the more. For when by reason of his poverty he is compelled to beg, and is insulted on account of his begging, think how great will be the punishment of those who insult him. He that dishonors the poor, it says, provokes his Maker. Proverbs 14:12-31, Septuagint For tell me, did He allow him to be poor for your sake, that you might be able to heal yourself -- and do you insult him who for your sake is poor? What obstinacy is this! What an act of ingratitude is it! Admonish him as a brother, he says, and after having given, he orders you to admonish him. But if even without giving we insult him, what excuse shall we have?

Ver. 16. Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways.

See how, when he mentions the things that are to be done, he sets his mark upon them by prayer, adding prayer and supplication, like certain marks set upon things that are laid up. Give you peace, he says, at all times, in all ways. For since it was likely that contentions would arise from these things, those men

becoming exasperated, and the others not supplying such persons so readily as formerly, he with good reason now offered this prayer for them, saying, Give you peace at all times. For this is what is sought, that they may ever have it. In every way, says he. What is, in every? So that they may have no occasion of contention from any quarter. For everywhere peace is a good thing, even towards those who are without. For hear him elsewhere saying, If it be possible, as much as in you lies, be at peace with all men. Romans 12:18 For nothing is so conducive to the right performance of the things which we wish, as to be peaceable and undisturbed, and to be free from all hatred, and to have no enemy.

The Lord be with you all.

Ver. 17, 18. The salutation of me Paul with my own hand, which is the token in every Epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

This he says that he writes in every Epistle, that no one may be able to counterfeit them, his subscription being subjoined as a great token. And he calls the prayer a salutation, showing that everything they then did was spiritual; even when it was proper to offer salutation, the thing was attended with advantage; and it was prayer, not merely a symbol of friendship. With this he began, and with it he ended, guarding with strong walls what he had said elsewhere, and laying safe foundations, he brought it also to a safe end. Grace be unto you and peace, he says; and again, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. This the Lord also promised, saying to His disciples, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:20 But this takes place when we are willing. For He will not be altogether with us, if we place ourselves at a distance. I will be with you, He says, always. Let us not therefore drive away grace. He tells us to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly. This was then a great evil, to be separated from the whole body of the brethren. By this indeed he punishes all, as elsewhere in his Epistle to the Corinthians he said, With such a one no, not to eat. 1 Corinthians 5:11 But now the majority do not think this a great evil. But all things are confounded and corrupted. With adulterers, with fornicators, with covetous persons, we mix freely, and as a matter of course. If we ought to withdraw ourselves from one who was only supported in idleness, how much more from the others. And that you may know how fearful a thing it was to be separated from the company of the brethren, and what advantage it produces to those who receive reproof with a right mind, hear how that man, who was puffed up with sin, who had proceeded to the extreme of wickedness, who had committed such fornication as is not named even among the heathens, who was insensible of his wound -- for this is the excess of perversion -- he after all, though such an one, was so bent down and humbled that Paul said, Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many. Wherefore confirm your love toward him. 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 For as a member separated from the rest of the body, so was he at that time.

But the cause, and that from which this was then so terrible, was, because even the being with them was thought by them a great blessing. For like men who inhabit one house, and are under one father, and partake of one table, so did they then dwell in every Church. How great an evil therefore was it to fall from so great love! But now it is not even thought to be a great evil, because neither is it considered any great thing when we are united with one another. What was then in the order of punishment, this, on account of the great coldness of love, now takes place even apart from punishment, and we withdraw from one another causelessly, and from coldness. For it is the cause of all evils that there is no love. This has dissolved all ties, and has disfigured all that was venerable and splendid in the Church, in which we ought to have gloried.

Great is the confidence of the Teacher, when from his own good actions he is entitled to reprove his disciples. Wherefore also Paul said, For yourselves know how you ought to imitate us. 2 Thessalonians 3:7 And he ought to be a Teacher more of life than of the word. And let no one think that this is said from a spirit of boasting. For it was as reduced to necessity that he spoke it, and with a view to general advantage. For we behaved not ourselves, he says, disorderly among you. From this do you not see his humility, in that he calls it, for nought, and disorderly behavior? We did not behave ourselves disorderly among you, he says, neither did we eat any man's bread for nought. Here he shows that perhaps also they were poor; and tell me not, that they were poor. For he is discoursing concerning the poor, and those who obtained their necessary subsistence from no other source than from the work of their hands. For he has not said, that they may have it from their fathers, but that by working they should eat their own bread. For if I, he says, a herald of the word of doctrine, was afraid to burden you, much more he who does you no service. For this is truly a burden. And it is a burden too, when one does not give with much alacrity; but this is not what he hints at, but as if they were not able to do it easily. For why do you not work? For God has given you hands for this purpose, not that you should receive from others, but that you should impart to others.

But the Lord, he says, be with you. This prayer also we may offer for ourselves, if we do the things of the Lord. For hear Christ saying to His disciples, Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:19-20 If you do these things, assuredly. For that the promise is not made to them only, but to those also who walk in their steps, is manifest from His saying to the end of the world.

What then does He say to those who are not teachers? Each of you, if he will, is a teacher, although not of another, yet of himself. Teach yourself first. If you teach to observe all things whatsoever He commanded, even by this means you will have many emulating you. For as a lamp, when it is shining, is able to light ten thousand others, but being extinguished will not give light even to itself, nor can it lighten other lamps; so also in the case of a pure life, if the light that is in us be shining, we shall make both disciples and teachers numberless, being set before them as a pattern to copy. For neither will the words proceeding from me be able so to benefit the hearers, as your life. For let a man, tell me, be dear to God, and shining in virtue, and having a wife; (for it is possible for a man having a wife and children and servants and friends to please God;) will he not be able much more than I to benefit them all? For me they will hear once or twice in a month, or not even once, and even though they have kept what they have heard as far as the threshold of the Church, they presently let it drop away from them: but seeing the life of that man constantly, they receive great advantage. For when being insulted he insults not again, does he not almost instill and engrave upon the soul of the insulter the reverence of his meekness? And though he does not immediately confess the benefit, being ashamed from anger, or put to confusion, yet nevertheless he immediately is made sensible of it. And it is impossible for a man that is insolent, though he be a very beast, to associate with one who is patient of evil, without going away much benefited. For although we do not what is good, we however all praise it and admire it. Again, the wife, if she see her husband gentle, being always with him receives great advantage, and the child also. It is therefore in the power of every one to be a teacher. For he says, Build each other up, even as also you do. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 For tell me, has any loss befallen the family? The wife is disturbed, as being weaker, and more extravagant, and fond of ornament; the man if he be a philosopher, and a derider of loss, both consoles her, and persuades her to bear it with fortitude. Tell me, then, will he not benefit her much more than our words? For it is easy to talk, but to act, when we are reduced to the necessity, is in every way difficult. On this account human

nature is wont rather to be regulated by deeds. And such is the superiority of virtue, that even a slave often benefits a whole family together with the master.

For not in vain, nor without reason, does Paul constantly command them to practice virtue, and to be obedient to their master, not so much regarding the service of their masters, as that the word of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed. But when it is not blasphemed, it will soon also be admired. And I know of many families, that they have greatly benefited by the virtue of their slaves. But if a servant placed under authority can improve his master, much more can the master his servants. Divide then with me, I beseech you, this ministry. I address all generally, do you each individual privately and let each charge himself with the salvation of his neighbors. For that it becomes one to preside over those of his household in these matters, hear where Paul sends women for instruction; And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home 1 Corinthians 14:35; and he does not lead them to the Teacher. For as in the schools of learning, there are teachers even among the disciples, so also in the Church. For he wishes the Teacher not to be troubled by all. Wherefore? Because then there will be great advantages, not only that the labor will be light to the Teacher, but that each of the disciples also, having taken pains, is soon able to become a teacher, making this his concern.

For see how great a service the wife contributes. She keeps the house, and takes care of all things in the house, she presides over her handmaids, she clothes them with her own hands, she causes you to be called the father of children, she delivers you from brothels, she aids you to live chastely, she puts a stop to the strong desire of nature. And do thou also benefit her. How? In spiritual things stretch forth your hand. Whatever useful things you have heard, these, like the swallows, bearing off in your mouth, carry away and place them in the mouth of the mother and the young ones. For how is it not absurd, in other things to think yourself worthy of the preeminence, and to occupy the place of the head, but in teaching to quit your station. The ruler ought not to excel the ruled in honors, so much as in virtues. For this is the duty of a ruler, for the other is the part of the ruled, but this is the achievement of the ruler himself. If you enjoy much honor, it is nothing to you, for you received it from others. If you shine in much virtue, this is all your own.

You are the head of the woman, let then the head regulate the rest of the body. Do you not see that it is not so much above the rest of the body in situation, as in forethought, directing like a steersman the whole of it? For in the head are the eyes both of the body, and of the soul. Hence flows to them both the faculty of seeing, and the power of directing. And the rest of the body is appointed for service, but this is set to command. All the senses have thence their origin and their source. Thence are sent forth the organs of speech, the power of seeing, and of smelling, and all touch. For thence is derived the root of the nerves and of the bones. Do you see not that it is superior in forethought more than in honor? So let us rule the women; let us surpass them, not by seeking greater honor from them, but by their being more benefited by us.

I have shown that they afford us no little benefit, but if we are willing to make them a return in spiritual things, we surpass them. For it is not possible in bodily things to offer an equivalent. For what? Do you contribute much wealth? But it is she who preserves it, and this care of hers is an equivalent, and thus there is need of her, because many, who had great possessions, have lost all because they had not one to take care of them. But as for the children, you both communicate, and the benefit from each is equal. She indeed in these things rather has the more laborious service, always bearing the offspring, and being afflicted with the pains of childbirth; so that in spiritual things only will you be able to surpass her.

Let us not therefore regard how we shall have wealth, but how we shall present with confidence to God the souls with which we are entrusted. For by regulating them we shall also most highly benefit ourselves. For he who teaches another, although he does nothing else, yet in speaking is affected with compunction, when he sees himself responsible for those things, on account of which he reproveth others. Since therefore we benefit both ourselves and them, and through them the household, and this is preëminently pleasing to God; let us not be weary of taking care both of our own souls and of those who minister to us, that for all we may receive a recompense, and with much riches may arrive at the holy City our mother, the Jerusalem that is above, from which God grant that we may never fall, but that having shone in the most excellent course of life, we may be thought worthy with much confidence to see our Lord Jesus Christ; with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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