

2 Corinthians 8:16

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul emphasizes the importance of integrity and trust in the handling of the collection and encourages the Corinthians to show love and respect to the brothers who are handling it.

Scripture: Exodus 18:14, Proverbs 11:14, Proverbs 15:22, Acts 1:15, Acts 6:2, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:16, Philippians 2:2

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Community"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation within the Church, highlighting the need for mutual respect and consideration among all members, regardless of status or position. He encourages the laity to actively participate in decision-making processes, illustrating how even the Apostles involved the people in their choices. Chrysostom stresses the significance of working together as one body, sharing responsibilities, and valuing diverse perspectives for the growth and well-being of the Church. He urges humility, openness to counsel from others, and a collective effort to seek what is best for the community, ultimately aiming for a harmonious and fruitful Church life.

Transcript

But thanks be to God, Which put the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.

Again he praises Titus. For since he had discoursed of almsgiving, he afterwards discourses also of those who are to receive the money from them and carry it away. For this was of aid towards this collection, and towards increasing the forwardness of the contributors. For he that feels confidence as to him that ministers, and suspects not those who are to be receivers, gives with the fuller bountifulness. And that this might be the case then also, hear how he commends those that had come for this purpose, the first of whom was Titus. Wherefore also he says, But thanks be to God, Which put (literally, 'gave') the same earnest care into the heart of Titus. What is the same? Which he had also in respect to the Thessalonians, or the same with me. And mark here wisdom. Showing this to be the work of God, he also gives thanks to Him that gave, so as to incite by this also. 'For if God stirred him up and sent him to you, He asks through Him. Think not therefore that what has happened is of men.' And whence is it manifest that God incited him?

2 Corinthians 8:17

For indeed he accepted our exhortation, but being himself very earnest, he went forth of his own accord.

Observe how he also represents him as fulfilling his own part, and needing no prompting from others. And having mentioned the grace of God, he does not leave the whole to be God's; again, that by this also he may win them unto greater love, having said that he was stirred up from himself also. For, being very earnest, he went forth of his own accord, 'he seized at the thing, he rushed upon the treasure, he considered your service to be his own advantage; and because he loved you exceedingly, he needed not the exhortation I gave; but though he was exhorted by me also, yet it was not by that he was stirred up; but from himself and by the grace of God.'

2 Corinthians 8:18

And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the Gospel is spread through all the Churches.

And who is this brother? Some indeed say, Luke, because of the history which he wrote, but some, Barnabas; for he calls the unwritten preaching also Gospel. And for what cause does he not mention their names; while he both makes Titus known see also 2 Corinthians 8:23 by name, and praises him for his cooperation in the Gospel, (seeing that he was so useful that by reason of his absence even Paul could do nothing great and noble; for, because I found not Titus my brother, I had no relief for my spirit, 2 Corinthians 2:13) and for his love towards them, (for, says he, his inward affection is more abundant towards you; 2 Corinthians 7:15) and for his zeal in this matter (for, he says, of his own accord he went)? But these he neither equally commends, nor mentions by name? What then is one to say? Perhaps they did not know them; wherefore he does not dwell upon their praises because as yet they had had no experience of them, but only says so much as was sufficient for their commendation unto them (i.e. the Corinthians,) and to their escaping all evil suspicion. However, let us see on what score he eulogizes this man himself also. On what score then does he eulogize? First, praising him from his preaching; that he not only preached, but also as he ought, and with the befitting earnestness. For he said not, 'he preaches and proclaims the Gospel,' but, whose praise is in the Gospel. And that he may not seem to flatter him, he brings not one or two or three men, but whole Churches to testify to him, saying, through all the churches. Then he makes him respected also from the judgment of those that had chosen him. And this too is no light matter. Therefore after saying, Whose praise in the Gospel is spread through all the churches, he added,

2 Corinthians 8:19

And not only so.

What is, and not only so? 'Not only on this account,' he says, 'is respect due to him, that he is approved as a preacher and is praised by all.'

But he was also appointed by the churches along with us.

Whence it seems to me, that Barnabas is the person intimated. And he signifies his dignity to be great, for he shows also for what office he was appointed. For he says,

To travel with us in the matter of this grace which is ministered by us. Do you see how great are these praises of him? He shone as a preacher of the Gospel and had all the churches testifying to this. He was chosen by us; and unto the same office with Paul, and everywhere was partner with him, both in his trials and in his dangers, for this is implied in the word travel. But what is, with this grace which is ministered by

us? So as to proclaim the word, he means, and to preach the Gospel; or to minister also in respect of the money; yea rather, he seems to me to refer to both of these. Then he adds,

To the glory of the same Lord, and to show your readiness. What he means is this: 'We thought good,' he says, 'that he should be chosen with us and be appointed unto this work, so as to become a dispenser and a minister of the sacred money.' Nor was this a little matter. For, Look ye out, it says, from among you seven men of good report; Acts 6:3 and he was chosen by the churches, and there was a vote of the whole people taken. What is, to the glory of the same Lord, and your readiness? 'That both God may be glorified and you may become the readier, they who are to receive this money being of proved character, and no one able to engender any false suspicion against them. Therefore we sought out such persons, and entrusted not the whole to one person only, that he might escape this suspicion also; but we sent both Titus and another with him. Then to interpret this same expression, to the glory of the Lord and your ready mind: he added,

2 Corinthians 8:20

Avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us.

What can this be which is said? A thing worthy of the virtue of Paul; and showing the greatness of his tender care and his condescension. 'For,' he says, 'that none should suspect us, nor have the slightest cavil against us, as though we purloined anything of the money placed in our hands; therefore we send such persons, and not one only, but even two or three.' Do you see how he clears them of all suspicions? Not on account of the Gospel, nor of their having been chosen merely; but also, from their being persons of proved character, (and for this very reason) having been chosen, that they might not be suspected. And he said not 'that you should not blame,' but 'that no other person should.' And yet it was on their account that he did this; and he implied as much in saying, to the glory of the same Lord, and your readiness: however, he does not wish to wound them; and so expresses himself differently,

Avoiding this. And he is not satisfied with this either, but by what he adds, soothes again, saying,

In the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us, and mingling his severity with praise. For that they might not feel hurt, and say, 'Is he obliged then to eye us stealthily, and are we so miserable as ever to have been suspected of these things?' Providing a correction against this too, he says, 'the money sent by you is of large amount, and this abundance, that is, the large amount of the money, is enough to afford suspicion to the evil-minded had we not offered that security. '

2 Corinthians 8:21

For we take thought for things, honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

What can compare with Paul? For he said not, 'Perdition and woe to him who chooses to suspect anything of the kind: so long as my conscience does not condemn me, I waste not a thought on those who suspect.' Rather, the weaker they were, the more he condescended. For it is meet not to be angry with, but help, him that is sick. And yet from what sin are we so removed as he was from any such suspicion? For not even a demon could have suspected that blessed saint of this unfaithfulness. But still although so far removed from that evil suspicion, he does everything and resorts to every expedient, so as not to leave a shadow even to those who might be desirous in any way of suspecting something wrong; and he avoids not only accusations, but also blame and the slightest censure, even bare suspicion.

2 Corinthians 8:22

2. And we have sent with them our brother.

Behold, again he adds yet another, and him also with an encomium; both his own judgment, and many other witnesses [to him].

Whom, says he, we have many times proved earnest in many things, but now much more earnest. And having praised him from his own good works, he extols him also from his love towards them; and what he said of Titus, that being very earnest he went forth of his own accord; this he says of this person also, saying, but now much more earnest; laying up beforehand for them the seeds of [the proof of their] love toward the Corinthians.

And then, after having showed forth their virtue, he exhorts them also on their behalf, saying,

2 Corinthians 8:23

Whether any inquire about Titus; he is my partner and my fellow-worker to youward.

What is, Whether about Titus? 'If,' says he, 'it be necessary to say any thing, this I have to say,' that he is my partner and fellow-worker to youward. For he either means this; or, 'if you will do anything for Titus, you will do it unto no ordinary person, for he is my partner.' And while appearing to be praising him, he magnifies them, showing them to be so disposed towards himself as that it were sufficient ground of honor among them that any one should appear to be his partner. But, nevertheless, he was not content with this, but he also added another thing, saying, fellow-worker to youward. Not merely fellow-worker, 'but in matters concerning you, in your progress, in your growth, in our friendship, in our zeal for you;' which last would avail most especially to endear him unto them.

Or our brethren: 'or whether you wish,' he says, 'to hear any thing about the others: they too have great claims to be commended to you. For they also,' he says, 'are our brethren, and,

The messengers of the Churches,' that is, sent by the Churches. Then, which is greater than all,

The glory of Christ; for to Him is referred whatever shall be done to them. 'Whether then ye wish to receive them as brethren, or as Apostles of the Churches, or as acting for the glory of Christ; you have many motives for good will towards them. For on behalf of Titus, I have to say, that he is both my partner, and a lover of you; on behalf of these, that they are brethren, that they are the messengers of the churches, that they are the glory of Christ. Do you see that it is plain from hence also, that they were of such as were unknown to them? For otherwise he would have set them off by those things with which he had also set off Titus, namely, his love towards them. But whereas as yet they were not known to them, 'Receive them,' he says, 'as brethren, as messengers of the churches, as acting for the glory of Christ.' On which account he adds;

2 Corinthians 8:24

Wherefore show ye unto them, to the person of the churches, the proof of your love, and of our glorying on your behalf.

'Now show,' he says, 'how ye love us; and how we do not lightly nor vainly boast in you: and this you will show, if you show forth love towards them.' Then he also makes his words more solemn, by saying, unto

the person of the churches. He means, to the glory, the honor, of the churches. 'For if you honor them, you have honored the churches that sent them. For the honor passes not to them alone, but also to those that sent them forth, who ordained them, and more than these, unto the glory of God.' For when we honor those that minister to Him, the kind reception passes unto Him, unto the common body of the churches. Now this too is no light thing, for great is the potency of that assembly.

3. Certain it is at least that the prayer of the churches loosed Peter from his chains, opened the mouth of Paul; their voice in no slight degree equips those that arrive unto spiritual rule. Therefore indeed it is that both he who is going to ordain calls at that time for their prayers also, and that they add their votes and assent by acclamations which the initiated know: for it is not lawful before the uninitiated to unbare all things. But there are occasions in which there is no difference at all between the priest and those under him; for instance, when we are to partake of the awful mysteries; for we are all alike counted worthy of the same things: not as under the Old Testament [when] the priest ate some things and those under him others, and it was not lawful for the people to partake of those things whereof the priest partook.

But not so now, but before all one body is set and one cup. And in the prayers also, one may observe the people contributing much. For in behalf of the possessed, in behalf of those under penance, the prayers are made in common both by the priest and by them; and all say one prayer, the prayer replete with pity. Again when we exclude from the holy precincts those who are unable to partake of the holy table, it behooves that another prayer be offered, and we all alike fall upon the ground, and all alike rise up.

Again, in the most awful mysteries themselves, the priest prays for the people and the people also pray for the priest; for the words, with your spirit, are nothing else than this. The offering of thanksgiving again is common: for neither does he give thanks alone, but also all the people. For having first taken their voices, next when they assent that it is meet and right so to do, then he begins the thanksgiving. And why do you marvel that the people any where utter anything with the priest, when indeed even with the very Cherubim, and the powers above, they send up in common those sacred hymns?

Now I have said all this in order that each one of the laity also may be wary, that we may understand that we are all one body, having such difference among ourselves as members with members; and may not throw the whole upon the priests but ourselves also so care for the whole Church as for a body common to us. For this course will provide for our greater safety, and for your greater growth unto virtue. Here, at least, in the case of the Apostles, how frequently they admitted the laity to share in their decisions.

For when they ordained the seven, Acts 6:2-3 they first communicated with the people; and when Peter ordained Matthias, with all that were then present, both men and women. Acts 1:15, etc. For here is no pride of rulers nor slavishness in the ruled; but a spiritual rule, in this particular usurping most, in taking on itself the greater share of the labor and of the care which is on your behalf, not in seeking larger honors. For so ought the Church to dwell as one house; as one body so to be all disposed; just as therefore there is both one Baptism, and one table, and one fountain, and one creation, and one Father.

Why then are we divided, when so great things unite us; why are we torn asunder? For we are compelled again to bewail the same things, which I have lamented often. The state in which we are calls for lamentation; so widely are we severed from each other, when we ought to image the conjunction of one body. For in this way will he that is greater, be able to gain even from him that is less. For if Moses learned from his father-in-law somewhat expedient which himself had not perceived, Exodus 18:14, etc. much more in the Church may this happen.

And how then came it that what he that was an unbeliever perceived, he that was spiritual perceived not? That all those of that time might understand that he was a man; and though he divide the sea, though he cleave the rock, he needs the influence of God, and that those acts were not of man's nature, but of God's power. And so let another rise up and speak; and so now, if such and such an one does not say expedient things, let another rise up and speak; though he be an inferior, yet if he say somewhat to the purpose, confirm his opinion; and even if he be of the very mean, do not show him disrespect.

For no one of these is at so great a distance from his neighbor, as Moses' father-in-law was from him, yet he disdained not to listen to him, but even admitted his opinion, and was persuaded, and recorded it; and was not ashamed to hand down the circumstances to history; casting down [so] the pride of the many. Wherefore also he left this story to the world engraven as it were on a pillar, for he knew that it would be useful to many. Let us then not overlook those who give us behooveful counsel, even though they be of the meaner sort, nor insist that those counsels prevail which we have ourselves introduced; but whatever shall appear to be best, let that be approved by all.

For many of duller sight have perceived things sooner than those of acute vision, by means of diligence and attention. And say not, why do you call me to council, if you hearken not to what I say? These accusations are not a counsellor's, but a despot's. For the counsellor has only power to speak his own opinion; but if something else appear more profitable, and yet he will carry his own opinion into effect, he is no longer a counsellor but a despot, as I said. Let us not, then, act in this manner; but having freed our souls from all arrogancy and pride, let us consider, not how our counsels only may stand, but how that opinion which is best may prevail, even though it may not have been brought forward by us.

For no light gain will be ours, even though we should not have discovered what behooves, if ourselves accepted what has been pointed out by others; and abundant is the reward we shall receive from God, and so too shall we best attain to glory. For as he is wise that speaks that which is behooveful, so shall we that have accepted it, ourselves also reap the praise of prudence and of candor. Thus if both houses and states, thus too if the Church be ordered, she will receive a larger increase; and so too shall we ourselves, having thus best ordered our present lives, receive the good things to come: whereunto may we all attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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