

Homily 23 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the importance of self-reflection over judgment of others and encourages earnest prayer for spiritual growth.

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-28

Topics: "Discerning False Prophets", "Spiritual Virtue"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of discerning false prophets and focusing on producing good fruits in our lives. He emphasizes the narrow and challenging path of virtue compared to the wide and easy path of destruction, urging believers to choose the path of righteousness despite its difficulties. Chrysostom warns against being deceived by those who appear righteous outwardly but are inwardly corrupt, highlighting the need to be vigilant and discerning. He stresses the eternal consequences of our actions, encouraging believers to prioritize spiritual virtues over worldly gains and power, as they lead to lasting rewards in the kingdom of God.

Transcript

Matt. VII. 1.

Judge not, that you be not judged.

What then? Ought we not to blame them that sin? Because Paul also says this selfsame thing: or rather, there too it is Christ, speaking by Paul, and saying, Romans 14:10 Why do you judge your brother? And thou, why do you set at nought your brother? and, Who are you that judgest another man's servant? Romans 14:4 And again, Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come. 1 Corinthians 4:5

How then does He say elsewhere, Reprove, rebuke, exhort, 2 Timothy 4:2 and, Them that sin rebuke before all? And Christ too to Peter, Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone, and if he neglect to hear, add to yourself another also; and if not even so does he yield, declare it to the church likewise? And how has He set over us so many to reprove; and not only to reprove, but also to punish? For him that hearkens to none of these, He has commanded to be as a heathen man and a publican. Matthew 18:17 And how gave He them the keys also? Since if they are not to judge, they will be without authority in any matter, and in vain have they received the power to bind and to loose.

And besides, if this were to obtain, all would be lost alike, whether in churches, or in states, or in houses. For except the master judge the servant, and the mistress the maid, and the father the son, and friends one another, there will be an increase of all wickedness. And why say I, friends? Unless we judge our enemies, we shall never be able to put an end to our enmity, but all things will be turned upside down.

What then can the saying be? Let us carefully attend, lest the medicines of salvation, and the laws of peace, be accounted by any man laws of overthrow and confusion. First of all, then, even by what follows, He has pointed out to them that have understanding the excellency of this law, saying, Why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in your own eye? Matthew 7:3

But if to many of the less attentive, it seem yet rather obscure, I will endeavor to explain it from the beginning. In this place, then, as it seems at least to me, He does not simply command us not to judge any of men's sins, neither does He simply forbid the doing of such a thing, but to them that are full of innumerable ills, and are trampling upon other men for trifles. And I think that certain Jews too are here hinted at, for that while they were bitter accusing their neighbors for small faults, and such as came to nothing, they were themselves insensibly committing deadly sins. Herewith towards the end also He was upbraiding them, when He said, You bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, but you will not move them with your finger, Matthew 23:4 and, ye pay tithe of mint and anise, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Matthew 23:23

Well then, I think that these are comprehended in His invective; that He is checking them beforehand as to those things, wherein they were hereafter to accuse His disciples. For although His disciples had been guilty of no such sin, yet in them were supposed to be offenses; as, for instance, not keeping the sabbath, eating with unwashed hands, sitting at meat with publicans; of which He says also in another place, You which strain at the gnat, and swallow the camel. But yet it is also a general law that He is laying down on these matters.

And the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 4:5 too Paul did not absolutely command not to judge, but not to judge their own superiors, and upon grounds that are not acknowledged; not absolutely to refrain from correcting them that sin. Neither indeed was He then rebuking all without distinction, but disciples doing so to their teachers were the object of His reproof; and they who, being guilty of innumerable sins, bring an evil report upon the guiltless.

This then is the sort of thing which Christ also in this place intimated; not intimated merely, but guarded it too with a great terror, and the punishment from which no prayers can deliver.

2. For with what judgment ye judge, says He, you shall be judged. Matthew 7:2

That is, it is not the other, says Christ, that you condemn, but yourself, and you are making the judgment-seat dreadful to yourself, and the account strict. As then in the forgiveness of our sins the beginnings are from us, so also in this judgment, it is by ourselves that the measures of our condemnation are laid down. You see, we ought not to upbraid nor trample upon them, but to admonish; not to revile, but to advise; not to assail with pride, but to correct with tenderness. For not him, but yourself, do you give over to extreme vengeance, by not sparing him, when it may be needful to give sentence on his offenses.

Do you see, how these two commandments are both easy, and fraught with great blessings to the obedient, even as of evils on the other hand, to the regardless? For both he that forgives his neighbor, has freed himself first of the two from the grounds of complaint, and that without any labor; and he that with

tenderness and indulgence inquires into other men's offenses, great is the allowance of pardon, which he has by his judgment laid up beforehand for himself.

What then! say you: if one commit fornication, may I not say that fornication is a bad thing, nor at all correct him that is playing the wanton? Nay, correct him, but not as a foe, nor as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician providing medicines. For neither did Christ say, stay not him that is sinning, but judge not; that is, be not bitter in pronouncing sentence.

And besides, it is not of great things (as I have already observed), nor of things prohibited, that this is said, but of those which are not even counted offenses. Wherefore He said also.

Why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye? Matthew 7:3

Yea, for many now do this; if they see but a monk wearing an unnecessary garment, they produce against him the law of our Lord, Matthew 10:10 while they themselves are extorting without end, and defrauding men every day. If they see him but partaking rather largely of food, they become bitter accusers, while they themselves are daily drinking to excess and surfeiting: not knowing, that besides their own sins, they do hereby gather up for themselves a greater flame, and deprive themselves of every plea. For on this point, that your own doings must be strictly inquired into, you yourself hast first made the law, by thus sentencing those of your neighbor. Account it not then to be a grievous thing, if you are also yourself to undergo the same kind of trial.

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye. Matthew 7:5

Here His will is to signify the great wrath, which He has against them that do such things. For so, wheresoever He would indicate that the sin is great, and the punishment and wrath in store for it grievous, He begins with a reproach. As then unto him that was exacting the hundred pence, He said in His deep displeasure, Thou wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt; Matthew 18:32 even so here also, Thou hypocrite. For not of protecting care comes such a judgment, but of ill will to man; and while a man puts forward a mask of benevolence, he is doing a work of the utmost wickedness, causing reproaches without ground, and accusations, to cleave unto his neighbors, and usurping a teacher's rank, when he is not worthy to be so much as a disciple. On account of this He called him hypocrite. For thou, who in other men's doings art so bitter, as to see even the little things; how have you become so remiss in your own, as that even the great things are hurried over by you?

First cast out the beam out of your own eye.

Do you see, that He forbids not judging, but commands to cast out first the beam from your eye, and then to set right the doings of the rest of the world? For indeed each one knows his own things better than those of others; and sees the greater rather than the less; and loves himself more than his neighbor. Wherefore, if you do it out of guardian care, I bid you care for yourself first, in whose case the sin is both more certain and greater. But if you neglect yourself, it is quite evident that neither do you judge your brother in care for him, but in hatred, and wishing to expose him. For what if he ought to be judged? It should be by one who commits no such sin, not by you.

Thus, because He had introduced great and high doctrines of self denial, lest any man should say, it is easy so to practise it in words; He willing to signify His entire confidence, and that He was not chargeable with any of the things that had been mentioned, but had duly fulfilled all, spoke this parable. And that,

because He too was afterwards to judge, saying, Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Matthew 23:1 Yet was not he chargeable with what has been mentioned; for neither did He pull out a mote, nor had He a beam on His eyes, but being clean from all these, He so corrected the faults of all. For it is not at all meet, says He, to judge others, when one is chargeable with the same things. And why marvel at His establishing this law, when even the very thief knew it upon the cross, saying to the other thief, Do you not fear God, seeing we are in the same condemnation; expressing the same sentiments with Christ?

But you, so far from casting out your own beam, dost not even see it, but another's mote thou not only see, but also judgest, and essayest to cast it out; as if any one seized with a grievous dropsy, or indeed with any other incurable disease, were to neglect this, and find fault with another who was neglecting a slight swelling. And if it be an evil not to see one's own sins, it is a twofold and threefold evil to be even sitting in judgment on others, while men themselves, as if past feeling, are bearing about beams in their own eyes: since no beam is so heavy as sin.

His injunction therefore in these words is as follows, that he who is chargeable with countless evil deeds, should not be a bitter censor of other men's offenses, and especially when these are trifling. He is not overthrowing reproof nor correction, but forbidding men to neglect their own faults, and exult over those of other men.

For indeed this was a cause of men's going unto great vice, bringing in a twofold wickedness. For he, whose practice it had been to slight his own faults, great as they were, and to search bitterly into those of others, being slight and of no account, was spoiling himself two ways: first, by thinking lightly of his own faults; next, by incurring enmities and feuds with all men, and training himself every day to extreme fierceness, and want of feeling for others.

3. Having then put away all these things, by this His excellent legislation, He added yet another charge, saying,

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.

Yet surely further on, it will be said, He commanded, What you have heard in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. Matthew 10:27 But this is in no wise contrary to the former. For neither in that place did He simply command to tell all men, but to whom it should be spoken, to them He bade speak with freedom. And by dogs here He figuratively described them that are living in incurable ungodliness, and affording no hope of change for the better; and by swine, them that abide continually in an unchaste life, all of whom He has pronounced unworthy of hearing such things. Paul also, it may be observed, declared this when He said, But a natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto him. And in many other places too He says that corruption of life is the cause of men's not receiving the more perfect doctrines. Wherefore He commands not to open the doors to them; for indeed they become more insolent after learning. For as to the well-disposed and intelligent, things appear venerable when revealed, so to the insensible, when they are unknown rather. Since then from their nature, they are not able to learn them, let the thing be hidden, says He, that at least for ignorance they may reverence them. For neither does the swine know at all what a pearl is. Therefore since he knows not, neither let him see it, lest he trample under foot what he knows not.

For nothing results, beyond greater mischief to them that are so disposed when they hear; for both the holy things are profaned by them, not knowing what they are; and they are the more lifted up and armed

against us. For this is meant by, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Nay, surely, says one, they ought to be so strong as to remain equally impregnable after men's learning them, and not to yield to other people occasions against us. But it is not the things that yield it, but that these men are swine; even as when the pearl is trampled under foot, it is not so trampled, because it is really contemptible, but because it fell among swine.

And full well did He say, turn again and rend you: for they feign gentleness, so as to be taught: then after they have learned, quite changing from one sort to another, they jeer, mock and deride us, as deceived persons. Therefore Paul also said to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:15 Of whom also beware; for he has greatly withstood our words; and again in another place, From such turn away, and, A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.

It is not, you see, that those truths furnish them with armor, but they become fools in this way of their own accord, being filled with more willfulness. On this account it is no small gain for them to abide in ignorance, for so they are not such entire scorers. But if they learn, the mischief is twofold. For neither will they themselves be at all profited thereby, but rather the more damaged, and to you they will cause endless difficulties.

Let them hearken, who shamelessly associate with all, and make the awful things contemptible. For the mysteries we too therefore celebrate with closed doors, and keep out the uninitiated, not for any weakness of which we have convicted our rites, but because the many are as yet imperfectly prepared for them. For this very reason He Himself also discoursed much unto the Jews in parables, because they seeing saw not. For this, Paul likewise commanded to know how we ought to answer every man. Colossians 4:6

4. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Matthew 7:6

For inasmuch as He had enjoined things great and marvellous, and had commanded men to be superior to all their passions, and had led them up to Heaven itself, and had enjoined them to strive after the resemblance, not of angels and archangels, but (as far as was possible) of the very Lord of all; and had bidden His disciples not only themselves duly to perform all this, but also to correct others, and to distinguish between the evil and them that are not such, the dogs and them that are not dogs (although there be much that is hidden in men):-- that they might not say, these things are grievous and intolerable, (for indeed in the sequel Peter did utter some such things, saying, Who can be saved? and again, If the case of the man be so, it is not good to marry): in order therefore that they might not now likewise say so; as in the first place even by what had gone before He had proved it all to be easy, setting down many reasons one upon another, of power to persuade men: so after all He adds also the pinnacle of all facility, devising as no ordinary relief to our toils, the assistance derived from persevering prayers. Thus, we are not ourselves, says He, to strive alone, but also to invoke the help from above: and it will surely come and be present with us, and will aid us in our struggles, and make all easy. Therefore He both commanded us to ask, and pledged Himself to the giving.

However, not simply to ask did He command us, but with much assiduity and earnestness. For this is the meaning of seek. For so he that seeks, putting all things out of his mind, is taken up with that alone which is sought, and forms no idea of any of the persons present. And this which I am saying they know, as many as have lost either gold, or servants, and are seeking diligently after them.

By seeking, then, He declared this; by knocking, that we approach with earnestness and a glowing mind.

Despond not therefore, O man, nor show less of zeal about virtue, than they do of desire for wealth. For things of that kind you have often sought and not found, but nevertheless, though thou know this, that you are not sure to find them, you put in motion every mode of search; but here, although having a promise that you will surely receive, thou dost not show even the smallest part of that earnestness. And if you dost not receive straightway, do not even thus despair. For to this end He said, knock, to signify that even if He should not straightway open the door, we are to continue there.

5. And if you doubt my affirmation, at any rate believe His example.

For what man is there of you, says He, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Because, as among men, if you keep on doing so, you are even accounted troublesome, and disgusting: so with God, when you do not so, then thou dost more entirely provoke Him. And if you continue asking, though thou receive not at once, thou surely will receive. For to this end was the door shut, that He may induce you to knock: to this end He does not straightway assent, that you may ask. Continue then to do these things, and you will surely receive. For that you might not say, What then if I should ask and not receive? He has blocked up your approach with that similitude, again framing arguments, and by those human things urging us to be confident on these matters; implying by them that we must not only ask, but ask what we ought.

For which of you is there, a father, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he give him a stone? So that if you receive not, your asking a stone is the cause of your not receiving. For though thou be a son, this suffices not for your receiving: rather this very thing even hinders your receiving, that being a son, you ask what is not profitable.

Do thou also therefore ask nothing worldly, but all things spiritual, and you will surely receive. For so Solomon, because he asked what he ought, behold how quickly he received. Two things now, you see, should be in him that prays, asking earnestly, and asking what he ought: since you too, says He, though ye be fathers, wait for your sons to ask: and if they should ask of you anything inexpedient, you refuse the gifts; just as, if it be expedient, you consent and bestow it. Do thou too, considering these things, not withdraw until thou receive; until thou have found, retire not; relax not your diligence, until the door be opened. For if you approach with this mind, and say, Except I receive, I depart not; you will surely receive, provided thou ask such things, as are both suitable for Him of whom you ask to give, and expedient for you the petitioner. But what are these? To seek the things spiritual, all of them; to forgive them that have trespassed, and so to draw near asking forgiveness; to lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. If we thus ask, we shall receive. As it is, surely our asking is a mockery, and the act of drunken rather than of sober men.

What then, says one, if I ask even spiritual things, and do not receive? You did not surely knock with earnestness; or you made yourself unworthy to receive; or quickly left off.

And wherefore, it may be inquired, did He not say, what things we ought to ask? Nay verily, He has mentioned them all in what precedes, and has signified for what things we ought to draw near. Say not then, I drew near, and did not receive. For in no case is it owing to God that we receive not, God who loves us so much as to surpass even fathers, to surpass them as far as goodness does this evil nature.

For if you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more your heavenly Father.

Now this He said, not to bring an evil name on man's nature, nor to condemn our race as bad; but in contrast to His own goodness He calls paternal tenderness evil, so great is the excess of His love to man.

Do you see an argument unspeakable, of power to arouse to good hopes even him that has become utterly desperate?

Now here indeed He signifies His goodness by means of our fathers, but in what precedes by the chief among His gifts, by the soul, by the body. And nowhere does He set down the chief of all good things, nor bring forward His own coming:-- for He who thus made speed to give up His Son to the slaughter, how shall He not freely give us all things?-- because it had not yet come to pass. But Paul indeed sets it forth, thus saying, He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things. Romans 8:32 But His discourse with them is still from the things of men.

6. After this, to indicate that we ought neither to feel confidence in prayer, while neglecting our own doings; nor, when taking pains, trust only to our own endeavors; but both to seek after the help from above, and contribute withal our own part; He sets forth the one in connection with the other. For so after much exhortation, He taught also how to pray, and when He had taught how to pray, He proceeded again to His exhortation concerning what we are to do; then from that again to the necessity of praying continually, saying, Ask, and seek, and knock. And thence again, to the necessity of being also diligent ourselves.

For all things, says He, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them.

Summing up all in brief, and signifying, that virtue is compendious, and easy, and readily known of all men.

And He did not merely say, All things whatsoever ye would, but, Therefore all things whatsoever ye would. For this word, therefore, He did not add without purpose, but with a concealed meaning: if you desire, says He, to be heard, together with what I have said, do these things also. What then are these? Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you. Do you see how He has hereby also signified that together with prayer we need exact conversation? And He did not say, whatsoever things you would to be done unto you of God, those do unto your neighbor; lest you should say, But how is it possible? He is God and I am man: but, whatsoever you would to be done unto you of your fellow servant, these things do thou also yourself show forth towards your neighbor. What is less burdensome than this? What fairer?

Then the praise also, before the rewards, is exceeding great.

For this is the law and the prophets. Whence it is evident, that virtue is according to our nature; that we all, of ourselves, know our duties; and that it is not possible for us ever to find refuge in ignorance.

7. Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: and strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

And yet after this He said, My yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:30 And in what He has lately said also, He intimated the same: how then does He here say it is strait and confined? In the first place, if you attend, even here He points to it as very light, and easy, and accessible. And how, it may be

said, is the narrow and confined way easy? Because it is a way and a gate; even as also the other, though it be wide, though spacious, is also a way and a gate. And of these there is nothing permanent, but all things are passing away, both the pains and the good things of life.

And not only herein is the part of virtue easy, but also by the end again it becomes yet easier. For not the passing away of our labors and toils, but also their issuing in a good end (for they end in life) is enough to console those in conflict. So that both the temporary nature of our labors, and the perpetuity of our crowns, and the fact that the labors come first, and the crowns after, must prove a very great relief in our toils. Wherefore Paul also called their affliction light; not from the nature of the events, but because of the mind of the combatants, and the hope of the future. For our light affliction, says he, works an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For if to sailors the waves and the seas, to soldiers their slaughters and wounds, to husbandmen the winters and the frosts, to boxers the sharp blows, be light and tolerable things, all of them, for the hope of those rewards which are temporary and perishing; much more when heaven is set forth, and the unspeakable blessings, and the eternal rewards, will no one feel any of the present hardships. Or if any account it, even thus, to be toilsome, the suspicion comes of nothing but their own remissness.

See, at any rate, how He on another side also makes it easy, commanding not to hold intercourse with the dogs, nor to give one's self over to the swine, and to beware of the false prophets; thus on all accounts causing men to feel as if in real conflict. And the very fact too of calling it narrow contributed very greatly towards making it easy; for it wrought on them to be vigilant. As Paul then, when he says, We wrestle not against flesh and blood, does so not to cast down, but to rouse up the spirits of the soldiers: even so He also, to shake the travellers out of their sleep, called the way rough. And not in this way only did He work upon men, to be vigilant, but also by adding, that it contains likewise many to supplant them; and, what is yet more grievous, they do not even attack openly, but hiding themselves; for such is the race of the false prophets. But look not to this, says He, that it is rough and narrow, but where it ends; nor that the opposite is wide and spacious, but where it issues.

And all these things He says, thoroughly to awaken our alacrity; even as elsewhere also He said, Violent men take it by force. For whoever is in conflict, when he actually sees the judge of the lists marvelling at the painfulness of his efforts, is the more inspirited.

Let it not then bewilder us, when many things spring up hence, that turn to our vexation. For the way is strait, and the gate narrow, but not the city. Therefore must one neither look for rest here, nor there expect any more anything that is painful.

Now in saying, Few there be that find it, here again He both declared the carelessness of the generality, and instructed His hearers not to regard the felicities of the many, but the labors of the few. For the more part, says He, so far from walking this way, do not so much as make it their choice: a thing of most extreme criminality. But we should not regard the many, nor be troubled thereat, but emulate the few; and, by all means equipping ourselves, should so walk therein.

For besides that it is strait, there are also many to overthrow us in the way that leads there. Wherefore He also added,

8. Beware of false prophets, for they will come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Behold together with the dogs and swine another kind of ambush and conspiracy, far more grievous than that. For those are acknowledged and open, but these shaded over. For which cause also,

while from those He commanded to hold off, these He charged men to watch with exact care, as though it were not possible to see them at the first approach. Wherefore He also said, beware; making us more exact to discern them.

Then, lest when they had heard that it was narrow and strait, and that they must walk on a way opposite to the many, and must keep themselves from swine and dogs, and together with these from another more wicked kind, even this of wolves; lest, I say, they should sink down at this multitude of vexations, having both to go a way contrary to most men, and therewith again to have such anxiety about these things: He reminded them of what took place in the days of their fathers, by using the term, false prophets, for then also no less did such things happen. Be not now, I pray you, troubled (so He speaks), for nothing new nor strange is to befall you. Since for all truth the devil is always secretly substituting its appropriate deceit.

And by the figure of false prophets, here, I think He shadows out not the heretics, but them that are of a corrupt life, yet wear a mask of virtue; whom the generality are wont to call by the name of impostors. Wherefore He also said further,

By their fruits you shall know them. Matthew 7:16

For among heretics one may often find actual goodness, but among those whom I was mentioning, by no means.

What then, it may be said, if in these things too they counterfeit? Nay, they will be easily detected; for such is the nature of this way, in which I commanded men to walk, painful and irksome; but the hypocrite would not choose to take pains, but to make a show only; wherefore also he is easily convicted. Thus, inasmuch as He had said, there be few that find it, He clears them out again from among those, who find it not, yet feign so to do, by commanding us not to look to them that wear the masks only, but to them who in reality pursue it.

But wherefore, one may say, did He not make them manifest, but set us on the search for them? That we might watch, and be ever prepared for conflict, guarding against our disguised as well as against our open enemies: which kind indeed Paul also was intimating, when he said, that by their good words they deceive the hearts of the simple. Let us not be troubled therefore, when we see many such even now. Nay, for this too Christ foretold from the beginning.

And see His gentleness: how He said not, Punish them, but, Be not hurt by them, Do not fall among them unguarded. Then that you might not say, it is impossible to distinguish that sort of men, again He states an argument from a human example, thus saying,

Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit, but the corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Matthew 7:16-18

Now what He says is like this: they have nothing gentle nor sweet; it is the sheep only so far as the skin; wherefore also it is easy to discern them. And lest you should have any the least doubt, He compares it to certain natural necessities, in matters which admit of no result but one. In which sense Paul also said, The carnal mind is death; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

And if He states the same thing twice, it is not tautology. But, lest any one should say, Though the evil tree bear evil fruit, it bears also good, and makes the distinction difficult, the crop being twofold: This is not so,

says He, for it bears evil fruit only, and never can bear good: as indeed in the contrary case also.

What then? Is there no such thing as a good man becoming wicked? And the contrary again takes place, and life abounds with many such examples.

But Christ says not this, that for the wicked there is no way to change, or that the good cannot fall away, but that so long as he is living in wickedness, he will not be able to bear good fruit. For he may indeed change to virtue, being evil; but while continuing in wickedness, he will not bear good fruit.

What then? Did not David, being good, bear evil fruit? Not continuing good, but being changed; since, undoubtedly, had he remained always what he was, he would not have brought forth such fruit. For not surely while abiding in the habit of virtue, did he commit what he committed.

Now by these words He was also stopping the mouths of those who speak evil at random, and putting a bridle on the lips of all calumniators. I mean, whereas many suspect the good by reason of the bad, He by this saying has deprived them of all excuse. For you can not say, 'I am deceived and beguiled;' since I have given you exactly this way of distinguishing them by their works, having added the injunction to go to their actions, and not to confound all at random.

9. Then forasmuch as He had not commanded to punish, but only to beware of them, He, at once both to comfort those whom they vex, and to alarm and change them, set up as a bulwark against them the punishment they should receive at His hands, saying,

Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Matthew 7:19

Then, to make the saying less grievous, He added,

Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.

That He might not seem to introduce the threatening as His leading topic, but to be stirring up their mind in the way of admonition and counsel.

Here He seems to me to be hinting at the Jews also, who were exhibiting such fruits. Wherefore also He reminded them of the sayings of John, in the very same terms delineating their punishment. For he too said the very same, making mention to them of an axe, and of a tree cut down, and of unquenchable fire.

And though it appear indeed to be some single judgment, the being burnt up, yet if one examine carefully, these are two punishments. For he that is burnt is also cast of course out of God's kingdom; and this latter punishment is more grievous than the other. Now I know indeed that many tremble only at hell, but I affirm the loss of that glory to be a far greater punishment than hell. And if it be not possible to exhibit it such in words, this is nothing marvellous. For neither do we know the blessedness of those good things, that we should on the other hand clearly perceive the wretchedness ensuing on being deprived of them; since Paul, as knowing these things clearly, is aware, that to fall from Christ's glory is more grievous than all. And this we shall know at that time, when we shall fall into the actual trial of it.

But may this never be our case, O thou only-begotten Son of God, neither may we ever have any experience of this irremediable punishment. For how great an evil it is to fall from those good things, cannot indeed be accurately told: nevertheless, as I may be able, I will labor and strive by an example to make it clear to you, though it be but in some small degree.

Let us then imagine a wondrous child, having besides His virtue the dominion of the whole world, and in all respects so virtuous, as to be capable of bringing all men to the yearning of a father's affection. What theft do you think the father of this child would not gladly suffer, not to be cast out of His society? And what evil, small or great, would he not welcome, on condition of seeing and enjoying Him? Now let us reason just so with respect to that glory also. For no child, be he never so virtuous, is so desirable and lovely to a father, as the having our portion in those good things, and to depart and be with Christ. Philippians 1:23

No doubt hell, and that punishment, is a thing not to be borne. Yet though one suppose ten thousand hells, he will utter nothing like what it will be to fail of that blessed glory, to be hated of Christ, to hear I know you not, Matthew 25:12 to be accused for not feeding Him when we saw Him an hungered. Matthew 25:42 Yea, better surely to endure a thousand thunderbolts, than to see that face of mildness turning away from us, and that eye of peace not enduring to look upon us. For if He, while I was an enemy, and hating Him, and turning from Him, did in such wise follow after me, as not to spare even Himself, but to give Himself up unto death: when after all this I do not vouchsafe to Him so much as a loaf in His hunger, with what kind of eyes shall I ever again behold Him?

But mark even here His gentleness; in that He does not at all speak of His benefits, nor say, You have despised Him that has done you so much good: neither does He say, Me, who brought you from that which is not into being, who breathed into you a soul, and set you over all things on earth, who for your sake made earth, and heaven, and sea, and air, and all things that are, who had been dishonored by you, yea accounted of less honor than the devil, and did not even so withdraw Himself, but had innumerable thoughts for you after it all; who chose to become a slave, who was beaten with rods and spit upon, who was slain, who died the most shameful death, who also on high makes intercession for you, who freely gives you His Spirit, who vouchsafes to you a kingdom, who makes you such promises, whose will it is to be unto you Head, and Bridegroom, and Garment, and House, and Root, and Meat, and Drink, and Shepherd, and King, and who has taken you to be brother, and heir, and joint-heir with Himself; who has brought you out of darkness into the dominion of light. These things, I say, and more than these He might speak of, but He mentions none of these; but what? Only the sin itself.

Even here He shows His love, and indicates the yearning which He has toward you: not saying, Depart into the fire prepared for you, but prepared for the devil. And before He tells them what wrongs they had done, and neither so does He endure to mention all, but a few. And before these He calls the other sort, those who have done well, to signify from this too that He is blaming them justly.

What amount of punishment, then, is so grievous as these words? For if any one seeing but a man who was his benefactor an hungered, would not neglect him; or if he should neglect him, being upbraided with it, would choose rather to sink into the earth than to hear of it in the presence of two or three friends; what will be our feelings, on hearing these words in the presence of the whole world; such as He would not say even then, were He not earnestly accounting for His own doings? For that not to upbraid did He bring these things forward, but in self-defense, and for the sake of showing, that not without ground nor at random was He saying, depart from me; this is evident from His unspeakable benefits. For if He had been minded to upbraid, He would have brought forwards all these, but now He mentions only what treatment He had received.

10. Let us therefore, beloved, fear the hearing these words. Life is not a plaything: or rather our present life is a plaything, but the things to come are not such; or perchance our life is not a plaything only, but even worse than this. For it ends not in laughter, but rather brings exceeding damage on them who are not

mind to order their own ways strictly. For what, I pray you, is the difference between children who are playing at building houses, and us when we are building our fine houses? What again between them making out their dinners, and us in our delicate fare? None, but just that we do it at the risk of being punished. And if we do not yet quite perceive the poverty of what is going on, no wonder, for we are not yet become men; but when we have become so, we shall know that all these things are childish.

For so those other things too, as we grow to manhood, we laugh to scorn; but when we are children we account them to be worth anxiety; and while we are gathering together potsherds and mire we think no less of ourselves than they who are erecting their great circuits of walls. Nevertheless they straightway perish and fall down, and not even when standing can they be of any use to us, as indeed neither can those fine houses. For the citizen of Heaven they cannot receive, neither can he bear to abide in them, who has his country above; but as we throw down these with our feet, so he too those by his high spirit. And as we laugh at the children, weeping at that overthrow, even so these also, when we are bewailing it all, do not laugh only, but weep also: because both their bowels are compassionate, and great is the mischief thence arising.

Let us therefore become men. How long are we to crawl on the earth, priding ourselves on stones and stocks? How long are we to play? And would we played only! But now we even betray our own salvation; and as children when they neglect their learning, and practise themselves in these things at their leisure, suffer very severe blows; even so we too, spending all our diligence herein, and having then our spiritual lessons required of us in our works, and not being able to produce them, shall have to pay the utmost penalty. And there is none to deliver us; though he be father, brother, what you will. But while these things shall all pass away, the torment ensuing upon them remains immortal and unceasing; which sort of thing indeed takes place with respect to the children as well, their father destroying their childish toys altogether for their idleness, and causing them to weep incessantly.

11. And to convince you that these things are such, let us bring before us wealth, that which more than anything seems to be worthy of our pains, and let us set against it a virtue of the soul (which soever you will), and then shall you see most clearly the vileness thereof. Let us, I say, suppose there are two men (and I do not now speak of injuriousness, but as yet of honest wealth); and of these two, let the one get together money, and sail on the sea, and till the land, and find many other ways of merchandise (although I know not quite, whether, so doing, he can make honest gains); nevertheless let it be so, and let it be granted that his gains are gotten with honesty; that he buys fields, and slaves, and all such things, and suppose no injustice connected therewith. But let the other one, possessing as much, sell fields, sell houses, and vessels of gold and silver, and give to the poor; let him supply the necessitous, heal the sick, free such as are in straits, some let him deliver from bonds, others let him release that are in mines, these let him bring back from the noose, those, who are captives, let him rescue from their punishment. Of whose side then would you be? And we have not as yet spoken of the future, but as yet of what is here. Of whose part then would ye be? His that is gathering gold, or his that is doing away with calamities? With him that is purchasing fields, or him who is making himself a harbor of refuge for the human race? Him that is clothed with much gold, or him that is crowned with innumerable blessings? Is not the one like some angel come down from Heaven for the amendment of the rest of mankind; but the other not so much as like a man, but like some little child that is gathering all together vainly and at random?

But if to get money honestly be thus absurd, and of extreme madness; when not even the honesty is there, how can such a man choose but be more wretched than any? I say, if the absurdity be so great; when hell is added thereto, and the loss of the kingdom, how great wailings are due to him, both living and

dead?

12. Or will you that we take in hand some other part also of virtue? Let us then introduce again another man, who is in power, commanding all, invested with great dignity, having a gorgeous herald, and girdle, and lictors, and a large company of attendants. Does not this seem great, and meet to be called happy? Well then, against this man again let us set another, him that is patient of injuries, and meek, and lowly, and long suffering; and let this last be despitefully used, be beaten, and let him bear it quietly, and bless them that are doing such things.

Now which is the one to be admired, I pray you? He that is puffed up, and inflamed, or he that is self-subdued? Is not the one again like the powers above, that are so free from passion, but the other like a blown bladder, or a man who has the dropsy, and great inflammation? The one like a spiritual physician, the other, a ridiculous child that is puffing out his cheeks?

For why do you pride yourself, O man? Because you are borne on high in a chariot? Because a yoke of mules is drawing you? And what is this? Why, this one may see befalling mere logs of wood and stones. Is it that you are clothed with beautiful garments? But look at him that is clad with virtue for garments, and you will see yourself to be like withering hay, but him like a tree that bears marvellous fruit, and affords much delight to the beholders. For you are bearing about food for worms and moths, who, if they should set upon you, will quickly strip you bare of this adorning (for truly garments and gold and silver, are the one, the spinning of worms; the other earth and dust, and again become earth and nothing more): but he that is clothed with virtue has such raiment, as not only worms cannot hurt, but not even death itself. And very naturally; for these virtues of the soul have not their origin from the earth, but are a fruit of the Spirit; wherefore neither are they subject to the mouths of worms. Nay, for these garments are woven in Heaven, where is neither moth, nor worm, nor any other such thing.

Which then is better, tell me? To be rich, or to be poor? To be in power, or in dishonor? In luxury, or in hunger? It is quite clear; to be in honor, and enjoyment, and wealth. Therefore, if you would have the things and not the names, leave the earth and what is here, and find you a place to anchor in Heaven: for what is here is a shadow, but all things there are immovable, steadfast, and beyond any assault.

Let us therefore choose them with all diligent care, that we may be delivered from the turmoil of the things here, and having sailed into that calm harbor, may be found with our lading abundant, and with that unspeakable wealth of almsgiving; unto which God grant we may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the might, world without end. Amen.

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