

# 2 Corinthians 9:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of generous and cheerful giving, using examples from scripture to inspire the congregation.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:7, 1 Kings 17:12, Psalm 112:9, Proverbs 11:24, Matthew 6:25, Luke 4:25, 2 Corinthians 8:9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

**Topics:** "Generous Giving", "Stewardship"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of generosity and giving to those in need, emphasizing the need to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully. He encourages the congregation to give cheerfully and willingly, not out of compulsion or grudgingly, as God loves a cheerful giver. Chrysostom uses examples from the Bible, such as the widow's mite and the prophet Elijah's encounter with a widow, to illustrate the virtue of sacrificial giving and hospitality. He urges the listeners to be generous, not calculating or hesitant, and to trust in God's provision and blessings for those who give with a joyful heart.

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## Transcript

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you.

Though he had said so much about it, he says here, It is superfluous for me to write to you. And his wisdom is shown not only in this, that though he had said so much about it, he says, it is superfluous for me to write to you, but in that he yet again speaks of it. For what he said indeed a little above, he said concerning those who received the money, to ensure them the enjoyment of great honor: but what he said before that, (his account of the Macedonians, that their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality, and all the rest,) was concerning loving-kindness and almsgiving. But nevertheless even though he had said so much before and was going to speak again, he says, it is superfluous for me to write to you. And this he does the rather to win them to himself. For a man who has so high a reputation as not to stand in need even of advice, is ashamed to appear inferior to, and come short of, that opinion of him. And he does this often in accusation also, using the rhetorical figure, omission, for this is very effective. For the judge seeing the magnanimity of the accuser entertains no suspicions even. For he argues, 'he who when he might say much, yet says it not, how should he invent what is not true?' And he gives occasion to suspect even more than he says, and invests himself with the presumption of a good disposition. This also in his advice and in his praises he does. For having said, It is superfluous for me to write to you, observe how he advises them.

For I know your readiness of which I glory on your behalf to them of Macedonia. Now it was a great thing that he even knew it himself, but much greater, that he also published it to others: for the force it has is greater: for they would not like to be so widely disgraced. Do you see his wisdom of purpose? He exhorted them by others' example, the Macedonians, for, he says, I make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the Churches of Macedonia. He exhorted them by their own, for he says, who were the first to make a beginning a year ago not only to do, but also to will. He exhorted them by the Lord's, for ye know he says, the grace of our Lord, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. 2 Corinthians 8:9 Again he retreats upon that strong main point, the conduct of others. For mankind is emulous. And truly the example of the Lord ought to have had most power to draw them over: and next to it, the [consideration] of the recompense: but because they were somewhat weak, this draws them most. For nothing does so much as emulation. But observe how he introduces it in a somewhat novel way. For He did not say, 'Imitate them;' but what?

And your zeal has stirred up very many. What do you say? A little before you said, [they did it] of their own accord, beseeching us with much entreaty, how then now, your zeal? 'Yes,' he says, 'we did not advise, we did not exhort, but we only praised you, we only boasted of you, and this was enough to incite them. Do you see how he rouses them each by the other, these by those, and those by these, and, along with the emulation, has intermingled also a very high encomium. Then, that he may not elate them, he follows it up in a tempered tone, saying, Your zeal has stirred up very many. Now consider what a thing it is that those who have been the occasion to others of this munificence, should be themselves behind hand in this contribution. Therefore he did not say, 'Imitate them,' for it would not have kindled so great an emulation, but how? 'They have imitated you; see then that you the teachers appear not inferior to your disciples.'

And see how, while stirring up and inflaming them still more, he feigns to be standing by them, as if espousing their party in some rivalry and contention. For, as he said above, Of their own accord, with much entreaty they came to us, insomuch that we exhorted Titus, that as he had made a beginning before, so he would complete this grace; so also he says here,

2 Corinthians 9:3

For this cause have I sent the brethren that our glorying on your behalf may not be made void.

Do you see that he is in anxiety and terror, lest he should seem to have said what he said only for exhortation's sake? 'But because so it is,' says he, I have sent the brethren; 'so earnest am I on your behalf,' that our glorying may not be made void. And he appears to make himself of the Corinthians' party throughout, although caring for all alike. What he says is this; 'I am very proud of you, I glory before all, I boasted even unto them, so that if you be found wanting, I am partner in the shame.' And this indeed he says under limitation, for he added,

In this respect, not, in all points;

That even as I said, you may be prepared. 'For I did not say, 'they are purposing,' but 'all is ready; and nothing is now wanting on their part. This then,' he says, 'I wish to be shown by your deeds.' Then he even heightens the anxiety, saying,

2 Corinthians 9:4

Lest by any means if there come with me any from Macedonia, we, (that we say not ye,) should be put to shame in this confidence. The shame is greater when the spectators he has arrayed against them are many, even those same persons who had heard [his boasting.] And he did not say, 'for I am bringing with me Macedonians.' 'for there are Macedonians coming with me;' lest he should seem to do it on purpose; but how [said he?] Lest by any means, if there come with me any from Macedonia? 'For this may happen,' he says, 'it is matter of possibility.' For thus he also made what he said unsuspected, but had he expressed himself in that other way, he would have even made them the more contentious. See how he leads them on, not from spiritual motives only, but from human ones as well. 'For,' says he, 'though you make no great account of me, and reckon confidently on my excusing you, yet think of them of Macedonia,' lest by any means, if they come and find you; and he did not say 'unwillingly,' but unprepared, not having got all completed. But if this be a disgrace, not to contribute quickly; consider how great it were to contribute either not at all, or less than behooved. Then he lays down what would thereupon follow, in terms at once gentle and pungent, thus saying, We, (that we say not ye,) should be put to shame. And he tempers it again, saying, in this confidence not as making them more listless, but as showing that they who were approved in all other respects, ought in this one also to have great fearlessness.

## 2 Corinthians 9:5

2. I thought it necessary therefore to entreat the brethren, that they would make up beforehand this your bounty, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty and not of extortion.

Again, he resumed the subject in a different manner: and that he may not seem to be saying these things without object, he asserts that the sole reason for this journey was, that they might not be put to shame. Do you see how his words, It is superfluous for me to write, were the beginning of advising? You see, at least, how many things he discourses concerning this ministering. And along with this, one may further remark that, (lest he should seem to contradict himself as having said, It is superfluous, yet discoursing at length about it,) he passed on unto discourse of quickness and largeness and forwardness [in contributing,] by this means securing that point also. For these three things he requires. And indeed he moved these three main points even at the first, for when he says, In much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality, he says nothing else than that they contributed both much and gladly and quickly; and that not only did not giving much pain them, but not even being in trials, which is more grievous than giving. And the words, they gave themselves to us; these also show both their forwardness and the greatness of their faith. And here too again he treats of those heads. For since these are opposed to [each other,] munificence and forwardness, and one that has given much is often sorrowful, while another, that he may not be sorry, gives less; observe how he takes care for each, and with the wisdom which belongs to him. For he did not say, 'it is better to give a little and of free choice, than much of necessity;' because he wished them to contribute both much and of free choice; but how says he? that they might make up beforehand this your bounty, that the same might be ready as a matter of bounty, and not extortion. He begins first with that which is pleasantest and lighter; namely, the 'not of necessity,' for, it is bounty he says. Observe how in the form of his exhortation he represents at once the fruit as springing up, and the givers as filled with blessing. And by the term employed he won them over, for no one gives a blessing with pain. Yet neither was he content with this; but added, not as of extortion. 'Think not,' he says, 'that we take it as extortioners, but that we may be the cause of a blessing unto you.' For extortion belongs to the unwilling, so that whoever gives alms unwillingly gives of extortion. Then from this he passed on again unto that, the giving munificently.

## 2 Corinthians 9:6

But this I say: that is, along with this I say also that. What?

He that sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. And he did not say niggardly, but a milder expression, employing the name of the sparing. And he called the thing sowing; that you might at once look unto the recompense, and having in mind the harvest, might feel that you receive more than you give. Wherefore he did not say, 'He that gives,' but He that sows: and he said not 'ye, if you sow,' but made what he said general. Neither did he say, 'largely,' but bountifully, which is far greater than this. And again, he betakes himself to that former point of gladness; saying,

## 2 Corinthians 9:7

Let each man do according as he has purposed in his heart. For a man when left to himself, does a thing more readily than when compelled. Wherefore also he dwells upon this: for having said, according as he is disposed, he added,

Not grudgingly, nor of necessity. And neither was he content with this, but he adds a testimony from Scripture also, saying,

For God loves a cheerful giver. Do you see how frequently he lays this down? I speak not by commandment: and, Herein I give my advice: and, as a matter of bounty, and not as of extortion, and again, not grudgingly, nor of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. In this passage I am of opinion that a large [giver] is intended; the Apostle however has taken it as giving with readiness. For because the example of the Macedonians and all those other things were enough to produce sumptuousness, he does not say many things on that head, but upon giving without reluctance. For if it is a work of virtue, and yet all that is done of necessity is shorn of its reward, with reason also he labors at this point. And he does not advise merely, but also adds a prayer, as his wont is to do, saying,

## 2 Corinthians 9:8

And may God, that is able, fulfill all grace towards you.

By this prayer he takes out the way a thought which lay in wait against this liberality and which is now also an hinderance to many. For many persons are afraid to give alms, saying, 'Lest perchance I become poor,' 'lest perchance I need aid from others.' To do away with this fear then, he adds this prayer, saying, May He make all grace abound towards you. Not merely fulfil, but make it abound. And what is make grace abound? 'Fill you,' he means, 'with so great things, that you may be able to abound in this liberality.'

That ye, having always all sufficiency in every thing, may abound to every good work.

Observe, even in this his prayer, his great philosophy. He prays not for riches nor for abundance, but for all sufficiency. Nor is this all that is admirable in him; but that as he prayed not for superfluity, so he does not press sore on them nor compel them to give of their want, condescending to their weakness; but asks for a sufficiency, and shows at the same time that they ought not to abuse the gifts received from God. That ye may abound, he says, to every good work. 'It is therefore,' says he, 'I ask for this, that you may bestow on others also.' Yet he did not say, 'bestow,' but 'abound.' For in carnal things he asks for a sufficiency for them, but in spiritual things for abundance even; not in almsgiving only, but in all other things also, unto every good work. Then he brings forward unto them the prophet for a counsellor, having

sought out a testimony inviting them to bountifulness, and says,

2 Corinthians 9:9

As it is written,

He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor;

His righteousness abides forever.

This is the import of abound; for the words, he has dispersed abroad, signify nothing else but the giving plentifully. For if the things themselves abide not, yet their results abide. For this is the thing to be admired, that when they are kept they are lost; but when dispersed abroad they abide, yea, abide forever. Now by righteousness, here, he means love towards men. For this makes righteous, consuming sins like a fire when it is plentifully poured out.

3. Let us not therefore nicely calculate, but sow with a profuse hand. Do you see not how much others give to players and harlots? Give at any rate the half to Christ, of what they give to dancers. As much as they give of ostentation to those upon the stage, so much at any rate give thou unto the hungry. For they indeed even clothe the persons of wantons with untold gold; but thou not even with a threadbare garment the flesh of Christ, and that though beholding it naked. What forgiveness does this deserve, yea, how great a punishment does it not deserve, when he indeed bestows so much upon her that ruins and shames him, but thou not the least thing on Him that saves you and makes you brighter?

But as long as you spend it upon your belly and on drunkenness and dissipation, you never think of poverty: but when need is to relieve poverty, you have become poorer than any body. And when feeding parasites and flatterers, you are as joyous as though you had fountains to spend from; but if you chance to see a poor man, then the fear of poverty besets you. Therefore surely we shall in that day be condemned, both by ourselves and by others, both by those that have done well and those that have done amiss.

For He will say to you, 'Wherefore were you not thus magnanimous in things where it became you? But here is a man who, when giving to an harlot, thought not of any of these things; while thou, bestowing upon your Master Who has bid you not be anxious Matthew 6:25, art full of fear and trembling.' And what forgiveness then shall you deserve? For if a man who has received will not overlook, but will requite the favor, much more will Christ. For He that gives even without receiving, how will He not give after receiving?

'What then,' says one, 'when some who have spent much come to need other men's help?' You speak of those that have spent their all; when you yourself bestowest not a farthing. Promise to strip yourself of every thing and then ask questions about such men; but as long as you are a niggard and bestowest little of your substance, why throw me out excuses and pretenses? For neither am I leading you to the lofty peak of entire poverty but for the present I require you to cut off superfluities and to desire a sufficiency alone.

Now the boundary of sufficiency is the using those things which it is impossible to live without. No one debars you from these; nor forbids you your daily food. I say food, not feasting; raiment, not ornament. Yea rather, if one should enquire accurately, this is in the best sense feasting. For, consider. Which should we say more truly feasted, he whose diet was herbs, and who was in sound health and suffered no

uneasiness: or he who had the table of a Sybarite, and was full of ten thousand disorders?

Very plainly the former. Therefore let us seek nothing more than this, if we would at once live luxuriously and healthfully: and let us set these boundaries to sufficiency. And let him that can be satisfied with pulse and can keep in good health, seek for nothing more; but let him who is weaker and requires to be dieted with garden herbs, not be hindered of this. But if any be even weaker than this and require the support of flesh in moderation, we will not debar him from this either.

For we do not advise these things, to kill and injure men but to cut off what is superfluous; and that is superfluous which is more than we need. For when we are able even without a thing to live healthfully and respectably, certainly the addition of that thing is a superfluity.

4. Thus let us think also in regard of clothing and of the table and of a dwelling house and of all our other wants; and in every thing inquire what is necessary. For what is superfluous is also useless. When you shall have practised living on what is sufficient; then if you have a mind to emulate that widow, we will lead you on to greater things than these. For you have not yet attained to the philosophy of that woman, while you are anxious about what is sufficient. For she soared higher even than this; for what was to have been her support; that she cast in, all of it.

Will you then still distress yourself about such things as be necessary; and do you not blush to be vanquished by a woman; and not only not to emulate her, but to be left even of her far behind? For she did not say the things we say, 'But what, if when I have spent all I be compelled to beg of another?' but in her munificence stripped herself of all she had. What shall we say of the widow in the Old Testament in the time of the prophet Elias? For the risk she ran was not of poverty, but even of death and extinction, and not her own only, but her children's too.

For neither had she any expectation of receiving from others, but of presently dying. 'But,' says one, 'she saw the prophet, and that made her munificent.' But do not ye see saints without number? And why do I speak of saints? You see the Lord of the prophets asking an alms, and yet not even so do ye become humane; but though you have coffers spewing one into another, do not even impart of your superfluity. What do you say? Was he a prophet that came to her, and did this persuade her to so great a magnanimity?

This of itself deserves much admiration, that she was persuaded of his being a great and wonderful person. For how was it she did not say, as it would have been likely that a barbarian woman and a foreigner would have reasoned, 'If he were a prophet, he would not have begged of me. If he were a friend of God, He would not have neglected him. Be it that because of sins the Jews suffer this punishment: but whence, and wherefore, does this man suffer?' But she entertained none of these thoughts; but opened to him her house, and before her house, her heart; and set before him all she had; and putting nature on one side and disregarding her children, preferred the stranger unto all.

Consider then how great punishment will be laid up for us, if we shall come behind and be weaker than a woman, a widow, poor, a foreigner, a barbarian, a mother of children, knowing nothing of these things which we know! For because we have strength of body, we are not therefore manly persons. For he alone has this virtue, yea though he be laid upon his bed, whose strength is from within; since without this, though a man should tear up a mountain by his strength of body, I would call him nothing stronger than a girl or wretched crone.

For the one struggles with incorporeal ills, but the other dares not even look them in the face. And that you may learn that this is the measure of manliness, collect it from this very example. For what could be more manly than that woman who both against the tyranny of nature, and against the force of hunger, and against the threat of death, stood nobly fast, and proved stronger than all? Hear at least how Christ proclaims her. For, says He, there were many widows in the days of Elias, and to none of them was the prophet sent but to her.

Luke 4:25-26 Shall I say something great and startling? This woman gave more to hospitality, than our father Abraham. For she ran not unto the herd, as he, Genesis 18:7 but by that handful 1 Kings 17:12 outstripped all that have been renowned for hospitality. For in this was his excellence that he set himself to do that office; but hers, in that for the sake of the stranger she spared not her children even, and that too, though she looked not for the things to come. But we, though a heaven exists, though a hell is threatened, though (which is greater than all) God has wrought such great things for us and is made glad and rejoices over such things, sink back supinely.

Not so, I beseech you: but let us scatter abroad, let us give to the poor as we ought to give. For what is much and what little, God defines, not by the measure of what is given, but by the extent of the substance of him that gives. Often surely have you who cast in an hundred staters of gold offered less than he that offered but one obol, for you cast in of your superfluity. Howbeit do if but this, and you will come quickly even to greater munificence. Scatter wealth that you may gather righteousness.

For along with wealth this refuses to come to us; yet through it, though not with it, it is made present to us. For it is not possible that lust of wealth and righteousness should dwell together; they have their tents apart. Do not then obstinately strive to bring things together which are incompatible, but banish the usurper covetousness, if you would obtain the kingdom. For this is the [rightful] queen, and of slaves makes freemen, the contrary of which the other does. Wherefore with all earnestness let us shun the one and welcome the other, that we may both gain freedom in this life and obtain the kingdom of heaven, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom, to the Father together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and for ever, and world without end. Amen.

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