

~Other Speakers A-F: John Chrysostom:

1 Corinthians 1:4-5

I thank my God always concerning you, for the Grace of God which was given you in Jesus Christ; that in every thing you were enriched in him.

1. That which he exhorts others to do, saying, Philippians 4:6 Let your requests with thanksgiving be made known unto God, the same also he used to do himself: teaching us to begin always from these words, and before all things to give thanks unto God. For nothing is so acceptable to God as that men should be thankful, both for themselves and for others: wherefore also he prefaces almost every Epistle with this. But the occasion for his doing so is even more urgent here than in the other Epistles. For he that gives thanks, does so, both as being well off, and as in acknowledgment of a favor: now a favor is not a debt nor a requital nor a payment: which indeed every where is important to be said, but much more in the case of the Corinthians who were gaping after the dividers of the Church.

2. Unto my God. Out of great affection he seizes on that which is common, and makes it his own; as the prophets also from time to time use to say, Psalm 43:4; 62:1 O God, my God; and by way of encouragement he incites them to use the same language also themselves. For such expressions belong to one who is retiring from all secular things, and moving towards Him whom he calls on with so much earnestness: since he alone can truly say this, who from things of this life is ever mounting upwards unto God, and always preferring Him to all, and giving thanks continually, not [only] for the grace already given, but whatever blessing has been since at any time bestowed, for this also he offers unto Him the same praise. Wherefore he says not merely, I give thanks, but at all times, concerning you; instructing them to be thankful both always, and to no one else save God only.

3. For the grace of God. Do you see how from every quarter he draws topics for correcting them? For where grace is, works are not; where works, it is no more grace. If therefore it be grace, why are you high-minded? Whence is it that you are puffed up?

Which is given you. And by whom was it given? By me, or by another Apostle? Not at all, but by Jesus Christ. For the expression, In Jesus Christ, signifies this. Observe how in various places he uses the word ἀ¹/₄•Î¹/₂, in, instead of Î¹/₄° Î¹/₂—, through means of whom; therefore its sense is no less.

That in every thing you were enriched. Again, by whom? By Him, is the reply. And not merely you were enriched, but in every thing. Since then it is first of all, riches then, riches of God, next, in every thing, and lastly, through the Only-Begotten, reflect on the ineffable treasure!

1 Corinthians 1:5

In all utterance, and all knowledge. Word [or utterance,] not such as the heathen, but that of God. For there is knowledge without word, and there is knowledge with word. For so there are many who possess knowledge, but have not the power of speech; as those who are uneducated and unable to exhibit clearly what they have in their mind. You, says he, are not such as these, but competent both to understand and to speak.

1 Corinthians 1:6

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. Under the color of praises and thanksgiving he touches them sharply. For not by heathen philosophy, says he, neither by heathen discipline, but the grace of God, and by the riches, and the knowledge, and the word given by Him, were you enabled to learn the doctrines of the truth, and to be confirmed unto the testimony of the Lord; that is, unto the Gospel. For you had the benefit of many signs, many wonders, unspeakable grace, to make you receive the Gospel. If therefore you were established by signs and grace, why do you waver? Now these are the words of one both reproving, and at the same time prepossessing them in his favor.

1 Corinthians 1:7

4. So that you come behind in no gift. A great question here arises. They who had been enriched in all utterance, so as in no respect to come behind in any gift, are they carnal? For if they were such at the beginning, much more now. How then does he call them carnal? For, says he, 1 Corinthians 3:1 I was not able

1 Corinthians 1:4-5

you been called, and do you addict yourselves unto men? What can be worse than this wretchedness? And how have you been called? By the Father. For since through Him, and in Him, were phrases which he was constantly employing in regard of the Son, lest men might suppose that he so mentions Him as being less, he ascribes the same to the Father. For not by this one and that one, says he, but by the Father have you been called; by Him also have you been enriched. Again, you have been called; ye did not yourselves approach. But what means, into the fellowship of His Son? Hear him declaring this very thing more clearly elsewhere. 2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him. Then, because it was a great thing which He had said, he adds an argument fraught with unanswerable conviction; for, says he, God is faithful, i.e. true. Now if true, what things He has promised He will also perform. And He has promised that He will make us partakers of His only-begotten Son; for to this end also did He call us. For Romans 11:29 His gifts, and the calling of God, are without repentance.

These things, by a kind of divine art he inserts thus early, lest after the vehemence of the reproofs they might fall into despair. For assuredly God's part will ensue, if we be not quite impatient of His rein. (ἀ¼€ĭ†ĭ½ĭĭ-ĭf%œ¼ĭμĭ½) As the Jews, being called, would not receive the blessings; but this was no longer of Him that called, but of their lack of sense. For He indeed was willing to give, but they, by refusing to receive, cast themselves away. For, had He called to a painful and toilsome undertaking, not even in that case were they pardonable in making excuse; however, they would have been able to say that so it was: but if the call be unto cleansing, Comp. 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, and grace, and a free gift, and the good things in store, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard; and it be God that calls, and calls by Himself; what pardon can they deserve, who come not running to Him? Let no one therefore accuse God; for unbelief comes not of Him that calls, but of those who start away (ἀ¼€ĭ€ĭĭ€ĭ-ĭ½ĭ, ĭ½ĭ), from Him.

9. But some man will say, He ought to bring men in, even against their will. Away with this. He does not use violence, nor compel; for who that bids to honors, and crowns, and banquets, and festivals, drags people, unwilling and bound? No one. For this is the part of one inflicting an insult. Unto hell He sends men against their will, but unto the kingdom He calls willing minds. To the fire He brings men bound and bemoaning themselves: to the endless state of blessings not so. Else it is a reproach to the very blessings themselves, if their nature be not such as that men should run to them of their own accord and with many thanks.

Whence it is then, say you, that all men do not choose them? From their own infirmity. And wherefore does He not cut off their infirmity? And how tell me “in what way” ought He to cut it off? Hath He not made a world that teaches His loving-kindness and His power? For Psalm 19:1 the heavens, says one, declare the glory of God. Hath He not also sent prophets? Hath He not both called and honored us? Hath He not done wonders? Hath He not given a law both written and natural? Hath He not sent His Son? Hath he not commissioned Apostles? Hath He not wrought sins? Hath He not threatened hell? Hath He not promised the kingdom? Does He not every day make His sun to rise? Are not the things which He has enjoined so simple and easy, that many transcend His commandments in the greatness of their self-denial? What was there to do unto the vineyard and I have not done it? Isaiah 5:4

10. And why, say you, did He not make knowledge and virtue natural to us? Who speaks thus? The Greek or the Christian? Both of them, indeed, but not about the same things: for the one raises his objection with a view to knowledge, the other with a view to conduct. First, then, we will reply to him who is on our side; for I do not so much regard those without, as our own members.

What then says the Christian? It were meet to have implanted in us the knowledge itself of virtue. He has implanted it; for if he had not done so, whence should we have known what things are to be done, what left undone? Whence are the laws and the tribunals? But God should have imparted not [merely] knowledge, but also the very doing of it [virtue]. For what then would you have to be rewarded, if the whole were of God? For tell me, does God punish in the same manner you and the Greek upon committing sin? Surely not. For up to a certain point you have confidence, viz. that which arises from the true knowledge. What then, if any one should now say that on the score of knowledge thou and the Greek will be accounted of like desert? Would it not disgust you? I think so, indeed. For you would say that the Greek, having of his own wherewith to attain knowledge, was not willing. If then the latter also should say that God ought to have implanted knowledge in us naturally, will you not laugh him to scorn, and say to him, But why did you not seek for it? Why were you not in earnest even as I? And you will stand firm with much confidence, and say that it was extreme folly to blame God for not implanting knowledge by nature. And this you will say, because you have obtained what appertains to knowledge. So also had you performed what appertains to practice, you would not have raised these questions: but you are tired of virtuous practice, therefore you shelter yourself with these inconsiderate words. But how could it be at all right to cause that by necessity one should become good? Then shall we next have the brute beasts contending with us about virtue, seeing that some of them are more temperate than ourselves.

But you say, I had rather have been good by necessity, and so forfeited all rewards, than evil by deliberate choice, to be punished and suffer vengeance. But it is impossible that one should ever be good by necessity. If therefore you know not what ought to be done, show it, and then we will tell you what is right to say. But if you know that uncleanness is wicked, wherefore do you not fly from the evil thing?

I cannot, you say. But others who have done greater things than this will plead against you, and will more than prevail to stop your mouth. For thou, perhaps, though living with a wife, are not chaste; but another even without a wife keeps his chastity inviolate. Now what excuse have you for not keeping the rule, while another even leaps beyond the lines that have been drawn to mark it?

But you say, I am not of this sort in my bodily frame, or my turn of mind. That is for want, not of power, but of will. For thus I prove that all have a certain aptness towards virtue: That which a man cannot do, neither will he be able to do though necessity be laid upon him; but, if, necessity being laid upon him, he is able, he that leaves it undone, leaves it undone out of choice. The kind of thing I mean is this: to fly up and be borne towards heaven, having a heavy body, is even simply impossible. What then, if a king should command one to do this, and threaten death, saying, Those men who do not fly, I decree that they lose their heads, or be burnt, or some other such punishment: would any one obey him? Surely not. For nature is not capable of it. But if in the case of chastity this same thing were done, and he were to lay down laws that the unclean should be punished, be burnt, be scourged, should suffer the extremity of torture, would not many obey the law? No you will say: for there is appointed, even now, a law forbidding to commit adultery and all do not obey it. Not because the fear looses its power, but because the greater part expect to be unobserved. So that if when they were on the point of committing an unclean action the legislator and the judge came before them, the fear would be strong enough to cast out the lust. Nay, were I to apply another kind of force inferior to this; were I to take the man and remove him from the beloved person, and shut him up close in chains, he will be able to bear it, without suffering any great harm. Let us not say then that such an one is by nature evil: for if a man were by nature good, he could never at any time become evil; and if he were by nature evil, he could never be good. But now we see that changes take place rapidly, and that men quickly shift from this side to the other, and from that fall back again into this. And these things we may see not in the Scriptures only, for instance, that publicans have become apostles; and disciples, traitors; and harlots, chaste; and robbers, men of good repute; and magicians have worshipped; and ungodly men passed over unto godliness, both in the New Testament and in the Old; but even every day a man may see many such things occurring. Now if things were natural, they could not change. For so we, being by nature susceptible, could never by any exertions become void of feeling. For that which is whatever it is by nature, can never fall away from such its natural condition. No one, for example, ever changed from sleeping to not sleeping: no one from a state of corruption unto incorruption: no one from hunger to the perpetual absence of that sensation. Wherefore neither are these things matters of accusation, nor do we reproach ourselves for them; nor ever did any one, meaning to blame another, say to him, O thou, corruptible and subject to passion: but either adultery or fornication, or something of that kind, we always lay to the charge of those who are responsible; and we bring them before judges, who blame and punish, and in the contrary cases award honors.

11. Since then both from our conduct towards one another, and from others' conduct to us when judged, and from the things about which we have written laws, and from the things wherein we condemn ourselves, though there be no one to accuse us; and from the instances of our becoming worse through indolence, and better through fear; and from the cases wherein we see others doing well and arriving at the height of self-command, (ἰσχυροὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἐπὶ ἑαυτοῖς,) it is quite clear that we also have it in our power to do well: why do we, the most part, deceive ourselves in vain with heartless pretexts and excuses, bringing not only no pardon, but even punishment intolerable? When we ought to keep before our eyes that fearful day, and to give heed to virtue; and after a little labor, obtain the incorruptible crowns? For these words will be no defense to us; rather our fellow-servants, and those who have practised the contrary virtues, will condemn all who continue in sin: the cruel man will be condemned by the merciful; the evil, by the good; the fierce, by the gentle; the grudging, by the courteous; the vain-glorious, by the self-denying; the indolent, by the serious; the intemperate, by the sober-minded. Thus will God pass judgment upon us, and will set in their place both companies; on one bestowing praise, on the other punishment. But God forbid that any of those present should be among the punished and dishonored, but rather among those who are crowned and the winners of the kingdom. Which may God grant us all to obtain through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ; with Whom unto the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, power, honor, now and ever, and unto everlasting ages. Amen.