

Homily 1 on Second Thessalonians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the importance of hope, humility, and vigilance against false teachings in the Christian faith as expressed in Second Thessalonians.

Topics: "Humility", "Eschatology"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of knowing God to overcome pride, highlighting how pride leads to arrogance, blasphemy, and other sins. He warns against false teachings about the Resurrection and the coming of Christ, urging believers to stay firm in their faith and not be deceived by deceptive spirits or forged letters. Chrysostom encourages humility by reflecting on the transient nature of worldly possessions and the inevitability of death, emphasizing the need to be meek and lowly in heart, following the example of Christ.

Transcript

Having said in his former Epistle that we pray night and day to see you, and that we could not forbear, but were left in Athens alone, and that I sent Timothy from 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10, by all these expressions he shows the desire which he had to come among them. When therefore he had perhaps not had time to go, and to perfect what was lacking in their faith, on this account he adds a second Epistle, filling up by his writings what was wanting of his presence. For that he did not depart, we may conjecture from hence: for he says in this Epistle, We beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:1 For in his first Epistle he said, Concerning the times and the seasons you have no need that anything be written unto you. 1 Thessalonians 5:1 So that if he had gone, there would have been no need of his writing. But since the question was deferred, on this account he adds this Epistle, as in his Epistle to Timothy he says, They subvert the faith of some, saying that the Resurrection is already past from 2 Timothy 2:18; that the faithful henceforth hoping for nothing great or splendid, might faint under their sufferings.

For since that hope supported them, and did not allow them to yield to the present evils, the devil wishing to cut it off, as being a kind of anchor, when he was not able to persuade them that the things to come were false, went to work another way, and having suborned certain pestilential men, endeavored to deceive those who believed into a persuasion that those great and splendid things had received their fulfillment. Accordingly these men then said that the Resurrection was already past. But now they said that the Judgment and the coming of Christ were at hand, that they might involve even Christ in a falsehood,

and having pointed out to them that there is hereafter no retribution, nor judgment-seat, nor punishment and vengeance for those who had done them evil, they might both render these more bold, and those more dispirited. And, what was worse than all, some attempted merely to report words as if they were said by Paul, but others even to forge Epistles as written by him. On this account, cutting off all access for them, he says, Be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us. 2 Thessalonians 2:2 Neither by spirit, he says, glancing at the false prophets. Whence then shall we know them, he says? For this very reason, he added, The salutation of me Paul with my own hand, which is the token in every Epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18 He does not here mean, that this is the token -- for it is probable that others also imitated this -- but that I write the salutation with my own hand, as is the custom also now among us. For by the subscription the writings of those who send letters are made known. But he comforts them, as being excessively pinched by their troubles; both praising them from their present state, and encouraging them from a prospect of the futurity, and from the punishment, and from the recompense of good things prepared for them; and he more clearly enlarges upon the topic, not indeed revealing the time itself, but showing the sign of the time, namely, Antichrist. For a weak soul is then most fully assured, not when it merely hears, but when it learns something more particular.

And Christ too bestowed great care upon this point, and being seated on the Mount, He with great particularity discoursed to His disciples upon the Consummation. And wherefore? That there might be no room for those who introduce Antichrists and false Christs. And He Himself also gives many signs, one indeed, and that the most important, saying, when the Gospel shall be preached to all nations from Matthew 24:14, and another also, that they should not be deceived with respect to His coming. As the lightning Matthew 24:27, He says, shall He come; not concealed in any corner, but shining everywhere. It requires no one to point it out, so splendid will it be, even as the lightning needs no one to point it out. And He has spoken in a certain place also concerning Antichrist, when He said, I have come in My Father's name, and you receive Me not: if another shall come in His own name, Him you will receive. John 5:43 And He said that those unspeakable calamities one after another were a sign of it, and that Elias must come.

The Thessalonians indeed were then perplexed, but their perplexity has been profitable to us. For not to them only, but to us also are these things useful, that we may be delivered from childish fables and from old women's fooleries. And have you not often heard, when you were children, persons talking much even about the name of Antichrist, and about his bending the knee? For the devil scatters these things in our minds, while yet tender, that the doctrine may grow up with us, and that he may be able to deceive us. Paul therefore, in speaking of Antichrist, would not have passed over these things if they had been profitable. Let us not therefore enquire into these things. For he will not come so bending his knees, but exalting himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 For as the devil fell by pride, so he who is wrought upon by him is anointed unto pride.

Wherefore, I beseech you, let us all be earnest to be far removed from this affection, that we may not fall into his condemnation, that we may not subject ourselves to the same punishment, that we may not partake of the vengeance. Not a novice, he says, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6 He who is puffed up therefore, suffers the same punishment with the devil. For the beginning of pride is not to know the Lord. Sirach 10:12-13 Pride is the beginning of sin, the first impulse and movement toward evil. Perhaps indeed it is both the root and the foundation. For the beginning means

either the first impulse towards evil, or the grounding. As if one should say, the beginning of chastity is to abstain from the sight of an improper object, that is the first impulse. But if we should say, the beginning of chastity is fasting, that is the foundation and establishment. So also pride is the beginning of sin. For every sin begins from it, and is maintained by it. For that, whatever good things we do, this vice suffers them not to remain and not fall away, but is as a certain root not letting them abide unshaken, is manifest from hence: see what things the Pharisee did, but they profited him nothing. For he did not extirpate the root, but it corrupted all his performances, because the root remained. From pride springs contempt of the poor, desire of riches, the love of power, the longing for much glory. Such an one is prompt to revenge an insult. For he who is proud cannot bear to be insulted even by his superiors, much less by his inferiors. But he who cannot bear to be insulted cannot bear either to suffer any ill. See how pride is the beginning of sin.

But how is it the beginning of pride, not to know the Lord? Justly. For he who knows God as he ought to know Him, he who knows that the Son of God humbled Himself so much, is not lifted up. But he who knows not these things, is lifted up. For pride anoints him unto arrogance. For tell me, whence is it that they who make war upon the Church say that they know God? Is it not from arrogance? See into what a precipice it plunges them, not to know the Lord! For if God loves a contrite spirit Psalm 51:17, etc, He on the other hand resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5 There is therefore no evil like pride. It renders a man a demon, insolent, blasphemous, perjured, and makes him desirous of deaths and murders. The proud man always lives in troubles, is always angry, always unhappy. There is nothing which can satiate his passion. If he should see the king stooping down to him, and prostrating himself, he is not satisfied, but is the more inflamed. For as the lovers of money, the more they receive, want so much the more, so also the proud, the more honor they enjoy, the more they desire. For their passion is increased; for a passion it is, and a passion knows not limit, but then stops when it has slain its possessor. Do you not see that drunkards are always thirsty? For it is a passion, not the desire of nature, but some perverted disease. Do you not see how those who are affected with bulimy, as it is called, are always hungry? For it is a passion, as the children of the physicians say, already exceeding the bounds of nature. The busy-bodies, and the over-curious, whatever they have learned, do not stop. For it is a passion, and has no limit. Sirach 23:17 Again, they who delight in fornication, they too cannot desist. To a fornicator, it is said, all bread is sweet. He will not cease, till he is devoured. For it is a passion.

But they are indeed passions, not however incurable, but admitting of cure, and much more than bodily affections. For if we will, we can extinguish them. How then can a man extinguish pride? By knowing God. For if it arises from not knowing God, if we know Him, all pride is banished. Think of Hell. Think of those who are much better than yourself. Think of your sins. Think for how many things you deserve punishment from God. If you think of these, you will soon bring down your proud mind, you will soon bend it. But can you not do these things? Are you too weak? Consider things present, human nature itself, the nothingness of man! When you see a dead body carried through the market-place, orphan children following it, a widow beating her breast, servants bewailing, friends looking dejected, reflect upon the nothingness of things present, and that they differ not from a shadow, or a dream.

Does this not suit you? Think of those who are very rich, who perish anyhow in war; look round on the houses, that belonged to the great and illustrious, and are now leveled to the ground. Consider how mighty they were, and now not even a memorial of them is left. For, if you will, every day you may find examples of these things -- the successions of rulers -- the confiscations of rich men's goods. Many tyrants have sat upon the ground -- and he who was never thought on, has worn a diadem. Sirach 11:15 Do not these things happen every day? Do not our affairs resemble a kind of wheel? Read, if you will, both

our own (books), and those without: for they also abound in such examples. If you despise ours, and this from pride; if you admire the works of philosophers, go even to them. They will instruct you, relating ancient calamities, as will poets, and orators, and sophists, and all historians. From every side, if you will, you may find examples.

But if you will none of these things, reflect upon our very nature, of what it consists, and wherein it ends. Consider, when you sleep, of what worth are you? Will not even a little beast be able to destroy you? For often a little animal falling from the roof has deprived many persons of sight, or has been the cause of some other danger. But what? Are you not less than all beasts? But what do you say? That you excel in reason? But behold, you have not reason: for pride is a sign of the want of reason. And for what, tell me, are you high-minded after all? Is it upon the good constitution of your body? But the prize of victory here is with the irrational creatures; this is possessed also by robbers and murderers, and violators of the tombs. But are you proud of your understanding? It is no proof of understanding to be proud. By this then first you deprive yourself of becoming intelligent. Let us bring down our high thoughts. Let us be moderate, and lowly, and gentle. For such even Christ has pronounced blessed above all, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit. Matthew 5:3 And again, He cried, saying, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Matthew 11:29 For this reason He washed the feet of His disciples, affording us an example of humility. From all these things let us gain profit, that we may be able to obtain the blessings promised to those who love Him, by the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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