

Titus 1:12-14

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being sound in the faith and rebuking those who are not, and it discusses what is unclean and how to avoid it.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 1:16, Isaiah 55:8, Acts 17:23, 1 Corinthians 9:20, Titus 1:12, Titus 1:14 - 2:1

Topics: "Sound Doctrine", "False Teachings"

Description

John Chrysostom delves into the complexities of Paul quoting Epimenides, a Cretan prophet, who called the Cretians liars, to emphasize the importance of rebuking and correcting those who stray from the faith and are influenced by false teachings. Chrysostom explains how Paul strategically uses Greek testimonies to confront and challenge the beliefs of the Athenians, highlighting the need to address different audiences with tailored approaches. He stresses the significance of sound doctrine, rebuking sharply when necessary, and avoiding distractions from Jewish fables and man-made commandments that deviate from the truth.

Transcript

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

There are several questions here. First, who it was that said this? Secondly, why Paul quoted it? Thirdly, why he brings forward a testimony that is not correct? Let us then offer a seasonable solution of these, having premised some other things. For when Paul was discoursing to the Athenians, in the course of his harangue he quoted these words, To the Unknown God: and again, For we also are His offspring, as certain also of your own poets have said. Acts 17:23-28 It was Epimenides who said this, himself a Cretan, and whence he was move moved to say it is necessary to mention. It is this. The Cretans have a tomb of Jupiter, with this inscription. Here lies Zan, whom they call Jove. On account of this inscription, then, the poet ridiculing the Cretans as liars, as he proceeds, introduces, to increase the ridicule, this passage.

For even a tomb, O King, of you

They made, who never died, but aye shall be.

If then this testimony is true, observe what a difficulty! For if the poet is true who said that they spoke falsely, in asserting that Jupiter could die, as the Apostle says, it is a fearful thing! Attend, beloved, with much exactness. The poet said that the Cretans were liars for saying that Jupiter was dead. The Apostle confirmed his testimony: so, according to the Apostle, Jupiter is immortal: for he says, this witness is true! What shall we say then? Or rather how shall we solve this? The Apostle has not said this, but simply and plainly applied this testimony to their habit of falsehood. Else why has he not added, For even a tomb, O king, of you, they made? So that the Apostle has not said this, but only that one had well said, The Cretians are always liars. But it is not only from hence that we are confident that Jupiter is not a God. From many other arguments we are able to prove this, and not from the testimony of the Cretans. Besides, he has not said, that in this they were liars. Nay and it is more probable that they were deceived as to this point too. For they believed in other gods, on which account the Apostle calls them liars.

And as to the question, why does he cite the testimonies of the Greeks? It is because we put them most to confusion when we bring our testimonies and accusations from their own writers, when we make those their accusers, who are admired among themselves. For this reason he elsewhere quotes those words, To the Unknown God. For the Athenians, as they did not receive all their gods from the beginning, but from time to time admitted some other, as those from the Hyperboreans, the worship of Pan, and the greater and the lesser mysteries, so these same, conjecturing that besides these there might be some other God, of whom they were ignorant, that they might be duly devout to him also, erected to him an altar, with this inscription, To the Unknown God, thereby almost implying, if there might be some God unknown to them. He therefore said to them, Him whom you have by anticipation acknowledged, I declare to you. But those words, We also are His offspring, are quoted from Aratus, who having previously said, Earth's paths are full of Jove, the sea is full -- adds, For we too are His offspring, in which I conceive he shows that we are sprung from God. How then does Paul wrest what is said of Jupiter to the God of the universe? He has not transferred to God what belongs to Jupiter. But what is applicable to God, and was neither justly nor properly applied to Jupiter, this he restores to God, since the name of God belongs to Him alone, and is not lawfully bestowed upon idols.

And from what writers should he address them? From the Prophets? They would not have believed them. Since with the Jews too he does not argue from the Gospels, but from the Prophets. For this reason he says, Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, to them that are without law, as without law, to those that are under the Law, as under the Law. 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 Thus does God too, as in the case of the wise men, He does not conduct them by an Angel, nor a Prophet, nor an Apostle, nor an Evangelist, but how? By a star. For as their art made them conversant with these, He made use of such means to guide them. So in the case of the oxen, that drew the ark. If it goes up by the way of his own coast, then He has done us this great evil 1 Samuel 6:9, as their prophets suggested. Do these prophets then speak the truth? No; but he refutes and confounds them out of their own mouths. Again, in the case of the witch, because Saul believed in her, he caused him to hear through her what was about to befall him. Why then did Paul stop the mouth of the spirit, that said, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation? Acts 16:17 And why did Christ hinder the devils from speaking of Him? In this case there was reason, since the miracles were going on. For here it was not a star that proclaimed Him, but He Himself; and the demons again were not worshipped; for it was not an image that spoke, that it should be forbidden. He also suffered Balaam to bless, and did not restrain him. Thus He everywhere condescends.

And what wonder? For He permitted opinions erroneous, and unworthy of Himself, to prevail, as that He was a body formerly, and that He was visible. In opposition to which He says, God is a Spirit. John 4:24

Again, that He delighted in sacrifices, which is far from His nature. And He utters words at variance with His declarations of Himself, and many such things. For He nowhere considers His own dignity, but always what will be profitable to us. And if a father considers not his own dignity, but talks lispingly with his children, and calls their meat and drink not by their Greek names, but by some childish and barbarous words, much more does God. Even in reproving He condescends, as when He speaks by the prophet, Hath a nation changed their gods? Jeremiah 2:11, and in every part of Scripture there are instances of His condescension both in words and actions.

Ver. 13. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.

This he says, because their disposition was froward, deceitful, and dissolute. They have these numberless bad qualities; and because they are prone to lying, deceiving, gluttonous, and slothful, severe reproof is necessary. For such characters will not be managed by mildness, therefore rebuke them. He speaks not here of Gentiles, but of his own people. Sharply. Give them, he says, a stroke that cuts deep. For one method is not to be employed with all, but they are to be differently dealt with, according to their various characters and dispositions. He does not here have recourse to exhortation. For as he who treats with harshness the meek and ingenuous, may destroy them; so he who flatters one that requires severity, causes him to perish, and does not allow him to be reclaimed.

That they may be sound in the faith.

This then is soundness, to introduce nothing spurious, nor foreign. But if they who are scrupulous about meats are not sound, but are sick and weak; for, Them that are weak, he says, receive, but not to doubtful disputations Romans 14:1; what can be said of those who observe the same fasts, (with the Jews,) who keep the sabbaths, who frequent the places that are consecrated by them? I speak of that at Daphne, of that which is called the cave of Matrona, and of that plain in Cilicia, which is called Saturn's. How are these sound? With them a heavier stroke is necessary. Why then does he not do the same with the Romans? Because their dispositions were different, they were of a nobler character.

Ver. 14. Not giving heed, he says, to Jewish fables.

The Jewish tenets were fables in two ways, because they were imitations, and because the thing was past its season, for such things become fables at last. For when a thing ought not to be done, and being done, is injurious, it is a fable even as it is useless. As then those ought not to be regarded, so neither ought these. For this is not being sound. For if you believe the Faith, why do you add other things, as if the faith were not sufficient to justify? Why do you enslave yourself by subjection to the Law? Have you no confidence in what you believe? This is a mark of an unsound and unbelieving mind. For one who is faithful does not doubt, but such an one evidently doubts.

Ver. 15. Unto the pure, he says, all things are pure.

You see that this is said to a particular purpose.

But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.

Things then are not clean or unclean from their own nature, but from the disposition of him who partakes of them.

But even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Ver. 16. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.

The swine therefore is clean. Why then was it forbidden as unclean? It was not unclean by nature; for, all things are pure. Nothing is more unclean than a fish, inasmuch as it even feeds upon human flesh. But it was permitted and considered clean. Nothing is more unclean than a bird, for it eats worms; or than a stag, which is said to have its name from eating serpents. Yet all these were eaten. Why then was the swine forbidden, and many other things? Not because they were unclean, but to check excessive luxury. But had this been said, they would not have been persuaded; they were restrained therefore by the fear of uncleanness. For tell me, if we enquire nicely into these things, what is more unclean than wine; or than water, with which they mostly purified themselves? They touched not the dead, and yet they were cleansed by the dead, for the victim was dead, and with that they were cleansed. This therefore was a doctrine for children. In the composition of wine, does not dung form a part? For as the vine draws moisture from the earth, so does it from the dung that is thrown upon it. In short, if we wish to be very nice, everything is unclean, otherwise if we please not to be nice, nothing is unclean. Yet all things are pure. God made nothing unclean, for nothing is unclean, except sin only. For that reaches to the soul, and defiles it. Other uncleanness is human prejudice.

But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

For how can there be anything unclean among the pure? But he that has a weak soul makes everything unclean, and if there be set abroad a scrupulous enquiry into what is clean or unclean, he will touch nothing. For even these things are not clean, I speak of fish, and other things, according to their notions; (for their mind and conscience, he says, is defiled,) but all are impure. Yet Paul says not so; he turns the whole matter upon themselves. For nothing is unclean, he says, but themselves, their mind and their conscience; and nothing is more unclean than these; but an evil will is unclean.

They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Chap. ii. ver. 1. But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine.

This then is uncleanness. They are themselves unclean. But be not thou silent on that account. Do your part, although they may not receive you. Advise and counsel them, though they may not be persuaded. Here he censures them more severely. For they who are mad imagine that nothing stands still, yet this arises not from the objects that are seen, but from the eyes that see. Because they are unsteady and giddy, they think that the earth turns round with them, which yet turns not, but stands firm. The derangement is of their own state, not from any affection of the element. So it is here, when the soul is unclean, it thinks all things unclean. Therefore scrupulous observances are no mark of purity, but it is the part of purity to be bold in all things. For he that is pure by nature ventures upon all things, they that are defiled, upon nothing. This we may say against Marcion. Do you see that it is a mark of purity to be superior to all defilement, to touch nothing implies impurity. This holds even with respect to God. That He assumed flesh is a proof of purity; if through fear He had not taken it, there would have been defilement. He who eats not things that seem unclean, is himself unclean and weak, he who eats, is neither. Let us not call such pure, they are the unclean. He is pure, who dares to feed upon all things. All this caution we ought to exercise towards the things that defile the soul. For that is uncleanness, that is defilement. None

of these things is so. Those who have a vitiated palate think what is set before them is unclean, but this is the effect of their disorder. It becomes us therefore to understand the nature of things pure, and things unclean.

Moral . What then is unclean? Sin, malice, covetousness, wickedness. As it is written: Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings. Isaiah 1:16 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Psalm 51:10 Depart, depart, go out from thence, touch no unclean thing. Isaiah 52:52 These observances were emblems of purifications. Touch not a dead body, it is said. For sin is such, it is dead and offensive. The leper is unclean. For sin is a leprosy, various and multiform. And that they had this meaning, appears from what follows. For if the leprosy is general, and overspreads the whole body, he is clean; if it is partial, he is unclean. Thus you see that what is various and changeable is the unclean thing. He again whose seed passes from him is unclean, consider one that is so in soul, casting away his seed. He who is uncircumcised is unclean. These things are not allegorical but typical, for he who does not cut off the wickedness of his heart is the unclean person. He who works on the Sabbath is to be stoned, that is, he who is not at all times devoted to God, shall perish. You see how many varieties of uncleanness there are. The woman in child-bed is unclean. Yet God made child-birth, and the seed of copulation. Why then is the woman unclean, unless something further was intimated? And what was this? He intended to produce piety in the soul, and to deter it from fornication. For if she is unclean who has borne a child, much more she who has committed fornication. If to approach his own wife is not altogether pure, much less to have intercourse with the wife of another. He who attends a funeral is unclean, much more he who has mixed in war and slaughter. And many kinds of uncleanness would be found, if it were necessary to recount them all. But these things are not now required of us. But all is transferred to the soul.

For bodily things are nearer to us, from these therefore he introduced instruction. But it is not so now. For we ought not to be confined to figures, and shadows, but to adhere to the truth, and to uphold it: sin is the unclean thing. From that let us flee, from that let us abstain. If you come near it, it will bite you. Sirach 21:2 Nothing is more unclean than covetousness. Whence is this manifest? From the facts themselves. For what does it not defile? The hands, the soul, the very house where the ill-gotten treasure is laid up. But the Jews consider this as nothing. And yet Moses carried off the bones of Joseph. Samson drank from the jawbone of an ass, and ate honey from the lion, and Elijah was nourished by ravens, and by a widow woman. And tell me, if we were to be precise about these things, what can be more unclean than our books, which are made of the skins of animals? The fornicator, then, is not the only one that is unclean, but others more than he, as the adulterer. But both the one and the other are unclean, not on account of the intercourse, (for according to that reasoning a man cohabiting with his own wife would be unclean,) but because of the wickedness of the act, and the injury done to his neighbor in his nearest interests. Do you see that it is wickedness that is unclean? He who had two wives was not unclean, and David who had many wives was not unclean. But when he had one unlawfully, he became unclean. Why? Because he had injured and defrauded his neighbor. And the fornicator is not unclean on account of the intercourse, but on account of the manner of it, because it injures the woman, and they injure one another, making the woman common, and subverting the laws of nature. For she ought to be the wife of one man, since it is said, Male and female created He them. Genesis 1:27 And, they two shall be one flesh. Not those many, but they two shall be one flesh. Here then is injustice, and therefore the act is wicked. Again, when anger exceeds due measure, it makes a man unclean, not in itself, but because of its excess. Since it is not said, He that is angry, merely, but angry without a cause. Thus every way to desire overmuch is unclean, for it proceeds from a greedy and irrational disposition. Let us therefore be sober, I beseech you, let us be pure, in that which is real purity, that we may be thought worthy to see God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with

whom, etc.

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