

# John 1:18

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the unseen essence of God, the unique revelation of the Father through the Son, and the call for believers to live in unity and charity.*

**Scripture:** John 5:39

**Topics:** "Divine Nature", "Christian Unity"

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## Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of carefully studying the Scriptures to understand the deeper spiritual meanings, rather than interpreting them literally, to avoid misconceptions about God's nature. He explains that while many have seen manifestations of God, no one has seen His essence directly, as it is beyond human comprehension. Chrysostom highlights the unique relationship between God the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, who dwells in the bosom of the Father, indicating an intimate and equal knowledge of each other. He concludes by urging believers to imitate Christ by selflessly serving others and fostering unity and love within the community.

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## Transcript

No man has seen God at any time; the Only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

1. God will not have us listen to the words and sentences contained in the Scriptures carelessly, but with much attention. This is why the blessed David has prefixed in many places to his Psalms the title for understanding, and has said, Open Thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Law. Psalm 32:42, etc.; Psalm 119:18 And after him his son again shows that we ought to seek out wisdom as silver, and to make merchandise of her rather than of gold. Proverbs 2:4 and 3:14 [partially quoted]; John 5:39 And the Lord when He exhorts the Jews to search the Scriptures, the more urges us to the enquiry, for He would not thus have spoken if it were possible to comprehend them immediately at the first reading. No one would ever search for what is obvious and at hand, but for that which is wrapt in shadow, and which must be found after much enquiry; and so to arouse us to the search He calls them hidden treasure. Proverbs 2:4; Matthew 13:44 These words are said to us that we may not apply ourselves to the words of the Scriptures carelessly or in a chance way, but with great exactness. For if any one listen to what is said in them without enquiring into the meaning, and receive all so as it is spoken, according to the letter, he will suppose many unseemly things of God, will admit of Him that He is a man, that He is made of brass, is wrathful, is furious, and many opinions yet worse than these. But if he fully learn the sense that lies

beneath, he will be freed from all this unseemliness. Revelation 1:15 The very text which now lies before us says, that God has a bosom, a thing proper to bodily substances, yet no one is so insane as to imagine, that He who is without body is a body. In order then that we may properly interpret the entire passage according to its spiritual meaning, let us search it through from its beginning.

No man has seen God at any time. By what connection of thought does the Apostle come to say this? After showing the exceeding greatness of the gifts of Christ, and the infinite difference between them and those ministered by Moses, he would add the reasonable cause of the difference. Moses, as being a servant, was minister of lower things, but Christ being Lord and King, and the King's Son, brought to us things far greater, being ever with the Father, and beholding Him continually; wherefore He says, No man has seen God at any time.

What then shall we answer to the most mighty of voice, Esaias, when he says, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up Isaiah 6:1; and to John himself testifying of Him, that he said these things when he had seen His glory? John 12:41 What also to Ezekiel? For he too beheld Him sitting above the Cherubim. Ezekiel 1 and 10 What to Daniel? For he too says, The Ancient of days did sit Daniel 7:9 What to Moses himself, saying, Show me Your Glory, that I may see You so as to know You.

Exodus 33:13, partly from Septuagint And Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called Israel; for Israel is one that sees God. And others have seen him. How then says John, No man has seen God at any time? It is to declare, that all these were instances of (His) condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. For had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms, since that is simple, without form, or parts, or bounding lines.

It sits not, nor stands, nor walks: these things belong all to bodies. But how He Is, He only knows. And this He has declared by a certain prophet, saying, I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the hands of the prophets Hosea 12:10, that is, I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was. For since His Son was about to appear in very flesh, He prepared them from old time to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It; but what God really is, not only have not the prophets seen, but not even angels nor archangels.

If you ask them, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men. Luke 2:14 If you desire to learn something from Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that heaven and earth are full of His glory. Isaiah 6:3 If you enquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. Praise Him, says David, all His hosts.

Psalms 148:2 But the Son only Beholds Him, and the Holy Ghost. How can any created nature even see the Uncreated? If we are absolutely unable clearly to discern any incorporeal power whatsoever, even though created, as has been often proved in the case of angels, much less can we discern the Essence which is incorporeal and uncreated. Wherefore Paul says, Whom no man has seen, nor can see. 1 Timothy 6:16 Does then this special attribute belong to the Father only, not to the Son?

Away with the thought. It belongs also to the Son; and to show that it does so, hear Paul declaring this point, and saying, that He is the Image of the invisible God. Colossians 1:15 Now if He be the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an image. And wonder not that Paul says in another place, God was manifested in the Flesh 1 Timothy 3:16; because the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to (His) Essence. Besides, Paul shows that He is invisible, not

only to men, but also to the powers above, for after saying, was manifested in the Flesh, he adds, was seen of angels.

2. So that even to angels He then became visible, when He put on the Flesh; but before that time they did not so behold Him, because even to them His Essence was invisible.

How then, asks some one, did Christ say, 'Despise not one of these little ones, for I tell you, that their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven'? Matthew 18:10 Hath then God a face, and is He bounded by the heavens? Who so mad as to assert this? What then is the meaning of the words? As when He says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God Matthew 5:8, He means that intellectual vision which is possible to us, and the having God in the thoughts; so in the case of angels, we must understand that by reason of their pure and sleepless nature they do nothing else, but always image to themselves God. And therefore Christ says, that No man knows the Father, save the Son. Matthew 10:27 What then, are we all in ignorance? God forbid; but none knows Him as the Son knows Him. As then many have seen Him in the mode of vision permitted to them, but no one has beheld His Essence, so many of us know God, but what His substance can be none knows, save only He that was begotten of Him. For by knowledge He here means an exact idea and comprehension, such as the Father has of the Son. As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father. John 10:15

Observe, therefore, with what fullness the Evangelist speaks; for having said that no man has seen God at any time, he does not go on to say, that the Son who has seen, has declared Him, but adds something beyond seeing by the words, Who is in the bosom of the Father; because, to dwell in the bosom is far more than to see. For he that merely sees has not an in every way exact knowledge of the object, but he that dwells in the bosom can be ignorant of nothing. Now lest when you hear that none knows the Father, save the Son, you should assert that although He knows the Father more than all, yet He knows not how great He is, the Evangelist says that He dwells in the bosom of the Father; and Christ Himself declares, that He knows Him as much as the Father knows the Son. Ask therefore the gainsayer, Tell me, does the Father know the Son? And if he be not mad, he will certainly answer Yes. Then ask again; Does He see and know Him with exact vision and knowledge? Does He know clearly what He Is? He will certainly confess this also. From this next collect the exact comprehension the Son has of the Father. For He says, As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father John 10:15; and in another place, Not that any man has seen the Father, save He which is of God. John 6:46 Wherefore, as I said, the Evangelist mentions the bosom, to show all this to us by that one word; that great is the affinity and nearness of the Essence, that the knowledge is nowise different, that the power is equal. For the Father would not have in His bosom one of another essence, nor would He have dared, had He been one among many servants, to live in the bosom of his Lord, for this belongs only to a true Son, to one who has much confidence towards His Father, and who is in nothing inferior to Him.

Would you learn also His eternity? Hear what Moses says concerning the Father. When he asked what he was commanded to answer should the Jews enquire of him, Who it was that had sent him, he heard these words: Say, I AM has sent me. Exodus 3:14 Now the expression I AM, is significative of Being ever, and Being without beginning, of Being really and absolutely. And this also the expression, Was in the beginning, declares, being indicative of Being ever; so that John uses this word to show that the Son Is from everlasting to everlasting in the bosom of the Father. For that you may not from the sameness of name, suppose that He is some one of those who are made sons by grace, first, the article is added, distinguishing Him from those by grace. But if this does not content you, if you still look earthwards, hear a name more absolute than this, Only-Begotten. If even after this you still look below, I will not refuse, says

he, (St. John,) to apply to God a term belonging to man, I mean the word 'bosom,' only suspect nothing degrading. Do you see the lovingkindness and carefulness of the Lord? God applies to Himself unworthy expressions, that even so you may see through them, and have some great and lofty thought of Him; and do you tarry below? For tell me, wherefore is that gross and carnal word bosom employed in this place? Is it that we may suppose God to be a body? Away, he by no means says so. Why then is it spoken? For if by it neither the genuineness of the Son is established, nor that God is not a body, the word, because it serves no purpose, is superfluously thrown in. Why then is it spoken? For I shall not desist from asking you this question. Is it not very plain, that it is for no other reason but that by it we might understand the genuineness of the Only-Begotten, and His Co-eternity with the Father?

3. He has declared Him, says John. What has he declared? That no man has seen God at any time? That God is one? But this all the other prophets testify, and Moses continually exclaims, The Lord your God is one Lord Deuteronomy 6:4; and Esaias, Before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. Isaiah 43:10 What more then have we learned from the Son which is in the bosom of the Father? What from the Only-Begotten? In the first place, these very words were uttered by His working; in the next place, we have received a teaching that is far clearer, and learned that God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth John 4:24; and again, that it is impossible to see God; that no man knows Him, save the Son Matthew 11:27; that He is the Father of the true and Only-Begotten; and all other things that are told us of Him. But the word has declared shows the plainer and clearer teaching which He gave not to the Jews only but to all the world, and established. To the prophets not even all the Jews gave heed, but to the Only-Begotten Son of God all the world yielded and obeyed. So the declaration in this place shows the greater clearness of His teaching, and therefore also He is called Word, and Angel of great Counsel.

Since then we have been vouchsafed a larger and more perfect teaching, God having no longer spoken by the prophets, but having in these last days spoken to us by His Son Hebrews 1:1, let us show forth a conversation far higher than theirs, and suitable to the honor bestowed on us. Strange would it be that He should have so far lowered Himself, as to choose to speak to us no longer by His servants, but by His own mouth, and yet we should show forth nothing more than those of old. They had Moses for their teacher, we, Moses' Lord. Let us then exhibit a heavenly wisdom worthy of this honor, and let us have nothing to do with earth. It was for this that He brought His teaching from heaven above, that He might remove our thoughts there, that we might be imitators of our Teacher according to our power. But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good, and not merely seeking our own. For even Christ, says Paul, pleased not Himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached You fell on Me. Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:9 Let no one therefore seek his own. In truth, a man (really) seeks his own good when he looks to that of his neighbor. What is their good is ours; we are one body, and parts and limbs one of another. Let us not then be as though we were rent asunder. Let no one say, such a person is no friend of mine, nor relation, nor neighbor, I have nought to do with him, how shall I approach, how address him? Though he be neither relation nor friend, yet he is a man, who shares the same nature with you, owns the same Lord, is your fellow-servant, and fellow-sojourner, for he is born in the same world. And if besides he partakes of the same faith, behold he has also become a member of you: for what friendship could work such union, as the relationship of faith? And our intimacy one with another must not be such nearness only as friends ought to show to friends, but such as is between limb and limb, because no man can possibly discover any intimacy greater than this sort of friendship and fellowship. As then you cannot say, Whence arises my intimacy and connection with this limb? (that would be ridiculous;) so neither can you say so in the case of your brother. We are all baptized into one body 1

Corinthians 12:13, says Paul. Wherefore into one body? That we be not rent asunder, but preserve the just proportions of that one body by our intercourse and friendship one with another.

Let us not then despise one another, lest we be neglectful of ourselves. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. Ephesians 5:29 And therefore God has given to us but one habitation, this earth, has distributed all things equally, has lighted one sun for us all, has spread above us one roof, the sky, made one table, the earth, bear food for us. And another table has He given far better than this, yet that too is one, (those who share our mysteries understand my words,) one manner of birth He has bestowed on all, the spiritual, we all have one country, that in the heavens, of the same cup drink we all. He has not bestowed on the rich man a gift more abundant and more honorable, and on the poor one more mean and small, but He has called all alike. He has given carnal things with equal regard to all, and spiritual in like manner. Whence then proceeds the great inequality of conditions in life? From the avarice and pride of the wealthy. But let not, brethren, let not this any longer be; and when matters of universal interest and more pressing necessity bring us together, let us not be divided by things earthly and insignificant: I mean, by wealth and poverty, by bodily relationship, by enmity and friendship; for all these things are a shadow, nay less substantial than a shadow, to those who possess the bond of charity from above. Let us then preserve this unbroken, and none of those evil spirits will be able to enter in, who cause division in so perfect union; to which may we all attain by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/john-118/>

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