

Titus 2:2-5

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of character, virtue, and obedience in the lives of believers, particularly in the aged, women, and servants, and encourages them to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Scripture: Proverbs 31:10, Ephesians 6:5, 1 Timothy 2:12, Titus 2:2, Titus 2:10

Topics: "Christian Living", "Discipleship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of older men and women setting a godly example by being sober, grave, temperate, and sound in faith, love, and patience. He emphasizes the need for older women to teach younger women to be virtuous, loving, discreet, chaste, and obedient to their husbands to prevent the Word of God from being blasphemed. Chrysostom also instructs young men to be sober-minded and servants to be obedient and faithful, showing that a virtuous life adorns the Gospel and brings glory to God.

Transcript

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

There are some failings which age has, that youth has not. Some indeed it has in common with youth, but in addition it has a slowness, a timidity, a forgetfulness, an insensibility, and an irritability. For this reason he exhorts old men concerning these matters, to be vigilant. For there are many things which at this period make men otherwise than vigilant, especially what I mentioned, their general insensibility, and the difficulty of stirring or exciting them. Wherefore he also adds, grave, temperate. Here he means prudent. For temperance is named from the well-tempered mind. For there are, indeed there are, among the old, some who rave and are beside themselves, some from wine, and some from sorrow. For old age makes them narrowminded.

Sound in faith, in charity [love], in patience.

He has well added in patience, for this quality more especially befits old men.

Ver. 3. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becomes holiness.

That is, that in their very dress and carriage they exhibit modesty.

Not false accusers, not given to much wine.

For this was particularly the vice of women and of old age. For from their natural coldness at that period of life arises the desire of wine, therefore he directs his exhortation to that point, to cut off all occasion of drunkenness, wishing them to be far removed from that vice, and to escape the ridicule that attends it. For the fumes mount more easily from beneath, and the membranes (of the brain) receive the mischief from their being impaired by age, and this especially causes intoxication. Yet wine is necessary at this age, because of its weakness, but much is not required. Nor do young women require much, though for a different reason, because it kindles the flame of lust.

Teachers of good things.

And yet you forbid a woman to teach; how do you command it here, when elsewhere you say, I suffer not a woman to teach? 1 Timothy 2:12 But mark what he has added, Nor to usurp authority over the man. For at the beginning it was permitted to men to teach both men and women. But to women it is allowed to instruct by discourse at home. But they are nowhere permitted to preside, nor to extend their speech to great length, wherefore he adds, Nor to usurp authority over the man.

Ver. 4. That they may teach the young women to be sober.

Observe how he binds the people together, how he subjects the younger women to the elder. For he is not speaking there of daughters, but merely in respect of age. Let each of the elder women, he means, teach any one that is younger to be sober.

To love their husbands.

This is the chief point of all that is good in a household, A man and his wife that agree together. Sirach 25:1 For where this exists, there will be nothing that is unpleasant. For where the head is in harmony with the body, and there is no disagreement between them, how shall not all the other members be at peace? For when the rulers are at peace, who is there to divide and break up concord? As on the other hand, where these are ill disposed to each other, there will be no good order in the house. This then is a point of the highest importance, and of more consequence than wealth, or rank, or power, or anything else. Nor has he said merely to be at peace, but to love their husbands. For where love is, no discord will find admittance, far from it, other advantages too spring up.

To love their children. This is well added, since she who loves the root, will much more love the fruit.

To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good. All these spring from love. They become good, and keepers at home, from affection to their husbands.

Obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

She who despises her husband, neglects also her house; but from love springs great soberness, and all contention is done away. And if he be a Heathen, he will soon be persuaded; and if he be a Christian, he will become a better man. Do you see the condescension of Paul? He who in everything would withdraw us from worldly concerns, here bestows his consideration upon domestic affairs. For when these are well

conducted, there will be room for spiritual things, but otherwise, they too will be marred. For she who keeps at home will be also sober, she that keeps at home will be also a prudent manager, she will have no inclination for luxury, unseasonable expenses, and other such things.

That the word of God, he says, be not blasphemed.

See how his first concern is for the preaching of the word, not for worldly things; for when he writes to Timothy, he says, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty 1 Timothy 2:2; and here, that the word of God, and the doctrine, be not blasphemed. For if it should happen that a believing woman, married to an unbeliever, should not be virtuous, the blasphemy is usually carried on to God; but if she be of good character, the Gospel obtains glory from her, and from her virtuous actions. Let those women hearken who are united to wicked men or unbelievers; let them hear, and learn to lead them to godliness by their own example. For if you gain nothing else, and do not attract your husband to embrace right doctrines, yet you have stopped his mouth, and do not allow him to blaspheme Christianity; and this is no mean thing, but great indeed, that the doctrine should be admired through our conversation.

Ver. 6. Young men likewise exhort to be soberminded.

See how he everywhere recommends the observance of decorum. For he has committed to women the greater part in the instruction of women, having appointed the elder to teach the younger. But the whole instruction of men he assigns to Titus himself. For nothing is so difficult for that age as to overcome unlawful pleasures. For neither the love of wealth, nor the desire of glory, or any other thing so much solicits the young, as fleshly lust. Therefore passing over other things, he directs his admonition to that vital point. Not however that he would have other things neglected; for what says he?

Ver. 7. In all things showing yourself a pattern of good works.

Let the elder women, he says, teach the younger, but do you yourself exhort young men to be soberminded. And let the luster of your life be a common school of instruction, a pattern of virtue to all, publicly exhibited, like some original model, containing in itself all beauties, affording examples whence those who are willing may easily imprint upon themselves any of its excellences.

Ver. 7, 8. In [your] doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

By him that is of the contrary part, he means the devil, and every one who ministers to him. For when the life is illustrious, and the discourse corresponds to it, being meek and gentle, and affording no handle to the adversaries, it is of unspeakable advantage. Of great use then is the ministry of the word, not any common word, but that which is approved, and cannot be condemned, affording no pretext to those who are willing to censure it.

Ver. 9. Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, and to please them well in all things.

Do you see what he has previously said, that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. He therefore is deserving of condemnation, who under pretense of continence separates wives from their husbands, and he who under any other pretext takes away servants from their masters. This is not speech that cannot be condemned, but it gives great handle to the unbelieving, and opens the mouths of all against us.

Not answering again.

Ver. 10. Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Thus he has well said in another place, Doing service as to the Lord, and not to men. For if you serve your master with good will, yet the occasion of this service proceeds from your fear, and he who with so great fear renders Him service, shall receive the greater reward. For if he restrain not his hand, or his unruly tongue, how shall the Gentile admire the doctrine that is among us? But if they see their slave, who has been taught the philosophy of Christ, displaying more self-command than their own philosophers, and serving with all meekness and good will, he will in every way admire the power of the Gospel. For the Greeks judge not of doctrines by the doctrine itself, but they make the life and conduct the test of the doctrines. Let women therefore and servants be their instructors by their conversation. For both among themselves, and everywhere, it is admitted that the race of servants is passionate, not open to impression, intractable, and not very apt to receive instruction in virtue, not from their nature, God forbid, but from their ill breeding, and the neglect of their masters. For those who rule them care about nothing but their own service; or if they do sometimes attend to their morals, they do it only to spare themselves the trouble that would be caused them by their fornication, their thefts, or their drunkenness, and being thus neglected and having no one to concern himself about them, they naturally sink into the very depths of wickedness. For if under the direction of a father and mother, a guardian, a master, and teacher, with suitable companions, with the honor of a free condition, and many other advantages, it is difficult to escape intimacies with the wicked, what can we expect from those who are destitute of all these, and are mixed up with the wicked, and associate fearlessly with whomsoever they will, no one troubling herself about their friendships? What sort of persons do we suppose they will be? On this account it is difficult for any servant to be good, especially when they have not the benefit of instruction either from those without or from ourselves. They do not converse with free men of orderly conduct, who have a great regard for their reputation. For all these reasons it is a difficult and surprising thing that there should ever be a good servant.

When therefore it is seen that the power of religion, imposing a restraint upon a class naturally so self-willed, has rendered them singularly well behaved and gentle, their masters, however unreasonable they may be, will form a high opinion of our doctrines. For it is manifest, that having previously instilled in their souls a fear of the Resurrection, of the Judgment, and of all those things which we are taught by our philosophy to expect after death, they have been able to resist wickedness, having in their souls a settled principle to counterbalance the pleasures of sin. So that it is not by chance or without reason, that Paul shows so much consideration for this class of men: since the more wicked they are, the more admirable is the power of that preaching which reforms them. For we then most admire a physician, when he restores to a healthy and sane state one who was despaired of, whom nothing benefited, who was unable to command his unreasonable desires, and wallowed in them. And observe what he most requires of them; the qualities which contribute most to their masters' ease.

Not answering again, not purloining; that is, to show all good will in matters entrusted to them, to be particularly faithful in their masters' concerns, and obedient to their commands.

Moral. Do not therefore think that I enlarge upon this subject without a purpose. For the rest of my discourse will be addressed to servants. Look not to this, my good friend, that you serve a man, but that your service is to God, that you adorn the Gospel. Then you will undertake everything in obedience to your master, bearing with him, though impatient, and angry without a cause. Consider that you are not

gratifying him, but fulfilling the commandment of God; then you will easily submit to anything. And what I have said before, I repeat here, that when our spiritual state is right, the things of this life will follow. For a servant, so tractable and so well disposed, will not only be accepted by God, and made partaker of those glorious crowns, but his master himself, whom he serves so well, even though he be brutish and stone-hearted, inhuman and ferocious, will commend and admire him, and will honor him above all the rest, and will set him over their heads, though he be a Gentile.

And that servants are required to be thus disposed towards a Gentile master, I will show you by an example. Joseph, who was of a different religion from the Egyptian, was sold to the chief cook. What then did he? When he saw the young man was virtuous, he did not consider the difference of their religion, but loved and favored and admired him, and committed the others to his superintendence, and knew nothing of the affairs of his own house because of him. Thus he was a second master, and even more of a master than his lord, for he knew more of his master's affairs than his master himself. And even afterwards, as it seems to me, when he believed the unjust accusation framed against him by his wife, yet from his former regard for him, retaining a respect for that just man, he satisfied his resentment with imprisonment. For if he had not greatly revered and esteemed him from his former conduct, he would have thrust his sword through his body, and dispatched him at once. For jealousy is the rage of a man; therefore he will not regard any ransom, neither will he rest content, though you give many gifts. Proverbs 6:34-35 And if such is the jealousy of men in general, much more violent must it have been with him, an Egyptian and barbarian, and injured as he thought by one whom he had honored. For you all know that injuries do not affect us in the same way from all persons, but that those grieve us most bitterly and deeply which proceed from those who were well-affected toward us, who had trusted us and whom we had trusted, and who had received many kindnesses from us. He did not consider with himself, nor say, What! Have I taken a servant into my house, shared with him my substance, made him free, and even greater than myself, and is this the return that he makes me? He did not say this, so much was his mind prepossessed by his previous respect for him.

And what wonder if he enjoyed so much honor in the house, when we see what great regard he obtained even in a prison. You know how practiced in cruelty are the dispositions of those who have the custody of prisons. They profit by the misfortune of others, and harass those whom others support in their afflictions, making a gain of them that is truly deplorable, with a more than brutal cruelty. For they take advantage of those wretched circumstances which ought to excite their pity. And we may further observe, that they do not treat in the same manner all their prisoners; for those who are confined upon accusation only, and who are injuriously treated, they perhaps pity, but they punish with numberless inflictions those who are imprisoned for shameful and atrocious crimes. So that the keeper of the prison not only from the manner of such men might have been expected to be inhuman, but from the cause for which he was imprisoned. For who would not have been incensed against a young man, who having been raised to so great honor, was charged with requiting such favors by a base attempt upon the master's wife. Would not the keeper, considering these things, the honor to which he had been raised, and the crime for which he was imprisoned, would he not have treated him with more than brutal cruelty? But he was raised above all these things by his hope in God. For the virtue of the soul can mollify even wild beasts. And by the same meekness which had gained his master, he captivated also the keeper of the prison. Thus Joseph was again a ruler, he ruled in the prison as he had ruled in the house. For since he was destined to reign, it was fit that he should learn to be governed, and while he was governed he became a governor, and presided in the house.

For if Paul requires this of one who is promoted to a Church, saying, If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God? 1 Timothy 3:5, it was fit that he who was to be a governor, should first be an excellent ruler of the house. He presided over the prison, not as over a prison, but as if it had been a house. For he alleviated the calamities of all, and took charge of those who were imprisoned as if they had been his own members, not only taking an interest in their misfortunes and consoling them, but if he saw any one absorbed in thought, he went to him and enquired the cause, and could not bear even to see any one dejected, or be easy till he had relieved his dejection. Such love as this, many a one has not shown even to his own children. And to these things may be traced the beginning of his good fortune. For our part must go before, and then the blessing of God will follow.

For that he did show this care and concern we learn from the story. He saw, it is said, two eunuchs who had been cast into prison by Pharaoh, his chief butler and chief baker, and he said, Wherefore do you look so sadly today? Genesis 40:7 And not from this question only, but from the conduct of these men, we may discern his merit. For, though they were the officers of the king, they did not despise him, nor in their despair did they reject his services, but they laid open to him all their secret, as to a brother who could sympathize with them.

And all this has been said by me to prove, that though the virtuous man be in slavery, in captivity, in prison; though he be in the depth of the earth, nothing will be able to overcome him. This I have said to servants, that they may learn that though they have masters that are very brutes, as this Egyptian, or ferocious as the keeper of the prison, they may gain their regard, and though they be heathen as they were, or whatever they be, they may soon win them to gentleness. For nothing is more engaging than good manners, nothing more agreeable and delightful than meekness, gentleness, and obedience. A person of this character is suitable to all. Such an one is not ashamed of slavery, he does not avoid the poor, the sick, and the infirm. For virtue is superior, and prevails over everything. And if it has such power in slaves, how much more in those who are free? This then let us practice, whether bond or free, men or women. Thus we shall be loved both by God and men; and not only by virtuous men, but by the wicked; nay by them more especially, for they more especially honor and respect virtue. For as those who are under rule stand most in awe of the meek, so do the vicious most revere the virtuous, knowing from what they themselves have fallen. Since such then is the fruit of virtue, this let us pursue, and attain. If we adhere to this, nothing will be formidable, but all things easy and manageable. And though we pass through the fire and through the water, all things yield to virtue, even death itself. Let us then be zealous in the pursuit of it, that we may attain the good things to come, in Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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