

~Other Speakers A-F: John Chrysostom:

It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even named among the Gentiles, that one of you has his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he that had done this deed might be taken away from among you.

When he was discoursing about their divisions, he did not indeed at once address them vehemently, but more gently at first; and afterwards, he ended in accusation, saying thus, 1 Corinthians 1:11 For it has been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them which are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. But in this place, not so; but he lays about him immediately and makes the reproach of the accusation as general as possible. For he said not, Why did such an one commit fornication? but, It is reported that there is fornication among you; that they might as persons altogether aloof from his charge take it easily; but might be filled with such anxiety as was natural when the whole body was wounded, and the Church had incurred reproach. For no one, says he, will state it thus, 'such an one has committed fornication,' but, 'in the Church of Corinthians that sin has been committed.'

And he said not, Fornication is perpetrated, but, Is reported as such as is not even named among the Gentiles. For so continually he makes the Gentiles a topic of reproach to the believers. Thus writing to the Thessalonians, he said, 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5, Let every one possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification, not in the passion of lust, even as the rest of the Gentiles. And to the Colossians and Ephesians, Ephesians 4:17. cf. Colossians 3:6-7 That you should no longer walk, as the other Gentiles walk. Now if their committing the same sins was unpardonable, when they even outdid the Gentiles, what place can we find for them? Tell me: inasmuch as among the Gentiles, so he speaks, not only they dare no such thing, but they do not even give it a name. Do you see to what point he aggravated his charge? For when they are convicted of inventing such modes of uncleanness as the unbelievers, so far from venturing on them, do not even know of, the sin must be exceeding great, beyond all words. And the clause, among you, is spoken also emphatically; that is, Among you, the faithful, who have been favored with so high mysteries, the partakers of secrets, the guests invited to heaven. Do you mark with what indignant feeling his works overflow? With what anger against all? For had it not been for the great wrath of which he was full, had he not been setting himself against them all, he would have spoken thus: Having heard that such and such a person has committed fornication, I charge you to punish him. But as it is he does not so; he rather challenges all at once. And indeed, if they had written first, this is what he probably would have said. Since however so far from writing, they had even thrown the fault into the shade, on this account he orders his discourse more vehemently.

2. That one of you should have his father's wife. Wherefore said he not, That he should abuse his father's wife? The extreme foulness of the deed caused him to shrink. He hurries by it accordingly, with a sort of scrupulousness as though it had been explicitly mentioned before. And hereby again he aggravates the charge, implying that such things are ventured on among them as even to speak plainly of was intolerable for Paul. Wherefore also, as he goes on, he uses the same mode of speech, saying, Him who has so done this thing: and is again ashamed and blushes to speak out; which also we are wont to do in regard of matters extremely disgraceful. And he said not, his step-mother, but, his father's wife; so as to strike much more severely. For when the mere terms are sufficient to convey the charge, he proceeds with them simply, adding nothing.

And tell me not, says he, that the fornicator is but one: the charge has become common to all. Wherefore at once he added, and you are puffed up: he said not, with the sin; for this would imply want of all reason: but with the doctrine you have heard from that person. This however he set not down himself, but left it undetermined, that he might inflict a heavier blow.

And mark the good sense of Paul. Having first overthrown the wisdom from without, and signified that it is nothing by itself although no sin were associated with it; then and not till then he discourses about the sin also. For if by way of comparison with the fornicator who perhaps was some wise one, he had maintained the greatness of his own spiritual gift; he had done no great thing: but even when unattended with sin to take down the heathen wisdom and demonstrate it to be nothing, this was indicating its extreme worthlessness indeed. Wherefore first, as I said, having made the comparison, he afterwards mentions the man's sin also.

And with him indeed he condescends not to debate, and thereby signifies the exceeding greatness of his dishonor. But to the others he says, You ought to weep and wail, and cover your faces, but now you do the contrary. And this is the force of the next clause, And you are puffed up, and did not rather mourn.

And why are we to weep? some might say. Because the reproach has made its way even unto the whole body of your Church. And what good are we to get by our weeping? That such an one should be taken away from you. Not even here does he mention his name; rather, I should say, not any where; which in all monstrous things is our usual way.

And he said not, You have not rather cast him out, but, as in the case of any disease or pestilence, there is need of mourning, says he, and of intense supplication, 'that he may be taken away.' And you should have used prayer for this, and left nothing undone that he should be cut off.

Nor yet does he accuse them for not having given him information, but for not having mourned so that the man should be taken away; implying that even without their Teacher this ought to have been done, because of the notoriety of the offense.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5

3. For I verily being absent in body, but present in spirit.

Mark his energy. He suffers them not even to wait for his presence, nor to receive him first and then pass the sentence of binding: but as if on the point of expelling some contagion before that it have spread itself into the rest of the body, he hastens to restrain it. And therefore he subjoins the clause, I have judged already, as though I were present. These things moreover he said, not only to urge them unto the declaration of their sentence and to give them no opportunity of contriving something else, but also to frighten them, as one who knew what was to be done and determined there. For this is the meaning of being present in spirit: as Elisha was present with Gehazi, and said, Went not my heart with you? 2 Kings 5:26 Wonderful! How great is the power of the gift, in that it makes all to be together and as one; and qualifies them to know the things which are far off. I have judged already as though I were present.

He permits them not to have any other device. Now I have uttered my decision as if I were present: let there be no delays and puttings off: for nothing else must be done.

Then lest he should be thought too authoritative and his speech sound rather self-willed, mark how he makes them also partners in the sentence. For having said, I have judged, he adds, concerning him that has so wrought this thing, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan.

Now what means, In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ? According to God; not possessed with any human prejudice.

Some, however, read thus, Him that has so wrought this thing in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and putting a stop there or a break, then subjoin what follows, saying, When you are gathered together and my spirit to deliver such an one unto Satan: and they assert that the sense of this reading is as follows, Him that has done this thing in the Name of Christ, says St. Paul, deliver ye unto Satan; that is, him that has done insult unto the Name of Christ, him that, after he had become a believer and was called after that appellation, has dared to do such things, deliver ye unto Satan. But to me the former exposition (ἀποδοῦναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἰς τὸν Σατανᾶ, . It seems to mean enunciation.) appears the truer.

What then is this? When you are gathered together in the Name of the Lord. That is; His Name, in whose behalf you have met, collecting you together.

And my spirit. Again he sets himself at their head in order that when they should pass sentence, they might no otherwise cut off the offender than as if he were present; and that no one might dare to judge him pardonable, knowing that Paul would be aware of the proceedings.

4. Then making it yet more awful, he says, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is, either that Christ is able to give you such grace as that you should have power to deliver him to the devil; or that He is Himself together with you passing that sentence against him.

And he said not, Give up such an one to Satan, but deliver; opening unto him the doors of repentance, and delivering up such an one as it were to a schoolmaster. And again it is, such an one: he no where can endure to make mention of his name.

For the destruction of the flesh. As was done in the case of the blessed Job, but not upon the same ground. For in that case it was for brighter crowns, but here for loosing of sins; that he might scourge him with a grievous sore or some other disease. True it is that elsewhere he says, Of the Lord are we judged, 1 Corinthians 11:32 when we suffer these things. But here, desirous of making them feel it more severely, he delivers up unto Satan. And so this too which God had determined ensued, that the man's flesh was chastised. For because inordinate eating and carnal luxuriousness are the parents of desires, it is the flesh which he chastises.

That the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; that is the soul. Not as though this were saved alone, but because it was a settled point that if that were saved, without all controversy the body too would partake in its salvation. For as it became mortal because of the soul's sinning: so if this do righteousness, that also on the other hand shall enjoy great glory.

But some maintain, that the Spirit is the Gracious Gift which is extinguished when we sin. In order then that this may not happen, says he, let him be punished; that thereby becoming better, he may draw down to himself God's grace, and be found having it safe in that day. So that all comes as from one exercising a nurse's or a physician's office, not merely scourging nor punishing rashly and at random. For the gain is greater than the punishment: one being but for a season, the other everlasting.

And he said not simply, That the spirit may be saved, but in that day. Well and seasonably does he remind them of that day in order that both they might more readily apply themselves to the cure, and that the person censured might the rather receive his words, not as it were of anger, but as the forethought of an anxious father. For this cause also he said, unto the destruction of the flesh: proceeding to lay down regulations for the devil and not suffering him to go a step too far. As in the instance of Job, God said, Job 2:6 But touch not his life.

5. Then, having ended his sentence, and spoken it in brief without dwelling on it, he brings in again a rebuke, directing himself against them;

1 Corinthians 5:6

Your glorying is not good: signifying that it was they up to the present time who had hindered him from repenting, by taking pride in him. Next he shows that he is taking this step in order to spare not that person only, but also those to whom he writes. To which effect he adds,

Do you not know, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? For, says he, though the offense be his, yet if neglected it has power to waste the rest of the body of the Church also. For when the first transgressor escapes punishment, speedily will others also commit the same faults.

In these words he indicates moreover that their struggle and their danger is for the whole Church, not for any one person. For which purpose he needs also the similitude of the leaven. For as that, says he, though it be but little, transforms unto its own nature the whole lump; so also this man, if he be let go unpunished and this sin turn out unavenged, will corrupt likewise all the rest.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Purge out the old leaven, that is, this evil one. Not that he speaks concerning this one only; rather he glances at others with him. For, the old leaven is not fornication only, but also sin of every kind. And he said not, purge, but purge out; cleanse with accuracy so that there be not so much as a remnant nor a shadow of that sort. In saying then, purge out, he signifies that there was still iniquity among them. But in saying, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened, he affirms and declares that not over very many was the wickedness prevailing. But though he says, as you are unleavened, he means it not as a fact that all were clean, but as to what sort of people you ought to be.

6. For our Passover also has been sacrificed for us, even Christ; wherefore let us keep the feast: not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. So also Christ called His doctrine Leaven. And further he himself dwells upon the metaphor, reminding them of an ancient history, and of the Passover and unleavened bread, and of their blessings both then and now, and their punishments and their plagues.

It is festival, therefore, the whole time in which we live. For though he said, Let us keep the feast, not with a view to the presence of the Passover or of Pentecost did he say it; but as pointing out that the whole of time is a

anxiety. And what favors he intended him after the repentance, he reveals not, imitating his own Master. For as God says, Jonah 3:4. Septuagint: rec. text, forty days. Yet three days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown, and added not, but if she repent she shall be saved: so also he did not say here, But if he repent worthily, we will 'confirm our love towards him.' 2 Corinthians 2:8. But he waits for him to do the work that so he may then receive the favor. For if he had said this at the beginning he might have set him free from the fear. Wherefore he not only does not so, but by the instance of leaven allows him not even a hope of return, but reserves him unto that day: Purge out (so he says) the old leaven; and, let us not keep the feast with old leaven. But as soon as he had repented, he brought him in again with all earnestness.

10. But why does he call it old? Either because our former life was of this sort, or because that which is old is ready to vanish away, Hebrews 8:13 and is unsavory and foul; which is the nature of sin. For He neither simply finds fault with the old, nor simply praises the new, but with reference to the subject matter. And thus elsewhere He says, Sirach 9:15 New wine is as a new friend: but if it become old, then with pleasure shall you drink it: in the case of friendship bestowing his praise rather upon the old than the new. And again, The Ancient of days sat, Daniel 7:9 here again, taking the term ancient as among those laudatory expressions which confer highest glory. Elsewhere the Scripture takes the term old in the sense of blame; for seeing that the things are of various aspect as being composed of many parts, it uses the same words both in a good and an evil import, not according to the same shade of meaning. Of which you may see an instance in the blame cast elsewhere on the old: Psalm 17:46. ap. Septuagint They waxed old, and they halted from their paths. And again, Psalm 6:7. ap. Septuagint I have become old in the midst of all mine enemies. And again, Daniel 13:52. Hist. Susan O you that are become old in evil days. So also the Leaven is often taken for the kingdom of Heaven, although here found fault with. But in that place it is used with one aspect, and in this with another.

11. But I have a strong conviction that the saying about the leaven refers also to the priests who suffer a vast deal of the old leaven to be within, not purging out from their borders, that is, out of the Church, the covetous, the extortioners, and whatsoever would exclude from the kingdom of Heaven. For surely covetousness is an old leaven; and whenever it lights and into whatsoever house it enters, makes it unclean: and though you may gain but little by your injustice, it leavens the whole of your substance. Wherefore not seldom the dishonest gain being little, has cast out the stock honestly laid up however abundant. For nothing is more rotten than covetousness. You may fasten up that man's closet with key, and door, and bolt: you do all in vain, while you shut up within covetousness, the worst of robbers, and able to carry off all.

But what, say you, if there are many covetous who do not experience this? In the first place, they will experience it, though their experience come not immediately. And should they now escape, then fear it the more: for they are reserved for greater punishment. Add to this, that in the event of themselves escaping, yet those who inherit their wealth will have the same to endure. But how can this be just, you will say? It is quite just. For he that has succeeded to an inheritance; full of injustice, though he have committed no rapine himself, detains nevertheless the property of others; and is perfectly aware of this; and it is fair he should suffer for it. For if this or that person had robbed and you received a thing, and then the owner came and demanded it back; would it avail you in defense to say that you had not seized it? By no means. For what would be your plea when accused! Tell me. That it was another who seized it? Well: but you are keeping possession. That it was he who robbed? But you are enjoying it. Why these rules even the laws of the heathen recognise, which acquitting those who have seized and stolen, bid you demand satisfaction from those persons in whose possession you happen to find your things all laid up.

If then you know who are the injured, restore and do what Zacchaeus did, with much increase. But if you know not, I offer you another way yet; I do not preclude you from the remedy. Distribute all these things to the poor: and thus you will mitigate the evil.

But if some have transmitted these things even to children and descendants, still in retribution they have suffered other disasters.

12. And why speak I of things in this present life? In that day at any rate will none of these things be said, when both appear naked, both the spoiled and the spoilers. Or rather not alike naked. Of riches indeed both will be equally stripped; but the one will be full of the charges to which they gave occasion. What then shall we do on that day, when before the dread tribunal he that has been evil entreated and lost his all is brought forward into the midst, and you have no one to speak a word for you? What will you say to the Judge? Now indeed you may be able even to corrupt the judgment, being but of men; but in that court and at that time, it will be no longer so: no, nor yet now will you be able. For even at this moment that tribunal is present: since God both sees our doings and is near unto the injured, though not invoked: it being certain that whoever suffers wrong, however in himself unworthy to obtain any redress, yet nevertheless seeing that what is done pleases not God, he has

most assuredly one to avenge him.

How then, you will say, is such an one well off, who is wicked? Nay, it will not be so unto the end. Hear what says the Prophet; Psalm 37:1-2 Fret not yourself because of the evil doers, because as grass they shall quickly wither away. For where, tell me, where is he who wrought rapine, after his departure hence? Where are his bright hopes! Where his august name? Are they not all passed and gone? Is it not a dream and a shadow, all that was his? And this you must expect in the case of every such person, both in his own person while living, and in that of him who shall come after him. But not such is the state of the saints, nor will it be possible for you to say the same things in their case also, that it is shadow and a dream and a tale, what belongs to them.

13. And if you please, he who spoke these things, the tent-maker, the Cilician, the man whose very parentage is unknown, let him be the example we produce. You will say, How is it possible to become such as he was? Do you then thoroughly desire it? Are you thoroughly anxious to become such? Yes, you will say. Well then, go the same way as he went and they that were with him. Now what way went he? One says, 2 Corinthians 11:27 In hunger, and thirst, and nakedness. Another, Acts 3:6 Silver and gold I have none. Thus they had nothing and yet possessed all things. 2 Corinthians 6:10 What can be nobler than this saying? What more blessed or more abundant in riches? Others indeed pride themselves on the contrary things, saying, I have this or that number of talents of gold, and acres of land without end, and houses, and slaves; but this man on his being naked of all things; and he shrinks not from poverty, (which is the feeling of the unwise,) nor hides his face, but he even wears it as an ornament.

Where now be the rich men, they who count up their interest simple and compound, they who take from all men and are never satisfied? Have you heard the voice of Peter, that voice which sets forth poverty as the mother of wealth? That voice which has nothing, yet is wealthier than those who wear diadems? For this is that voice, which having nothing, raised the dead, and set upright the lame, and drove away devils, and bestowed such gracious gifts, as those who are clad in the purple robe and lead the mighty and terrible legions never were able to bestow. This is the voice of those who are now removed into heaven, of those who have attained unto that height.

14. Thus it is possible that he who has nothing may possess all men's goods. Thus may he who possesses nothing acquire the goods of all: whereas, were we to get all men's goods, we are bereft of all. Perhaps this saying seems to be a paradox; but it is not. But, you will say, how does he who has nothing possess all men's goods? Does he not have much more who has what belongs to all? By no means: but the contrary. For he who has nothing commands all, even as they did. And throughout the world all houses were open to them, and they who offered them took their coming as a favor, and they came to them as to friends and kindred. For so they came to the woman who was a seller of purple, Acts 16:14 and she like a servant set before them what she had. And to the keeper of the prison; and he opened to them all his house. And to innumerable others. Thus they had all things and had nothing: for Acts 4:32 they said that none of the things which they possessed was their own; therefore all things were theirs. For he that considers all things to be common, will not only use his own, but also the things of others as if they belonged to him. But he that parts things off and sets himself as master over his own only, will not be master even of these. And this is plain from an example. He who possesses nothing at all, neither house, nor table, nor garment to spare, but for God's sake is bereft of all, uses the things which are in common as his own; and he shall receive from all whatsoever he may desire, and thus he that has nothing possesses the things of all. But he that has some things, will not be master even of these. For first, no one will give to him that has possessions; and, secondly, his property shall belong to robbers and thieves and informers and changing events and be any body's rather than his. Paul, for instance, went up and down throughout all the world, carrying nothing with him, though he went neither unto friends nor kindred. Nay, at first he was a common enemy to all: but nevertheless he had all men's goods after he had made good his entrance. But Ananias and Sapphira, hastening to gain a little more than their own, lost all together with life itself. Withdraw then from your own, that you may use others' goods as your own.

15. But I must stop: I know not how I have been carried into such a transport in speaking such words as these unto men who think it a great thing to impart but ever so little of their own. Wherefore let these my words have been spoken to the perfect. But to the more imperfect, this is what we may say, Give of what you have unto the needy. Increase your substance. For, says He, Proverbs 19:17 He that gives unto the poor, lends unto God. But if you are in a hurry and wait not for the time of recompense, think of those who lend money to men: for not even these desire to get their interest immediately; but they are anxious that the principal should remain a good long while in the hands of the borrower, provided only the repayment be secure and they have no mistrust of the borrower. Let this be done then in the present case also. Leave them with God that He may pay you your wages manifold. Seek not to have the whole here; for if you recover it all here, how will you receive it back there? And it is on this account that God stores them up there, inasmuch as this present life is full of decay. But

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

He gives even here also; for, Seek, says He, the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33 Well then, let us look towards the kingdom, and not be in a hurry for the repayment of the whole, lest we diminish our recompense. But let us wait for the fit season. For the interest in these cases is not of that kind, but is such as is meet to be given to God. This then having collected together in great abundance, so let us depart hence, that we may obtain both the present and the future blessings; through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom unto the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power, honor, now, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.