

A Plea for Alms

by Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson's sermon emphasizes the critical importance of charity as a reflection of Christian love and a means of spiritual enrichment.

Scripture: Psalm 112:9, Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 25:40, Ephesians 2:10, 1 John 3:17

Topics: "Christian Charity", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches a powerful sermon on the importance of charity and almsgiving, emphasizing the need for compassion and generosity towards those in need. He highlights how true charity is a reflection of God's love and mercy, urging the listeners to imitate Christ's sacrificial giving. Watson addresses the lack of charity in society, calling for a revival of compassion and kindness, and reminds the audience that charity is a fundamental aspect of Christian faith, reflecting the heart of God's mercy and grace.

Transcript

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by Thomas Watson

(Delivered in a sermon before the London city assembly, on April 13, 1658)

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" 1 John 3:17

To the assembly of the famous city of London,

My own lack of dexterity and my unfitness to release this publicly, needs some apology. But your acceptance is my encouragement and the order from your honorable court carries so much authority with it as to add some weight to that which dares not plead worth. I was more inclined to publish this discourse because, though the theme is common--yet the practice of it is rare and unusual. When contentions are never more hot, and charity never more cold--it is a sign that iniquity abounds. The zeal of our forefathers condemns us; we with Rachel have better eyes--but they with Leah were more fruitful. We are so far (at least the generality of men) from building churches and almshouses, that we are more ready to pull them down.

How truth is, in these days, forsaken--and charity forgotten! We may say of many, that they are miserably rich; their affections toward public advancements and charity are like the scales of the Leviathan, "tightly sealed" (Job 41:15). Ambrose said that when we relieve not one whom we see ready to perish with hunger--that we are the cause of his death. If this rule holds true, there are more guilty of the breach of the sixth commandment, than we are aware of.

When shall we see a resurrection of charity, which seems to lie dead and buried? Surely it will not be, unless God works a miracle upon men's hearts. May the good Lord by His Spirit cleave the rocks in our bosoms so that the water of repentance and the wine of charity may flow forth! Oh, that England might have that eulogy, as once Athens had, to be the nursery of humanity.

Believe it, charity is the best policy. By helping others--we heal ourselves. Job 29:13: "The blessing of him who was ready to perish came upon me." As the poor had Job's alms--so he had their prayers, and he fared better. Christ's poor are favorites of the court of heaven, and when you give them of your gold--they can unlock heaven by the golden key of prayer, and set God at work on your behalf. The merciful man has many intercessors, which made Jerome to say that it is almost impossible that God should not hear the prayers of so many. Why should there be the least regret or hesitance in our hearts? It would be our glory, if it might be said of us as Paul speaks of those evangelical Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:9: "As touching brotherly love, you need not that I write unto you." Oh, how forgetful are we--of that breast of mercy which feeds us, those golden wings which cover us! Surely we need to keep a register of God's favors to us. If we did, we would, as Clement of Alexandria said, give alms to testify of our gratitude.

This sermon which you read with seriousness, is not so much to be read over as to be lived over. Your liberality to those who are in need will give the best commentary upon the text. The Lord has set you in public places, and that you may become public blessing in your generation, walking in the fear of God and shining forth in a Bible life, shall be the prayer of him who is your servant in the work of the Lord,

Thomas Watson

"He distributes freely to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Psalms 112:9

The prophet David, inspired from heaven in this Psalm, describes a godly man and describes him in two ways:

1. By his sanctity, and that, first, in general, he is one who fears God (verses 1 and 2). In particular, he is charitably minded (verses 5 and 9).
2. The psalmist describes a godly man by his safety. "Surely he will never be shaken" (verse 6). He stands impregnable, being planted on the rock of ages. Though evil times come, he is not terrified. "They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the Lord to care for them" (verse 7). Guilt is the breeder of fear. Isaiah 33:14: "The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless!" Leviticus 26:36: "The sound of a wind-driven leaf will put them to flight."

It is not affliction without--but sin within which creates fear. It is the stirring withing the earth which makes an earthquake. True religion is the best antidote against these heart-killing fears. The fear of God drives out all other fear! The godly man insults danger. With the Leviathan, he laughs at the shaking of a spear, as in Job 41:29. When there is a tempest abroad--he has music at home. He is settled by faith--as a ship at anchor or as a weight in the center. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

I shall at this time consider the godly man as he is described by his sanctity, specified under the notion of charity and munificence in these words: "He distributes freely to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

Mercy is a weighty matter of the law (Matthew 23:23). Never can it more seasonably be pressed, than upon a day of such solemnity wherein we commemorate the noble bounty of many worthy and famous men, whose acts of beneficence and liberality are left behind, as so many monuments of their piety and renown to succeeding ages.

Give me permission to open the terms.

"He distributes freely." This is a metaphor taken from farmers who scatter and disperse their seed in the furrows of the field, expecting a crop afterwards. So the godly man scatters the precious seed of his charity abroad---and this seed is not lost but afterwards springs up into a crop.

"To the poor." The Hebrew word for "poor" in Scripture signifies one who is empty or drawn dry, a metaphor taken from ponds or rivers that are drawn dry. So the poor are exhausted of their strength, beauty, and substance. Like ponds, they are dried up; therefore, they must be filled again with the silver streams of charity.

"His righteousness." By "righteousness" (as most agreeable to the context) I understand the work of inherent grace in the heart, displaying and evidencing itself in works of mercy and bountifulness.

"Endures forever." Either, first, the comfort of his righteousness endures--he has sweet peace and satisfaction in his own mind.

Or, second, the honor of it endures. According to the Hebrew phrase, the memorial of his goodness stands as a monument of fame, not to be forgotten.

Or third, the reward of his righteousness endures. He reaps the fruit of his charity forever, as others interpret it.

The words thus opened fall into these four parts:

the benefactor;

his bounty--"He distributes freely";

the object--the poor;

the trophy or insignia of his honor displayed--"His righteousness endures forever."

Or, if you will, the text consists of two things:

the godly man's benignity--"He distributes freely";

and his benediction--"His righteousness endures forever."

The observation from the words is this--that a godly man is a liberal man. The Hebrew word for "godly" signifies merciful. The more godly--the more merciful. A godly man is a public blessing in the place where he lives, as in Psalm 37:26. "He is ever merciful and lends." As a nobleman's servant is known by the

livery he wears; just so, a servant of Christ known by this livery of mercifulness and charity.

There are two channels in which the stream of charity must run: charity to the souls of others and charity to the temporal needs of others.

Charity to the souls of others is a spiritual alms. Indeed, this is the highest kind of charity. The soul is the most precious thing. It is a vessel of honor, a bud of eternity, a spark lighted by the breath of God, a rich diamond set in a ring of clay. The soul has the image of God to beautify it--and the blood of God to redeem it. It being, therefore, of so high a descent, sprung from the ancient of days, and of so noble an extraction, that charity which is shown to the soul must be the greatest.

This is charity to souls--when we see others in their sins, and we pity them. If I weep (says Augustine) for that body from which the soul is departed, how should I weep for that soul from which God is departed! This is charity to souls--when we see men in the bondage of sin--and we labor by counsel, admonition or reproof to pull them out of their dreadful estate, as the angels did to Lot in Sodom. "Hurry! Get out of here right now, or you will be caught in the destruction of the city! When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city!" Genesis 19.

God made a law (Exodus 23:5) "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it." On these words Chrysostom said, "We will help a beast which is fallen under a burden, and shall we not extend relief to those who are fallen under a worse burden of sin!" To let others go on in sin securely--is not charity but cruelty! If a man's house were on fire, and another should see it and not tell him of it for fear of waking him--would not this be cruelty? Did he not deserve to be warned? And when we see the souls of others sleeping the sleep of death and the fire of God's wrath ready to burn about their ears--and we are silent, is not this to be accessory to their death!

If men wish to go to hell--and we do not attempt to stop them, is this love to their souls? Oh, I beseech you, if you have any compassion--strengthen the weak, bring back the wandering, raise up those who are fallen. "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." James 5:20

Charity to the needs of others, which this text properly intends, consists of three things:

- (1) a judicious consideration;
- (2) a tender commiseration;
- (3) a liberal contribution.

1 A judicious CONSIDERATION. Psalm 41:1, "Blessed is he who cares for the poor." And you must consider four things:

1. It might have been your own case. You might have stood in need of another's charity--and then how welcome and refreshing would those streams have been to you!
2. Consider how sad a condition poverty is. Though Chrysostom calls poverty the highway to heaven, he who keeps this road will go weeping there. Consider the poor. Behold their tears, their sighs, their dying groans. Look upon the deep furrows made in their faces and consider if there is not reason why you should scatter your seed in these furrows. The poor man feeds upon sorrow, he drinks tears (Psalm 80:5).

Like Jacob in a windy night--he has the clouds for his canopy, and a stone for his pillow. Further, consider that oftentimes poverty becomes not only a cross--but a snare. It exposes to much evil which made Agur pray, "Give me not poverty" (Proverbs 30:8). Poverty puts men upon sinful courses. The poor will venture their souls for money. If the rich would wisely consider this, they might be a means of preventing much sin.

3. Consider why the wise God has ordained an inequality in the world. It is for this very reason, that He would have charity exercised. If all were rich, there would be no need for alms nor could the merciful man have been so well known. If he who traveled to Jericho had not been wounded and left half dead, the good Samaritan who poured wine and oil into his wounds would not have been known.

4. Consider how quickly the balance of providence may turn. We ourselves may be brought to poverty, and then it will be no small comfort to us that we relieved others while we were in a capacity to do it. Ecclesiastes 11:2: "Give a portion to seven and also to eight, for you know not what evil shall be upon the earth." We cannot always promise ourselves halcyon days. God knows how soon any of us may change our pasture. The cup which now runs over with wine--may be soon filled with the waters of Marah. Ruth 1:21: "I went out full--and the Lord has brought me home again empty." How many have we seen who are invested with great lordships and possessions, who have, all of a sudden brought their manor down to a morsel.

It is wisdom in this sense to consider the poor. Remember how soon the scene may alter, and we may be put in the poor's dress and, if adversity comes, it will rejoice us to think that while we had an estate, we laid it out upon Christ's indigent members.

This is the first thing in charity--a judicious consideration.

2. Second is a tender COMMISERATION. The Hebrew word for "mercy" signifies affections. Christ first had compassion on the multitude (Matthew 15:32), then He wrought a miracle to feed them. Charity which lacks compassion, is brutish. The brute creatures can relieve us in many ways--but cannot pity us. It is a kind of cruelty (said Quintilian) to feed one in need and not to sympathize with him. True religion begets tenderness. As it melts the heart in tears of contrition towards God, so in affections of compassion toward others. Isaiah 16:11: "My affections shall sound like a harp." When your affections of pity sound, then your alms make sweet music in the ears of God.

3. Charity consists of a liberal CONTRIBUTION. Isaiah 58:10: "Feed the hungry and help those in trouble." Deuteronomy 15:8: "If there be a poor man within your gates, you shall open your hand wide unto him." The Hebrew word in the text signifies a largeness of bounty. It must be like water which overflows the banks. If God has enriched you with estates and made His candle (as Job said) to shine upon your tabernacle, you must not encircle and engross all to yourselves--but be as the moon which, having received its light from the sun, lets it shine to the world. The ancients made oil to be the emblem of charity. The golden oil of your mercy must, like Aaron's oil, run down upon the poor which are the lower skirts of the garment.

This liberal disbursement to the necessities of others, God commands, and grace compels. There is an express statute in Leviticus 25:35: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself, then you shall relieve him." The Hebrew is, "You shall strengthen him," or "put under him a silver crutch when he is falling."

It is worth our observation, what great care God took of the poor besides what was given privately. God made many laws for the public and visible relief of the poor, as in Exodus 23:11: "During the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove." God's intention in this law was that the poor should be liberally provided for. They might freely eat of anything which grew of itself the seventh year, whether of herbs, vines, or olive trees.

Someone may ask how the poor could live only on these fruits, there being (as it is probable) no corn growing then. Cajetan is of the opinion they lived by selling these fruits and converting them into money; so they lived upon the price of the fruits.

There is another law made in Leviticus 19:9: "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God." See how God indulged the poor. Some corners of the field were for the poor's sake, to be left uncut; and when the owners reaped they must not go too near the earth with their sickle. Something like an after-crop must be left. The shorter ears of corn, and such as lay bending to the ground, were to be reserved for the poor.

God made another law in favor of the poor, Deuteronomy 14:28-29: "At the end of every third year bring the tithe of all your crops and store it in the nearest town. Give it to the Levites, who have no inheritance among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all your work." The Hebrews write that every third year, besides the first tithe given to Levi, which was called the perpetual tithe (Numbers 18:21), the Jews set apart another tithe of their increase for the use of the widows and orphans; and that was called the tithe of the poor. Besides, at the Jew's solemn festivals, the poor were to have a share (Deuteronomy 16:11).

Relieving the necessities was commanded under the law, and it stands in force under the gospel. 1 Timothy 6:17-18: "Charge those who are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works." It is not only a counsel but a charge, and non-attendance to it runs men into a gospel offense.

Thus we have seen the mind of God in this particular charity. Let all good Christians comment upon it in their practice. What benefit is there of gold while it is emboweled and locked up in the mine? How is it better to have a great estate if it is so hoarded and cloistered up, as to never see the light?

As God commands us, so grace compels us to works of mercy and beneficence. 2 Corinthians 5:14: "The love of Christ constrains us." Grace comes with majesty upon the heart. Grace is not in theory--but virtue. Grace does not lie as a sleepy habit in the soul--but will put forth itself in vigorous and glorious actions. Grace can no more be concealed, than fire. Like new wine, it will have vent. Grace does not lie in the heart as a stone in the earth--but as seed in the earth; and it will spring up into good works.

It may serve to justify the Church of England against the calumny of malevolent men. The church of Rome lays upon us the aspersion that we are against good works. Indeed, we plead not for the merit of them--but we are for the use of them (Titus 3:14). Let us also learn to maintain good works for necessary use.

We read the angels had hands under their wings (Ezekiel 1:8). It may be an emblem of this truth: Christians must not only have the wings of faith to fly--but hands under their wings to work the works of mercy. "Everyone who trusts in God will be careful to do good deeds all the time. These things are good and beneficial for everyone" (Titus 3:8).

The lamp of faith must be filled with the oil of charity. Faith alone justifies--but justifying faith is not alone. You may as well separate weight from lead or heat from fire--as works from faith. Good works, though they are not the causes of salvation--yet they are evidences of salvation. Though they are not the foundation--yet they are the superstructure. Faith must not be built upon works--but works must be built upon faith. Romans 7:4: "You are united with the One who was raised from the dead. As a result, you can produce good fruit, that is, good deeds for God." Faith is the spouse which marries Christ--and good works are the children which faith bears! For the vindication of the doctrine of our church and in the honor of good works, I shall lay down these four aphorisms.

1. Works are distinct from faith. It is vain to imagine that works are included in faith, as the diamond is enclosed in the ring. They are distinct, as the sap in the vine is different from the clusters that grow upon it.

2. Works are the touchstone of faith. "Show me your faith by your works" (James 2:18). Works are faith's letters of credence to show. If (said Bernard) you see a man full of good works, then, by the rule of charity, you are not to doubt his faith. We judge the health of the body by the pulse, where the blood stirs and operates. Christian, judge the health of your faith--by the pulse of charity. It is with faith as with a deed in law. To make a deed in law valid, there are three things required: the writing, the seal, and the witnesses. So for the trial and confirmation of faith, there must be these three things: the writing (the Word of God), the seal (the Spirit of God), and the witnesses (good works). Bring your faith to this Scripture touchstone. Faith justifies works; works testify to faith.

3. Works honor faith--as the fruit adorns the tree. Let the liberality of your hand (said Clement of Alexandria) be the ornament of your faith, and wear it as a holy bracelet about your wrists. "All who heard of me praised me. All who saw me spoke well of me. For I helped the poor in their need and the orphans who had no one to help them. I helped those who had lost hope, and they blessed me. And I caused the widows' hearts to sing for joy. All I did was just and honest. Righteousness covered me like a robe, and I wore justice like a turban. I served as eyes for the blind and feet for the lame. I was a father to the poor." Job 29:11-16. While Job was pleading the cause of the poor, this was the ensign of his honor; it clothed him as a robe and crowned him as a diadem. This is what takes off the odium and obloquy from religion, and makes others speak well of holiness--when they see good works as handmaids waiting upon this queen.

4. Good works are in some sense more excellent than faith in two respects:

First, because they are of a more noble diffusive nature. Though faith is more needful for us--yet works are more beneficial to others. Faith is a receptive grace, all for self-interest, and it moves within its own sphere. Works are for the good of others. It is a more blessed thing to give, than to receive.

Second, good works are more visible and conspicuous than faith. Faith is a more hidden grace. It may lie hidden in the heart and may not be seen--but when works are joined with it, it shines forth in its native beauty. Though a garden is decked with flowers, they are not seen until the light comes. So the heart of a Christian may be enriched with faith--but it is like a flower in the night. It is not seen until works come. When this light shines before men--then faith appears in its orient colors.

REPROOF. If this is the effigy of a godly man, that he is of a charitable disposition; then it sharply reproves those who are far from this temper--who are all for gathering, but not for dispersing. They move only within the circle of their own interests--but do not relieve the necessities of others. They have a flourishing estate--but, like the man in the gospel, they have a withered hand and cannot stretch it out to good uses. These are like the churl Nabal in 1 Samuel 25:11: "Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

It was said of the Emperor Pertinax that he had a large empire--but a narrow, scanty heart. There was a temple at Athens which was called the temple of mercy. It was dedicated to charitable uses, and the greatest reproach was to upbraid one--that he had never been in the temple of mercy. It is the greatest disgrace to a Christian to be unmerciful.

Covetous men, while they enrich themselves, debase themselves, setting up a monopoly and committing idolatry with mammon, thus making themselves lower than men.

In the time of pestilence it is sad to have your houses shut up--but it is worse to have your hearts shut up. Covetous people are like the Leviathan in Job 41:24--their hearts are hard as a stone. You may as well extract oil out of a flint--as the golden oil of charity out of their flinty hearts! Coldness of the heart is a presage of death. When men's affections toward works of mercy are frozen, this coldness of heart is ominous and sadly portends that they are dead in sin. We read in the law, that the shellfish was accounted as unclean. This is probably because the meat of it was enclosed in the shell and was hard to come by. They are to be reckoned among the unclean who enclose all their estate within the shell of their own cabinet, and will not let others be the better for it. How many have lost their souls by being so saving!

There are some who, perhaps, will give the poor good words--and that is all. James 2:15-16: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2:15-17. Good words are but a cold kind of charity. The poor cannot live as the chameleon, upon this air. Let your words be as smooth as oil--yet they will not heal the wounded. Let them drop as the honeycomb, they will not feed the hungry.

"Though I speak with the tongue of angels and have not charity, I am but as a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). It is better to be charitable as a saint--than eloquent as an angel. Such as are cruel to the poor, let me tell you--you "unChristian" yourselves.

Unmercifulness is the sin of the heathen, Romans 1:31. While you put off the affections of charity, you put off the badge of Christianity. James speaks a sad word in James 2:13: "for he shall have judgment without mercy--who showed no mercy." Dives denied Lazarus a crumb of bread--and Dives was denied a drop of water at the last day. Behold the sinner's indictment in Matthew 25:42: "I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you didn't take Me in; I was naked and you didn't clothe Me, sick and in prison and you didn't take care of Me." Christ does not say, "You took away My food," but "You gave Me nothing to eat. You did not feed My members." Then follows the sentence, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!"

If Christ's poor come to your doors--and you bid them depart from you; the time may come when you shall knock at heaven's gate--and Christ will say, "Go from My door; depart from Me, you who are cursed."

In short, covetousness is a foolish sin. God gave the rich man in the gospel the appellation, "You fool!" (Luke 12:20). The covetous man does not enjoy what he possesses. He embitters his own life. He occupies himself with care either how to get, or how to increase, or how to secure an estate; and what is the outcome and result? Often, as a just reward of sordid penuriousness, God blasts and withers him in his outward estate. The saying of Gregory Nazianzen is to be seriously weighed: "God many times lets the thief take away and the moth consume that which is injuriously and uncharitably withheld from the poor."

I am sorry that any professors should be impeached as guilty of this sin of covetousness and unmercifulness. Sure I am, that God's elect are merciful people. (Colossians 3:12). I tell you, these devout misers are the reproach of Christianity! They are warts and spots on the face of true religion. Truly, I know not well what to make of them!

Aelian, in his history, reports that in India there is a griffin having four feet and two wings, with a bill like an eagle. It is hard to decide whether to rank him among the beasts or the fowl. So I may say of penurious votaries: they have the wings of profession, by which they seem to fly to heaven--but the feet of beasts--walking on the earth and even licking the dust! It is hard to know where to rank these, whether among the godly or the wicked. Take heed that, if your religion will not destroy your covetousness, that at last, your covetousness does not destroy your religion.

The fable tells us a story of the hedgehog that came to the conies' burrows in stormy weather and desired harbor, promising that he would be a quiet guest. Once he had gotten entertainment, he set up his prickles and never left until he had thrust the poor conies out of their burrows. So it is with covetousness: though it has many fair pleas to insinuate and wind itself into the heart, as soon as you let it in--this thorn will never stop pricking until it has choked all good beginnings and thrust all religion out of your heart!

EXHORTATION 1. I beseech all who hear me this day to put on affections of mercies, to be ready to relieve the miseries and necessities of others. Ambrose calls charity "the sum of Christianity". The Apostle James (1:27) makes it the very definition of religion: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this--to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." The poor are, as it were, in the grave--the comfort of their life is buried. Help with your merciful hands to raise them out of the sepulcher. God sends His springs into the valleys (Psalm 104:10). Let the springs of your charity run among the valleys of poverty. Your sweetest and most gracious influences should fall upon the lower grounds. What is all your seeming devotion, without bounty and mercifulness?

I have known many (said Basil) who pray and fast--but do not relieve those who as are in distress. They are for a zeal which puts them to no expense. What are they the better (said he) for all their seeming virtue?

We read that the incense was to be laid upon the fire (Leviticus 16:13). The flame of devotion must be perfumed with the incense of charity. Aaron was to have a bell and a pomegranate. The pomegranate (as some of the learned observe) was a symbol of good works. They lack the pomegranate (said Gregory Nazianzen) who have no good works. The wise men not only bowed the knee to Christ--but presented Him with gold, myrrh, and frankincense (Matthew 2:11). Pretenses of zeal are insufficient. We must not only worship Christ--but bestow something upon His members. This is to present Christ with gold and frankincense. Isaac would not bless Jacob by the voice--but he felt and handled him, and supposing them to be Esau's hands--he blessed him. God will not bless you by your voice, your loud prayers, or your devout discourses--but if He feels Esau's hands, if your hands have wrought good works--then He will

bless you.

Let me exhort you, therefore, to deeds of mercy. Let your fingers drop with the myrrh of liberality. Sow your golden seed. In this sense, it is lawful to put out your money--when you lay it out for good uses. Remember that excellent saying of Augustine, "Give those things to the poor which you cannot keep--that you may receive those things which you cannot lose."

There are many occasions for exercising your pious charity: hear the orphan's cry; pity the widow's tears. There are some who need employment, so it would do well to set their wheel a-going. Others who are past employment. Be as eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. Some whole families will sink--if your merciful hands do not help to shore them up.

I cannot be unmindful of the Christian universities--which are the nurseries of the church. They may be compared to that Persian tree--which buds, blossoms and bears ripe fruit at the same time. Oh, let these plants be watered with your silver drops! Cast not salt--but gold into these springs, that from thence may flow forth many celestial streams both of learning and piety--to refresh this city of our God.

Before I come to press you with arguments to liberality and munificence, there are three objections in the way which I shall endeavor to remove.

OBJECTION 1. "We may give, and so in time ourselves come to need." Let Basil answer this, "Wells which have their water drawn--spring ever more freely." Proverbs 11:25: "The liberal soul shall be made fat." There is nothing lost--by doing our duty. An estate may be imparted, yet not impaired. The flowers yield honey to the bee--yet their own fruit is not harmed. When the candle of prosperity shines upon us--we may give light to our neighbor who is in the dark--and have never the less light ourselves. Whatever is disbursed to pious uses, God brings it back in some other way, as the loaves multiplied in breaking, or as the widow's oil increased by pouring it out. 1 Kings 17:16.

OBJECTION 2. "I cannot do so much as others--erect churches, build hospitals, augment libraries, or maintain scholars at the university."

If you cannot do much--do something! The widow's two mites cast into the treasury were accepted by Christ. He did not look at the smallness of her gift--but the largeness of her heart! In the law, for him who could not bring a lamb for an offering, it sufficed if he brought two turtle-doves. We read in Exodus 35 that the people brought gold and silver and goat's hair for the building of the tabernacle. On which place, said Origen, "I desire, Lord, to bring something to the building of Your temple; if not gold to make the mercy seat, if not silk to make the curtains--yet a little goat's hair that I may not be found in the number of those who brought nothing to Your temple."

OBJECTION 3. "I have nothing to bestow upon the necessities of others." Do you have money to feed your lust and pride--and nothing to relieve the poor members of Christ? Let us admit this excuse to be real, that you have no such estate--yet you may do something wherein you may express your mercy to the poor. You may sympathize with them, pray for them, or speak a word of comfort to them. Isaiah 40:2 says, "Speak comfortably to Jerusalem." If you can give them no gold--you may speak a word in season which may be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. You may be helpful to the poor by stirring up others who do have estates, to relieve them. If a man is hungry, the wind will not fill him--but it can blow the sails of the mill and make it grind corn for the use of man. Just so, though you have no estate yourself to help those in need, you may stir up others to help them. You may blow the sails of their affections, causing them to

show mercy--and so may help your brother by a proxy.

EXHORTATION 2. Having answered these objections, let me pursue the exhortation to mercy and liberality. I shall lay down several arguments which I desire you to weigh in the balance of reason and conscience.

To be diffusively good is the great end of our creation. Ephesians 2:10 says we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Every creature answers the end of its creation. The star shines, the bird sings, the plant bears fruit, the end of our life is service. He who does not answer his end in respect of usefulness, cannot enjoy his end in respect of happiness. Many, says Seneca, have been long in the world--but have not lived. They have done no good for others. A selfish person is good for nothing, but to cumber the ground and--because he is barren of good works--he shall be fruitful in curses.

By this we resemble God, who is a God of mercy. He is said to delight in mercy (Micah 7:18). "His mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:9). He requites good for evil. Like the clouds which receive ill vapors from us--but return them to us again in sweet showers, there is not a creature alive--but tastes of the mercies of God! "Every bird," said Ambrose, "does in its kind sing hymns of praise to God for His bounty--but men and angels, in a more peculiar manner, taste the cream and quintessence of God's mercies."

What temporal mercies have you received? Every time you draw your breath--you suck in God's mercy; every bit of bread you eat--the hand of God's mercy carves it to you. You never drink, but in a golden cup of mercy. What spiritual mercies has God invested some of you with? Pardon, adoption, saving mercy. The picture of God's mercy, can never be drawn to the full. You cannot take the breadth of His mercy, for it is infinite; nor the height of it, for it reaches above the clouds; nor the length of it, for it is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 103:17). The works of mercy are the glory of the Godhead. Moses prayed, "Lord, show me Your glory." God said, "I will make all My goodness to pass before you" (Exodus 33:18-19). God accounts Himself most glorious, in the shining robes of His mercy. Now, by works of mercy, we resemble the God of mercy. We are bid to draw our lines according to Luke 6:36: "Be merciful--as your Father also is merciful."

Alms are a sacrifice. Hebrews 13:16: "Don't forget to do good and to share what you have with those in need, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God." When you are distributing to the poor, it is as if you were praying, as if you were worshiping God. There are two sorts of sacrifices: expiatory sacrifices (the sacrifice of Christ's blood); and thank offerings (the sacrifice of alms). This, said holy Greenham, is more acceptable to God than any other sacrifice. Acts 10:4: "The angel said to Cornelius, 'Your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God.'" The backs of the poor are the altar on which this sacrifice is to be offered up!

We ourselves live upon alms. Other creatures liberally contribute to our necessities. The sun has not its light for itself--but for us. It enriches us with its golden beams; the earth brings us a fruitful crop. The Psalmist says, "The valleys are covered with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Psalm 65:13). One creature gives us wool, another oil, another silk. We are glad to go begging to the creation. Shall every creature be for the good of man--and man alone, be for himself alone?

We are to extend our liberality by virtue of a shared membership. Isaiah 58:7: "I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from your own flesh and blood, who need your help." The poor are fellow members

of the same body. The members, by a law of equity and sympathy, contribute one to another.

The eye conveys light to the body, the heart blood, the head spirits. It is a dead member in the body, which does not communicate to the rest. Thus it is also in the body of Christ. Let no man think it is too far below him, to mind the needs and necessities of others. It is a pity that the hand should disdain to pluck a thorn out of the foot. It is spoken in the honor of that renowned princess, the Empress of Theodosius, that she herself visited the sick and prepared relief for them with her own imperial hands.

We are not owners of an estate--but stewards. Soon we may hear, "Give an account of your stewardship, for you may be no longer steward" (Luke 16:2). An estate is a talent to trade with. It is as dangerous to hide our talent--as to waste it (Matthew 25:25-30). If the covetous man keeps his gold too long, it will begin to rust--and the rust of it will witness against him.

Recall the examples of others who have been famous and renowned for acts of charity. Our Lord Christ was a great example of charity. He was not more full of merit, than of bounty. Trajan, the emperor, tore off a piece of his own royal robe, to wrap his soldiers' wounds. Christ did more: He made a medicine of His body and blood to heal us. Isaiah 53:5: "By His stripes we are healed." Here was a pattern of charity without parallel.

The Jews are noted in this respect. It is a rabbinical observation that those who live devoutly among the Jews distribute a tenth part of their estate among the poor, and they give freely (said Philo, the Jew) as if by giving they hope to receive some great gratuity. Now if the Jews are so devoted to works of mercy, who live without the Messiah, shall not we much more, who profess our faith in the blessed Messiah?

Let me tell you of some heathens. I have read that Titus Vespasian, who was so accustomed to works of mercy that, remembering he had given nothing that day, cried out, "I have lost a day!" It is reported of some of the Turks that they have servants whom they employ for the sole purpose to send relief to the poor. The Turks have a saying in their Koran, that if men knew what a blessed thing it was to distribute alms--they would give some of their own flesh to relieve the poor; and shall not a Christian's creed be better than a Turk's Koran!

Beloved, we are not left this day without witness. I desire to speak it to the glory of God, and the renown of this city--that there has been, both in the days of our worthy ancestors, and still to this day among many of you--a spirit of sympathy and compassion.

When poor indigent creatures have been as Moses, laid in the ark of bulrushes, ready to sink in the waters of affliction, you have sent temporal favors to them, and have drawn them out of the waters with a golden cord. When they have been ready to make their own grave, you have built them hospitals. The milk of your charity has nursed them--and while they have sat under your vines, they have eaten the sweet grape! We read that they showed Peter the garments and coats which Dorcas made (Acts 9:39). May we not this day behold the coats which have been made to clothe the indigent? Go on still to do worthily, and, by your acts of munificence, to emblazon your coat of arms and eternalize your fame!

I shall use one more argument to persuade to charity, and that is the REWARD which follows alms-deeds. Giving alms is a glorious work, and, let me tell you, it is a fruitful work. They who sow mercy--shall reap mercy. Whatever is disbursed to the poor, is given to Christ! Matthew 25:40: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me!" The poor man's hand is Christ's treasury--and there is nothing lost, which is put there.

There is a reward in this life. The charitable man is crowned with a blessing. He is:

Blessed in his PERSON. Psalm 41:1: "Blessed is he who considers the poor." God casts a favorable aspect upon him.

Blessed in his NAME. So it is in the text: his horn shall be exalted with honor. Also Psalm 112:6: "He shall be had in everlasting remembrance." His name shall be gloriously embalmed.

Blessed in his ESTATE. Proverbs 11:25: "The liberal soul shall be made fat." He shall not only have the venison--but the blessing.

Blessed in his POSTERITY. Psalm 37:26: "He is ever merciful and lends, and his seed is blessed." He shall not only leave an estate behind--but a blessing behind to his children; and God will see that the estate shall not be cut off.

Blessed in his NEGOTIATIONS. Deuteronomy 15:10: "Give freely without begrudging it, and the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do!" The charitable man shall be blessed in his building, planting, journeying; whatever he is about--a blessing shall empty itself upon him. He shall be a prosperous man; the honeycomb of a blessing shall be still dropping upon him!

Blessed with LONG LIFE. Psalm 41:2: "The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive." He has helped to keep others alive--and God will keep him alive. Is there anything then, lost by charity? It spins out the silver thread of life. Many are taken away the sooner for their unmercifulness; because their hearts are not charitable, their lives are shortened.

The great reward is in the life to come. Aristotle joined these two together, liberality and usefulness. God will reward the merciful man, though not for his works--yet according to his works. Revelation 20:12: "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." As God has a bottle to put your tears in--so He has a book to write your alms in! As God will put a veil over His people's sins--so He will set a crown upon their works. The way to lay up--is to lay out. Other parts of your estate you leave behind--but that which is given to Christ's poor, is hoarded up in heaven! That is a blessed kind of giving which, though it makes the purse lighter--makes the crown heavier.

Whatever alms you distribute, you shall have good security. Proverbs 19:17: "He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and that which he has given will He pay him again." There is God's pledge to save you from being the loser for your charity. Yet here is our unbelief and atheism: we will not take God's pledge. We commonly put our deeds of mercy among our desperate debts.

You shall be paid with an abundance. For a wedge of gold which you have parted with--you shall have a weight of glory! For a cup of cold water--you shall have rivers of pleasure which run at God's right hand forevermore! The interest comes to infinitely more than the principal. Pliny writes of a country in Africa where the people, for every bushel of seed they sow, receive a hundred and fifty-fold increase. Just so, for every penny you drop into Christ's treasury--you shall receive above a thousandfold increase. Your after-crop of glory will be so great that, though you are still reaping, you will never be able to come to the end the whole harvest. Let this persuade rich men to honor the Lord with their substance.

Before I conclude, let me briefly lay down some RULES concerning your charity--that it may be the sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor to God.

RULE 1. Your charity must be FREE. Deuteronomy 15:10: "Give freely without begrudging it, and the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do." That is, you shall not be troubled at parting with your money. He who gives grievously gives grudgingly. Charity must flow like spring water--freely. The heart must be the spring, the hand the pipe, the poor the cistern. God loves a cheerful giver. You must not give to the poor as if you were delivering your purse to the highway robber. Charity without willingness, is rather a fine than an offering. It is rather doing penance than giving alms. Charity must be like the myrrh which drops from the tree without cutting or forcing.

RULE 2. We must give that which is our own. Isaiah 58:7: "Share your bread with the hungry, bring the poor and homeless into your house." The word for "alms" in the Syriac signifies "justice". To show that alms must be of that which is justly gotten, the Scripture puts them together. "To do justice, to love mercy" (Micah 6:8), we must not make a sacrilege of sacrifice. Isaiah 61:8: "For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and injustice." He who shall build a hospital with ill-gotten goods, displays the insignia of his pride and sets up the monument of his shame!

RULE 3. Do all IN Christ and FOR Christ. Labor that your persons may be in Christ. We are accepted in Him (Ephesians 1:6). Origen, Chrysostom, and Peter Martyr affirm that the all works, not springing from a root of faith--are lost.

The Pelagians thought to have posed Augustine with the question whether it was sin in the heathen to clothe the naked. Augustine answered rightly, "The doing of good is not in itself simply evil--but, proceeding of infidelity, it becomes evil." Titus 1:15: "To those who are unbelieving, nothing is pure." That fruit is most sweet and genuine which is brought forth in the vine (John 15:4). Outside of Christ--all our alms and charities are but the fruit of the wild olive. They are not good works--but dead works.

RULE 4. Do all for Christ, for His sake, that you may testify to your love for Him. Love mellows and ripens our alms deeds; it makes them a precious perfume to God. As Mary, out of love, brought her ointments and sweet spices to anoint Christ's dead body; so, out of love for Christ, bring your ointments and anoint His living body, His saints and members.

RULE 5. Works of mercy are to be done in HUMILITY. Away with ostentation! The worm breeds in the fairest fruit, the moth in the finest cloth. Pride will be creeping into our most holy things. Beware of this dead fly in the box of ointment. When Moses' face shone, he put a veil over it; so while your light shines before men, and they see your good works--cover yourselves with the veil of humility. As the silkworm weaves her fancy works, and hides herself within the silk and is not seen--so we should hide ourselves from pride and vainglory.

It was the sin of the Pharisees that, while they were distributing alms, they blew the trumpet (Matthew 6:2). They did not give their alms--but sold them for applause. A proud man casts his bread upon the waters, as the fisherman casts his rod upon the waters--he angles for vainglory.

I have read of Cosmos Medices, a rich citizen of Florence, who confessed to a near friend of his, that he built so many magnificent structures, and spent so much on libraries, not for any love of learning--but to raise up for himself the trophies of fame and renown. A humble soul denies himself, yes, even annihilates himself. He thinks how little it is he can do for God, and, if he could do more, it would be but a due debt. Therefore he looks upon all his works as if he had done nothing.

The saints are brought in at the last day as disowning their works of charity. "Then the righteous will answer Him--Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?" Matthew 25:37-39. A good Christian not only empties his hand of alms--but empties his heart of pride. While he raises the poor out of the dust--he lays himself in the dust. Works of mercy must be like the cassia--which is a sweet spice, but grows low.

RULE 6. Dispose your alms **PRUDENTLY**. It is said of the merciful man, that he orders his affairs with discretion (Psalm 112:5). There is a great deal of wisdom in distinguishing between those who have sinned themselves into poverty--and those who, by the hand of God, are brought into poverty. Discretion in the distribution of alms consists in two things: in finding a fit object and in taking the fit season.

In finding a fit **OBJECT**. Give to those who are in most need. Raise the hedge where it is lowest; feed the lamp which is going out. Give to those who most in dire need. Though we bestow cost and dressing upon a weak plant--yet not upon a dead plant. Help such as may help to build the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11). Those who may be pillars in church and state, not caterpillars, make your charity to flourish.

In taking the fit **SEASON**. Give to charitable uses in time of health and prosperity. Distribute your silver and gold to the poor before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken (Ecclesiastes 12:6). Make your hands your executors, not as some who reserve all they give until after they expire. Truly, what is then bestowed is not given away--but taken away by death. It is not charity but necessity. Do not marry yourselves to money--so that you are resolved that nothing shall part you but death. The miser is never good--until he is rotted in the grave. A covetous man receives money--but parts with none until death breaks his money-box in pieces, and then the silver and gold come tumbling out. Give in time of health. These are the alms which God takes notice of, and, as Calvin said, He puts into His book of accounts.

RULE 7. Give **THANKFULLY**. They should be more thankful who give alms--than they who receive alms. We should, said Nazianzen, give a thank offering to God that we are in the number of givers--and not receivers. Bless God for a willing heart. To have not only a good estate--but a good heart, is a matter for thankfulness. Set the crown of your thankfulness upon the head of free grace!

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