

6:3–4 *Sound Words of Our Lord*

Humbly Knowing.

Chrysostom: Presumption therefore arises not from knowledge but from “knowing nothing.” For he that knows the doctrine of godliness is also the most disposed to moderation. He who knows sound words is not unsound. For what inflammation is to the body, pride is to the soul. And as we do not in the first case say that the inflamed part is healthy, so neither do we say of the soul that the arrogant part is healthy. It is possible then to be knowing and yet to know nothing. Homilies on 1 Timothy 17.1

6:4–5 *Disputes About Words*

Dangerous Sophistry.

Clement of Alexandria: Skill in sophistry, an enthusiasm of the Greeks, is a power operating on the imagination, using arguments to implant false opinions as if they were true. It produces rhetoric for persuasion and eristic for controversy. ² If the skills lack philosophy, then anyone at all would find them damaging.... So the admirable apostle was right to play down these appalling excesses in language skills. Stromata 1.8.39.1–40.1.3

Actions Rather Than Elaborate Words.

Gregory of Nazianzus: I shall address my words to those whose cleverness is in words.... “Strife of words” is the term given to all elaborate verbiage by Paul, who proclaims and confirms the “short and final account,” ⁷ Paul, the pupil and teacher of fishermen. These people I speak of have versatile tongues and are resourceful in attacking doctrines nobler and worthier than their own. I only wish they would display comparable energy in their actions. Orations 27.1.8

6:5 *Godliness is a Means of Gain*

The Sin of Judas.

Origen: In appearance Judas championed the cause of the poor and said with indignation, “This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor.” ⁹ But in reality he “was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put in it.” ¹⁰ If, then, anyone in our time who has the bag of the church

speaks like Judas on behalf of the poor but takes away what is put in it, let there be assigned to him the portion along with Judas who did these same things. Commentary on Matthew 11.9.¹¹

The Sin of Commerce in Holy Things.

Jerome: It is of all of us ... that the apostle speaks. Christ is a pauper, let us blush with shame. Christ is lowly, let us be made lowly. Christ was crucified. He did not rule. He was crucified in order to rule. He conquered the world, not in pride but in humility. He destroyed the devil, not by derisive laughter but by weeping; he did not scourge but was scourged. He received a blow but did not give blows. Let us, therefore, imitate our Lord. Homilies on Mark 83.¹²

6:6 Great Gain in Godliness

Proper Temporal Desire.

Augustine: He, then, is happy who has everything he wants but does not want what is not proper.... But, when men have attained that welfare for themselves and for those whom they love, shall we be able to say that they are now happy? They have something which it is proper to wish for, but if they have nothing else, either greater or better or more to their advantage and personal distinction, they are still far from happiness.... Certainly it is proper for them to wish for these things, not for the sake of the things themselves but for another reason, namely, that they may do good by providing for the welfare of those who live under them, but it is not proper to covet them out of the empty pride of self-esteem or useless ostentation or hurtful vanity. Letters 130.5.11.¹³

The Poor Also Can Abuse Resources.

Augustine: I've been wagging a finger at the rich. Poor people, you listen too. You should pay out too; you shouldn't go plundering either. You should give of your means too. You too curb your greed. Listen, you poor, to the same apostle, "There is great gain," he says, "in godliness with contentment." You have the world in common with the rich. You don't have a house in common with the rich, but you do have the sky, you do have the light in common with them. Just look for a sufficiency, look for what is enough, not for more than that. Anything more is a weighing down, not a lifting up of the spirit; a burden, not a reward. Sermons 85.6.¹⁴

6:7 Bringing and Taking Nothing

Assisting a Thief.

Anonymous: Abba Macarius, when in Egypt, found a man who had brought a beast to his cell and was stealing his possessions. As though he was a traveler who did not live there, he went up to the thief and helped him to load the beast, and peaceably led him on his way, saying to himself, “We brought nothing into this world, ¹⁵ but the Lord gave; as he willed, so it is done. Blessed be the Lord in all things.” Sayings of the Fathers Macarius 18.¹⁶

Not Stung by Losses.

Chrysostom: For there is no one free, save only one who lives for Christ. He stands superior to all troubles. And if he does not choose to injure himself, no one else will be able to do this, for he is impregnable. He is not stung by the loss of wealth, for he has learned that we “brought nothing into this world, neither can we carry anything out.” He is not caught by the longings of ambition or glory, for he has learned that our citizenship is in heaven. ¹⁷ No one annoys him by abuse or provokes him by blows. There is only one calamity for a Christian: disobedience to God. All the other things, such as loss of property, exile, peril of life, one does not even reckon to be a grievance at all. And that which all dread, departure hence to the other world—this is to him sweeter than life itself. Letters to the Fallen Theodore 2.5.¹⁸

Detachment.

Augustine: But the world retains its hold on us. On all sides its charms decoy us. We like lots of money, we like splendid honors, we like power to overawe others. We like all these things, but let’s listen to the apostle, “We brought nothing into this world, neither can we take anything out.” Honor should be looking for you, not you for it. You, after all, should sit down in the humbler place, so he that invited you may make you go up to a more honored place. But if he doesn’t wish to, eat where you are sitting, because you brought nothing into this world. Sermons 39.2.¹⁹

Disordered Desire.

Augustine: We neither take nor snatch anything away with us. What if we could take something—wouldn’t we be devouring people alive? What is this monstrously avid appetite, when even huge beasts know their limits? The time they pounce on something, you see, is when they are hungry; but when they feel satisfied, they spare their prey. It is only the avarice and greed of the rich that is forever insatiable. Sermons 367.1.²⁰

6:8 If We Have Food and Clothing

The Apostolic Way of Life.

Chrysostom: For it is not by beautifying herself, or by living a life of luxury, or by demanding from her husband money, or by being extravagant and lavish that a good wife will be able to win him over. When she removes herself from all present concerns and imprints upon herself the apostolic way of life, when she displays great modesty, decorum, disdain for money and forbearance, then she will be able to capture him. When she says, “If we have food and clothing, we have all that we need,” when she practices this philosophy in her actions and, laughing at physical death, calls this life nothing, when she considers along with the prophet every glory of this life to be as the flower of the field, ²¹ then she will capture him. On Virginitv 47.1.²²

Not for Self-Exaltation.

Chrysostom: And observe also their laws, ²³ how moderate and freed from all vainglory. Thus: “Having,” says he, “food and covering, let us be content.” Not like him of Sinope [Diogenes the Cynic], who clothed in rags and living in a cask to no good, astonished many but profited none. Paul did none of these things. For neither had he an eye to ostentation, but was both clothed in ordinary apparel with all decency, and lived in a house continually, and displayed all exactness in the practice of all other virtue. These things the cynic despised, living impurely and publicly disgracing himself, and dragged away by his mad passion for glory. Homilies on First Corinthians 35.4.²⁴

The Paradox of Faith.

Cyril of Jerusalem: For those who in appearance are rich, though they have many possessions, are yet poor in soul. The more they amass, the more they pine with longing for what they lack. But the believer, paradoxically, is rich even when poor. Knowing that we have need only of raiment and food and being content with these, he has trampled riches underfoot. Catechetical Lectures 5.2.²⁵

Touching the Ground.

Jerome: Let us now speak in particular about the interior man. A wheel, as you know, rests upon the ground with a very slight base. Nor does it merely rest; it rolls along; it does not stand still but barely touches the ground and passes on. Further, when it rolls onward, it always mounts higher. So the saintly man, because he has a human body, has to give some thought to earthly matters. When it comes to food

and clothing and other such things, he is content with what he has, and merely touching the ground with them, hastens on to higher things. Homilies on the Psalms 10.26

Daily Bread.

Augustine: “Give us today our daily bread.”²⁷ It can be taken quite simply that we pour out this prayer for our daily sustenance, that we may have plenty of it; and if we don’t have plenty, that we may not lack it entirely. He called it “daily,” “for as long as it is called ‘today.’”²⁸ Daily we live, daily we get up, daily we take our fill, daily we get hungry. May he give us our daily bread. Sermons 58.5.29

Moderation.

Basil the Great: But, if a man would also have mercy upon his body as being a possession necessary to the soul and its co-operator in carrying on life on earth, he will occupy himself with its needs only so far as is required to preserve it and keep it vigorous by moderate care in the service of the soul. He will by no means allow it to become unmanageable through satiety. On Detachment, Homily 21.30

Victory Over Covetousness.

John Cassian: This then is the perfect victory over covetousness. It is not to allow a gleam from the very smallest scrap of it to remain in our heart, as we know that we shall have no further power of quenching it if we cherish even the tiniest bit of a spark of it in us. And we can better preserve this virtue unimpaired if we remain in a monastery, and as the apostle says, having food and clothing, are therewith content. Institutes 7.28–29.31

6:9a *Those Who Desire to Be Rich*

Anxious Fear.

Cyprian: You are afraid that your wealth may fail. You may have begun to do some good generously from it, yet you do not know, in your wretchedness, that your life itself may fail, and your salvation as well. While you are anxious lest any of your possessions be diminished, you do not take notice that you yourself, a lover of mammon rather than of your soul, are being diminished. While you are afraid lest for your own sake you lose your estate, you yourself are perishing for the sake of your estate. Works and Almsgiving 10.32

See the Consequences.

Chrysostom: Do you see the skill of physicians, who besides health are supplying you also with the riches of wisdom? Sit down therefore with them, and learn from them the nature of your disease. For instance, do you love wealth and greedy gain, like the fevered love water? Listen to their admonitions. For it is just as the physician says to you, If you wish only to gratify your desire, you will perish and undergo this or that consequence. In the same way Paul wrote, “They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare of the devil, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Homilies on Matthew 74.4.³³

6:9b *Falling into a Snare*

6:9c *Hurtful Desires that Plunge People into Ruin*

Unworthy Desire Is the Issue.

Augustine: He did not say: Those who are rich. He said: Those who seek to become rich.... The name of riches is, as it were, sweet-sounding to the ear. But, “many vain and harmful desires”—does that sound sweet? To be “involved in many troubles”—does that sound sweet? Do not be so misled by one false good that you will thereby cling to many real evils. Sermons 11.3.³⁵

Do Not Consent to Desire That Leads to Death.

Augustine: See what a fight we have with our dead sins, as that active soldier of Christ and faithful teacher of the church shows. For how is sin dead when it works many things in us while we struggle against it? What are these many things except foolish and harmful desires which plunge into death and destruction those who consent to them? And to bear them patiently and not to consent to them is a struggle, a conflict, a battle. Against Julian 2.9.32.³⁶

6:10 *The Root of All Evils*

The Just Person.

Clement of Alexandria: Poverty of heart is the true wealth, and the true nobility is not that founded on riches but that which comes from a contempt for riches. It is disgraceful to boast about one's possessions. Not to be concerned about them any longer very clearly proves the just man. *Christ the Educator* 2.3.39.37

Virtue Its Own Reward.

Ambrose: How happy is the man who has been able to cut out the root of vices, avarice. Surely he will not dread this balance. Avarice generally dulls men's senses and corrupts their judgments, so that they think piety a gain, and money a sort of reward for sagacity. But great is the reward of piety and the gaining of sobriety. The possession of these virtues is sufficient. *Letters* 15.38

Enough Is Enough.

Ambrose: Therefore the man of good counsel says, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content." 39 For he knew that the root of all evils is the love of money. Therefore he was content with what he had, without seeking for what was another's. Sufficient for me, he says, is what I have. Whether I have little or much, to me it is much. *Duties of the Clergy* 2.17.89.40

Love of Money Leads to Bad Living and Bad Faith.

Chrysostom: What evils does it not cause! What fraudulent practices, what robberies! What miseries, enmities, contentions, battles! Does it not stretch forth its hand even to the dead, even to fathers and brothers? Do not they who are possessed by this passion violate the laws of nature and the commandments of God? In short everything? Is it not this that renders our courts of justice necessary? Take away therefore the love of money, and you put an end to war, to battle, to enmity, to strife and contention. *Homilies on 1 Timothy* 17.41

Faith Damaged by Avarice.

Chrysostom: In many places 42 Paul covertly signifies this point: a corrupt life is the parent of evil doctrines. "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, which some reaching after, have been led astray from the faith." Indeed, many of those who are conscious of wickedness and would prefer not to pay its penalty are by this fear damaged also in their faith concerning the resurrection. This can happen even when they on a daily basis are virtuously desiring to behold the resurrection. *Homilies on First Corinthians* 40.3.43

Possessing Nothing as If Everything.

Chrysostom: The man who possesses nothing as if he had everything disdains all. He is very outspoken with officials, and rulers, and the sovereign. For by despising possessions and advancing methodically, he will scorn even death with ease. Since he is above these things, he will speak openly with everyone and tremble with fear before no one. But the man who has devoted himself to money is a slave to it and also to his reputation, honor, the present life, in short, to all human concerns. Consequently, Paul has called it the root of all evil. On Virginité 81.⁴⁴

Some Phantom of Good.

Gregory of Nyssa: The tree, then, from which comes this fruit of mixed knowledge is among those things which are forbidden. Its fruit is combined of opposite qualities, and therefore for this reason perhaps has the serpent to commend it. For the evil is not exposed in its nakedness, thereby appearing in its own proper nature; for wickedness would surely fail of its effect were it not decked with some fair color to entice to the desire of it him whom it deceives. But now the nature of evil is in a manner mixed and thus keeps destruction like some snare concealed in its depths and displays some phantom of good in the deceitfulness of its exterior. The beauty of the substance seems good to those who love money. On the Making of Man 20.2.⁴⁵

Disordered Love.

Augustine: For when the soul loves its own power, it slips from the common whole to its own particular part. Had it followed God as its ruler in the universal creature, it could have been most excellently governed by his laws. But in that apostatizing pride, which is called “the beginning of sin,”⁴⁶ it sought for something more than the whole; and while it struggled to govern it by its own laws, it was thrust into caring for a part, since there is nothing more than the whole. So by desiring something more, it becomes less, and for this reason covetousness is called “the root of all evils.” On the Trinity 12.9.14.⁴⁷

Greed and Charity.

Augustine: So love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. I mean, I can see that you love yourself, because you love God. Charity is the root of all good works. Just as greed, after all, is the root of all evil, so charity is the root of all good things. Sermons 179a.5.⁴⁸

6:11a *Man of God*

Close to Spiritual Things.

Isaac of Nineveh: Strive to discover stirrings that are good during the time of prayer, as the wise do. These consist in reflection on the Spirit's insights and sagacious thought, and consideration during the time of prayer of how to please the will of the Maker of all. This is the final end of all virtue and of all prayer. When in these matters you receive the power that stems from grace to be bound firmly to their continual stirrings, you will become a "man of God" and will be close to spiritual things. Instructions for Monks, second part.¹

6:11b *Shun All This*

Freedom of the Heart.

Augustine: "As for you, man of God, flee from these things." You see, he didn't just say, "Leave and forsake," but "Flee from," as from an enemy. You were trying to flee with gold; flee from gold instead. Let your heart flee from it, and your use of it need have no worries. Do without greed; don't do without concern for others. There's something you can do with gold, if you're its master, not its slave. If you're the master of gold, you can do good with it; if you're its slave, it can do evil with you. Sermons 177.3.²

6:12a *Fight the Good Fight*

Do Not Be Diverted.

Ambrose: Let godliness move you to justice, continence, gentleness, that you may avoid childish acts, and that rooted and grounded in grace you may fight the good fight of faith. Do not entangle yourself in the affairs of this life, for you are fighting for God. ³ For he who fights for the emperor is forbidden by human laws to enter upon lawsuits or do any legal business or sell merchandise. How much more ought he who enters upon the warfare of faith to keep away from every kind of business. Let him be satisfied with the produce of his own little bit of land, if he has it. If he has not that, let him be content with the pay he will get for his service. Duties of the Clergy 1.36.184.⁴

Suffering Persecution.

Athanasius: In another place the apostle says, "And all those who will live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." ⁵ Then, to help prevent people from renouncing godliness when they are persecuted, he urges them to cling to the faith. "You, therefore, continue in the things you have learned and been assured of." ⁶ Just as brothers become strongly knit together when one helps another, so faith and godliness, coming from the same family, cohere together. A person who gives his attention to one of the two is strengthened by the other. Consequently, wishing Timothy to live godly to the end and to fight the battle in faith, St. Paul says, "Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." Festal Letters 9.7

6:12b *When You Made the Good Confession*

Faithfulness to the Good Confession.

Origen: For the angels, as it were, have charge over our souls, to whom "while we are still children we are committed," as it were, "to tutors and governors until the time appointed by the father." ⁸ And they, therefore, now say about the progress of each of us, "Now I know that you fear God." ⁹ Suppose, for example, I intend to be a martyr. An angel could not say to me on this basis, "Now I know that you fear God," for an intention of the mind is known to God alone. But if I shall undertake the struggles, if I shall utter a "good confession," if I shall bear calmly all things which are inflicted. Then an angel can say, as if confirming and strengthening me, "Now I know that you fear God." Homilies on Genesis 8.8.10

Maintain Your Original Vows.

Basil the Great: Recall your glorious profession which you made before God, the angels and men. Remember the august company, the holy chorus of virgins, the assembly of the Lord and the church of saints. Call to mind also your grandmother, old in Christ but still young and strong in virtue, and your mother, vying with her in the Lord and striving by new and unusual toils to destroy former habits. Remember also your sister, who is likewise both imitating and aspiring to surpass them, and who by the advantage of her virginity is outstripping the virtuous actions of her elders and is industriously summoning, both by word and by life, you her sister, as she thought, to a contest of like eagerness. Recall these, and also the angelic chorus singing with them to God, the spiritual life in the flesh and the heavenly life on earth. Letters 46, To a Fallen Virgin.12

6:14 *Free from Reproach*

Spiritual Combat.

Chrysostom: There is need not only of profession but of patience also to persevere in that profession, and of vehement contention, and of numberless toils, that you be not overthrown.... It is necessary therefore to be self-collected and well belted in on every side. All around appear pleasures attracting the eyes of the soul. Those of beauty, of wealth, of luxury, of indolence, of glory, of revenge, of power, of dominion, and these are all fair and lovely in appearance, and able to captivate those who are unsteady and who do not love the truth. Homilies on 1 Timothy 17.13

6:15a *The Blessed and Only Sovereign*

The Sovereign Son Inseparable from the Father.

Ambrose: When I speak of the Father, I do not make separation of the Son, because the Son is in the bosom and the solitude of the Father. ¹⁴ When I speak of the Son alone, I also associate the Father, even as the Son also associated him, saying, “Behold the hour is coming for you to leave me alone. But I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” ¹⁵ In this way is the Father called “the blessed and only Sovereign”— in such a way that the Son, who is always in the Father, is not separated from him. The Prayer of Job and David 2.4.15.16

6:15b *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*

A King to Kings, Yet Lowly.

Chrysostom: When someone sees resplendent lords of rank, kings, leaders and all those who appear prominent in wealth, to them he speaks in fearful words. Their dynasties are advantaged by his fear. Yet “now, kings, understand; be instructed, all you who judge the earth; serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in him with trembling,” ¹⁷ because “he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” Wherever the mighty rules, God threatens with the fear of his kingdom. Yet wherever the worthless are humbled, God offers the medicine of his clemency. For this God is a great King to those who reign and a Lord to those who exercise lordship. Again, the very same one lowers his rank and is found, according to holy Scripture, to

be a Father to orphans and a Judge to widows, a King to kings, a Leader to leaders, a Lord to lords. On Repentance and Almsgiving 7.3.9.¹⁸

The Economy of Titles.

Gregory of Nazianzus: God's other titles fall into two distinct groups. The first group belongs to his power, the second to his providential ordering of the world, a twofold providential ordering—involving, and not involving, incarnation. Clear cases of titles which belong to his power are ... “King” of “rulers” and “Lord of the masters.” ... For since we are controlled by three conditions—fear of punishment, hope for salvation and glory too, and the practice of the virtues which result in these last—the name which mentions retribution deals with fear. The one which mentions salvation with hope, and that which refers to virtues, disciplines us to practice them. The intention is that by, as it were, carrying God inside him, one may have some success here and press on all the harder to perfection, toward that affinity with God which comes from the virtues. Orations 30.19.¹⁹

Baptismal Faith.

John of Damascus: He, the framer of all creation and maker of our race, became man for our sake, and coming from a holy Virgin's womb, on earth conversed with men. For us ungrateful servants the master endured death, even the death of the cross, that the tyranny of sin might be destroyed, that the former condemnation might be abolished, that the gates of heaven might be open to us again. In this way he has exalted our nature, and set it on the throne of glory, and granted to them that love him an everlasting kingdom and joys beyond all that tongue can tell or ear can hear. He is the mighty and the only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords, whose might is invincible and whose lordship is beyond comparison. He alone is holy and dwells in holiness, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is glorified. Into this faith I have been baptized. Barlaam and Ioasaph 24.211.²¹

6:16a *Who Alone Has Immortality*

God's Immortality Unique.

Origen: To be fully alive belongs to God, more fully than to any creature. The apostle considered the superiority of the life of God to be beyond comparison. It is with this in mind that Scripture says “Surely as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.”²² This is God, “Who alone has immortality,”

because none of the living beings with God has the life whose aliveness is absolutely unchangeable and immutable. Commentary on John 2.123.23

Shared with the Son.

Ambrose: How could the Son not have immortality who has life in himself? He has it in his nature. He has it in his essential Being. God has it not as a temporal grace but owing to his eternal Godhead. He has it not by way of a gift as a servant but by peculiar right of his generation, as the coeternal Son. He has life in the same way that the Father has life. Of the Christian Faith 5.2.35.24

The Son Is the Immortality.

Gregory of Nyssa: But we, even when we are told that God “only has immortality,” we understand by “immortality” the Son. For life is immortality, and the Lord is that life, who said, “I am the Life.”²⁵ And if he is said to dwell “in the light that no man can approach,” again we make no difficulty in understanding that the true Light, unapproachable by falsehood, is the Only-begotten, in whom we learn from the Truth itself that the Father is.²⁶ Are we to think of the Only-begotten in a manner worthy of the Godhead, or to call him, as heresy prescribes, perishable and temporary? Against Eunomius 2.4.27

The Unchangeable Is Immortal.

Augustine: Already you have told me, O Lord, by means of a loud voice in my interior ear, that you are eternal, alone possessing immortality, since you change in relation neither to any form nor to motion. Your will is not altered in regard to periods of time, because no will is immortal if it is now one way and now another. In your sight this is clear to me. May it become more and more clear, I pray, and may I continue to live soberly under your protecting wings, within the influence of this revelation. Confessions 12.11.11.28

The Soul Only Relatively Immortal.

Augustine: I am doing the right thing in taking my time over this question [about the origin of the soul], because I have no doubt at all that the soul is immortal, not as God is, “Who only has immortality,” but in a certain way according to its own nature, and that it is a created being, not the substance of the Creator: this I hold most firmly, as well as all other truths about the nature of the soul. Letters 143.1.7.29

God's Immortality Distinguished from the Soul's.

Augustine: So if God alone has immortality, is the soul mortal? That's why I said the soul is immortal after its own fashion. You see, it can also die. Your graces must try to understand, and then the problem will be solved. I make bold to say, the soul can die, can be killed. Certainly it's immortal. So there you are; I make bold to say it is both immortal in one sense and capable of being killed in another sense. And that's why I said there is a kind of immortality, that is to say, an absolute and total unchangeableness, which God alone has, as it says of him, "Who alone has immortality." Sermons 65.4.³⁰

6:16b Dwells in Unapproachable Light

Charity Does Not Love the Corruptible.

Origen: We must understand, therefore, that this charity, which God is, in whoever it exists loves nothing earthly, nothing material, nothing corruptible. It is against its nature to love anything corruptible, seeing that it is itself the fount of incorruption. For, because God, "who only has immortality and inhabits light inaccessible," is charity, it is charity alone that possesses immortality. Commentary on the Song of Songs, Prologue.2.28.³¹

The Soul Images God's Incorruptibility.

Methodius: For the unbegotten and incorporeal beauty, which neither begins nor is corruptible but is unchangeable and grows not old and is in need of nothing, he resting in himself and in the very light which is in unspeakable and inapproachable places, embracing all things in the circumference of his power, creating and arranging, made the soul after the image of his image. Therefore, also, it is reasonable and immortal. The Banquet of the Ten Virgins 6.1.³²

Beyond Comprehension.

Chrysostom: And pay heed to the accuracy with which Paul speaks. He did not say, "Who is an unapproachable light" but "Who dwells in unapproachable light." Why? So that you may learn that if the dwelling is unapproachable, so much more so is the God that dwells in it. But Paul did not say this to make you suspect that there is a house or place surrounding God. Rather, he wished you to have a deeper and superior knowledge that God is beyond our comprehension.... A thing is unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be investigated nor can anyone come near to it. We call the sea incomprehensible because, even when divers lower themselves into its waters and go down to a great depth, they cannot find the

bottom. We call that thing unapproachable which, from the start, cannot be searched out or investigated. On the Incomprehensible Nature of God 3.2.33

Creation by Means of Light.

Ambrose: There would be no purpose in the world if it were not seen. In fact, God himself was in the light, because he “dwells in light inaccessible,” and he “was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.”³⁴ But he wishes the light to be such as might be perceived by mortal eyes. The person who desires to erect a house as a fitting habitation for the head of a family determines first how it may receive light abundantly before he lays the foundation. This is the first requisite. If this is lacking, the whole house is without beauty and is uninhabitable. It is light which sets off the other beautiful objects in the house. Six Days of Creation 1.9.33.35

God Is Light.

Gregory of Nazianzus: God is light: the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable, that can neither be conceived in the mind nor uttered with the lips, that gives life to every reasoning creature. He is in the world of thought what the sun is in the world of sense; presenting himself to our minds in proportion as we are cleansed; and loved in proportion as he is presented to our mind; and again, conceived in proportion as we love him; himself contemplating and comprehending himself and pouring himself out on what is external to him. That light, I mean, which is contemplated in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, whose riches is their unity of nature and the one out-leaping of their brightness. Orations 40.5.36

Seen with the Eyes of the Heart.

Augustine: If you ask whether he can also be seen at any time as he is, I answer that this was promised to his sons, of whom it is said, “We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”³⁷ If you ask by what means we shall see him, I answer: as the angels see, for we shall then be equal to them,³⁸ as the angels see those things which are called visible; but no one has ever seen God nor can see him, because “he inhabits light inaccessible,” and his nature is invisible as it is immortal. Letters 147.15.37.39

Charity the Eyes of the Heart.

Augustine: This, then, is charity, however small a thing it appears to us, as it inheres in our will; “it is not seen in any locality, nor sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by

its utterance, nor perceived in its approach.”⁴⁰ How much more true this is of God, of whom charity is the pledge within us! If our interior man is an image of him—insignificant, indeed—not begotten of him but created by him, and, although it is still renewed day by day,⁴¹ it now dwells in such light that no faculty of corporeal sight comes near to it, and if those things which we perceive with the eyes of the heart by means of that light are distinguished from each other and separated by no intervals of space, how much more is this true of God, who inhabits light inaccessible to the bodily senses, to whom there can be no approach except for the clean of heart! Letters 147.18.44.⁴²

6:16c *Whom No One Has Ever Seen or Can See*

God Is Seen in Contemplation.

Chrysostom: But if Paul said elsewhere, “God was manifested in the flesh,”⁵⁰ do not wonder, because the manifestation took place in the flesh, not in his substance. Furthermore, Paul also testified here that God himself was invisible, not only to men but also to the powers above. Having said “was manifested in the flesh,” he added, “he appeared to angels.” Thus he became visible to the angels as well, at the time when he put on the flesh.... Similarly, when he said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,”⁵¹ he was speaking of mental vision—which is within our power—and also of thought about God, so, likewise, it may be said of the angels that by reason of their pure and constant nature, they continually think of nothing else but God.... Therefore, just as he has been seen by many, in whatever way vision of him was possible for them, but no one has ever beheld his essence, so also we all now know God, but no one knows his substance, whatever it is, except only he who has been begotten from him. Homilies on John 15.1–2.52

God Is Seen in the Mind and Heart.

Augustine: God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, is in his own proper nature invisible. But he has appeared when he wished and to whom he wished; not as he is but in whatever way he wished, being served after all by all creation. If your mind, though it is invisible in your body, can appear by uttering your voice, and the voice in which your mind appears when you speak is not the substance of your mind, it means that mind is one thing and voice another, and yet mind becomes apparent in a thing which in itself is not. So too God, if he appeared in fire, is all the same not fire; if he appeared in smoke, still he isn’t smoke; if he appeared in a sound, he isn’t a sound. These things are not God, but they indicate God. If we bear this in mind, we may safely believe that it could have been the Son who appeared to Moses and was called both Lord and angel of the Lord. Sermons 7.4.⁵³