

# Homily 12 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 12 on Ephesians emphasizes the contrast between the life of believers and the vanity of the Gentiles, urging a life aligned with God's truth and purpose.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:31, Psalm 39:6, Psalm 53:5, Psalm 112:9, Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 12:8, Isaiah 44:20, 1 Corinthians 15:32, Ephesians 4:17

**Topics:** "Separation From World", "Pleasing God"

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## Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of living a life separate from the ways of the world, urging believers to walk in the path of God and not in the vanity of their minds like the Gentiles. He highlights the dangers of being darkened in understanding and being consumed by earthly pursuits that have no eternal value. Chrysostom contrasts the emptiness of worldly desires with the true purpose of honoring God and living in His light, warning against idolizing material things or false gods. He encourages believers to break free from the slavery of sin and to focus on what truly matters - pleasing God and avoiding the snares of the enemy.

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## Transcript

Ephesians 4:17

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding.

It is the duty of the teacher to build up and restore the souls of his disciples, not only by counseling and instructing them, but also by alarming them, and delivering them up to God. For when the words spoken by men as coming from fellow-servants are not sufficient to kindle the soul, it then becomes necessary to make over the case to God. This accordingly Paul does also; for having discoursed concerning lowliness, and concerning unity, and concerning our duty not to rise up one against another, hear what he says. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk. He does not say, That ye henceforth walk not as you are now walking, for that expression would have struck too hard. But he plainly indicates the same thing, only he brings his example from others. And so in writing to the Thessalonians, he does this very same thing, where he says, Not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know not God. 1 Thessalonians 4:5 You differ from them, he means to say, in doctrine, but that is wholly God's work: what I require on your path is the life and the course of behavior that is after God. This is your own. And I call the Lord to witness what I have said, that I have not shrunk, but have told

you how ye ought to walk.

In the vanity, says he, of their mind.

What is vanity of mind? It is the being busied about vain things. And what are those vain things, but all things in the present life? Of which the Preacher says, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2 But a man will say, If they be vain and vanity, wherefore were they made? If they are God's works, how are they vain? And great is the dispute concerning these things. But hearken, beloved: it is not the works of God which he calls vain; God forbid! The Heaven is not vain, the earth is not vain -- God forbid!-- nor the sun, nor the moon and stars, nor our own body.

No, all these are very good. Genesis 1:31 But what is vain? Let us hear the Preacher himself, what he says; I planted me vineyards, I gat me men singers and women singers, I made me pools of water, I had great possession of herds and flocks, I gathered me also silver and gold, and I saw that these are vanity. Ecclesiastes 2:4-8 And again, Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity. Ecclesiastes 12:8 Hear also what the Prophet says, He heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them.

Psalms 39:6 Such is vanity of vanities, your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts, and your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God, but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end. Riches are vain when they are spent upon luxury; but they cease to be vain when they are dispersed and given to the needy.

Psalms 112:9 But when you have spent them upon luxury, let us look at the end of them, what it is -- grossness of body, flatulence, pantings, fullness of belly, heaviness of head, softness of flesh, feverishness, enervation; for as a man who shall draw into a leaking vessel labors in vain, so also does the one who lives in luxury and self-indulgence draw into a leaking vessel. But again, that is called vain, which is expected indeed to contain something, but contains it not -- that which men call empty, as when they speak of empty hopes.

And generally that is called vain, which is bare and purposeless, which is of no use. Let us see then whether all human things are not of this sort. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. 1 Corinthians 15:32 What then, tell me, is the end? Corruption. Let us put on clothing and raiment. And what is the result? Nothing. Such are the lives of the Greeks. They philosophized, but in vain. They made a show of a life of hardship, but of mere hardship, not looking to any beneficial end, but to vainglory, and to honor from the many.

But what is the honor of the many? It is nothing, for if they themselves which render the honor perish, much more does the honor. He that renders honor to another, ought first to render it to himself; for if he gain not honor for himself, how can he ever render it to another? Whereas now we seek even honors from vile and despicable characters, themselves dishonorable, and objects of reproach. What kind of honor then is this? Perceive ye, how that all things are vanity of vanities? Therefore, says he, in the vanity of their mind.

But further, is not their religion of this sort, wood and stone? He has made the sun to shine for a lamp to light us. Who will worship his own lamp? The sun supplies us with light, but where he cannot, a lamp can do it. Then why not worship your lamp? Nay, one will say, I worship the fire. Oh, how ridiculous! So great is the absurdity, and yet look again at another absurdity. Why extinguish the object of your worship? Why

destroy, why annihilate your god? Wherefore do you not suffer your house to be filled with him? For if the fire be god, let him feed upon your body. Put not your god under the bottom of your kettle, or your cauldron. Bring him into your inner chambers, bring him within your silken draperies. Whereas not only do you not bring him in, but if by any accident he has found entrance, you drive him out from every place, you call everybody together, and, as though some wild beast had entered, you weep and wail, and callest the presence of your god an overwhelming calamity. I have a God, and I do all I can to enshrine Him in my bosom, and I deem it my true bliss, not when He visits my dwelling, but when I can draw Him even to my heart. Do thou too draw the fire to your heart. This is folly and vanity. Fire is good for use, not for adoration; good for ministration and for service, to be my slave, not to be my master. It was made for me, not I for it. If you are a worshiper of fire, why recline upon your couch yourself, and order your cook to stand before your god? Take up the art of cookery yourself, become a baker if you will, or a coppersmith, for nothing can be more honorable than these arts, since these are they that your god visits. Why deem that art a disgrace, where your god is all in all? Why commit it to your slaves, and not be ambitious of it yourself? Fire is good, inasmuch as it is the work of a good Creator, but it is not God. It is the work of God, it was not called God. Do you see not how ungovernable is its nature;-- how when it lays hold on a building it stops nowhere? But if it seizes anything continuous, it destroys all; and, except the hands of workmen or others quench its fury, it knows not friends nor foes, but deals with all alike. Is this then your god, and are you not ashamed? Well indeed does he say, in the vanity of their mind.

But the sun, they say, is God. Tell me, how and wherefore. Is it that he sheds abundance of light? Yet do you not see him overcome by clouds, and in bondage to the necessity of nature, and eclipsed, and hidden by the moon? And yet the cloud is weaker than the sun; but still it often gains the mastery of him. And this indeed is the work of God's wisdom. God must needs be all sufficient: but the sun needs many things; and this is not like a god. For he requires air to shine in, and that, too, thin air; since the air, when it is greatly condensed, suffers not the rays to pass through it.

He requires also water, and other restraining power, to prevent him from consuming. For were it not that fountains, and lakes, and rivers, and seas, formed some moisture by the emission of their vapors, there would be nothing to prevent an universal conflagration. Do you see then, say ye, that he is a god? What folly, what madness! A god, say ye, because he has power to do harm. Nay, rather, for this very reason is he no god, because where he does harm he needs nothing; whereas, where he does good, he requires many things besides.

Now to do harm, is foreign to God's nature; to do good, is His property. Where then the reverse is the case, how can he be God? Do you see not that poisonous drugs injure, and need nothing; but when they are to do good, need many things? For your sake then is he such as he is, both good, and powerless; good, that you may acknowledge his Lord; and powerless, that you may not say that he is lord. But, say they, he nourishes the plants and the seeds. What then, at that rate is not the very dung a god?

For even that also nourishes. And why not at that rate the scythe as well, and the hands of the husbandman? Prove to me that the sun alone does the work of nourishing without needing the help of either earth, or water, or tillage; but let the seeds be sown, and let him shed forth his rays, and produce the ears of grain. But now if this work be not his alone, but that of the rains also, wherefore is not the water a god also? But of this I speak not yet. Why is not the earth too a god, and why not the dung, and the hoe?

Shall we then, tell me, worship all? Alas, what trifling! And indeed rather might the ear of grain be produced without sun, than without earth and water; and so with plants and all other things. Were there no

earth, none of these things could ever appear. And if any one, as children and women do, were to put some earth into a pot, and to fill up the pot with a quantity of dung, and to place it under the roof, plants, though they may be weak ones, will be produced from it. So that the contribution of the earth and of the dung is greater, and these therefore we ought to worship rather than the sun.

He requires the sky, he requires the air, he requires these waters, to prevent his doing harm, to be as bridles to curb the fierceness of his power, and to restrain him from letting loose his rays over the world, like some furious horse. And now tell me, where is he at night? Whither has your god taken his departure? For this is not like a god, to be circumscribed and limited. This is in fact the property of bodies only. But, say they, there is some sort of power residing in him, and he has motion.

Is this power then, I pray you, itself God? Why then is it insufficient in itself, and why does it not restrain the fire? For again, I come to the same argument. But what is that power? Is it productive of light, or does it by the sun give light, though of itself possessing none of these qualities? If so, then is the sun superior to it. How far shall we unwind this maze?

Again, what is water? Is not that too, they say, a god? This again is a matter of truly absurd disputation. Is that not a god, they say, which we make use of for so many purposes? And so again, in like manner, of the earth. Truly they walk in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding.

But these words he is now using concerning life and conduct. The Greeks are fornicators and adulterers. Of course. They who paint to themselves such gods as these, will naturally do all these things; and if they can but escape the eyes of men, there is no one to restrain them. For what will avail the argument of a resurrection, if it appear to them a mere fable? Yea, and what that of the torments of hell?-- they too are but a fable. And mark the Satanic notion. When they are told of gods who are fornicators, they deny that these are fables, but believe them. Yet whenever any shall discourse to them of punishment, these, they say, are poets, men who turn everything into fable, that man's happy condition may be on all sides overturned.

But the philosophers, it is said, discovered something truly grand, and far better than these. How? They who introduced fate, and who tell us that nothing is providential, and that there is no one to care for anything, but that all things consist of atoms? Or, others again who say that God is a body? Or who, tell me, are they? Are they those who would turn the souls of men into the souls of dogs, and would pervade mankind that one was once a dog, and a lion, and a fish? How long will you go on and never cease trifling, being darkened in the understanding?

For they say and do all things as though they were indeed in the dark, both in those things which concern doctrine, and those which concern life and conduct; for the man who is in darkness sees none of the things which lie before him, but oftentimes when he sees a rope, he will take it for a live serpent; or again, if he is caught by a hedge, he will think that a man or an evil spirit has hold of him, and great is the alarm, and great the perturbation. Such as these are the things they fear.

There were they in great fear, it says, where no fear was Psalm 53:5; but the things which they ought to fear, these they fear not. But just as children in their nurses' arms thrust their hands incautiously into the fire, and boldly into the candle also, and yet are scared at a man clothed in sackcloth; just so these Greeks, as if they were really always children, (as some one also among themselves has said, the Greeks are always children,) fear those things that are no sins, such as filthiness of the body, the pollution of a funeral, a bed, or the keeping of days, and the like: whereas those which are really sins, unnatural lust,

adultery, fornication, of these they make no account at all.

No, you may see a man washing himself from the pollution of a dead body, but from dead works, never; and, again, spending much zeal in the pursuit of riches, and yet supposing the whole is undone by the crowing of a single cock. So darkened are they in their understanding. Their soul is filled with all sorts of terrors. For instance: Such a person, one will say, was the first who met me, as I was going out of the house; of course ten thousand evils must certainly ensue. At another time, the wretch of a servant in giving me my shoes, held out the left shoe first,-- terrible mishaps and mischiefs!

I myself in coming out set forth with the left foot foremost; and this too is a token of misfortune. And these are the evils that occur about the house. Then, as I go out, my right eye shoots up from beneath. This is a sure sign of tears. Again the women, when the reeds strike against the standards, and ring, or when they themselves are scratched by the shuttle, turn this also into a sign. And again, when they strike the web with the shuttle, and do it with some vehemence, and then the reeds on the top from the intensity of the blow strike against the standards and ring, this again they make a sign, and ten thousand things besides, deserving of ridicule.

And so if an ass should bray, or a cock should crow, or a man should sneeze, or whatever else may happen, like men bound with ten thousand chains, or, as I was saying, like men confined in the dark, they suspect everything, and are more slavish than all the slaves in the world.

But let it not be so with us. But scorning all these things, as men living in the light, and having our citizenship in Heaven, and having nothing in common with earth, let us regard but one thing as terrible, that is, sin, and offending against God. And if there be not this, let us scorn all the rest, and him that brought them in, the Devil. For these things let us give thanks to God. Let us be diligent, not only that we ourselves be never caught by this slavery, but if any of those who are dear to us have been caught, let us break his bonds asunder, let us release him from this most bitter and contemptible captivity, let us make him free and unshackled for his course toward Heaven, let us raise up his flagging wings, and teach him to be wise for life and doctrine's sake. Let us give thanks to God for all things. Let us beseech Him that He will not declare us unworthy of the gifts offered to us, and let us ourselves withal endeavor to contribute our own part, that we may teach not only by speaking, but by acting also. For thus shall we be able to attain His unnumbered blessings, of which God grant we may all be counted worthy, in Christ Jesus our Lord with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost together, be glory, might, and honor, now, henceforth, and for ever and ever. Amen.

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