

1 Timothy 5:8

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of providing for one's own, caring for one's family, and living a life of hospitality and generosity.

Scripture: Genesis 22:7, Psalm 41:1, Ecclesiastes 7:2, Isaiah 58:7, Matthew 6:3, Matthew 25:40, Acts 6:5, Philippians 1:21, 1 Timothy 5:8

Topics: "Family Responsibility", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of providing for one's own family, especially those closely related, as a demonstration of faith and care. He highlights the need to prioritize the well-being of family members over others, showing affection and support to those who are connected by kinship. Chrysostom warns against neglecting one's relatives while benefiting strangers, as it goes against the laws of God and nature. He encourages widows to be of good reputation, well-reported for good works, and to diligently follow every good work, including caring for children, lodging strangers, and relieving the afflicted.

Transcript

But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Many consider that their own virtue is sufficient for their salvation, and if they duly regulate their own life, that nothing further is wanting to save them. But in this they greatly err, which is proved by the example of him who buried his one talent, for he brought it back not diminished but entire, and just as it had been delivered to him. It is shown also by the blessed Paul, who says here, If any one provide not for his own. The provision of which he speaks is universal, and relates to the soul as well as the body, since both are to be provided for.

If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, that is, those who are nearly related to him, he is worse than an infidel. And so says Isaiah, the chief of the Prophets, You shall not overlook your kinsmen of your own seed. Isaiah 58:7, Septuagint For if a man deserts those who are united by ties of kindred and affinity, how shall he be affectionate towards others? Will it not have the appearance of vainglory, when benefiting others he slights his own relations, and does not provide for them? And what will be said, if instructing others, he neglects his own, though he has greater facilities; and a higher obligation to benefit them? Will it not be said, These Christians are affectionate indeed, who neglect their own relatives? He is worse than an infidel. Wherefore? Because the latter, if he benefits not

aliens, does not neglect his near kindred. What is meant is this: The law of God and of nature is violated by him who provides not for his own family. But if he who provides not for them has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel, where shall he be ranked who has injured his relatives? With whom shall he be placed? But how has he denied the faith? Even as it is said, They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him. Titus 1:16 What has God, in whom they believe, commanded? Hide not yourself from your own flesh. Isaiah 58:7 How does he then believe who thus denies God? Let those consider this, who to spare their wealth neglect their kindred. It was the design of God, in uniting us by the ties of kindred, to afford us many opportunities of doing good to one another. When therefore you neglect a duty which infidels perform, have you not denied the faith? For it is not faith merely to profess belief, but to do works worthy of faith. And it is possible in each particular to believe and not to believe. For since he had spoken of luxury and self-indulgence, he says that it is not for this only that such a woman is punished, because she is luxurious, but because her luxury compels her to neglect her household. This he says with reason; for she that lives to the belly, perishes hereby also, as having denied the faith. But how is she worse than an infidel? Because it is not the same thing to neglect our kindred, as to neglect a stranger. How should it be? But the fault is greater here, to desert one known than one who is unknown to us, a friend than one who is not a friend.

Ver. 9, 10. Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. Well reported of for good works.

He had said, Let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents. He had also said, She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. He had said, If she provides not for her own she is worse than an infidel. Having mentioned the qualities which not to have would render a woman unworthy to be reckoned among the widows, he now mentions what she ought to have besides. What then? Are we to receive her for her years? What merit is there in that? It is not her own doing that she is threescore years old. Therefore he does not speak of her age merely, as, if she has even reached those years, she may not yet, he says, without good works, be reckoned among the number. But why then is he particular about the age? He afterwards assigns a cause not originating with himself, but with the widows themselves. Meanwhile let us hear what follows. Well reported of for good works, if she have brought up children. Truly, it is no unimportant work to bring up children; but bringing them up is not merely taking care of them; they must be brought up well; as he said before, If they continue in faith, and charity, and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:15 Observe how constantly he sets kindnesses to our own relatives before those to strangers. First he says, If she have brought up children, then, If she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the Saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But what if she be poor? Not even in that case is she debarred from bringing up children, lodging strangers, relieving the afflicted. She is not more destitute than the widow who gave the two mites. Poor though she be, she has a house, she does not lodge in the open air. If, he says, she have washed the Saints' feet. This is not a costly work. If she have diligently followed every good work. What precept does he give here? He exhorts them to contribute bodily service, for women are peculiarly fitted for such attendance, for making the bed of the sick, and composing them to rest.

Strange! What strictness does he require of widows; almost as much as of the Bishop himself. For he says, If she have diligently followed every good work. This is as though he meant that, if she could not of herself perform it, she shared and cooperated in it. When he cuts off luxury, he would have her provident, a good economist, and at the same time continually persevering in prayer. Such was Anna. Such strictness does he require of widows. Greater even than of virgins, from whom he yet requires much

strictness, and eminent virtue. For when he speaks of that which is comely, and that she may attend upon the Lord without distraction 1 Corinthians 7:35, he gives, in a manner, a summary of all virtue. You see that it is not merely the not contracting a second marriage that is enough to make a widow, many other things are necessary. But why does he discourage second marriages? Is the thing condemned? By no means. That is heretical. Only he would have her henceforth occupied in spiritual things, transferring all her care to virtue. For marriage is not an impure state, but one of much occupation. He speaks of their having leisure, not of their being more pure by remaining unmarried. For marriage certainly implies much secular engagement. If you abstain from marriage that you may have leisure for the service of God, and yet do not so employ that leisure, it is of no advantage to you, (if you do not use your leisure,) to perform all services to strangers, and to the Saints. If you do not thus, you abstain from marriage not for any good end, but as though you condemned the state. So the virgin, who is not truly crucified to the world, by declining marriage, appears to condemn it as accursed and impure.

Observe, the hospitality here spoken of is not merely a friendly reception, but one given with zeal and alacrity, with readiness, and going about it as if one were receiving Christ Himself. The widows should perform these services themselves, not commit them to their handmaids. For Christ said, If I your Master and Lord have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet. John 13:14 And though a woman may be very rich, and of the highest rank, vain of her birth and noble family, there is not the same distance between her and others, as between God and the disciples. If you receive the stranger as Christ, be not ashamed, but rather glory: but if you receive him not as Christ, receive him not at all. He that receives you, He said, receives Me. Matthew 10:40 If you do not so receive him, you have no reward. Abraham was receiving men that passed as travelers, as he thought, and he did not leave to his servants to make the preparations for their entertainment, but took the greater part of the service upon himself, and commanded his wife to mix the flour, though he had three hundred and eighteen servants born in his house, of whom there must have been many maidservants; but he wished that himself and his wife should have the reward, not of the cost only, but of the service. Thus ought we ever to exercise hospitality by our own personal exertions, that we may be sanctified, and our hands be blessed. And if you give to the poor, disdain not yourself to give it, for it is not to the poor that it is given, but to Christ; and who is so wretched, as to disdain to stretch out his own hand to Christ?

This is hospitality, this is truly to do it for God's sake. But if you give orders with pride, though you bid him take the first place, it is not hospitality, it is not done for God's sake. The stranger requires much attendance, much encouragement, and with all this it is difficult for him not to feel abashed; for so delicate is his position, that while he receives the favor, he is ashamed. That shame we ought to remove by the most attentive service, and to show by words and actions, that we do not think we are conferring a favor, but receiving one, that we are obliging less than we are obliged. So much does good will multiply the kindness. For as he who considers himself a loser, and thinks that he is doing a favor, destroys all the merit of it; so he who looks upon himself as receiving a kindness, increases the reward. For God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 So that you are rather indebted to the poor man for receiving your kindness. For if there were no poor, the greater part of your sins would not be removed. They are the healers of your wounds, their hands are medicinal to you. The physician, extending his hand to apply a remedy, does not exercise the healing art more than the poor man, who stretches out his hand to receive your alms, and thus becomes a cure for your ills. You give your money, and with it your sins pass away. Such were the Priests of old, of whom it was said, They eat up the sin of My people. Hosea 4:8 Thus you receive more than you give, you are benefited more than you benefit. You lend to God, not to men. You increase your wealth, rather than diminish it. But if you do not lessen it by giving, then it is indeed

diminished!

If she have received strangers, if she have washed the Saints' feet. But who are these? The distressed saints, not any saints whatever. For there may be saints, who are much waited on by every one. Do not visit these, who are in the enjoyment of plenty, but those who are in tribulation, who are unknown, or known to few. He who has done it unto the least of these, He says, has done it unto Me. Matthew 25:40

Moral. Give not your alms to those who preside in the Church to distribute. Bestow it yourself, that you may have the reward not of giving merely, but of kind service. Give with your own hands. Cast into the furrow yourself. Here it is not required to handle the plow, to yoke the ox, to wait the season, nor to break up the earth, or to contend with the frost. No such trouble is required here, where you sow for heaven, where there is no frost nor winter nor any such thing. You sow in souls, where no one takes away what is sown, but it is firmly retained with all care and diligence. Cast the seed yourself, why deprive yourself of your reward. There is great reward in dispensing even what belongs to others. There is a reward not only for giving, but for dispensing well the things that are given. Why will you not have this reward? For that there is a reward for this, hear how we read that the Apostles appointed Stephen to the ministry of the widows. Acts 6:5-7

Be thou the dispenser of your own gifts. Your own benevolence and the fear of God appoint you to that ministry. Thus vainglory is excluded. This refreshes the soul, this sanctifies the hands, this pulls down pride. This teaches you philosophy, this inflames your zeal, this makes you to receive blessings. Your head, as you depart, receives all the blessings of the widows.

Be more earnest in your prayers. Inquire diligently for holy men, men that are truly such, who, in the retirement of the desert, cannot beg, but are wholly devoted to God. Take a long journey to visit them, and give with your own hand. For you may profit much in your own person, if you give. Do you see their tents, their lodging? Do you see the desert? Do you see the solitude? Often when you have gone to bestow money, you give your whole soul. You are detained, and hast become his fellow-captive, and hast been alike estranged from the world.

It is of great benefit even to see the poor. It is better, he says, to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting. Ecclesiastes 7:2 By the latter the soul is inflamed. For if you can imitate the luxury, then you are encouraged to self-indulgence, and if you can not, you are grieved. In the house of mourning there is nothing of this kind. If you can not afford to be luxurious, you are not pained; and if you can, you are restrained. Monasteries are indeed houses of mourning. There is sackcloth and ashes, there is solitude, there is no laughter, no pressure of worldly business. There is fasting, and lying upon the ground; there is no impure savor of rich food, no blood shed, no tumult, no disturbance, or crowding. There is a serene harbor. They are as lights shining from a lofty place to mariners afar off. They are stationed at the port, drawing all men to their own calm, and preserving from shipwreck those who gaze on them, and not letting those walk in darkness who look there. Go to them, and make friends with them, embrace their holy feet, more honorable to touch than the heads of others. If some clasp the feet of statues, because they bear but a likeness of the king, will you not clasp his feet who has Christ within him, and be saved? The Saints' feet are holy, though they are poor men, but not even the head of the profane is honorable. Such efficacy is there in the feet of the Saints, that when they shake off the dust of their feet, they inflict punishment. When a saint is among us, let us not be ashamed of anything that belongs to him. And all are saints, who unite a holy life with a right faith and though they do not work miracles nor cast out devils, still they are saints.

Go then to their tabernacles. To go to the monastery of a holy man is to pass, as it were, from earth to heaven. You see not there what is seen in a private house. That company is free from all impurity. There is silence and profound quiet. The words mine and yours are not in use among them. And if you remain there a whole day or even two, the more pleasure you will enjoy. There, as soon as it is day, or rather before day, the cock crows, and you see it not as you may see it in a house, the servants snoring, the doors shut, all sleeping like the dead, while the muleteer without is ringing his bells. There is nothing of all this. All, immediately shaking off sleep, reverently rise when their President calls them, and forming themselves into a holy choir, they stand, and lifting up their hands all at once sing the sacred hymns. For they are not like us, who require many hours to shake off sleep from our heavy heads. We indeed, as soon as we are waked, sit some time stretching our limbs, go as nature calls, then proceed to wash our face and our hands; afterwards we take our shoes and clothes, and a deal of time is spent.

It is not so there. No one calls for his servant, for each waits upon himself: neither does he require many clothes, nor need to shake off sleep. For as soon as he opens his eyes, he is like one who has been long awake in collectedness. For when the heart is not stifled within by excess of food, it soon recovers itself, and is immediately wakeful. The hands are always pure; for his sleep is composed and regular. No one among them is found snoring or breathing hard, or tossing about in sleep, or with his body exposed; but they lie in sleep as decently as those who are awake, and all this is the effect of the orderly state of their souls. These are truly saints and angels among men. And marvel not when you hear these things. For their great fear of God suffers them not to go down into the depths of sleep, and to drown their minds, but it falls lightly upon them, merely affording them rest. And as their sleep is, such are their dreams, not full of wild fancies and monstrous visions.

But, as I said, at the crowing of the cock their President comes, and gently touching the sleeper with his foot, rouses them all. For there are none sleeping naked. Then as soon as they have arisen they stand up, and sing the prophetic hymns with much harmony, and well composed tunes. And neither harp nor pipe nor other musical instrument utters such sweet melodies, as you hear from the singing of these saints in their deep and quiet solitudes. And the songs themselves too are suitable, and full of the love of God. In the night, they say, lift up your hands unto God. With my soul have I desired You in the night, yea with my spirit within me will I seek You early, Isaiah 26:9 And the Psalms of David, that cause fountains of tears to flow. For when he sings, I am weary with my groaning, all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears Psalm 6:6: and, again, I have eaten ashes like bread. Psalm 102:9 What is man that you are mindful of him? Psalm 8:4 Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passes away. Psalm 144:4 Be not afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased Psalm 49:16; and, Who makes men to be of one mind in a house Psalm 68:6: and, Seven times a day do I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments Psalm 119:164: and, At midnight will I rise to give thanks unto You, because of Your righteous judgments Psalm 119:62: and, God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave Psalm 49:15: and, Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me Psalm 23:4: and, I will not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday Psalm 91:5-6: and, We are counted as sheep for the slaughter Psalm 43:22: he expresses their ardent love to God. And again, when they sing with the Angels, (for Angels too are singing then,) Praise the Lord from the Heavens. Psalm 148:1 And we meanwhile are snoring, or scratching our heads, or lying supine meditating endless deceits. Think what it was for them to spend the whole night in this employment.

And when the day is coming on, they take rest again; for when we begin our works, they have a season of rest. But each of us, when it is day, calls upon his neighbor, takes account of his outgoings, then goes into the forum; trembling he appears before the magistrate, and dreads a reckoning. Another visits the stage, another goes about his own business. But these holy men, having performed their morning prayers and hymns, proceed to the reading of the Scriptures. There are some too that have learned to write out books, each having his own apartment assigned to him, where he lives in perpetual quiet; no one is trifling, not one speaks a word. Then at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, and in the evening, they perform their devotions, having divided the day into four parts, and at the conclusion of each they honor God with psalms and hymns, and while others are dining, laughing, and sporting, and bursting with gluttony, they are occupied with their hymns. For they have no time for the table nor for these things of sense. After their meal they again pursue the same course, having previously given themselves a while to sleep. The men of the world sleep during the day: but these watch during the night. Truly children of light are they! And while the former, having slept away the greater part of the day, go forth oppressed with heaviness, these are still collected, remaining without food till the evening, and occupied in hymns. Other men, when evening overtakes them, hasten to the baths, and different recreations, but these, being relieved from their labors, then betake themselves to their table, not calling up a multitude of servants, nor throwing the house into bustle and confusion, nor setting before them high-seasoned dishes, and rich-steaming viands, but some only partaking of bread and salt, to which others add oil, while the weakly have also herbs and pulse. Then after sitting a short time, or rather after concluding all with hymns, they each go to rest upon a bed made for repose only and not for luxury. There is no dread of magistrates, no lordly arrogance, no terror of slaves, no disturbance of women or children, no multitudes of chests, or superfluous laying by of garments, no gold or silver, no guards and sentinels, no storehouse. Nothing of all these, but all there is full of prayer, of hymns, and of a spiritual savor. Nothing carnal is there. They fear no attacks of robbers, having nothing of which they can be deprived, no wealth, but a soul and body, of which if they are robbed, it is not a loss but a gain. For it is said, To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21 They have freed themselves from all bonds. Truly, The voice of gladness is in the tabernacles of the righteous. Psalm 118:15

There is no such thing to be heard there as wailing and lamentation. Their roof is free from that melancholy and those cries. Deaths happen there indeed, for their bodies are not immortal, but they know not death, as death. The departed are accompanied to the grave with hymns. This they call a procession, not a burial; and when it is reported that any one is dead, great is their cheerfulness, great their pleasure; or rather not one of them can bear to say that one is dead, but that he is perfected. Then there is thanksgiving, and great glory, and joy, every one praying that such may be his own end, that so his own combat may terminate, and he may rest from his labor and struggles, and may see Christ. And if any is sick, instead of tears and lamentations they have recourse to prayers. Often not the care of physicians, but faith alone relieves the sick. And if a physician be necessary, then too there is the greatest firmness and philosophy. There is no wife tearing her hair, nor children bewailing their orphan state before the time, nor slaves entreating the dying man to give them an assurance that they shall be committed to good hands. Escaping from all these, the soul looks but to one thing at its last breath, that it may depart in favor with God. And if disease occurs, the causes of it are matter of glory rather than of reproach, as in other cases. For it proceeds not from gluttony nor fullness of the head, but from intense watchfulness and fasting, or the like causes; and hence it is easily removed, for it is sufficient for its removal to abate the severity of these exercises.

Tell me then, you will say, whether any one could wash the Saints' feet in the Church? Whether such are to be found among us? Yes: undoubtedly they are such. Let us not, however, when the life of these saints is described despise those that are in the Churches. There are many such often among us, though they are in secret. Nor let us despise them, because they go from house to house, or go into the forum, or stand forth in public. God has even commanded such services, saying, Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:17 Many are the ways of being virtuous, as there are many varieties of jewels, though all are called jewels; one is bright and round on all sides, another has some different beauty. And how is this? As coral has, by a kind of art, its line extended, and its angles shaped off, and another color more delicious than white, and the prasius above every green, another has the rich color of blood, another an azure surpassing the sea, another is more brilliant than the purple, and thus rivaling in their varieties all the colors of flowers or of the sun. Yet all are called jewels. So it is with the Saints. Some discipline themselves, some the Churches. Paul therefore has well said, If she have washed the Saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted. For he speaks thus, that he may excite us all to imitation. Let us hasten then to perform such actions, that we may be able hereafter to boast that we have washed the Saints' feet. For if we ought to wash their feet, much more ought we to give them our money with our own hands, and at the same time study to be concealed. Let not your left hand know, He says, what your right hand does. Matthew 6:3

Why do you take so many witnesses? Let not your servant know it, nor, if possible, your wife. Many are the impediments of the deceitful one. Often she who never before interfered, will impede such works, either from vainglory, or some other motive. Even Abraham, who had an admirable wife, when he was about to offer up his son, concealed it from her, though he knew not what was to happen, but was fully persuaded that he must slaughter his son. What then, would any one that was but an ordinary man have said? Would it not be, Who is this that perpetrates such acts? Would he not have accused him of cruelty and brutality? His wife was not even allowed to see her son, to receive his last words, to witness his dying struggles. But he led him away like a captive. That just man though not of any such thing, inebriated as he was with zeal, so that he looked only how to fulfill that which was commanded. No servant, no wife was present, nay, he himself knew not what would be the issue. But intent upon offering up a pure victim, he would not defile it with tears, or with any opposition. Mark too with what gentleness Isaac asks, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?: and what was the father's answer? My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering. Genesis 22:7-8 In this he uttered a prophecy that God would provide Himself a burnt offering in His Son, and it also came true at the time. But why did he conceal it from him who was to be sacrificed? Because he feared lest he should be astounded, lest he should prove unworthy. With such care and prudence did he act throughout this affair! Well then has the Scripture said, Let not your left hand know what your right hand does. If we have one dear to us as one of our own members, let us not be anxious to show to him our charitable works, unless it be necessary. For many evils may arise from it. A man is excited to vainglory, and impediments are often raised. For this reason let us conceal it, if possible, from our own selves, that we may attain the blessings promised, through the grace and lovingkindness of Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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