

Homily 16 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily emphasizes Christ's role in fulfilling the Law and the importance of a deeper righteousness that transcends mere legalism.

Scripture: Romans 12:19

Topics: "Christian Living", "Reconciliation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of following Christ's teachings, emphasizing the need to control our anger and reconcile with others quickly to avoid judgment and punishment. He highlights the value of love and unity, urging believers to prioritize reconciliation over personal grievances. Chrysostom explains that by following Christ's commandments, we not only benefit ourselves but also demonstrate our love for God. He encourages a mindset that values eternal rewards over temporary pleasures, reminding listeners that God assists and rewards those who strive to live virtuously.

Transcript

Matt. V. 17.

Think not that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets.

Why, who suspected this? Or who accused Him, that He should make a defense against this charge? Since surely from what had gone before no such suspicion was generated. For to command men to be meek, and gentle, and merciful, and pure in heart, and to strive for righteousness, indicated no such design, but rather altogether the contrary.

Wherefore then can He have said this? Not at random, nor vainly: but inasmuch as He was proceeding to ordain commandments greater than those of old, saying, It was said to them of old time, You shall not kill; but I say unto you, Be not even angry; and to mark out a way for a kind of divine and heavenly conversation; in order that the strangeness thereof might not disturb the souls of the hearers, nor dispose them quite to mutiny against what He said He used this means of setting them right beforehand.

For although they fulfilled not the law, yet nevertheless they were possessed with much conscientious regard to it; and while they were annulling it every day by their deeds, the letters thereof they would have remain unmoved, and that no one should add anything more to them. Or rather, they bore with their rulers adding thereto, not however for the better, but for the worse. For so they used to set aside the honor due

to our parents by additions of their own, and very many others also of the matters enjoined them, they would free themselves of by these unseasonable additions.

Therefore, since Christ in the first place was not of the sacerdotal tribe, and next, the things which He was about to introduce were a sort of addition, not however lessening, but enhancing virtue; He knowing beforehand that both these circumstances would trouble them, before He wrote in their mind those wondrous laws, casts out that which was sure to be harboring there. And what was it that was harboring there, and making an obstacle?

2. They thought that He, thus speaking, did so with a view to the abrogation of the ancient institutions. This suspicion therefore He heals; nor here only does He so, but elsewhere also again. Thus, since they accounted Him no less than an adversary of God, from this sort of reason, namely, His not keeping the sabbath; He, to heal such their suspicion, there also again sets forth His pleas, of which some indeed were proper to Himself; as when He says, My Father works, and I work; John 5:17 but some had in them much condescension, as when He brings forward the sheep lost on the sabbath day, Matthew 12:11 and points out that the law is disturbed for its preservation, and makes mention again of circumcision, as having this same effect. John 7:23

Wherefore we see also that He often speaks words somewhat beneath Him, to remove the semblance of His being an adversary of God.

For this cause He who had raised thousands of the dead with a word only, when He was calling Lazarus, added also a prayer; and then, lest this should make Him appear less than Him that begot Him, He, to correct this suspicion, added, I said these things, because of the people which stands by, that they may believe that you have sent me. And neither does He work all things as one who acted by His own power, that He might thoroughly correct their weakness; nor does He all things with prayer, lest He should leave matter of evil suspicion to them that should follow, as though He were without strength or power: but He mingles the latter with the former, and those again with these. Neither does He this indiscriminately, but with His own proper wisdom. For while He does the greater works authoritatively, in the less He looks up unto Heaven. Thus, when absolving sins, and revealing His secrets, and opening Paradise, and driving away devils, and cleansing lepers, and bridling death, and raising the dead by thousands, He did all by way of command: but when, what was much less than these, He was causing many loaves to spring forth out of few, then He looked up to Heaven: signifying that not through weakness He does this. For He who could do the greater with authority, how in the lesser could He need prayer? But as I was saying, He does this to silence their shamelessness. The same reckoning, then, I bid you make of His words also, when you hear Him speak lowly things. For many in truth are the causes both for words and for actions of that cast: as, for instance, that He might not be supposed alien from God; His instructing and waiting on all men; His teaching humility; His being encompassed with flesh; the Jews' inability to hear all at once; His teaching us to utter no high word of ourselves. For this cause many times, having in His own person said much that is lowly of Himself, the great things He leaves to be said by others. Thus He Himself indeed, reasoning with the Jews, said, Before Abraham was, I Am: John 8:58 but His disciple not thus, but, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

Again, that He Himself made Heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things visible and invisible, in His own person He nowhere expressly said: but His disciple, speaking plainly out, and suppressing nothing, affirms this once, twice, yea often: writing that all things were made by Him; and, without Him was not one thing made; and, He was in the world, and the world was made by Him.

And why marvel, if others have said greater things of Him than He of Himself; since (what is more) in many cases, what He showed forth by His deeds, by His words He uttered not openly? Thus that it was Himself who made mankind He showed clearly even by that blind man; but when He was speaking of our formation at the beginning, He said not, I made, but He who made them, made them male and female. Matthew 19:4 Again, that He created the world and all things therein, He demonstrated by the fishes, by the wine, by the loaves, by the calm in the sea, by the sunbeam which He averted on the Cross; and by very many things besides: but in words He has nowhere said this plainly, though His disciples are continually declaring it, both John, and Paul, and Peter.

For if they who night and day hear Him discourse, and see Him work marvels; to whom He explained many things in private, and gave so great power as even to raise the dead; whom He made so perfect, as to forsake all things for Him: if even they, after so great virtue and self-denial, had not strength to bear it all, before the supply of the Spirit; how could the people of the Jews, being both void of understanding, and far behind such excellency, and only by hazard present when He did or said anything, how could they have been persuaded but that He was alien from the God of all, unless he had practised such great condescension throughout?

For on this account we see that even when He was abrogating the sabbath, He did not as of set purpose bring in such His legislation, but He puts together many and various pleas of defense. Now if, when He was about to cause one commandment to cease, He used so much reserve in His language, that He might not startle the hearers; much more, when adding to the law, entire as it was, another entire code of laws, did He require much management and attention, not to alarm those who were then hearing Him.

For this same cause, neither do we find Him teaching everywhere clearly concerning His own Godhead. For if His adding to the law was sure to perplex them so greatly, much more His declaring Himself God.

3. Wherefore many things are uttered by Him, far below His proper dignity, and here when He is about to proceed upon His addition to the law, He has used abundance for correction beforehand. For neither was it once only that He said, I do not abrogate the law, but He both repeated it again, and added another and a greater thing; in that, to the words, Think not that I have come to destroy, He subjoined, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Now this not only obstructs the obstinacy of the Jews, but stops also the mouths of those heretics, who say that the old covenant is of the devil. For if Christ came to destroy his tyranny, how is this covenant not only not destroyed, but even fulfilled by Him? For He said not only, I do not destroy it; though this had been enough; but I even fulfill it: which are the words of one so far from opposing himself, as to be even establishing it.

And how, one may ask, did He not destroy it? In what way did He rather fulfill either the law or the prophets? The prophets He fulfilled, inasmuch as He confirmed by His actions all that had been said concerning Him; wherefore also the evangelist used to say in each case, That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. Both when He was born, Matthew 1:22-23 and when the children sung that wondrous hymn to Him, and when He sat on the ass, Matthew 21:5-16 and in very many more instances He worked this same fulfillment: all which things must have been unfulfilled, if He had not come.

But the law He fulfilled, not in one way only, but in a second and third also. In one way, by transgressing none of the precepts of the law. For that He did fulfill it all, hear what He says to John, For thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness. Matthew 3:15 And to the Jews also He said, Which of you convinces me of

sin. John 8:46 And to His disciples again, The prince of this world comes, and finds nothing in me. John 14:30 And the prophet too from the first had said that He did no sin. Isaiah 53:9

This then was one sense in which He fulfilled it. Another, that He did the same through us also; for this is the marvel, that He not only Himself fulfilled it, but He granted this to us likewise. Which thing Paul also declaring said, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. Romans 10:4 And he said also, that He judged sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh. Romans 8:3-4 And again, Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the law. Romans 3:31 For since the law was laboring at this, to make man righteous, but had not power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the law desired: and what the law could not by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He says, I am not come to destroy the law.

4. But if any one will inquire accurately, he will find also another, a third sense, in which this has been done. Of what sort is it then? In the sense of that future code of laws, which He was about to deliver to them.

For His sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out, and filling up of them. Thus, not to kill, is not annulled by the saying, Be not angry, but rather is filled up and put in greater security: and so of all the others.

Wherefore, you see, as He had before unsuspectedly cast the seeds of this teaching; so at the time when from His comparison of the old and new commandments, He would be more distinctly suspected of placing them in opposition, He used His corrective beforehand. For in a covert way He had indeed already scattered those seeds, by what He had said. Thus, Blessed are the poor, is the same as that we are not to be angry; and, Blessed are the pure in heart, as not to look upon a woman for lust; and the not laying up treasures on earth, harmonizes with, Blessed are the merciful; and to mourn also, to be persecuted and reviled, coincide with entering in at the strait gate; and, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, is nothing else than that which He says afterwards, Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them. And having declared the peace-maker blessed, He again almost said the same, when He gave command to leave the gift, and hasten to reconciliation with him that was grieved, and about agreeing with our adversary.

But there He set down the rewards of them that do right, here rather the punishments of them who neglect practice. Wherefore as in that place He said, The meek shall inherit earth; so here, He who calls his brother fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire; and there, The pure in heart shall see God; here, he is a complete adulterer who looks unchastely. And having there called the peace-makers, sons of God; here He alarms us from another quarter, saying, Lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge. Thus also, whereas in the former part He blesses them that mourn, and them that are persecuted; in the following, establishing the very same point, He threatens destruction to them that go not that way; for, They that walk 'in the broad way,' says He, 'make their end there.' And, You cannot serve God and mammon, seems to me the same with, Blessed are the merciful, and, those that hunger after righteousness.

But as I said, since He is going to say these things more clearly, and not only more clearly, but also to add again more than had been already said (for He no longer merely seeks a merciful man, but bids us give up even our coat; not simply a meek person, but to turn also the other cheek to him that would smite us):

therefore He first takes away the apparent contradiction.

On this account, then, as I have already stated, He said this not once only, but once and again; in that to the words, Think not that I have come to destroy, He added, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all come to pass.

Now what He says is like this: it cannot be that it should remain unaccomplished, but the very least thing therein must needs be fulfilled. Which thing He Himself performed, in that He completed it with all exactness.

And here He signifies to us obscurely that the fashion of the whole world is also being changed. Nor did He set it down without purpose, but in order to arouse the hearer, and indicate, that He was with just cause introducing another discipline; if at least the very works of the creation are all to be transformed, and mankind is to be called to another country, and to a higher way of practising how to live.

5. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:19

Thus, having rid Himself of the evil suspicion, and having stopped the mouths of them who would fain gainsay, then at length He proceeds to alarm, and sets down a heavy, denunciation in support of the enactments He was entering on.

For as to His having said this in behalf not of the ancient laws, but of those which He was proceeding to enact, listen to what follows, For I say unto you, says He, Unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

For if He were threatening with regard to the ancient laws, how said He, except it shall exceed? since they who did just the same as those ancients, could not exceed them on the score of righteousness.

But of what kind was the required excess? Not to be angry, not even to look upon a woman unchastely.

For what cause then does He call these commandments least, though they were so great and high? Because He Himself was about to introduce the enactment of them; for as He humbled Himself, and speaks of Himself frequently with measure, so likewise of His own enactments, hereby again teaching us to be modest in everything. And besides, since there seemed to be some suspicion of novelty, He ordered His discourse for a while with reserve.

But when you hear, least in the kingdom of Heaven, surmise nothing but hell and torments. For He was used to mean by the kingdom, not merely the enjoyment thereof, but also the time of the resurrection, and that awful coming. And how could it be reasonable, that while he who called his brother fool, and transgressed but one commandment, falls into hell; the breaker of them all, and instigator of others to the same, should be within the kingdom. This therefore is not what He means, but that such a one will be at that time least, that is, cast out, last. And he that is last will surely then fall into hell. For, being God, He foreknew the laxity of the many, He foreknew that some would think these sayings were merely hyperbolic, and would argue about the laws, and say, What, if any one call another a fool, is he punished? If one merely look on a woman, does he become an adulterer? For this very cause He, destroying such insolence beforehand, has set down the strongest denunciation against either sort, as

well them who transgress, as them who lead on others so to do.

Knowing then His threat as we do, let us neither ourselves transgress, nor discourage such as are disposed to keep these things.

But whosoever shall do and teach, says He, shall be called great.

For not to ourselves alone, should we be profitable, but to others also; since neither is the reward as great for him who guides himself aright, as for one who with himself adds also another. For as teaching without doing condemns the teacher (for you who teach another, it is said, do you not teach yourself Romans 2:21?) so doing but not guiding others, lessens our reward. One ought therefore to be chief in either work, and having first set one's self right, thus to proceed also to the care of the rest. For on this account He Himself has set the doing before the teaching; to intimate that so most of all may one be able to teach, but in no other way. For one will be told, Physician, heal yourself. Luke 4:23 Since he who cannot teach himself, yet attempts to set others right, will have many to ridicule him. Or rather such a one will have no power to teach at all, his actions uttering their voice against him. But if he be complete in both respects, he shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.

6. For I say unto you, Unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:20

Here by righteousness He means the whole of virtue; even as also discoursing of Job, He said, He was a blameless man, righteous. According to the same signification of the word, Paul also called that man righteous for whom, as he said, no law is even set. For, says he, a law is not made for a righteous man. 1 Timothy 1:9 And in many other places too one might find this name standing for virtue in general.

But observe, I pray you, the increase of grace; in that He will have His newly-come disciples better than the teachers in the old covenant. For by Scribes and Pharisees here, He meant not merely the lawless, but the well-doers. For, were they not doing well, He would not have said they have a righteousness; neither would He have compared the unreal to the real.

And observe also here, how He commends the old law, by making a comparison between it and the other; which kind of thing implies it to be of the same tribe and kindred. For more and less, is in the same kind. He does not, you see, find fault with the old law, but will have it made stricter. Whereas, had it been evil, He would not have required more of it; He would not have made it more perfect, but would have cast it out.

And how one may say, if it be such, does it not bring us into the Kingdom? It does not now bring in them who live after the coming of Christ, favored as they are with more strength, and bound to strive for greater things: since as to its own foster-children, them it does bring in one and all. Yea, for many shall come, says He, from east and west, and shall lie down in the bosoms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Matthew 8:11 And Lazarus also receiving the great prize, is shown dwelling in Abraham's bosom. And all, as many as have shone forth with excellency in the old dispensation, shone by it, every one of them. And Christ Himself, had it been in anything evil or alien from Him, would not have fulfilled it all when He came. For if only to attract the Jews He was doing this, and not in order to prove it akin to the new law, and concurrent therewith; wherefore did He not also fulfill the laws and customs of the Gentiles, that He might attract the Gentiles also?

So that from all considerations it is clear, that not from any badness in itself does it fail to bring us in, but because it is now the season of higher precepts.

And if it be more imperfect than the new, neither does this imply it to be evil: since upon this principle the new law itself will be in the very same case. Because in truth our knowledge of this, when compared with that which is to come, is a sort of partial and imperfect thing, and is done away on the coming of that other. For when, says He, that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away: 1 Corinthians 13:10 even as it befell the old law through the new. Yet we are not to blame the new law for this, though that also gives place on our attaining unto the Kingdom: for then, says He, that which is in part shall be done away: but for all this we call it great.

Since then both the rewards thereof are greater, and the power given by the Spirit more abundant, in reason it requires our graces to be greater also. For it is no longer a land that flows with milk and honey, nor a comfortable old age, nor many children, nor grain and wine, and flocks and herds: but Heaven, and the good things in the Heavens, and adoption and brotherhood with the Only-Begotten, and to partake of the inheritance and to be glorified and to reign with Him, and those unnumbered rewards. And as to our having received more abundant help, hear Paul, when he says, There is therefore no condemnation now to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

7. And now after threatening the transgressors, and setting great rewards for them that do right, and signifying that He justly requires of us something beyond the former measures; He from this point begins to legislate, not simply, but by way of comparison with the ancient ordinances, desiring to intimate these two things: first, that not as contending with the former, but rather in great harmony with them, He is making these enactments; next, that it was meet and very seasonable for Him to add thereto these second precepts.

And that this may be made yet clearer, let us hearken to the words of the Legislator. What then does He Himself say?

You have heard that it was said to them of old time, You shall not kill. Matthew 5:21

And yet it was Himself who gave those laws also, but so far He states them impersonally. For if on the one hand He had said, You have heard that I said to them of old, the saying would have been hard to receive, and would have stood in the way of all the hearers. If again, on the other hand, after having said, You have heard that it was said to them of old by my Father, He had added, But I say, He would have seemed to be taking yet more on Himself.

Wherefore He has simply stated it, making out thereby one point only; the proof that in fitting season He had come saying these things. For by the words, It was said to them of old, He pointed out the length of the time, since they received this commandment. And this He did to shame the hearer, shrinking from the advance to the higher class of His commandments; as though a teacher should say to a child that was indolent, Do you not know how long a time you have consumed in learning syllables? This then He also covertly intimates by the expression, them of old time, and thus for the future summons them on to the higher order of His instructions: as if He had said, You are learning these lessons long enough, and you must henceforth press on to such as are higher than these.

And it is well that He does not disturb the order of the commandments, but begins first with that which comes earlier, with which the law also began. Yea, for this too suits with one showing the harmony between them.

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment.

Do you see authority in perfection? Do you see a bearing suited to a legislator? Why, which among prophets ever spoke on this wise? Which among righteous men? Which among patriarchs? None; but, Thus says the Lord. But the Son not so. Because they were publishing their Master's commands, He His Father's. And when I say, His Father's, I mean His own. For mine, says He, are yours, and yours are mine. John 17:10 And they had their fellow-servants to legislate for, He His own servants.

Let us now ask those who reject the law, is, 'Be not angry' contrary to 'Do no murder'? Or is not the one commandment the completion and the development of the other? Clearly the one is the fulfilling of the other, and that is greater on this very account. Since he who is not stirred up to anger, will much more refrain from murder; and he who bridles wrath will much more keep his hands to himself. For wrath is the root of murder. And you see that He who cuts up the root will much more remove the branches; or rather, will not permit them so much as to shoot out at all. Not therefore to abolish the law did He make these enactments, but for the more complete observation of it. For with what design did the law enjoin these things? Was it not, that no one might slay his neighbor? It follows, that he who was opposing the law would have to enjoin murder. For to murder, were the contrary to doing no murder. But if He does not suffer one even to be angry, the mind of the law is established by Him more completely. For he that studies to avoid murder will not refrain from it equally with him that has put away even anger; this latter being further removed from the crime.

8. But that we may convict them in another way also, let us bring forward all their allegations. What then do they affirm? They assert that the God who made the world, who makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, who sends the rain on the just and on the unjust, is in some sense an evil being. But the more moderate (forsooth) among them, though declining this, yet while they affirm Him to be just, they deprive Him of being good. And some other one, who is not, nor made any of the things that are, they assign for a Father to Christ. And they say that he, who is not good, abides in his own, and preserves what are his own; but that He, that is good, seeks what are another's, and desires of a sudden to become a Saviour to them whose Creator He was not. Do you see the children of the devil, how they speak out of the fountain of their father, alienating the work of creation from God: while John cries out, He came unto His own, and, The world was made by Him?

In the next place, they criticise the law in the old covenant, which bids put out an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; and straightway they insult and say, Why, how can He be good who speaks so?

What then do we say in answer to this? That it is the highest kind of philanthropy. For He made this law, not that we might strike out one another's eyes, but that fear of suffering by others might restrain us from doing any such thing to them. As therefore He threatened the Ninevites with overthrow, not that He might destroy them, (for had that been His will, He ought to have been silent), but that He might by fear make them better, and so quiet His wrath: so also has He appointed a punishment for those who wantonly assail the eyes of others, that if good principle dispose them not to refrain from such cruelty, fear may restrain them from injuring their neighbors' sight.

And if this be cruelty, it is cruelty also for the murderer to be restrained, and the adulterer checked. But these are the sayings of senseless men, and of those that are mad to the extreme of madness. For I, so far from saying that this comes of cruelty, should say, that the contrary to this would be unlawful, according to men's reckoning. And whereas, you say, Because He commanded to pluck out an eye for an eye, therefore He is cruel; I say, that if He had not given this commandment, then He would have seemed, in the judgment of most men, to be that which you say He is.

For let us suppose that this law had been altogether done away, and that no one feared the punishment ensuing thereupon, but that license had been given to all the wicked to follow their own disposition in all security, to adulterers, and to murderers, to perjured persons, and to parricides; would not all things have been turned upside down? Would not cities, market-places, and houses, sea and land, and the whole world, have been filled with unnumbered pollutions and murders? Every one sees it. For if, when there are laws, and fear, and threatening, our evil dispositions are hardly checked; were even this security taken away, what is there to prevent men's choosing vice? And what degree of mischief would not then come revelling upon the whole of human life?

The rather, since cruelty lies not only in allowing the bad to do what they will, but in another thing too quite as much; to overlook, and leave uncared for, him who has done no wrong, but who is without cause or reason suffering ill. For tell me; were any one to gather together wicked men from all quarters, and arm them with swords, and bid them go about the whole city, and massacre all that came in their way, could there be anything more like a wild beast than he? And what if some other should bind, and confine with the utmost strictness those whom that man had armed, and should snatch from those lawless hands them, who were on the point of being butchered; could anything be greater humanity than this?

Now then, I bid you transfer these examples to the law likewise; for He that commands to pluck out an eye for an eye, has laid the fear as a kind of strong chain upon the souls of the bad, and so resembles him, who detains those assassins in prison; whereas he who appoints no punishment for them, does all but arm them by such security, and acts the part of that other, who was putting the swords in their hands, and letting them loose over the whole city.

Do you see not, how the commandments, so far from coming of cruelty, come rather of abounding mercy? And if on account of these you call the Lawgiver grievous, and hard to bear with; tell me which sort of command is the more toilsome and grievous, Do no murder, or, Be not even angry? Which is more in extreme, he who exacts a penalty for murder, or for mere anger? He who subjects the adulterer to vengeance after the fact, or he who enjoins a penalty even for the very desire, and that penalty everlasting? See ye not how their reasoning comes round to the very contrary? How the God of the old covenant, whom they call cruel, will be found mild and meek: and He of the new, whom they acknowledged to be good, will be hard and grievous, according to their madness? Whereas we say, that there is but one and the same Legislator of either covenant, who dispensed all meetly, and adapted to the difference of the times the difference between the two systems of law. Therefore neither are the first commandments cruel, nor the second hard and grievous, but all of one and the same providential care.

For that He Himself gave the old covenant also, hear the affirmation of the prophet, or rather (so we must speak), of Him who is both the one and the other: I will make a covenant with you, not according to the covenant which I made with your fathers. Jeremiah 31:31-32

But if he receive not this, who is diseased with the Manichæan doctrines, let him hear Paul saying the very same in another place, For Abraham had two sons, one by the bondmaid, and another by the freewoman; and these are two covenants. Galatians 4:22 As therefore in that case the wives are different, the husband the same; so here too the covenants are two, the Lawgiver one.

And to prove to you that it was of one and the same mildness; in the one He says, An eye for an eye, but in this other,

If one smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:39

For as in that case He checks him that does the wrong with the fear of this suffering, even so also in this. How so, it may be said, when He bids turn to him the other cheek also? Nay, what of that? Since not to take away his fear did He enjoin this, but as charging yourself to allow him to take his fill entirely. Neither did He say, that the other continues unpunished, but, do not thou punish; at once both enhancing the fear of him that smites, if he persist, and comforting him who is smitten.

9. But these things we have said, as one might say them incidentally, concerning all the commandments. Now we must go on to that which is before us, and keep to the thread of what had been affirmed. He that is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: so He speaks. Thus He has not altogether taken the thing away: first, because it is not possible, being a man, to be freed from passions: we may indeed get the dominion over them, but to be altogether without them is out of the question.

Next, because this passion is even useful, if we know how to use it at the suitable time. See, for instance, what great good was wrought by that anger of Paul, which he felt against the Corinthians, on that well-known occasion; and how, as it delivered them from a grievous pest, so by the same means again he recovered the people of the Galatians likewise, which had fallen aside; and others too beside these. What then is the proper time for anger? When we are not avenging ourselves, but checking others in their lawless freaks, or forcing them to attend in their negligence.

And what is the unsuitable time? When we do so as avenging ourselves: which Paul also forbidding, said Avenge not yourselves, dearly beloved, but rather give place unto wrath. Romans 12:19 When we are contending for riches: yea, for this has he also taken away, where he says, Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? 1 Corinthians 6:7 For as this last sort is superfluous, so is the first necessary and profitable. But most men do the contrary; becoming like wild beasts when they are injured themselves, but remiss and cowardly when they see despite done to another: both which are just opposite to the laws of the Gospel.

Being angry then is not a transgression, but being so unseasonably. For this cause the prophet also said, Be angry, and sin not.

10. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council.

By the council in this place He means the tribunal of the Hebrews: and He has mentioned this now, on purpose that He might not seem everywhere to play the stranger and innovator.

But this word, Raca, is not an expression of a great insolence, but rather of some contempt and slight on the part of the speaker. For as we, giving orders either to our servants, or to any very inferior person, say, Away with you; you here, tell such an one: so they who make use of the Syrians' language say, Raca,

putting that word instead of you. But God, the lover of man, roots up even the least faults, commanding us to behave to one another in seemly manner, and with due respect; and this with a view of destroying hereby also the greater.

But whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

To many this commandment has appeared grievous and galling, if for a mere word we are really to pay so great a penalty. And some even say that it was spoken rather hyperbolically. But I fear lest, when we have deceived ourselves with words here, we may in deeds there suffer that extreme punishment.

For wherefore, tell me, does the commandment seem overburdensome? Do you not know that most punishments and most sins have their beginning from words? Yea, for by words are blasphemies, and denials are by words, and revilings, and reproaches, and perjuries, and bearing false witness. Regard not then its being a mere word, but whether it have not much danger, this do thou inquire. Are you ignorant that in the season of enmity, when wrath is inflamed, and the soul kindled, even the least thing appears great, and what is not very reproachful is counted intolerable? And often these little things have given birth even to murder, and overthrown whole cities. For just as where friendship is, even grievous things are light, so where enmity lies beneath, very trifles appear intolerable. And however simply a word be spoken, it is surmised to have been spoken with an evil meaning. And as in fire: if there be but a small spark, though thousands of planks lie by, it does not easily lay hold of them; but if the flame have waxed strong and high, it readily seizes not planks only, but stones, and all materials that fall in its way; and by what things it is usually quenched, by the same it is kindled the more (for some say that at such a time not only wood and tow, and the other combustibles, but even water darted forth upon it does but fan its power the more); so is it also with anger; whatever any one may say, becomes food in a moment for this evil conflagration. All which kind of evils Christ checking beforehand, had condemned first him that is angry without a cause to the judgment, (this being the very reason why He said, He that is angry shall be in danger of the judgment); then him that says Raca, to the council. But as yet these are no great things; for the punishments are here. Therefore for him who calls fool He has added the fire of hell, now for the first time mentioning the name of hell. For having before discoursed much of the kingdom, not until then did He mention this; implying, that the former comes of His own love and indulgence towards man, this latter of our negligence.

11. And see how He proceeds little by little in His punishments, all but excusing Himself unto you, and signifying that His desire indeed is to threaten nothing of the kind, but that we drag Him on to such denunciations. For observe: I bade you, says He, not be angry for nought, because you are in danger of the judgment. You have despised the former commandment: see what anger has produced; it has led you on straightway to insult, for you have called your brother 'Raca.' Again, I set another punishment, 'the council.' If you overlook even this, and proceed to that which is more grievous, I visit you no longer with these finite punishments, but with the undying penalty of hell, lest after this you should break forth even to murder. For there is nothing, nothing in the world more intolerable than insolence; it is what has very great power to sting a man's soul. But when the word too which is spoken is in itself more wounding than the insolence, the blaze becomes twice as great. Think it not then a light thing to call another fool. For when of that which separates us from the brutes, and by which especially we are human beings, namely, the mind and the understanding -- when of this you have robbed your brother, you have deprived him of all his nobleness.

Let us not then regard the words merely, but realizing the things themselves, and his feeling, let us consider how great a wound is made by this word, and unto how much evil it proceeds. For this cause Paul likewise cast out of the kingdom not only the adulterous and the effeminate, but the revilers 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 also. And with great reason: for the insolent man mars all the beauty of charity, and casts upon his neighbor unnumbered ills, and works up lasting enmities, and tears asunder the members of Christ, and is daily driving away that peace which God so desires: giving much vantage ground unto the devil by his injurious ways, and making him the stronger. Therefore Christ Himself, cutting out the sinews of the devil's power, brought in this law.

For indeed He makes much account of love: this being above all things the mother of every good, and the badge of His disciples, and the bond which holds together our whole condition. With reason therefore does He remove with great earnestness the roots and the sources of that hatred which utterly spoils it.

Think not therefore that these sayings are in any wise hyperbolical, but consider the good done by them, and admire the mildness of these laws. For there is nothing for which God takes so much pains, as this; that we should be united and knit together one with another. Therefore both in His own person, and by His disciples, as well those in the Old, as in the New Testament, He makes so much account of this commandment; and is a severe avenger and punisher of those who despise the duty. For in truth nothing so effectually gives entrance and root to all wickedness, as the taking away of love. Wherefore He also said, When iniquity abounds, the love of the many shall wax cold. Thus Cain became his brother's murderer; thus Esau; thus Joseph's brethren; thus our unnumbered crimes have come revelling in, this bond being dissevered. You see why He Himself also roots out whatever things injure this, on every side, with great exactness.

12. Neither does He stop at those precepts only which have been mentioned, but adds also others more than those: whereby He signifies how much account He makes thereof. Namely, having threatened by the council, by the judgment, and by hell, He added other sayings again in harmony with the former, saying thus:

If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

O goodness! O exceeding love to man! He makes no account of the honor due unto Himself, for the sake of our love towards our neighbor; implying that not at all from any enmity, nor out of any desire to punish, had He uttered those former threatenings, but out of very tender affection. For what can be milder than these sayings? Let my service, says he, be interrupted, that your love may continue; since this also is a sacrifice, your being reconciled to your brother. Yea, for this cause He said not, after the offering, or before the offering; but, while the very gift lies there, and when the sacrifice is already beginning, He sends you to be reconciled to your brother; and neither after removing that which lies before us, nor before presenting the gift, but while it lies in the midst, He bids you hasten there.

With what motive then does He command so to do, and wherefore? These two ends, as it appears to me, He is hereby shadowing out and providing for. First, as I have said, His will is to point out that He highly values charity, and considers it to be the greatest sacrifice: and that without it He does not receive even that other; next, He is imposing such a necessity of reconciliation, as admits of no excuse. For whoever has been charged not to offer before he be reconciled, will hasten, if not for love of his neighbor, yet, that

this may not lie unconsecrated, to run unto him who has been grieved, and do away the enmity. For this cause He has also expressed it all most significantly, to alarm and thoroughly to awaken him. Thus, when He had said, Leave your gift, He stayed not at this, but added, before the altar (by the very place again causing him to shudder); and go away. And He said not merely, Go away, but He added, first, and then come and offer your gift. By all these things making it manifest, that this table receives not them that are at enmity with each other.

Let the initiated hear this, as many as draw near in enmity: and let the uninitiated hear too: yea, for the saying has some relation to them also. For they too offer a gift and a sacrifice: prayer, I mean, and almsgiving. For as to this also being a sacrifice, hear what the prophet says: A sacrifice of praise will glorify me; and again, Sacrifice to God a sacrifice of praise; and, The lifting up of mine hands is an evening sacrifice. So that if it be but a prayer, which you are offering in such a frame of mind, it were better to leave your prayer, and become reconciled to your brother, and then to offer your prayer.

For to this end were all things done: to this end even God became man, and took order for all those works, that He might set us at one.

And whereas in this place He is sending the wrong doer to the sufferer, in His prayer He leads the sufferer to the wrong doer, and reconciles them. For as there He says, Forgive men their debts; so here, If he has anything against you, go your way unto him.

Or rather, even here too He seems to me to be sending the injured person: and for some such reason He said not, Reconcile yourself to your brother, but, Be reconciled. And while the saying seems to pertain to the aggressor, the whole of it really pertains to him that is aggrieved. Thus, If you are reconciled to him, says Christ, through your love to him you will have me also propitious, and will be able to offer your sacrifice with great confidence. But if you are still irritated, consider that even I readily command that which is mine to be lightly esteemed, that you may become friends; and let these thoughts be soothing to your anger.

And He said not, When you have suffered any of the greater wrongs, then be reconciled; but, Though it be some trifle that he has against you. And He added not, Whether justly or unjustly; but merely, If he has anything against you. For though it be justly, not even in that case ought thou to protract the enmity; since Christ also was justly angered with us, yet nevertheless He gave Himself for us to be slain, not imputing those trespasses. 2 Corinthians 5:19

For this cause Paul also, when urging us in another way to reconciliation, said, Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Ephesians 4:26 For much as Christ by this argument of the sacrifice, so there Paul by that of the day, is urging us on to the self-same point. Because in truth he fears the night, lest it overtake him that is smitten alone, and make the wound greater. For whereas in the day there are many to distract, and draw him off; in the night, when he is alone, and is thinking it over by himself, the waves swell, and the storm becomes greater. Therefore Paul, you see, to prevent this, would fain commit him to the night already reconciled, that the devil may after that have no opportunity, from his solitude, to rekindle the furnace of his wrath, and make it fiercer. Thus also Christ permits not, though it be ever so little delay, lest, the sacrifice being accomplished, such an one become more remiss, procrastinating from day to day: for He knows that the case requires very speedy treatment. And as a skillful physician exhibits not only the preventives of our diseases, but their correctives also, even so does He likewise. Thus, to forbid our calling fool, is a preventive of enmity; but to command reconciliation is a means of removing the diseases

that ensue on the enmity.

And mark how both commands are set forth with earnestness. For as in the former case He threatened hell, so here He receives not the gift before the reconciliation, indicating great displeasure, and by all these methods destroying both the root and the produce.

And first of all He says, Be not angry; and after that, revile not. For indeed both these are augmented, the one by the other: from enmity is reviling, from reviling enmity. On this account then He heals now the root, and now the fruit; hindering indeed the evil from ever springing up in the first instance: but if perchance it may have sprouted up and borne its most evil fruit, then by all means He burns it down the more.

13. Therefore, you see, having mentioned, first the judgment, then the council, then hell, and having spoken of His own sacrifice, He adds other topics again, thus speaking:

Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him. Matthew 5:25

That is, that you may not say, What then, if I am injured; what if I am plundered, and dragged too before the tribunal? even this occasion and excuse He has taken away: for He commands us not even so to be at enmity. Then, since this injunction was great, He draws His advice from the things present, which are wont to restrain the grosser sort more than the future. Why, what do you say? says He. That your adversary is stronger, and does you wrong? Of course then he will wrong you more, if you do not make it up, but art forced to go into court. For in the former case, by giving up some money, you will keep your person free; but when you have come under the sentence of the judge, you will both be bound, and pay the utmost penalty. But if you avoid the contest there, you will reap two good results: first, not having to suffer anything painful: and secondly, that the good done will be thereafter your own doing, and no longer the effect of compulsion on his part. But if you will not be ruled by these sayings, you wrong not him, so much as yourself.

And see here also how He hastens him; for having said, Agree with your adversary, He added, quickly; and He was not satisfied with this, but even of this quickness He has required a further increase, saying, Whilst you are in the way with him; pressing and hastening him hereby with great earnestness. For nothing does so much turn our life upside down, as delay and procrastination in the performance of our good works. Nay, this has often caused us to lose all. Therefore, as Paul for his part says, Before the sun set, do away the enmity; and as He Himself had said above, Before the offering is completed, be reconciled; so He says in this place also, Quickly, while you are in the way with him, before you have come to the doors of the court; before you stand at the bar and art come to be thenceforth under the sway of him that judges. Since, before entering in, you have all in your own control; but if you set your foot on that threshold, you will not by ever so earnest efforts be able to arrange your matters at your will, having come under the constraint of another.

But what is it to agree? He means either, consent rather to suffer wrong? or, so plead the cause, as if you were in the place of the other; that you may not corrupt justice by self-love, but rather, deliberating on another's cause as your own, may so proceed to deliver your vote in this matter. And if this be a great thing, marvel not; since with this view did He set forth all those His blessings, that having beforehand smoothed and prepared the hearer's soul, he might render it apter to receive all His enactments.

Now some say that He obscurely signifies the devil himself, under the name of the adversary; and bids us have nothing of his, (for this, they say, is to agree with him): no compromise being possible after our

departure hence, nor anything awaiting us, but that punishment, from which no prayers can deliver. But to me He seems to be speaking of the judges in this world, and of the way to the court of justice, and of this prison.

For after he had abashed men by higher things, and things future, he alarms them also by such as are in this life. Which thing Paul also does, using both the future and the present to sway his hearer: as when, deterring from wickedness, he points out to him that is inclined to evil, the ruler armed: thus saying, But if you do that which is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God. Romans 13:4 And again, enjoining us to be subject unto him, he sets forth not the fear of God only, but the threatening also of the other party, and his watchful care. For you must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. Romans 5:5 Because the more irrational, as I have already said, are wont to be sooner corrected by these things, things which appear and are at hand. Wherefore Christ also made mention, not of hell only, but also of a court of justice, and of being dragged there, and of the prison, and of all the suffering there; by all these means destroying the roots of murder. For he who neither reviles, nor goes to law, nor prolongs enmity, how will he ever commit murder? So that from hence also it is evident, that in the advantage of our neighbor stands our own advantage. For he that agrees with his adversary, will benefit himself much more; becoming free, by his own act, from courts of law, and prisons, and the wretchedness that is there.

14. Let us then be obedient to His sayings; let us not oppose ourselves, nor be contentious; for first of all, even antecedently to their rewards, these injunctions have their pleasure and profit in themselves. And if to the more part they seem to be burdensome, and the trouble which they cause, great; have it in your mind that you are doing it for Christ's sake, and the pain will be pleasant. For if we maintain this way of reckoning at all times, we shall experience nothing burdensome, but great will be the pleasure we reap from every quarter; for our toil will no longer seem toil, but by how much it is enhanced, so much the sweeter and pleasanter does it grow.

When therefore the custom of evil things, and the desire of wealth, keep on bewitching you; do thou war against them with that mode of thinking which tells us, Great is the reward we shall receive, for despising the pleasure which is but for a season; and say to your soul; Are you quite dejected because I defraud you of pleasure? Nay, be of good cheer, for I am introducing you into Heaven. You do it not for man's sake, but for God's. Be patient therefore a little while, and you shall see how great is the gain. Endure for the present life, and you shall receive an unspeakable confidence. For if we would thus discourse with our own soul, and not only consider that which is burdensome in virtue, but take account also of the crown that comes thereof, we shall quickly withdraw it from all wickedness.

For if the devil, holding out pleasure for a season, but pain for ever, is yet strong, and prevails; seeing our case is just the reverse in these matters, the labor temporary, the pleasure and profit immortal, what plea shall we have, if we follow not virtue after so great encouragement? Why, the object of our labors is enough to set against all, and our clear persuasion that for God's sake we are enduring all this. For if one having the king his debtor, thinks he has sufficient security for all his life; consider how great will he be, who has made the Gracious and Everlasting God a debtor to himself, for good deeds both small and great. Do not then allege to me labors and sweats; for not by the hope only of the things to come, but in another way also, God has made virtue easy, assisting us everywhere, and putting His hand to our work. And if you will only contribute a little zeal, everything else follows. For to this end He will have you too to labor a little, even that the victory may be yours also. And just as a king would have his own son present indeed in the array; he would have him shoot with the bow, and show himself, that the trophy may be

reckoned his, while he achieves it all Himself: even so does God in our war against the devil: He requires of you one thing alone, that you show forth a sincere hatred against that foe. And if you contribute this to Him, He by Himself brings all the war to an end. Though thou burn with anger, with desire of riches, with any tyrannical passion whatever; if He see you only stripping yourself and prepared against it, He comes quickly to you, and makes all things easy, and sets you above the flame, as He did those children of old in the Babylonian furnace: for they too carried in with them nought but their good will.

In order then that we also may extinguish all the furnace of disordered pleasure here, and so escape the hell that is there, let these each day be our counsels, our cares, and our practice, drawing towards us the favor of God, both by our full purpose concerning good works, and by our frequent prayers. For thus even those things which appear insupportable now, will be most easy, and light, and lovely. Because, so long as we are in our passions, we think virtue rugged and morose and arduous, vice desirable and most pleasing; but if we would stand off from these but a little, then both vice will appear abominable and unsightly, and virtue easy, mild, and much to be desired. And this you may learn plainly from those who have done well. Hear, for instance, how of those passions Paul is ashamed, even after his deliverance from them, saying, For what fruit had ye then in those things, whereof you are now ashamed? Romans 6:21 But virtue, even after his labor, he affirms to be light, calling the laboriousness of our affliction momentary and light, and rejoicing in his sufferings, and glorying in his tribulations, and taking a pride in the marks wherewith he had been branded for Christ's sake.

In order then that we too may establish ourselves in this habit, let us order ourselves each day by what has been said, and forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press on towards the prize of the high calling: Philippians 3:13-14 unto which God grant that we may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

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