

1 Corinthians 16:1

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the moral imperative of almsgiving, encouraging the faithful to contribute generously and responsibly while recognizing the spiritual significance of their actions.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:2-9

Topics: "Christian Stewardship", "Generous Giving"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of giving to the saints, emphasizing the ethical aspect of almsgiving and the need for practical morality. He encourages the Corinthians to contribute generously and regularly, highlighting the significance of laying by in store on the Lord's day. Chrysostom urges the congregation to be steadfast in their benevolence, even in the face of adversity, as a means of provoking the devil and securing heavenly rewards. He advises on the proper disposition of alms, suggesting a systematic approach to giving and the sanctification of one's home through charity.

Transcript

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the Churches of Galatia, so also do ye.

Having completed his discourse concerning doctrines, and being about to enter upon that which belongs rather to morals, he dismisses every thing else and proceeds to the chief of good things, discoursing about alms. Nor does he discuss morals in general, but when he has treated of this matter alone, he leaves off. A thing however obviously unlike what he did every where else; for of alms and of temperance and of meekness and of long-suffering and of all the rest, he treats in the other Epistles in the conclusion. For what reason then does he handle here this part only of practical morality? Because the greater part also of what had been spoken before was of an ethical nature: I mean, where he chastised the fornicator; where he was correcting those who go to law among Gentiles; where he terrified the drunkards and the gluttons; where he condemned the seditious, the contentious, and those who loved to have the preeminence; where those who unworthily approach the Mysteries were delivered over by him unto that intolerable sentence; where he discoursed concerning love. For this cause, I say, the subject which most pressed on him, viz. the aid required for the saints, this alone he mentions.

And observe his consideration. When he had persuaded them concerning the resurrection, and made them more earnest, then and not till then he discusses this point also.

It is true indeed that on these matters he had spoken to them before, when he said, If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things? And, Who plants a vineyard, and eats not of the fruit thereof? But because he knew the greatness of this moral achievement, he refuses not to add a fresh mention at the end of his letter.

And he calls the collection λογισμῶν (a contribution,) immediately from the very first making out the things to be easy. For when contribution is made by all together, that becomes light which is charged upon each.

But having spoken about the collection, he did not say immediately, Let every one of you lay up in store with himself; although this of course was the natural consequence; but having first said, As I gave order to the Churches of Galatia, he added this, kindling their emulation by the account of the well-doings of others, and putting it in the form of a narration. And this also he did when writing to the Romans; for to them also while appearing to narrate the reason why he was going away to Jerusalem, he introduces thereupon his discourse about alms; But now I go unto Jerusalem, ministering unto the saints: for it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints. Romans 15:25 Only those he stimulates by mention of Macedonians and Corinthians; these of Galatians. For he says, As I gave order to the Churches of Galatia, so also do ye: for they would surely feel ashamed ever afterwards to be found inferior to Galatians. And he says not, I advised, and, I counselled; but, I gave order, which is more authoritative. And he does not bring forward a single city, or two, or three, but an entire nation: which also he does in his doctrinal instructions, saying, Even as also in all the Churches of the saints. For if this be potent for conviction of doctrines, much more for imitation of actions.

1 Corinthians 16:2

2. What then, I ask, did you give order about?

On the first day of the week, that is, the Lord's day, let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper. Mark how he exhorts them even from the time: for indeed the day was enough to lead them to almsgiving. Wherefore call to mind, says he, what ye attained to on this day: how all the unutterable blessings, and that which is the root and the beginning of our life took place on this day. But not in this regard only is the season convenient for a zealous benevolence, but also because it has rest and immunity from toils: the souls when released from labors becoming readier and apter to show pity. Moreover, the communicating also on that day in Mysteries so tremendous and immortal instills great zealously. On it, accordingly, let each one of you, not merely this or that individual, but each one of you, whether poor or rich, woman or man, slave or free, lay by him store. He said not, Let him bring it the church, lest they might feel ashamed because of the smallness of the sum; but having by gradual additions swelled his contribution, let him then produce it, when I have come but for the present lay it up, says he, at home, and make your house a church; your little box a treasury. Become a guardian sacred wealth, a self-ordained steward of the poor. Your benevolent mind assigns to you this priesthood.

Of this our treasury even now is a sign: but the sign remains, the thing itself no where.

3. Now I am aware that many of this congregation will again find fault with me when I treat of these subjects, and say, Be not, I beseech you, be not harsh and disagreeable to your audience. Make allowances for their disposition; give way to the mind of the hearers. For in this case you really do put us to shame; you make us blush. But I may not endure such words: since neither was Paul ashamed to be continually troublesome upon such points as these and to speak words such as mendicants use. I grant

indeed that if I said, give it me, and lay it up in my house, there might perchance be something to be ashamed of in what I said: hardly however even in that case; for they who wait upon the altar, we read, have their portion with the altar. 1 Corinthians 9:13 However, some one perhaps might find fault as if he were framing an argument for his own interest. But now it is for the poor that I make my supplication; nay, not so much for the poor, as for your sake who bestow the gift. Wherefore also I am bold to speak out. For what shame is it to say, Give unto your Lord in His hunger: Put raiment on Him going about naked; Receive Him being a stranger? Your Lord is not ashamed before the whole world to speak thus: I was an hungred, and you gave Me not to eat, He who is void of all want and requires nothing. And am I to be ashamed and hesitate? Away with this. This shame is of the snare of the devil. I will not then be ashamed, but will say, and that boldly, Give to the needy; I will say it with a louder voice than the needy themselves. True it is, if any one can show and prove that in saying these things we are drawing you over unto ourselves, and under the pretence of the poor are ourselves making gain, such a course would be worthy, I say not of shame, but even of ten thousand thunderbolts; and life itself would be more than persons so behaving would deserve. If, on the contrary, by the grace of God, we are in nothing troublesome about ourselves, but have made the Gospel without charge to you; laboring indeed in no wise like Paul, but being contented with our own -- with all boldness of speech I will say, Give unto the needy: yea, and I will not leave off saying it, and of those who give not I will be a severe accuser. For so, if I were a general and had soldiers, I should not feel ashamed at demanding food for my men: for I vehemently set my heart upon your salvation.

4. But that my argument may both be more forcible and more effective, I will take Paul for my comrade, and like him will discourse and say, Let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper. Now observe also how he avoids being burdensome. He said not, so much, or so much, but as he may prosper, whether much or little. Neither said he, what any one may have gained, but, as he may prosper: signifying that the supply is of God. And not only so, but also by his not enjoining them to deposit all at once, he makes his counsel easy: since the gathering little by little hinders all perception of the burden and the cost. Here you see the reason too for his not enjoining them to produce it immediately, but giving them a long day ; whereof adding the cause, he says, That there be no gatherings when I come: which means, that you may not when the season has come for paying in contributions just then be compelled to collect them. And this too in no ordinary degree encouraged them again: the expectation of Paul being sure to make them more earnest.

1 Corinthians 16:3

And when I arrive, whomsoever you shall approve, them will I send with letters to carry your bounty to Jerusalem.

He said not, this person, and that, but, whomsoever you shall approve, whomsoever you shall choose, thus freeing his ministration from suspicion. Wherefore to them he leaves the right of voting in the choice of those who are to convey it. He is far enough from saying, The payment is yours, but the privilege of selecting those who are to carry it is not yours. Next, that they might not think him quite absent, he adds his letters, saying, Whomsoever you approve, I will send with letters. As if he had said, I also will be with them and share in the ministration, by my letters. And he said not, These will I send to bear your alms, but, your bounty; to signify that they were doing great deeds; to mark that they were gainers themselves. And elsewhere he calls it both a blessing and a distribution. 2 Corinthians 9:5-13 The one that he might not make them less active, the other that he might not elate them. But in no case whatever has he called it alms.

1 Corinthians 16:4

And if it be meet for me to go also, they shall go with me.

Here again he exhorts them to liberality. As thus: if it be so much, says he, as to require my presence also, neither will I decline this. But he did not in the first instance promise this, nor say, When I have come I will carry it. For he would not have made so much of it, if he had so set it down from the first. Afterwards however he adds it well and seasonably. Here then you have the reason why he did not immediately promise, nor yet altogether hold his peace concerning it: but having said, I will send, then at length he adds himself also. And here too again he leaves it to their own decision; in saying, If it be meet for me to go also: whereas this rested with them, namely, to make their collection large; so large even, as to affect his plans and cause him in person to make the journey.

1 Corinthians 16:5

5. But I will come to you, says he, when I shall have passed through Macedonia. This he had said also above; then however with anger: at least he added, 1 Corinthians 4:19 And I will know not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power: but here, more mildly; that they might even long for his coming. Then, that they might not say, Why is it that you honor the Macedonians above us? he said not, When I depart, but, When I shall have passed through Macedonia; for I do pass through Macedonia.

1 Corinthians 16:6

But with you it may be that I shall abide, or even winter. For I do not at all wish to take you merely in my way, but to continue among you and spend some time. For when he wrote this letter, he was in Ephesus, and it was winter; as you may know by his saying, Until Pentecost I will tarry at Ephesus; but after this I shall go away to Macedonia, and after having gone through it, I will be with you in the summer; and perhaps I shall even spend the winter with you. And why did he say, perhaps; and did not positively affirm it? Because Paul did not foreknow all things; for good purposes. Wherefore neither does he absolutely affirm, in order that if it came not to pass, he might have something to resort to; first, his previous mention of it having been indefinite; and next, the power of the Spirit leading him wheresoever It willed, not where he himself desired. And this also he expresses in the second Epistle, when excusing himself on account of his delay, and saying, Or the things which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay? 2 Corinthians 1:17

That ye may set me forward on my journey wheresoever I go. This also is a mark of love, and great strength of affection.

1 Corinthians 16:7

For I do not wish to see you now by the way; for I hope to tarry awhile with you, if the Lord permit.

Now these things he said, both to signify his love and also to terrify the sinners, not however openly, but with outward demonstration of friendship.

1 Corinthians 16:8

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

As we should expect, he tells them all exactly, informing them as friends. For this too is a mark of friendship to say the reason why he was not with them, why he delayed, and where he was staying.

1 Corinthians 16:9

For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

Now if it was great, how could there be adversaries? Why on this very account the adversaries were many, because men's faith was great; because the entrance was great and wide. But what means, A great door? There are many prepared to receive the faith, many ready to approach and be converted. There is a spacious entrance for me, things being now come to that point that the mind of those approaching is at its prime for the obedience of the faith. On this account, vehement was the blast of the breath of the devil, because he saw many turning away from him.

You see then on both accounts it was needful for him to stay; both because the gain was abundant, and because the struggle was great.

And herewith also he cheered them up, namely, by saying, that henceforth the word works every where and springs up readily. And if there be many who plot against it, this also is a sign of the advance of the Gospel. For at no time does that evil demon wax fierce, except on seeing his goods made spoil of abundantly. Matthew 12

6. Let us then, when we desire to effect any thing great and noble, not regard this, the greatness of the labor which it brings, but let us rather look to the gain. Mark, for instance, Paul, not therefore lingering, not therefore shrinking back, because there were many adversaries; but because there was a great door, pressing on and persevering. Yea, and as I was saying, this was a sign that the devil was being stripped, for it is not, depend on it, by little and mean achievements that men provoke that evil monster to wrath. And so when you see a righteous man performing great and excellent deeds, yet suffering innumerable ills, marvel not; on the contrary, one might well marvel, if the devil receiving so many blows were to keep quiet and bear the wounds meekly. Even as you ought not to be surprised were a serpent, continually goaded, to grow fierce and spring on the person that goaded it. Now no serpent steals on you so fierce as the devil, leaping up against all; and, like a scorpion with its sting raised, he raises himself upright. Let not this then disturb you: since of course he that returns from war and victory and slaughter must needs be bloody, and oftentimes also have received wounds. Do thou, then, for your part, when you see any one doing alms and performing numberless other good works and so curtailing the power of the devil, and then falling into temptations and perils; be not troubled thereupon. This is the very reason why he fell into temptations, because he mightily smote the devil.

And how did God permit it? you will say. That he might be crowned more signally: that the other might receive a severer wound. For when after benefits conferred a man suffers, and that grievously, and yet continually gives thanks, it is a blow to the devil. For it is a great thing, even when our affairs are flowing on prosperously, to show mercy and to adhere to virtue: but it is far greater in grievous calamity not to desist from this noble occupation; this is he who may be most truly said to do so for God's sake. So then, though we be in peril, beloved, though we suffer ever so greatly, let us with the greater zeal apply ourselves to our labors for virtue's sake. For this is not at all the season for retribution.

Here then let us not ask for our crowns, lest when the crowns come in their season, we diminish our recompense. For as in the case of artificers, they who support themselves and work receive higher pay;

while those who have their maintenance with their employers, are curtailed in no small part of the wages; so also in regard to the saints: he that does immense good and suffers extreme evil has his reward unimpaired and a far more abundant recompense, not only for the good things which he has done, but also for the evil which he has suffered. But he that enjoys rest and luxury here, has not such bright crowns there. Let us not then seek for our recompense here. But then of all times let us rejoice, when doing well we suffer ill. For God has in store for us in that world not only the reward of our good deeds, but that of our temptations also.

But to explain myself more clearly: suppose two rich merciful men, and let them give to the poor: then let one continue in his riches and enjoy all prosperity: the other fall into poverty and diseases and calamities, and give God thanks. Now when these are gone away into the other world, which will receive the greater reward? Is it not quite plain that it will be he who is sick and in adversity, seeing that though he did well and suffered ill, he felt not according to human infirmity? I suppose this is plain to every one. And, in truth, this is the adamantine statue, this is the considerate servant. See Matthew 25:21 But if we ought not to do any thing good for the hope of the kingdom, but because it so pleases God, which is more than any kingdom; what does he deserve, who because he does not receive his recompense here, has become more remiss concerning virtue?

Let us then not be troubled when we see that such an one who invited widows and made continual feasts lost his house by fire, or sustained some other such like disaster. Yea, for this very thing he shall receive his reward. For even Job was not so much admired for his almsdeeds as he was for his sufferings afterwards. For this reason his friends also are little esteemed and deemed of no account; because they sought for the recompenses of the present world, and with a view to this gave sentence against the just man. Let us then not seek for our return here; let us not become poor and needy; since surely it is of extreme meanness, when heaven is proposed, and things which are above the heaven, to be looking round on the things which are here. Let us not by any means do so; but whichever of unexpected things come upon us, hold we fast the commands of God continually, and obey the blessed Paul.

7. And let us make a little chest for the poor at home; and near the place at which you stand praying, there let it be put: and as often as you enter in to pray, first deposit your alms, and then send up your prayer; and as you would not wish to pray with unwashen hands, so neither do so without alms: since not even the Gospel hanging by our bed is more important than that alms should be laid up for you; for if you hang up the Gospel and do nothing, it will do you no such great good. But if you have this little coffer, you have a defense against the devil, you give wings to your prayer, you make your house holy, having meat for the King Matthew 25:34 there laid up in store. And for this reason let the little coffer be placed also near the bed, and the night will not be troubled with fantasies. Only let nothing be cast into it, which is the fruit of injustice. For this thing is charity; and it cannot be that charity should ever spring out of hardheartedness.

Will you have mention also of the resources out of which you should make your deposits, so as in this respect also to make this kind of contribution easy? The handicraft man, for instance, the sandal-maker, or the leather-cutter, or the brass-founder, or any other artificer -- when he sells any article of his trade, let him give the first-fruits of its price unto God: let him cast in a small portion here, and assign something to God out of his portion, though it be rather scanty. For neither do I ask any great thing; but so much as the childish ones among the Jews, full as they are of innumerable evils, just so much let us cast in, we who look forward to heaven. And this I say not as laying down a law, neither as forbidding more, but as recommending a deposit of not less than a tenth part. And this also do thou practise not in selling only, but also in buying and receiving a recompense. Let those also who possess land observe this law in regard to

their rents: yea, let it be a law for all who gather their incomes in an honest way. For with those who demand usury I have no concern, neither with soldiers who do violence to others and turn to their own advantage their neighbors' calamities. Since from that quarter God will accept nothing. But these things I say to those who gather their substance by righteous labor.

Yea, and if we establish ourselves in this kind of habit, we are ever after stung by our conscience if ever we omit this rule; and after a while we shall not even think it a hard thing; and by degrees we shall arrive at the greater things, and by practising how to despise wealth, and by pulling up the root of evils, we shall both pass the present life in peace, and obtain the life to come; which may it be the portion of us all to attain unto, etc. etc.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/1-corinthians-161/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net