

1 Thessalonians 4:9, 10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of love towards brethren, chastity, and working, and encourages believers to place their hope in God, even in the midst of suffering and loss.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:11

Topics: "Christian Love", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of love among brethren, highlighting that God Himself teaches us to love one another, making it unnecessary to write about it. He encourages the congregation to excel in love and to work diligently, emphasizing the significance of industry over idleness. Chrysostom addresses the sorrow for the departed, urging believers not to grieve like those without hope but to find comfort in the promise of the Resurrection and the eternal life in Christ.

Transcript

But concerning love of the brethren we have no need to write unto you: for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another; for indeed you do it toward all the brethren, and those which are in all Macedonia.

Why then having discoursed with them earnestly concerning chastity, and being about to discourse about the duty of working, and about the not sorrowing for the departed, does he introduce that which was the principal of all good things, love, as if he were passing it over, saying, We have no need to write to you? This also is from his great wisdom, and belongs to spiritual instruction. For here he shows two things. First, that the thing is so necessary, as not to require instruction. For things that are very important are manifest to all. And secondly, by saying this he makes them more ashamed than if he had admonished them. For he who thinks that they have behaved aright, and therefore does not admonish them, even if they had not behaved aright, would the sooner lead them to it. And observe, he does not speak of love towards all, but of that towards the brethren. We have no need to write unto you. He ought then to have been silent, and to say nothing, if there was no need. But now by saying there is no need, he has done a greater thing, than if he had said it.

For you yourselves are taught of God. And see with how high a praise he has made God their Teacher in this matter. You need not, he says, to learn from man. Which also the prophet says, and they shall all be taught of God. Isaiah 54:13 For you yourselves, he says, are taught of God to love one another. For indeed you do it toward all the brethren, and those which are in all Macedonia; and toward all the others,

he means. These words are very encouraging to make them do so. And I do not merely say, that you are taught of God, but I know it from the things which you do. And in this respect he bore many testimonies to them.

But we exhort you, brethren, that you abound more and more, and study; that is, increase and study.

Ver. 11, 12. To be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you: that you may walk honestly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing.

He shows of how many evils idleness is the cause, and of how many benefits industry. And this he makes manifest from things which happen among us, as he often does, and that wisely. For by these things the majority are led on more than by spiritual things. For it is a mark of love to our neighbors not to receive from them, but to impart to them. And observe. Being about to exhort and admonish, he places in the middle their good conduct, both that they may recover even from the preceding admonition, and from the threat, when he said, He therefore that rejects, rejects not man, but God, and that they may not be restive at this. And this is the effect of working, that one does not receive of others, nor live idly, but by working imparts to others. For it is said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 And to work, he says, with your hands. Where are those, who look out for work that is spiritual? Do you see how he takes from them every excuse, saying, with your hands? But does one practice fasting with his hands? Or watchings all night? Or lyings on the ground? This no one can say. But he is speaking of spiritual work. For it is truly spiritual, that one should by working impart to others, and there is nothing equal to this. That you may walk, he says, becomingly. Do you see whence he touches them? He has not said, that you may not be shamed by begging. But he has indeed insinuated the same, yet he puts it in a milder way, so as both to strike and not to do this severely. For if those who are among us are offended at these things, much more those who are without, finding numberless accusations and handles, when they see a man who is in good health and able to support himself, begging and asking help of others. Wherefore also they call us Christ-mongers. On this account, he means, the name of God is blasphemed. Romans 2:24 But none of these things has he stated; but that which was able to touch them most nearly, the disgracefulness of the thing.

Ver. 13. But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep; that you sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope.

These two things, poverty and despondency, distressed them most, which also pertain to all men. See therefore how he remedies them. But their poverty arose from their goods being taken from them. But if he commands those, whose goods had been taken from them for Christ's sake, to support themselves by working, much more then others. For that they were taken away is manifest from his saying, You became partakers with the churches of God. How partakers with them? And you took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions. Hebrews 10:34

Here he proceeds now to start his discourse concerning the Resurrection. And why? Had he not discoursed with them upon that point? Yes, but here he glances at some further mystery. What then is this? That we that are alive, he says, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in nowise precede them that are fallen asleep. The discourse then of the Resurrection was sufficient to comfort him that was grieving. But that which is now said is sufficient also to make the Resurrection eminently worthy of credit. But first let us speak of what precedes, But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep; that you sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope. See how here also he treats

them mildly. He does not say, Are you so without understanding? as he said to the Corinthians, foolish? That, knowing there is a resurrection, you so sorrow, as those who do not believe; but he speaks very mildly, showing respect to their other virtues. And he has not said concerning the dead, but them that are asleep, even at the beginning suggesting consolation to them. That you sorrow not, he says, even as the rest, which have no hope. Therefore to afflict yourselves for the departed is to act like those who have no hope. And they justly. For a soul that knows nothing of the Resurrection, but thinks that this death is death, naturally afflicts itself, and bewails and mourns intolerably as for lost ones. But you, who expectest a resurrection, on what account do you lament? To lament then is the part of those who have no hope.

Hear this, you women, as many of you as are fond of wailing, as many as at times of mourning take the sorrow impatiently, that you act the part of heathens. But if to grieve for the departed is the part of heathens, then tell me whose part it is to beat one's self, and tear the cheeks? On what account do you lament, if you believe that he will rise again, that he has not perished, that the matter is but a slumber and a sleep? You say, On account of his society, his protection, his care of our affairs, and all his other services. When therefore you lose a child at an untimely age, who is not yet able to do anything, on what account do you lament? Why do you seek to recall him? He was displaying, you say, good hopes, and I was expecting that he would be my supporter. On this account I miss my husband, on this account my son, on this account I wail and lament, not disbelieving the Resurrection, but being left destitute of support, and having lost my protector, my companion, who shared with me in all things -- my comforter. On this account I mourn. I know that he will rise again, but I cannot bear the intermediate separation. A multitude of troubles rushes in upon me. I am exposed to all who are willing to injure me. Those of my servants who formerly feared me now despise me, and trample upon me. If any one has been benefited, he has forgotten the benefit he received from him; if any one was ill-treated by the departed, to return the grudge against him, he lets loose his anger upon me. These things do not suffer me to bear my widowhood. It is for these things that I afflict myself, for these things I bewail.

How then shall we comfort such? What shall we say? How shall we banish their sorrow? In the first place I shall endeavor to convict them, that their wailing proceeds not from these things they say, but from an unreasonable passion. For if you mourn for these things, you ought always to mourn the departed. But if when a year has passed away, you forget him as if he had never been, you do not bewail the departed nor his protection. But you cannot endure the separation, nor the breaking off of your society? And what can they say, who even enter into second marriages? Sure enough! It is the former husbands that they long for. But let us not direct our discourse to them, but to those who preserve a kind affection towards the departed. Why do you lament your child? Why your husband? The former, because I had not enjoyed him, you say; the latter, because I expected that I should have enjoyed him longer. And this very thing, what want of faith does it argue, to suppose that your husband or your son constitutes your safety, and not God! How do you not think to provoke Him? For often on this account He takes them away, that you may not be so bound to them, so that it may withdraw your hopes from them. For God is jealous, and wills to be loved by us most of all things: and that, because He loves us exceedingly. For you know that this is the custom of those who love to distraction. They are excessively jealous, and would choose rather to throw away their life, than to be surpassed in esteem by any of their rival lovers. On this account also God has taken him because of these words.

For, tell me, on what account were there not in old times widowhoods, and untimely orphanhoods? Wherefore did He permit Abraham and Isaac to live a long time? Because even when he was living he preferred God before him. He said indeed, slay; and he slew him. Why did he bring Sarah to so great an

age? Because, even while she was living, he listened to God rather than to her. For this reason God said to him, Hear Sarah your wife. From Genesis 21:12 No one then either from love to husband or wife, or on account of the protection of a child, provoked God to anger. But now because we are declining downwards, and have exceedingly fallen off, we men love our wives more than God, and we women honor our husbands more than God. It is on this account that He draws us even against our will to the love of Himself. Love not your husband more than God, and you shall not ever experience widowhood. Or rather, even if it should happen, you shall not have the feeling of it. Why? Because you have an immortal Protector who loves you better. If you love God more, mourn not: for He who is more beloved is immortal, and does not suffer you to feel the loss of him who is less beloved. This I will make manifest to you by an example. Tell me, if you have a husband, complying with you in all things, one that is respected, and that makes you honorable everywhere, and not to be despised, one respected among all, intelligent and wise, and loving you, thou being esteemed happy on his account, and in conjunction with him should you also bring forth a child, and then before it has arrived at the age of maturity, that child should depart; will you then feel the affliction? By no means. For he that is more beloved makes it disappear. And now if you love God more than your husband, assuredly He will not soon take him away. But even if He should take him, you will not be sensible of the affliction. For this reason the blessed Job felt no severe suffering, when he heard of the death of his children all at once, because he loved God more than them. And while He whom he loved was living, those things would not be able to afflict him.

What do you say, O woman? Your husband or your son was your protector? But does not your God spare you? Who gave you your very husband? Was it not He? And who made you? Was it not He? He surely who brought you out of nothing into being, and breathed into you a soul, and put in you a mind, and vouchsafed to favor you with the knowledge of Himself, and for your sake spared not His only-begotten Son, does not He spare you? And does your fellow-servant spare you? What wrath is due to these words! What of this kind have you had from your husband? You can not say anything. For if he has even done you any kindness, it was after he had received kindness, you having previously begun. But in the case of God no one can say any such thing. For it is not as having received any favors from us that God benefits us, but being incapable of want, from His goodness alone He does good to mankind. He has promised you a kingdom, He has given immortal life, glory, brotherhood, adoption. He has made you fellow-heir with His Only-Begotten. And do you after so great benefits remember your husband? What has he bestowed of this kind? He has made His sun to shine, He has given rain, He sustains you with yearly nourishment. Woe to us for our great ingratitude!

For this reason He takes your husband, that you may not seek him. But do you still cling to him though departed, and forsakest God, when it was your duty to give thanks, to cast it all upon Him? For what is it that you have received from your husband? The pains of childbirth, and labors, and insults and reproaches often, and chidings, and bursts of anger. Are not these the things that come from husbands? But there are, you say, other things too that are good. Of what sort then are these? Did he set off your beauty with costly garments? Did he put gold ornaments about your face? Did he make you respected by all? But if you will, you shall adorn yourself with a much better ornament than the departed. For gravity makes its possessor much more admirable than golden ornaments. This King also has garments, not of this sort, but much better. With those, if you will, invest yourself. Of what sort then are they? There is a clothing which has fringes of gold; if you will, array the soul. But did he make you not to be despised by men? And what is there great in that? Your widowhood suffers you not to be despised by the demons. Then you ruled over your servants, if at least you at all ruled over them. But now, instead of your servants, you have mastery over unbodied powers, principalities, authorities, the ruler of this world. And thou dost not mention the

troubles, in which you shared with him, sometimes the fear of magistrates, sometimes the preference given to neighbors. From all these things you are now delivered, from dread and fear. But are you solicitous who will support the children that are left you? The Father of the fatherless. For tell me, who gave them? Do you not hear Christ in the Gospels saying, Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? Matthew 6:25

Do you see, that your lamentation is not from loss of his society, but from want of faith. But the children of a father that is dead are not equally illustrious. Wherefore? They have God for their Father, and are they not illustrious? How many can I show you brought up by widows, who have become famous, how many who have been under their fathers, and have been undone! For if you bring them up from their first youth, as they ought to be brought up, they will enjoy an advantage much greater than a father's protection. For that it is the business of widows-- I speak of the bringing up of children -- hear Paul saying, If she has brought up children 1 Timothy 5:10; and again, She shall be saved through the child-bearing, (he has not said through her husband,) if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety. 1 Timothy 2:15 Instill into them the fear of God from their first youth, and He will protect them better than any father; this will be a wall not to be broken. For when there is a guard seated within, we have no need of contrivances without: but where he is not, all our outward contrivances are vain.

This will be to them wealth and glory too and ornament. This will make them illustrious, not upon earth, but even in heaven. For do not look to those who are begirt with the golden girdles, nor those who are borne on horses, nor those who shine in kings' palaces on account of their fathers, nor those who have footmen and tutors. For these things perhaps cause widows to bewail over their orphans, thinking that this my son also, if his father at least were living, would have enjoyed so much happiness; but now he is in a state of depression and dishonor, and worthy of no consideration. Think not of these things, O woman, but open to you in thought the gates of heaven, consider the palace there, behold the King who is there seated. Consider if those who are upon the earth can be more illustrious than your son there -- and then groan. But if some are of good repute on earth, this is not worth any consideration. It is allowed him, if you will, to be a soldier in heaven, to enlist him in the ranks of that army. For those who are enlisted there are not borne on horses, but in the clouds. They walk not upon earth, but are caught up into heaven. They have not slaves to go before them, but the Angels themselves. They stand not in the presence of a mortal king, but of Him who is immortal, the King of kings and Lord of lords. They have not a leathern girdle about their loins, but that glory which is unspeakable, and they are more splendid than kings, or whoever have been most illustrious. For in those royal courts not wealth is required, nor noble birth, nothing else than virtue alone; and where that is present, nothing is wanting to their obtaining the chief place.

Nothing is painful to us, if we are willing to cultivate wisdom. Look up to heaven, and see how much more splendid it is than the roofs of palaces. And if the pavement of the palaces above is so much more grand than those below, that the one may be considered as dirt in comparison with the other; if any one should be thought worthy to see those palaces perfectly, what blessedness will not be his!

But she, he says, that is a widow indeed, and desolate, has her hope set on God. 1 Timothy 5:5 To whom is this said? To those who have no children, because they are more highly approved, and have a greater opportunity of pleasing God, because all their chains are loosened to them. There is no one to hold them fast, no one to compel them to drag their chains after them. You are separated from your husband, but art united to God. You have not a fellow-servant for your associate, but you have your Lord. When you pray, tell me, do you not converse with God? When you read, hear Him conversing with you. And what does He say to you? Much kinder words than your husband. For though indeed your husband should flatter you,

the honor is not great, for he is your fellow-servant. But when the Lord flatters the slave, then is the courtship great. How then does He court us? Hear by what means he does it. Come, He says, unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28 And again through the Prophet He calls, saying, Will a woman forget to have compassion on the offspring of her womb? But even if a woman should forget, yet will I not forget you, says the Lord. Isaiah 49:15, Septuagint Of how great a love are these words? And again, Turn unto Me Isaiah 45:22; and again elsewhere, Turn unto Me, and you shall be saved. Isaiah 43:22 And if one was willing to select too from the Canticles, taking them in the more mystical way, he will hear Him conversing and saying to every soul that is fitted for Him, My fair one, my dove. Canticles 2:10 What is sweeter than these words? Do you see the conversation of God with men? But what? Tell me, do you not see how many children of those blessed women are gone, and are in their tombs; how many have suffered more severely, and with their husbands have lost also their children? To these things let us attend; let us be anxious about these things, and nothing will be grievous to us, but we shall continue passing all our time in spiritual joy; and we shall enjoy the eternal blessings, of which may we all be partakers, by the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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