

2 Timothy 1:13-18

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holding fast the form of sound words, relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance and protection, and standing by one another in times of need.

Scripture: Ezekiel 18:24, Romans 2:5, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:30, Philippians 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:13-16, 2 Timothy 1:18

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of holding fast to sound words of faith and love received, urging believers to keep the good things committed to them by the Holy Spirit. He highlights the faithfulness of Onesiphorus in refreshing and supporting him, contrasting it with the abandonment of others like Phygellus and Hermogenes. Chrysostom encourages believers to support and stand by each other in times of trials, reminding them of the mercy and compassion of the Lord in rewarding acts of kindness and service.

Transcript

Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto you keep by the Holy Ghost Which dwells in us. This you know, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, you know very well.

Not by letters alone did Paul instruct his disciple in his duty, but before by words also which he shows, both in many other passages, as where he says, whether by word or our Epistle 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and especially here. Let us not therefore suppose that anything relating to doctrine was spoken imperfectly. For many things he delivered to him without writing. Of these therefore he reminds him, when he says, Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me. After the manner of artists, I have impressed on you the image of virtue, fixing in your soul a sort of rule, and model, and outline of all things pleasing to God. These things then hold fast, and whether you are meditating any matter of faith or love, or of a sound mind, form from hence your ideas of them. It will not be necessary to have recourse to others for examples, when all has been deposited within yourself.

That good thing which was committed unto you keep,-- how?-- by the Holy Ghost which dwells in us. For it is not in the power of a human soul, when instructed with things so great, to be sufficient for the keeping of them. And why? Because there are many robbers, and thick darkness, and the devil still at hand to plot against us; and we know not what is the hour, what the occasion for him to set upon us. How then, he means, shall we be sufficient for the keeping of them? By the Holy Ghost; that is if we have the Spirit with us, if we do not expel grace, He will stand by us. For, Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain. Psalm 127:1 This is our wall, this our castle, this our refuge. If therefore It dwells in us, and is Itself our guard, what need of the commandment? That we may hold It fast, may keep It, and not banish It by our evil deeds.

Then he describes his trials and temptations, not to depress his disciple, but to elevate him, that if he should ever fall into the same, he may not think it strange, when he looks back and remembers what things happened to his Teacher. What then says he? Since it was probable that Timothy might be apprehended, and be deserted, and be relieved by no friendly attention, or influence, or assistance, but be abandoned even by his friends and the faithful themselves, hear what he says, This you know, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me. It seems that there were then in Rome many persons from the regions of Asia. But no one stood by me, he says, no one acknowledged me, all were alienated. And observe the philosophy of his soul. He only mentions their conduct, he does not curse them, but he praises him that showed kindness to him, and invokes a thousand blessings upon him, without any curse on them. Of whom is Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out diligently and found me. Observe how he everywhere speaks of the shame, and not of the danger, lest Timothy should be alarmed. And yet it was a thing that was full of peril. For he gave offense to Nero by making friends with one of his prisoners. But when he was in Rome, he says, he not only did not shun intercourse with me, but sought me out very diligently, and found me.

The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, you know very well.

Such ought the faithful to be. Neither fear, nor threats, nor disgrace, should deter them from assisting one another, standing by them and succoring them as in war. For they do not so much benefit those who are in danger, as themselves, by the service they render to them, making themselves partakers of the crowns due to them. For example, is any one of those who are devoted to God visited with affliction and distress, and maintaining the conflict with great fortitude; while you are not yet brought to this conflict? It is in your power if you will, without entering into the course, to be a sharer of the crowns reserved for him, by standing by him, preparing his mind, and animating and exciting him. Hence it is that Paul elsewhere says, You have done well that you did communicate with my affliction. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again unto my necessity. Philippians 4:14-16 And how could they that were far off share in the affliction of him that was not with them? How? He says, you sent once and again unto my necessities. Again he says, speaking of Epaphroditus, Because he was near unto death, not regarding his life, that he might supply your lack of service toward me. Philippians 2:30 For as in the service of kings, not only those who fight the battle, but those who guard the baggage, share in the honor; and not merely so, but frequently even have an equal portion of the spoils, though they have not imbrued their hands in blood, nor stood in array, nor even seen the ranks of the enemy; so it is in these conflicts. For he who relieves the combatant, when wasted with hunger, who stands by him, encouraging him by words, and rendering him every service, he is not inferior to the combatant.

For do not suppose Paul the combatant, that irresistible and invincible one, but some one of the many, who, if he had not received much consolation and encouragement, would not perhaps have stood, would not have contended. So those who are out of the contest may perchance be the cause of victory to him, who is engaged in it, and may be partakers of the crowns reserved for the victor. And what wonder, if he who communicates to the living is thought worthy of the same rewards with those who contend, since it is possible to communicate after death even with the departed, with those who are asleep, who are already crowned, who want for nothing. For hear Paul saying, Partaking in the memories of the Saints. And how may this be done? When you admire a man, buildest his monument.}--> when you do any of those acts for which he was crowned, you are evidently a sharer in his labors, and in his crowns.

The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. He had compassion on me, he says, he shall therefore have the like return in that terrible Day, when we shall have need of much mercy. The Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord. Are there two Lords then? By no means. But to us there is one Lord Christ Jesus, and one God. 1 Corinthians 8:6 Here those who are infected with the heresy of Marcion assail this expression; but let them learn that this mode of speech is not uncommon in Scripture; as when it is said, The Lord said to my Lord Psalm 110:1; and again, I said to the Lord, You are my Lord Psalm 16:2; and, The Lord rained fire from the Lord. Genesis 19:24 This indicates that the Persons are of the same substance, not that there is a distinction of nature. For we are not to understand that there are two substances differing from each other, but two Persons, each being of the same substance.

Observe too, that he says, The Lord grant him mercy. For as he himself had obtained mercy from Onesiphorus, so he wished him to obtain the same from God. Moral. And if Onesiphorus, who exposed himself to danger, is saved by mercy, much more are we also saved by the same. For terrible indeed, terrible is that account, and such as needs great love for mankind, that we may not hear that awful sentence, Depart from me...I never knew you, you that work iniquity Matthew 7:23; or that fearful word, Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels Matthew 25:40: that we may not hear, Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed Luke 16:16: that we may not hear that voice full of horror, Take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: that we may not hear those words full of terror, Thou wicked and slothful servant. Matthew 22:13 and 25:26 For awful truly and terrible is that tribunal. And yet God is gracious and merciful. He is called a God of mercies and a God of comfort 2 Corinthians 1:3; good as none else is good, and kind, and gentle, and full of pity, Who wills not the death of a sinner, but that he should be converted and live. Ezekiel 18:24; 33:11 Whence then, whence is that Day so full of agony and anguish? A stream of fire is rolling before His face. The books of our deeds are opened. The day itself is burning as an oven, the angels are flying around, and many furnaces are prepared. How then is He good and merciful, and full of lovingkindness to man? Even herein is He merciful, and He shows in these things the greatness of His lovingkindness. For He holds forth to us these terrors, that being constrained by them, we may be awakened to the desire of the kingdom.

And observe how, besides commending Onesiphorus, he specifies his kindness, he oft refreshed me; like a wearied wrestler overcome by heat, he refreshed and strengthened him in his tribulations. And in how many things he ministered to me at Ephesus, you know very well. Not only at Ephesus, but here also he refreshed me. For such ought to be the conduct of one on the watch and awakened to good actions, not to work once, or twice, or thrice, but through the whole of life. For as our body is not fed once for all, and so provided with sustenance for a whole life, but needs also daily food, so in this too, godliness requires to be supported every day by good works. For we ourselves have need of great mercy. It is on account of our sins that God, the Friend of man, does all these things, not that He needs them Himself, but He does all

for us. For therefore it is that He has revealed them all, and made them known to us, and not merely told us of them, but given us assurance of them by what He has done. Though He was worthy of credit upon His word only, that no one may think it is said hyperbolically, or in the way of threatening merely, we have further assurance by His works. How? By the punishments which He has inflicted both publicly and privately. And that you may learn by the very examples, at one time he punished Pharaoh, at another time He brought a flood of water upon the earth, and that utter destruction, and again at another time a flood of fire: and even now we see in many instances the wicked suffering vengeance, and punishments, which things are figures of Hell.

For lest we should slumber and be slothful, and forget His word, He awakens our minds by deeds; showing us, even here, courts of justice, judgment seats, and trials. Is there then among men so great a regard for justice, and does God, whose ordinance even these things are, make no account of it? Is this credible? In a house, in a market-place, there is a court of justice. The master daily sits in judgment upon his slaves, calls them to account for their offenses, punishes some and pardons others. In the country, the husbandman and his wife are daily at law. In a ship, the master is judge, and in a camp the general over his soldiers, and everywhere one may see judicial proceedings. In trades, the master judges the learner. In short all, publicly and privately, are judges to one another. In nothing is the consideration of justice overlooked, and all in every place give account of their actions. And is the inquisition for justice here thus spread through cities, through houses, and among individuals; and is there no regard for what is justice there, where the right hand of God is full of righteousness Psalm 48:10, and His righteousness is as the mountains of God? Psalm 36:6

How is it then that God, the righteous Judge, strong and patient Psalm 7:11, Septuagint, bears thus with men, and does not exact punishment? Here you have the cause, He is longsuffering, and thereby would lead you to repentance. But if you continue in sin, thou after your hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto yourself wrath. Romans 2:5 If then He is just, He repays according to desert, and does not overlook those who suffer wrongfully, but avenges them. For this is the part of one who is just. If He is powerful, He requites after death, and at the Resurrection: for this belongs to him who is powerful. And if because He is longsuffering He bears with men, let us not be disturbed, nor ask, why He does not prosecute vengeance here? For if this were done, the whole human race before this would have been swept away, if every day He should call us to account for our transgressions, since there is not, there is not indeed, a single day pure from sin, but in something greater or less we offend; so that we should not one of us have arrived at our twentieth year, but for His great long-suffering, and His goodness, that grants us a longer space for repentance, that we may put off our past transgressions.

Let each therefore, with an upright conscience, entering into a review of what he has done, and bringing his whole life before him, consider, whether he is not deserving of chastisements and punishments without number? And when he is indignant that some one, who has been guilty of many bad actions, escapes with impunity; let him consider his own faults, and his indignation will cease. For those crimes appear great, because they are in great and notorious matters; but if he will enquire into his own, he will perhaps find them more numerous.

For to rob and to defraud is the same thing, whether it be done for gold or silver; since both proceed from the same mind. He that will steal a little would not refuse to steal much, if it fell in his way; and that it does not, is not his own choice, but an accidental circumstance. A poor man, who robs a poorer, would not hesitate to rob the rich if he could. His forbearance arises from weakness, and not from choice. Such an one, you say, is a ruler; and takes away the property of those who are under his rule.

And say, dost not thou steal? For tell me not that he steals talents, and you as many pence. In giving alms, some cast in gold, while the widow threw in two mites, yet she contributed not less than they. Wherefore? Because the intention is considered, and not the amount of the gift. And then, in the case of alms, you will have God judge thus, and would, because of your poverty, receive no less a reward for giving two mites than he who lays down many talents of gold? And is not the same rule applicable to wrongful dealings?

How is this consistent? As she who contributed two mites was considered equal to the greatest givers, because of her good intention, so thou, who stealest two mites, art as culpable as those mightier robbers. Nay, if I may give utterance to something strange, you are a worse robber than they. For a man would be equally an adulterer, whether he committed the sin with the wife of a king, or of a poor man, or of a slave: since the offense is not judged by the quality of the persons, but by the wickedness of his will who commits it; so is it likewise in this case.

Nay, I should call him who committed the sin with an inferior perhaps more guilty, than him who intrigued with the queen herself. For in this case, wealth, and beauty, and other attractions might be pleaded, none of which exist in the other. Therefore the other is the worse adulterer. Again, he seems to me a more determined drunkard, who commits that excess with bad wine; so he is a worse defrauder, who does not despise small thefts; for he who commits great robberies, would perhaps not stoop to petty thefts, whereas he who steals little things would never forbear greater, therefore he is the greater thief of the two.

For how should he despise gold, who does not despise silver? So that when we accuse our rulers, let us recount our own faults, and we shall find ourselves more given to wrong and robbery than they; unless we judge of right and wrong rather by the act, than by the intention of the mind, as we ought to judge. If one should be convicted of having stolen the goods of a poor man, another those of a rich man, will they not both be punished alike? Is not a man equally a murderer, whether he murder a poor and deformed, or a rich and handsome, man?

When therefore we say that such an one has seized upon another person's land, let us reflect upon our own faults, and then we shall not condemn other men, but we shall admire the longsuffering of God. We shall not be indignant that judgment does not fall upon them, but we shall be more slow to commit wickedness ourselves. For when we perceive ourselves liable to the same punishment, we shall no longer feel such discontent, and shall desist from offenses, and shall obtain the good things to come, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father, etc.

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