

~Other Speakers A-F: John Chrysostom:

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

It is necessary first to say what the meaning of this passage is: for so shall we readily comprehend the Apostle's discourse. For he that sees a charge brought against any one, except he first perceive the nature of the offense will not understand what is said. What then is it of which he was then accusing the Corinthians? A heavy charge and the cause of many evils. Well, what is it? Many among them, having learned that Matthew 15:11 not the things which enter in defile the man, but the things which proceed out, and that idols of wood and stone, and demons, have no power to hurt or help, had made an immoderate use of their perfect knowledge of this to the harm both of others and of themselves. They had both gone in where idols were and had partaken of the tables there, and were producing thereby great and ruinous evil. For, on the one hand, those who still retained the fear of idols and knew not how to condemn them, took part in those meals, because they saw the more perfect sort doing this; and hence they got the greatest injury: since they did not touch what was set before them with the same mind as the others, but as things offered in sacrifice to idols; and the thing was becoming a way to idolatry. On the other hand, these very persons who pretended to be more perfect were injured in no common way, partaking in the tables of demons.

This then was the subject of complaint. Now this blessed man being about to correct it, did not immediately begin to speak vehemently; for that which was done came more of folly than of wickedness: wherefore in the first instance there was need rather of exhortation than of severe rebuke and wrath. Now herein observe his good sense, how he immediately begins to admonish.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Leaving alone the weak, which he always does, he discourses with the strong first. And this is what he did also in the Epistle to the Romans, saying, Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? for this is the sort of person that is able to receive rebuke also with readiness. Exactly the same then he does here also.

And first he makes void their conceit by declaring that this very thing which they considered as peculiar to themselves, the having perfect knowledge, was common to all. Thus, we know, says he, that we all have knowledge. For if allowing them to have high thoughts, he had first pointed out how hurtful the thing was to others, he would not have done them so much good as harm. For the ambitious soul when it plumes itself upon any thing, even though the same do harm to others, yet strongly adheres to it because of the tyranny of vain-glory. Wherefore Paul first examines the matter itself by itself: just as he had done before in the case of the wisdom from without, demolishing it with a high hand. But in that case he did it as we might have expected: for the whole thing was altogether blameworthy and his task was very easy. Wherefore he signifies it to be not only useless, but even contrary to the Gospel. But in the present case it was not possible to do this. For what was done was of knowledge, and perfect knowledge. Nor was it safe to overthrow it, and yet in no other way was it possible to cast out the conceit which had resulted from it. What then does he? First, by signifying that it was common, he curbs that swelling pride of theirs. For they who possess something great and excellent are more elated, when they alone have it; but if it be made out that they possess it in common with others, they no longer have so much of this feeling. First then he makes it common property, because they considered it to belong to themselves alone.

Next, having made it common, he does not make himself singly a sharer in it with them; for in this way too he would have rather set them up; for as to be the only possessor elates, so to have one partner or two perhaps among leading persons has this effect just as much. For this reason he does not mention himself but all: he said not, I too have knowledge, but, we know that we all have knowledge.

2. This then is one way, and the first, by which he cast down their pride; the next has greater force. What then is this? In that he shows that not even this thing itself was in all points complete, but imperfect, and extremely so. And not only imperfect, but also injurious, unless there were another thing joined together with it. For having said that we have knowledge, he added, Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies: so that when it is without love, it lifts men up to absolute arrogance.

And yet not even love, you will say, without knowledge has any advantage. Well: this he did not say; but omitting it as a thing allowed by all, he signifies that knowledge stands in extreme need of love. For he who loves, inasmuch as he fulfils the commandment which is most absolute of all, even though he have some defects, will quickly be blessed with knowledge because of his love; as Cornelius and many others. But he that

has knowledge but has not love, not only shall gain nothing more, but shall also be cast out of that which he has, in many cases falling into arrogance. It seems then that knowledge is not productive of love, but on the contrary debars from it him that is not on his guard, puffing him up and elating him. For arrogance is wont to cause divisions: but love both draws together and leads to knowledge. And to make this plain he says, But if any man loves God, the same is known of Him. So that I forbid not this, says he, namely, your having perfect knowledge; but your having it with love, that I enjoy; else is it no gain, but rather loss.

Do you see how he already sounds the first note of his discourse concerning love? For since all these evils were springing from the following root, i.e., not from perfect knowledge, but from their not greatly loving nor sparing their neighbors; whence ensued both their variance and their self-satisfaction, and all the rest which he had charged them with; both before this and after he is continually providing for love; so correcting the fountain of all good things. Now why, says he, are you puffed up about knowledge? For if you have not love, you shall even be injured thereby. For what is worse than boasting? But if the other be added, the first also will be in safety. For although you may know something more than your neighbor, if you love him you will not set yourself up but lead him also to the same. Wherefore also having said, Knowledge puffs up, he added, but love edifies. He did not say, Behaves itself modestly, but what is much more, and more gainful. For their knowledge was not only puffing them up but also distracting them. On this account he opposes the one to the other.

3. And then he adds a third consideration, which was of force to set them down. What then is this? That although charity be joined with it, yet not even in that case is this our knowledge perfect. And therefore he adds,

1 Corinthians 8:2

But if any man think that he knows any thing, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. This is a mortal blow. I dwell not, says he, on the knowledge being common to all. I say not that by hating your neighbor and by arrogance, you injure yourself most. But even though you have it by yourself alone, though you be modest, though you love your brother, even in this case you are imperfect in regard of knowledge. For as yet you know nothing as you ought to know, Now if we possess as yet exact knowledge of nothing, how is it that some have rushed on to such a pitch of frenzy as to say that they know God with all exactness? Whereas, though we had an exact knowledge of all other things, not even so were it possible to possess this knowledge to such an extent. For how far He is apart from all things, it is impossible even to say.

And mark how he pulls down their swelling pride: for he said not, of the matters before us you have not the proper knowledge, but, about every thing. And he did not say, ye, but, no one whatever, be it Peter, be it Paul, be it any one else. For by this he both soothed them and carefully kept them under.

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if any man love God, the same, he does not say, knows Him, but, is known of Him. For we have not known Him, but He has known us. And therefore did Christ say, You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you. And Paul elsewhere, Then shall I know fully, even as also I have been known.

Observe now, I pray, by what means he brings down their high-mindedness. First, he points out that not they alone knew the things which they knew; for we all, he says, have knowledge. Next, that the thing itself was hurtful so long as it was without love; for knowledge, says he, puffs up. Thirdly, that even joined with love it is not complete nor perfect. For if any man thinks that he knows any thing, he knows nothing as yet as he ought to know, so he speaks. In addition to this, that they have not even this from themselves, but by gift from God. For he said not, has known God, but, is known of Him. Again, that this very thing comes of love which they have not as they ought. For, if any man, says he, love God, the same is known of Him. Having then so much at large allayed their irritation, he begins to speak doctrinally, saying thus.

1 Corinthians 8:4

4. Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God but one. Look what a strait he has fallen into! For indeed his mind is to prove both; that one ought to abstain from this kind of banquet, and that it has no power to hurt those who partake of it: things which were not greatly in agreement with each other. For when they were told that they had no harm in them, they would naturally run to them as indifferent things. But when forbidden to touch them, they would suspect, on the contrary, that their having power to do hurt occasioned the prohibition. Wherefore, you see, he puts down their opinion about idols, and then states as a first reason for their abstaining the scandals which they

Father, God, he calls the Son, Lord. If now he ventured not to call the Father Lord together with the Son, lest they might suspect him to be speaking of two Lords; nor yet the Son, God, with the Father, lest he might be supposed to speak of two Gods: why marvel at his not having mentioned the Spirit? His contest was, so far, with the Gentiles: his point, to signify that with us there is no plurality of Gods. Wherefore he keeps hold continually of this word, One; saying, There is no God but One; and, to us there is One God, and One Lord. From which it is plain, that to spare the weakness of the hearers he used this mode of explanation, and for this reason made no mention at all of the Spirit. For if it be not this, neither ought he to make mention of the Spirit elsewhere, nor to join Him with the Father and the Son. For if He be rejected from the Father and Son, much more ought He not to be put in the same rank with them in the matter of Baptism; where most especially the dignity of the Godhead appears and gifts are bestowed which pertain to God alone to afford. Thus then I have assigned the cause why in this place He is passed over in silence. Now do thou if this be not the true reason, tell me, why He is ranked with Them in Baptism? But you can not give any other reason but His being of equal honor. At any rate, when he has no such constraint upon him, he puts Him in the same rank, saying thus: 2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all: and again, 2 Corinthians 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit: and there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of workings but the same God. But because now his speech was with Greeks and the weaker sort of the converts from among Greeks, for this reason he husbands it (ἰσοπέθειν) so far. And this is what the prophets do in regard of the Son; no where making mention of Him plainly because of the infirmity of the hearers.

1 Corinthians 8:7

But not in all is knowledge, says he. What knowledge does he mean? About God, or about things offered in sacrifice to idols? For either he here glances at the Greeks who say that there are many gods and lords, and who know not Him that is truly God; or at the converts from among Greeks who were still rather infirm, such as did not yet know clearly that they ought not to fear idols and that an idol is nothing in the world. But in saying this, he gently soothes and encourages the latter. For there was no need of mentioning all he had to reprove, particularly as he intended to visit them again with more severity.

8. But some being used to the idol eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled. They still tremble at idols, he says. For tell me not of the present establishment, and that you have received the true religion from your ancestors. But carry back your thoughts to those times, and consider when the Gospel was just set on foot, and impiety was still at its height, and altars burning, and sacrifices and libations offering up, and the greater part of men were Gentiles; think, I say, of those who from their ancestors had received impiety, and who were the descendants of fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers like themselves, and who had suffered great miseries from the demons. How must they have felt after their sudden change! How would they face and tremble at the assaults of the demons! For their sake also he employs some reserve, saying, But some with conscience of the things sacrificed to an idol. Thus he neither exposed them openly, not to strike them hard; nor does he pass by them altogether: but makes mention of them in a vague manner, saying, Now some with conscience of the idol even until now eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol; that is, with the same thoughts as they did in former times: 'and their conscience being weak is defiled;' not yet being able to despise and once for all laugh them to scorn, but still in some doubt. Just as if a man were to think that by touching a dead body he should pollute himself according to the Jewish custom, and then seeing others touching it with a clear conscience, but not with the same mind touching it himself, would be polluted. This was their state of feeling at that time. For some, says he, with conscience of the idol do it even until now. Not without cause did he add, even until now; but to signify that they gained no ground by their refusing to condescend. For this was not the way to bring them in, but in some other way persuading them by word and by teaching.

And their conscience being weak is defiled. No where as yet does he state his argument about the nature of the thing, but turns himself this way and that as concerning the conscience of the person partaking. For he was afraid lest in his wish to correct the weak person, he should inflict a heavy blow upon the strong one, and make him also weak. On which account he spares the one no less than the other. Nor does he allow the thing itself to be thought of any consequence, but makes his argument very full to prevent any suspicion of the kind.

1 Corinthians 8:8

9. But meat does not commend us to God. For neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we eat not are we the worse. Do you see how again he takes down their high spirit? In that, after saying that not only they but all of us have knowledge, and that no one knows any thing as he ought to know, and that knowledge puffs up; then having soothed them, and said that this knowledge is not in all, and that weakness is the cause of these being

defiled, in order that they might not say, And what is it to us, if knowledge be not in all? Why then has not such an one knowledge? Why is he weak? I say, in order that they might not rejoin in these terms, he did not proceed immediately to point out clearly that for fear of the other's harm one ought to abstain: but having first made but a sort of skirmish upon mention of him, he points out what is more than this. What then is this? That although no one were injured nor any perversion of another ensued, not even in this case were it right so to do. For the former topic by itself is laboring in vain. Since he that hears of another being hurt while himself has the gain, is not very apt to abstain; but then rather he does so, when he finds out that he himself is no way advantaged by the thing. Wherefore he sets this down first, saying, But meat commends us not to God. See how cheap he holds that which was accounted to spring from perfect knowledge! For neither if we eat are we the better, (that is, stand higher in God's estimation, as if we had done any thing good or great:) nor if we eat not are we the worse, that is, fall in any way short of others. So far then he has signified that the thing itself is superfluous, and as nothing. For that which being done profits not, and which being left undone injures not, must be superfluous.

10. But as he goes on, he discloses all the harm which was likely to arise from the matter. For the present, however, that which befell the brethren is his subject.

1 Corinthians 8:9

For take heed, says he, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to the weak among the brethren. (I., áλ̄ π̄ι'½ á¼€í' μ̄ί»† áλ̄ π̄ι'½ not in rec. text.)

He did not say, Your liberty has become a stumbling-block, nor did he positively affirm it that he might not make them more shameless; but how? Take heed; frightening them, and making them ashamed, and leading them to disavow any such conduct. And he said not, This your knowledge, which would have sounded more like praise; nor this your perfectness; but, your liberty; a thing which seemed to savor more of rashness and obstinacy and arrogance. Neither said he, To the brethren, but, To those of the brethren who are weak; enhancing his accusation from their not even sparing the weak, and those too their brethren. For let it be so that you correct them not, nor arouse them: yet why trip them up, and make them to stumble, when you ought to stretch out the hand? But for that you have no mind: well then, at least avoid casting them down. Since if one were wicked, he required punishment; if weak, healing: but now he is not only weak, but also a brother.

1 Corinthians 8:10

For if a man see you who hast knowledge, sitting at meat in an idol's temple, will not his conscience if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

After having said, Take heed lest this your liberty become a stumbling-block, he explains how and in what manner it becomes so: and he continually employs the term weakness, that the mischief may not be thought to arise from the nature of the thing, nor demons appear formidable. As thus: At present, says he, a man is on the point of withdrawing himself entirely from all idols; but when he sees you fond of loitering about them, he takes the circumstance for a recommendation and abides there himself also. So that not only his weakness, but also your ill-timed behavior, helps to further the plot against him; for it is you who make him weaker.

1 Corinthians 8:11

And through your meat he that is weak perishes, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

For there are two things which deprive you of excuse in this mischief; one, that he is weak, the other, that he is your brother: rather, I should say, there is a third also, and one more terrible than all. What then is this? That whereas Christ refused not even to die for him, you can not bear even to accommodate yourself to him. By these means, you see, he reminds the perfect man also, what he too was before, and that for him He died. And he said not, For whom even to die was your duty; but what is much stronger, that even Christ died for his sake. Did your Lord then not refuse to die for him, and do you so make him of none account as not even to abstain from a polluted table for his sake? Yea, do you permit him to perish, after the salvation so wrought, and, what is still more grievous, 'for a morsel of meat?' For he said not, for your perfectness, nor for your knowledge, but for your meat. So that the charges are four, and these extremely heavy: that it was a brother, that he was weak, and one of whom Christ made so much account as even to die for him, and that after all this for a morsel of meat he is destroyed.

1 Corinthians 8:12

And thus sinning against the brethren, and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

Do you observe how quietly and gradually he has brought their offense up to the very summit of iniquity? And again, he makes mention of the infirmity of the other sort: and so, the very thing which these considered to make for them, that he every where turns round upon their own head. And he said not, Putting stumbling-blocks in their way, but, wounding; so as by the force of his expression to indicate their cruelty. For what can be more savage than a man who wounds the sick? And yet no wound is so grievous as making a man to stumble. Often, in fact, is this also the cause of death.

But how do they sin against Christ? In one way, because He considers the concerns of His servants as His own; in another, because those who are wounded go to make up His Body and that which is part of Him: in a third way, because that work of His which He built up by His own blood, these are destroying for their ambition's sake.

1 Corinthians 8:13

11. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forever. This is like the best of teachers, to teach in his own person the things which he speaks. Nor did he say whether justly or unjustly; but in any case. I say not, (such is his tone,) meat offered in sacrifice to an idol, which is already prohibited for another reason; but if any even of those things which are within license and are permitted causes stumbling, from these also will I abstain: and not one or two days, but all the time of my life. For he says, I will eat no flesh forever. And he said not, Lest I destroy my brother, but simply, That I make not my brother to stumble. For indeed it comes of folly in the extreme that what things are greatly cared for by Christ, and such as He should have even chosen to die for them, these we should esteem so entirely beneath our notice as not even to abstain from meats on their account.

Now these things might be seasonably spoken not to them only, but also to us, apt as we are to esteem lightly the salvation of our neighbors and to utter those satanical words. I say, satanical: for the expression, What care I, though such an one stumble, and such another perish? savors of his cruelty and inhuman mind. And yet in that instance, the infirmity also of those who were offended had some share in the result: but in our case it is not so, sinning as we do in such a way as to offend even the strong. For when we smite, and raven, and overreach, and use the free as if they were slaves, whom is not this enough to offend? Tell me not of such a man's being a shoemaker, another a dyer, another a brazier: but bear in mind that he is a believer and a brother. Why these are they whose disciples we are; the fishermen, the publicans, the tent-makers, of Him who was brought up in the house of a carpenter; and who deigned to have the carpenter's betrothed wife for a mother; and who was laid, after His swaddling clothes, in a manger; and who had not where to lay His head of Him whose journeys were so long that His very journeying was enough to tire Him down; of Him who was supported by others.

12. Think on these things, and esteem the pride of man to be nothing. But count the tent-maker as well as your brother, as him that is borne upon a chariot and has innumerable servants and struts in the market-place: nay, rather the former than the latter; since the term brother would more naturally be used where there is the greater resemblance. Which then resembles the fisherman? He who is supported by daily labor and has neither servant nor dwelling, but is quite beset with privations; or that other who is surrounded with such vast pomp, and who acts contrary to the laws of God? Despise not then him that is more of the two your brother, for he comes nearer to the Apostolic pattern.

Not however, say you, of his own accord, but by compulsion; for he does not this of his own mind. How comes this? Have you not heard, Judge not, that you be not judged? But, to convince yourself that he does it not against his inclination, approach and give him ten thousand talents of gold, and you shall see him putting it away from him. And thus, even though he have received no wealth by inheritance from his ancestors, yet when it is in his power to take it, and he lets it not come near him neither adds to his goods, he exhibits a mighty proof of his contempt of wealth. For so John was the son of Zebedee that extremely poor man: yet I suppose we are not therefore to say that his poverty was forced upon him.

Whenever then you see one driving nails, smiting with a hammer, covered with soot, do not therefore hold him cheap, but rather for that reason admire him. Since even Peter girded himself, and handled the dragnet, and went a fishing after the Resurrection of the Lord.

And why say I Peter? For this same Paul himself, after his incessant runnings to and fro and all those vast

miracles, standing in a tent-maker's shop, sewed hides together: while angels were reverencing him and demons trembling. And he was not ashamed to say, Acts 20:34 Unto my necessities, and to those who were with me, these hands ministered. What say I, that he was not ashamed? Yea, he gloried in this very thing.

But you will say, Who is there now to be compared with the virtue of Paul? I too am aware that there is no one, yet not on this account are those who live now to be despised: for if for Christ's sake thou give honor, though one be last of all, yet if he be a believer he shall justly be honored. For suppose a general and a common soldier both present themselves before you, being friends of the king, and you open your house to both: in which of their persons would you seem to pay most honor to the king? Plainly in that of a soldier. For there were in the general, beside his loyalty to the king, many other things apt to win such a mark of respect from you: but the soldier had nothing else but his loyalty to the king.

Wherefore God bade us call to our suppers and our feasts the lame, and the maimed, and those who cannot repay us; for these are most of all properly called good deeds which are done for God's sake. Whereas if you entertain some great and distinguished man, it is not such pure mercy, what you do, but some portion many times is assigned to yourself also, both by vain-glory, and by the return of the favor, and by your rising in many men's estimation on account of your . At any rate, I think I could point out many who with this view pay court to the more distinguished among the saints, namely, that by their means they may enjoy a greater intimacy with rulers, and that they may find them thenceforth more useful in their own affairs and to their families. And many such favors do they ask in recompense from those saints; a thing which mars the repayment of their hospitality, they seeking it with such a mind.

And why need I say this about the saints? Since he who seeks, even from God, the reward of his labors in the present life and follows after virtue for this world's good, is sure to diminish his recompense. But he that asks for all his crowns wholly there, is found far more admirable; like that Lazarus, who even now is receiving Luke 16:25 there all his good things; like those Three Children, who when they were on the point of being thrown into the furnace said, Daniel 17:17-18 There is a God in heaven able to deliver us; and if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up: like Abraham, who even offered his son and slew him; and this he did, not for any reward, but esteeming this one thing the greatest recompense, to obey the Lord.

These let us also imitate. For so shall we be visited with a return of all our good deeds and that abundantly, because we do all with such a mind as this: so shall we obtain also the brighter crowns. And God grant that we may all obtain them, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom, to the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now, henceforth, and for everlasting ages. Amen.