

Titus 3:8-11

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining good works, avoiding unprofitable activities, and handling heretics, while highlighting the dangers of covetousness and the importance of almsgiving in Christianity.

Scripture: Daniel 4:27, Acts 4:35, Philippians 4:17, 1 Timothy 1:4, 2 Timothy 2:25, Titus 3:8

Topics: "Good Works", "Heresy Warning"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of maintaining good works and avoiding unprofitable disputes and contentions. He encourages believers to be diligent in almsgiving and to seek out opportunities to help those in need, highlighting that good works are beneficial to all. Chrysostom warns against engaging in futile arguments with heretics and advises to reject those who persist in heresy after repeated admonitions. He stresses the significance of almsgiving as a powerful virtue that not only benefits others but also strengthens one's relationship with God.

Transcript

These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sins, being condemned of himself.

Having spoken of the love of God to man, of His ineffable regard for us, of what we were and what He has done for us, he has added, These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works; that is, Discourse of these things, and from a consideration of them exhort to almsgiving. For what has been said will not only apply to humility, to the not being puffed up, and not reviling others, but to every other virtue. So also in arguing with the Corinthians, he says, You know that our Lord being rich became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 Having considered the care and exceeding love of God for man, he thence exhorts them to almsgiving, and that not in a common and slight manner, but that they may be careful, he says, to maintain good works, that is, both to succor the injured, not only by money, but by patronage and protection, and to defend the widows and orphans, and to afford a refuge to all that are afflicted. For this is to maintain good works. For these things, he says, are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and

genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. What do these genealogies mean? For in his Epistle to Timothy he mentions fables and endless genealogies. 1 Timothy 1:4 [Perhaps both here and there glancing at the Jews, who, priding themselves on having Abraham for their forefather, neglected their own part. On this account he calls them both foolish and unprofitable; for it is the part of folly to confide in things unprofitable.] Contentions, he means, with heretics, in which he would not have us labor to no purpose, where nothing is to be gained, for they end in nothing. For when a man is perverted and predetermined not to change his mind, whatever may happen, why should you labor in vain, sowing upon a rock, when you should spend your honorable toil upon your own people, in discoursing with them upon almsgiving and every other virtue? How then does he elsewhere say, If God perhaps will give them repentance 2 Timothy 2:25; but here, A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sins, being condemned of himself? In the former passage he speaks of the correction of those of whom he had hope, and who had simply made opposition. But when he is known and manifest to all, why do you contend in vain? Why do you beat the air? What means, being condemned of himself? Because he cannot say that no one has told him, no one admonished him; since therefore after admonition he continues the same, he is self-condemned.

Ver. 12. When I shall send Artemas unto you, or Tychicus; be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis. What do you say? After having appointed him to preside over Crete, do you again summon him to yourself? It was not to withdraw him from that occupation, but to discipline him the more for it. For that he does not call him to attend upon him, as if he took him everywhere with him as his follower, appears from what he adds:

For I have determined there to winter.

Now Nicopolis is a city of Thrace.

Ver. 14. Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them.

These were not of the number to whom Churches had been entrusted, but of the number of his companions. But Apollos was the more vehement, being an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures. Acts 18:24 But if Zenas was a lawyer, you say, he ought not to have been supported by others. But by a lawyer here is meant one versed in the laws of the Jews. And he seems to say, supply their wants abundantly, that nothing may be lacking to them.

Ver. 14, 15. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful. All that are with me salute you. Greet them that love us in the faith.

That is, either those that love Paul himself, or those men that are faithful.

Grace be with you all. Amen.

How then do you command him to stop the mouths of gainsayers, if he must pass them by when they are doing everything to their own destruction? He means that he should not do it principally for their advantage, for being once perverted in their minds, they would not profit by it. But if they injured others, it behooved him to withstand and contend with them; and manfully await them, but if you are reduced to necessity, seeing them destroying others, be not silent, but stop their mouths, from regard to those whom they would destroy. It is not indeed possible for a zealous man of upright life to abstain from contention, but so do as I have said. For the evil arises from idleness and a vain philosophy, that one should be

occupied about words only. For it is a great injury to be uttering a superfluity of words, when one ought to be teaching, or praying, or giving thanks. For it is not right to be sparing of our money but not sparing of our words; we ought rather to spare words than our money, and not to give ourselves up to all sorts of persons.

What means, that they be careful to maintain good works? That they wait not for those who are in want to come to them, but that they seek out those who need their assistance. Thus the considerate man shows his concern, and with great zeal will he perform this duty. For in doing good actions, it is not those who receive the kindness that are benefited, so much as those who do it that make gain and profit, for it gives them confidence towards God. But in the other case, there is no end of contention: therefore he calls the heretic incorrigible. For as to neglect those for whom there is a hope of conversion is the part of slothfulness, so to bestow pains upon those who are diseased past remedy is the extreme of folly and madness; for we render them more bold.

And let ours, he says, learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful. You observe that he is more anxious for them than for those who are to receive their kindnesses. For they might probably have been brought on their way by many others, but I am concerned, he says, for our own friends. For what advantage would it be to them, if others should dig up treasures, and maintain their teachers? This would be no benefit to them, for they remained unfruitful. Could not Christ then, Who with five loaves fed five thousand men, and with seven loaves fed four thousand, could not He have supported Himself and His disciples?

Moral. For what reason then was He maintained by women? For women, it is said, followed Him, and ministered unto Him. Mark 15:41 It was to teach us from the first that He is concerned for those who do good. Could not Paul, who supported others by his own hands, have maintained himself without assistance from others? But you see him receiving and requesting aid. And hear the reason for it. Not because I desire a gift, he says, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. Philippians 4:17 And at the beginning too, when men sold all their possessions and laid them at the Apostles' feet, the Apostles, do you see, were more concerned for them than for those who received their alms. For if their concern had only been that the poor might by any means be relieved, they would not have judged so severely of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, when they kept back their money. Nor would Paul have charged men to give not grudgingly nor of necessity. 2 Corinthians 9:7 What do you say, Paul? Do you discourage giving to the poor? No, he answers; but I consider not their advantage only, but the good of those who give. Do you see, that when the prophet gave that excellent counsel to Nebuchadnezzar, he did not merely consider the poor. For he does not content himself with saying, Give to the poor; but what? Break off your sins by almsdeeds, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Daniel 4:27 Part with your wealth, not that others may be fed, but that you may escape punishment. And Christ again says, Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor...and come and follow Me. Matthew 19:21 Do you see that the commandment was given that he might be induced to follow Him? For as riches are an impediment, therefore he commands them to be given to the poor, instructing the soul to be pitiful and merciful, to despise wealth, and to flee from covetousness. For he who has learned to give to him that needs, will in time learn not to receive from those who have to give. This makes men like God. Yet virginity, and fasting, and lying on the ground, are more difficult than this, but nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. It is greater than all other virtues. It places the lovers of it by the side of the King Himself, and justly. For the effect of virginity, of fasting, of lying on the ground, is confined to those who practice them, and no other is saved thereby. But almsgiving extends to all, and embraces the members of Christ,

and actions that extend their effects to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.

For almsgiving is the mother of love, of that love, which is the characteristic of Christianity, which is greater than all miracles, by which the disciples of Christ are manifested. It is the medicine of our sins, the cleansing of the filth of our souls, the ladder fixed to heaven; it binds together the body of Christ. Would you learn how excellent a thing it is? In the time of the Apostles, men selling their possessions brought them to them, and they were distributed. For it is said, Distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. Acts 4:35 For tell me how, setting aside the future, and not now considering the kingdom that is to come, let us see who in the present life are the gainers, those who received, or those who gave. The former murmured and quarreled with each other. The latter had one soul. They were of one heart, and of one soul, it is said, and grace was upon them all. Acts 4:32 And they lived in great simplicity. Do you see that they were gainers even by thus giving? Tell me now, with whom would you wish to be numbered, with those who gave away their possessions, and had nothing, or with those who received even the goods of others?

See the fruit of almsgiving, the separations and hindrances were removed, and immediately their souls were knit together. They were all of one heart and of one soul. So that even setting aside almsgiving, the parting with riches is attended with gain. And these things I have said, that those who have not succeeded to an inheritance from their forefathers may not be cast down, as if they had less than those who are wealthy. For if they please they have more. For they will more readily incline to almsgiving, like the widow, and they will have no occasion for enmity towards their neighbor, and they will enjoy freedom in every respect. Such an one cannot be threatened with the confiscation of his goods, and he is superior to all wrongs. As those who fly unincumbered with clothes are not easily caught, but they who are incumbered with many garments and a long train are soon overtaken, so it is with the rich man and the poor. The one, though he be taken, will easily make his escape, while the other, though he be not detained, is incumbered by cords of his own, by numberless cares, distresses, passions, provocations, all which overwhelm the soul, and not these alone, but many other things which riches draw after them. It is much more difficult for a rich man to be moderate and to live frugally, than for the poor, more difficult for him to be free from passion. Then he, you say, will have the greater reward.-- By no means.-- What, not if he overcomes greater difficulties?-- But these difficulties were of his own seeking. For we are not commanded to become rich, but the reverse. But he prepares for himself so many stumbling-blocks and impediments.

Others not only divest themselves of riches, but macerate their bodies, as travelers in the narrow way. Instead of doing this, you heat more intensely the furnace of your passions, and gettest more about you. Go therefore into the broad way, for it is that which receives such as you. But the narrow way is for those who are afflicted and straitened, who bear along with them nothing but those burdens, which they can carry through it, as almsgiving, love for mankind, goodness, and meekness. These if you bear, you will easily find entrance, but if you take with you arrogance, a soul inflamed with passions, and that load of thorns, wealth, there is need of wide room for you to pass, nor will you well be able to enter into the crowd without striking others, and coming down upon them on your way. In this case a wide distance from others is required. But he who carries gold and silver, I mean the achievements of virtue, does not cause his neighbors to flee from him, but brings men nearer to him, even to link themselves with him. But if riches in themselves are thorns, what must covetousness be? Why do you take that away with you? Is it to make the flame greater by adding fuel to that fire? Is not the fire of hell sufficient? Consider how the Three Children overcame the furnace. Imagine that to be hell. With tribulation were they plunged into it, bound

and fettered; but within they found large room; not so they that stood around without.

Something of this kind even now will be experienced, if we will manfully resist the trials that encompass us. If we have hope in God, we shall be in security, and have ample room, and those who bring us into these straits shall perish. For it is written, Whoever digs a pit shall fall therein. Sirach 26:27 Though they bind our hands and our feet, the affliction will have power to set us loose. For observe this miracle. Those whom men had bound, the fire set free. As if certain persons were delivered up to the servants of their friends, and the servants, from regard to the friendship of their master, instead of injuring them, should treat them with much respect; so the fire, when as it knew that the Three Children were the friends of its Lord, burst their fetters, set them free, and let them go, and became to them as a pavement, and was trodden under their feet. And justly, since they had been cast into it for the glory of God. Let us, as many of us as are afflicted, hold fast these examples.

But behold, they were delivered from their affliction, you say, and we are not. True, they were delivered, and justly; since they did not enter into that furnace expecting deliverance, but as if to die outright. For hear what they say: There is a God in Heaven, Who will deliver us. But if not, be it known unto you, O King, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up. Daniel 3:17-18 But we, as if bargaining on the chastisements of the Lord, even fix a time, saying, If He does not show mercy till this time. Therefore it is that we are not delivered. Surely Abraham did not leave his home expecting again to receive his son, but as prepared to sacrifice him; and it was contrary to his expectation that he received him again safe. And thou, when you fall into tribulation, be not in haste to be delivered, prepare your mind for all endurance, and speedily you shall be delivered from your affliction. For God brings it upon you for this end, that He may chasten you. When therefore from the first we learn to bear it patiently, and do not sink into despair, He presently relieves us, as having effected the whole matter.

I should like to tell you an instructive story, which has much of profit in it. What then is it? Once, when a persecution arose, and a severe war was raging against the Church, two men were apprehended. The one was ready to suffer anything whatever; the other was prepared to submit with firmness to be beheaded, but with fear and trembling shrunk from other tortures. Observe then the dispensation towards these men. When the judge was seated, he ordered the one who was ready to endure anything, to be beheaded. The other he caused to be hung up and tortured, and that not once or twice, but from city to city. Now why was this permitted? That he might recover through torments that quality of mind which he had neglected, that he might shake off all cowardice, and be no longer afraid to endure anything. Joseph too, when he was urgent to escape from prison, was left to remain there. For hear him saying, Indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; but do thou make mention of me to the king. Genesis 40:14-15 And for this he was suffered to remain, that he might learn not to place hope or confidence in men, but to cast all upon God. Knowing these things therefore let us give thanks to God, and let us do all things that are expedient for us, that we may obtain the good things to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom to the Father be glory, with the Holy Ghost, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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