

St. John Chrysostom's Commentary on 1 Corinthians Chapters 5-11 A Summary

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1 Corinthians Chapter 5¹

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

St. John Chrysostom tells us that in the preceding chapters (1-4) St. Paul does not immediately address the problem of fornication so as to ease into the matter. And when he finally does address this sin in the fifth chapter, he does so, not by directly accusing the one who has committed the sin, but by saying “it is heard.” St. Paul addresses the gravity of the sin by indicating that not even non-Christians dare to commit the sin of taking the wife of one’s father. But he also makes this a matter that is important not simply for the one who committed the sin, but for the community as a whole. For when an impurity enters the dough, the entire batch goes bad (verse 6-7). Rather than taking pride in the sin committed, St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to weep and lament over such grievous acts within their community. They ought, therefore, to have mourned over this sin. Here we are reminded of Christ’s teaching: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mt. 5:4). For the Christian is called to mourn over his or her own sins as well as those of others.

3 For I indeed, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

St. Paul indicates that he has no need of being physical present in order to judge the wrongness of the act committed. He also indicates by saying that he is present in the spirit, that he and the community are as one body, and therefore, despite the physical distance, they act as one.

4 In the name of the Lord Jesus, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Here St. John informs us that Christ is at the very heart of the gathering to condemn the man who has committed the grievous act. He is also clear that St. Paul does not say “give the one up to Satan” but “deliver him to Satan.” This means that by the will of God, the man will be allowed to suffer in the flesh some sort of illness such that he will repent of his awful deed and be saved. Finally, be not mistaken so as to think that the spirit and the flesh are somehow saved independently of one another. Rather, if the spirit is saved, so too is the body.

6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.

¹ All passages from the New Testament are taken from:

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The boasting of the people actually prevented the man from repenting. St. Paul is clear that although one man has committed the sin, the entire community suffers as a result. And if the one escapes any sort of punishment, all will be inclined to run toward the same sin. The importance of the community working together is strongly emphasized here.

For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christ is our Passover as He delivers us from death. Thus, we are always in a time of keeping festival since, as St. John Chrysostom says: “The Son of God was made man for you; He freed you from death; and called you to a kingdom. You therefore who have obtained and are still obtaining such things, how can it be less than your duty to ‘keep the feast’ all your life? Let no one then be downcast about poverty, disease, or craft of enemies. For it is a festival, even the whole of our time.”² The last part of verse eight is St. Paul’s admonition that the believers must rejoice in Christ as the true Passover, but they can only do so in purity, which is to say that the community must guard against impurity, whether this comes in the form of acts or teachings (cf. Matthew 16:6, 11-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1).

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

Associated with those who are members of the Church, yet do not associate with those who call themselves Christians but act in evil ways since there is always the potential for being dragged along into sin with them.

St. Paul’s statement “what have I to do with judging outsiders?” does not come from a lack of love, but rather it comes from the wisdom of experience. Those whose hearts are not yet ready to receive the Gospel will not be convinced of the dangers of their evil deeds.

1 Corinthians Chapter 6

2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged in you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

² All quotes from St. John Chrysostom’s commentary on the letter to the Corinthians are taken from: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. 1889. *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*. Volume XII. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing company.

The commentary can be found online here: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2201.htm>

N.B. After the summary provided for Chapter 5, all other excerpts are direct quotes from St. John Chrysostom’s commentary on 1 Corinthians.

St. John Chrysostom says, “‘And if the world is being judged in you...’ He says not ‘by you,’ but, ‘in you;’ even as when He said, ‘A queen of *the* south shall be raised in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it [Mt. 12:42]’; and, ‘Men, Ninevites, shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it [Mt. 12:41].’ For when beholding the same sun and sharing all the same things, we shall be found believers but they unbelievers, and they shall not be able to take refuge in ignorance, we shall accuse them by those things which we have practiced. And many such ways shall one find there a means of judging.”

3 *Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!*

According to St. John Chrysostom, by angels St. Paul means demons.

4 *If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church?*

Though the community of the Corinthians had a legal system to settle disagreements, St. Paul declares that disagreeing Christians should not go to a secular court in order to resolve their differences. Taken that Christians have the Holy Spirit and the mind of Christ, why should they turn to secular courts who lack the wisdom of God and of the Holy Spirit.

12 *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be enslaved by anything.*

“Here St. Paul touches upon the issue of gluttony. Since he intends to assail the fornicator again, and fornication arises from luxuriousness and want of moderation, he strongly chastises this passion. It cannot be that he speaks thus with regard to things forbidden, but of things which seem to be indifferent. To illustrate my meaning: ‘It is lawful,’ he says, ‘to eat and to drink; but it is not expedient with excess.’ He signifies that to do what is in one’s power not only is not expedient, but even is not a part of power, but of slavery.

“First he dissuades them on the ground of the inexpediency of the thing, saying, ‘they are not expedient.’ Next place on that of its contrariety to itself, saying, ‘I will not be brought under the power of any.’ This is his meaning: ‘You are at liberty to eat. Good, but remain in liberty and take heed that you do not become a slave to this appetite for he who uses it properly, he is master of it. However, he that exceeds the proper measure is no longer its master but its slave, since gluttony reigns paramount within him.’ Do you perceive how though the man thought he had authority, St. Paul points out that he is under authority? For this is his custom, as I was saying before, to give all objections a different view. It is just this which he has done here. For see how each of them was saying, “I have power to live luxuriously.” He then replies, “In doing so, you are not so much acting as one who had power over a thing, but rather as being yourself subject to the power. For you do not have power even over your own belly so long as you are self-indulgent, but rather it has power over you.’ And the same we may say both of riches and of other things.”

15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!*

Having passed on from the fornicator to the covetous person, he comes back to the former, no longer discoursing about him who committed sexual immority but with the others who had not committed fornication. And in the act of securing them lest they fall into the same sins, he assails him again. For he that has committed sin, though you direct your words to another, he is still stung even in that way, his conscience being thoroughly awakened and scourging him.

Now the fear of punishment indeed was enough to keep them in chastity. But seeing that he does not wish by fear alone to set these matters right, he uses both threats and reasoning. Now upon that other occasion, having stated the sin, and prescribed the punishment, and pointed out the harm which mingling with the fornicator brought upon all, he left off and passed to the subject of covetousness. And having threatened the covetous and all the rest whom he mentioned with expulsion from the kingdom, he so concluded his discourse. But here he takes in hand the work of admonition in a yet more terrific manner. For as he that only punishes a sin and does nothing to point out its most extreme lawlessness, produces no such great effect by his chastisement, so also he who only abashes and fails to terrify by his mode of punishing, does not very keenly hit men of hardened minds. Therefore St. Paul does both: here he abashes, saying, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" and again he terrifies, saying, "Do you not know that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"

And in regard to the fornicator, he again uses this order of discourse. For having terrified him by what he had said before (first cutting him off and delivering him to Satan, and then reminding him of that day which is coming), he again abashes him by saying, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" thus speaking as to children of noble birth. For whereas he had said, "Now the body is for the Lord," he indicates it more plainly now. And in another place as well he does this same thing, saying, "You are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Cor. 12:27). And the same figure he often employs, not with the same aim, but at one time to show them Christ's love, and at another to increase their fear. But here he has employed it to startle and fill them with alarm. "Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? God forbid." Nothing can be more prone to strike horror than this expression. He did not say, "Shall I take the members of Christ, and join them on to a harlot?" but rather "make them members of a harlot," which surely would strike more keenly.

Then he shows how the fornicator does his, saying thus, "Do you not know he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her?" How is this evident? "For the two," He says, "shall become one."

16 Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one."

See the accuracy of expression, not "they shall be one flesh," but joined together "into one flesh" namely, that of the child. What then? When there is no child, will they not be two? Quite clearly, no. For intercourse has this effect: it pours together and mingles the bodies of both. Indeed, even as one who puts unguent into oil, making the whole one so it is also here."

1 Corinthians Chapter 7

3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

Now what is the meaning of “the due honor? The wife has not power over her own body;” but is both the slave and the head of the husband. And if you decline the service which is due, you have offended God. But if you wish to withdraw yourself, it must be with the husband’s permission, though it be but a for short time. For this is why he calls the matter a debt, to show that no one is master of himself but that they are servants to each other.

When therefore you see a harlot tempting you, say, “My body is not mine, but is my wife’s.” The same also let the woman say to those who would undermine her chastity, “My body is not mine, but my husband’s.”

Now if neither husband nor wife have power even over their own body, much less have they over their property. Listen all you that have husbands and or wives: that if you shouldn’t count your body your own, much less your money.

Elsewhere I grant He gives to the husband abundant precedence, both in the New Testament, and the Old saying, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). St. Paul does so too by making a distinction, writing, “Husbands, love your wives; and let the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph. 5:25,33). But in this place we do not hear of greater and less, but it is one and the same right. Now why is this? Because his speech was about chastity. “In all other things,” he says, “let the husband have the prerogative; but not so where the question is about chastity.” “The husband has no power over his own body, neither the wife.” There is great equality of honor, and no prerogative.

23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

This saying is addressed not only to slaves, but also to free men. For it is possible for one who is a slave not to be a slave; and for one who is a freeman to be a slave. How can one who is a slave not be a slave? When he does all for God, when he feigns nothing, and does nothing out of eye-service towards men: this is how one that is a slave to men can be free. How does one who is free become a slave? When he serves men in any evil service, either for gluttony or desire of wealth or for the sake of a position. For such a one, though he is free, is more of a slave than any man.

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage.

These words carry no contradiction to what had been said before but rather the most entire agreement with them. For he says in that place also, “Except it is by consent” (1 Cor 7:5), as here he says, “Are you bound to a wife? Seek not separation.” This is no contradiction. For its being against consent makes a dissolution, but if with consent both live continently, it is no dissolution. Then, lest this should seem to be laying down a law, he adds “but if you marry, you have not sinned.” He next alleges the existing state of things, mentioning “the present distress, the shortness of the time,” and “the affliction.”

“But if and you marry, you have not sinned.” He is not speaking about her who has made the commitment of virginity, for if it comes to that, she has sinned since if the widows are

condemned for having to do with second marriages after they have once chosen widowhood, much more the virgins.

“Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh.” “And pleasure too,” you will say. But observe how he curtails this by the shortness of the time, saying, “the time is short” (v. 29), that is, we are exhorted to depart now and go forth, but you are running further in. And even if marriage had no troubles, we ought to press on towards things to come. But when it has affliction too, why should we add an additional burden to ourselves. Why take up such a load, when even after taking it you must use it as if not having it? For “those even that have wives must be,” he says, “as though they had none.”

Then, having interposed something about the future, he brings back his speech to the present. For some of his topics are spiritual, others relate to this present life. But still with all this he leaves it to their own choice: inasmuch as he who after proving what is best goes back to compulsion, seems as if he did not trust his own statements.

1 Corinthians Chapter 8

5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”

But not in reality having [the nature of gods] but only in name: “be it in heaven or on earth:—in heaven,” meaning the sun and the moon and the remainder of the choir of stars; for these too the Greeks worshipped: but upon the earth demons, and all those who had been made gods of men.

1 Corinthians Chapter 9

16-18 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.

What you mean St. Paul when you say, “If I preach the Gospel it is nothing for me to glory of, but it is if I make the Gospel of Christ without charge?” Is latter therefore greater than the former? By no means, but in another point of view it has some advantage, inasmuch as the one is a command, but the other is a good deed of my own free-will. For those things that are done beyond what is commanded of someone have a great reward in this respect, but not so great are those that are done in as a result of a commandment. And so in this respect he says, the one is greater than the other; but not in the very nature of the thing. For what is equal to preaching since it makes men vie even with the angels themselves. Nevertheless since the one is a commandment and a debt, the other a forwardness of free-will, in this respect this is more than that. Therefore he says,

“For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, a stewardship is entrusted to me.” By the words “my own will” he means those things committed to him, and by the words “not of my own will,” he means those not committed to him. And thus we must understand the expression, “for necessity is laid upon me” not as though he did any of these things against his will, God forbid, but as though he were bound by the things commanded. Therefore also Christ said to the disciples, “When you have done all, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; for we have done that which was our duty to do’” (Lk 17:10).

“What then is my reward? That when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel without charge.” What then, tell me, does St. Peter have no reward? No, who can ever have so great a reward as he? And what shall we say of the other Apostles? How then does he say, “If I do this of my own will I have a reward, but if not of my own will, a stewardship is entrusted to me”? Do you also see here his wisdom? For he did not say, “But if not of my own will I have no reward,” but, “a stewardship is committed to me,” implying that even thus he has a reward, but such as he obtains who has performed what was commanded, not such as belongs to him who has of his own resources been generous and exceeded the commandment.

“What then is the reward? That, when I preach the Gospel,” he says, “I may make the Gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the Gospel.” See how throughout he uses the term “right,” showing that who do receive their right are neither worthy of blame. But he added, “in the Gospel,” partly to show the reasonableness of it, partly also to forbid our carrying the matter out into every case. For the teacher ought to receive, but not the mere drone also.

20 *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law.*

“And I became,” he says, “to the Jews as a Jew, that I might gain Jews.” And how did this take place? When he circumcised [St. Timothy] that he might abolish circumcision. Note that he did not say, “a Jew,” but, “as a Jew,” which was a wise arrangement. Why? The herald of the world and he who touched the very heavens and shone so bright in grace, does he all at once descend so low? Yes; for this is to ascend. For you are not to look to the fact only of his descending, but also to his raising up him who was bowed down and bringing him up to himself.

“To those that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law.” Either it is the explanation of what went before, or he hints at some other thing besides the former, calling those Jews, who were such originally and from the first, but “under the law,” the proselytes, or those who became believers and yet adhered to the law. For they were no longer as Jews, yet ‘under the law.’ And when was he under the law? When he shaved his head; when he offered sacrifice. Now these things were done, not because his mind changed (since such conduct would have been wickedness), but because his love caused him to condescend. For that he might bring over to this faith those who were really Jews, he became as Jew himself not really, showing himself such only, but not such in fact nor doing these things from a mind so disposed. Indeed, how could he, zealous as he was to convert others also, and doing these things only in order that he might free others who did them from that degradation?

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law.

“To them that are without law, as without law.” These were neither Jews, nor Christians, nor Greeks, but “outside of the Law” as was Cornelius, and if there were any others like him. For among these also making his appearance, he used to assume many of their ways. But some say that he hints at his discourse with the Athenians from the inscription on the altar, and that so he says, “to them that are without law, as without law.”

Then, lest any should think that the matter was a change of mind, he added, “not being without law to God, but under law to Christ;” that is, so far from being without law, I am not simply under the Law, but I have that law which is much more exalted than the older one, which is that of the Spirit and of grace.”

27 but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

He did not say, “I kill my body” nor, “I punish” it for the flesh is not to be hated, but, “I buffet and bring it into bondage;” which is the part of a master not of an enemy, of a teacher not of a foe, of a gymnastic master not of an adversary.

1 Corinthians Chapter 10

2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea

But what is, “They were baptized into Moses?” Similar to how we in our belief in Christ and in His resurrection are baptized as being destined in our own persons to partake in the same mysteries (for, “we are baptized,” he says, “for the dead,” that is, for our own bodies), even so they putting confidence in Moses, that is having seen him cross first, ventured also themselves into the waters. But because he wishes to bring the Type near the Truth; he speaks it not thus, but uses the terms of the Truth even concerning the Type.

4 and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

For it was not the nature of the rock which sent forth the water (such is his meaning) or else it would have gushed out water before this time, but another sort of Rock, a spiritual One, performed the whole, even Christ who was everywhere with them and worked all the wonders. For on this account he said, “that followed them.”

11 Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.

Again he terrifies them speaking of the “ends,” and prepares them to expect things greater than had already taken place. “For that we shall suffer punishment is manifest,” he says, “from what

has been said, even to those who disbelieve the statements concerning hell-fire. But that the punishment also will be most severe is evident from the more numerous blessings which we have enjoyed, and from the things of which those were but figures. Since if in the gifts one go beyond the other, it is most evident that so it will also be in the punishment.” For this cause he both called them types, and said that they were “written for us” and made mention of an “end” that he might remind them of the consummation of all things. For such will not be the penalties then as to admit of a termination and be done away, but the punishment will be eternal; for even as the punishments in this world are ended with the present life, so those in the next continually remain. But when he says, “the ends of the ages,” he means nothing else than that the fearful judgment is henceforth nigh at hand.

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

What do you say thou, O blessed Paul? When you wanted to appeal to the hearer’s reverence, when you are making mention of the awe-inspiring mysteries, do you give the title of “cup of blessing” to that fearful and most tremendous cup? “Yes,” he says, “and no lowly title is meant. For when I call it ‘blessing,’ I mean thanksgiving, and when I call it thanksgiving I unfold all the treasure of God’s goodness, and call to mind those mighty gifts.” Since we too, recounting over the cup the unspeakable mercies of God and all that we have been made partakers of, so draw near to Him, and communicate, giving Him thanks that He has delivered from error the whole race of mankind; that being afar off, He made them near to Him; that when they had no hope and were without God in the world, He constituted them His own brethren and fellow-heirs. For these and all such things, giving thanks, thus we approach. “How then are not your doings inconsistent,” he says, “O you Corinthians who bless God for delivering you from idols, yet run again to their tables?”

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the Blood of Christ?” Very persuasively and fearfully he speaks. For what he says is this: “This which is in the cup is that which flowed from His side, and of that do we partake.” But he called it a cup of blessing, because holding it in our hands, we so exalt Him in our hymn, wondering, astonished at His unspeakable gift, blessing Him among other things for the pouring out of this self-same Drink that we might not abide in error. And not only for the pouring It out, but also for the imparting It to us all. “Wherefore if you desire blood,” He says, “redden not the altar of idols with the slaughter of brute beasts, but My altar with My blood.” Tell me, what can be more tremendous than this? What more tenderly kind? This also lovers do. When they see those whom they love desiring what belongs to strangers and despising their own, they give what belongs to themselves, and so persuade them to withdraw themselves from the gifts of those others. Lovers, however, display this liberality in goods and money and garments, but in blood none ever did so. Whereas Christ even herein exhibited His care and fervent love for us. And in the old covenant, because they were in an imperfect state, the blood which they used to offer to idols He Himself submitted to receive, that He might separate them from those idols; which very thing again was a proof of His unspeakable affection. But here He transferred the service to that which is far more fearful and glorious, changing the very sacrifice itself, and instead of the slaughter of irrational creatures, commanding to offer up Himself.

“The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the Body of Christ?” Why did he not say, “the participation of Body of Christ”? Because he intended to express something more and to point out how close was the union: in that we communicate not only by participating and partaking, but also by being united. For as that body is united to Christ, so also are we united to Him by this Bread. But why he also add, “which we break?” For although in the Eucharist one may see this done, yet on the cross not so, but the very contrary. For, “A bone of Him shall not be broken.” But that which He suffered not on the cross, this He suffers in the oblation for your sake, and submits to be broken, that He may fill all men.

30 *If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*

“Of what do you ‘partake with thanksgiving?’ tell me.” Of the gifts of God. For His grace is so great, as to render my soul unstained and above all pollution. For as the sun sending down its beams upon many spots of pollution, withdraws them again pure; so likewise and much more, we, living in the midst of the world remain pure, will if we so desire. “Why then abstain?” do you say. Not as though I should become unclean, far from it; but for my brother’s sake, and that I may not become a partaker with devils, and that I may not be judged by the unbeliever. For in this case it is no longer now the nature of the thing, but the disobedience and the friendship with devils that makes me unclean, and the purpose of heart works the pollution.

1 Corinthians Chapter 11

3 *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

“The head of every man is Christ.” Is He then Head of the Gentile also? In no wise. ... when he says, “of every man,” one must understand it of the believer. ... If the wife be under subjection to us it is as a wife, as free, as equal in honor. And the Son also, though He did become obedient to the Father, it was as the Son of God, it was as God. ... For the counselor is no slave. But again, when you hear of a counselor, do not understand it as though the Father were in need, but that the Son has the same honor with Him that begat Him. Do not therefore strain the example of the man and the woman to all particulars. ... And elsewhere also having called the husband “head of the wife,” he added, “Even as Christ is Head and Savior and Defender of the Church, so also ought the man to be of his own wife” (Ephes. 5:23) — head, savior, and defender.

4 *Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.*

He said not, “covered,” but “having any thing on his head,” signifying that even though he pray with the head bare, yet if he have long hair, he is liken to one covered. “For the hair,” he says, “is given for a covering.”³

19 *For there must be factions [heresies] among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.*

³ Note that the more accurate translation of this verse would read as St. John mentions, i.e. “having anything on his head.”

By “factions,” here he means those which concern not the doctrines, but these present divisions. But even if he had spoken of the doctrinal heresies, not even thus did he give them any handle. For Christ Himself said, “It must needs be that occasions of stumbling come” (Matt. 18:7), not destroying the liberty of the will nor appointing any necessity and compulsion over man’s life, but foretelling what would certainly ensue from the evil mind of men. That is, this would take place not because of His prediction, but because the incurably disposed are so minded. These things did not happen because He foretold them, but because they were certainly about to happen, and therefore He foretold them. Since, if the occasions of stumbling were of necessity and not of the mind of them that bring them in, it was superfluous for Him to say, “Woe to that man by whom the occasion comes.” But these things we discussed more at length when we were upon the passage itself; now we must proceed to what is before us.

That St. Paul said these things of these factions relating to the tables, and resulting contention and division, is made manifest also from what follows. For having said, “I hear that there are divisions among you,” he stopped not here, but signifying what divisions he means he goes on to say, “each one takes before other his own supper.” And again, “What? Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God?” However, that of these he was speaking is evident. And if he calls them divisions marvel not. For, as I said, he wishes to touch them by the expression; whereas had they been divisions of doctrine, he would not have discoursed with them thus mildly. Hear him, for instance, when he speaks of any such thing, how vehement he is both in assertion and in reproof. In assertion he says, “If even an angel preach any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8); but in reproof, as when he says, “Whoever of you would be justified by the law, you are fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4). And at one time he calls the corrupters “dogs,” saying, “Beware of dogs” (Philip. 3:2), at another, “having their consciences seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). And again, “angels of Satan:” (2 Cor. 11:14–15), but here he said no such thing, but spoke in a gentle and subdued tone.

24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Why does he here make mention of the Mysteries? Because that argument was very necessary to his present purpose. As thus: “Your Master,” he says, “counted all worthy of the same Table, even though it is very fearful and far exceeding the dignity of all, yet you consider them to be unworthy even of your own table, small and lowly as we see it is. And while they have no advantage over you in spiritual things, you rob them in the temporal things. For neither are these your own.”

However, he does not express himself in this way in order to prevent his discourse from becoming harsh, but he frames it in a gentler form, saying, that “the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread.”

And why does he remind us of the time, and of that evening, and of the betrayal? Not indifferently nor without some reason, but that he might exceedingly fill them with compunction, were it but from consideration of the time. For even if one be a very stone, yet when he considers that night, how He was with His disciples, “very heavy,” how He was betrayed, how He was bound, how He was led away, how He was judged, how He suffered all the rest in order, he becomes softer than wax, and is withdrawn from earth and all the pomp of this world. Therefore he leads us to the remembrance of all those things, by His time, and His table, and His betrayal,

putting us to shame and saying, “Your Master gave up even Himself for you, and you do not even share a little meat with your brother for your own sake.”

But how does he say that “he received it from the Lord?” since certainly he was not present then but was one of the persecutors. That you may know that the first table had no advantage above that which comes after it. For even today also it is He who does all, and delivers it even as then.

And not on this account only does St. Paul remind us of that night, but so that he may also in another way bring us to compunction. For as we particularly remember those words which we hear last from those who are departing; and to their heirs if they should venture to transgress their commands, when we would put them to shame we say, “Consider that this was the last word that your father uttered to you, and until the evening when he was just about to breathe his last he kept repeating these injunctions” just so St. Paul, purposing hence also to make his argument full of fear. “Remember,” he says, “that this was the last mysterious rite He gave to you, and in that night on which He was about to be slain for us, He commanded these things, and having delivered to us that Supper after that He added nothing further.”

Next also St. Paul proceeds to recount the very things that were done, saying, “He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My Body which is broken for you.’” If therefore you come for a sacrifice of thanksgiving, you on your part do nothing unworthy of that sacrifice. By no means either dishonor your brother or neglect him in his hunger; be not drunken nor insult the Church. As you come giving thanks for what you have enjoyed, so you yourself do accordingly make return and not cut yourself off from your neighbor. Since Christ for His part gave equally to all, saying, “Take, eat.” He gave His Body equally, but do you not give so much as the common bread equally? Yes, it was indeed broken for all alike, and became the Body equally for all.

25 In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

What do you have to say for yourself? Are you making a remembrance of Christ and despising the poor; how do you not tremble? Why, if a son or brother had died and you were making a remembrance of him, you would have been smitten by your conscience, had you not fulfilled the custom and invited the poor. And when you are making remembrance of your Master, do you not so much as simply give a portion of the Table?

But what is it which He says, “This cup is the New Covenant?” Because there was also a cup of the Old Covenant—the libations and the blood of the brute creatures. For after sacrificing, they used to receive the blood in a chalice and bowl and so pour it out. Since then instead of the blood of beasts He brought in His own Blood. Lest any should be troubled on hearing this, He reminds them of that ancient sacrifice.

Next, having spoken concerning that Supper, St. Paul connects the things present with the things of that time, that even as on that very evening and reclining on that very couch and receiving from Christ Himself this sacrifice, so also now might men be affected.

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

For as Christ in regard to the bread and the cup said, “Do this in remembrance of Me,” revealing to us the cause of the giving of the Mystery, declaring this to be a sufficient cause to ground our religious fear upon—for when you consider what your Master has suffered for you, you will better deny yourself—so also St. Paul says here: “as often as you eat do you proclaim His death.” And this is that Supper. Then indicating that it abides to the end, he says, “till He come.”

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

Why so? Because He poured it out, and makes the thing appear a slaughter and no longer a sacrifice. Similar therefore as they who then pierced Him, pierced Him not that they might drink but that they might shed His blood, so likewise does he who comes for It unworthily and reaps no profit by It. Do you see how fearful he makes his discourse, and inveighs against them very exceedingly, signifying that if they are thus to drink, they partake unworthily of the elements? How can one be more unworthily than when he neglects the hungry? Who besides himself puts him more to shame? Since if not giving to the poor casts one out of the kingdom, even though one should be a virgin, or rather, not giving liberally (for even those virgins too had oil, only they had it not abundantly); consider how great the evil will prove, to have wrought so many impieties?

“What impieties?” are you speaking of. Why do you ask, what impieties? You have partaken of such a Table and thus you ought to have been more gentle than any and to be like the angels, yet none is so cruel as you have become. You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, and not even in doing this do you acknowledge your brother. Of what indulgence are you then worthy of? Whereas if even before this you had not known him, you ought to have come to the knowledge of him from the Table. But now you dishonor the Table itself, your brother having been deemed worthy to partake of it and yet you do not judge him worthy of your meat. Have you not heard how much he suffered who demanded the hundred pence and how he made void the gift granted to him? Does it not come into your mind what you were and what you have become? Do you not put yourself in remembrance that if this man be poor in possessions, you were much more beggarly in good works, being full of ten thousand sins? Nevertheless, God delivered you from all those and counted you worthy of such a Table, yet you have not even thus become more merciful. Therefore of course nothing else remains but that you should be “delivered to the tormentors.”

28 Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

What mean these words, when another object is proposed to us? This is Paul’s custom, as also I said before, not only to treat of those things which he had proposed to himself, but also if an argument relates to his purpose occur, to proceed upon this also with great diligence, and especially when it relates to very necessary and urgent matters. Thus, when he was discoursing with married persons, and the question about the servants fell in his way, he handled it very strenuously and at great length. Again, when he was speaking of the duty of not going to law before those courts, then also having fallen on the admonition respecting covetousness, he discoursed at length concerning this subject likewise. Now the same thing he has also done here: in that having once found occasion to remind them of the Mysteries, he judged it necessary to proceed with that subject. For indeed it was no ordinary one. Therefore also he discoursed very

majestically concerning it, providing for that which is the sum of all good things, that is their approaching those Mysteries with a pure conscience.

29 *For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.*

What do you mean by this, tell me? Is this Table which is the cause of so many blessings and teeming with life, become judgment? Not from Its own nature, he says, but from the will of him who approaches. For as His presence, which conveyed to us those great and unutterable blessings, condemned them the more who did not receive It, so also the Mysteries become provisions of greater punishment to such as partake unworthily.

But why does he eat judgment to himself? Because he is “not discerning the Lord’s body,” that is, he is not searching, not bearing in mind, as he ought, the greatness of the Things set before him; not estimating the weight of the gift. For if you should come to know accurately Who it is Who lies before you, and Who is He Who gives Himself and to whom, you will need no other argument, but this is enough for you to use all vigilance; unless you should be altogether fallen.

30 *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have fallen asleep.*

Here he no longer brings his examples from others as he did in the case of the idol-sacrifices, relating the ancient histories and the chastisements in the wilderness, but from the Corinthians themselves; this made the discourse apt to strike them more keenly. For whereas he was saying, “he eats judgment to himself,” and, “he is guilty;” that he might not seem to speak mere words, he points to deeds also and calls themselves to witness; a kind of thing which comes home to men more than threatening, by showing that the threat has come about in some real fact. He was not however content with these things alone, but from these he also introduced and confirmed the argument concerning hell-fire, terrifying them in both ways, and he also solved an inquiry which is often asked. Since many question one with another, “from where arises the untimely deaths and the long diseases of men?” he tells them that these unexpected events are many of them conditional upon certain sins. “How about them who are in continual health,” you ask “and come to a green old age, do they not sin?” No, who say this? “How then,” you ask, “do they not suffer punishment?” Because in the age to come they shall suffer a severer punishment. But we, if we would, neither here nor there need suffer it.

31 *But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged.*

And he said not, “if we punished ourselves” nor “if we took revenge on ourselves,” but if we were only willing to acknowledge our offence, to pass sentence on ourselves, to condemn the things done amiss, we should be rid of the punishment both in this world and the next. For he who condemns himself propitiates God in two ways, both by acknowledging his sins, and by being more on his guard for the future. But since we are not willing to do even this light thing, as we ought to do it, not even thus does He endure to punish us with the world, but even thus spares us, exacting punishment in this world, where the penalty is for a season and the consolation great. The result is both deliverance from sins, and a good hope of things to come, alleviating the present evils. And these things he says, at the same time comforting the sick and rendering the

rest more serious. Therefore he says,

32 *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

He said not, “we are punished” nor “we have vengeance taken on us,” but, “we are chastened.” For what is done belongs rather to admonition than condemnation, to healing than vengeance, to correction than punishment. And not so only but by the threat of a greater evil he makes the present light, saying, “that we may not be condemned with the world.” Do you see how he brings in hell also and that tremendous judgment-seat, and signifies that that trial and punishment is necessary and by all means must be? For if the faithful, which God especially cares for, escapes not without punishment in whatever things they offend (and this is evident from things present), much more the unbelieving and they who commit the unpardonable and incurable sins.

33 *So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—*

Thus, while their fear was yet at its height and the terror of hell remained, he chooses again to bring in also the exhortation in behalf of the poor, on account of which he said all these things, implying that if they do not do this then they are partaking unworthily. But if the not imparting of our goods excludes us from that Table, much more when we violently taking away from the poor. And he said not, “therefore, when you come together, give to them that need,” but, which has a more reverential sound, “wait one for another.” For this also prepared the way for and indicated that, and in a fitting form introduced the exhortation. Then further to shame them,

34 *if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned. About the other things I will give directions when I come.*

By permitting, he hinders it, and more strongly than by an absolute prohibition. For he brings him out of the church and sends him to his house, hereby severely reprimanding and ridiculing them, as slaves to the belly and unable to contain themselves. For he said not, “if any despise the poor,” but, “if any hunger,” discoursing as with impatient children, as with brute beasts which are slaves to appetite. Since it would be indeed very ridiculous if because they were hungry they were to eat at home.

Yet he was not content with this, but added also another more fearful thing, saying, “that your coming together is not to judgment;” that you come not to chastisement, to punishment, insulting the Church, or dishonoring your brother. “For for this cause you come together,” he says, “that you may love one another, that you may profit and be profited. But if the contrary happen, it were better for you to feed yourselves at home.”