

Titus 1:5, 6

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking true glory from God and overcoming the desire for vainglory, which is a corrupting influence that leads to slavery.

Scripture: Matthew 6:23, John 5:41, Romans 2:29, Titus 1:5-7, Titus 1:9

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of appointing blameless elders in every city, emphasizing the qualities they should possess such as being faithful, not given to wine, and having obedient children. He highlights the need for leaders to be examples of virtue and to hold fast to the faithful word they have been taught, in order to exhort and convince those who oppose the truth. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of seeking glory from men, urging humility and a focus on true, lasting glory that comes from God alone.

Transcript

For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed you: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly.

The whole life of men in ancient times was one of action and contention; ours on the contrary is a life of indolence. They knew that they were brought into the world for this purpose, that they might labor according to the will of Him who brought them into it; but we, as if we had been placed here but to eat and drink, and lead a life of pleasure, we pay no regard to spiritual things. I speak not only of the Apostles, but of those that followed them. You see them accordingly traversing all places, and pursuing this as their only business, living altogether as in a foreign land, as those who had no city upon earth. Hear therefore what the blessed Apostle says,

For this cause left I you in Crete.

As if the whole world had been one house, they divided it among themselves, administering its affairs everywhere, each taking care of his several portion of it.

For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are [R.V. were] wanting.

He does not command this in an imperious manner; that you should set in order, he says. Here we see a soul free from all envy, seeking everywhere the advantage of his disciples, not curiously solicitous, whether the good was done by himself or by another. For where there was a case of danger and great difficulty, he in his own person set it in order. But those things which were rather attended with honor and praise he committed to his disciple, as the ordination of Bishops, and such other things as required some farther arrangement, or, so to speak, to be brought to greater perfection. What do you say? Does he farther set in order your work? And do you not think it a disgrace bringing shame upon you? By no means; for I look only to the common good, and whether it be done by me, or by another, it makes no difference to me. Thus it becomes him to be affected who presides in the Church, not to seek his own honor, but the common good.

And ordain elders in every city, here he is speaking of Bishops, as we have before said, as I had appointed you. If any is blameless. In every city, he says, for he did not wish the whole island to be entrusted to one, but that each should have his own charge and care, for thus he would have less labor himself, and those under his rule would receive greater attention, if the Teacher had not to go about to the presidency of many Churches, but was left to be occupied with one only, and to bring that into order.

Ver. 6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly.

Why does he bring forward such an one? To stop the mouths of those heretics, who condemned marriage, showing that it is not an unholy thing in itself, but so far honorable, that a married man might ascend the holy throne; and at the same reproving the wanton, and not permitting their admission into this high office who contracted a second marriage. For he who retains no kind regard for her who is departed, how shall he be a good president? And what accusation would he not incur? For you all know, that though it is not forbidden by the laws to enter into a second marriage, yet it is a thing liable to many ill constructions. Wishing therefore a ruler to give no handle for reproach to those under his rule, he on this account says, If any be blameless, that is, if his life be free from reproach, if he has given occasion to no one to assail his character. Hear what Christ says, If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!
Matthew 6:23

Having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly.

We should observe what care he bestows upon children. For he who cannot be the instructor of his own children, how should he be the Teacher of others? If he cannot keep in order those whom he has had with him from the beginning, whom he has brought up, and over whom he had power both by the laws, and by nature, how will he be able to benefit those without? For if the incompetency of the father had not been great, he would not have allowed those to become bad whom from the first he had under his power. For it is not possible, indeed it is not, that one should turn out ill who is brought up with much care, and has received great attention. Sins are not so prevalent by nature, as to overcome so much previous care. But if, occupied in the pursuit of wealth, he has made his children a secondary concern, and not bestowed much care upon them, even so he is unworthy. For if when nature prompted, he was so void of affection or so senseless, that he thought more of his wealth than of his children, how should he be raised to the Episcopal throne, and so great rule? For if he was unable to restrain them it is a great proof of his weakness; and if he was unconcerned, his want of affection is much to be blamed. He then that neglects his own children, how shall he take care of other men's? And he has not only said, not riotous, but not even accused of riot. There must not be an ill report, or such an opinion of them.

Ver. 7. For a Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker.

For a ruler without, as he rules by law and compulsion, perhaps does not consult the wishes of those under his rule. But he who ought to rule men with their own consent, and who will be thankful for his rule, if he so conduct himself as to do everything of his own will, and share counsels with no one, makes his presidency tyrannical rather than popular. For he must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry. For how shall he instruct others to rule that passion, who has not taught himself? For power leads on to many temptations, it makes a man more harsh and difficult to please, even him that was very mild, surrounding him with so many occasions of anger. If he have not previously practiced himself in this virtue, he will grow harsh, and will injure and destroy much that is under his rule.

Not given to wine, no striker. Here he is speaking of the insolent man. For he should do all things by admonition or rebuke, and not by insolence. What necessity, tell me, for insult? He ought to terrify, to alarm, to penetrate the soul with the threat of hell. But he that is insulted becomes more impudent, and rather despises him that insults him. Nothing produces contempt more than insult; it disgraces the insolent person, and prevents his being respected, as he ought to be. Their discourse ought to be delivered with much caution. In reproving sins they should bear in mind the future judgment, but keep clear of all insolence. Yet if any prevent them from doing their duty, they must prosecute the matter with all authority. Not a striker, he says. The teacher is the physician of souls. But the physician does not strike, but heals and restores him that has stricken him. Not given to filthy lucre.

Ver. 8. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.

Ver. 9. Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught.

You see what intensity of virtue he required. Not given to filthy lucre, that is, showing great contempt for money. A lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy; he means, giving away all his substance to them that need. Temperate; he speaks not here of one who fasts, but of one who commands his passions, his tongue, his hands, his eyes. For this is temperance, to be drawn aside by no passion.

Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught. By faithful is here meant true, or that which was delivered through faith, not requiring reasonings, or questionings.

Holding fast, that is, having care of it, making it his business. What then, if he be ignorant of the learning that is without? For this cause, he says, the faithful word, according to teaching.

That he may be able both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers.

So that there is need not of pomp of words, but of strong minds, of skill in the Scriptures and of powerful thoughts. Do you not see that Paul put to flight the whole world, that he was more powerful than Plato and all the rest? But it was by miracles, you say. Not by miracles only, for if you peruse the Acts of the Apostles, you will find him often prevailing by his teaching previously to his miracles.

That he may be able by sound doctrine to exhort, that is, to retain his own people, and to overthrow the adversaries. And to convince the gainsayers. For if this is not done, all is lost. He who knows not how to combat the adversaries, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and to beat down reasonings, he who knows not what he ought to teach with regard to right doctrine, far from him be the Teacher's throne. For the other qualities may be found in those under his rule, such as to be

blameless, to have his children in subjection, to be hospitable, just, holy. But that which characterizes the Teacher is this, to be able to instruct in the word, to which no regard is now paid.

Ver. 10. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision;

Ver. 11. Whose mouths must be stopped.

Do you see how he shows that they are such? From their not wishing to be ruled, but to rule. For he has glanced at this. When therefore you can not persuade them, do not give them charges, but stop their mouths, for the benefit of others. But of what advantage will this be, if they will not obey, or are unruly? Why then should he stop their mouths? In order that others may be benefited by it.

Who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake.

For if he has undertaken the office of a Teacher, and is not able to combat these enemies, and to stop their mouths who are so shameless, he will become in each case the cause of their destination who perish. And if some one has thus advised, Seek not to be a judge, unless you can take away iniquity Sirach 7:6; much more may we say here, Seek not to be a Teacher, if you are unequal to the dignity of the office; but though dragged to it, decline it. Do you see that the love of power, the love of filthy lucre, is the cause of these evils? Teaching things which they ought not, he says, for filthy lucre's sake.

Moral . For there is nothing which is not spoiled by these passions. But as when violent winds, falling on a calm sea, turn it up from its foundation, and mingle the sand with the waves, so these passions assailing the soul turn all upside down, and dim the clearness of the mental sight, but especially does the mad desire of glory. For a contempt for money any one may easily attain, but to despise the honor that proceeds from the multitude, requires a great effort, a philosophic temper, a certain angelic soul that reaches to the very summit of heaven. For there is no passion so tyrannical, so universally prevalent, in a greater or less degree indeed, but still everywhere. How then shall we subdue it, if not wholly, yet in some little part? By looking up to heaven, by setting God before our eyes, by entertaining thoughts superior to earthly things. Imagine, when you desire glory, that you have already attained it, and mark the end, and you will find it to be nothing. Consider with what loss it is attended, of how many and how great blessings it will deprive you. For you will undergo the toils and danger, yet be deprived of the fruits and rewards of them. Consider that the majority are bad, and despise their opinion. In the case of each individual, consider what the man is, and you will see how ridiculous a thing is glory, that it is rather to be called shame.

And after this, lift up your thoughts to the theater above. When in doing any good you consider that it ought to be displayed to men, and you seek for some spectators of the action, and art in travail to be seen, reflect that God beholds you, and all that desire will be extinguished. Retire from the earth, and look to that theater that is in Heaven. If men should praise you, yet hereafter they will blame you, will envy you, will assail your character; or if they do not, yet their praise will not benefit you. It is not so with God. He delights in praising our virtuous deeds. Have you spoken well, and obtained applause? What have you gained? For if those who applauded you were benefited, changed in their minds, become better men, and had desisted from their evil deeds, then might thou indeed rejoice, not at the praises bestowed, but at the wonderful change for the better. But if they continue their praises, and loud plaudits, but gain no good by what they applaud, you ought rather to grieve: for these things turn to their judgment and condemnation. But you obtain glory for your piety. If you are truly pious, and conscious of no guilt, you should rejoice, not because thou are reputed pious, but because you are so. But if, without being so, you desire the good

opinion of the multitude, consider that they will not be your judges at the last day, but He who knows perfectly the things that are hid. And if while conscious of guilt, you are supposed by all to be pure, instead of rejoicing, you should grieve and mourn bitterly, keeping constantly in view that Day, in which all things will be revealed, in which the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light.

Do you enjoy honor? Reject it, knowing that it renders you a debtor. Does no one honor you? You ought to rejoice at it. For God will not lay to your charge this, among other things, that you have enjoyed honor. Do you see not that God upbraids Israel with this among other things, by his prophet, I took of your sons for Prophets, and of your young men for sanctification? Amos 2:11, Septuagint You will therefore gain this advantage at least, that you will not aggravate your punishment. For he who is not honored in the present life, who is despised, and held in no consideration, but is insulted and scorned, gains this at least, if nothing else, that he has not to answer for being honored by his fellow-servants. And on many other accounts he gains by it. He is brought down and humbled, nor if he would, can he be high-minded, if he takes the more heed to himself. But he, who enjoys more honor, besides being responsible for great debts, is lifted up into arrogance and vainglory, and becomes the slave of men; and as this tyranny increases, he is compelled to do many things which he would not.

Knowing therefore that it is better to want glory, than to possess it, let us not seek for honors, but evade them when they are offered, let us cast them from us, let us extinguish that desire. This we have said at once to the rulers of the church, and to those under their rule. For a soul desirous of honor, and of being glorified, shall not see the kingdom of heaven. This is not my own saying. I speak not my own words, but those of the Spirit of God. He shall not see it, though he practice virtue. For he says, They have their reward. Matthew 6:5 He then, who has no reward to receive, how shall he see the kingdom of heaven? I forbid you not to desire glory, but I would wish it to be the true glory, that which proceeds from God. Whose praise, it is said, is not of men, but of God. Romans 2:29 Let us be pious in secret, not cumbered with parade, and show, and hypocrisy. Let us cast away the sheep's clothing, and rather let us become sheep. Nothing is more worthless than the glory of men. Should thou see a company of little children, mere sucklings, would you desire glory from them? sayest.)--> Be thus affected towards all men with respect to glory.

It is for this reason called vainglory. Do you see the masks worn by stage-players? How beautiful and splendid they are, fashioned to the extreme height of elegance. Can you show me any such real countenance? By no means. What then? Did you ever fall in love with them? No. Wherefore? Because they are empty, imitating beauty, but not being really beautiful. Thus human glory is empty, and an imitation of glory: it is not true glory. That beauty only which is natural, which is within, is lasting: that which is put on externally often conceals deformity, conceals it from men until the evening. But when the theater breaks up, and the masks are taken off, each appears what he really is.

Let us therefore pursue truth, and not be as if we were on the stage and acting a part. For of what advantage is it, tell me, to be gazed at by a multitude? It is vainglory, and nothing else. For return to your house, and solitude, and immediately all is gone. You have gone to the market-place, you have turned upon you the eyes of all present. What have you gained? Nothing. It vanished, and passed away like dissolving smoke. Do we then love things thus unsubstantial? How unreasonable is this! What madness! To one thing only let us look, to the never seek the praise of men; but if it falls to us, we shall despise, deride, and reject it. We shall be affected as those who desire gold, but receive clay. Let not any one praise you, for it profits nothing; and if he blame you, it harms you not. But with God praise and blame are attended with real gain and loss, while all is vain that proceeds from men. And herein we are made like

God, that He needs not glory from men. I receive not, said Christ, honor from men. John 5:41 Is this then a light thing, tell me? When you are unwilling to despise glory, say, By despising it, I shall resemble God, and immediately you will despise it. But it is impossible that the slave of glory should not be a slave to all, more servile than slaves in reality. For we do not impose upon our slaves such tasks, as glory exacts from her captives. Base and shameful are the things she makes them say, and do, and suffer, and when she sees them obedient, she is the more urgent in her commands.

Let us fly then, I entreat you, let us fly from this slavery. But how shall we be able? If we think seriously of what is in this world, if we observe that things present are a dream, a shadow, and nothing better; we shall easily overcome this desire, and neither in little nor in great things shall be led captive by it. But if in little things we do not despise it, we shall easily be overcome by it in the most important. Let us therefore remove far from us the sources of it, and these are, folly, and meanness of mind, so that, if we assume a lofty spirit, we shall be able to look beyond honor from the multitude, and to extend our views to heaven, and obtain the good things there. Of which God grant that we may all be partakers, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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