

1 Corinthians 12:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 emphasizes the importance of understanding spiritual gifts, their purpose, and the need for unity within the church body.

Scripture: Psalm 15:4, Psalm 49:16, Ecclesiastes 12:13, Isaiah 40:7, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:3-11

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of understanding spiritual gifts and the manifestation of the Spirit, emphasizing the diversity of gifts given by the same Spirit for the benefit of all believers. He addresses the Corinthians' struggles with envy and division due to the varying gifts, highlighting the need for humility and gratitude in receiving God's gifts. Chrysostom explains the difference between soothsaying and prophecy, urging believers to discern the spirits and seek the true manifestation of the Spirit. He encourages contentment with the gifts received, reminding them that all gifts come from the same source and are given according to God's will for the profit of all.

Transcript

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.

This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?

This however let us defer to another time, but for the present let us state what things were occurring then. Well: what did happen then? Whoever was baptized he straightway spoke with tongues and not with tongues only, but many also prophesied, and some also performed many other wonderful works. For since on their coming over from idols, without any clear knowledge or training in the ancient Scriptures, they at once on their baptism received the Spirit, yet the Spirit they saw not, for It is invisible; therefore God's grace bestowed some sensible proof of that energy. And one straightway spoke in the Persian, another in the Roman, another in the Indian, another in some other such tongue: and this made manifest to them that were without that it is the Spirit in the very person speaking. Wherefore also he so calls it, saying, But to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given to profit withal; 1 Corinthians 12:7 calling the gifts a manifestation of the Spirit. For as the Apostles themselves had received this sign first, so also the faithful

went on receiving it, I mean, the gift of tongues; yet not this only but also many others: inasmuch as many used even to raise the dead and to cast out devils and to perform many other such wonders: and they had gifts too, some less, and some more. But more abundant than all was the gift of tongues among them: and this became to them a cause of division; not from its own nature but from the perverseness of them that had received it: in that on the one hand the possessors of the greater gifts were lifted up against them that had the lesser: and these again were grieved, and envied the owners of the greater. And Paul himself as he proceeds intimates this.

Since then herefrom they were receiving a fatal blow in the dissolution of their charity, he takes great care to correct it. For this happened indeed in Rome also, but not in the same way. And this is why in the Epistle to the Romans he moots it indeed, but obscurely and briefly, saying thus: For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office; so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teaches to his teaching. Romans 12:4-8 And that the Romans also were falling into wilfulness hereby, this he intimates in the beginning of that discourse, thus saying: For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith. Romans 12:3 With these, however, (for the disease of division and pride had not proceeded to any length,) he thus discoursed: but here with great anxiety; for the distemper had greatly spread.

And this was not the only thing to disturb them, but there were also in the place many soothsayers, inasmuch as the city was more than usually addicted to Grecian customs, and this with the rest was tending to offense and disturbance among them. This is the reason why he begins by first stating the difference between soothsaying and prophecy. For this cause also they received discerning of spirits, so as to discern and know which is he that speaks by a pure spirit, and which by an impure.

For because it was not possible to supply the evidence of the things uttered from within themselves at the moment; (for prophecy supplies the proof of its own truth not at the time when it is spoken, but at the time of the event;) and it was not easy to distinguish the true prophet from the pretender; (for the devil himself, accursed as he is, had entered into them that prophesied, [See 1 Kings 22:23.] bringing in false prophets, as if forsooth they also could foretell things to come) and further, men were easily deceived, because the things spoken could not for the present be brought to trial, ere yet the events had come to pass concerning which the prophecy was; (for it was the end that proved the false prophet and the true:)--in order that the hearers might not be deceived before the end, he gives them a sign which even before the event served to indicate the one and the other. And hence taking his order and beginning, he thus goes on also to the discourse concerning the gifts and corrects the contentiousness that arose from hence likewise. For the present however he begins the discourse concerning the soothsayers, thus saying,

2. Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant; calling the signs spiritual, because they are the works of the Spirit alone, human effort contributing nothing to the working such wonders. And intending to discourse concerning them, first, as I said, he lays down the difference between soothsaying and prophecy, thus saying,

You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. Now what he means is this: In the idol-temples, says he, if any were at any time possessed by an

unclean spirit and began to divine, even as one dragged away, so was he drawn by that spirit in chains: knowing nothing of the things which he utters. For this is peculiar to the soothsayer, to be beside himself, to be under compulsion, to be pushed, to be dragged, to be haled as a madman. But the prophet not so, but with sober mind and composed temper and knowing what he is saying, he utters all things. Therefore even before the event do thou from this distinguish the soothsayer and the prophet. And consider how he frees his discourse of all suspicion; calling themselves to witness who had made trial of the matter. As if he had said, that I lie not nor rashly traduce the religion of the Gentiles, feigning like an enemy, do ye yourselves bear me witness: knowing as you do, when you were Gentiles, how you were pulled and dragged away then.

But if any should say that these too are suspected as believers, come, even from them that are without will I make this manifest to you. Hear, for example, Plato saying thus: (Apol. Soc. c. 7.) Even as they who deliver oracles and the soothsayers say many and excellent things, but know nothing of what they utter. Hear again another, a poet, giving the same intimation. For whereas by certain mystical rites and witchcrafts a certain person had imprisoned a demon in a man, and the man divined, and in his divination was thrown down and torn, and was unable to endure the violence of the demon, but was on the point of perishing in that convulsion; he says to the persons who were practicing such mystical arts,

Loose me, I pray you:

The mighty God no longer mortal flesh

Can hold.

And again,

Unbind my wreaths, and bathe my feet in drops

From the pure stream; erase these mystic lines,

And let me go.

For these and such like things, (for one might mention many more,) point out to us both of these facts which follow; the compulsion which holds down the demons and makes them slaves; and the violence to which they submit who have once given themselves up to them, so as to swerve even from their natural reason. And the Pythoness too : (for I am compelled now to bring forward and expose another disgraceful custom of theirs, which it were well to pass by, because it is unseemly for us to mention such things; but that you may more clearly know their shame it is necessary to mention it, that hence at least ye may come to know the madness and exceeding mockery of those that make use of the soothsayers): this same Pythoness then is said, being a female, to sit at times upon the tripod of Apollo astride, and thus the evil spirit ascending from beneath and entering the lower part of her body, fills the woman with madness, and she with dishevelled hair begins to play the bacchanal and to foam at the mouth, and thus being in a frenzy to utter the words of her madness. I know that you are ashamed and blush when you hear these things: but they glory both in the disgrace and in the madness which I have described. These then and all such things. Paul was bringing forward when he said, You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led.

And because he was discoursing with those who knew well, he states not all things with exact care, not wishing to be troublesome to them, but having reminded them only and brought all into their recollection,

he soon quits the point, hastening to the subject before him.

But what is, unto those dumb idols? These soothsayers used to be led and dragged unto them.

But if they be themselves dumb, how did they give responses to others? And wherefore did the demon lead them to the images? As men taken in war, and in chains, and rendering at the same time his deceit plausible. Thus, to keep men from the notion that it was just a dumb stone, they were earnest to rivet the people to the idols that their own style and title might be inscribed upon them. But our rites are not such. He did not however state ours, I mean the prophesyings. For it was well known to them all, and prophecy was exercised among them, as was meet for their condition, with understanding and with entire freedom. Therefore, you see, they had power either to speak or to refrain from speaking. For they were not bound by necessity, but were honored with a privilege. For this cause Jonah fled; Jonah 1:3 for this cause Ezekiel delayed; Ezekiel 3:15 for this cause Jeremiah excused himself. Jeremiah 1:6 And God thrusts them not on by compulsion, but advising, exhorting, threatening; not darkening their mind; for to cause distraction and madness and great darkness, is the proper work of a demon: but it is God's work to illuminate and with consideration to teach things needful.

3. This then is the first difference between a soothsayer and a prophet; but a second and a different one is that which he next states, saying,

1 Corinthians 12:3

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and then another: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but in the Holy Ghost.

When you see, says he, any one not uttering His name, or anathematizing Him, he is a soothsayer. Again, when you see another speaking all things with His Name, understand that he is spiritual. What then, say you, must we say concerning the Catechumens? For if, no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost, what must we say of them who name indeed His Name, but are destitute of His Spirit? But his discourse at this time was not concerning these for there were not at that time Catechumens, but concerning believers and unbelievers. What then, does no demon call upon God's Name? Did not the demoniacs say, We know You who You are, the Holy One of God? Mark 1:24 Did they not say to Paul, these men are the servants of the Most High God? Acts 16:17 They did, but upon scourging, upon compulsion; never of their own will and without being scourged.

But here it is proper to enquire, both why the demon uttered these things and why Paul rebuked him. In imitation of his Teacher; for so Christ did also rebuke: since it was not his will to have testimony from them. And wherefore did the devil also practise this? Intending to confound the order of things, and to seize upon the dignity of the Apostles, and to persuade many to pay attention to them: which had it happened, they would easily have made themselves appear from hence worthy of credit, and have brought in their own designs. That these things then might not be, and the deceit might not have a beginning, he stops their mouths even when speaking the truth, so that in their falsehoods men should not at all give heed unto them, but stop their ears altogether against the things said by them.

4. Having therefore made manifest the soothsayers and the prophets both by the first sign and also by the second, he next discourses of the wonders; not passing without reason to this topic, but so as to remove the dissension which had thence arisen, and to persuade both those that had the less portion not to grieve and those who had the greater not to be elated. Wherefore also he thus began.

1 Corinthians 12:4

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

And first he attends on him that had the lesser gift, and was grieved on this account. For wherefore, says he, are you dejected? Because you have not received as much as another? Still, consider that it is a free gift and not a debt, and you will be able to soothe your pain. For this cause he spoke thus in the very beginning: but there are diversities of gifts. And he said not of signs, nor of wonders, but of gifts, by the name of free gifts prevailing on them not only not to grieve but even to be thankful. And withal consider this also, says he, that even if you are made inferior in the measure of what is given; in that it has been vouchsafed you to receive from the same source as the other who has received more, you have equal honor. For certainly you can not say that the Spirit bestowed the gift on him, but an angel on you: since the Spirit bestowed it both on you and him. Wherefore he added, but the same Spirit. So that even if there be a difference in the gift, yet is there no difference in the Giver. For from the same Fountain you are drawing, both thou and he.

1 Corinthians 12:5

And there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord.

Thus, enriching the consolation, he adds mention of the Son also, and of the Father. And again, he calls these gifts by another name, designing by this also an increase of consolation. Wherefore also he thus said: there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord. For he that hears of a gift, and has received a less share, perhaps might grieve; but when we speak of a ministration, the case is different. For the thing implies labor and sweat. Why do you grieve then, says he, if he has bidden another labor more, sparing you?

1 Corinthians 12:6

And there are diversities of workings, but the same God who works all things in all.

1 Corinthians 12:7

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal.

And what, says one, is a working? and what a gift? and what a ministration? They are mere differences of names, since the things are the same. For what a gift is, that is a ministration, that he calls an operation also. Thus fulfil your ministry; 2 Timothy 4:5. ministry and, I magnify my ministration: Romans 11:13. office and writing to Timothy, he says, Therefore I put you in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in you. 2 Timothy 1:6 And again, writing to the Galatians, he said, for he that wrought in Peter to the Apostleship, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles. Galatians 2:8 Do you see that he implies that there is no difference in the gifts of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Not confounding the Persons, God forbid! But declaring the equal honor of the Essence. For that which the Spirit bestows, this he says that God also works; this, that the Son likewise ordains and grants. Yet surely if the one were inferior to the other, or the other to it, he would not have thus set it down nor would this have been his way of consoling the person who was vexed.

5. Now after this, he comforts him also in another kind of way; by the consideration that the measure vouchsafed is profitable to him, even though it be not so large. For having said, that it is the same Spirit,

and the same Lord, and the same God, and having thereby recovered him, he brings in again another consolation, thus saying, but to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For lest one should say, what if there be the same Lord, the same Spirit, the same God? Yet I have received less: he says, that thus it was profitable.

But he calls miracles a manifestation of the Spirit, with evident reason. For to me who am a believer, he that has the Spirit is manifest from his having been baptized: but to the unbeliever this will in no way be manifest, except from the miracles: so that hence also again there is no small consolation. For though there be a difference of gifts, yet the evidence is one: since whether you have much or little, you are equally manifest. So that if you desire to show this, that you have the Spirit, you have a sufficient demonstration.

Wherefore, now that both the Giver is one and the thing given a pure favor, and the manifestation takes place thereby, and this is more profitable for you; grieve not as if despised. For not to dishonor you has God done it, nor to declare you inferior to another, but to spare you and with a view to your welfare. To receive more than one has ability to bear, this rather is unprofitable, and injurious, and a fit cause of dejection.

1 Corinthians 12:8

For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;

1 Corinthians 12:9

To another, faith in the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing in the one Spirit.

Do you see how he every where makes this addition, saying, through the same Spirit, and according to the same Spirit? For he knew that the comfort from thence was great.

1 Corinthians 12:10

To another working of miracles; to another prophecies; to another discernings of spirits; to another various kind of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.

Thus, since they boasted themselves in this, therefore he placed it last, and added,

1 Corinthians 12:11

But all these works one and the same Spirit.

The universal medicine in which his consolation consists is that out of the same root, out of the same treasures, out of the same streams, they all receive. And accordingly, from time to time dwelling on this expression, he levels the apparent inequality, and consoles them. And above indeed he points out both the Spirit, and the Son, and the Father, as supplying the gifts, but here he was content to make the Spirit, that even hence again you may understand their dignity to be the same.

But what is the word of wisdom? That which Paul had, which John had, the son of thunder.

And what is the word of knowledge? That which most of the faithful had, possessing indeed knowledge, but not thereupon able to teach nor easily to convey to another what they knew.

And to another, faith: not meaning by this faith the faith of doctrines, but the faith of miracles; concerning which Christ says, If you have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall say to this mountain, Remove, and it shall remove. Matthew 17:20 And the Apostles too concerning this besought Him, saying, Increase our faith: Luke 17:5 for this is the mother of the miracles. But to possess the power of working miracles and gifts of healing, is not the same thing: for he that had a gift of healing used only to do cures: but he that possessed powers for working miracles used to punish also. For a miracle is not the healing only, but the punishing also: even as Paul inflicted blindness: as Peter slew.

To another prophecies; and to another discernings of spirits. What is, discernings of spirits? the knowing who is spiritual, and who is not: who is a prophet, and who a deceiver: as he said to the Thessalonians, despise not prophesyings: 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 but proving all things, hold fast that which is good. For great was at that time the rush of the false prophets, the devil striving underhand to substitute falsehood for the truth. To another various kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. For one person knew what he spoke himself, but was unable to interpret to another; while another had acquired both these or the other of the two. Now this seemed to be a great gift because both the Apostles received it first, and the most among the Corinthians had obtained it. But the word of teaching not so. Wherefore that he places first, but this last: for this was on account of that, and so indeed were all the rest; both prophecies, and working of miracles, and various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. For none is equal to this. Wherefore also he said, Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and in teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 And to Timothy he wrote, saying, Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to teaching; neglect not the gift that is in you. 1 Timothy 4:13-14 Do you see how he calls it also a gift?

6. Next, the comfort which he before gave, when he said, the same Spirit, this also he here sets before us, saying, But all these works the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will. And he not only gives consolation but also stops the mouth of the gainsayer, saying here, dividing to each one severally even as he will. For it was necessary to bind up also, not to heal only, as he does also in the Epistle to the Romans, when he says, But who are you that repliest against God? Romans 9:20 So likewise here, dividing to each one severally as he will.

And that which was of the Father, this he signifies to be of the Spirit also. For as concerning the Father, he says, but it is the same God who works all things in all; so also concerning the Spirit, but all these things works one and the same Spirit. But, it will be said, He does it, actuated by God. Nay, he no where said this, but you feign it. For when he says, who actuates all things in all, he says this concerning men: you will hardly say that among those men he numbers also the Spirit, though you should be ever so manifold in your doting and madness. For because he had said through the Spirit, that you might not suppose this word, through, to denote inferiority or the being actuated, he adds, that the Spirit works, not is worked, and works as he will, not as he is bidden. For as concerning the Father, the Son says that He raises up the dead and quickens; in like manner also, concerning Himself, that He quickens whom He will: John 5:21 thus also of the Spirit, in another place, that He does all things with authority and that there is nothing that hinders Him; (for the expression, blows where it lists [John 3:8,] though it be spoken of the wind is apt to establish this) but here, that He works all things as He will. And from another place to learn that He is not one of the things actuated, but of those that actuate. For who knows, says he, the things of a man, but the spirit of the man? Even so the things of God none knows save the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:11 Now

that the spirit of a man, i.e., the soul, requires not to be actuated that it may know the things of itself, is, I suppose, evident to every one. Therefore neither does the Holy Ghost, that he may know the things of God. For his meaning is like this, the secret things of God are known to the Holy Spirit as to the soul of man the secret things of herself. But if this be not actuated for that end, much less would That which knows the depths of God and needs no actuation for that knowledge, require any actuating Power in order to the giving gifts to the Apostles.

But besides these things, that also, which I before spoke of, I will mention again now. What then is this? That if the Spirit were inferior and of another substance, there would have been no avail in his consolation, nor in our hearing the words, of the same Spirit. For he who has received from the king, I grant, may find it a very soothing circumstance, that he himself gave to him; but if it be from the slave, he is then rather vexed, when one reproaches him with it. So that even hence is it evident, that the Holy Spirit is not of the substance of the servant, but of the King.

7. Wherefore as he comforted them, when he said, that there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord; and diversities of operations, but the same God; so also when he said above, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and after this again when he said, But all these works the one and the same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Let us not, I pray you, be at a loss, says he; neither let us grieve, saying, 'Why have I received this and not received that?' neither let us demand an account of the Holy Spirit. For if you know that he vouchsafed it from providential care, consider that from the same care he has given also the measure of it, and be content and rejoice in what you have received: but murmur not at what you have not received; yea, rather confess God's favor that you have not received things beyond your power.

5. And if in spiritual things one ought not to be over-curious, much more in temporal things; but to be quiet and not nicely enquire why one is rich and another poor. For, first of all, not every single rich man is rich from God, but many even of unrighteousness, and rapine, and avarice. For he that forbade to be rich, how can he have granted that which he forbade to receive?

But that I may, far above what the case requires, stop the mouths of those who concerning these things gainsay us, come, let us carry our discourse higher up, to the time when riches used to be given by God; and answer me. Wherefore was Abraham rich whereas Jacob wanted even bread? Were not both the one and the other righteous? Does He not say concerning the three alike, I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob? Exodus 3:6 Wherefore then was the one a rich man, and the other a hired servant? Or rather, why was Esau rich, who was unrighteous and a murderer of his brother, while Jacob was in bondage for so long a time? Wherefore again did Isaac live in ease all his time, but Jacob in toils and miseries? For which cause also he said, Few and evil are my days. Genesis 47:9

Wherefore did David, who was both a prophet and a king, himself also live all his time in toils? Whereas Solomon his son spent forty years in security above all men, in the enjoyment of profound peace, glory, and honor, and going through every kind of deliciousness? What again could be the reason, that among the prophets also one was afflicted more, and another less? Because so it was expedient for each. Wherefore upon each our remark must be, Your judgments are a great deep. Psalm 36:6 For if those great and wonderful men were not alike exercised by God, but one by poverty, and another by riches; one by ease, and another by trouble; much more ought we now to bear these things in mind.

8. But besides this, it becomes one to consider also that many of the things which happen do not take place according to His mind, but arise from our wickedness. Say not then, Why is one man rich who is wicked, and another poor who is righteous? For first of all, one may give an account of these things also, and say that neither does the righteous receive any harm from his poverty, nay, even a greater addition of honor; and that the bad man in his riches possesses but a store of punishment on his future road, unless he be changed: and, even before punishment, often-times his riches become to him the cause of many evils, and lead him into ten thousand pitfalls. But God permits it, at the same to signify the free choice of the will, and also to teach all others not to be mad nor rave after money.

How is it then, when a man being wicked is rich, and suffers nothing dreadful? say you. Since if being good he has wealth, he has it justly: but if bad, what shall we say? That even therein he is to be pitied. For wealth added to wickedness aggravates the mischief. But is he a good man, and poor? Yet is he nothing injured. Is he then a bad man, and poor? This is he so justly and by desert, or rather even with advantage to himself. But such an one, say you, received his riches from his ancestors and lavishes it upon harlots and parasites, and suffers no evil. What do you say? Does he commit whoredom, and do you say, he suffers no evils? Is he drunken, and do you think that he is in luxury? Does he spend for no good, and do you judge that he is to be envied? Nay what can be worse than this wealth which destroys the very soul? But you, if the body were distorted and maimed, would say that his was a case for great lamentation; and do you see his whole soul mutilated, yet countest him even happy? But he does not perceive it, say you. Well then, for this very reason again is he to be pitied, as all frantic persons are. For he that knows he is sick will of course both seek the physician and submit to remedies; but he that is ignorant of it will have no chance at all of deliverance. Do you call such an one happy, tell me?

But it is no marvel: for the more part are ignorant of the true love of wisdom. Therefore do we suffer the extremest penalty, being chastised and not even withdrawing ourselves from the punishment. For this cause are angers, dejections, and continual tumults; because when God has shown us a life without sorrow, the life of virtue, we leave this and mark out another way, the way of riches and money, full of infinite evils. And we do the same, as if one, not knowing how to discern the beauty of men's bodies but attributing the whole to the clothes and the ornaments worn, when he saw a handsome woman and possessed of natural beauty, should pass quickly by her, but when he beheld one ugly, ill-shaped, and deformed, but clothed in beautiful garments, should take her for his wife. Now also in some such way are the multitude affected about virtue and vice. They admit the one that is deformed by nature on account of her external ornaments, but turn away from her that is fair and lovely, on account of her unadorned beauty, for which cause they ought especially to choose her.

9. Therefore am I ashamed that among the foolish heathen there are those that practise this philosophy, if not in deeds, yet so far at least as judgment goes; and who know the perishable nature of things present: whereas among us some do not even understand these things, but have their very judgment corrupted: and this while the Scripture is ever and anon sounding in our ears, and saying, In his sight the vile person is condemned, but he honors them that fear the Lord: Psalm 15:4 the fear of the Lord excels every thing ; fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of man: Ecclesiastes 12:13; be not thou envious of evil men; Psalm 49:16; all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; Isaiah 40:7 For these and such-like things though we hear every day, we are yet nailed to earth. And as ignorant children, who learn their letters continuously, if they be examined concerning their order when they are disarranged, naming one instead of another, make much laughter: so also ye, when here we recount them in order, follow us in a manner; but when we ask you out of doors and in no set order, what we ought to

place first and what next among things, and which after which; not knowing how to answer, you become ridiculous. Is it not a matter of great laughter, tell me, that they who expect immortality and the good things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, should strive about things which linger here and count them enviable? For if you have need yet to learn these things that riches are no great thing, that things present are a shadow and a dream, that like smoke they are dissolved and fly away: stand for the present without the sanctuary: abide in the vestibule: since you are not yet worthy of the entrance to the palace-courts on high. For if you know not to discern their nature which is unstable and continually passing away, when will you be able to despise them?

But if you say you know, cease curiously to inquire and busy yourself, what can be the reason why such an one is rich and such an one poor: for you do the same when you ask these questions, as if you went round and enquire, why one is fair and another black, or one hook-nosed and another flat-nosed. For as these things make no difference to us, whether it be thus or thus; so neither poverty nor riches, and much less than they. But the whole depends upon the way in which we use them. Whether you are poor, you may live cheerfully denying yourself; or rich, you are most miserable of all men if you fly from virtue. For these are what really concern us, the things of virtue. And if these things be not added, the rest are useless. For this cause also are those continual questions, because the most think that indifferent things are of importance to them, but of the important things they make no account: since that which is of importance to us is virtue and love of wisdom.

Because then ye stand I know not where, at some far distance from her, therefore is there confusion of thoughts, therefore the many waves, therefore the tempest. For when men have fallen from heavenly glory and the love of heaven, they desire present glory and become slaves and captives. And how is it that we desire this, say you? From the not greatly desiring that. And this very thing, whence happens it? From negligence. And whence the negligence? From contempt. And whence the contempt? From folly and cleaving to things present and unwillingness to investigate accurately the nature of things. And whence again does this latter arise? From the neither giving heed to the reading of the Scripture nor conversing with holy men, and from following the assemblies of the wicked.

That this therefore may not always be so, and lest wave after wave receiving us should carry us out into the deep of miseries and altogether drown and destroy us; while there is time, let us bear up and standing upon the rock, I mean of the divine doctrines and words, let us look down upon the surge of this present life. For thus shall we both ourselves escape the same, and having drawn up others who are making shipwreck, we shall obtain the blessings which are to come, through the grace and mercy, etc.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/1-corinthians-121-2/>

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