

# No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself - Part 1

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon argues that no one can harm the man who does not harm himself, and that suffering can actually increase one's wealth of virtue.*

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 17:12, Luke 6:26, Luke 21:2, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Colossians 1:24, 1 Timothy 6:7

**Topics:** "Wealth And Greed", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of being captivated by the pursuit of wealth and the false sense of pleasure and honor it brings. He challenges the common assumption that material possessions lead to happiness and honor, highlighting the physical and spiritual harm that excessive wealth can bring. Chrysostom emphasizes that true virtue and honor come from self-control, moderation, and righteousness, rather than from external possessions or societal status. He uses examples from biblical figures like Job, Joseph, and Paul to illustrate how suffering and loss do not harm those who are virtuous, but rather lead to greater spiritual growth and reward.

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## Transcript

1. I know well that to coarse-minded persons, who are greedy in the pursuit of present things, and are nailed to earth, and enslaved to physical pleasure, and have no strong hold upon spiritual ideas, this treatise will be of a strange and paradoxical kind: and they will laugh immoderately, and condemn me for uttering incredible things from the very outset of my theme. Nevertheless, I shall not on this account desist from my promise, but for this very reason shall proceed with great earnestness to the proof of what I have undertaken. For if those who take that view of my subject will please not to make a clamour and disturbance, but wait to the end of my discourse, I am sure that they will take my side, and condemn themselves, finding that they have been deceived hitherto, and will make a recantation, and apology, and crave pardon for the mistaken opinion which they held concerning these matters, and will express great gratitude to me, as patients do to physicians, when they have been relieved from the disorders which lay seige to their body. For do not tell me of the judgment which is prevailing in your mind at the present time, but wait to hear the contention of my arguments and then you will be able to record an impartial verdict without being hindered by ignorance from forming a true judgment. For even judges in secular causes, if they see the first orator pouring forth a mighty torrent of words and overwhelming everything with his speech do not venture to record their decision without having patiently listened to the other speaker who is

opposed to him; and even if the remarks of the first speaker seem to be just to an unlimited extent, they reserve an unprejudiced hearing for the second. In fact the special merit of judges consists in ascertaining with all possible accuracy what each side has to allege and then bringing forward their own judgment.

Now in the place of an orator we have the common assumption of mankind which in the course of ages has taken deep root in the minds of the multitude, and declaims to the following effect throughout the world. All things it says have been turned upside down, the human race is full of much confusion and many are they who every day are being wronged, insulted, subjected to violence and injury, the weak by the strong, the poor by the rich: and as it is impossible to number the waves of the sea, so is it impossible to reckon the multitude of those who are the victims of intrigue, insult, and suffering; and neither the correction of law, nor the fear of being brought to trial, nor anything else can arrest this pestilence and disorder, but the evil is increasing every day, and the groans, and lamentations, and weeping of the sufferers are universal; and the judges who are appointed to reform such evils, themselves intensify the tempest, and inflame the disorder, and hence many of the more senseless and despicable kind, seized with a new kind of frenzy, accuse the providence of God, when they see the forbearing man often violently seized, racked, and oppressed, and the audacious, impetuous, low and low-born man waxing rich, and invested with authority, and becoming formidable to many, and inflicting countless troubles upon the more moderate, and this perpetrated both in town and country, and desert, on sea and land. This discourse of ours of necessity comes in by way of direct opposition to what has been alleged, maintaining a contention which is new, as I said at the beginning, and contrary to opinion, yet useful and true, and profitable to those who will give heed to it and be persuaded by it; for what I undertake is to prove (only make no commotion) that no one of those who are wronged is wronged by another, but experiences this injury at his own hands.

2. But in order to make my argument plainer, let us first of all enquire what injustice is, and of what kind of things the material of it is wont to be composed; also what human virtue is, and what it is which ruins it; and further what it is which seems to ruin it but really does not. For instance (for I must complete my argument by means of examples) each thing is subject to one evil which ruins it; iron to rust, wool to moth, flocks of sheep to wolves. The virtue of wine is injured when it ferments and turns sour: of honey when it loses its natural sweetness, and is reduced to a bitter juice.

Ears of grain are ruined by mildew and drought, and the fruit, and leaves, and branches of vines by the mischievous host of locusts, other trees by the caterpillar, and irrational creatures by diseases of various kinds: and not to lengthen the list by going through all possible examples, our own flesh is subject to fevers, and palsies, and a crowd of other maladies. As then each one of these things is liable to that which ruins its virtue, let us now consider what it is which injures the human race, and what it is which ruins the virtue of a human being.

Most men think that there are various things which have this effect; for I must mention the erroneous opinions on the subject, and, after confuting them, proceed to exhibit that which really does ruin our virtue: and to demonstrate clearly that no one could inflict this injury or bring this ruin upon us unless we betrayed ourselves. The multitude then having erroneous opinions imagine that there are many different things which ruin our virtue: some say it is poverty, others bodily disease, others loss of property, others calumny, others death and they are perpetually bewailing and lamenting these things: and while they are commiserating the sufferers and shedding tears they excitedly exclaim to one another What a calamity has befallen such and such a man!

He has been deprived of all his fortune at a blow. Of another again one will say: such and such a man has been attacked by severe sickness and is despaired of by the physicians in attendance. Some bewail and lament the inmates of the prison, some those who have been expelled from their country and transported to the land of exile, others those who have been deprived of their freedom, others those who have been seized and made captives by enemies, others those who have been drowned, or burnt, or buried by the fall of a house, but no one mourns those who are living in wickedness: on the contrary, which is worse than all, they often congratulate them, a practice which is the cause of all manner of evils.

Come then (only, as I exhorted you at the outset, do not make a commotion), let me prove that none of the things which have been mentioned injure the man who lives soberly, nor can ruin his virtue. For tell me if a man has lost his all either at the hands of calumniators or of robbers, or has been stripped of his goods by knavish servants, what harm has the loss done to the virtue of the man?

But if it seems well let me rather indicate in the first place what is the virtue of a man, beginning by dealing with the subject in the case of existences of another kind so as to make it more intelligible and plain to the majority of readers.

3. What then is the virtue of a horse? Is it to have a bridle studded with gold and girths to match, and a band of silken threads to fasten the housing, and clothes wrought in various colors and gold tissue, and head gear studded with jewels, and locks of hair plaited with gold cord? Or is it to be swift and strong in its legs, and even in its paces, and to have hoofs suitable to a well bred horse, and courage fitted for long journies and warfare, and to be able to behave with calmness in the battle field, and if a rout takes place to save its rider?

Is it not manifest that these are the things which constitute the virtue of the horse, not the others? Again, what should you say was the virtue of asses and mules? Is it not the power of carrying burdens with contentment, and accomplishing journies with ease, and having hoofs like rock? Shall we say that their outside trappings contribute anything to their own proper virtue? By no means. And what kind of vine shall we admire? One which abounds in leaves and branches, or one which is laden with fruit?

Or what kind of virtue do we predicate of an olive? Is it to have large boughs, and great luxuriance of leaves, or to exhibit an abundance of its proper fruit dispersed over all parts of the tree? Well, let us act in the same way in the case of human beings also: let us determine what is the virtue of man, and let us regard that alone as an injury, which is destructive to it. What then is the virtue of man? Not riches that you should fear poverty: nor health of body that you should dread sickness, nor the opinion of the public, that you should view an evil reputation with alarm, nor life simply for its own sake, that death should be terrible to you: nor liberty that you should avoid servitude: but carefulness in holding true doctrine, and rectitude in life.

Of these things not even the devil himself will be able to rob a man, if he who possesses them guards them with the needful carefulness: and that most malicious and ferocious demon is aware of this. For this cause also he robbed Job of his substance, not to make him poor, but that he might force him into uttering some blasphemous speech; and he tortured his body, not to subject him to infirmity, but to upset the virtue of his soul. But nevertheless when he had set all his devices in motion, and turned him from a rich man into a poor one (that calamity which seems to us the most terrible of all), and had made him childless who was once surrounded by many children, and had scarified his whole body more cruelly than the executioners do in the public tribunals (for their nails do not lacerate the sides of those who fall into their

hands so severely as the gnawing of the worms lacerated his body), and when he had fastened a bad reputation upon him (for Job's friends who were present with him said you have not received the chastisement which your sins deserve, and directed many words of accusation against him), and after he had not merely expelled him from city and home and transferred him to another city, but had actually made the dunghill serve as his home and city; after all this, he not only did him no damage but rendered him more glorious by the designs which he formed against him.

And he not only failed to rob him of any of his possessions although he had robbed him of so many things, but he even increased the wealth of his virtue. For after these things he enjoyed greater confidence inasmuch as he had contended in a more severe contest. Now if he who underwent such sufferings, and this not at the hand of man, but at the hand of the devil who is more wicked than all men, sustained no injury, which of those persons who say such and such a man injured and damaged me will have any defense to make in future?

For if the devil who is full of such great malice, after having set all his instruments in motion, and discharged all his weapons, and poured out all the evils incident to man, in a superlative degree upon the family and the person of that righteous man nevertheless did him no injury, but as I was saying rather profited him: how shall certain be able to accuse such and such a man alleging that they have suffered injury at their hands, not at their own?

4. What then? Some one will say, did he not inflict injury on Adam, and upset him, and cast him out of paradise? No: he did it not, but the cause was the listlessness of him who was injured, and his want of temperance and vigilance. For he who applied such powerful and manifold devices and yet was not able to subdue Job, how could he by inferior means have mastered Adam, had not Adam betrayed himself through his own listlessness? What then? Has not he been injured who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of his property, having been deprived of all his goods, and is thrown out of his patrimony, and struggles with extreme poverty?

No! He has not been injured, but has even profited, if he be sober. For, tell me, what harm did this do the apostles? Were they not continually struggling with hunger, and thirst and nakedness? And this was the very reason why they were so illustrious, and distinguished, and won for themselves much help from God. Again what harm was done to Lazarus by his disease, and sores, and poverty and dearth of protectors? Were they not the reasons why garlands of victory were more abundantly woven for him?

Or what harm was done to Joseph by his getting evil reported of, both in his own land, and in the land of strangers for he was supposed to be both an adulterer and fornicator: or what harm did servitude do him or expatriation? Is it not specially on account of these things that we regard him with admiration and astonishment? And why do I speak of removal into a foreign land, and poverty, and evil report, and bondage? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel, although it was a violent and untimely death, and perpetrated by a brother's hand?

Is not this the reason why his praise is sounded throughout the whole world? Do you see how the discourse has demonstrated even more than it promised? For not only has it disclosed the fact that no one is injured by anybody, but also that they who take heed to themselves derive the greater gain (from such assaults). What is the purpose then it will be said of penalties and punishments? What is the purpose of hell? What is the purpose of such great threatenings, if no one is either injured or injures?

What is it you say? Why do you confuse the argument? For I did not say that no one injures, but that no one is injured. And how is it possible, you will say, for no one to be injured when many are committing injury? In the way which I indicated just now. For Joseph's brethren did indeed injure him, yet he himself was not injured: and Cain laid snares for Abel, yet he himself was not ensnared. This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. For God does not abolish penalties on account of the virtue of those who suffer; but he ordains punishments on account of the malice of those who do wickedly.

For although they who are evil entreated become more illustrious in consequence of the designs formed against them, this is not due to the intention of those who plan the designs, but to the courage of those who are the victims of them. Wherefore for the latter the rewards of philosophy are made ready and prepared, for the former the penalties of wickedness. Have you been deprived of your money? Read the word Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there.

Job 1:21 And add to this the apostolic saying for we brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out. 1 Timothy 6:7 Are you evil reported of, and have some men loaded you with countless abuse? Remember that passage where it is said Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you Luke 6:26 and rejoice ye and leap for joy when they shall cast upon you an evil name. Have you been transported into the land of exile? Consider that you have not here a fatherland, but that if you will be wise you are bidden to regard the whole world as a strange country.

Or have you been given over to a sore disease? Quote the apostolic saying the more our outward man decays, so much the more is the inward man renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16 Has any one suffered a violent death? Consider the case of John, his head cut off in prison, carried in a charger, and made the reward of a harlot's dancing. Consider the recompense which is derived from these things: for all these sufferings when they are unjustly inflicted by any one on another, expiate sins, and work righteousness. So great is the advantage of them in the case of those who bear them bravely.

5. When then neither loss of money, nor slander, nor railing, nor banishment, nor diseases, nor tortures, nor that which seems more formidable than all, namely death, harms those who suffer them, but rather adds to their profit, whence can you prove to me that any one is injured when he is not injured at all from any of these things? For I will endeavour to prove the reverse, showing that they who are most injured and insulted, and suffer the most incurable evils are the persons who do these things.

For what could be more miserable than the condition of Cain, who dealt with his brother in this fashion? What more pitiable than that of Phillip's wife who beheaded John? Or the brethren of Joseph who sold him away, and transported him into the land of exile? Or the devil who tortured Job with such great calamities? For not only on account of his other iniquities, but at the same time also for this assault he will pay no trifling penalty. Do you see how here the argument has proved even more than was proposed, showing that those who are insulted not only sustain no harm from these assaults, but that the whole mischief recoils on the head of those who contrive them?

For since neither wealth nor freedom, nor life in our native land nor the other things which I have mentioned, but only right actions of the soul, constitute the virtue of man, naturally when the harm is directed against these things, human virtue itself is no wise harmed. What then? Supposing some one does harm the moral condition of the soul? Even then if a man suffers damage, the damage does not come from another but proceeds from within, and from the man himself. How so, do you say?

When any one having been beaten by another, or deprived of his goods, or having endured some other grievous insult, utters a blasphemous speech, he certainly sustains a damage thereby, and a very great one, nevertheless it does not proceed from him who has inflicted the insult, but from his own littleness of soul. For what I said before I will now repeat, no man if he be infinitely wicked could attack any one more wickedly or more bitterly than that revengeful demon who is implacably hostile to us, the devil: but yet this cruel demon had not power to upset or overthrow him who lived before the law, and before the time of grace, although he discharged so many and such bitter weapons against him from all quarters.

Such is the force of nobility of soul. And what shall I say of Paul? Did he not suffer so many distresses that even to make a list of them is no easy matter? He was put in prison, loaded with chains, dragged hither and hither, scourged by the Jews, stoned, lacerated on the back not only by thongs, but also by rods, he was immersed in the sea, oftentimes beset by robbers, involved in strife with his own countrymen, continually assailed both by foes and by acquaintance, subjected to countless intrigues, struggling with hunger and nakedness, undergoing other frequent and lasting mischances and afflictions: and why need I mention the greater part of them?

He was dying every day: but yet, although subjected to so many and such grievous sufferings, he not only uttered no blasphemous word, but rejoiced over these things and gloried in them: and one time he says I rejoice in my sufferings, Colossians 1:24 and then again not only this but we also glory in afflictions. Romans 5:3 If then he rejoiced and gloried when suffering such great troubles what excuse will you have, and what defense will you make if you blaspheme when you do not undergo the smallest fraction of them.

6. But I am injured in other ways, one will say, and even if I do not blaspheme, yet when I am robbed of my money I am disabled from giving alms. This is a mere pretext and pretence. For if you grieve on this account know certainly that poverty is no bar to almsgiving. For even if you are infinitely poor you are not poorer than the woman who possessed only a handful of meal, 1 Kings 17:12 and the one who had only two mites, Luke 21:2 each of whom having spent all her substance upon those who were in need was an object of surpassing admiration: and such great poverty was no hindrance to such great lovingkindness, but the alms bestowed from the two mites was so abundant and generous as to eclipse all who had riches, and in wealth of intension and superabundance of zeal to surpass those who cast in much coin. Wherefore even in this matter you are not injured but rather benefitted, receiving by means of a small contribution rewards more glorious than they who put down large sums. But since, if I were to say these things for ever, sensuous characters which delight to grovel in worldly things, and revel in present things would not readily endure parting from the fading flowers (for such are the pleasant things of this life) or letting go its shadows: but the better sort of men indeed cling to both the one and the other, while the more pitiable and abject cling more strongly to the former than to the latter, come let us strip off the pleasant and showy masks which hide the base and ugly countenance of these things, and let us expose the foul deformity of the harlot. For such is the character of a life of this kind which is devoted to luxury, and wealth and power: it is foul and ugly and full of much abomination, disagreeable and burdensome, and charged with bitterness. For this indeed is the special feature in this life which deprives those who are captivated by it of every excuse, that although it is the aim of their longings and endeavours, yet is it filled with much annoyance and bitterness, and teems with innumerable evils, dangers, bloodshed, precipices, crags, murders, fears and tremblings, envy and ill-will, and intrigue, perpetual anxiety and care, and derives no profit, and produces no fruit from these great evils save punishment and revenge, and incessant torment. But although this is its character it seems to be to most men an object of ambition, and eager contention, which is a sign of the folly of those who are captivated by it, not of the blessedness of the thing itself. Little

children indeed are eager and excited about toys and cannot take notice of the things which become full grown men. There is an excuse for them on account of their immaturity: but these others are debarred from the right of defense, because, although of full age they are childish in disposition, and more foolish than children in their manner of life.

Now tell me why is wealth an object of ambition? For it is necessary to start from this point, because to the majority of those who are afflicted with this grievous malady it seems to be more precious than health and life, and public reputation, and good opinion, and country, and household, and friends, and kindred and everything else. Moreover the flame has ascended to the very clouds: and this fierce heat has taken possession of land and sea. Nor is there any one to quench this fire: but all people are engaged in stirring it up, both those who have been already caught by it, and those who have not yet been caught, in order that they may be captured.

And you may see every one, husband and wife, household slave, and freeman, rich and poor, each according to his ability carrying loads which supply much fuel to this fire by day and night: loads not of wood or faggots (for the fire is not of that kind), but loads of souls and bodies, of unrighteousness and iniquity. For such is the material of which a fire of this kind is wont to be kindled. For those who have riches place no limit anywhere to this monstrous passion, even if they compass the whole world: and the poor press on to get in advance of them, and a kind of incurable craze, and unrestrainable frenzy and irremediable disease possesses the souls of all.

And this affection has conquered every other kind and thrust it away expelling it from the soul: neither friends nor kindred are taken into account: and why do I speak of friends and kindred? Not even wife and children are regarded, and what can be dearer to man than these? But all things are dashed to the ground and trampled underfoot, when this savage and inhuman mistress has laid hold of the souls of all who are taken captive by her. For as an inhuman mistress, and harsh tyrant, and savage barbarian, and public and expensive prostitute she debases and exhausts and punishes with innumerable dangers and torments those who have chosen to be in bondage to her; and yet although she is terrible and harsh, and fierce and cruel, and has the face of a barbarian, or rather of a wild beast, fiercer than a wolf or a lion, she seems to those who have been taken captive by her gentle and loveable, and sweeter than honey.

And although she forges swords and weapons against them every day, and digs pitfalls and leads them to precipices and crags and weaves endless snares of punishment for them, yet is she supposed to make these things objects of ambition to those who have been made captive, and those who are desiring to be captured. And just as a sow delights and revels in wallowing in the ditch and mire, and beetles delight in perpetually crawling over dung; even so they who are captivated by the love of money are more miserable than these creatures.

For the abomination is greater in this case, and the mire more offensive: for they who are addicted to this passion imagine that much pleasure is derived from it: which does not arise from the nature of the thing, but of the understanding which is afflicted with such an irrational taste. And this taste is worse in their case than in that of brutes: for as with the mire and the dung the cause of pleasure is not in them, but in the irrational nature of the creatures who plunge into it; even so count it to be in the case of human beings.

7. And how might we cure those who are thus disposed? It would be possible if they would open their ears to us, and unfold their heart, and receive our words. For it is impossible to turn and divert the irrational animals from their unclean habit; for they are destitute of reason: but this the gentlest of all tribes,

honoured by reason and speech, I mean human nature, might, if it chose, readily and easily be released from the mire and the stench, and the dung hill and its abomination.

For wherefore, O man, do riches seem to you worthy such diligent pursuit? Is it on account of the pleasure which no doubt is derived from the table? Or on account of the honour and the escort of those who pay court to you, because of your wealth? Is it because you are able to defend yourself against those who annoy you, and to be an object of fear to all? For you cannot name any other reasons, save pleasure and flattery, and fear, and the power of taking revenge; for wealth is not generally wont to make any one wiser, or more self-controlled, or more gentle, or more intelligent, or kind, or benevolent, or superior to anger, or gluttony or pleasure: it does not train any one to be moderate, or teach him how to be humble, nor introduce and implant any other piece of virtue in the soul.

Neither could you say for which of these things it deserves to be so diligently sought and desired. For not only is it ignorant how to plant and cultivate any good thing, but even if it finds a store of them it mars and stunts and blights them; and some of them it even uproots, and introduces their opposites, unmeasured licentiousness, unseasonable wrath, unrighteous anger, pride, arrogance, foolishness. But let me not speak of these; for they who have been seized by this malady will not endure to hear about virtue and vice, being entirely abandoned to pleasure and therefore enslaved to it.

Come then let us forego for the time being the consideration of these points, and let us bring forward the others which remain, and see whether wealth has any pleasure, or any honour: for in my eyes the case is quite the reverse. And first of all, if you please, let us investigate the meals of rich and poor, and ask the guests which they are who enjoy the purest and most genuine pleasure; is it they who recline for a full day on couches, and join breakfast and dinner together, and distend their stomach, and blunt their senses, and sink the vessel by an overladen cargo of food, and waterlog the ship, and drench it as in some shipwreck of the body, and devise fetters, and manacles, and gags, and bind their whole body with the band of drunkenness and surfeit more grievous than an iron chain, and enjoy no sound pure sleep undisturbed by frightful dreams, and are more miserable than madmen and introduce a kind of self-imposed demon into the soul and display themselves as a laughing stock to the gaze of their servants, or rather to the kinder sort among them as a tragical spectacle eliciting tears, and cannot recognize any of those who are present, and are incapable of speaking or hearing but have to be carried away from their couches to their bed -- or is it they who are sober and vigilant, and limit their eating by their need, and sail with a favourable breeze, and find hunger and thirst the best relish in their food and drink?

For nothing is so conducive to enjoyment and health as to be hungry and thirsty when one attacks the viands, and to identify satiety with the simple necessity of food, never overstepping the limits of this, nor imposing a load upon the body too great for its strength.

8. But if you disbelieve my statement study the physical condition, and the soul of each class. Are not the bodies vigorous of those who live thus moderately (for do not tell me of that which rarely happens, although some may be weak from some other circumstance, but form your judgment from those instances which are of constant occurrence), I say are they not vigorous, and their senses clear, fulfilling their proper function with much ease? Whereas the bodies of the others are flaccid and softer than wax, and beset with a crowd of maladies? For gout soon fastens upon them, and untimely palsy, and premature old age, and headache, and flatulence, and feebleness of digestion, and loss of appetite, and they require constant attendance of physicians, and perpetual dosing, and daily care. Are these things pleasurable? Tell me. Who of those that know what pleasure really is would say so? For pleasure is produced when desire leads

the way, and fruition follows: now if there is fruition, but desire is nowhere to be found, the conditions of pleasure fail and vanish. On this account also invalids, although the most charming food is set before them, partake of it with a feeling of disgust and sense of oppression: because there is no desire which gives a keen relish to the enjoyment of it. For it is not the nature of the food, or of the drink, but the appetite of the eaters which is wont to produce the desire, and is capable of causing pleasure. Therefore also a certain wise man who had an accurate knowledge of all that concerned pleasure, and understood how to moralize about these things said the full soul mocks at honeycombs: showing that the conditions of pleasure consist not in the nature of the meal, but in the disposition of the eaters. Therefore also the prophet recounting the wonders in Egypt and in the desert mentioned this in connection with the others He satisfied them with honey out of the rock. And yet nowhere does it appear that honey actually sprang forth for them out of the rock: what then is the meaning of the expression? Because the people being exhausted by much toil and long travelling, and distressed by great thirst rushed to the cool spring, their craving for drink serving as a relish, the writer wishing to describe the pleasures which they received from those fountains called the water honey, not meaning that the element was converted into honey, but that the pleasure received from the water rivalled the sweetness of honey, inasmuch as those who partook of it rushed to it in their eagerness to drink.

Since then these things are so and no one can deny it, however stupid he may be: is it not perfectly plain that pure, undiluted, and lively pleasure is to be found at the tables of the poor? Whereas at the tables of the rich there is discomfort, and disgust and defilement? As that wise man has said even sweet things seem to be a vexation.

9. But riches some one will say procure honour for those who possess them, and enable them to take vengeance on their enemies with ease. And is this a reason, pray, why riches seem to you desirable and worth contending for -- that they nourish the most dangerous passion in our nature, leading on anger into action, swelling the empty bubbles of ambition, and stimulating and urging men to arrogance? Why these are just the very reasons why we ought resolutely to turn our backs upon riches, because they introduce certain fierce and dangerous wild beasts into our heart depriving us of the real honour which we might receive from all, and introducing to deluded men another which is the opposite of this, only painted over with its colors, and persuading them to fancy that it is the same, when by nature it is not so, but only seems to be so to the eye. For as the beauty of courtesans, made up as it is of dyes and pigments, is destitute of real beauty, yet makes a foul and ugly face appear fair and beautiful to those who are deluded by it when it is not so in reality: even so also riches force flattery to look like honour. For I beg you not to consider the praises which are openly bestowed through fear and fawning: for these are only tints and pigments; but unfold the conscience of each of those who flatter you in this fashion, and inside it you will see countless accusers declaring against you, and loathing and detesting you more than your bitterest adversaries and foes. And if ever a change of circumstances should occur which would remove and expose this mask which fear has manufactured, just as the sun when it emits a hotter ray than usual discloses the real countenances of those women whom I mentioned, then you will see clearly that all through the former time you were held in the greatest contempt by those who paid court to you, and you fancied you were enjoying honour from those who thoroughly hated you, and in their heart poured infinite abuse upon you, and longed to see you involved in extreme calamities. For there is nothing like virtue to produce honour --honour neither forced nor feigned, nor hidden under a mask of deceit, but real and genuine, and able to stand the test of hard times.

Source:

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