

John 17:14-26

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving and serving God, and loving our neighbors as ourselves, and warns against the dangers of living aimlessly and to no purpose.

Scripture: John 15:19, John 17:15-17, John 17:19-23, John 17:26

Topics: "Persecution And Faith", "Christian Unity"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the inevitability of facing persecution for pursuing virtue, as wicked individuals often hate those who strive for righteousness. He emphasizes that believers are not of this world but are called to live according to God's Word, even if it means being despised by the world. Chrysostom delves into Jesus' prayer for believers to be kept from evil, sanctified in truth, and united in faith, highlighting the importance of unity, love, and faith in God's plan. He urges the congregation to show love through actions, care for the needy, and prioritize spiritual matters over worldly pursuits, emphasizing the significance of genuine love and compassion towards others.

Transcript

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

1. When having become virtuous we are persecuted by the wicked, or when being desirous of virtue we are mocked at by them, let us not be distracted or angry. For this is the natural course of things, and everywhere virtue is wont to engender hatred from wicked men. For envying those who desire to live properly, and thinking to prepare an excuse for themselves if they can overthrow the credit of others, they hate them as having pursuits opposite to their own, and use every means to shame their way of life. But let not us grieve, for this is a mark of virtue. Wherefore Christ also says, If you were of the world, the world would love its own. John 15:19 And in another place again, Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you. Luke 6:26 Wherefore also He says here, I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them. Again He tells the reason for which they were worthy to obtain much care from the Father; For Your sake, He says, they have been hated, and for Your word's sake; so that they would be entitled to all providential care.

John 17:15

I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil.

Again He simplifies His language; again He renders it more clear; which is the act of one showing, by making entreaty for them with exactness, nothing else but this, that He has a very tender care for them. Yet He Himself had told them, that the Father would do all things whatsoever they should ask. How then does He here pray for them? As I said, for no other purpose than to show His love.

John 17:16

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

How then says He in another place, Which You gave Me out of the world; Yours they were? John 17:6 There He speaks of their nature; here of wicked actions. And He puts together a long encomium of them; first, that they were not of the world; then, that the Father Himself had given them; and that they had kept His word; and that on this account they were hated. And if He says, As I am not of the world, be not troubled; for the as is not here expressive of unvarying exactness. For as, when in the case of Him and the Father the as is used, a great Equality is signified, because of the Relationship in Nature; so when it is used of us and Him, the interval is great, because of the great and infinite interval between the respective natures. For if He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth 1 Peter 2:22, how could the Apostles be reckoned equal to Him? What is it then that He says, They are not of the world? They look to another world, they have nothing common with earth, but have become citizens of heaven. And by these words He shows His love, when He commends them to the Father, and commits them to Him who begot Him. When He says, Keep them, He does not speak merely of delivering them from dangers, but also with regard to their continuance in the faith. Wherefore He adds,

John 17:17

Sanctify them through Your truth. Make them holy by the gift of the Spirit, and of right doctrines. As when He says, You are clean through the word which I spoke unto you John 15:3, so now He says the same thing, Instruct them, teach them the truth. And yet He says that the Spirit does this. How then does He now ask it from the Father? That you may again learn their equality of Honor. For right doctrines asserted concerning God sanctify the soul. And if He says that they are sanctified by the word, marvel not. And to show that He speaks of doctrines, He adds,

Your word is truth.

That is, there is no falsehood in it, and all that is said in it must needs come to pass; and again, it signifies nothing typical or bodily. As also Paul says concerning the Church, that He has sanctified it by the Word. For the Word of God is wont also to cleanse. Ephesians 5:26 Moreover, the, sanctify them, seems to me to signify something else, such as this, Set them apart for the Word and for preaching. And this is made plain from what follows. For, He says,

John 17:17

As You have sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

As Paul also says, Having put in us the word of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19 For the same end for which Christ came, for the same did these take possession of the world. In this place again the as is not put to signify resemblance in the case of Himself and the Apostles; for how was it possible for men to be sent otherwise? But it was His custom to speak of the future as having come to pass.

John 17:19

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified in the truth.

What is, I sanctify Myself? I offer to You a sacrifice. Now all sacrifices are called holy, and those are specially called holy things, which are laid up for God. For whereas of old in type the sanctification was by the sheep, but now it is not in type, but by the truth itself, He therefore says, That they may be sanctified in Your truth. For I both dedicate them to You, and make them an offering; this He says, either because their Head was being made so, or because they also were sacrificed; for, Present, it says, your bodies a living sacrifice, holy Romans 12:1; and, We were counted as sheep for the slaughter. Psalm 43:22 And He makes them; without death, a sacrifice and offering; for that He alluded to His own sacrifice, when He said, I sanctify, is clear from what follows.

John 17:20

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe.

2. For since He was dying for them, and said, that For their sakes I sanctify Myself, lest any one should think that He did this for the Apostles only, He added, Neither pray I for these only, but for them also who believe in Me through their word. By this again He revived their souls, showing that the disciples should be many. For because He made common what they possessed peculiarly, He comforts them by showing that they were being made the cause of the salvation of others.

After having thus spoken concerning their salvation, and their being sanctified by faith and the Sacrifice, He afterwards speaks of concord, and finally closes his discourse with this, having begun with it and ended in it. For at the beginning He says, A new commandment I give unto you John 13:34; and here,

John 17:21

That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You.

Here again the as does not denote exact similarity in their case, (for it was not possible for them in so great a degree,) but only as far as was possible for men. Just as when He says Be merciful, as your Father. Luke 6:36

But what is, In Us? In the faith which is on Us. Because nothing so offends all men as divisions, He provides that they should be one. What then, says some one, did He effect this? Certainly He effected it. For all who believe through the Apostles are one, though some from among them were torn away. Nor did this escape His knowledge, He even foretold it, and showed that it proceeded from men's slack-mindedness.

That the world may believe that You have sent Me.

As He said in the beginning, By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. And how should they hence believe? Because, He says, You are a God of peace. If therefore they observe the same as those of whom they have learned, their hearers shall know the teacher by the disciples, but if they quarrel, men shall deny that they are the disciples of a God of peace, and will not allow that I, not being peaceable, have been sent from You. Do you see how, unto the end, He proves His unanimity with the Father?

John 17:22

And the glory which You gave Me, I have given them.

That by miracles, that by doctrines, and, that they should be of one soul; for this is glory, that they should be one, and greater even than miracles. As men admire God because there is no strife or discord in That Nature, and this is His greatest glory, so too let these, He says, from this cause become glorious. And how, says some one, does He ask the Father to give this to them, when He says that He Himself gives it? Whether His discourse be concerning miracles, or unanimity, or peace, He is seen Himself to have given these things to them; whence it is clear that the petition is made for the sake of their comfort.

John 17:23

I in them, and You in Me.

How gave He the glory? By being in them, and having the Father with Him, so as to weld them together. But in another place He speaks not so; He says not that the Father comes by Him, but, that He and the Father come, and take up their abode with him, there removing the suspicion of Sabellius, here that of Arius.

That they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me. John 14:23

He says these latter words immediately after the other, to show that peace has more power to attract men than a miracle; for as it is the nature of strife to separate, so it is that of agreement to weld together.

And I have loved them as You have loved Me.

Here again the as means, as far as it is possible for a man to be loved; and the sure proof of His love is His giving Himself for them. After having told them that they shall be in safety, that they shall not be overturned, that they shall be holy, that many shall believe through them, that they shall enjoy great glory, that not He alone loved them, but the Father also; He next tells them of what shall be after their sojourning here, concerning the prizes and crowns laid up for them.

John 17:24

Father, I will that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am.

Then dost Thou gain by prayer, and dost Thou not yet possess that concerning which they enquired continually, saying, 'Where are You going?' What sayest Thou? How then did You say to them, 'You shall sit upon twelve thrones'? Matthew 19:28 How did You promise other things more and greater? Do you see that He says all in the way of condescension? Since how would He have said, You shall follow afterwards? John 13:36 But He speaks thus with a view to a fuller conviction and demonstration of His love.

That they may behold My glory which You have given Me.

This again is a sign of His being of one mind with the Father, of a higher character than those former, for He says, Before the foundation of the world, yet has it also a certain condescension; for, You have given Me, He says. Now if this be not the case, I would gladly ask the gainsayers a question. He that gives, gives to one subsisting; did the Father then, having first begotten the Son, afterwards give Him glory,

having before allowed Him to be without glory? And how could this be reasonable? Seest that the He gave, is, He begot?

3. But why said He not, That they may share My glory, instead of, That they may be hold My glory? Here He implies, that all that rest is, the looking on the Son of God. This certainly it is which causes them to be glorified; as Paul says, With open face mirroring the glory of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18 For as they who look on the sunbeams, and enjoy a very clear atmosphere, draw their enjoyment from their sight, so then also, and in much greater degree, this will cause us pleasure. At the same time also He shows, that what they should behold was not the body then seen, but some awful Substance.

John 17:25

O righteous Father, the world has not known You.

What means this? What connection has it? He here shows that no man knows God, save those only who have come to know the Son. And what He says is of this kind: I wished all to be so, yet they have not known You, although they had no complaint against You. For this is the meaning of, O righteous Father. And here He seems to me to speak these words, as vexed that they would not know One so just and good. For since the Jews had said that they knew God, but that He knew Him not, at this He aims, saying, For You loved Me before the foundation of the world; thus putting together a defense against the accusations of the Jews. For how could He who had received glory, who was loved before the foundation of the world, who desired to have them as witnesses of that glory, how could He be opposed to the Father? This then is not true which the Jews say, that they know You, and that I know You not; on the contrary, I know You, and they have not known You.

And these have known that You have sent Me.

Do you see that He alludes to those, who said that He was not from God, and all is finally summed up to meet this argument?

John 17:26

And I have declared unto them Your Name, and will declare it.

Yet you say that perfect knowledge is from the Spirit. But the things of the Spirit are Mine.

That the love wherewith You have loved Me may remain in them, and I in them.

For if they learn who You are, then they shall know that I am not separated from You, but one of the greatly beloved, and a true Son, and closely knit to You. And those who are rightly persuaded of this, will keep both the faith which is on Me and perfect love; and while they love as they ought, I remain in them. Do you see how He has arrived at a good end, finishing off the discourse with love, the mother of all blessings?

4. Let us then believe and love God, that it may not be said of us, They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him. Titus 1:16 And again, He has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. 1 Timothy 5:8 For when he helps his domestics and kinsmen and strangers, while thou dost not even succor those who are related to you by family, what will henceforth be your excuse, when God is blasphemed and insulted by reason of you? Consider what opportunities of doing good God has given to us.

Have mercy on one, He says, as a kinsman, on another as a friend, on another as a neighbor, on another as a citizen, on another as a man. And if none of these things hold you, but you break through all bonds, hear from Paul, that you are worse than an infidel; for he having heard nothing of almsgiving, or of heavenly things, has overshot you in love for man; but thou who art bidden to love your very enemies, lookest upon your friends as enemies, and art more careful of your money than of their bodies.

Yet the money by being spent will sustain no injury, but your brother if neglected will perish. What madness then to be careful of money, and careless about one's kindred? Whence has this craving for riches burst in upon us? Whence this inhumanity and cruelty? For if any one could, as though seated on the highest bench of a theater, look down upon all the world -- or rather, if you will, let us for the present take in hand a single city -- if then a man seated on an elevated spot could take in at a glance all the doings of the men there, consider what folly he would condemn, what tears he would weep, what laughter he would laugh, with what hatred he would hate; for we commit such actions as deserve both laughter, and the charge of folly, and tears, and hatred.

One man keeps dogs to catch brute animals, himself sinking into brutality; another keeps oxen and asses to transport stones, but neglects men wasting with hunger; and spends gold without limit to make men of stone, but neglects real men, who are becoming like stones through their evil state. Another, collecting with great pains golden quarries, puts them about his walls, but when he beholds the naked bellies of the poor, is not moved. Some again contrive garments over their very garments, while their brother has not even wherewithal to cover his naked body.

Again, one has swallowed up another in the law-courts; another has spent his money on women and parasites, another on stage-players and theatrical bands, another on splendid edifices, on purchases of fields and houses. Again, one man is counting interest, another interest of interest; another is putting together bands full of many deaths, and does not enjoy rest even at night, lying awake for others' harm. Then, when it is day, they run, one to his unjust gain, another to his wanton expense, others to public robbery.

And great is the earnestness about things superfluous and forbidden, but of things necessary no account is taken; and they who decide questions of law have indeed the name of jurymen, but are really thieves and murderers. And if one should enquire into law suits and wills, he would find there again ten thousand mischiefs, frauds, robberies, plots, and about these things is all time spent; but for spiritual things there is no care, and they all inconvenience the Church, for the sake of seeing only.

But this is not what is required; we need works, and a pure mind. But if you spend all the day in grasping after riches, and then coming in sayest a few words, you have not only not propitiated God, but hast even angered Him more. Would you conciliate your Lord, exhibit works, make yourself acquainted with the mass of woes, look upon the naked, the hungry, the wronged; He has cut out for you ten thousand ways of showing love for men. Let us not then deceive ourselves by living aimlessly and to no purpose, nor presume, because we now are in health; but bearing in mind, that often when we have fallen into sickness, and have reached the extreme of debility, we have been dead with fear and the looking for things to come, let us expect to fall again into the same state, let us get again the same fear, and let us become better men; since what is done now deserves infinite condemnation.

For those in the courts of justice are like lions and dogs; those in the public places like foxes; and those who lead a life of leisure, even they do not use their leisure as they ought, spending all their time on

theaters and the mischiefs arising from them. And there is no one to reprove what is being done; but there are many who envy, and are vexed that they are not in the like condition, so that these in their turn are punished, though not actually doing wicked things. For they not only do these things, but also have pleasure in them that do them.

Because what belongs to their will is alike corrupt; whence it is plain, that the intention also will be punished. These things I say each day, and I will not cease to say them. For if any listen, it is gain; but if none give heed, you shall then hear these things, when it will avail you nothing, and you shall blame yourselves, and we shall be free from fault. But may it never come to pass that we should only have this excuse, but that you may be our boast before the judgment-seat of Christ, that together we may enjoy the blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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