

Philemon I. 17-19

by St. John Chrysostom

God's goodness is shown in punishing sin, and this is an important aspect of His mercy and justice.

Scripture: Psalm 58:10, Matthew 5:7, Romans 6:2, Philemon 1:17, James 2:13

Topics: "Forgiveness And Mercy", "Gods Goodness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation, using the letter of Paul to Philemon as a powerful example. He emphasizes the need to extend grace and mercy to others, just as God does to us, highlighting the transformative power of forgiveness in relationships. Chrysostom delves into the concept of God's goodness in both punishing and calling us to account, showing how it ultimately leads to our spiritual growth and preservation. He concludes with a reflection on the mercy of God and the importance of showing mercy to others as a reflection of our faith and gratitude for God's grace.

Transcript

If you count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with my own hand, I will repay it: that I say not to you how you owe unto me even your own self besides.

No procedure is so apt to gain a hearing, as not to ask for everything at once. For see after how many praises, after how much preparation he has introduced this great matter. After having said that he is my son, that he is a partaker of the Gospel, that he is my bowels, that you receive him back as a brother, and hold him as a brother, then he has added as myself. And Paul was not ashamed to do this. For he who was not ashamed to be called the servant of the faithful, but confesses that he was such, much more would he not refuse this. But what he says is to this effect. If you are of the same mind with me, if you run upon the same terms, if you consider me a friend, receive him as myself.

If he has wronged you at all. See where and when he has introduced the mention of the injury; last, after having said so many things in his behalf. For since the loss of money is particularly apt to annoy men, that he might not accuse him of this, (for it was most likely that it was spent,) then he brings in this, and says, If he has wronged you. He does not say, If he has stolen anything; but what? If he has wronged you. At the same time he both confessed the offense, and not as if it were the offense of a servant, but of a friend against a friend, making use of the expression of wrong rather than of theft.

Put that to mine account, he says, that is, reckon the debt to me, I will repay it. Then also with that spiritual pleasantry,

I Paul write it with my own hand. At once movingly and pleasantly; if when Paul did not refuse to execute a bond for him, he should refuse to receive him! This would both shame Philemon into compliance, and bring Onesimus out of trouble. I write it, he says, with my own hand. Nothing is more affectionate than these bowels, nothing more earnest, nothing more zealous. See what great concern he bestows in behalf of one man. Albeit I do not say to you how you owe unto me even your own self besides. Then that it might not appear insulting to him, whom he requests, if he had not the confidence to ask and obtain in behalf of a theft, he in some measure relieves this, saying, That I say not unto you how you owe to me even your own self besides. Not only your own things, but yourself also. And this proceeded from love, and was according to the rule of friendship, and was a proof of his great confidence. See how he everywhere provides for both, that he may ask with great security, and that this may not seem a sign of too little confidence in him.

Ver. 20. Yea, brother.

What is, Yea, brother? Receive him, he says. For this we must understand though unexpressed. For dismissing all pleasantry, he again pursues his former considerations, that is, serious ones. And yet even these are serious. For the things that proceed from Saints are of themselves serious, even when they are pleasantry.

Yea, brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord, refresh my heart in Christ.

That is, you grant the favor to the Lord, not to me. My heart, that is, toward yourself.

Ver. 21. Having confidence in your obedience, I write unto you.

What stone would not these things have softened? What wild beast would not these things have rendered mild, and prepared to receive him heartily? After having borne witness to him by so many great testimonies of his goodness, he is not ashamed again to excuse himself. He says, Not barely requesting it, nor as commanding it, nor arbitrarily, but having confidence in your obedience I wrote to you. What he had said at the beginning, having confidence, that he also says here in the sealing up of his letter.

Knowing that you will also do more than I say.

At the same time in saying this he excited him. For he would have been ashamed, though for nothing else, if having such credit with him as this, that he would do more than he said -- he should not do so much.

Ver. 22. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

This also was the part of one who was exceedingly confident -- or rather this too was in behalf of Onesimus, that not being indifferent, but knowing that he upon his return would know the things relating to him, they might lay aside all remembrance of the wrong, and might the rather grant the favor. For great was the influence and the honor of Paul residing among them, of Paul in his age, of Paul after imprisonment. Again, it is a proof of their love that he says that they pray; and to attribute to them so much as that they pray for him. For although I be now in danger, yet nevertheless you will see me if you pray for it.

Ver. 23. Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes you.

He was sent by the Colossians, so that from this it appears that Philemon was also at Colossæ. And he calls him his fellow-prisoner, showing that he also was in much tribulation, so that if not on his own account, yet on account of the other, it was right that he should be heard. For he that is in tribulation, and overlooks himself, and is concerned for others, deserves to be heard.

And he puts him to shame from another consideration, if his countryman is a fellow-prisoner with Paul and suffers affliction with him, and he himself does not grant him a favor in behalf of his own servant. And he has added, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, instead of on account of Christ.

Ver. 24. Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow-workers.

Why then does he put Luke last? And yet he elsewhere says, Only Luke is with me 2 Timothy 4:11, and Demas, he says, was one of those who forsook him, having loved the present world. 2 Timothy 4:10 All these things, although they are mentioned elsewhere, yet nevertheless ought not to be passed over here without enquiry, nor ought we merely to hear them as things of course. But how comes he to say that he who forsook him salutes them? For Erastus, he says, abode at Corinth. 2 Timothy 4:20 He adds Epaphras, both as known to them, and being of their country. And Mark, as being himself also an admirable man. Why then does he number Demas with these? Perhaps it was after this that he became more remiss, when he saw the dangers multiplied. But Luke being last became first. And from these indeed he salutes him, urging him the more to obedience, and calls them his fellow-laborers, and in this way shames him into granting the request.

Ver. 25. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Moral. He has closed his Epistle with a prayer. And indeed prayer is a great good, salutary, and preservative of our souls. But it is great when we do things worthy of it, and do not render ourselves unworthy. And thou too, therefore, when you go to the priest, and he shall say to you, The Lord will have mercy on you, my son, do not confide in the word only, but add also works. Do acts worthy of mercy, God will bless you, my son, if indeed you do things worthy of blessing. He will bless you, if you show mercy to your neighbor. For the things which we wish to obtain from God, of those we ought first to impart to our neighbors. But if we deprive our neighbors of them, how can we wish to obtain them? Blessed, He says, are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Matthew 5:7 For if men show mercy to such, much more will God, but to the unmerciful by no means. For he shall have judgment without mercy to him that has showed no mercy. James 2:13

An excellent thing is mercy! Why then have you not done it to another? Do you wish to be pardoned, when you offend, why then do you not yourself pardon him who has offended you? But you come to God, asking of Him the kingdom of heaven, and you yourself dost not give money when it is begged of you. For this cause we do not obtain mercy, because we do not show mercy. But why? You say. Is not this also a part of mercy, to show mercy to the unmerciful? Nay! For he that treated with the greatest kindness the hard-hearted cruel man, that had done numberless ills to his neighbor, how should he be merciful? What then, say you? Hath not the Laver saved us, who had committed infinite evils? It has delivered us from them, not that we should commit them again, but that we may not commit them. For how shall we, it is said, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Romans 6:2

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law? God forbid. Romans 6:15 For this cause God has delivered you from those sins that you might no more run back to that dishonor. Since even physicians relieve their feverish patients from their heat, not that they may abuse their health to their injury and disorder, (since it would be better to be sick, if one was about to use his health only that he might confine himself again to his bed,) but having learned the evils that arise from sickness, they may no longer fall into the same, that they may the more securely preserve their health, that they may do everything that conduces to its preservation.

How then? You say: what is the lovingkindness of God, if He is not about to save the bad? For oftentimes I hear many talking in this way, that He is the Friend of man, and will by all means save all. That we may not therefore vainly deceive ourselves, (for I remember that I made a promise of this kind to you,) come let us today move this argument. I lately discoursed with you about Hell, and I deferred my argument upon the lovingkindness of God. It is proper therefore today to resume it. That there will, then, be a hell, we have, as I think, sufficiently proved, bringing forward the deluge, and former evils, and arguing that it is not possible that He who performed these things should leave the men of the present age unpunished. For if thus He chastised those who sinned before the Law, He will not let those go unpunished who after grace have committed greater wickedness. It has been questioned therefore how is He good? How merciful to man, if at least He punishes? And we have deferred the argument, that we might not overwhelm your ears with a multitude of words.

Come, today let us discharge the debt, and show how good is God, even in punishing. For this discourse would be suitable for us in opposition to the heretics. Let us therefore pay earnest heed to it. God, standing in no need of anything from us, yet created us. For that He stood in need of us, is manifest from His having made us after a long time. For He might have made us long ago, if He had needed us. For if He Himself was, even without us, and we were made in later times, He made us, not needing us.

He made the Heaven, the earth, the sea, all things that exist, for our sake. Tell me, are not these marks of goodness? And many things one might mention. But to cut short the matter, He makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:45 Is not this a mark of goodness? No, you say. For I said once in conversing with a Marcionite, Are not these things a mark of goodness? And he answered, If He did not call men to account for their sins, it were a mark of goodness. But if He calls them to account, it is not goodness. That man, however, is not now present. But come, let us repeat what was then said, and more beside. For I, out of my superfluity, show that if He did not call men to account, He would not be good; but because He does call them to account, therefore He is good.

For, say, if He did not call us to account, would human life then have endured? Should we not then have fallen into the state of beasts? For if when there is this fear impending over us, and the giving account, and judgments, we have gone beyond fishes in devouring one another, we have thrown wolves and lions into the shade in ravaging one another's possessions; if He did not call us to account, and we were persuaded of this, with how great tumult and confusion would life be filled? What would be the fabled labyrinth after this, compared with the perplexities of the world? Would you not see numberless indecencies and disorders? For who then would have respected his father any more? Or who would have spared his mother? Who would have left unattempted any pleasure, any wickedness? And that the matter is so, I will endeavor to show you from one house only. How? You who raise these questions and who have servants; if I could make it manifest to these, that if they should destroy the family of their masters, if they should insult their persons, if they should plunder everything, if they should turn things upside down, if they should treat them as enemies, they would not threaten them, nor correct them, nor punish them, nor

even grieve them with a word, would this be any proof of goodness? I maintain that this is the extreme of cruelty, not only because the wife and children are betrayed by this unreasonable kindness, but because the slaves themselves are destroyed before them. For they will be drunkards, wanton, dissolute, and more irrational than any beasts. Is this, tell me, a proof of goodness, to trample upon the noble nature of the soul, and to destroy both themselves and others beside? Do you see that to call men to account is a proof of great goodness? But why do I speak of slaves, who more readily fall into these sins? But let a man have sons, and let him permit them to do everything they will, and let him not punish them; will they not be worse than anything? Tell me. In the case of men then, it is a mark of goodness to punish, and of cruelty not to punish, and is it not so in the case of God? So that because He is good, therefore He has prepared a hell.

And do you wish that I should speak of another instance of God's goodness? It is not only this, but that He does not suffer the good to become bad. For if they were destined to meet with the same things, they would all be bad. But now this also does not a little console the good. For hear the Prophet, saying, The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance upon the ungodly, he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner. Psalm 58:10 Not rejoicing on account of it, God forbid! But fearing lest he should suffer the same things, he will render his own life more pure. This then is a mark of His great care. Yes, you say, but He ought only to threaten, and not to punish also. But if He does punish, and still you say it is a matter of threat, and on that account become more slothful, if it were really but a threat, would you not become more supine? If the Ninevites had known it was a matter of threat, they would not have repented. But because they repented, they cause the threat to stop at words only. Do you wish it to be a threat only? You have the disposal of that matter. Become a better man, and it stops only at the threat. But if, which be far from you! Thou despises the threat, you will come to the experience of it. The men before the flood, if they had feared the threat, would not have experienced the execution of it. And we, if we fear the threat, shall not expose ourselves to experience the reality. God forbid we should. And may the merciful God grant that we all henceforth, having been brought to sound mind, may obtain those unspeakable blessings. Of which may we all be thought worthy, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, and honor, now and for ever and ever. Amen.

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