

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the need for spiritual maturity and unity in the church, warning against jealousy and the importance of Christ as the foundation of faith.

Scripture: Psalm 73:7, Proverbs 20:9, Isaiah 1:18, Jeremiah 7:17, John 14:21, 1 Corinthians 3:1-10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches to the Corinthians about the dangers of being carnal and not spiritual, highlighting the need to grow in faith and knowledge of God's wisdom. He emphasizes the importance of building our foundation on Jesus Christ and being united in Him to avoid division and jealousy. Chrysostom encourages believers to be vigilant in their faith, to repent of sins, and to seek God's mercy and forgiveness, knowing that God desires our salvation and is willing to forgive. He warns against falling into despair but urges believers to confess their sins, mourn over their offenses, and turn away from worldly temptations to secure their place in the eternal kingdom.

Transcript

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto Carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, and not with meat: for you were not yet able to bear it; nay, not even now are you able. For you are yet carnal.

After having overturned the philosophy which is from without, and cast down all its arrogance, he comes unto another argument. For it was likely that they would say, If we were putting forth the opinions of Plato, or of Pythagoras, or any other of the philosophers, reason were you should draw out such a long discourse against us. But if we announce the things of the Spirit, for what reason do you turn and toss up and down (ἀνακαταστήτε) the wisdom which is from without?

Hear then how he makes his stand against this. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual. Why, in the first place, says he, though you had been perfect in spiritual things also, not even so ought you to be elated; for what you preach is not your own, nor such as yourselves have found from your own means. But now even these things you know not as you ought to know them, but you are learners, and the last of all. Whether therefore the Gentile wisdom be the occasion of your high imaginations; that has been proved to be nothing, nay, in regard to spiritual things to be even contrary unto us: or if it be on account of things spiritual, in these, too, you come short and have your place among the hindmost. Wherefore he says, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual. He said not, I did not speak, lest the thing

might seem to proceed from his grudging them somewhat; but in two ways he brings down their high spirit; first, because they knew not the things that are perfect; next, because their ignorance was owing to themselves: yea, in a third way besides these, by pointing out that not even now are they able [to bear it]. For as to their want of ability at first, that perhaps arose from the nature of the case. In fact, however, he does not leave them even this excuse. For not through any inability on their part to receive high doctrines, does he say they received them not, but because they were carnal. However, in the beginning this was not so blame-worthy; but that after so long a time, they had not yet arrived at the more perfect knowledge, this was a symptom of most utter dulness.

It may be observed, that he brings the same charge against the Hebrews, not however, with so much vehemence. For those, he says, are such, partly because of tribulation: but these, because of some appetite for wickedness. Now the two things are not the same. He implies too, that in the one case he was intending rebuke, in the other rather stirring them up, when he spoke these words of truth. For to these Corinthians he says, Neither yet now are you able; but unto the others Hebrews 6:1 Wherefore let us cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on unto perfection: and again, Hebrews 5:9 we are persuaded better things concerning you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

2. And how calls he those carnal, who had attained so large a measure of the Spirit; and into whose praises, at the beginning he had entered so much at large? Because they also were carnal, unto whom the Lord says, Matthew 7:22-23 Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I know you not; and yet they both cast out devils, and raised the dead, and uttered prophecies. So that it is possible even for one who wrought miracles to be carnal. For so God wrought by Balaam, and unto Pharaoh He revealed things to come, and unto Nebuchadnezzar; and Caiaphas prophesied, not knowing what he said; yea, and some others cast out devils in His name, though they were Luke 9:49 not with Him; since not for the doers' sake are these things done, but for others' sake: nor is it seldom, that those who were positively unworthy have been made instrumental to them. Now why wonder, if in the case of unworthy men these things are done for others' sake, seeing that so it is, even when they are wrought by saints? For Paul says, 1 Corinthians 3:22 All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death: and again, Ephesians 4:11-12 He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering. For if it were not so, there would have been no security against universal corruption. For it may be that rulers are wicked and polluted, and their subjects good and virtuous; that laymen may live in piety, and priests in wickedness; and there could not have been either baptism, or the body of Christ, or oblation, through such, if in every instance grace required merit. But as it is, God uses to work even by unworthy persons, and in no respect is the grace of baptism damaged by the conduct of the priest: else would the receiver suffer loss. Accordingly, though such things happen rarely, still, it must be owned, they do happen. Now these things I say, lest any one of the bystanders busying himself about the life of the priest, should be offended as concerning the things solemnized (ἡ ἀπόκρισις τοῦ ἱερέως ἐπὶ τῇ ἑορτῇ τῆς ἑορτῆς). For man introduces nothing into the things which are set before us, but the whole is a work of the power of God, and He it is who initiates (ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἀρχὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀρχίζων) you into the mysteries.

3. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. I fed you with milk, and not with meat. For you were not able [to bear it.]

For lest he should seem to have spoken ambitiously (ἐπιφανῶς, ἐπιφανῶς, ἐπιφανῶς, to obtain favor) these things which he has just spoken; the spiritual man judges all things, and, he himself is judged of no man, and, we have the mind of Christ; with a view also to repress their pride: observe what he says. Not on this

account, says he, was I silent, because I was not able to tell you more, but because 'you are carnal: neither yet now are you able.'

Why said he not, you are not willing, but you are not able? Even because he put the latter for the former. For as to the want of ability, it arises from the want of will. Which to them indeed is a matter of accusation, but to their teacher, of excuse. For if they had been unable by nature, one might perhaps have been forgiven them; but since it was from choice, they were bereft of all excuse. He then speaks of the particular point also which makes them carnal. For whereas there is among you strife, and jealousy, and division, are you not carnal and walk as men? Although he had fornications also and uncleannesses of theirs to speak of, he sets down rather that offense which he had been a good while endeavoring to correct. Now if jealousy makes men carnal, it is high time for us to bewail bitterly, and to clothe ourselves with sackcloth and lie in ashes. For who is pure from this passion? Except indeed I am but conjecturing the case of others from myself. If jealousy makes men carnal, and suffers them not to be spiritual, although they prophesy and show forth other wonderful works; now, when not even so much grace is with us, what place shall we find for our own doings; when not in this matter alone, but also in others of greater moment, we are convicted.

4. From this place we learn that Christ had good reason for saying, John 3:20 He that does evil comes not to light; and that unclean life is an obstacle to high doctrines, not suffering the clear-sightedness of the understanding to show itself. As then it is not in any case possible for a person in error, but living uprightly, to remain in error; so it is not easy for one brought up in iniquity, speedily to look up to the height of the doctrines delivered to us, but he must be clean from all the passions who is to hunt after the truth: for whoever is freed from these shall be freed also from his error and attain unto the truth. For do not, I beseech you, think that abstinence merely from covetousness or fornication may suffice you for this purpose. Not so. All must concur in him that seeks the truth. Wherefore says Peter, Acts 10:34-35 Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that fears Him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to Him: that is, He calls and attracts him unto the truth. Do you see not Paul, that he was more vehement than any one in warring and persecuting? Yet because he led an irreproachable life, and did these things not through human passion, he was both received, and reached a mark beyond all. But if any one should say, How does such a one, a Greek, who is kind, and good, and humane, continue in error? this would be my answer: He has some other passion, vainglory, or indolence of mind, or want of carefulness about his own salvation, accounting that all things which concern him are drifted along loosely and at random. Peter calls the man irreproachable in all things one that works righteousness, [and Paul says] touching the righteousness which is in the law found blameless. Again, I give thanks to God, whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience, 2 Timothy 1:3 How then, you will say, were unclean persons considered worthy of the Gospel? Because they wished and longed for it. Thus the one sort, though in error, are attracted by Him, because they are clean from passions; the others, of their own accord approaching, are not thrust back. Many also even from their ancestors have received the true religion.

1 Corinthians 3:3

5. For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife.

At this point he prepares himself to wrestle with those whose part was obedience: for in what went before he has been casting down the rulers of the Church, where he said that wisdom of speech is nothing worth. But here he strikes at those in subjection, in the words,

1 Corinthians 3:4

For when one says, I am Paul, and I of Apollos, are you not carnal?

And he points out that this, so far from helping them at all or causing them to acquire any thing, had even become an obstacle to their profiting in the greater things. For this it was which brought forth jealousy, and jealousy had made them carnal; and the having become carnal left them not at liberty to hear truths of the sublimer sort.

1 Corinthians 3:5

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?

In this way, after producing and proving his facts, he makes his accusation henceforth more openly. Moreover, he employs his own name, doing away all harshness and not suffering them to be angry at what it is said. For if Paul is nothing and murmur not, much less ought they to think themselves ill used. Two ways, you see, he has of soothing them; first by bringing forward his own person, then by not robbing them of all as if they contributed nothing. Rather he allows them some small portion: small though it be, he does allow it. For having said, Who is Paul, and who Apollos, he adds, but ministers by whom you believed. Now this in itself is a great thing, and deserving of great rewards: although in regard of the archetype and the root of all good, it is nothing. (For not he that ministers to our blessings, but he that provides and gives them, he is our Benefactor.) And he said not, Evangelists, but Ministers, which is more. For they had not merely preached the Gospel, but had also ministered unto us; the one being a matter of word only, while the other has deed also. And so, if even Christ be a minister only of good things, and not the root Himself and the fountain, (I mean, of course, in that He is a Son,) observe to what an issue this matter is brought. (How deep and high it is made to go.) How then, you will ask, does he say that He was made a Minister of Circumcision? Romans 15:8 He is speaking in that place of His secret dispensation in the Flesh, and not in the same sense which we have now mentioned. For there, by Minister, he means Fulfiller, (How full of types), and not one that of his own store gives out the blessings.

Further, he said not, Those who guide you into the Faith, but those by whom you believed; again attributing the greater share to themselves, and indicating by this also the subordinate class of ministers (ἡ ἑκκλησία οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἡγεμονία, ἀλλ' ἡ ἡγεμονία οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἑκκλησία. Now if they were ministering to another, how come they to seize the authority for themselves? But I would have you consider how in no wise he lays the blame on them as seizing it for themselves, but on those who endow them with it. For the ground-work of the error lay in the multitude; since, had the one fallen away, the other would have been broken up. Here are two points which he has skilfully provided for: in that first he has prepared, as by mining (ἀποκατασκευάζει) in the quarter where it was necessary to overthrow the mischief; and next, on their side, in not attracting ill-will, nor yet making them more contentious.

Even as Christ ($\alpha\frac{1}{2}$ ἰσῳῖς ὁ υἱός, rec. text.) gave to every man.

For not even this small thing itself was of themselves, but of God, who put it into their hands. For lest they might say, What then? Are we not to love those that minister unto us? Yea, says he; but you should know to what extent. For not even this thing itself is of them, but of God who gave it.

1 Corinthians 3:6

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

That is, I first cast the word into the ground; but, in order that the seeds might not wither away through temptations, Apollos added his own part. But the whole was of God.

1 Corinthians 3:7

6. So then, neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters, but God that gives the increase.

Do you observe the manner in which he soothes them, so that they should not be too much irritated, on hearing, Who is this person, and Who is that? Nay, both are invidious, namely, both the saying, 'Who is this person? Who the other,' and the saying, that neither he that plants nor he that waters is any thing. How then does he soften these expressions? First, By attaching the contempt to his own person, Who is Paul, and who Apollos? and next, by referring the whole to God who gave all things. For after he had said, Such a person planted, and added, He that plants is nothing, he subjoined, but God that gives the increase. Nor does he stop even here, but applies again another healing clause, in the words.

1 Corinthians 3:8

He that plants and he that waters, are one.

For by means of this he establishes another point also, viz. that they should not be exalted one against another. His assertion, that they are one, refers to their inability to do any thing without God that gives the increase. And thus saying, he permitted not either those who labored much to lift themselves up against those who had contributed less; nor these again to envy the former. In the next place, since this had a tendency to make men more indolent, I mean, all being esteemed as one, whether they have labored much or little; observe how he sets this right, saying, But each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. As if he said, Fear not, because I said, You are one; for, compared with the work of God, they are one; howbeit, in regard to labors, they are not so, but each shall receive his own reward.

Then he smooths it still more, having succeeded in what he wished; and gratifies them, where it is allowed, with liberality.

1 Corinthians 3:9

For we are God's fellow-workers: you are God's husbandry, God's building.

Do you see how to them also he has assigned no small work, having before laid it down that the whole is of God? For since he is always persuading them to obey those that have the rule over them, on this account he abstains from making very light of their teachers.

You are God's husbandry.

For because he had said, I planted, he kept to the metaphor. Now if you be God's husbandry, it is right that you should be called not from those who cultivate you, but from God. For the field is not called the husbandman's, but the householder's.

You are God's building.

Again, the building is not the workman's, but the master's. Now if you be a building, you must not be forced asunder: since this were no building. If you be a farm, you must not be divided, but be walled in with a single fence, namely, unanimity.

1 Corinthians 3:10

According to the Grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master-builder I laid a foundation.

In this place he calls himself wise, not exalting himself, but to give them an ensample, and to point out that this is a wise man's part, to lay a foundation. You may observe as one instance of his modest bearing, that in speaking of himself as wise, he allowed not this to stand as though it were something of his own; but first attributing himself entirely unto God, then and not till then calls himself by that name. For, according to the Grace of God, says he, which was given unto me. Thus, at once he signifies both that the whole is of God; and that this most of all is Grace, viz. the not being divided, but resting on One Foundation.

7. Another builds thereon; but let each man take heed how he builds thereon.

Here, I think, and in what follows, he puts them upon their trial concerning practice, after that he had once for all knit them together and made them one.

1 Corinthians 3:11

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

I say, no man can lay it so long as he is a master-builder; but if he lay it, (ἰ, ἰῆ, ἄ, ῥ conj. for ἰ, ἰῆ, ἄ, ῥ . DounÅ'us ap. Savil. viii. not. p. 261.) he ceases to be a master-builder.

See how even from men's common notions he proves the whole of his proposition. His meaning is this: I have preached Christ, I have delivered unto you the foundation. Take heed how you build thereon, lest haply it be in vainglory, lest haply so as to draw away the disciples unto men. Let us not then give heed unto the heresies. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid. Upon this then let us build, and as a foundation let us cleave to it, as a branch to a vine; and let there be no interval between us and Christ. For if there be any interval, immediately we perish. For the branch by its adherence draws in the fatness, and the building stands because it is cemented together. Since, if it stand apart it perishes, having nothing whereon to support itself. Let us not then merely keep hold of Christ, but let us be cemented to Him, for if we stand apart, we perish. For they who withdraw themselves far from You, shall perish; Psalm 72:27. Septuagint so it is said. Let us cleave then unto Him, and let us cleave by our works. For he that keeps my commandments, the same abides in Me John 14:21. in substance And accordingly, there are many images whereby He brings us into union. Thus, if you mark it, He is the Head, we are the body: can there be any empty interval between the head and body? He is a Foundation, we a building: He a Vine, we branches: He the Bridegroom, we the bride: He the Shepherd, we the sheep; He is the Way, we they who walk therein. Again, we are a temple, He the Indweller: He the First-Begotten, we the brethren: He the Heir, we the heirs together with Him: He the Life, we the living: He the Resurrection, we those who rise again: He the Light, we the enlightened. All these things indicate unity; and they allow no void interval, not even the smallest. For he that removes but to a little distance will go on till he has become very far distant. For so the body, receiving though it be but a small cut by a sword, perishes: and the building, though there be but a small chink, falls to decay: and the branch, though it be but a little while cut off from the root, becomes useless. So that this trifle is no trifle, but is even almost the whole. Whenever then we commit

8. These things then let us bear in mind, and never slight the small things, lest we fall into those which are great. But if so be that we have slighted them and have come into the abyss of evils, not even when we have come there let us despond, lest we fall into recklessness (ἰσχυρῶς καὶ ἀνολογῶν). For to emerge from thence is hard ever after, for one who is not extremely watchful; not because of the distance alone, but of the very position, too, wherein we find ourselves. For sin also is a deep, and is wont to bear down and crush. And just as those who have fallen into a well cannot with ease get out, but will want others to draw them up; so also is he that has come into any depth of sins. To such then we must lower ropes and draw them up. Nay rather, we need not others only, but ourselves also, that we for our part may fasten on ourselves and ascend, I say not so much as we have descended, but much further, if we be willing: for why? God also helps: for He wills not the death of a sinner so much as his conversion. Let no one then despair; let no one have the feeling of the ungodly; for to them properly belongs this kind of sin: an ungodly man having come into any depth of evils, makes light of it. So that it is not the multitude of men's sins which causes their despair, but their ungodly mind.

Would you know how good our Master is? The Publican went up full of ten thousand wickednesses, and saying only, Be merciful unto me, went down justified. St. 48 13, 14 Yea, God says by the prophet, Because of sin for some little season I grieved him, Isaiah 57:17-18. Septuagint and I saw that ($\hat{\imath}\mu\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\eta}\hat{\imath}\hat{\iota}\hat{\zeta}\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath},\hat{\imath}^1$ not in Sept.) he was grieved and went sorrowful, and I healed his ways ($\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\circ\hat{\imath}\pm\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}-\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\imath}\cdot\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}$
 $\hat{\imath}\pm\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath},,\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{2},\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}$, Sept.) What is there equal to this loving-kindness? On condition $\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath}\pm \hat{\imath}\hat{\imath},,\hat{\imath}^1\dots\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath}-\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}$. See John 8:56. $\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath}\pm \acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}\cdot \hat{\imath},,\acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{2}\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2} \acute{\alpha}\frac{1}{4}\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}\hat{\imath}\pm\hat{\imath}\frac{1}{2}$ of his being but sorrowful, so he speaks, I forgave him his sins. But we do not even this: wherefore we especially provoke God to wrath. (For he, who by little things even is made propitious, when He meets not with so much as these, is of course indignant and exacts of us the last penalty; for this comes of exceeding contempt.) Who is there, for instance, that has ever become melancholy for his sins? Who has bemoaned himself? Who has beaten his breast? Who has taken anxious thought? Not one, to my thinking. But days without number do men weep for dead servants; for the loss of money: while as to the soul which we are ruining day by day, we give it not a thought. How then will you be able to render God propitious, when you know not even that you have sinned?

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evil at the hands of his fellow-servants, takes no account of any one of the rest, but is only anxious not to provoke his master; is he not able by this alone to do away your anger? But what, if his offenses against you are no manner of care to him, while on those against his fellow-servants he is full of thought; will you not lay on him the heavier punishment? So also God does: when we neglect His wrath, He brings it upon us more heavily; but when we regard it, more gently. Yea, rather, He lays it on us no more at all. He wills that we should exact vengeance of ourselves for our offenses, and thenceforth He does not exact it Himself. For this is why He at all threatens punishment; that by fear He may destroy contempt; and when the threat alone is sufficient to cause fear in us, He does not suffer us to undergo the actual trial. See, for instance, what He says unto Jeremiah, Jeremiah 7:17-18. Septuagint, transposing the first and second clauses Do you see not what they do? Their fathers light a fire, their children gather sticks together, their women knead dough. It is to be feared lest the same kind of thing be said also concerning us. Do you see not what they do? No one seeks the things of Christ, but all their own. Their children run into uncleanness, their fathers into covetousness and rapine, their wives so far from keeping back their husbands from the pomps and vanities of life, do rather sharpen their appetites for them. Just take your stand in the market place; question the comers and goers, and not one will you see hastening upon a spiritual errand, but all running after carnal things. How long ere we awake from our surfeiting? How long are we to keep sinking down into deep slumber? Have we not had our fill of evils?

9. And yet one might think that even without words experience itself is sufficient to teach you the nothingness of things present, and their utter meanness. At all events, there have been men, who, exercising mere heathen wisdom and knowing nothing of the future, because they had proved the great worthlessness of present things, have left them on this account alone. What pardon then can you expect to obtain, grovelling on the ground and not despising the little things and transient for the sake of the great and everlasting: who also hear God Himself declaring and revealing these things unto you, and hast such promises from Him? For that things here have no sufficient power to detain a man, those have shown who even without any promise of things greater have kept away from them. For what wealth did they expect that they came to poverty? There was none. But it was from their knowing full well that such poverty is better than wealth. What sort of life did they hope for that they forsook luxury, and gave themselves up unto severe discipline? Not any. But they had become aware of the very nature of things; and perceived that this of the two is more suitable, both for the strict training of the soul, and for the health of the body.

These things then duly estimating, and revolving with ourselves continually the future blessings, let us withdraw from this present world that we may obtain that other which is to come; through the favor and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost etc., etc.

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