

# 1 Corinthians 3:18-19

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's wisdom and using our spiritual gifts humbly and faithfully, recognizing that all things belong to the Lord.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 19:27, Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 3:18-19, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19

**Topics:** "Godly Wisdom", "Humility"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of humility and wisdom in the eyes of God, emphasizing the need to become fools in this world to gain true wisdom. He warns against being deceived by worldly wisdom, which is considered foolishness by God, and urges believers to be faithful stewards of God's mysteries and blessings. Chrysostom encourages a lifestyle of generosity and selflessness, reminding that all things belong to God and should be used to benefit others, leading to eternal rewards and favor from God.

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## Transcript

Let no man deceive himself. If any man (■v■μ■v omitted.) thinks that he is wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

As I said before, having launched out before the proper time into accusation of the fornicator, and having half opened it obscurely in a few words, and made the man's conscience to quail, he hastens again to the battle with heathen wisdom, and to his accusations of those who were puffed up there-with, and who were dividing the Church: in order that having added what remained and completed the whole topic with accuracy, he might thenceforth suffer his tongue to be carried away with vehement impulse against the unclean person, having had but a preliminary skirmishing with him in what he had said before. For this, Let no man deceive himself, is the expression of one aiming chiefly at him and quelling him beforehand by fear: and the saying about the stubble, suits best with one hinting at him. And so does the phrase, Do you not know that you are the Temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? For these two things are most apt to withdraw us from sin; when we have in mind the punishment appointed for the sin; and when we reckon up the amount of our true dignity. By bringing forward then the hay and the stubble, he terrifies; but by speaking of the dignity of that noble birth which was theirs, he puts them to shame; by the former striving to amend the more insensible kind, by the latter the more considerate.

2. Let no man deceive himself; if any man thinks that he is wise in this world, let him become a fool.

As he bids one become, as it were, dead unto the world -- and this deadness harms not at all, but rather profits, being made a cause of life:-- so also he bids him become foolish unto this world, introducing to us hereby the true wisdom. Now he becomes a fool unto the world, who slights the wisdom from without, and is persuaded that it contributes nothing towards his comprehension of the faith. As then that poverty which is according to God is the cause of wealth, and lowliness, of exaltation, and to despise glory is the cause of glory; so also the becoming a fool makes a man wiser than all. For all, with us, goes by contraries.

Further: why said he not, Let him put off wisdom, but, Let him become a fool? That he might most exceedingly disparage the heathen instruction. For it was not the same thing to say, Lay aside your wisdom, and, become a fool. And besides, he is also training people not to be ashamed at the want of refinement among us; for he quite laughs to scorn all heathen things. And for the same sort of reason he shrinks not from the names, trusting as he does to the power of the things [which he speaks of].

Wherefore, as the Cross, though counted ignominious, became the author of innumerable blessings, and the foundation and root of glory unspeakable; so also that which was accounted to be foolishness became unto us the cause of wisdom. For as he who has learned anything ill, unless he put away the whole, and make his soul level and clear, and so offer it to him who is to write on it, will know no wholesome truth for certain; so also in regard of the wisdom from without. Unless thou turn out the whole and sweep your mind clear, and like one that is ignorant yield up yourself unto the faith, you will know accurately nothing excellent. For so those also who see imperfectly if they will not shut their eyes and commit themselves unto others, but will be trusting their own matters to their own faulty eyesight, they will commit many more mistakes than those who see not.

But how, you will say, are men to put off this wisdom? By not acting on its precepts.

3. Then, seeing that he bade men so urgently withdraw themselves from it, he adds the cause, saying, For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For not only it contributes nothing, but it even hinders. We must then withdraw ourselves from it, as doing harm. Do you mark with what a high hand he carries off the spoils of victory, having proved that so far from profiting us at all, it is even an opponent?

And he is not content with his own arguments, but he has also adduced testimony again, saying, For it is written, Job 5:13 He takes the wise in their own craftiness. By craftiness, i.e. by their own arms getting the better of them. For seeing that they made use of their wisdom to the doing away of all need of God, by it and no other thing He refuted them, showing that they were specially in need of God. How and by what method? Because having by it become fools, by it, as was meet, they were taken. For they who supposed that they needed not God, were reduced to so great a strait as to appear inferior to fishermen and unlettered persons; and from that time forth to be unable to do without them. Wherefore he says, In their own craftiness He took them. For the saying I will destroy their wisdom, was spoken in regard to its introducing nothing useful; but this, who takes the wise in their own craftiness, with a view of showing the power of God.

Next, he declares also the mode in which God took them, adding another testimony:

1 Corinthians 3:20

For the Lord, says he, knows the reasonings of men Psalm 94:11. ■vθp■πov Septuagint that they are vain. Now when the Wisdom which is boundless pronounces this edict concerning them, and declares them to be such, what other proof do you seek of their extreme folly? For men's judgments, it is true, in

many instances fail; but the decree of God is unexceptionable and uncorrupt in every case.

4. Thus having set up so splendid a trophy of the judgment from on high, he employs in what follows a certain vehemence of style, turning it against those who were under his ministry, (ἄρχοι) and speaking thus:

1 Corinthians 3:21

Wherefore let no man glory in men; for all things are yours. He comes again to the former topic, pointing out that not even for their spiritual things ought they to be highminded, as having nothing of themselves. Since then the wisdom from without is hurtful, and the spiritual gifts were not given by you, what have you wherein to boast? And in regard to the wisdom from without, Let no man deceive himself, says he, because they were conceited about a thing which in truth did more harm than good. But here, inasmuch as the thing spoken of was really advantageous, Let no man glory. And he orders his speech more gently: for all things are yours.

1 Corinthians 3:22-23

Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and you are Christ's and Christ is God's. For because he had handled them sharply, he refreshes them again. And as above he had said, 1 Corinthians 3:9 We are fellow-workers with God; and by many other expressions had soothed them: so here too he says, All things are yours; taking down the pride of the teachers, and signifying that so far from bestowing any favor on them, they themselves ought to be grateful to the others. Since for their sake they were made such as they were, yea, moreover, had received grace. But seeing that these also were sure to boast, on this account he cuts out beforehand this disease too, saying, As God gave to every man, Supr. vi. 5. 6 and, God gave the increase: to the end that neither the one party might be puffed up as bestowers of good; nor the others, on their hearing a second time, All things are yours, be again elated. For, indeed, though it were for your sakes, yet the whole was God's doing. And I wish you to observe how he has kept on throughout, making suppositions in his own name and that of Peter.

But what is, or death? That even though they die, for your sakes they die, encountering dangers for your salvation. Do you mark how he again takes down the high spirit of the disciples, and raises the spirit of the teachers? In fact, he talks with them as with children of high birth, who have preceptors, and who are to be heirs of all.

We may say also, in another sense, that both the death of Adam was for our sakes, that we might be corrected; and the death of Christ, that we might be saved.

And you are Christ's; and Christ is God's. In one sense we are Christ's, and in another sense Christ is God's, and in a third sense is the world ours. For we indeed are Christ's, as his work: Christ is God's, as a genuine Offspring, not as a work: in which sense neither is the world ours. So that though the saying is the same, yet the meaning is different. For the world is ours, as being a thing made for our sakes: but Christ is God's, as having Him the Author of his being, in that He is Father. And we are Christ's, as having been formed by Him. Now if they are yours, says he, why have you done what is just contrary to this, in calling yourselves after their name, and not after Christ, and God?

1 Corinthians 4:1

5. Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. After he had cast down their spirit, mark how again he refreshes it, saying, as ministers of Christ. Do not thou then, letting go the Master, receive a name from the servants and ministers. Stewards; says he, indicating that we ought not to give these things unto all, but unto whom it is due, and to whom it is fitting we should minister.

1 Corinthians 4:2

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful: that is, that he do not appropriate to himself his master's goods, that he do not as a master lay claim for himself but administer as a steward. For a steward's part is to administer well the things committed to his charge: not to say that his master's things are his own; but, on the contrary, that his own are his master's. Let every one think on these things, both he that has power in speech and he that possesses wealth, namely, that he has been entrusted with a master's goods and that they are not his own; let him not keep them with himself, nor set them down to his own account; but let him impute them unto God who gave them all. Would you see faithful stewards? Hear what says Peter, Why do you look so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man to walk? Acts 3:12 Unto Cornelius also he says, We also are men of like passions with you: and unto Christ Himself, Lo, we have left all, and followed You. Matthew 19:27 And Paul, no less, when he had said, I labored more abundantly than they all, 1 Corinthians 15:10 added, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Elsewhere also, setting himself strongly against the same persons, he said, For what have you which thou did not receive? C. 1 Corinthians 4:7 For you have nothing of your own, neither wealth, nor speech, nor life itself; for this also is surely the Lord's. Wherefore, when necessity calls, do thou lay down this also. But if you doatest on life, and being ordered to lay it down refusest, you are no longer a faithful steward.

And how is it possible, when God calls, to resist? Well, that is just what I say too: and on this account do I chiefly admire the loving-kindness of God, that the things which He is able, even against your will, to take from you, these He wills not to be paid in (ἐ■σενεχθ■ναι) by you unwillingly, that you may have a reward besides. For instance, He can take away life without your consent; but His will is to do so with your consent, that you may say with Paul, I die daily, 1 Corinthians 15:31 He can take away your glory without your consent, and bring you low: but He will have it from you with your own goodwill, that you may have a recompense. He can make you poor, though unwilling, but He will have you willingly become such, that He may weave crowns for you. Do you see God's mercy to man? Do you see our own brutish stupidity?

What if you have come to great dignity, and hast at any time obtained some office of Church government? Be not high-minded. You have not acquired the glory, but God has put it on you. As if it were another's, therefore, use it sparingly; neither abusing it nor using it upon unsuitable things, nor puffed up, nor appropriating it unto yourself; but esteem yourself to be poor and inglorious. For never -- had you been entrusted with a king's purple to keep -- never would it have become you to abuse the robe and spoil it, but with the more exactness to keep it for the giver. Is utterance given you? Be not puffed up; be not arrogant; for the gracious gift is not yours. Be not grudging about your Master's good, but distribute them among your fellow-servants; and neither be thou elated with these things as if they were your own, nor be sparing as to the distribution of them. Again, if you have children, they are God's which you have. If such be your thought, you will both be thankful for having them, and if bereft you will not take it hard. Such was Job when he said, Job 1:21 The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away.

For we have all things from Christ. Both existence itself we have through Him, and life, and breath, and light, and air, and earth. And if He were to exclude us from any one of these, we are lost and undone. For 1 Peter 2:11 we are sojourners and pilgrims. And all this about mine, and yours, is bare words only, and does not stand for things. For if you do but say the house is yours, it is a word without a reality: since the very air, earth, matter, are the Creator's; and so are you too yourself, who hast framed it; and all other things also. But supposing the use to be yours, even this is uncertain, not on account of death alone, but also before death, because of the instability of things.

6. These things then continually picturing to ourselves, let us lead strict lives; and we shall gain two of the greatest advantages. For first, we shall be thankful both when we have and when we are bereaved; and we shall not be enslaved to things which are fleeting by, and things not our own. For whether it be wealth that He takes, He has taken but His own; or honor, or glory, or the body, or the life itself: be it that He takes away your son, it is not your son that He has taken, but His own servant. For you formed him not, but He made him. Thou but ministered to his appearing; the whole was God's own work. Let us give thanks therefore that we have been counted worthy to be His ministers in this matter. But what? Would you have had him for ever? This again proves you grudging, and ignorant that it was another's child which you had, and not your own. As therefore those who part resignedly are but aware that they have what was not theirs; so whoever gives way to grief is in fact counting the King's property his own. For, if we are not our own, how can they be ours? I say, we: for in two ways we are His, both on account of our creation, and also on account of the faith. Wherefore David says, My substance is with You: **■π■στασις** Septuagint hope rec. vers. of. ver. 6; Psalm 139:14 and Paul too, For in Him we live and move and have our being: Acts 17:28 and plying the argument about the faith, he says, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own, and you were bought with a price. For all things are God's. When then He calls and chooses to take, let us not, like grudging servants, fly from the reckoning, nor purloin our Master's goods. Your soul is not yours; and how can your wealth be yours? How is it then that you spend on what is unnecessary the things which are not yours? Do you not know that for this we are soon to be put on our trial, that is, if we have used them badly? But seeing that they are not our's but our Master's, it were right to expend them upon our fellow-servants. It is worth considering that the omission of this was the charge brought against that rich man: and against those also who had not given food to the Lord. Luke 14:21. Matthew 25:42

7. Say not then, I am but spending my own, and of my own I live delicately. It is not of your own, but of other men's. Other men's, I say, because such is your own choice: for God's will is that those things should be yours, which have been entrusted unto you on behalf of your brethren. Now the things which are not your own become yours, if you spend them upon others: but if you spend on yourself unsparingly, your own things become no longer yours. For since you use them cruelly, and sayest, That my own things should be altogether spent on my own enjoyment is fair: therefore I call them not your own. For they are common to you and your fellow-servants; just as the sun is common, the air, the earth, and all the rest. For as in the case of the body, each ministration belongs both to the whole body and to each several member; but when it is applied to one single member only, it destroys the proper function of that very member: so also it comes to pass in the case of wealth. And that what I say may be made plainer; the food of the body which is given in common to the members, should it pass into one member, even to that it turns out alien in the end. For when it cannot be digested nor afford nourishment, even to that part, I say, it turns out alien. But if it be made common, both that part and all the rest have it as their own.

So also in regard of wealth. If you enjoy it alone, you too have lost it: for you will not reap its reward. But if you possess it jointly with the rest, then will it be more your own, and then will you reap the benefit of it. Do

you see not that the hands minister, and the mouth softens, and the stomach receives? Does the stomach say, Since I have received, I ought to keep it all? Then do not thou I pray, in regard to riches, use this language. For it belongs to the receiver to impart. As then it is a vice in the stomach to retain the food and not to distribute it, (for it is injurious to the whole body,) so it is a vice in those that are rich to keep to themselves what they have. For this destroys both themselves and others. Again, the eye receives all the light: but it does not itself alone retain it, but enlightens the entire body. For it is not its nature to keep it to itself, so long as it is an eye. Again, the nostrils are sensible of perfume; but they do not keep it all to themselves, but transmit it to the brain, and affect the stomach with a sweet savor, and by their means refresh the entire man. The feet alone walk; but they move not away themselves only, but transfer also the whole body. In like manner do thou, whatsoever you have been entrusted withal, keep it not to yourself alone, since you are doing harm to the whole and to yourself more than all.

And not in the case of the limbs only may one see this occurring: for the smith also, if he chose to impart of his craft to no one, ruins both himself and all other crafts. Likewise the cordwainer, the husbandman, the baker, and everyone of those who pursue any necessary calling; if he chose not to communicate to anyone of the results of his art, will ruin not the others only but himself also with them.

And why do I say, the rich? For the poor too, if they followed after the wickedness of you who are covetous and rich, would injure you very greatly and soon make you poor; yea rather, they would quite destroy you, were they in your want unwilling to impart of their own: the tiller of the ground, (for instance,) of the labor of his hands; the sailor, of the gain from his voyages; the soldier, of his distinction won in the wars.

Wherefore if nothing else can, yet let this at least put you to shame, and do you imitate their benevolence. Do you impart none of your wealth unto any? Then should you not receive any thing from another: in which case, the world will be turned upside down. For in every thing to give and receive is the principle of numerous blessings: in seeds, in scholars, in arts. For if any one desire to keep his art to himself, he subverts both himself and the whole course of things. And the husbandman, if he bury and keep the seeds in his house, will bring about a grievous famine. So also the rich man, if he act thus in regard of his wealth, will destroy himself before the poor, heaping up the fire of hell more grievous upon his own head.

8. Therefore as teachers, however many scholars they have, impart some of their lore unto each; so let your possession be, many to whom you have done good. And let all say, such an one he freed from poverty, such an one from dangers. Such an one would have perished, had he not, next to the grace of God, enjoyed your patronage. This man's disease you cured, another you rid of false accusation, another being a stranger you took in, another being naked you clothed. Wealth inexhaustible and many treasures are not so good as such sayings. They draw all men's gaze more powerfully than your golden vestments, and horses, and slaves. For these make a man appear even odious: (φορτικόν, a conj. of Saville's for φορτικόν) they cause him to be hated as a common foe; but the former proclaim him as a common father and benefactor. And, what is greatest of all, Favor from God waits on you in every part of your proceedings. What I mean is, let one man say, He helped to portion out my daughter: another, And he afforded my son the means of taking his station among men: (εἰς ἄνδρα μὴ φανῆναι) another, He made my calamity to cease: another, He delivered me from dangers. Better than golden crowns are words such as these, that a man should have in his city innumerable persons to proclaim his beneficence. Voices such as these are pleasanter far, and sweeter than the voices of the heralds marching before the archons; to be called saviour, benefactor, defender, (the very names of God;) and not, covetous, proud, insatiate, and mean. Let us not, I beseech you, let us not have a fancy for any of these titles, but the contrary. For if these, spoken on earth, make one so splendid and illustrious; when they are written in heaven, and God

proclaims them on the day that shall come, think what renown, what splendor you shall enjoy! Which may it be the lot of us all to obtain, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ; with Whom unto the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now and always and unto everlasting ages. Amen.

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