

# Philippians 3:18-21

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of living a crucified life in light of our heavenly citizenship and the dangers of earthly indulgence.*

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:18-20, Philippians 4:1-2

**Topics:** "Crucified Life", "Heavenly Citizenship"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not being enemies of the cross of Christ, emphasizing the need to live a crucified life and not seek ease or worldly pleasures. He warns against making idols of our bellies and glorying in shameful things, urging believers to focus on heavenly citizenship and await the Savior, Jesus Christ, who will transform our bodies to be like His glorious body. Chrysostom encourages believers to stand firm in the Lord, be of the same mind, and labor in the Gospel, reminding them that their true citizenship and hope are in heaven.

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## Transcript

For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself.

Nothing is so incongruous in a Christian, and foreign to his character, as to seek ease and rest; and to be engrossed with the present life is foreign to our profession and enlistment. Your Master was crucified, and do you seek ease? Your Master was pierced with nails, and do you live delicately? Do these things become a noble soldier? Wherefore Paul says, Many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. Since there were some who made a pretense of Christianity, yet lived in ease and luxury, and this is contrary to the Cross: therefore he thus spoke. For the cross belongs to a soul at its post for the fight, longing to die, seeking nothing like ease, while their conduct is of the contrary sort. So that even if they say, they are Christ's, still they are as it were enemies of the Cross. For did they love the Cross, they would strive to live the crucified life. Was not your Master hung upon the tree? Do thou otherwise imitate Him. Crucify yourself, though no one crucify you. Crucify yourself, not that you may slay yourself, God forbid, for that is a wicked thing, but as Paul said, The world has been crucified unto me and I unto the world. Galatians 6:14 If you love your Master, die His

death. Learn how great is the power of the Cross; how many good things it has achieved, and does still: how it is the safety of our life. Through it all things are done. Baptism is through the Cross, for we must receive that seal. The laying on of hands is through the Cross. If we are on journeys, if we are at home, wherever we are, the Cross is a great good, the armor of salvation, a shield which cannot be beaten down, a weapon to oppose the devil; you bear the Cross when you are at enmity with him, not simply when you seal yourself by it, but when you suffer the things belonging to the Cross. Christ thought fit to call our sufferings by the name of the Cross. As when he says, Except a man take up his cross and follow Me Matthew 16:24, i.e. except he be prepared to die.

But these being base, and lovers of life, and lovers of their bodies, are enemies of the Cross. And every one, who is a friend of luxury, and of present safety, is an enemy of that Cross in which Paul makes his boast: which he embraces, with which he desires to be incorporated. As when he says, I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me. But here he says, I now tell you weeping. Wherefore? Because the evil was urgent, because such deserve tears. Of a truth the luxurious are worthy of tears, who make fat that which is thrown about them, I mean the body, and take no thought of that soul which must give account. Behold you live delicately, behold you are drunken, today and tomorrow, ten years, twenty, thirty, fifty, a hundred, which is impossible; but if you will, let us suppose it. What is the end? What is the gain? Nought at all. Does it not then deserve tears, and lamentations, to lead such a life; God has brought us into this course, that He may crown us, and we take our departure without doing any noble action. Wherefore Paul weeps, where others laugh, and live in pleasure. So sympathetic is he: such thought takes he for all men. Whose god, says he, is the belly. For this have they a God! That is, let us eat and drink! Do you see, how great an evil luxury is? To some their wealth, and to others their belly is a god. Are not these too idolaters, and worse than the common? And their glory is in their shame. 1 Corinthians 15:32 Some say it is circumcision. I think not so, but this is its meaning, they make a boast of those things, of which they ought to be ashamed. It is a fearful thing to do shameful actions; yet to do them, and be ashamed, is only half so dreadful. But where a man even boasts himself of them, it is excessive senselessness.

Do these words apply to them alone? And do those who are here present escape the charge? And will no one have account to render of these things? Does no one make a god of his belly, or glory in his shame? I wish, earnestly I wish, that none of these charges lay against us, and that I did not know any one involved in what I have said. But I fear lest the words have more reference to us than to the men of those times. For when one consumes his whole life in drinking and reveling, and expends some small trifle on the poor, while he consumes the larger portion on his belly, will not these words with justice apply to him? No words are more apt to call attention, or more cutting in reproof, than these: Whose god is the belly, whose glory is in their shame. And who are these? They, he says, who mind earthly things. Let us build houses. Where, I ask? On the earth, they answer. Let us purchase farms; on the earth again: let us obtain power; again on the earth: let us gain glory; again on the earth: let us enrich ourselves; all these things are on the earth. These are they, whose god is their belly; for if they have no spiritual thoughts, but have all their possessions here, and mind these things, with reason have they their belly for their god, in saying, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. And about your body, you grieve, tell me, that it is of earth, though thus you are not at all injured. But your soul you drag down to the earth, when you ought to render even your body spiritual; for you may, if you will. You have received a belly, that you may feed, not distend it, that you may have the mastery over it, not have it as mistress over you: that it may minister to you for the nourishment of the other parts, not that you may minister to it, not that you may exceed limits. The sea, when it passes its bounds, does not work so many evils, as the belly does to our body, together with our soul. The former overflows all the earth, the latter all the body. Put moderation for a boundary to it, as God

has put the sand for the sea. Then if its waves arise, and rage furiously, rebuke it, with the power which is in you. See how God has honored you, that you might imitate Him, and you will not; but you see the belly overflowing, destroying and overwhelming your whole nature, and darest not to restrain or moderate it.

Whose God, he says, is their belly. Let us see how Paul served God: let us see how gluttons serve their belly. Do not they undergo ten thousand such deaths? Do not they fear to disobey whatever it orders? Do not they minister impossibilities to it? Are not they worse than slaves? But our citizenship, says he, is in Heaven. Let us not then seek for ease here; there do we shine, where also our citizenship is. From whence also, says he, we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. By little and little he has carried us up. He says, From Heaven and Our Saviour, showing, from the place and from the Person, the dignity of the subject. Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, says he. The body now suffers many things: it is bound with chains, it is scourged, it suffers innumerable evils; but the body of Christ suffered the same. This, then, he hinted at when he said, That it may be conformed to the body of his glory. Wherefore the body is the same, but puts on incorruption. Shall fashion anew. Wherefore the fashion is different; or perchance he has spoken figuratively of the change.

He says, the body of our humiliation, because it is now humbled, subject to destruction, to pain, because it seems to be worthless, and to have nothing beyond that of other animals. That it may be conformed to the body of his glory. What? Shall this our body be fashioned like Him, who sits at the right hand of the Father, to Him who is worshipped by the Angels, before whom do stand the incorporeal Powers, to Him who is above all rule and power, and might? If then the whole world were to take up weeping and lament for those who have fallen from this hope, could it worthily lament? Because, when a promise is given us of our body being made like to Him, it still departs with the demons. I care not for hell henceforth; whatever can be said, having fallen from so great glory, now and henceforth consider hell to be nothing to this falling away. What do you say, O Paul? To be made like Him? Yes, he answers; then, lest you should disbelieve, he adds a reason; According to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself. He has power, says he, to subject all things unto Himself, wherefore also destruction and death. Or rather, He does this also with the same power. For tell me, which requires the greater power, to subject demons, and Angels, and Archangels, and Cherubim, and Seraphim, or to make the body incorruptible and immortal? The latter certainly much more than the former; he showed forth the greater works of His power, that you might believe these too. Wherefore, though ye see these men rejoicing, and honored, yet stand firm, be not offended at them, be not moved. These our hopes are sufficient to raise up even the most sluggish and indolent.

Chap. iv. ver. 1. Wherefore, says he, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved.

So. How? Unmoved. See how he adds praise after exhortation, my joy and my crown, not simply joy but glory too, not simply glory but my crown too. Which glory nought can equal, since it is the crown of Paul. So stand fast in the Lord, my beloved, i.e. in the hope of God.

Ver. 2, 3. I exhort Euodia, and exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech you also, true yokefellow, help these women.

Some say Paul here exhorts his own wife; but it is not so, but some other woman, or the husband of one of them. Help these women, for they labored with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my

fellow-workers whose names are in the book of life. Do you see how great a testimony he bears to their virtue? For as Christ says to his Apostles, Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in the book of life Luke 10:20; so Paul testifies to them, saying, whose names are in the book of life. These women seem to me to be the chief of the Church which was there, and he commends them to some notable man whom he calls his yokefellow, to whom perchance he was wont to commend them, as to a fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier, and brother, and companion, as he does in the Epistle to the Romans, when he says, I commend unto you Phebe our sister, who is a servant of the Church that is at Cenchrea. Romans 16:1 Yokefellow; either some brother of theirs, or a husband of hers; as if he had said, Now you are a true brother, now a true husband, because you have become a Member. For they labored with me in the Gospel. This protection came from home, not from friendship, but for good deeds. Labored with me. What do you say? Did women labor with you? Yes, he answers, they too contributed no small portion. Although many were they who wrought together with him, yet these women also acted with him among the many. The Churches then were no little edified, for many good ends are gained where they who are approved, be they men, or be they women, enjoy from the rest such honor. For in the first place the rest were led on to a like zeal; in the second place, they also gained by the respect shown; and thirdly, they made those very persons more zealous and earnest. Wherefore you see that Paul has everywhere a care for this, and commends such men for consideration. As he says in the Epistle to the Corinthians: Who are the first-fruits of Achaia, 1 Corinthians 16:15 Some say that the word yokefellow, (Syzygus,) is a proper name. Well, what? Whether it be so, or no, we need not accurately enquire, but observe that he gives his orders, that these women should enjoy much protection.

All we have, says he, is in the heavens, our Saviour, our city, whatever a man can name: whence, says he, we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is an act of His kindness and love toward man. He Himself again comes to us, he does not drag us there, but takes us, and so departs with us. And this is a mark of great honor; for if He came to us when we were enemies, much rather does He now when we have become friends. He does not commit this to the Angels, nor to servants, but Himself comes to call us to His royal mansion. See, we also shall be caught up in the clouds 1 Thessalonians 4:17, doing him honor.

Who then is to be found the faithful and wise servant? Who are they that are deemed worthy of such good things? How miserable are those who fail! For if we were forever to weep, should we do anything worthy of the occasion? For were you to make mention of hells innumerable, you would name nothing equal to that pain which the soul sustains, when all the world is in confusion, when the trumpets are sounding, when the Angels are rushing forward, the first, then the second, then the third, then ten thousand ranks, are pouring forth upon the earth; then the Cherubim, (and many are these and infinite;) the Seraphim; when He Himself is coming, with His ineffable glory; when those meet Him, who had gone to gather the elect into the midst; when Paul and his companions, and all who in his time had been approved, are crowned, are proclaimed aloud, are honored by the King, before all His heavenly host. For if hell did not exist, how fearful a thing it is, that the one part should be honored, and the other dishonored! Hell, I confess, is intolerable, yea, very intolerable, but more intolerable than it is the loss of the Kingdom. Consider; if any king, or the son of a king, having taken his departure, and been successful in innumerable wars, and become the object of admiration, should with his army entire, return to any city, in his chariot, with his trophies, with his innumerable ranks of golden shields, with his spearmen, his bodyguard all about him, while the whole city was adorned with crowns, while all the rulers of the world accompanied him, and all the soldiery of foreign nations followed him as captives, then præfects, satraps, and in the presence of all the rulers, and all that splendor, he should receive the citizens who meet him, and kiss them, and stretch

forth his hand, and give them freedom of access, and converse with them, all standing around, as with friends, and tell them that all that journey was undertaken for their sake, and should lead them into his palace, and give them a share of it, even if the rest should not be punished, to how great punishment would not this be equal? But if in the case of men it were a bitter thing to fall away from this glory, much more is it so with God, when all the heavenly Powers are present with the King, when the demons, bound, and bowing down their heads, and the devil himself is led along in chains, and all military force that opposes itself, when the Powers of the heavens, when He Himself, comes upon the clouds.

Believe me, I am not even able to finish my words, from the grief which lays hold of my soul at this relation. Consider of how great glory we shall be deprived, when it is in our power not to be deprived of it. For this is the misery, that we suffer these things, when it is in our power not to suffer them. When he receives the one part and leads them to His Father in heaven, and rejects the other, whom Angels take and drag against their will, weeping, and hanging down their heads, to the fire of hell, when they have first been made a spectacle to the whole world, what grief, think you, is there? Let us then make haste, while there is time, and take great thought of our own salvation. How many things have we to say like the rich man? If any one would now suffer us, we would take counsel of the things that are profitable! But no one does suffer us. And that we shall so say, is clear, not from him alone, but from many others. And that you may learn this, how many men have been in fevers, and said, if we recover, we shall never again fall into the same state. Many such words we shall then say, but we shall be answered as the rich man was, that there is a gulf, that we have received our good things here. Luke 16:25-26 Let us groan then, I entreat you, bitterly, rather let us not only groan, but pursue virtue too; let us lament now, for salvation, that we may not then lament in vain. Let us weep now, and not weep then, at our evil lot. This weeping is of virtue, that of unprofitable repentance; let us afflict ourselves now, that we may not then; for it is not the same thing to be afflicted here and there. Here, you are afflicted for a little time, or rather thou dost not perceive your affliction, knowing that you are afflicted for your good. But there, the affliction is more bitter, because it is not in hope, nor for any escape, but without limit, and throughout.

But may we all be freed from this, and obtain remission. But let us pray and be diligent, that we may obtain the remission. Let us be diligent, I entreat; for if we are diligent, we prevail even through our prayer: if we pray earnestly, God grants our request; but if we neither ask Him, nor do earnestly anything of this sort, nor work, how is it possible that we should ever succeed? By sleeping? Not at all. For it is much if even by running, and stretching forth, and being conformed to His death, as Paul said, we shall be able to succeed, not to say sleeping. If by any means I may attain, says he. But if Paul said, If by any means I may attain, what shall we say? For it is not possible by sleeping to accomplish even worldly business, not to say spiritual. By sleeping, not even from friends can anything be received, far less from God. Not even fathers honor them who sleep, far less does God. Let us labor for a little time, that we may have rest forever. We must at all events be afflicted. If we are not afflicted here, it awaits us there. Why choose we not to be afflicted here, that there we may have rest, and obtain the unspeakable blessings, in Christ Jesus, with whom, to the Father together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, and honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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