

1 Corinthians 4:6

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of humility and the recognition of God's gifts in the life of believers, warning against pride and the pursuit of human approval.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:7-11, Galatians 3:28

Topics: "Spiritual Values", "Godly Judgment"

Description

John Chrysostom delivers a sermon criticizing the societal customs and practices prevalent during his time, highlighting the folly and corruption in seeking the praise of men over God's approval. He condemns the absurdity of certain traditions associated with marriage, childbirth, and funerals, pointing out the degradation of modesty, morality, and spiritual values. Chrysostom urges his audience to prioritize God's judgment above human opinions, emphasizing the importance of spiritual armor, the Cross, and the teachings of Christ in guiding one's actions and decisions.

Transcript

Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in you might learn not to think of men above that which is written.

So long as there was need of expressions as harsh as these, he refrained from drawing up the curtain, and went on arguing as if he were himself the person to whom they were addressed; in order that the dignity of the persons censured tending to counteract the censurers, no room might be left for flying out in wrath at the charges. But when the time came for a gentler process, then he strips it off, and removes the mask, and shows the persons concealed by the appellation of Paul and Apollos. And on this account he said, These things, brethren, I have transferred in a figure unto myself and Apollos.

And as in the case of the sick, when the child being out of health kicks and turns away from the food offered by the physicians, the attendants call the father or the tutor, and bid them take the food from the physician's hands and bring it, so that out of fear towards them he may take it and be quiet: so also Paul, intending to censure them about certain other persons, of whom some, he thought, were injured, others honored above measure, did not set down the persons themselves, but conducted the argument in his own name and that of Apollos, in order that reverencing these they might receive his mode of cure. But that once received, he presently makes known in whose behalf he was so expressing himself.

3. For who makes you to differ? For what have you which thou did not receive?

From this point, dismissing the governed, he turns to the governors. What he says comes to this: From whence is evident that you are worthy of being praised? Why, has any judgment taken place? Any inquiry proceeded? Any essay? Any severe testing? Nay, you can not say it: and if men give their votes, their judgment is not upright. But let us suppose that thou really art worthy of praise and hast indeed the gracious gift, and that the judgment of men is not corrupt: yet not even in this case were it right to be high-minded; for you have nothing of yourself but from God received it. Why then do you pretend to have that which you have not? You will say, you have it: and others have it with you: well then, you have it upon receiving it: not merely this thing or that, but all things whatsoever you have.

For not to you belong these excellencies, but to the grace of God. Whether you name faith, it came of His calling; or whether it be the forgiveness of sins which you speak of, or spiritual gifts, or the word of teaching, or the miracles; you received all from thence. Now what have you, tell me, which you have not received, but hast rather achieved of your own self? You have nothing to say. Well: you have received; and does that make you high-minded? Nay, it ought to make you shrink back into yourself. For it is not yours, what has been given, but the giver's. What if you received it? You received it of him. And if you received of him, it was not yours which you received, and if you but received what was not your own, why are you exalted as if you had something of your own? Wherefore he added also, Now if you received it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?

4. Thus having, you see, made good his argument by concession, (ἰὸς ἡμῶν ἵνα ἴδωμεν ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.) he indicates that they have their deficiencies; and those not a few: and says, In the first place, though you had received all things, it were not meet to glory, for nothing is your own; but as the case really stands there are many things of which you are destitute. And in the beginning he did but hint at this, saying, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual: and, I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. But here he does it in a way to abash them, saying,

1 Corinthians 4:8

Already you are filled, already you are rich: that is, you want nothing henceforth; you have become perfect; you have attained the very summit; you stand, as you think, in need of no one, either among Apostles or teachers.

Already you are filled. And well says he already; pointing out, from the time, the incredibility of their statements and their unreasonable notion of themselves. It was therefore in mockery that he said to them, So quickly have you come to the end; which thing was impossible in the time: for all the more perfect things wait long in futurity: but to be full with a little betokens a feeble soul; and from a little to imagine one's self rich, a sick and miserable one. For piety is an insatiable thing; and it argues a childish mind to imagine from just the beginnings that you have obtained the whole: and for men who are not yet even in the prelude of a matter, to be high-minded as if they had laid hold of the end.

Then also by means of what follows he puts them yet more out of countenance; for having said, Already you are full, he added, you have become rich, you have reigned without us: yea and I would to God you reigned, that we also might reign with you. Full of great austerity is the speech: which is why it comes last, being introduced by him after that abundance of reproof. For then is our admonition respected and easily received, when after our accusations we introduce our humiliating expressions, (ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμὲν ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ δόξα, ἵνα ἴδωμεν ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.) For this were enough to repress even the shameless soul and strike it more sharply than

On this account, you see, both things which are truly good, not accounted such by the generality, become objects of our aversion, we not investigating the nature of the things, but having respect unto the opinion of the many: and again, in the case of evil things, acting on this same principle. Certain things therefore not really good, but seeming fair unto the many, we pursue, as goods, through the same habit. So that on either side we go to destruction.

8. Perhaps many may find this remark somewhat obscure. Wherefore we must express it more clearly. When we commit uncleanness, (for we must begin from the instances alleged,) we fear men more than God. When therefore we have thus subjected ourselves unto them and made them lords over us; there are many other things also which seem unto these our lords to be evil, not being such; these also we flee for our part in like manner. For instance; To live in poverty, many account disgraceful: and we flee poverty, not because it is disgraceful nor because we are so persuaded, but because our masters count it disgraceful; and we fear them. Again, to be unhonored and contemptible, and void of all authority seems likewise unto the most part a matter of great shame and vileness. This again we flee; not condemning the thing itself, but because of the sentence of our masters.

Again on the contrary side also we undergo the same mischief. As wealth is counted a good thing, and pride, and pomp, and to be conspicuous. Accordingly this again we pursue, not either in this case from considering the nature of the things as good, but persuaded by the opinion of our masters. For the people is our master and the great mob (ἀΐ... ἰϵῖ... ἀΐ... ἰϵῖ...); a savage master and a severe tyrant: not so much as a command being needed in order to make us listen to him; it is enough that we just know what he wills, and without a command we submit: so great good will do we bear towards him. Again, God threatening and admonishing day by day is not heard; but the common people, full of disorder, made up of all manner of dregs, has no occasion for one word of command; enough for it only to signify with what it is well pleased, and in all things we obey immediately.

9. But how, says some one, is a man to flee from these masters? By getting a mind greater than their's; by looking into the nature of things; by condemning the voice of the multitude; before all, by training himself in things really disgraceful to fear not men, but the unsleeping Eye; and again, in all good things, to seek the crowns which come from Him. For thus neither in other sort of things shall we be able to tolerate them. For whoever when he does right judges them unworthy to know his good deeds, and contents himself with the suffrage of God; neither will he take account of them in matters of the contrary sort.

And how can this be? you will say. Consider what man is, what God; whom you desert, and unto whom you fly for refuge; and you will soon be right altogether. Man lies under the same sin as yourself, and the same condemnation, and the same punishment. Man is like to vanity, Psalm 144:4, Septuagint and has not correct judgment, and needs the correction from above. Man is dust and ashes, and if he bestow praise, he will often bestow it at random, or out of favor, or ill will. And if he calumniate and accuse, this again will he do out of the same kind of purpose. But God does not so: rather irreprovable in His sentence, and pure His judgment. Wherefore we must always flee to Him for refuge; and not for these reasons alone, but because He both made, and more than all spares you, and loves you better than thou dost yourself.

Why then, neglecting to have so admirable (ἰ, ἰ... ἰ... ἰ... ἰ... ἰ... ἰ...) an approver, betake we ourselves unto man, who is nothing, all rashness, all at random? Does he call you wicked and polluted when you are not so? So much the more do thou pity him, and weep because he is corrupt; and despise his opinion, because the eyes of his understanding are darkened. For even the Apostles were thus evil reported of;

and they laughed to scorn their calumniators. But does he call you good and kind? If such indeed you are, yet be not at all puffed up by the opinion: but if you are not such, despise it the more, and esteem the thing to be mockery.

Would you know the judgments of the greater part of men, how corrupt they are, how useless, and worthy of ridicule; some of them coming only from raving and distracted persons, others from children at the breast? Hear what has been from the beginning. I will tell you of judgments, not of the people only, but also of those who passed for the wisest, of those who were legislators from the earliest period. For who would be counted wiser among the multitude than the person considered worthy of legislating for cities and peoples? But yet to these wise men fornication seems to be nothing evil nor worthy of punishment. At least, no one of the heathen laws makes its penal or brings men to trial on account of it. And should any one bring another into court for things of that kind, the multitude laughs it to scorn, and the judge will not suffer it. Dice-playing, again, is exempt from all their punishments: nor did any one among them ever incur penalty for it. Drunkenness and gluttony, so far from being a crime, are considered by many even as a fine thing. And in military carousals it is a point of great emulation; and they who most of all need a sober mind and a strong body, these are most of all given over to the tyranny of drunkenness; both utterly weakening the body and darkening the soul. Yet of the lawgivers not one has punished this fault. What can be worse than this madness?

Is then the good word of men so disposed an object of desire to you, and do you not hide yourself in the earth? For even though all such admired you, ought you not to feel ashamed and cover your face, at being applauded by men of such corrupt judgment?

Again, blasphemy by legislators in general is accounted nothing terrible. At any rate, no one for having blasphemed God was ever brought to trial and punishment. But if a man steal another's garment, or cut his purse, his sides are flayed, and he is often given over unto death: while he that blasphemes God has nothing laid to his charge by the heathen legislators. And if a man seduce a female servant when he has a wife, it seems nothing to the heathen laws nor to men in general.

10. Will you hear besides of some things of another class which show their folly? For as they punish not these things, so there are others which they enforce by law. What then are these? They collect crowds to fill theatres, and there they introduce choirs of harlots and prostituted children, yea such as trample on nature herself; and they make the whole people sit on high, and so they captivate their city; so they crown these mighty kings whom they are perpetually admiring for their trophies and victories. And yet, what can be more insipid than this honor? What more undelightful than this delight? From among these then do you seek judges to applaud your deeds? And is it in company with dancers, and effeminate, and buffoons, and harlots, that you are fain to enjoy the sound of compliment? Answer me.

How can these things be other than proofs of extreme infatuation? For I should like to ask them, is it or is it not, a dreadful thing to subvert the laws of nature, and introduce unlawful intercourse? They will surely say, it is dreadful: at any rate, they make a show of inflicting a penalty on that crime. Why then do you bring on the stage those abused wretches; and not only bring them in, but honor them also with honors innumerable, and gifts not to be told? In other places you punish those who dare such things; but here even as on common benefactors of the city, you spend money upon them and supportest them at the public expense.

even before her destined consort.

But many will admire the woman for her beauty. And what of that? Even if discreet, she will hardly avoid evil suspicion; but if careless, she will be quickly overtaken, having got that very day a starting point in dissolute behavior.

Yet though the evils are so great, the omission of these proceedings is called an insult, by certain who are no better than brute beasts, and they are indignant that the woman is not exhibited to a multitude, that she is not set forth as a stage spectacle, common to all beholders: whereas most assuredly they should rather count it insult when these things do take place; and a laughing stock, and a farce. For even now I know that men will condemn me of much folly and make me a laughing stock: but the derision I can bear when any gain accrues from it. For I should indeed be worthy of derision, if while I was exhorting to contempt of the opinion of the many, I myself, of all men, were subdued by that feeling.

Behold then what follows from all this. Not in the day only but also in the evening, they provide on purpose men that have well drunk, besotted, and inflamed with luxurious fare, to look upon the beauty of the damsel's countenance; nor yet in the house only but even through the market-place do they lead her in pomp to make an exhibition; conducting her with torches late in the evening so as that she may be seen of all: by their doings recommending nothing else than that henceforth she put off all modesty. And they do not even stop here; but with shameful words do they conduct her. And this with the multitude is a law. And runaway slaves and convicts, thousands of them and of desperate character, go on with impunity uttering whatever they please, both against her and against him who is going to take her to his home. Nor is there any thing solemn, but all base and full of indecency. Will it not be a fine lesson in chastity for the bride to see and hear such things? [Savile reads this sentence with a question.] And there is a sort of diabolical rivalry among these profligates to outdo one another in their zealous use of reproaches and foul words, whereby they put the whole company out of countenance, and those go away victorious who have found the largest store of railings and the greatest indecencies to throw at their neighbors.

Now I know that I am a troublesome, sort of person and disagreeable, and morose, as though I were curtailing life of some of its pleasure. Why, this is the very cause of my mourning that things so displeasing are esteemed a sort of pleasure. For how, I ask, can it be other than displeasing to be insulted and reviled? To be reproached by all, together with your bride? If any one in the market place speak ill of your wife, you make ado without end and countest life not worth living: and can it be that disgracing yourself with your future consort in the presence of the whole city, you are pleased and lookest gay on the matter? Why, what strange madness is this!

But, says one, the thing is customary. Nay, for this very reason we ought most to bewail it, because the devil has hedged in the thing with custom. In fact, since marriage is a solemn thing and that which recruits our race and the cause of numerous blessings; that evil one, inwardly pining and knowing that it was ordained as a barrier against uncleanness, by a new device introduces into it all kinds of uncleanness. At any rate, in such assemblages many virgins have been even corrupted. And if not so in every case, it is because for the time the devil is content with those words and those songs, so flagitious; with making a show of the bride openly, and leading the bridegroom in triumph through the market-place.

Moreover, because all this takes place in the evening, that not even the darkness may be a veil to these evils, many torches are brought in, suffering not the disgraceful scene to be concealed. For what means the vast throng, and what the wassail, and what the pipes? Most clearly to prevent even those who are in

their houses and plunged [ἰνὰ τὴν ἄνοιαν, ἰνὰ τὴν ἀνομιαν] in deep sleep from remaining ignorant of these proceedings; that being wakened by the pipe and leaning to look out of the lattices, they may be witnesses of the comedy such as it is.

What can one say of the songs themselves, crammed as they are with all uncleanness, introducing monstrous amours, and unlawful connections, and subversions of houses, and tragic scenes without end; and making continual mention of the titles of friend and lover, mistress and beloved? And, what is still more grievous, that young women are present at these things, having divested themselves of all modesty; in honor of the bride, rather I should say to insult her, exposing even their own salvation, and in the midst of wanton young men acting a shameless part with their disorderly songs, with their foul words, with their devilish harmony. Tell me then: do you still enquire, Whence come adulteries? Whence fornications? Whence violations of marriage?

12. But they are not noble nor decent women, you will say, who do these things. Why then laugh me to scorn for this remonstrance, having been yourself aware of this law, before I said any thing. I say, if the proceedings are right, allow those well-born women also to enact them. For what if these others live in poverty? Are not they also virgins? Ought not they also to be careful of chastity? But now here is a virgin dancing in a public theatre of licentious youths; and, I ask, seems she not unto you more dishonored than a harlot?

But if you say, Female servants do these things; neither so do I acquit you of my charge: for neither to these ought such things to have been permitted. For hence all these evils have their origin, that of our household we make no account. But it is enough in the way of contempt to say, He is a slave, and, They are handmaids. And yet, day after day we hear, Galatians 3:28 In Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free. Again, were it a horse or an ass, thou dost not overlook it but takest all pains not to have it of an inferior kind; and your slaves who have souls like your own do you neglect? And why do I say slaves, when I might say sons and daughters? What then must follow? It cannot be but grief (ἰδέσθαι τὴν ἀπορίαν, qu. ἰδέσθαι τὴν ἀπορίαν, mischief.) must immediately enter in, when all these are going to ruin. And often also very great losses must ensue, valuable golden ornaments being lost in the crowd and the confusion.

13. Then after the marriage if perchance a child is born, in this case again we shall see the same folly and many practices [ἰνὰ τὴν ἀνομιαν, ἰνὰ τὴν ἀνομιαν] full of absurdity. For when the time has come for giving the infant a name, caring not to call it after the saints as the ancients at first did, they light lamps and give them names, and name the child after that one which continues burning the longest; from thence conjecturing that he will live a long time. After all, should there be many instances of the child's untimely death, (and there are many,) great laughter on the devil's part will ensue, at his having made sport of them as if they were silly children. What shall we say about the amulets and the bells which are hung upon the hand, and the scarlet woof, and the other things full of such extreme folly; when they ought to invest the child with nothing else save the protection of the Cross. But now that is despised which has converted the whole world and given the sore wound to the devil and overthrown all his power: while the thread, and the woof, and the other amulets of that kind are entrusted with the child's safety.

May I mention another thing yet more ridiculous than this? Only let no one tax us with speaking out of season, should our argument proceed with that instance also. For he that would cleanse an ulcer will not hesitate first to pollute his own hands. What then is this so very ridiculous custom? It is counted indeed as nothing; (and this is why I grieve;) but it is the beginning of folly and madness in the extreme. The women in the bath, nurses and waiting-maids, take up mud and smearing it with the finger make a mark on the

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