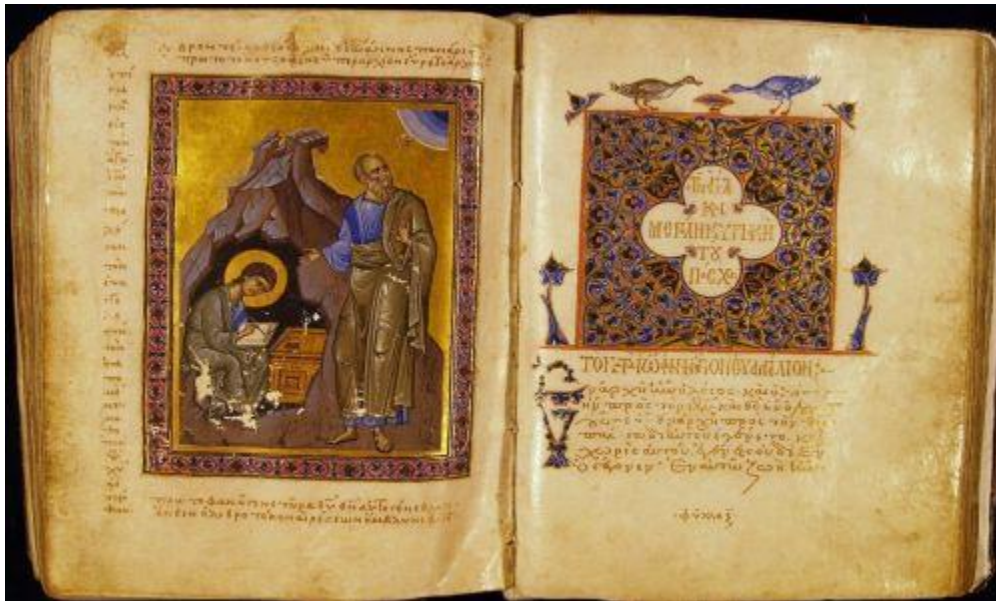


Select Quotes from St. John Chrysostom On the Benefits and Importance of Scripture Reading for Christians

– Dr. Eugenia Constantinou



“Let them hear, as many of us as neglect the reading of the Scriptures, to what harm we are subjecting ourselves, to what poverty.” (Hom. XLVII On Matthew)

The Bible helps us to obtain our salvation. “Now if we are willing to examine the Scriptures in this way, carefully and systematically, we shall be able to obtain our salvation. If we unceasingly are preoccupied with them, we shall learn both correctness of doctrine and an upright way of life. (Hom 53 On John)

Scripture reading sanctifies us. “Moreover, if the Devil does not dare to enter into the house where the Gospel lies, much less will he ever seize upon the soul which contains such thoughts as these, and no evil spirit will approach it, nor will the nature of sin come near. Well, then, sanctify your soul, sanctify your body by having these thoughts always in your heart and on your tongue. For if foul language is defiling and evokes evil spirits, it is evident that spiritual reading sanctifies the reader and attracts the grace of the Spirit.” (Hom. 32 On John)

The Scriptures are a treasure and neglect of it causes harm. "It is not possible, I say *not possible*, ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well which has no bottom." (Hom. XIX On Acts)

Knowledge of the Bible protects us and ignorance of it results in a multitude of evils. "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without arms, and how are we to come off safe?" (Hom. IX On Colossians)

The Bible is a medicine chest with remedies for grief and all troubles. "Listen, I entreat you, all that are careful for this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul...get at least the New Testament, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befalls you, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take from there comfort for your trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather do not merely dive into them but take them wholly to yourself, keeping them in your mind." (Hom. IX On Colossians)

The Bible is a treasury with remedies for every ailment. "Great is the profit to be derived from the sacred Scriptures and their assistance is sufficient for every need. Paul was pointing this out when he said, 'Whatever things have been written have been written for our instruction, upon whom the final age of the world has come, that through the patience and the consolation afforded by the Scriptures we may have hope.' (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11) The divine words, indeed, are a treasury containing every sort of remedy, so that, whether one needs to put down senseless pride, or to quench the fire of concupiscence or to trample on the love of riches, or to despise pain, or to cultivate cheerfulness and acquire patience – in them one may find in abundance the means to do so." (Hom. 37 On John.)

Knowledge of the Scriptures allows us to bear difficulties. "For as the rich in money can bear fines and damages, so he that is rich in the doctrines of [Christian] philosophy will bear not poverty only, but all calamities also easily, more easily than that [rich] one." (Hom. IX On Colossians.)

Children must be instructed in the Scriptures, beginning with the learning of psalms and hymns. "But now your children will utter songs and dances of Satan, like cooks, and caterers, and musicians; no one knows any psalm but it seems a thing to be ashamed of even, a mockery and a joke. There is the treasury house of all these evils. For whatsoever soil the plant stands in, such is the

fruit it bears; if in a sandy and salty soil, of like nature is its fruit; if in a sweet and rich one, it is again similar. So the matter of instruction is a sort of fountain. Teach him to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom. When in these you have led him on from childhood, by little and little you will lead him forward even to the higher things" (Hom. IX On Colossians)

On the lack of attention paid when listening to the reading of Scriptures in church, when in fact it is not the clergy but God who addresses them. "They think that when they enter in here [the church], that they enter into our presence [the clergy], they think that they hear from us. They do not lay to heart, they do not consider that they are entering the presence of God, that it is *He* who addresses them. For when the Reader standing up says "Thus says the Lord", and the Deacon stands and imposes silence on all, he does not say this as doing honor to the Reader but to honor Him who speaks to all through him [the Reader]. If they knew that it was God who through His prophet speaks these things, they would cast away all their pride. For if rulers are addressing them, they do not allow their minds to wander, much else would they when God is speaking. We are ministers, beloved. We speak not our own things, but the things of God. Letters coming from heaven are read every day.... These letters are sent from God; therefore let us enter with becoming reverence into the churches and let us hearken with fear to the things here said." (Hom. IX On Thessalonians.)

On the importance of instructing children in the Holy Scriptures. "Do you wish your son to be obedient? From the very first, "Bring him up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." Never deem it an unnecessary thing that he should be a diligent hearer of the divine Scriptures. For there the first thing he hears will be this: 'Honor thy father and thy mother'. So then, this is for you. Never say, 'This is the business of monks'. Am I making a monk of him? No, there is no need he should become a monk. Why be so afraid of a thing so replete with so much advantage? Make him a Christian. For it is of all things necessary for laymen to be acquainted with the lessons derived from this source, but especially for children. For theirs is an age full of folly and to this folly are added the bad examples derived from the heathen tales, where they are made acquainted with those heroes so admired amongst them...[A child] requires therefore the remedies against these things. How is it not absurd to send children out to trades and to school, and to do all you can for these objectives, and yet, not to "Bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord?" And for this reason truly we are the first to reap the fruits, because we bring up our children to be insolent and profligate, disobedient and mere vulgar fellows. Let us not then do this; no, let us listen to this blessed Apostle's admonitions "Let us bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord". Let us give them a

pattern. Let us make them from the earliest age apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures.....Study not to make him an orator, but train him up to be a [Christian] philosopher. In the want of the one there will be no harm whatever; in the absence of the other, all the rhetoric in the world will be of no advantage. Tempers are wanted, not talking; character, not cleverness; deeds not word. These gain a man the kingdom. These confer what are benefits indeed. Whet not his tongue but cleanse his soul. I do not say this to prevent you teaching him these things, but to prevent your attending to them exclusively. Do not imagine that the monk alone stands in need of these lessons from Scripture. Of all others, the children just about to enter into the world especially need them.” (Hom. XXI Ephesians)

The Scriptures were written for a purpose and it is a great evil to be ignorant of them. “From this it is that countless evils have arisen – from ignorance of the Scriptures; from this it is that the plague of heresies has broken out; from this it is that there are negligent lives; from this there are labors without advantage. For as men deprived of this daylight would not walk aright, so they that look not to the gleaming of the Holy Scriptures must be frequently and constantly sinning, in that they are walking in the worst darkness.” (Intro. Hom. On Romans)

On the importance of attentiveness when listening to the readings. “If a man should come here with earnestness – even though he does not read the Scriptures at home – and if he pays attention to what is said here, within the space of even one year he will be able to obtain a considerable acquaintance with them. For we do not read these Scriptures today, and tomorrow others that are quite different, but always the same section and consecutively. However, in spite of this, many have such an apathetic attitude that after such reading they do not even know the names of the books. And they are not ashamed, nor do they shudder with dread, because they have come so carelessly to the hearing of the word of God. On the other hand, if a musician, or a dancer, or anyone else connected with the theater should summon them to the city, they all hurry eagerly, and thank the one who invited them, and spend an entire half-day with their attention fixed on the performer exclusively. Yet when God addresses us through the prophets and apostles, we yawn, we are bored, we become drowsy. (Hom. 58 On John)

Ignorance of the Scriptures by Christians is a disgrace. “Is it not strange that those who sit in the marketplace tell the names, and races, and cities and talents of charioteers and dancers, even accurately state the good and bad qualities of horses, while those who assemble in this place [the church] understand nothing of what is taking place here and even are ignorant of the number of the [sacred] Books?” (Hom. 32 On John)

Christians who are ignorant of their faith are responsible for the pagans’ unbelief and the blasphemies which they say about Christ. “It is ridiculous if he who professes to be a Christian is unable to utter a word in defense of his own faith...It is this that prevents the pagans from quickly realizing the absurdity of their error. Inasmuch as, relying on falsehood, they make every effort to obscure the baseness of their teachings, while we who are the guardians of truth cannot even open our mouth, what will prevent them from despising the great weakness of our doctrine? Will they not get the idea that our teaching is deceitful and foolish? Will they not blaspheme Christ as a dissembler and deceiver who makes us of the stupidity of the majority to advance his deceit? And we are responsible for this blasphemy if we are not willing to be on the alert to speak in defense of righteousness, but rate such matters as superfluous, and concern ourselves about the things of earth. To be sure, and admirer of a dancer or of a charioteer or of a contender against wild beasts runs every risk and makes every effort so as not to come off worsted in disputes concerning his favorite. Moreover, these men string together long commendations, building up a defense against those who find fault with them, casting countless jibes at their opponents. But, when arguments are proposed about Christianity they all bow their heads, and rub them and yawn, and when laugh at, withdraw. Now are you not deserving of unmitigated anger if Christ appears less honored among you than a dancer? For while, you have thought up countless defenses of their deeds – even though all of these are somewhat base – you do not even exert yourself to give any thought and care to the wondrous deeds of Christ.” (Hom 17 on John)

To those who say that there is no harm in worldly pursuits while neglecting the spiritual life. “Now I say this for there are some, much less responsive than this audience here, who do not become ashamed at my words, but even speak at length in defense of their behavior. And if you ask, ‘Who is Amos, or Abias, or what is the number of the Prophets or of the Apostles?’ they cannot even open their mouth. But with regard to horses and charioteers, they can compose a discourse more cleverly than sophists or rhetors. Furthermore, after all this they say: “What harm, now?” and “What loss?” Indeed, it is for this reason that I am groaning, namely because you do not know that the thing

is harmful, and have no perception of the evil. God has given you a limited period of life to serve Him, and if you squander it vainly and fruitlessly, and to no purpose, do you still seek to learn what the loss is? If you completely squander your days entirely on Satan's pomps, do you consider that you are not doing anything wrong? Though you ought to spend your entire life in prayers and supplications, while actually you waste your life, fruitlessly and for your damnation, in shouting and tumult and base words and quarreling and unlawful pleasure and deeds of sorcery – even after all this do you ask 'What loss is there?' You are not aware that time must be expended more sparingly than anything else, If you spend gold, you will be able to replenish your supply, but if you lose time you will repair the loss with great difficulty for a small amount has been dispensed to us in the present life. Therefore, if we do not use it as we ought, what shall we say when we depart to the next life?" (Hom. 58 On John)