

# Philemon I. 1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and humility in our relationships with others, and encourages us to live a life of love, mercy, and compassion.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:14, Luke 18:13, Galatians 6:17, Ephesians 4:32, Philemon 1:1

**Topics:** "Christian Forgiveness", "Godly Humility"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Paul's letter to Philemon, highlighting Paul's humility and strategic approach in addressing Philemon as a beloved fellow-laborer, appealing for mercy towards a servant. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, mercy, and humility, urging listeners to imitate God's grace and peace in their interactions with others. He warns against honoring men above God, stressing the need to forgive and show kindness, as it leads to blessings and favor from God. Chrysostom encourages a life of virtue, forgiveness, and compassion, illustrating the simplicity and benefits of following God's commandments.

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## Transcript

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-laborer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the Church in your house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

These things are said to a master in behalf of a servant. Immediately at the outset, he has pulled down his spirit, and not suffered him to be ashamed, he has quenched his anger; calling himself a prisoner, he strikes him with compunction, and makes him collect himself, and makes it appear that present things are nothing. For if a chain for Christ's sake is not a shame but a boast, much more is slavery not to be considered a reproach. And this he says, not exalting himself, but for a good purpose doing this, showing thence that he was worthy of credit; and this he does not for his own sake, but that he may more readily obtain the favor. As if he had said, It is on your account that I am invested with this chain. As he also has said elsewhere, there indeed showing his concern, but here his trustworthiness.

Nothing is greater than this boast, to be called the stigmatized of Christ. For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Galatians 6:17

The prisoner of the Lord. For he had been bound on His account. Who would not be struck with awe, who would not be humbled when he hears of the chains of Christ? Who would not be ready to give up even his

own life, much less one domestic?

And Timothy our brother.

He joins another also with himself, that he, being entreated by many, may the more readily yield and grant the favor.

Unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-laborer.

If beloved, then his confidence is not boldness nor forwardness, but a proof of much affection. If a fellow-laborer, then not only may he be instructed in such a matter, but he ought to acknowledge it as a favor. For he is gratifying himself, he is building up the same work. So that apart from any request, he says, you have another necessity for granting the favor. For if he is profitable to the Gospel, and you are anxious to promote the Gospel, then ought you not to be entreated, but to entreat.

Ver. 2. And to our beloved Apphia.

It seems to me that she was his partner in life. Observe the humility of Paul; he both joins Timothy with him in his request, and asks not only the husband, but the wife also, and some one else, perhaps a friend.

And Archippus, he says, our fellow-soldier.

Not wishing to effect such things by command, and not taking it ill, if he did not immediately comply with his request; but he begs them to do what a stranger might have done to aid his request. For not only the being requested by many, but the petition being urged to many, contributes to its being granted. And on this account he says, And Archippus our fellow-soldier. If you are a fellow-soldier, you ought also to take a concern in these things. But this is the Archippus, about whom he says in his Epistle to the Colossians, Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it. Colossians 4:17 It seems to me too, that he, whom he joins with him in this request, was also one of the Clergy. And he calls him his fellow-soldier, that he may by all means cooperate with him.

And to the Church in your house.

Here he has not omitted even the slaves. For he knew that often even the words of slaves have power to overthrow their master; and more especially when his request was in behalf of a slave. And perhaps it was they particularly who exasperated him. He does not suffer them therefore to fall into envy, having honored them by including them in a salutation with their masters. And neither does he allow the master to take offense. For if he had made mention of them by name, perhaps he would have been angry. And if he had not mentioned them at all, he might have been displeased. Observe therefore how prudently he has found a way by his manner of mentioning them, both to honor them by his mention of them, and not to wound him. For the name of the Church does not suffer masters to be angry, even though they are reckoned together with their servants. For the Church knows not the distinction of master and servant. By good actions and by sins she defines the one and the other. If then it is a Church, be not displeased that your slave is saluted with you. For in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free. Galatians 3:28

Grace to you, and peace.

By mentioning grace, he brings his own sins to his remembrance. Consider, he says, how great things God has pardoned in you, how by grace you are saved. Imitate your Lord. And he prays for peace to him;

and naturally: for it comes then when we imitate Him, then grace abides. Since even that servant who was unmerciful to his fellow-servants, until he demanded the hundred pence, had the grace of his master abiding on him. But when he made that demand, it was taken from him, and he was delivered to the tormentors.

Moral. Considering these things, then, let us also be merciful and forgiving towards those who have trespassed against us. The offenses against us here are a hundred pence, but those from us against God are ten thousand talents. But you know that offenses are also judged by the quality of the persons: for instance, he who has insulted a private person has done wrong, but not so much as he who has insulted a magistrate, and he who has offended a greater magistrate offends in a higher degree, and he who offends an inferior one in a lower degree; but he who insults the king offends much more. The injury indeed is the same, but it becomes greater by the excellence of the person. And if he who insults a king receives intolerable punishment, on account of the superiority of the person; for how many talents will he be answerable who insults God? So that even if we should commit the same offenses against God, that we do against men, even so it is not an equal thing: but as great as is the difference between God and men, so great is that between the offenses against Him and them.

But now I find also that the offenses exceed, not only in that they become great by the eminence of the person, but by their very nature. And it is a horrible saying that I am about to utter, and truly awful, but it is necessary to be said, that it may even so shake our minds and strike them with terror, showing that we fear men much more than God, and we honor men much more than God. For consider, he that commits adultery knows that God sees him, yet he disregards Him; but if a man see him, he restrains his lust. Does not such a one not only honor men above God, not only insult God, but, which is even much more dreadful, while he fears them, despise Him? For if he sees them, he restrains the flame of lust, but rather what flame? It is not a flame, but a willfulness. For if indeed it was not lawful to have intercourse with a woman, the matter perhaps would be a flame, but now it is insult and wantonness. For if he should see men, he desists from his mad passion, but for the longsuffering of God he has less regard. Again, another who steals, is conscious that he is committing robbery, and endeavors to deceive men, and defends himself against those who accuse him, and clothes his apology with a fair show; but though he cannot thus prevail with God, he does not regard Him, nor stand in awe of Him, nor honor Him. And if the king indeed commands us to abstain from other men's goods, or even to give away our own, all readily contribute, but when God commands not to rob, not to gather other men's goods, we do not forbear.

Do you see then that we honor men more than God? It is a sad and grievous saying, a heavy charge. But show that it is grievous; flee from the fact! But if you fear not the fact, how can I believe you when you say, We fear your words, you lay a burden on us! It is you that by the deed lay a burden on yourselves, and not our words. And if I but name the words of which you do the deeds, you are offended. And is not this absurd?

May the thing spoken by me prove false! I would rather myself in That Day bear the imputation of ill language, as having vainly and causelessly reproached you, than see you accused of such things.

But not only do you honor men more than God, but you compel others to do so likewise. Many have thus compelled their domestics and slaves. Some have drawn them into marriage against their will, and others have forced them to minister to disgraceful services, to infamous love, to acts of rapine, and fraud, and violence: so that the accusation is twofold, and neither can they obtain pardon upon the plea of necessity. For if you yourself do wrong things unwillingly, and on account of the command of the ruler, not even so is

it by any means a sufficient excuse: but the offense becomes heavier, when you compel them also to fall into the same sins. For what pardon can there be any more for such an one?

These things I have said, not from a wish to condemn you, but to show in how many things we are debtors to God. For if by honoring men even equally with God, we insult God, how much more, when we honor men above Him? But if those offenses that are committed against men are shown to be much greater against God; how much more when the actual offense is greater and more grievous in its own quality.

Let any one examine himself, and he will see that he does everything on account of men. Exceedingly blessed we should be, if we did as many things for the sake of God, as we do for the sake of men, and of the opinion of men, and for the dread or the respect of men. If then we have so many things to answer for, we ought with all alacrity to forgive those who injure us, who defraud us, and not to bear malice. For there is a way to the forgiveness of our sins that needs no labors, nor expense of wealth, nor any other things, but merely our own choice. We have no need to set out upon our travels, nor go beyond the boundaries of our country, nor submit to dangers and toils, but only to will.

What excuse, tell me, shall we have in things that appear difficult, when we do not do even a light thing, attended too with so much gain and so much benefit, and no trouble? Can you not despise wealth? Can you not spend your substance on the needy? Can you not will anything that is good? Can you not forgive him that has injured you? For if you had not so many things to answer for, and God had only commanded you to forgive, ought you not to do it? But now having so many things to answer for, do you not forgive? And that too, knowing that you are required to do it on account of things which you have from Him? If indeed we go to our debtor, he knowing it, receives us courteously, and shows us honor, and pays us every attention in a liberal way; and that though he is not paying off his debt, but because he wishes to render us merciful in our demand of payment: and thou, who owest so much to God, and art commanded to forgive that you may receive in return, dost not thou forgive? And wherefore not, I beseech you? Woe is me! How much of goodness do we receive, and what wickedness do we show in return! What sleepiness! What indolence! How easy a thing is virtue, attended too with much advantage; and how laborious a thing is vice! But we, flying from that which is so light, pursue that which is heavier than lead.

Here there is no need of bodily strength, nor of wealth, nor possessions, nor of power, nor of friendship, nor of any other thing; but it is sufficient only to will, and all is accomplished. Hath some one grieved you, and insulted you, and mocked you? But consider, how often you have done such things to others, and even to the Lord Himself; and forbear, and forgive him it. Consider that you say, Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:13 Consider, that if you dost not forgive, you will not be able to say this with confidence: but if you forgive, you demand the matter as a debt, not by reason of the nature of the thing, but on account of the lovingkindness of Him that has granted it. And wherein is it equal, that one who forgives his fellow-servants should receive remission of the sins committed against the Lord? But nevertheless we do receive such great lovingkindness, because He is rich in mercy and pity.

And that I may show that even without these things, and without the remission, you are a gainer by forgiving, consider how many friends such a person has, how the praises of such an one are everywhere sounded by men who go about saying, This is a good man, he is easily reconciled, he knows not to bear malice, he is no sooner stricken than he is healed. When such an one falls into any misfortune, who will not pity him? When he has offended, who will not pardon him? When he asks a favor of others, who will not grant it to him? Who will not be willing to be the friend and servant of so good a soul? Yea, I entreat you, let us do all things for Him, not to our friends, not to our relations only, but even to our domestics. For

He says, Forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven. Ephesians 6:9

If we forgive our neighbors their trespasses, ours will be forgiven to us, if we bestow alms, if we be humble. For this also takes away sins. For if the publican, only for saying, God be merciful to me a sinner Luke 18:13, went down justified, much more we also, if we be humble and contrite, shall be able to obtain abundant lovingkindness. If we confess our own sins and condemn ourselves, we shall be cleansed from the most of our defilement. For there are many ways that purify. Let us therefore in every way war against the devil. I have said nothing difficult, nothing burdensome. Forgive him that has injured you, have pity on the needy, humble your soul, and though thou be a grievous sinner, you will be able to obtain the kingdom, by these means purging off your sins themselves, and wiping off their stain. And God grant that we all, having purified ourselves here by confession from all the filth of our sins, may there obtain the blessings promised in Christ Jesus our Lord, etc.

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