

John 1:1 - Part 2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the eternal nature of the Word and the importance of spiritual education for both children and adults.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, Matthew 6:33, John 5:44, 1 Thessalonians 2:6

Topics: "Godly Humility", "Worldly Ambition"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of seeking worldly glory and the importance of focusing on God's approval rather than the applause of others. He emphasizes the detrimental effects of vainglory, which blinds individuals to truth, leads to dishonor, and causes them to prioritize the opinions of the crowd over God's will. Chrysostom urges his audience to reject the empty pursuit of human honor and instead seek the true honor that comes from living according to God's standards, reminding them that God rewards those who seek His approval above all else.

Transcript

In the beginning was the Word.

1. On the subject of attention in hearkening it is superfluous to exhort you any more, so quickly have you shown by your actions the effects of my advice. For your manner of running together, your attentive postures, the thrusting one another in your eagerness to get the inner places, where my voice may more clearly be heard by you, your unwillingness to retire from the press until this spiritual assembly be dissolved, the clapping of hands, the murmurs of applause; in a word, all things of this kind may be considered proofs of the fervor of your souls, and of your desire to hear. So that on this point it is superfluous to exhort you. One thing, however, it is necessary for us to bid and entreat, that you continue to have the same zeal, and manifest it not here only, but that also when you are at home, you converse man with wife, and father with son, concerning these matters. And say somewhat of yourselves, and require somewhat in return from them; and so all contribute to this excellent banquet.

For let no one tell me that our children ought not to be occupied with these things; they ought not only to be occupied with them, but to be zealous about them only. And although on account of your infirmity I do not assert this, nor take them away from their worldly learning, just as I do not draw you either from your civil business; yet of these seven days I claim that you dedicate one to the common Lord of us all. For is it not a strange thing that we should bid our domestics slave for us all their time, and ourselves apportion not even a little of our leisure to God; and this too when all our service adds nothing to Him, (for the Godhead

is incapable of want,) but turns out to our own advantage? And yet when you take your children into the theaters, you allege neither their mathematical lessons, nor anything of the kind; but if it be required to gain or collect anything spiritual, you call the matter a waste of time. And how shall you not anger God, if you find leisure and assign a season for everything else, and yet think it a troublesome and unseasonable thing for your children to take in hand what relates to Him?

Do not so, brethren, do not so. It is this very age that most of all needs the hearing these things; for from its tenderness it readily stores up what is said; and what children hear is impressed as a seal on the wax of their minds. Besides, it is then that their life begins to incline to vice or virtue; and if from the very gates and portals one lead them away from iniquity, and guide them by the hand to the best road, he will fix them for the time to come in a sort of habit and nature, and they will not, even if they be willing, easily change for the worse, since this force of custom draws them to the performance of good actions. So that we shall see them become more worthy of respect than those who have grown old, and they will be more useful in civil matters, displaying in youth the qualities of the aged.

For, as I before said, it cannot be that they who enjoy the hearing of such things as these, and who are in the company of such an Apostle, should depart without receiving some great and remarkable advantage, be it man, woman, or youth, that partakes of this table. If we train by words the animals which we have, and so tame them, how much more shall we effect this with men by this spiritual teaching, when there is a wide difference between the remedy in each case, and the subject healed as well. For neither is there so much fierceness in us as in the brutes, since theirs is from nature, ours from choice; nor is the power of the words the same, for the power of the first is that of the human intellect, the power of the second is that of the might and grace of the Spirit. Let then the man who despairs of himself consider the tame animals, and he shall no longer be thus affected; let him come continually to this house of healing, let him hear at all times the laws of the Spirit, and on retiring home let him write down in his mind the things which he has heard; so shall his hopes be good and his confidence great, as he feels his progress by experience. For when the devil sees the law of God written in the soul, and the heart become tablets to write it on, he will not approach any more. Since wherever the king's writing is, not engraved on a pillar of brass, but stamped by the Holy Ghost on a mind loving God, and bright with abundant grace, that (evil one) will not be able even to look at it, but from afar will turn his back upon us. For nothing is so terrible to him and to the thoughts which are suggested by him as a mind careful about Divine matters, and a soul which ever hangs over this fountain. Such an one can nothing present annoy, even though it be displeasing; nothing puff up or make proud, even though it be favorable; but amidst all this storm and surge it will even enjoy a great calm.

2. For confusion arises within us, not from the nature of circumstances, but from the infirmity of our minds; for if we were thus affected by reason of what befalls us, then, (as we all sail the same sea, and it is impossible to escape waves and spray,) all men must needs be troubled; but if there are some who stand beyond the influence of the storm and the raging sea, then it is clear that it is not circumstances which make the storm, but the condition of our own mind. If therefore we so order the mind that it may bear all things contentedly, we shall have no storm nor even a ripple, but always a clear calm.

After professing that I should say nothing on these points, I know not how I have been carried away into such a length of exhortation. Pardon my prolixity; for I fear, yes, I greatly fear lest this zeal of ours should ever become weaker. Did I feel confident respecting it, I would not now have said to you anything on these matters, since it is sufficient to make all things easy to you. But it is time in what follows to proceed to the matters proposed for consideration today; that you may not come weary to the contest. For we have

contests against the enemies of the truth, against those who use every artifice to destroy the honor of the Son of God, or rather their own. This remains for ever as it now is, nothing lessened by the blaspheming tongue, but they, by seeking eagerly to pull down Him whom they say they worship, fill their faces with shame and their souls with punishment.

What then do they say when we assert what we have asserted? That the words, 'in the beginning was the Word,' do not denote eternity absolutely, for that this same expression was used also concerning heaven and earth. What enormous shamelessness and irreverence! I speak to you concerning God, and do you bring the earth into the argument, and men who are of the earth? At this rate, since Christ is called Son of God, and God, Man who is called Son of God must be God also. For, I have said, You are Gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. Psalm 82:6 Will you contend with the Only-Begotten concerning Sonship, and assert that in that respect He enjoys nothing more than thou? By no means, is the reply. And yet you do this even though thou say not so in words. How? Because you say that thou by grace art partaker of the adoption, and He in like manner. For by saying that He is not Son by nature, thou only makest him to be so by grace.

However, let us see the proofs which they produce to us. In the beginning, it is said, God made the Heaven and the earth, and the earth was invisible and unformed. Genesis 1:2 And, There 'was' a man of Ramathaim Zophim. 1 Samuel 1:1 These are what they think strong arguments, and they are strong; but it is to prove the correctness of the doctrines asserted by us, while they are utterly powerless to establish their blasphemy. For tell me, what has the word was in common with the word made? What has God in common with man? Why do you mix what may not be mixed? Why confound things which are distinct, why bring low what is above? In that place it is not the expression was only which denotes eternity, but that One was in the beginning. And that other, The Word was; for as the word being, when used concerning man, only distinguishes present time, but when concerning God, denotes eternity, so was, when used respecting our nature, signifies to us past time, and that too limited, but when respecting God it declares eternity. It would have been enough then when one had heard the words earth and man, to imagine nothing more concerning them than what one may fitly think of a nature that came into being, for that which came to be, be it what it may, has come to be either in time, or the age before time was, but the Son of God is above not only times, but all ages which were before, for He is the Creator and Maker of them, as the Apostle says, by whom also He made the ages. Now the Maker necessarily is, before the thing made. Yet since some are so senseless, as even after this to have higher notions concerning creatures than is their due, by the expression He made, and by that other, there was a man, he lays hold beforehand of the mind of his hearer, and cuts up all shamelessness by the roots. For all that has been made, both heaven and earth, has been made in time, and has its beginning in time, and none of them is without beginning, as having been made: so that when you hear that he made the earth, and that there was a man, you are trifling to no purpose, and weaving a tissue of useless folly.

For I can mention even another thing by way of going further. What is it? It is, that if it had been said of the earth, In the beginning was the earth, and of man, In the beginning was the man, we must not even then have imagined any greater things concerning them than what we have now determined. For the terms earth and man as they are presupposed, whatever may be said concerning them, do not allow the mind to imagine to itself anything greater concerning them than what we know at present. Just as the Word, although but little be said of It, does not allow us to think (respecting It) anything low or poor. Since in proceeding he says of the earth, The earth was invisible and unformed. For having said that He made it, and having settled its proper limit, he afterwards declares fearlessly what follows, as knowing that there is

no one so silly as to suppose that it is without beginning and uncreated, since the word earth, and that other made, are enough to convince even a very simple person that it is not eternal nor increate, but one of those things created in time.

3. Besides, the expression was, applied to the earth and to man, is not indicative of absolute existence. But in the case of a man (it denotes) his being of a certain place, in that of the earth its being in a certain way. For he has not said absolutely the earth was, and then held his peace, but has taught how it was even after its creation, as that it was invisible and unformed, as yet covered by the waters and in confusion. So in the case of Elkanah he does not merely say that there was a man, but adds also whence he was, of Armathaim Zophim. But in the case of the Word, it is not so. I am ashamed to try these cases, one against the other, for if we find fault with those who do so in the case of men, when there is a great difference in the virtue of those who are so tried, though in truth their substance be one; where the difference both of nature and of everything else is so infinite, is it not the extremest madness to raise such questions? But may He who is blasphemed by them be merciful to us. For it was not we who invented the necessity of such discussions, but they who war against their own salvation laid it on us.

What then do I say? That this first was, applied to the Word, is only indicative of His eternal Being, (for In the beginning, he says, was the Word,) and that the second was, (and the Word was with God,) denotes His relative Being. For since to be eternal and without beginning is most peculiar to God, this he puts first; and then, lest any one hearing that He was in the beginning, should assert, that He was unbegotten also, he immediately remedies this by saying, before he declares what He was, that He was with God. And he has prevented any one from supposing, that this Word is simply such a one as is either uttered or conceived, by the addition, as I foresaid, of the article, as well as by this second expression. For he does not say, was in God, but was with God: declaring to us His eternity as to person. Then, as he advances, he has more clearly revealed it, by adding, that this Word also was God.

But yet created, it may be said. What then hindered him from saying, that In the beginning God made the Word? At least Moses speaking of the earth says, not that in the beginning was the earth, but that He made it, and then it was. What now hindered John from saying in like manner, that In the beginning God made the Word? For if Moses feared lest any one should assert that the earth was uncreated, much more ought John to have feared this respecting the Son, if He was indeed created. The world being visible, by this very circumstance proclaims its Maker, (the heavens, says the Psalmist, declare the glory of God Psalm 19:1), but the Son is invisible, and is greatly, infinitely, higher than all creation. If now, in the one instance, where we needed neither argument nor teaching to know that the world is created, yet the prophet sets down this fact clearly and before all others; much more should John have declared the same concerning the Son, if He had really been created.

Yes, it may be said, but Peter has asserted this clearly and openly. Where and when? When speaking to the Jews he said, that 'God has made Him both Lord and Christ.' Acts 2:36 Why do you not add what follows, That same Jesus whom you have crucified? Or do you not know that of the words, part relate to His unmixed Nature, part to His Incarnation? But if this be not the case, and you will absolutely understand all as referring to the Godhead, then you will make the Godhead capable of suffering; but if not capable of suffering, then not created. For if blood had flowed from that divine and ineffable Nature, and if that Nature, and not the flesh, had been torn and cut by the nails upon the cross, on this supposition your quibbling would have had reason; but if not even the devil himself could utter such a blasphemy, why do you feign to be ignorant with ignorance so unpardonable, and such as not the evil spirits themselves could pretend? Besides the expressions Lord and Christ belong not to His Essence, but to His dignity; for the

one refers to His Power, the other to his having been anointed. What then would you say concerning the Son of God? For if he were even, as you assert, created, this argument could not have place. For He was not first created and afterwards God chose Him, nor does He hold a kingdom which could be thrown aside, but one which belongs by nature to His Essence; since, when asked if He were a King, He answers, To this end was I born. John 18:37 But Peter speaks as concerning one chosen, because his argument wholly refers to the Dispensation.

4. And why do you wonder if Peter says this? For Paul, reasoning with the Athenians, calls Him Man only, saying, By that Man whom He has ordained, whereof He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead. Acts 17:31 He speaks nothing concerning the form of God Philippians 2:6, nor that He was equal to Him, nor that He was the brightness of His glory. Hebrews 1:3 And with reason. The time for words like these was not yet come; but it would have contented him that they should in the meanwhile admit that He was Man, and that He rose again from the dead. Christ Himself acted in the same manner, from whom Paul having learned, used this reserve. For He did not at once reveal to us His Divinity, but was at first held to be a Prophet and a good man; but afterwards His real nature was shown by His works and words. On this account Peter too at first used this method, (for this was the first sermon that he made to the Jews;) and because they were not yet able clearly to understand anything respecting His Godhead, he dwelt on the arguments relating to His Incarnation; that their ears being exercised in these, might open a way to the rest of his teaching. And if any one will go through all the sermon from the beginning, he will find what I say very observable, for he (Peter) calls Him Man, and dwells on the accounts of His Passion, His Resurrection, and His generation according to the flesh. Paul too when he says, Who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh Romans 1:3, only teaches us that the word made is taken with a view to His Incarnation, as we allow. But the son of thunder is now speaking to us concerning His Ineffable and Eternal Existence, and therefore he leaves the word made and puts was; yet if He were created, this point he needs must most especially have determined. For if Paul feared that some foolish persons might suppose that He shall be greater than the Father, and have Him who begot Him made subject to Him, (for this is the reason why the Apostle in sending to the Corinthians writes, But when He says, All things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted which did put all things under Him, yet who could possibly imagine that the Father, even in common with all things, will be subject to the Son?) if, I say, he nevertheless feared these foolish imaginations, and says, He is excepted that did put all things under Him; much more if the Son of God were indeed created, ought John to have feared lest any one should suppose Him uncreated, and to have taught on this point before any other.

But now, since He was Begotten, with good reason neither John nor any other, whether apostle or prophet, has asserted that He was created. Neither had it been so would the Only-Begotten Himself have let it pass unmentioned. For He who spoke of Himself so humbly from condescension would certainly not have been silent on this matter. And I think it not unreasonable to suppose, that He would be more likely to have the higher Nature, and say nothing of it, than not having it to pass by this omission, and fail to make known that He had it not.

For in the first case there was a good excuse for silence, namely, His desire to teach mankind humility by being silent as to the greatness of His attributes; but in the second case you can find no just excuse for silence. For why should He who declined many of His real attributes have been, if He were created, silent as to His having been made? He who, in order to teach humility, often uttered expressions of lowliness, such as did not properly belong to Him, much more if He had been indeed created, would not have failed to speak of this.

Do you not see Him, in order that none may imagine Him not to have been begotten, doing and saying everything to show that He was so, uttering words unworthy both of His dignity and His essence, and descending to the humble character of a Prophet? For the expression, As I hear, I judge John 5:30; and that other, He has told Me what I should say, and what I should speak John 12:49, and the like, belong merely to a prophet. If now, from His desire to remove this suspicion, He did not disdain to utter words thus lowly, much more if He were created would He have said many like words, that none might suppose Him to be uncreated; as, Think not that I am begotten of the Father; I am created, not begotten, nor do I share His essence.

But as it is, He does the very contrary, and utters words which compel men, even against their will and desire, to admit the opposite opinion. As, I am in the Father, and the Father in Me John 14:11; and, Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known Me, Philip? He that has seen Me, has seen the Father. John 14:9 And, That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. John 5:23 As the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will.

John 5:21 My Father works hitherto, and I work. John 5:17 As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father. John 10:15 I and My Father are One. John 10:30 And everywhere by putting the as, and the so, and the being with the Father, He declares His undeviating likeness to Him. His power in Himself He manifests by these, as well as by many other words; as when He says, Peace, be still. Mark 4:39 I will, be thou clean. Matthew 8:3 Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge you, come out of him.

Mark 9:25 And again, You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger. Matthew 5:21-22 And all the other laws which He gave, and wonders which He worked, are sufficient to show His power, or rather, I should say, a very small part of them is enough to bring over and convince any, except the utterly insensate.

5. But vainglory is a thing powerful to blind even to very evident truths the minds of those ensnared by it, and to persuade them to dispute against what is allowed by others; nay, it instigates some who know and are persuaded of the truth to pretended ignorance and opposition. As took place in the case of the Jews, for they did not through ignorance deny the Son of God, but that they might obtain honor from the multitude; they believed, says the Evangelist, but were afraid, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. John 12:40 And so they gave up their salvation to others. For it cannot be that he who is so zealous a slave to the glory of this present world can obtain the glory which is from God. Wherefore He rebuked them, saying, How can you believe, which receive honor of men, and seek not the honor which comes from God? John 5:44 This passion is a sort of deep intoxication, and makes him who is subdued by it hard to recover. And having detached the souls of its captives from heavenly things, it nails them to earth, and lets them not look up to the true light, but persuades them ever to wallow in the mire, giving them masters so powerful, that they have the rule over them without needing to use commands. For the man who is sick of this disease, does of his own accord, and without bidding, all that he thinks will be agreeable to his masters. On their account he clothes himself in rich apparel, and beautifies his face, taking these pains not for himself but for others; and he leads about a train of followers through the market-place, that others may admire him, and all that he does he goes through, merely out of obsequiousness to the rest of the world. Can any state of mind be more wretched than this? That others may admire him, he is ever being precipitated to ruin.

Would you learn what a tyrannous sway it exercises? Why surely, the words of Christ are sufficient to show it all. But yet listen to these further remarks. If you will ask any of those men who mingle in state affairs and incur great expenses, why they lavish so much gold, and what their so vast expenditure means; you will hear from them, that it is for nothing else but to gratify the people. If again you ask what the people may be; they will say, that it is a thing full of confusion and turbulent, made up for the most part of folly, tossed blindly to and fro like the waves of the sea, and often composed of varying and adverse opinions.

Must not the man who has such a master be more pitiable than any one? And yet strange though it be, it is not so strange that worldly men should be eager about these things; but that those who say that they have started away from the world should be sick of this same disease, or rather of one more grievous still, this is the strangest thing of all. For with the first the loss extends only to money, but in the last case the danger reaches to the soul. For when men alter a right faith for reputation's sake, and dishonor God that they may be in high repute themselves, tell me, what excess of stupidity and madness must there not be in what they do?

Other passions, even if they are very hurtful, at least bring some pleasure with them, though it be but for a time and fleeting; those who love money, or wine, or women, have, with their hurt, a pleasure, though a brief one. But those who are taken captives by this passion, live a life continually embittered and stripped of enjoyment, for they do not obtain what they earnestly desire, glory, I mean, from the many. They think they enjoy it, but do not really, because the thing they aim at is not glory at all.

And therefore their state of mind is not called glory, but a something void of glory, vaingloriousness, so have all the ancients named it, and with good reason; inasmuch as it is quite empty, and contains nothing bright or glorious within it, but as players' masks seem to be bright and lovely, but are hollow within, (for which cause, though they be more beautiful than natural faces, yet they never draw any to love them,) even so, or rather yet more wretchedly, has the applause of the multitude tricked out for us this passion, dangerous as an antagonist, and cruel as a master.

Its countenance alone is bright, but within it is no more like the mask's mere emptiness, but crammed with dishonor, and full of savage tyranny. Whence then, it may be asked, has this passion, so unreasonable, so devoid of pleasure, its birth? Whence else but from a low, mean soul? It cannot be that one who is captivated by love of applause should imagine readily anything great or noble; he needs must be base, mean, dishonorable, little. He who does nothing for virtue's sake, but to please men worthy of no consideration, and who ever makes account of their mistaken and erring opinions, how can he be worth anything?

Consider; if any one should ask him, What do you think of the many? He clearly would say, that they are thoughtless, and not to be regarded. Then if any one again should ask him, Would you choose to be like them? I do not suppose he could possibly desire to be like them. Must it not then be excessively ridiculous to seek the good opinion of those whom you never would choose to resemble?

6. Do you say that they are many and a sort of collective body? This is the very reason why you ought most to despise them. If when taken singly they are contemptible, still more will this be the case when they are many; for when they are assembled together, their individual folly is increased by numbers, and becomes greater. So that a man might possibly take a single one of them and set him right, but could not do so with them when together, because then their folly becomes intense, and they are led like sheep, and

follow in every direction the opinions of one another. Tell me, will you seek to obtain this vulgar glory? Do not, I beg and entreat you. It turns everything upside down; it is the mother of avarice, of slander, of false witness, of treacheries; it arms and exasperates those who have received no injury against those who have inflicted none. He who has fallen into this disease neither knows friendship nor remembers old companionship, and knows not how to respect any one at all; he has cast away from his soul all goodness, and is at war with every one, unstable, without natural affection.

Again, the passion of anger, tyrannical though it be and hard to bear, still is not wont always to disturb, but only when it has persons that excite it; but that of vainglory is ever active, and there is no time, as one may say, when it can cease, since reason neither hinders nor restrains it, but it is always with us not only persuading us to sin, but snatching from our hands anything which we may chance to do aright, or sometimes not allowing us to do right at all. If Paul calls covetousness idolatry, what ought we to name that which is mother, and root, and source of it, I mean, vainglory?

We cannot possibly find any term such as its wickedness deserves. Beloved, let us now return to our senses; let us put off this filthy garment, let us rend and cut it off from us, let us at some time or other become free with true freedom, and be sensible of the nobility which has been given to us by God; let us despise vulgar applause. For nothing is so ridiculous and disgraceful as this passion, nothing so full of shame and dishonor. One may in many ways see, that to love honor, is dishonor; and that true honor consists in neglecting honor, in making no account of it, but in saying and doing everything according to what seems good to God.

In this way we shall be able to receive a reward from Him who sees exactly all our doings, if we are content to have Him only for a spectator. What need we other eyes, when He who shall confer the prize is ever beholding our actions? Is it not a strange thing that, whatever a servant does, he should do to please his master, should seek nothing more than his master's observation, desire not to attract other eyes (though they be great men who are looking on) to his conduct, but aim at one thing only, that his master may observe him; while we who have a Lord so great, seek other spectators who can nothing profit, but rather hurt us by their observation, and make all our labor vain?

Not so, I beseech you. Let us call Him to applaud and view our actions from whom we shall receive our rewards. Let us have nothing to do with human eyes. For if we should even desire to attain this honor, we shall then attain to it, when we seek that which comes from God alone. For, He says, Them that honor Me, I will honor. 1 Samuel 2:30 And even as we are best supplied with riches when we despise them, and seek only the wealth which comes from God (Seek, he says, the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you Matthew 6:33); so it is in the case of honor.

When the granting either of riches or honor is no longer attended with danger to us, then God gives them freely; and it is then unattended with danger, when they have not the rule or power over us, do not command us as slaves, but belong to us as masters and free men. For the reason that He wishes us not to love them is, that we may not be ruled by them; and if we succeed in this respect, He gives us them with great liberality. Tell me, what is brighter than Paul, when he says, We seek not honor of men, neither of you, nor yet of others. 1 Thessalonians 2:6 What then is richer than him who has nothing, and yet possesses all things?

For as I said, when we are not mastered by them, then we shall master them, then we shall receive them. If then we desire to obtain honor, let us shun honor, so shall we be enabled after accomplishing the laws

of God to obtain both the good things which are here, and those which are promised, by the grace of Christ, with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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