

1 Corinthians 4:3-5

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of humility in judgment and the need for self-examination in light of God's ultimate authority.

Scripture: Psalm 139:12, Ecclesiastes 1:2, Matthew 7:1, Acts 2:37, Romans 6:7, Romans 8:27, Romans 14:10, 1 Corinthians 4:3, 1 Corinthians 6:3, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Judging Others", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of judgment and the importance of humility, highlighting the need to refrain from harshly judging others and to focus on self-reflection. He emphasizes that true judgment belongs to the Lord, who sees the hidden things of darkness and the intentions of the heart. Chrysostom warns against the disease of covetousness and the restless pursuit of wealth, urging listeners to consider the consequences of their actions and to show compassion towards those in need. He encourages a shift in perspective from worldly desires to spiritual gain, reminding that true wealth lies in righteousness and compassion.

Transcript

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea I judge not my own self. For I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judges me is the Lord.

Together with all other ills, I know not how, there has come upon man's nature the disease of restless prying and of unseasonable curiosity, which Christ Himself chastised, saying, Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged. A kind of thing, which has no pleasure as all other sins have, but only punishment and vengeance. For though we are ourselves full of ten thousand evils, and bearing the beams in our own eyes, we become exact inquisitors of the offenses of our neighbor which are not at all bigger than motes. And so this matter at Corinth was falling out. Religious men and dear to God were ridiculed and cast out for their want of learning; while others, brimful of evils innumerable, were classed highly because of their fluent speech. Then like persons sitting in public to try causes, these were the sort of votes they kept rashly passing: such an one is worthy: such an one is better than such another; this man is inferior to that; that, better than this. And, leaving off to mourn for their own bad ways, they had become judges of others; and in this way again were kindling grievous warfare.

Mark then, how wisely Paul corrects them, doing away with this disease. For since he had said, Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful, and it seemed as if he were giving them an opening to judge and pry into each man's life, and this was aggravating the party feeling; lest such should be the effect on them, he draws them away from that kind of petty disputation, saying, With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you; again in his own person carrying on the discourse.

2. But what means, With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's day? (ἀλλά ἡμῶν ἢ τοῦ κόσμου) I judge myself unworthy, says he, of being judged by you. And why say I, by you? I will add, by (οὐδὲν ἢ τοῦ κόσμου ἢ τοῦ κόσμου) any one else. Howbeit, let no one condemn Paul of arrogance; though he says that no man is worthy to pass sentence concerning him. For first, he says these things not for his own sake, but wishing to rescue others from the odium which they had incurred from the Corinthians. And in the next place, he limits not the matter to the Corinthians merely, but himself also he deposes from this right of judging; saying, that to decree such things was a matter beyond his decision. At least he adds, I judge not my own self.

But besides what has been said, we must search out the ground upon which these expressions were uttered. For he knew well in many cases how to speak with high spirit: and that, not of pride or arrogance, but of a certain excellent management [ὡς ἡμεῖς οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλὰ ἡμῶν ἢ τοῦ κόσμου] seeing that in the present case also he says this, not as lifting up himself, but as taking down other men's sails, and earnestly seeking to invest the saints with due honor. For in proof that he was one of the very humble, hear what he says, bringing forward the testimony of his enemies on this point; His bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account; 2 Corinthians 10:10 and again, Last of all, as to one born out of due time, He appeared unto me also. 2 Corinthians 15:8 But notwithstanding, see this lowly man, when the time called on him, to what a pitch he raises the spirit of the disciples, not teaching pride but instilling a wholesome courage. For with these same discoursing he says, And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 1 Cor. vi. 2. For as the Christian ought to be far removed from arrogance, so also from flattery and a mean spirit. Thus, if any one says, I count money as nothing, but all things here are to me as a shadow, and a dream, and child's play; we are not at all to charge him as arrogant; since in this way we shall have to accuse Solomon himself of arrogance, for speaking austere (ὡς ἡμεῖς οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλὰ ἡμῶν ἢ τοῦ κόσμου) on these things, saying Vanity of vanities Ecclesiastes 1:2 all is vanity. But God forbid that we should call the strict rule of life by the name of arrogance. Wherefore to despise these things is not haughtiness, but greatness of soul; albeit we see kings, and rulers, and potentates, making much of them. But many a poor man, leading a strict life despises them; and we are not therefore to call him arrogant but highminded: just as, on the other hand, if any be extremely addicted to them, we do not call him lowly of heart and moderate, but weak, and poor spirited, and ignoble. For so, should a son despise the pursuits which become his father and affect slavish ways, we should not commend him as lowly of heart, but as base and servile we should reproach him. What we should admire in him would be, his despising those meaner things and making much account of what came to him from his father. For this is arrogance, to think one's self better than one's fellow-servants: but to pass the true sentence on things comes not of boasting, but of strictness of life.

On this account Paul also, not to exalt himself, but to humble others, and to keep down those who were rising up out of their places, and to persuade them to be modest, said, With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's day. Observe how he soothes the other party also. For whosoever is told that he looks down on all alike, and deigns not to be judged of any one, will not thenceforth any more feel pain, as though himself were the only one excluded. For if he had said, Of you, only, and so held his

peace; this were enough to gall them as if treated contemptuously. But now, by introducing, nor yet of man's day, he brought alleviation to the blow; giving them partners in the contempt. Nay, he even softens this point again, saying, not even do I judge myself. Mark the expression, how entirely free from arrogance: in that not even he himself, he says, is capable of so great exactness.

3. Then because this saying also seemed to be that of one extolling himself greatly, this too he corrects, saying, Yet am I not hereby justified. What then? Ought we not to judge ourselves and our own misdeeds? Yes surely: there is great need to do this when we sin. But Paul said not this, For I know nothing, says he, against myself. What misdeed then was he to judge, when he knew nothing against himself? Yet, says he, he was not justified. 1 Corinthians 6:3 We then who have our conscience filled with ten thousand wounds, and are conscious to ourselves of nothing good, but quite the contrary; what can we say?

And how could it be, if he knew nothing against himself that he was not justified? Because it was possible for him to have committed certain sins, not however, knowing that they were sins. From this make your estimate how great shall be the strictness of the future judgment. It is not, you see, as considering himself unblameable that he says it is so unmeet for him to be judged by them, but to stop the mouths of those who were doing so unreasonably. At least in another place, even though men's sins be notorious, he permits not judgment unto others, because the occasion required it. For why do you judge your brother, says he, Romans 14:10 or, thou, why do you set at nought your brother? For thou were not enjoined, O man, to judge others, but to test your own doings. Why then do you seize upon the office of the Lord? Judgment is His, not yours.

To which effect, he adds, Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come; who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall each man have his praise from God. What then? Is it not right that our teachers should do this? It is right in the case of open and confessed sins, and that with fitting opportunity, and even then with pain and inward vexation: not as these were acting at that time, of vain-glory and arrogance. For neither in this instance is he speaking of those sins which all own to be such, but about preferring one before another, and making comparisons of modes of life. For these things He alone knows how to judge with accuracy, who is to judge our secret doings, which of these be worthy of greater and which of less punishment and honor. But we do all this according to what meets our eye. For if in my own errors, says he, I know nothing clearly, how can I be worthy to pass sentence on other men? And how shall I who know not my own case with accuracy, be able to judge the state of others? Now if Paul felt this, much more we. For (to proceed) he spoke these things, not to exhibit himself as faultless, but to show that even should there be among them some such person, free from transgression, not even he would be worthy to judge the lives of others: and that if he, though conscious to himself of nothing declare himself guilty, much more they who have ten thousand sins to be conscious of in themselves.

4. Having thus, you see, stopped the mouths of those who pass such sentences, he travails next with strong feeling ready to break out and come upon the unclean person. And like as when a storm is coming on, some clouds fraught with darkness run before it; afterwards, when the crash of the thunders arises and works the whole heavens into one black cloud, then all at once the rain bursts down upon the earth: so also did it then happen. For though he might in deep indignation have dealt with the fornicator, he does not so; but with fearful words he first represses the swelling pride of the man, since in truth, what had occurred was a twofold sin, fornication, and, that which is worse than fornication, the not grieving over the sin committed. For not so much does he bewail the sin, as him that committed it and did not as yet repent. Thus, I shall bewail many of those, says he, not simply who have sinned heretofore, but he adds, who

have not repented of the uncleanness and impurity which they wrought. 2 Corinthians 12:21 For he who after sinning has practised repentance, is a worthy object not of grief but of gratulations, having passed over into the choir of the righteous. For, Isaiah 43:26 declare thou your iniquities first, that you may be justified: but if after sinning one is void of shame, he is not so much to be pitied for falling as for lying where he is fallen.

Now if it be a grievous fault not to repent after sins; to be puffed up because of sins, what sort of punishment does it deserve? For if he who is elate for his good deeds is unclean, what pardon shall he meet with who has that feeling with regard to his sins?

Since then the fornicator was of this sort, and had rendered his mind so headstrong and unyielding through his sin, he of course begins by casting down his pride. And he neither puts the charge first, for fear of making him hardened, as singled out for accusation before the rest; nor yet later, lest he should suppose that what related to him was but incidental. But, having first excited great alarm in him by his plain speaking towards others, then, and not till then, he goes on to him, in the course of his rebuke to others giving the man's wilfulness a share beforehand.

For these same words, viz. I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified, and this, He that judges me is the Lord, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, glance not lightly both upon that person, and upon such as act in concert with him and despise the saints. For what, says he, if any outwardly appear to be virtuous and admirable persons? He, the Judge, is not a discernor of externals only, but also brings to light all secrets.

5. On two accounts you see, or rather on three, correct judgement belongs not to us. One, because, though we be conscious to ourselves of nothing, still we need one to reprove our sins with strictness. Another, because the most part of the things which are done escape us and are concealed. And for a third besides these, because many things which are done by others seem to us indeed fair, but they come not of a right mind. Why do you say then, that no sin has been committed by this or that person? That such an one is better than such another? Seeing that this we are not to pronounce, not even concerning him who knows nothing against himself. For He who discerns secrets, He it is who with certainty judges. Behold, for example; I for my part know nothing against myself: yet neither so am I justified, that is, I am not quit of accounts to be given, nor of charges to be answered. For he does not say this, I rank not among the righteous; but I am not pure from sin. For elsewhere he says also, Romans 6:7, ἵνα μὴ ἡμῶν ὁ θάνατος ἵπται, ἵνα ἡμῶν ἡ ζωὴ ἵπται. He that has died is justified from sin, that is, is liberated.

Again, many things we do, good indeed, but not of a right mind. For so we commend many, not from a wish to render them conspicuous, but to wound others by means of them. And the thing done indeed is right for the well-doer is praised; but the intention is corrupt: for it is done of a satanical purpose. For this one has often done, not rejoicing with his brother, but desiring to wound the other party.

Again, a man has committed a great error; some other person, wishing to supplant him, says that he has done nothing, and comforts him forsooth in his error by recurring to the common frailty of nature. But oftentimes he does this from no mind to sympathize, but to make him more easy in his faults.

Again, a man rebukes oftentimes not so much to reprove and admonish, as publicly to (ἀναγγεῖλαι τὴν ἁμαρτίαν αὐτοῦ ἵνα ὁ πλησίον αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνῃ, ἵνα ὁ πλησίον αὐτοῦ σωθῇ) display and exaggerate his neighbor's sin. Our counsels however themselves men do not know; but, Romans 8:27 He that searches the hearts, knows them perfectly; and He will bring all such things into view at that time. Wherefore he says, Who will bring to

light the secret things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.

6. Seeing then that not even where we know nothing against ourselves, can we be clean from accusations, and where we do any thing good, but do it not of a right mind, we are liable to punishment; consider how vastly men are deceived in their judgments. For all these matters are not be come at by men, but by the unsleeping Eye alone: and though we may deceive men, our sophistry will never avail against Him. Say not then, darkness is around me and walls; who sees me? For He who by Himself formed our hearts, Himself knows all things. Psalm 139:12 For darkness is no darkness with Him. And yet he who is committing sin, well says, Darkness is around me and walls; for were there not a darkness in his mind he would not have cast out the fear of God and acted as he pleased. For unless the ruling principle be first darkened, the entrance of sin without fear is a thing impossible. Say not then, who sees me? For there is that Hebrews 4:12 pierces even unto soul and spirit, joints and marrow; but you see not yourself nor can you pierce the cloud; but as if you had a wall on all sides surrounding you, you are without power to look up unto the heaven.

For whatsoever sin you will, first let us examine, and you shall see that so it is engendered. For as robbers and they who dig through walls when they desire to carry off any valuable thing, put out the candle and then do their work; so also does men's perverse reasoning in the case of those who are committing sin. Since in us also surely there is a light, the light of reason, ever burning. But if the spirit of wickedness coming eagerly on with its strong blast quench that flame, it straightway darkens the soul and prevails against it, and despoils it straightway of all that is laid up therein. For when by unclean desire the soul is made captive, even as a cloud and mist the eyes of the body, so that desire intercepts the foresight of the mind, and suffers it to see nothing at any distance, either precipice, or hell, or fear; but thenceforth, having that deceit as a tyrant over him, he comes to be easily vanquished by sin; and there is raised up before his eyes as it were a wall without windows, which suffers not the ray of righteousness to shine in upon the mind, the absurd conceits of lust enclosing it as with a rampart on all sides. And from that time forward the unchaste woman is everywhere meeting him: standing present before his eyes, before his mind, before his thoughts. And as the blind, although they stand at high noon beneath the very central point of the heaven, receive not the light, their eyes being fast closed up; just so these also, though ten thousand doctrines of salvation sound in their ears from all quarters, having their soul preoccupied with this passion stop their ears against such discourses. And they know it well who have made the trial. But God forbid that you should know it from actual experience.

7. And not only this sin has these effects, but every misplaced affection as well. For let us transfer, if you please, the argument from the unchaste woman unto money, and we shall see here also thick and unbroken darkness. For in the former case, inasmuch as the beloved object is one and shut up in one place, the feeling is not so violent; but in the case of money which shows itself every where, in silversmiths' shops, in taverns, in foundries for gold, in the houses of the wealthy, the passion blows a vehement gale. For when servants swaggering in the market place, horses with golden trappings, men decked with costly garments, are seen with desire by him who has that distemper, the darkness becomes intense which envelopes him. And why speak of houses and silversmiths' shops? For my part I think that such persons, though it be but in a picture and image that they see the wealth, are convulsed, and grow wild, and rave. So that from all quarters the darkness gathers around them. And if they chance to behold a portraiture of a King, they admire not the beauty of the precious stones, nor yet the gold, nor the purple robe, but they pine away. And as the wretched lover before mentioned, though he see but the image of the woman beloved, cleaves unto the lifeless thing; so this man also, beholding a lifeless image of wealth, is

more strongly affected in the same way, as being holden of a more tyrannical passion. And he must henceforth either abide at home, or if he venture into the Forum, return home with innumerable hurts. For many are the objects which grieve his eyes. And just as the former sees nothing else save the woman, even so the latter hastens by poor persons, and all things else, that he may not obtain so much as a slight alleviation. But upon the wealthy he steadily fixes his eyes; by the sight of them introducing the fire into his own soul mightily and vehemently. For it is a fire that miserably devours the person that falls into it; and if no hell were threatened nor yet punishment, this condition were itself punishment; to be continually tormented and never able to find an end to the malady.

8. Well: these things alone might suffice to recommend our fleeing from this distemper. But there is no greater evil than inconsideration which causes men to be riveted unto things that bring sorrow of heart and no advantage. Wherefore I exhort that you cut off the passion at its beginning: for just as a fever on its first attack, does not violently burn up the patients with thirst, but on its increase and the heightening of its fire causes from that time incurable thirst; and though one should let them fill themselves full of drink, it puts not out the furnace but makes it burn fiercer: so also it happens in regard to this passion; unless when it first invades our soul we stop it and shut the doors; having got in, from that time it makes the disease of those who have admitted it incurable. For so both good things and bad, the longer they abide in us, the more powerful they become.

And in all other things too, any one may see that this comes to pass. For so a plant but lately set in the ground is easily pulled up; but no more so when rooted for a long time; it then requires great strength in the lever. And a building newly put together is easily thrown down by those who push against it; but once well fixed, it gives great trouble to those who attempt to pull it down. And a wild beast that has made his accustomed haunt in certain places for a long time is with difficulty driven away.

Those therefore who are not yet possessed by the passion in question, I exhort not to be taken captive. For it is more easy to guard against falling into it, than having fallen to get away.

9. But unto those who are seized by it and broken down, if they will consent to put themselves into the hands of the Word of healing, I promise large hope of salvation, by the Grace of God. For if they will consider those who have suffered and fallen into that distemper and have recovered, they will have good hopes respecting the removal of the disease. Who then ever fell into this disease, and was easily rid of it? That well-known Zacch^{aeus}. For who could be more fond of money than a publican? But all at once he became a man of strict life, (ἰσχυρὸς ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἁγίῳ,) and put out all that blaze. Matthew in like manner: for he too was a publican, living in continual rapine. But he likewise all at once stripped himself of the mischief, and quenched his thirst, and followed after spiritual gain. Considering therefore these, and the like to them, despair not even thou. For if you will, quickly you shall be able to recover. And if you please, according to the rule of physicians, we will prescribe accurately what you should do.

It is necessary then, before all other things, to be right in this, that we never despond, nor despair of our salvation. Next, we must look not only upon the examples of those who have done well, but also upon the sufferings of those who have persisted in sin. For as we have considered Zacch^{aeus}, and Matthew, even so ought we also to take account of Judas, and Gehazi, and Ahar, [perhaps Achan, Josh. vii.] and Ahab, and Ananias, and Sapphira, in order that by the one, we may cast out all despair, and by the other cut off all indolence; and that the soul become not reckless of the remedies suggested. And let us teach them of themselves to say what the Jews said on that day, approaching unto Peter, Acts 2:37, cf. 16:30 What must we do to be saved? And let them hear what they must do.

10. What then must we do? We must know how worthless the things in question are, and that wealth is a run-away slave, and heartless, and encompasses its possessors with ills innumerable. And such words, like charms, let us sound in their ears continually. And as physicians soothe their patients when they ask for cold water, by saying that they will give it, making excuses about the spring, and the vessel, and the fit time, and many more such, (for should they refuse at once, they make them wild with phrensy,) so let us also act towards the lovers of money.

When they say we desire to be rich, let us not say immediately that wealth is an evil thing; but let us assent, and say that we also desire it; but in due time; yea, true wealth; yea, that which has undying pleasure: yea, that which is gathered for yourself, and not for others, and those often our enemies. And let us produce the lessons of true wisdom, and say, we forbid not riches, but ill-gotten riches. For it is lawful to be rich, but without covetousness, without rapine and violence, and an ill report from all men.

With these arguments let us first smooth them down, and not as yet discourse of hell. For the sick man endures not yet such sayings. Wherefore let us go to this world for all our arguments upon these matters; and say, Why is it your choice to be rich through covetousness? That the gold and the silver may be laid up for others, but for you, curses and accusations innumerable? That he whom you have defrauded may be stung by want of the very necessities of life, and bewail himself, and draw down upon you the censure of thousands; and may go at fall of evening about the market place, encountering every one in the alleys, and in utter perplexity, and not knowing what to trust to even for that one night?

For how is he to sleep after all, with pangs of the belly, restless famine besetting him, and that often while it is freezing, and the rain coming down on him? And while thou, having washed, returnest home from the bath, in a glow with soft raiment, merry of heart and rejoicing, and hastening unto a banquet prepared and costly: he, driven every where about the market place by cold and hunger, takes his round, stooping low and stretching out his hands; nor has he even spirit without trembling to make his suit for his necessary food to one so full fed and so bent on taking his ease; nay, often he has to retire with insult.

When therefore you have returned home, when you lie down on your couch, when the lights round your house shine bright, when the table is prepared and plentiful, at that time call to remembrance that poor miserable man wandering about, like the dogs in the alleys, in darkness and in mire; except indeed when, as is often the case, he has to depart thence, not unto house, nor wife, nor bed, but unto a pallet of straw; even as we see the dogs baying all through the night. And thou, if you see but a little drop falling from the roof, throwest the whole house into confusion, calling your slaves and disturbing every thing: while he, laid in rags, and straw, and dirt, has to bear all the cold.

What wild beast would not be softened by these things? Who is there so savage and inhuman that these things should not make him mild? And yet there are some who are arrived at such a pitch of cruelty as even to say that they deserve what they suffer. Yea, when they ought to pity, and weep, and help to alleviate men's calamities, they on the contrary visit them with savage and inhuman censures. Of these I should be glad to ask, Tell me, why do they deserve what they suffer? Is it because they would be fed and not starve?

No, you will reply; but because they would be fed in idleness. And thou, dost not thou wanton in idleness? What say I? Are you not oft-times toiling in an occupation more grievous than any idleness, grasping, and oppressing, and coveting? Better were it if you too were idle after this sort; for it is better to be idle in this way, than to be covetous. But now thou even tramplest on the calamities of others, not only idling, not only

pursuing an occupation worse than idleness, but also maligning those who spend their days in misery.

And let us farther narrate to them the disasters of others; the untimely bereavements, the dwellers in prison, those who are torn to pieces before tribunals, those who are trembling for life; the unlooked for widowhood of women; the sudden reverse of the rich: and with this let us soften their minds. For by our narrations concerning others, we shall induce them by all means to fear these evils in their own case too. For when they hear that the son of such an one who was a covetous and grasping man, or (ἀνὴρ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ φιλαργὺς, instead of ἀνὴρ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ φιλαργὺς, ἡ γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ) the wife of such an one who did many tyrannical actions, after the death of her husband endured afflictions without end; the injured persons setting upon the wife and the children, and a general war being raised from all quarters against his house; although a man be the most senseless of beings, yet expecting himself also to suffer the same, and fearing for his own lest they undergo the same fate, he will become more moderate. Now we find life full of many such histories, and we shall not be at a loss for correctives of this kind.

But when we speak these things, let us not speak them as giving advice or counsel, lest our discourse become too irksome: but as in the order of the narrative and by association with something else, let us proceed in each case unto that kind of conversation, and let us be constantly putting them upon stories of the kind, permitting them to speak of no subject except these which follow: How such an one's splendid and famous mansion fell down; How it is so entirely desolate that all things that were in it have come into the hands of others; How many trials have taken place daily about this same property, what a stir; How many of that man's relations (οἱ συγγενεῖς αὐτοῦ, probably οἱ συγγενεῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ παῖδες αὐτοῦ) have died either beggars, or inhabitants of a prison.

All these things let us speak as in pity for the deceased, and as depreciating things present; in order that by fear and by pity we may soften the cruel mind. And when we see men shrinking into themselves at these narrations, then and not till then let us introduce to their notice also the doctrine of hell, not as terrifying these, but in compassion for others. And let us say, But why speak of things present? For far, indeed, will our concern be from ending with these; a yet more grievous punishment will await all such persons: even a river of fire, and a poisonous worm, and darkness interminable, and undying tortures. If with such addresses we succeed in throwing a spell over them, we shall correct both ourselves and them, and quickly get the better of our infirmity.

And on that day we shall have God to praise us: as also Paul says, And then shall each man have praise from God. For that which comes from men, is both fleeting, and sometimes it proceeds from no good intentions. But that which comes from God both abides continually, and shines out clearly. For when He who knew all things before their creation, and who is free from all passion, gives praise, then also the demonstration of our virtue is even unquestionable.

Knowing these things therefore, let us act so as to be praised of God, and to acquire the greatest blessings; which God grant us all to obtain, 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 and always, and unto all the ages of eternity. Amen.

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