

Colossians 1:1, 2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on Colossians 1:1-2 explores the themes of grace, faith, and the enduring nature of spiritual love amidst challenges.

Scripture: Colossians 4:9

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Gratitude Prayer"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the contrast between the pleasures of the world and the spiritual joy found in gratitude, prayer, and love for God and others. He emphasizes the importance of giving thanks, prayer, and continual praise to God, highlighting the eternal rewards of living a life of virtue and selflessness. Chrysostom urges his listeners to choose the table of spiritual nourishment over the fleeting pleasures of excess, showcasing the superiority of a life dedicated to serving God and others with love and humility.

Transcript

Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossæ: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father.

Holy indeed are all the Epistles of Paul: but some advantage have those which he sent after he was in bonds: those, for instance, to the Ephesians and Philemon: that to Timothy, that to the Philippians, and the one before us: for this also was sent when he was a prisoner, since he writes in it thus: for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3-4 But this Epistle appears to have been written after that to the Romans. For the one to the Romans he wrote before he had seen them, but this Epistle, after; and near upon the close of his preaching. And it is evident from hence; that in the Epistle to Philemon he says, Being such an one as Paul the aged Philemon 9, and makes request for Onesimus; but in this he sends Onesimus himself, as he says, With Onesimus the faithful and beloved brother Colossians 4:9: calling him faithful, and beloved, and brother. Wherefore also he boldly says in this Epistle, from the hope of the Gospel which you heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven. Colossians 1:23 For it had now been preached for a long time. I think then that the Epistle to Timothy was written after this; and when he was now come to the very end of his life, for there he says, for I am already being offered 2 Timothy 4:6; this is later however than that to the Philippians, for in that Epistle he was just entering upon his imprisonment at Rome.

But why do I say that these Epistles have some advantage over the rest in this respect, because he writes while in bonds? As if a champion were to write in the midst of carnage and victory; so also in truth did he. For himself too was aware that this was a great thing, for writing to Philemon he says, Whom I have begotten in my bonds. Philemon 10 And this he said, that we should not be dispirited when in adversity, but even rejoice. At this place was Philemon with these (Colossians). For in the Epistle to him he says, And to Archippus our fellow-soldier Philemon 2; and in this, Say to Archippus. Colossians 4:17 This man seems to me to have been charged with some office in the Church.

But he had not seen either these people, or the Romans, or the Hebrews, when he wrote to them. That this is true of the others, he shows in many places; with regard to the Colossians, hear him saying, And as many as have not seen my face in the flesh Colossians 2:1-5: and again, Though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit. So great a thing did he know his presence everywhere to be. And always, even though he be absent, he makes himself present. So, when he punishes the fornicator, look how he places himself on the tribunal; for, he says, I verily being absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present 1 Corinthians 5:3: and again, I will come to you, and will know not the word of them which are puffed up, but the power 1 Corinthians 4:19: and again, Not only when I am present with you, but much more when I am absent. Philippians 2:12; Galatians 4:18

Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.

It were well also to say, what from considering this Epistle we have found to be its occasion and subject. What then is it? They used to approach God through angels; they held many Jewish and Grecian observances. These things then he is correcting. Wherefore in the very outset he says, Through the will of God. So here again he has used the expression through. And Timothy the brother, he says; of course then he too was an Apostle, and probably also known to them. To the saints which are at Colossæ. This was a city of Phrygia, as is plain from Laodicea's being near to it. And faithful brethren in Christ. Colossians 4:16 Whence, says he, are you made a saint? Tell me. Whence are you called faithful? Is it not because thou were sanctified through death? Is it not because you have faith in Christ? Whence are you made a brother? For neither in deed, nor in word, nor in achievement did you show yourself faithful. Tell me, whence is it that you have been entrusted with so great mysteries? Is it not because of Christ?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Whence comes grace to you? Whence peace? From God, says he, our Father. Although he uses not in this place the name of Christ.

I will ask those who speak disparagingly of the Spirit, Whence is God the Father of servants? Who wrought these mighty achievements? Who made you a saint? Who faithful? Who a son of God? He who made you worthy to be trusted, the same is also the cause of your being entrusted with all.

For we are called faithful, not only because we have faith, but also because we are entrusted of God with mysteries which not even angels knew before us. However, to Paul it was indifferent whether or not to put it thus.

Ver. 3. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He seems to me to refer everything to the Father, that what he has to say may not at once offend them.

Praying always for you.

He shows his love, not by giving thanks only, but also by continual prayer, in that those whom he did not see, he had continually within himself.

Ver. 4. [Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.

A little above he said, our Lord. He, says he, is Lord, not the servants. Of Jesus Christ. These names also are symbols of His benefit to us, for He, it means, shall save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:21]

Ver. 4. Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have toward all the saints.

Already he conciliates them. It was Epaphroditus who brought him this account. But he sends the Epistle by Tychicus, retaining Epaphroditus with himself. And of the love, he says, which you have toward all the saints, not toward this one and that: of course then toward us also.

Ver. 5. Because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens.

He speaks of the good things to come. This is with a view to their temptations, that they should not seek their rest here. For lest any should say, And where is the good of their love toward the saints, if they themselves are in affliction? he says, We rejoice that you are securing for yourselves a noble reception in heaven. Because of the hope, he says, which is laid up. He shows its secureness. Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth. Here the expression is as if he would chide them, as having changed from it when they had long held it.

Whereof, says he, ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel. And he bears witness to its truth. With good reason, for in it there is nothing false.

Of the Gospel. He does not say, of the preaching, but he calls it the Gospel, continually reminding them of God's benefits. And having first praised them, he next reminds them of these.

Ver. 6. Which has come unto you, even as it is also in all the world.

He now gives them credit. Is come, he said metaphorically. He means, it did not come and go away, but that it remained, and was there. Then because to the many the strongest confirmation of doctrines is that they hold them in common with many, he therefore added, As also it is in all the world.

It is present everywhere, everywhere victorious, everywhere established.

And is bearing fruit, and increasing, as it does in you also.

Bearing fruit. In works. Increasing. By the accession of many, by becoming firmer; for plants then begin to thicken when they have become firm.

As also among you, says he.

He first gains the hearer by his praises, so that even though disinclined, he may not refuse to hear him.

Since the day ye heard it.

Marvelous! That you quickly came unto it and believed; and straightway, from the very first, showed forth its fruits.

Since the day ye heard, and knew the grace of God in truth.

Not in word, says he, nor in deceit, but in very deeds. Either then this is what he means by bearing fruit, or else, the signs and wonders. Because as soon as you received it, so soon ye knew the grace of God. What then immediately gave proofs of its inherent virtue, is it not a hard thing that that should now be disbelieved?

Ver. 7. Even as you learned of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant.

He, it is probable, had preached there. You learned the Gospel. Then to show the trustworthiness of the man, he says, our fellow servant.

Who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Doubt not, he says, of the hope which is to come: ye see that the world is being converted. And what need to allege the cases of others? What happened in your own is even independently a sufficient ground for belief, for, ye knew the grace of God in truth: that is, in works. So that these two things, viz. the belief of all, and your own too, confirm the things that are to come. Nor was the fact one thing, and what Epaphras said, another. Who is, says he, faithful, that is, true. How, a minister on your behalf? In that he had gone to him. Who also declared to us, says he, your love in the Spirit, that is, the spiritual love ye bear us. If this man be the minister of Christ; how say ye, that you approach God by angels? Who also declared unto us, says he, your love in the Spirit. For this love is wonderful and steadfast; all other has but the name. And there are some persons who are not of this kind, but such is not friendship, wherefore also it is easily dissolved.

There are many causes which produce friendship; and we will pass over those which are infamous, (for none will take an objection against us in their favor, seeing they are evil.) But let us, if you will, review those which are natural, and those which arise out of the relations of life. Now of the social sort are these, for instance; one receives a kindness, or inherits a friend from forefathers, or has been a companion at table or in travel: or is neighbor to another (and these are virtuous); or is of the same trade, which last however is not sincere; for it is attended by a certain emulation and envy. But the natural are such as that of father to son, son to father, brother to brother, grandfather to descendant, mother to children, and if you like let us add also that of wife to husband; for all matrimonial attachments are also of this life, and earthly. Now these latter appear stronger than the former: appear, I said, because often they are surpassed by them. For friends have at times shown a more genuinely kind disposition than brothers, or than sons toward fathers; and when he whom a man has begotten would not succor him, one who knew him not has stood by him, and succored him. But the spiritual love is higher than all, as it were some queen ruling her subjects; and in her form is bright: for not as the other, has she anything of earth for her parent; neither habitual intercourse, nor benefits, nor nature, nor time; but she descends from above, out of heaven. And why do you wonder that she needs no benefits in order that she should subsist, seeing that neither by injuries is she overthrown?

Now that this love is greater than the other, hear Paul saying; For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren. Romans 9:3 What father would have thus wished himself in misery? And again, To depart, and to be with Christ is very far better; yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. Philippians 1:23-24 What mother would have chosen so to speak, regardless of herself? And again hear him saying, For being bereaved of you for a short season, in presence, not in heart. 1 Thessalonians 2:17 And here indeed [in the world], when a father has been insulted, he withdraws

his love; not so however there, but he went to those who stoned him, seeking to do them good. For nothing, nothing is so strong as the bond of the Spirit. For he who became a friend from receiving benefits, will, should these be discontinued, become an enemy; he whom habitual intercourse made inseparable, will, when the habit is broken through, let his friendship become extinct. A wife again, should a broil have taken place, will leave her husband, and withdraw affection; the son, when he sees his father living to a great age, is dissatisfied. But in case of spiritual love there is nothing of this. For by none of these things can it be dissolved; seeing it is not composed out of them. Neither time, nor length of journey, nor ill usage, nor being evil spoken of, nor anger, nor insult, nor any other thing, make inroads upon it, nor have the power of dissolving it. And that you may know this Moses was stoned, and yet he made entreaty for them. Exodus 17:4 What father would have done this for one that stoned him, and would not rather have stoned him too to death?

Let us then follow after these friendships which are of the Spirit, for they are strong, and hard to be dissolved, and not those which arise from the table, for these we are forbidden to carry in Thither. For hear Christ saying in the Gospel, Call not your friends nor your neighbors, if you make a feast, but the lame, the maimed. Luke 14:12 With reason: for great is the recompense for these. But you can not, nor endure to feast with lame and blind, but thinkest it grievous and offensive, and refusest. Now it were indeed best that you should not refuse, however it is not necessary to do it. If you seat them not with you, send to them of the dishes on your own table. And he that invites his friends, has done no great thing: for he has received his recompense here. But he that called the maimed, and poor, has God for his Debtor. Let us then not repine when we receive not a reward here, but when we do receive; for we shall have nothing more to receive There. In like manner, if man recompense, God recompenses not; if man recompense not, then God will recompense. Let us then not seek those out for our benefits, who have it in their power to requite us again, nor bestow our favors on them with such an expectation: this were a cold thought. If you invite a friend, the gratitude lasts till evening; and therefore the friendship for the nonce is spent more quickly than the expenses are paid. But if you call the poor and the maimed, never shall the gratitude perish, for God, who remembers ever, and never forgets, you have even Him for your Debtor. What squeamishness is this, pray, that you can not sit down in company with the poor? What do you say? He is unclean and filthy? Then wash him, and lead him up to your table. But he has filthy garments? Then change them, and give him clean apparel. Do you see not how great the gain is? Christ comes unto you through him, and do you make petty calculations of such things? When you are inviting the King to your table, do you fear because of such things as these?

Let us suppose two tables, and let one be filled with those, and have the blind, the halt, the maimed in hand or leg, the barefoot, those clad with but one scanty garment, and that worn out: but let the other have grandees, generals, governors, great officers, arrayed in costly robes, and fine lawn, belted with golden girdles. Again, here at the table of the poor let there be neither silver, nor store of wine, but just enough to refresh and gladden, and let the drinking cups and the rest of the vessels be made from glass only; but there, at the table of the rich, let all the vessels be of silver and gold, and the semicircular table, not such as one person can lift, but as two young men can with difficulty move, and the wine-jars lie in order, glittering far beyond the silver with gold, and let the semicircle be smoothly laid all over with soft drapery. Here, again, let there be many servants, in garments not less ornamented than those of the guests, and bravely appareled, and wearing loose trowsers, men beauteous to look upon, in the very flower of life, plump, and well conditioned; but there let there be only two servants disdaining all that proud vanity. And let those have costly meats, but these only enough to appease hunger and inspire cheerfulness. Have I said enough? And are both tables laid out with sufficient minuteness? Is anything wanting? I think not. For

I have gone over the guests, and the costliness both of the vessels, and of the linen, and the meats. However, if we should have omitted anything, we shall discover it as we proceed with the discourse.

Come then, now that we have correctly drawn each table in its proper outline, let us see at which you will seat yourselves. For I for my part am going to that of the blind, and the lame, but probably the more part of you will choose the other, that of the generals, that is so gay and splendid. Let us then see which of them does more abound in pleasure; for as yet let us not examine into the things of hereafter, seeing that in those at least this of mine has the superiority. Wherefore? Because this one has Christ sitting down at it, the other men, this has the Master, that the servants. But say we nothing of these things as yet; but let us see which has the more of present pleasure. And even in this respect, then, this pleasure is greater, for it is more pleasure to sit down with a King than with his servants. But let us withdraw this consideration also; let us examine the matter simply by itself. I, then, and those who choose the table I do, shall with much freedom and ease of mind both say and hear everything: but you trembling and fearing, and ashamed before those you sit down with, will not even have the heart to reach out your hands, just as though you had got to a school, and not a dinner, just as though you were trembling before dreadful masters. But not so they. But, says one, the honor is great. Nay, I further am in more honor; for your mean estate appears grander, when even while sharing the same table, the words ye utter are those of slaves.

For the servant then most of all shows as such, when he sits down with his master; for he is in a place where he ought not to be; nor has he from such familiarity so much dignity as he has abasement, for he is then abased exceedingly. And one may see a servant by himself make a brave appearance, and the poor man seem splendid by himself, rather than when he is walking with a rich one; for the low when near the lofty, then appears low, and the juxtaposition makes the low seem lower, not loftier. So too your sitting down with them makes you seem as of yet meaner condition. But not so, us. In these two things, then, we have the advantage, in freedom, and in honor; which have nothing equal to them in regard of pleasure. For I at least would prefer a crust with freedom, to thousands of dainties with slavery. For, says one, Better is an entertainment of herbs with love and kindness, than an ox from the stall with hatred. Proverbs 15:17 For whatsoever those may say, they who are present must needs praise it, or give offense; assuming thus the rank of parasites, or rather, being worse than they. For parasites indeed, even though it be with shame and insult, have yet liberty of speech: but you have not even this. But your meanness is indeed as great, (for you fear and crouch,) but not so your honor. Surely then that table is deprived of every pleasure, but this is replete with all delight of soul.

But let us examine the nature even of the meats themselves. For there indeed it is necessary to burst one's self with the large quantity of wine, even against one's will, but here none who is disinclined need eat or drink. So that there indeed the pleasure arising from the quality of the food is cancelled by the dishonor which precedes, and the discomfort which follows the surfeit. For not less than hunger does surfeiting destroy and rack our bodies; but even far more grievously; and whomsoever you like to give me, I shall more easily destroy by bursting him with surfeit than by hunger. For thus the latter is easier to be borne than the other, for one might indeed endure hunger for twenty days, but surfeiting not for as many as two only. And the country people who are perpetually struggling with the one, are healthy, and need no physicians; but the other, surfeiting I mean, none can endure without perpetually calling in physicians; yea, rather, its tyranny has often baffled even their attempt to rescue.

So far then as pleasure is concerned, this [table of mine] has the advantage. For if honor has more pleasure than dishonor, if authority than subjection, and if manly confidence than trembling and fear, and if enjoyment of what is enough, than to be plunged out of depth in the tide of luxury; on the score of pleasure

this table is better than the other. It is besides better in regard of expense; for the other is expensive, but this, not so.

But what? Is it then to the guests alone that this table is the more pleasurable, or brings it more pleasure than the other to him who invites them, as well? For this is what we are enquiring after rather. Now he who invites those makes preparation many days before, and is forced to have trouble and anxious thoughts and cares, neither sleeping by night, nor resting by day; but forming with himself many plans, conversing with cooks, confectioners, deckers of tables. Then when the very day has come, one may see him in greater fear than those who are going to fight a boxing match, lest anything should turn out other than was expected, lest he be shot with the glance of envy, lest he thereby procure himself a multitude of accusers. But the other escapes all this anxious thought and trouble by extemporizing his table, and not being careful about it for many days before. And then, truly, after this, the former indeed has straightway lost the grateful return; but the other has God for his Debtor; and is nourished with good hopes, being every day feasted from off that table. For the meats indeed are spent, but the grateful thought is never spent, but every day he rejoices and exults more than they that are gorged with their excess of wine. For nothing does so nourish the soul as a virtuous hope, and the expectation of good things.

But now let us consider what follows. There indeed are flutes, and harps, and pipes; but here is no music of sounds unsuitable; but what? hymns, singing of psalms. There indeed the Demons are hymned; but here, the Lord of all, God. Do you see with what gratitude this one abounds, with what ingratitude and insensibility that? For, tell me, when God has nourished you with His good things, and when you ought to give Him thanks after being fed, do you even introduce the Demons? For these songs to the lyre, are none other than songs to Demons. When you ought to say, Blessed are You, O Lord, that You have nourished me with Your good things, do you like a worthless dog not even so much as remember Him, but, over and above, introduce the Demons? Nay rather, dogs, whether they receive anything or not, fawn upon those they know, but thou dost not even this. The dog, although he receives nothing, fawns upon his master; but thou, even when you have received, barkest at Him. Again, the dog, even though he be well treated by a stranger, not even so will be reconciled of his hatred of him, nor be enticed on to be friends with him: but thou, even though suffering mischief incalculable from the Demons, introduce them at your feasts. So that, in two ways, you are worse than the dog. And the mention I have now made of dogs is happy, in regard of those who give thanks then only when they receive a benefit. Take shame, I pray you, at the dogs, which when famishing still fawn upon their masters. But you, if you have haply heard that the Demon has cured anyone, straightway forsakest your Master; O more unreasoning than the dogs!

But, says one, the harlots are a pleasure to look upon. What sort of pleasure are they? Yea rather what infamy are they not? Your house has become a brothel, madness, and fury; and are you not ashamed to call this pleasure? If then it be allowed to use them, greater than all pleasure is the shame, and the discomfort which arises from the shame, to make one's house a brothel, like hogs in wallowing in the mire? But if so far only be allowed as to see them, lo! Again the pain is greater. For to see is no pleasure, where to use is not allowed, but the lust becomes only the greater, and the flame the fiercer.

But would you learn the end? Those, indeed, when they rise up from the table, are like the madmen and those that have lost their wits; foolhardy, quarrelsome, laughing-stocks for the very slaves; and the servants indeed retire sober, but these, drunk. O the shame! But with the other is nothing of this sort; but closing the table with thanksgiving, they so retire to their homes, with pleasure sleeping, with pleasure waking, free from all shame and accusation.

If you will consider also the guests themselves, you will see that the one are within just what the others are without; blind, maimed, lame; and as are the bodies of these, such are the souls of those, laboring under dropsy and inflammation. For of such sort is pride; for after the luxurious gratification a maiming takes place; of such sort is surfeiting and drunkenness, making men lame and maimed. And you will see too that these have souls like the bodies of the others, brilliant, ornamented. For they who live in giving of thanks, who seek nothing beyond a sufficiency, they whose philosophy is of this sort are in all brightness.

But let us see the end both here and there. There, indeed, is unchaste pleasure, loose laughter, drunkenness, buffoonery, filthy language; (for since they in their own persons are ashamed to talk filthily, this is brought about by means of the harlots;) but here is love of mankind, gentleness. Near to him who invites those stands vainglory arming him, but near the other, love of man, and gentleness. For the one table, love of man prepares, but the other, vainglory, and cruelty, out of injustice and grasping. And that one ends in what I have said, in loss of wits, in delirium, in madness; (for such are the offshoots of vainglory;) but this one in thanksgiving and the glory of God. And the praise too, which comes of men, attends more abundantly upon this; for that man is even regarded with an envious eye, but this all men regard as their common father, even they who have received no benefit at his hands. And as with the injured even they who have not been injured sympathize, and all become in common enemies (to the injurer): so too, when some receive kindness, they also who have not received any, not less than they who have, praise and admire him that conferred it. And there indeed is much envy, but here much tender solicitude, many prayers from all.

And so much indeed here; but There, when Christ has come, this one indeed shall stand with much boldness, and shall hear before the whole world, Thou saw Me an hungered, and fed Me; naked, and clothed Me; a stranger, and took Me in Matthew 25:35; and all the like words: but the other shall hear the contrary; Wicked and slothful servant Matthew 25:26; and again, Woe unto them that luxuriate upon their couches, and sleep upon beds of ivory, and drink the refined wine, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; they counted upon these things as staying, and not as fleeting. Amos 6:4-6; Septuagint

I have not said this without purpose, but with the view of changing your minds; and that you should do nothing that is fruitless. What then, says one, of the fact that I do both the one and the other? This argument is much resorted to by all. And what need, tell me, when everything might be done usefully, to make a division, and to expend part on what is not wanted, but even without any purpose at all, and part usefully? Tell me, had you, when sowing, cast some upon a rock, and some upon very good ground; is it likely that you would have been contented so, and have said, Where is the harm, if we cast some to no purpose, and some upon very good ground? For why not all into the very good ground? Why lessen the gain? And if you have occasion to be getting money together, you will not talk in that way, but will get it together from every quarter; but in the other case thou dost not so. And if to lend on usury; you will not say, Wherefore shall we give some to the poor, and some to the rich, but all is given to the former: yet in the case before us, where the gain is so great, thou dost not thus calculate, and will not at length desist from expending without purpose, and laying out without return?

But, says one, this also has a gain. Of what kind, tell me? It increases friendships. Nothing is colder than men who are made friends by these things, by the table, and surfeiting. The friendships of parasites are born only from that source.

Insult not a thing so marvelous as love, nor say that this is its root. As if one were to say, that a tree which bore gold and precious stones had not its root of the same, but that it was gendered of rottenness; so

doest even thou: for even though friendship should be born from that source, nothing could possibly be colder. But those other tables produce friendship, not with man, but with God; and that an intense one, so thou be intent on preparing them. For he that expends part in this way and part in that, even should he have bestowed much, has done no great thing: but he that expends all in this way, even though he should have given little, has done the whole. For what is required is that we give, not much or little, but not less than is in our power. Think we on him with the five talents, and on him with the two. Matthew 25:15 Think we on her who cast in those two mites. Mark 12:41 Think we on the widow in Elijah's days. She who threw in those two mites said not, What harm if I keep the one mite for myself, and give the other? But gave her whole living. 1 Kings 17 But you, in the midst of so great plenty, art more penurious than she. Let us then not be careless of our own salvation, but apply ourselves to almsgiving. For nothing is better than this, as the time to come shall show; meanwhile the present shows it also. Live we then to the glory of God, and do those things that please Him, that we may be counted worthy of the good things of promise; which may all we obtain, through the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/colossians-11-2/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net