

2 Corinthians 8:7

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the call to abound in grace and generosity, reflecting Christ's example of humility and sacrifice.

Scripture: Matthew 7:12, 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

Topics: "Christian Stewardship", "Spiritual Generosity"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of abundance in faith, utterance, knowledge, and earnestness, urging the Corinthians to excel in love and grace. He emphasizes the example of Christ's humility, who became poor for our sake so that we might become rich in spiritual blessings. Chrysostom advises the Corinthians to act according to their ability, not beyond it, and to willingly give to those in need, highlighting the equality and mutual dependence among believers. He challenges the fear of poverty, encouraging a mindset of generosity, compassion, and readiness to help others, reflecting the love and mercy we desire to receive from God and fellow believers.

Transcript

Therefore that ye abound in every thing; in faith and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness.

See again his exhortation accompanied with commendations, greater commendations. And he said not, 'that you give,' but that you abound; in faith, namely, of the gifts, and in utterance, the word of wisdom, and knowledge, namely, of the doctrines, and in all earnestness, to the attaining of all other virtue.

And in your love, that, namely of which I have before spoken, of which I have also made proof.

That ye may abound in this grace also. Do you see that for this reason it was that he began by those praises, that advancing forward he might draw them on to the same diligence in these things also.

2 Corinthians 8:8

I speak not by way of commandment.

See how constantly he humors them, how he avoids offensiveness, and is not violent nor compulsory; or rather what he says has both these, with the inoffensiveness of that which is uncompelled. For after he had repeatedly exhorted them and had greatly commended the Macedonians, in order that this might not seem to constitute a necessity, he says,

I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others, the sincerity also of your love.

'Not as doubting it,' (for that is not what he would here imply,) 'but to make it approved, display it and frame it unto greater strength. For I therefore say these things that I may provoke you to the same forwardness. And I mention their zeal to brighten, to cheer, to stimulate your inclinations.' Then from this he proceeded to another and a greater point. For he lets slip no mode of persuasion, but moves heaven and earth in handling his argument. For he exhorted them both by other men's praises, saying, You know the grace of God which has been given in the Churches of Macedonia; and by their own, therefore that you abound in everything, in utterance and knowledge. For this has power to sting man more that he falls short of himself, than that he does so of others. Then he proceeds afterwards to the head and crown of his persuasion.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich.

'For have in mind,' says he, 'ponder and consider the grace of God and do not lightly pass it by, but aim at realizing the greatness of it both as to extent and nature , and you will grudge nothing of yours. He emptied Himself of His glory that you, not through His riches but through His poverty, might be rich. If you believe not that poverty is productive of riches, have in mind your Lord and you will doubt no longer. For had He not become poor, you would not have become rich. For this is the marvel, that poverty has made riches rich.' And by riches here he means the knowledge of godliness, the cleansing away of sins, justification, sanctification, the countless good things which He bestowed upon us and purposes to bestow. And all these things accrued to us through His poverty. What poverty? Through His taking flesh on Him and becoming man and suffering what He suffered. And yet he owed not this, but thou dost owe to Him.

2 Corinthians 8:10

And herein I give you my advice for your profit.

See how again he is careful to give no offense and softens down what he says, by these two things, by saying, I give advice, and, for your profit. 'For, neither do I compel and force you,' says he, 'or demand it from unwilling subjects; nor do I say these things with an eye so much to the receivers benefit as to yours.' Then the instance also which follows is drawn from themselves, and not from others.

Who were the first to make a beginning a year ago, not only to do, but also to will.

See how he shows both that themselves were willing, and had come to this resolution without persuasion. For since he had borne this witness to the Thessalonians, that of their own accord with much intreaty, they had prosecuted this giving of alms; he is desirous of showing of these also that this good work is their own. Wherefore he said, not only to do, but also to will, and not begun, but begun before, a year ago. Unto these things therefore I exhort you, whereunto ye beforehand bestirred yourselves with all forwardness.

2 Corinthians 8:11

And now also you have completed the doing of it.

He said not, you have done it, but, you have put a completion to it,

That as there was the readiness to will, so also [there may be] the completion also out of your ability.

That this good work halt not at readiness but receive also the reward that follows upon deeds.

2 Corinthians 8:12

2. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man has, not according as he has not.

See wisdom unspeakable. In that (having pointed out those who were doing beyond their power, I mean the Thessalonians, and having praised them for this and said, I bear them record that even beyond their power;) he exhorts the Corinthians to do only after their power, leaving the example to do its own work; for he knew that not so much exhortation, as emulation, incites unto imitation of the like; wherefore he says, For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man has, not according as he has not.

'Fear not,' he means, 'because I have said these things, for what I said was an encomium upon their munificence, but God requires things after a man's power,' according as he has, not according as he has not. For the word is acceptable, here implies 'is required.' And he softens it greatly, in confident reliance upon this example, and as winning them more surely by leaving them at liberty. Wherefore also he added,

2 Corinthians 8:13

For I say not this, that others may be eased, and you distressed.

And yet Christ praised the contrary conduct in the widow's case, that she emptied out all of her living and gave out of her want. Mark 12:43 But because he was discoursing to Corinthians among whom he chose to suffer hunger; for it were good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorying void; 1 Corinthians 9:15 he therefore uses a tempered exhortation, praising indeed those who had done beyond their power, but not compelling these to do so; not because he did not desire it, but because they were somewhat weak. For wherefore does he praise those, because in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality: and because they gave beyond their power? is it not very evident that it is as inducing these also to this conduct? So that even if he appears to permit a lower standard; he does so, that by it he may raise them to this. Consider, for instance, how even in what follows he is covertly preparing the way for this. For having said these things, he added,

2 Corinthians 8:14

Your abundance being a supply for their want.

For not only by the words he has before used but by these also, he is desirous of making the commandment light. Nor yet from this consideration alone, but from that of the recompense also, again he makes it easier; and utters higher things than they deserve, saying, That there may be equality at this time, and their abundance a supply for your want. Now what is it that he says? 'You are flourishing in money; they in life and in boldness towards God.' 'Give ye to them, therefore, of the money which you abound in but they have not; that you may receive of that boldness wherein they are rich and you are lacking.' See how he has covertly prepared for their giving beyond their power and of their want. 'For,' he says, 'if you desire to receive of their abundance, give of your abundance; but if to win for yourself the

whole, you will give of your want and beyond your power.' He does not say this, however, but leaves it to the reasoning of his hearers; and himself meanwhile works out his object and the exhortation that was meet, adding in keeping with what appeared, the words, that there may be equality at this time. How equality? You and they mutually giving your superabundance, and filling up your wants. And what sort of equality is this, giving spiritual things for carnal? For great is the advantage on that side; how then does he call it equality? either in respect of each abounding and wanting, does he say that this [equality] takes place; or else in respect of the present life only. And therefore after saying equality, he added, at this time. Now this he said, both to subdue the high-mindedness of the rich, and to show that after our departure hence the spiritual possess the greater advantage. For here indeed we all enjoy much equality of honor; but then there will be a wide distinction and a very great superiority, when the just shine brighter than the sun. Then since he showed that they were to be not only giving, but also receiving, and more, in return; he tries by a further consideration to make them forward, showing that if they did not give of their substance to others, they would not gain anything by gathering all together within. And he adduces an ancient story, thus saying,

2 Corinthians 8:15

As it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack.

Now this happened in the case of the manna. For both they that gathered more, and they that gathered less, were found to have the same quantity, God in this way punishing insatiableness. And this he said at once both to alarm them by what then happened, and to persuade them never to desire to have more nor to grieve at having less. And this one may see happening now in things of this life not in the manna only. For if we all fill but one belly, and live the same length of time, and clothe one body; neither will the rich gain anything by his abundance nor the poor lose anything by his poverty.

3. Why then do you tremble at poverty? And why do you pursue after wealth? 'I fear,' says one, 'lest I be compelled to go to other men's doors and to beg from my neighbor.' And I constantly hear also many praying to this effect, and saying, 'Allow me not at any time to stand in need of men.' And I laugh exceedingly when I hear these prayers, for this fear is even childish. For every day and in every thing, so to speak, do we stand in need of one another. So that these are the words of an unthinking and puffed up spirit, and that does not clearly discern the nature of things.

Do you see not that all of us are in need one of another? The soldier of the artisan, the artisan of the merchant, the merchant of the husbandman, the slave of the free man, the master of the slave, the poor man of the rich, the rich man of the poor, he that works not of him that gives alms, he that bestows of him that receives. For he that receives alms supplies a very great want, a want greater than any. For if there were no poor, the greater part of our salvation would be overthrown, in that we should not have where to bestow our wealth.

So that even the poor man who appears to be more useless than any is the most useful of any. But if to be in need of another is disgraceful, it remains to die; for it is not possible for a man to live who is afraid of this. 'But,' says one, 'I cannot bear blows arched [in scorn.]' Why do you in accusing another of arrogance, disgrace yourself by this accusation? For to be unable to endure the inflation of a proud soul is arrogant. And why do you fear these things, and tremble at these things, and on account of these things which are worthy of no account, dread poverty also?

For if you are rich, you will stand in need of more, yea of more and meaner. For just in proportion to your wealth do you subject yourself to this curse. So ignorant are you of what you pray when you ask for wealth in order to be in need of no man; just as if one having come to a sea, where there is need both of sailors and a ship and endless stores of outfit, should pray that he might be in need of nothing at all. For if you are desirous of being exceedingly independent of every one, pray for poverty; and [then] if you are dependent on any, you will be so only for bread and raiment; but in the other case you will have need of others, both for lands, and for houses, and for imposts, and for wages, and for rank, and for safety, and for honor, and for magistrates, and those subject to them, both those in the city and those in the country, and for merchants, and for shopkeepers.

Do you see that those words are words of extreme carelessness? For, in a word, if to be in need one of another appears to you a dreadful thing, [know that] it is impossible altogether to escape it; but if you will avoid the tumult, (for you may take refuge in the waveless haven of poverty,) cut off the great tumult of your affairs, and deem it not disgraceful to be in need of another; for this is the doing of God's unspeakable wisdom. For if we stand in need one of another, yet even the compulsion of this need draws us not together unto love; had we been independent, should we not have been untamed wild beasts?

Perforce and of compulsion God has subjected us one to another, and every day we are in collision one with another. And had He removed this curb, who is there who would readily have longed after his neighbor's love? Let us then neither deem this to be disgraceful, nor pray against it and say, 'Grant us not to stand in need of any one;' but let us pray and say, 'Suffer us not, when we are in need, to refuse those who are able to help us.' It is not the standing in need of others, but seizing the things of others, that is grievous.

But now we have never prayed in respect to that nor said, 'Grant me not to covet other men's goods.' but to stand in need, this we think a fit subject of deprecation. Yet Paul stood in need many times, and was not ashamed; nay, even prided himself upon it, and praised those that had ministered to him, saying, For you sent once and again to my need; Philippians 4:16 and again, I robbed other Churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you. 2 Corinthians 11:8 It is no mark therefore of a generous temper, but of weakness and of a low minded and senseless spirit, to be ashamed of this.

For it is even God's decree that we should stand in need one of another. Push not therefore your philosophy beyond the mean. 'But,' says one, 'I cannot bear a man that is entreated often and complies not.' And how shall God bear you who art entreated by Him, and yet obeyest not; and entreated too in things that advantage you? For we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:20 says he, as though God were entreating by us; be ye reconciled unto God. 'And yet, I am His servant,' says he.

And what of that? For when thou, the servant, art drunken, while He, the Master, is hungry and has not even necessary food, how shall your name of servant stand you in stead? Nay, this itself will even the more weigh you down, when you indeed live in a three-storied dwelling while He owns not even a decent shelter; when you [lie] upon soft couches while He has not even a pillow. 'But,' says one, 'I have given.' But you ought not to leave off so doing. For then only will you have an excuse, when you have not what [to give], when you possess nothing; but so long as you have, (though thou have given to ten thousand,) and there be others hungering, there is no excuse for you.

But when you both shut up grain and raise the price, and devise other unusual tricks of traffic; what hope of salvation shall you have henceforth? You have been bidden to give freely to the hungry, but thou dost

not give at a suitable price even. He emptied Himself of so great glory for your sake, but thou dost not count Him deserving even of a loaf; but your dog is fed to fullness while Christ wastes with hunger; and your servant bursts with surfeiting while your Lord and his is in want of necessary food. And how are these the deeds of friends? Be reconciled unto God, 2 Corinthians 5:20 for these are [the deeds] of enemies and such as are in hostility.

4. Let us then think with shame on the great benefits we have already received, the great benefits we are yet to receive. And if a poor man come to us and beg, let us receive him with much good will, comforting, raising him up with [our] words, that we ourselves also may meet with the like, both from God and from men. For whatsoever ye would that they should do unto you, do ye also unto them. Matthew 7:12 Nothing burdensome, nothing offensive, does this law contain. 'What you would receive, that do,' it says. The return is equal. And it said not, 'what you would not receive, that do not,' but what is more. For that indeed is an abstinence from evil things, but this is a doing of good things, in which the other is involved. Also He said not 'that do ye also wish, but do, to them.' And what is the advantage? This is the Law and the Prophets. Would you have mercy shown you? Then show mercy. Would you obtain forgiveness? Then grant it. Would you not be evil spoken of? Then speak not evil. Do you long to receive praise? Then bestow it. Would you not be wronged? Then do not plunder. Do you see how He shows that virtue is natural, and that we need no external laws nor teachers? For in the things we wish to receive, or not to receive from our neighbors, we legislate unto ourselves. So that if you would not receive a thing, yet do it, or if you would receive it, yet do it not, you have become self-condemned and are henceforth without any excuse, on the ground of ignorance and of not knowing what ought to be done. Wherefore, I beseech you, having set up this law in ourselves for ourselves, and reading this that is written so clearly and succinctly, let us become such to our neighbors, as we would have them be to ourselves; that may we both enjoy present immunity, and obtain the future good things, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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