

THE GOOD SAMARITAN JOHN the MERCIFUL

November 12, 2023
8th Sunday of Luke
Revision H

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

The Gospel lesson of the Good Samaritan returns to an often-occurring theme of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as us. This Gospel lesson is used in the Western Church in July.

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Today’s Gospel lesson is recorded only by Luke and occurred in the Fall of 29 AD. It begins with a lawyer (an expert in the Mosaic Law, not civil law) trying to justify himself with Jesus (Luke 10:29). He first asked Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law?” (Luke 10:26) The lawyer replied by quoting the Greatest Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). The lawyer did not come up with this completely on his own. His statement was part of a creed used in the synagogue worship that was learned and memorized by school children¹. This is also a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

The same issue came up again in the Spring of 30 AD during Holy Week, where the Pharisees and Scribes also asked Jesus which is the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34). Jesus replied that all the (Mosaic) Law and the Prophets hang on this same statement that the lawyer made; that is, the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:40). One scribe² replied to Jesus, “to love Him with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). Jesus remarked then that he had answered wisely; so Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). This is to say: you know what to do; all you need now is to go do it.

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¹ Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 245, 101-104
Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, p. 79.

² Scribes were experts in the Mosaic Law and could be called lawyers.

Background: The Lawyer

In our Gospel lesson, when the lawyer quoted the Greatest Commandment, Jesus replied, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Thus the opinion of the experts on the Mosaic Law (Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers) concur that the Greatest Commandment is the answer for obtaining eternal life, and the Lord agreed with them.

Clement of Alexandria discussed³ why Christ first asked the lawyer if he had kept the Commandments. Keeping them leads to eternal life in that the Commandments define sin and what God requires. Good deeds and the keeping of the Commandments are an acceptable prayer to God.

“God dispenses many treasures; some disclosed by the Law, others by the prophets; some by the mouth of God, and others by the Spirit singing accordingly. And the Lord is the same Instructor by all these. Here is then a comprehensive precept, and an exhortation of life, all embracing, ‘As you wish that men should do to you, do likewise to them’ (Luke 6:31). We may comprehend the Commandments in two parts, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength; and your neighbor as yourself’. From these He infers, ‘on this hang the Law and the prophets’ (Matthew 22:37-40). Further, to him that asked, ‘What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?’, He answered, ‘Do you know the Commandments?’ And on him replying, Yes, He said, ‘This do⁴, and you shall be saved’ (Matthew 19:16-20). Especially conspicuous is the love of our Instructor set forth in various Commandments. We have the Ten Commandments given by Moses, an elementary principle, defining the designation of sins in a way conducive to salvation. These things are to be observed, and whatever else is commanded in reading the Bible. And He directs us, ‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord’ (Isaiah 1:16-18). We find many examples in other places, as, for instance, respecting prayer, where good works are an acceptable prayer to the Lord⁵. And the manner of prayer is described: ‘If you see the naked, cover him; and you shall not overlook those who belong to your seed. Then shall your light spring forth early, and your healing shall spring up quickly; and your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of God shall encompass you’. What, then, is the fruit of such prayer? ‘Then shall you call, and God will hear you; while you are yet speaking, He will say, I am here’” (Isaiah 58:7-9).

Irenaeus of Lyon stated⁶ that when Jesus asked the lawyer if he had kept the Commandments, this was in keeping with what He had imposed on mankind from the beginning;

³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, III, 12.

⁴ Clement has added a few of the expressions from Luke 10:25-28.

⁵ See for example the Judgment of Works (Matthew 25:31-46), where people are saved by virtue of their dedication to serving the Lord’s brethren.

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, IV, xii, 5.

but the lawyer hadn't kept them, even though he said that he had. Jesus offered the lawyer the reward of an Apostle if he would diligently pursue his question, but the lawyer turned Him down.

“The Law beforehand taught mankind the necessity of following Christ, and He made this clear, when He replied to him who asked Him what he should do that he might inherit eternal life. ‘If you want to enter into life, keep the Commandments’. When the lawyer asked ‘Which?’, again the Lord replied, ‘Do not commit adultery, kill, steal, or lie; honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 19:16-19). He set this as an ascending series of precepts before those who wished to follow Him, where the precepts of the Law are the entrance into life. What He said to this lawyer, He says to everyone. The former said, ‘All these have I done’, and most likely he had not kept them, for if he had, the Lord would not have said to him, ‘Keep the Commandments’ (Matthew 19:17). The Lord, exposing his covetousness, said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, sell all that you have, and distribute to the poor; and come, follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). He promised to those, who would act thus, the portion of the Apostles⁷. He did not preach to His followers another God the Father, besides Him, who was proclaimed by the Law from the beginning, nor the fables invented by the heretics. But He taught that they should obey the Commandments, which God imposed from the beginning, and do away with their former covetousness by good works, and follow after Christ. That possessions distributed to the poor annul former covetousness, Zacchaeus made clear, when he said, ‘Half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone, I restore fourfold’” (Luke 19:8).

The Temptation of the Lawyer

In our Gospel lesson, the lawyer wanted to justify himself and sought clarification on the word “neighbor” (Luke 10:29). The implication was that he was only interested in tempting Jesus (Luke 10:25), not in inheriting eternal life. Cyril of Alexandria⁸ comes out smoking against the lawyer, saying that he had no intention of learning from Him, but merely sought to tempt Him. Thus Jesus rightly returned his focus to that part of the Mosaic Law that might lead to his understanding and repentance.

“For a man to make a pretense of pleasant-spoken words, with a tongue anointed with the honey of deception, with a heart full of bitterness is double-dealing and hypocrisy in action and conduct. ‘Their tongue is a piercing arrow; the words of their mouth are deceitful; he speaks peacefully to his neighbor, and enmity is in his heart’ (Jeremiah 9:8 LXX). And again, ‘Their words are smoother than oil, yet they are arrows’ (Psalm 54:21 LXX); by which is meant that their words have the force of arrows shot from bows and striking violently.”

“As proof of my assertion let us examine the lawyer's words. ‘A certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Luke 10:25) A lawyer, according to the custom of the Jews, was one acquainted with the Law, or at least having the reputation for knowing it; but in this case, he really didn't know it. This man imagined that he could trap Christ! Many

⁷ This is exactly what the Twelve Apostles did; they left everything (Matthew 19:29), and so did the entire Early Church after Pentecost (Acts 2:44-45).

⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 68, Studion Publishers, 1983, pp 287-290,

people had accused Christ, saying that He taught that the commandments given by Moses were of no value, while He introduced new teachings, which were not in accordance with the Law. The lawyer, expecting to be able to trap Christ, and get Him to say something against Moses, tempted Him, saying, ‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life?’”

“But he didn’t know Who he was dealing with! How could he have ventured to tempt God, Who tries the hearts and reins (Psalm 7:9 LXX), and to Whom nothing in us is hid? He might have said, ‘What shall I do to be saved, or to please God, and receive reward from Him?’ But he passed by this, and used rather Christ’s expressions, trying to pour ridicule upon His head. Since Jesus spoke constantly of eternal life to as many as drew near to Him, the haughty lawyer, to ridicule Him, made use of His own expressions.”

“Now had he been truly desirous of learning, he would have heard from Him the things that lead on to eternal life; but as he wickedly tempted Him, he heard nothing more than those commands, which were given by Moses. Jesus said, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ (Luke 10:26) And on the lawyer’s repeating what is enacted in the Law, as if to punish his wickedness, and reprove his malicious purpose, Christ, as knowing all things, said, ‘You have answered rightly; do this, and you shall live’ (Luke 10:28). At this point, the lawyer had missed his prey; his wickedness was unsuccessful, the net of deceit was torn apart. He was ‘found and caught, because he contended against the Lord’” (Jeremiah 50:24).

“Having missed his prey, he fell headlong into vanity; hurried from one pitfall to another, he fell from deceit to pride. One kind of wickedness, as soon as it has seized him, thrusts him on to another, making him wander from destruction to destruction. He does not ask in order that he may learn, but wishing to justify himself. For observe how from self-love as well as pride he shamelessly called out, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ (Luke 10:29) There is no one like you, O lawyer? Do you raise yourself above everyone? Those who are able to judge themselves are wise (Proverbs 13:10 LXX). As he exalted himself and boasted in vain imaginations, he learned from Christ, that he was destitute of love towards his neighbors; the profession of being learned in the Law didn’t profit him in any way whatever.”

“Very skillfully Jesus weaved the parable of him who fell into the hands of thieves, saying, that when he was lying half dead, a priest passed by, and in like manner a Levite, without feeling towards him any sentiment of humanity, or dropping upon him the oil of compassionate love. But rather, their mind was unsympathetic and cruel towards him. But one of another race, a Samaritan, fulfilled the law of love. Justly He asked, which of these three, he thinks, was the sufferer’s neighbor. He said, ‘He that showed mercy to him’. And to this Christ added, ‘Go also, and act in like manner’ (Luke 10:37). You have seen, O lawyer, and it has been proved by the parable, that it is of no avail whatever to any man, to be set up by empty names, and to pride yourself with meaningless titles, so long as the excellence of deeds does not accompany them. The dignity of the priesthood is useless to its owners, and equally so being called learned in the Law, unless they excel also in deeds. For a crown of love is being made for him who loves his

neighbor; and he proves to be a Samaritan. As Peter testified, ‘I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ (Acts 10:34-35). For Christ, Who loves our virtues, accepts all who are diligent in good pursuits.”

Loving Our Neighbor as Ourselves

The command in the Mosaic Law to love one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) uses the Hebrew word “*rea*” meaning friend or companion and thus implies a very close neighbor. But the Mosaic Law also says to treat the stranger among you as the native and to love the stranger as yourself, remembering that you were once strangers in Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34). The Hebrew word for stranger is “*ger*” meaning sojourner; in the Greek Septuagint, the corresponding word is “*proselutos*” meaning one who draws near; that is, a proselyte. So how far should loving one’s neighbor extend? Should it extend just to one’s friends and companions, to the members of one’s own tribe or people, as far as to Gentile proselytes or to any sojourner passing through? For a Mosaic Law scholar knowledgeable about minute details of the Law, this was a thought-provoking question that might be used to trap Jesus into saying something against Moses.

Jesus proceeded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan to clarify this. In the Parable the victim is:

- Robbed, stripped and wounded
- Ignored by a priest and a Levite
- Given first aid by a Samaritan
- Transported to the nearest inn and treated further by the Samaritan
- Given 1 to 2 weeks further paid medical care by the Samaritan.

In the context, it is implied that the victim was a Jew⁹. Being left half dead, he was likely bleeding to death from puncture wounds. By the time the Samaritan reached him, he had probably lost enough blood to make him very weak. Pouring wine on his wounds served as an antiseptic due to the alcohol in the wine. Pouring oil on his wounds also served as an ointment to further prevent infection.

The priest and Levite passing by had good excuses for not getting involved. They were probably either going to or coming from serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. Priests and Levites were divided up into 24 lots (1 Chronicles 24) where those in one lot served in the Temple in Jerusalem for one week, then went home. Twenty-three weeks later they served one week again. That way, service in the Temple was divided up among all the priests and Levites. The homes of the priests and Levites were confined to the “Levitical Cities” prescribed in the Mosaic Law (Numbers 35:1-8, Joshua 21:1-42). This lasted until the kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon and most Levites abandoned the Northern cities and returned to Judah. After the Babylonian captivity, Levitical cities were not distinct anymore and priests and Levites grouped together into what were called “Priestly Centers.” From these “Priestly Centers”, they traveled together to and from Jerusalem. One such “Priestly Center” was Nazareth¹⁰.

⁹ 1st Century Jews and Samaritans generally despised each other (John 4:8, 20). If the Samaritan had helped another foreigner, it would be no big deal. But for him to stop to help a Jew was remarkable.

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1995, pp. 36-37.

From the viewpoint of the priest or Levite, it was easy to rationalize not getting involved. The man was bleeding, and therefore he was unclean and so would they be if they touched him (Leviticus 15:2-13). And they couldn't serve in the Temple if they were unclean (Leviticus 22:2-6). But yet, the Lord cut through this religiosity excuse by saying, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13, 2:7, both of which quote Hosea 6:6). Even the scribe understood this, saying that loving one's neighbor is more important than sacrifice (Mark 12:33). God can raise up from stones children to Abraham who can offer sacrifices (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, 19:40). What God really wants is someone who will be like Him and show mercy.

For the Samaritan to transport the wounded man to an inn was not a small task either. If the guy was unconscious or drifting in and out, he couldn't ride. Somehow, the Samaritan "set him on his own animal" (Luke 20:34).

Finally, after taking care of the wounded man overnight, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper two denarii (this represented two days' wages for a laborer!) to continue his medical care and promised more if more was needed.

Jesus concluded the story by asking the lawyer which of the three was a neighbor to him who fell among thieves (Luke 10:36). The lawyer got the message, "He who showed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). Then Jesus said to him (and to us) "Go and do likewise."

Ambrose of Milan stated¹¹ that there are "ordinary duties" and "perfect duties". "Ordinary duties" are keeping the Commandments; everyone should do this without even thinking about it. "Perfect duties" refer to loving our enemies and showing mercy to the poor, whereby we receive more than we give. The righteous Job is a good example of this.

"Every duty is either 'ordinary' or 'perfect', a fact which we can also confirm by the authority of the Scriptures. For the Lord said, 'If you will enter into life, keep the Commandments. The lawyer said, 'Which?' Jesus said to him, 'Do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness; honor your father and your mother, and love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 19:17-19). These are ordinary duties, to which something is lacking."

"Upon this the young man said to Him, 'All these things have I kept from my youth, what do I still lack? Jesus said to him, 'If you will be perfect, go and sell all your goods and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me' (Matthew 19:20-21). Earlier the same is written, where the Lord said that we must love our enemies, and pray for those that falsely accuse and persecute us, and bless those that curse us. This we are bound to do, if we want to be perfect as our Father Who is in heaven. He directs the sun to shed his rays over the evil and the good, and makes the lands of the whole earth fertile with rain and dew without any distinction (Matthew 5:45). This, then, is a perfect duty, whereby all things are put right, which could have any failings in them."

"Mercy is a good thing, for it makes men perfect, in that it imitates the perfect Father. Nothing graces the Christian soul so much as mercy; mercy as shown chiefly towards the poor, that you may treat them as sharers in common with

¹¹ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, xi, 36-39.

you in the produce of nature, which brings forth the fruits of the earth for use to all. Thus, you may freely give to a poor man what you have, and in this way help him who is your brother and companion. You give silver; he receives life. You give money; he considers it his fortune. Your coin makes up all his property.”

“Further, he bestows more on you than you on him, since he is your debtor in regard to your salvation. How? If you clothe the naked, you clothe yourself with righteousness; if you bring the stranger under your roof, if you support the needy, he procures for you the friendship of the saints and eternal habitations. That is no small recompense. You sow earthly things and receive heavenly. Do you wonder at the judgment of God in the case of holy Job? Wonder rather at his virtue, in that he could say, ‘I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know’ (Job 29:15-16). Their shoulders were made warm with the skins of my lambs. The stranger dwelt not at my gates, but my door was open to everyone that came. Clearly blessed is he from whose house a poor man has never gone with empty hand. Nor again is anyone more blessed than he who is sensible to the needs of the poor, and the hardships of the weak and helpless. In the Day of Judgment, he will receive salvation from the Lord, Whom he will have as his debtor for the mercy he has shown.”

John Chrysostom looked¹² very carefully at Paul’s words, “All the Commandments are summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love *is* the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9-10). God puts love for our brethren on a par with love for God Himself; that is, one Commandment “is like” the other. There are two parts: abstinence from evil and doing good deeds. He considers us worthy to share His love, and He has been saying this even from ancient times.

“He does not say merely it is fulfilled, but ‘it is summed up’, that is, the whole work of the Commandments is concisely and, in a few words, completed. For the beginning and the end of virtue is love. This it has for its root and its groundwork, this for its summit. If then it is both beginning and fulfillment, what is there equal to it? But he does not seek love merely, but intense love. He does not say merely ‘love your neighbor’ but, ‘as yourself’. Christ also said that ‘the Law and the Prophets hang on it’. And in making two kinds of love, see how He has raised this! For after saying that the first commandment is, ‘You shall love the Lord your God’, He added a second; and He did not stop there, but added, ‘like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37-40). What can be equal to this love for man, or this gentleness? When we were at infinite distance from Him, He brought the love for us into comparison with that toward Himself, and said that it ‘is like this’. He puts the measures of either as nearly the same, of the one He says, ‘with all your heart, and with all your soul’, but of the love towards one’s neighbor, He says, ‘as yourself’. When we are fond of anyone, we say, if you love him, then you love me. So, He also showed this and said, ‘is like it’; to Peter, He said, ‘If you love Me, feed My sheep’” (John 21:16).

“Observe how the Law has two virtues: (1) abstinence from evils, for it ‘works no harm’, and (2) the working of good deeds. ‘For it is’, he says, ‘the fulfilling (or filling up) of the Law’ (Matthew 5:18). It does not bring before us

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXIII, vv. 9-10.

instruction only on moral duties in a concise form, but makes the accomplishment of them easy also. He was not just careful that we should become acquainted with things that are profitable to us, but also the doing of them was a great assistance to us. He did not just accomplish some part of the Commandments, but the whole sum of virtue in us. Let us then love one another, since in this way we shall also love God, Who loves us. He considers you worthy to share His love, and hates you when you don't share it. For man's love is full of envy and grudging; but God's love is free from all passion; therefore, He seeks for those to share His love. For He says, love with Me, and then I will love you the more. These are the words of a vehement lover! If you love My brethren, then I will also reckon Myself to be greatly beloved of you. For He vehemently desires our salvation, and this He showed from ancient times. Hear what He said when He was forming man, 'Let Us make man in Our Image', and again, 'Let Us make a helper for him. It is not good for him to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). And when man had transgressed, He rebuked him, but observe how gently. He did not say, 'Wretch! After receiving so great benefits, have you trusted the devil, and left your Benefactor, to take up with the evil spirit?' But what did He say? 'Who told you that you were naked, unless you have eaten of the Tree, which is the only one I commanded you not to eat of?' (Genesis 3:11) This is as if a father were to say to a child, who was ordered not to touch a sword, and then disobeyed and got wounded, 'How did you come to be wounded? You came so by not listening to me'. You see they are the words of a friend rather than a master, of a friend despised, and not even then forsaking. Let us then imitate Him, and when we need to rebuke, let us preserve this moderation."

Tertullian stated¹³ that Adam, in the Garden, knew the Law given to Moses in a condensed form, and he gives evidence for this from the Scriptures. This condensed form certainly included loving God and neighbor.

"Why should people believe that God, the founder of the universe, the Governor of the whole world (Jeremiah 31:27 LXX (37:27), Hosea 2:23, Zechariah 10:9, Matthew 13:31-43), had given a Law through Moses to one people, and not to all nations? Unless He had given it to everyone, He would not have permitted proselytes out of the nations to have access to it. He gave to all nations the same Law, which at definite times He directed should be observed, when He willed, through whom He willed, and as He willed. In the beginning of the world, He gave to Adam and Eve a Law, that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree planted in the middle of Paradise; if they did otherwise, they were to die (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:2-3). In this Law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts, which afterwards sprouted when given through Moses. If they had loved the Lord their God, they would not have disobeyed His precept (Genesis 3:6). If they had loved their neighbor¹⁴, that is, themselves, they would not have believed the persuasion of the serpent, and thus would not have committed murder upon themselves, falling from immortality, by disobeying God's precept. They also would have abstained from theft, stealthily tasting the fruit of the tree (Genesis 3:12-13); they would not

¹³ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, I, vii, 2.

¹⁴ Compare Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:34-40, Matthew 19:19, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10 :25-28, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Exodus 20:12-17, Deuteronomy 5:16-21.

have been anxious to hide beneath a tree to escape the view of the Lord their God (Genesis 3:8-9). Further, they would not have made themselves partners with the lies of the devil, by believing him that they would be 'like God' (Genesis 3:4-5). And thus, they would not have offended God either, as their Father, if they had not coveted another's, they would not have tasted of the unlawful fruit."

"Therefore, in this general and primordial Law of God, we recognize all the precepts of the Mosaic Law, which germinated when disclosed at their proper times. For the subsequent addition of a Law is the work of the same Being who had before given a precept; it is His function subsequently to train those, whom He had formed as righteous creatures. Before the Law of Moses, I contend that there was a Law unwritten, which was habitually understood naturally, and by the fathers was habitually kept. How was Noah 'found righteous' (Genesis 6:9, 7:1, Hebrews 11:7), if in his case the righteousness of a natural Law had not preceded him? How was Abraham accounted 'a friend of God' (Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23), if not on the ground of righteousness, in the observance of a natural Law? How was Melchizedek named 'priest¹⁵ of the Most High God', if before the Levitical priesthood, there were no Levites who offered sacrifices to God? It was after the above-mentioned patriarchs that the Law was given to Moses, 430 years after Abraham at their Exodus from Egypt (Genesis 15:13, Exodus 12:40-42, Acts 7:6). From this we understand that God's Law preceded Moses, and was not first given at Sinai but existed in Paradise. It was updated for the patriarchs, and again for the Jews, at definite periods and even set forth to the Gentiles."

We Are Like the Man Fallen Among Thieves

There are many ways where we are like the man who fell among thieves. Sin, the passions, covetousness have wounded us and the devil has beaten us up. As we get mired in sin, we feel like we are half dead. Christ, who was even called a Samaritan by His enemies (John 8:48), doesn't pass us by, but comes to help us. He pours wine and oil on our wounds: the wine is an antiseptic, like discipline, that may cause temporary pain as it does its work. The oil is soothing, like compassion, and seals the wounds to prevent further infection. After carrying us to a place, the Church, where we can be taken care of, our Good Samaritan gives us two denarii, which is like the servant who received two talents from his master. If we need more, He will provide more later.

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁶ that true love, such as shown by the Samaritan, buds into well-doing, since "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Our love is directed first to God, then to our neighbor. Love shown to our neighbor, God accepts as if done to Himself. On another level, we are like the wounded man lying on the road, and Christ is the Good Samaritan

"The Master accordingly, when asked, 'Which is the greatest of the Commandments?', said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Matthew 22:36-38). That no commandment is greater than this, He says, with good reason; it commands us regarding the Greatest God

¹⁵ See Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:10, 7:1-3, 10, 15, 17.

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 27-30.

Himself. Being loved by Him beforehand, it is impious for us to regard anything else older or more excellent.”

“The second in order, and not any less than this, He says, is, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:39); that is, God above yourself. When the lawyer inquired, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ (Luke 10:29), He did not specify the blood relation, the fellow-citizen, the proselyte, him that had been circumcised, or the man who uses the same Law. But He introduces one on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and represents him stabbed by robbers, thrown half-dead on the road, passed by the priest, looked sideways at by the Levite, but pitied by the vilified and excommunicated Samaritan. He did not, like those, pass casually, but provided such things as the man in danger required, such as oil, bandages, a beast of burden, money for the inn-keeper, part given now, and part promised. ‘Which of them was neighbor to him that suffered these things?’ On his answering, ‘He that showed mercy to him’ (Luke 10:36-37), He replied, ‘Go, therefore, and do likewise’, since love buds into well-doing.”

“In both the Commandments, then, He introduces love; but distinguishes it in order. He assigns to God the first part of love, and allots the second to our neighbor. He has pitied us most of all, we who were all but put to death with many wounds, fears, lusts, passions, pains, deceits, and pleasures by the rulers of darkness? Of these wounds the only physician is Jesus, who cuts out the passions thoroughly by the root. He does not do as the Law does, with bare effects¹⁷, but applies His ax to the roots of wickedness. He it is that poured wine on our wounded souls that brought the oil, which flows from the compassions of the Father, and gave it abundantly. He it is that produced the bindings of health and salvation that cannot be undone, Faith, Hope, Love. He it is that subjected angels, and principalities, and powers to serve us. They also shall be delivered from the vanity of the world through the revelation of the glory of the sons of God. We are therefore to love Him equally with God. And he who loves Christ Jesus does His will and keeps His Commandments. ‘For not everyone that said to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father’ (Matthew 7:21). And ‘Why call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?’ (Luke 6:46) ‘And blessed are you who see and hear what neither righteous men nor prophets’ have seen or heard (Matthew 13:16-17), if you do what I say.”

“He then is first who loves Christ; and second, he who loves and cares for those who have believed on Him. For whatever is done to a disciple, the Lord accepts as done to Himself, and reckons the whole as His. ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat’ (Matthew 25:35 etc.). And in another place, ‘He that receives you; receives Me; and he that doesn’t receive you, rejects Me’” (Matthew 10:40, Luke 10:16).

Ambrose of Milan applied¹⁸ the imagery of the wounded man, who was helped by the Samaritan, to those who have lapsed (denied the Faith) under persecution and succumbed to the

¹⁷ That is, He does not just say, “Thou shall not” to a stiff-necked people, but calls to those who have a willing heart.

¹⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Two Books Concerning Repentance, I, xi, 50-52.

pleasures and comforts of this life. In this way, he is wounded and half dead, and he needs both the comfort of the oil and the discipline or disinfectant of the wine.

“It is a twofold grace that everyone who believes might, in addition, suffer for the Lord Jesus. He who believes receives His grace, but he receives a second, if his faith is crowned by suffering. Peter received grace before he suffered, but when he suffered he received a second gift. And many who have not had the grace to suffer for Christ have nevertheless had the grace of believing on Him.”

“Therefore, ‘everyone that believes in Him should not perish’ (John 3:15-16). Let no one, whatever his condition, fear that he will perish, even after a fall. It may come to pass that the Good Samaritan may find someone going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; that is, falling back from the martyr’s conflict to the pleasures of this life and the comforts of the world. We may be wounded by robbers, that is, by persecutors, and left half dead. That Good Samaritan, Who is the Guardian of our souls -- for the word ‘Samaritan’ means Guardian -- won’t pass him by, but tend and heal him.”

“He doesn’t pass him by, because He sees in him some signs of life, so that there is hope that he may recover. Doesn’t it seem to you that he who has fallen is half alive if faith sustains any breath of life? He is dead who completely casts God out of his heart. He who does not completely cast Him out, but under pressure from torments has denied Him for a time, is half dead. If he is dead, you cannot ask him to repent, seeing he cannot be healed? If he is half dead, pour in oil and wine, not wine without oil, oil for comforting and wine for the sting of disinfectant. Place him on your beast, give him over to the host, lay out two denarii for his cure, be a neighbor to him. You cannot be a neighbor unless you have compassion on him; for no one can be called a neighbor unless he has healed, not killed, another. If you wish to be called a neighbor, Christ says to you, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37).

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹⁹ to shepherds in the Church regarding the balance between compassion and discipline, where both are necessary. One extreme is the High Priest Eli, who was unable to discipline his sons out of excess compassion and lost everything. On the other hand, harsh discipline without compassion represents a lack of love. The Good Samaritan exhibits a balance in that he poured wine on the man’s wounds as an antiseptic (discipline) but also poured oil on the wounds to soothe them (compassion).

“Eli, overcome by false affection, would not punish his delinquent sons, and smote himself along with his sons before the strict Judge (1 Samuel 4:17, 18). God said to him, ‘You have honored your sons more than Me’ (1 Samuel 2:29). The Lord also criticized the shepherds of Israel saying, ‘That which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was cast away you have not brought back’ (Ezekiel 34:4). One who has fallen away is brought back when anyone who has fallen into sin is recalled to a state of righteousness by pastoral diligence. For binding a fracture is similar to discipline subduing a sin; if not done, the injured might bleed to death for lack of the wound being compressed and constrained adequately.

¹⁹ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 6.

But often a fracture is made worse, when it is bound too tight, so that the cut is more severely felt from being constrained improperly. Wounds of sin in subordinates should be done with great carefulness, so that it exercises discipline against delinquents, but retains loving-kindness. Care should be taken that a ruler shows himself to his subjects as a mother in loving-kindness, and as a father in discipline. It should be done with anxious overview, so that neither discipline is rigid nor loving-kindness is lax. There is much lacking both to discipline and to compassion, if one is used without the other. Rulers ought to exercise both compassion justly considerate, and discipline affectionately severe towards their subjects. For the Truth teaches, the man is brought by the care of the Samaritan half dead into the inn, and both wine and oil are applied to his wounds (Luke 10:34); the wine to make them smart, the oil to soothe them. For whoever superintends the healing of wounds needs to administer the wine to the smart of pain, and in oil the softness of loving-kindness. Through wine what is festering may be purged, and through oil what is curable may be soothed. Gentleness must be mingled with severity; a sort of compound must be made of both, so that subjects are neither overcome by too much severity, nor relaxed by too great kindness. This is well signified by that ark of the tabernacle, in which, together with the tablets, there was a rod and manna (Hebrews 9:4). With knowledge of sacred Scripture in the good ruler's heart there is the rod of constraint, there should be also the manna of sweetness. David said, 'Your rod and Your staff, they have comforted me' (Psalm 23:4). For with a rod we are disciplined, with a staff we are supported. If, then, there is the constraint of the rod for striking, there should be also the comfort of the staff for supporting. Therefore, let there be love, but not weakness; let there be vigor, but not aggravation; let there be zeal, but not senseless burning; let there be pity; but not sparing more than is expedient. Justice and mercy blend themselves together in the best rule.

Irenaeus likened²⁰ the dew on the fleece for Gideon to the Holy Spirit diffusing throughout the world. We are the ones who had fallen among thieves that the Holy Spirit cares for; we receive the two denarii for our care to make us fruitful and bring an increase to our Master

"Gideon, foreseeing the gracious gift of God, changed his request, and prophesied that there would be dryness upon the fleece of wool (a type of the people), on which alone at first there had been dew (Judges 6:36-40). This indicates that those people should no longer have the Holy Spirit from God, as Isaiah said, 'I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it' (Isaiah 5:6). But that the dew, which is the Spirit of God, who descended upon the Lord, should be diffused throughout the earth. This is 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of the fear of God' (Isaiah 11:2). This Spirit He conferred on the Church, sending the Comforter from heaven throughout the entire world. The Lord also told us that the devil, like lightning, was thrown down from heaven. We need the dew of God, that we might not be consumed by fire, nor rendered unfruitful. Where we have an accuser, there we need an Advocate, the Lord commending to the Holy Spirit His own man, who had fallen among thieves. He Himself had compassion, and bound

²⁰ Irenaeus of Lyon, Against Heresies, III, xvii, 3.

up his wounds, giving two royal denarii. We, receiving by the Spirit the image and superscription of the Father and the Son, might cause the denarius entrusted to us to be fruitful, counting out the increase to the Lord.”

John Chrysostom stated²¹ that we should not be overly curious about the spiritual condition of those that we give help to. The Samaritan didn't do this to the wounded man, but gave him help immediately. Being overly curious and selective can take away the greater part of charity. Even if we are dealing with an unbeliever, he may be sanctified by someone else.

“I beseech you, brethren, to minister to the saints. For every believer is a saint in that he is a believer. Though he is a person living in the world, he is a saint. ‘The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband’ (1 Corinthians 7:14). See how the faith makes the saint? If then we see even a secular person in misfortune, let us stretch out a hand to him. Let us not be zealous for those only who dwell in the mountains; they are indeed saints both in manner of life and in faith; these others however are saints by their faith, and some of them also in manner of life. Let us not, if we see a monk thrown into prison, in that case go in to visit; but if it is a secular person, refuse to go in. He also is a saint and a brother.”

“What then, you say, if he is unclean and polluted? Listen to Christ saying, ‘Judge not that you be not judged’ (Matthew 7:1). Help him for God's sake! Even if we see a heathen in misfortune, we ought to show kindness to him, and to every man without exception who is in misfortunes, and much more to a believer who is in the world. Listen to Paul, saying, ‘Do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith’ (Galatians 6:10).

I don't know why this notion has been introduced, or where this custom has prevailed. For he that only helps monks, and with others is over-curious in his inquiries, and says, ‘unless he be worthy, unless he be righteous, unless he work miracles, I won't stretch out my hand’; such a one has taken away the greater part of charity. In time he will destroy the act of charity itself. And yet that is charity, which is shown towards sinners, towards the guilty. This is charity, not the pitying those who have done well, but those who have done wrong.”

“Listen to the Parable! ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves’ (Luke 10:30-37). When they had beaten him, they left him next to the road, having badly bruised him. A certain Levite came, and when he saw him, he passed by; a priest came, and when he saw him, he hurried past. A certain Samaritan came, and showed great care for him. He ‘bandaged his wounds’ (Luke 10:34), dropped oil on them, set him upon his donkey, ‘brought him to the inn, said to the host, Take care of him’ (Luke 10:35). Observe his great liberality, ‘I will give you whatever you shall spend’. Who then is his neighbor? ‘He that showed mercy on him! Go then also and do likewise’ (Luke 10:37). What a parable He spoke! He didn't say that a Jew did this to a Samaritan, but that a Samaritan showed all that liberality. Having then heard these things, let us not care only for ‘those that are of the household of faith’ (Galatians 6:10), and neglect others. If you see any one in affliction, do not be curious to inquire further. His being in affliction involves a just claim to your aid. For if you see a donkey

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, X, 7-8.

choking, you raise him up, and do not curiously inquire whose he is. Much more about a man, one ought not to be over-curious in inquiring whose he is. He is God's, whether he is heathen or Jew; since even if he is an unbeliever, still he needs help. If it had been committed to you to inquire and to judge, you would have had something to say. But, as it is, his misfortune does not allow you to search out these things. Even about men in good health, it is not right to be over-curious, or to be a busybody in other men's matters; much less about those that are in affliction."

TITHES, FESTIVALS AND ALMS

November 12, 2023
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision G

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Today’s Epistle reading is used in Western Churches the United States as the Epistle for the American holiday of Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day is not a Feast Day in the Orthodox Lectionary.

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Background: Old Testament Tithing

Under Mosaic Law, there were three types of tithes, often referred to by scholars today as the first, second and third tithe. The righteous Tobin described these three tithes in his almsgiving (Tobit 1:5-8 LXX). In the Old Testament, they are referred to as the tithe, festival offerings, and alms. Since the Mosaic Law was given to Moses in the wilderness, no central city had yet been established where one might bring one’s tithes. Later this would be Jerusalem where the Temple was located. At the place that the Lord will choose (this is, Jerusalem, Deuteronomy 12:5-7) everyone was to gather and bring their:

- Burnt offerings
 - Sacrifices
 - Tithes
 - Alms or gifts
 - Vows or promises
 - Free will offerings
 - The firstborn of everything

Tithes:

The first tithe was used for the support of the Levites, who had no land for an inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The way this worked in an agricultural economy was that every 10th sheep (for example) coming into the sheepfold went to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30-33) and was received by the Levites. The Levites, in turn, contributed a tithe of what they received to the high priest, which was Aaron and his descendants (Numbers 18:26-28). Following their model, most Antiochian Orthodox churches contribute a tithe of all income to their Archbishop, in our case, Metropolitan JOSEPH.

Festivals:

The tithes and other vows, alms and freewill offerings were to be brought to Jerusalem three times per year at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles where everyone rejoiced before the Lord. The first tithe belonged to the Levites; the tithe used at the festivals was actually a second tithe, since everyone used it, not just the Levites (Deuteronomy 12:12-19).

Alms:

Every third year, an additional portion was set aside for the alien, the orphans, the widows and the Levites (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13). Josephus said²² that this was a third tithe and it had been set up that way from the days of Moses. Following the giving of this third tithe, the people were to say “before the Lord” that they have not withheld any and to ask the Lord for a blessing that they might continue to have a land flowing with milk and honey (Deuteronomy 26:12-15). This third tithe was all that the widow of Nain could expect if the people were faithful to follow the Mosaic Law. Since Jesus criticized the Scribes and Pharisees for devouring widows’ houses (Matthew 23:14), the widow of Nain could probably expect nothing and was probably in dire straits with the death of her son.

The harvest of the land was dependent on the peoples’ observing the Lord’s statutes. For example, every seventh year, the land was to lie fallow with no planting or reaping (Leviticus 25:2-5). If the people observed the Lord’s statutes, the sixth year’s crops would be extensive enough to carry them for three years, or until the eighth-year-crop was in (Leviticus 25:18-22). The same was true with the tithe; the more they gave, the more they had.

The same applied to helping the poor. They were to freely open their hand to him and generously lend him sufficient for his needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). To not do so was a sin and the poor man may cry to the Lord against his rich neighbors. In being generous to him, however, “the Lord will bless them in all their work and in everything they do” (Deuteronomy 15:9-11).

The Firstborn:

The firstborn of both man and beast was devoted to the Lord (Exodus 13:2). The Lord intended the firstborn of man to be devoted to Him as priests. However, when all the people sinned by worshipping the golden calf, it was only the Levites who responded to Moses’ call to return to the Lord (Exodus 32:26). Therefore, the Lord dedicated the Levites instead of the firstborn to serve in the Tabernacle (Numbers 3:12-13). All the firstborn of non-Levites and all the firstborn of unclean animals were to be redeemed (Numbers 28:15-16). All firstborn of clean animals were to be offered as a sacrifice, where the priests received the meat of the animals after it was offered

²² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, IV, viii, 22, 240.

(Numbers 18:17-19). The dedication of the firstborn was in addition to the tithes. At the time of Joshua, the Canaanites and the surrounding nations took this one step further and offered the firstborn of man as a human sacrifice. This was heresy and implied that man could redeem himself by himself.

Where Did Tithes Originate?

The practice of tithing was well established at the time of Abraham when Abraham (Abram) gave a tithe to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-6). Two generations later Jacob made a vow or promise to give the Lord a tithe upon his safe return home (Genesis 28:20-22). Vows or votive offerings were well established then also.

Sacrifice had already been established before Cain killed Abel, and it was jealousy over the Lord's acceptance of Abel's offering that led Cain to kill Abel (Genesis 4:2-5). Had Cain and Abel been instructed to give tithes? The Lord taught them to make clothes out of animal skins (Genesis 3:21); yet people before the flood weren't meat-eaters (Genesis 9:2-4). The meat of the animals must have been used for sacrifices and the skin for clothing, just as the priests later received the skin of the animal that they helped to sacrifice (Leviticus 7:8).

New Testament Tithe:

One might contend that tithing is Old Testament Law and is not applicable to life in the New Testament. But in a discussion with the Scribes and Pharisees who paid a strict tithe of everything they received, Jesus criticized them for neglecting weightier matters of the Law (justice, mercy and faith). He said, "These you ought to have done without leaving the others (i.e. tithing) undone" (Matthew 23:23).

Under the Old Testament Law, the Prophet Malachi spoke to the people of his day about robbing God by refusing to contribute their tithes: "But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house. Test Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Malachi 3:8-10: compare Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

In the Early Church, people gave not just a Tithe, but they sold everything they had and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet for the Apostles to do as they pleased (Acts 2:45, 4:36-37). This demonstrates a singular detachment from worldly possessions among members of the Early Church.

New Testament Alms:

The Apostle Paul was involved in bringing alms to the Church in Jerusalem on at least two occasions. One occurred during a famine in 45 AD where Paul and Barnabas brought relief from Antioch to the churches in Judea (Acts 11:27-30).

On another occasion in 57 AD at the end of Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey, Paul collected alms from the Churches in Achaia (Corinth and Athens), Macedonia, (Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi) and Galatia (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) to bring to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). Paul felt it was the duty of the Gentile churches to help out materially since they benefited spiritually from

Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27). The collection of these alms was systematic and well planned (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Even though the churches in Macedonia were mired in deep poverty, they still managed to give alms well beyond their ability (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

Paul's References to Tithing: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Today's Epistle reading contains two Old Testament references: Psalm 112:9 and Isaiah 55:10. Psalm 112 begins with "How Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1). This man has descendants who are mighty (Psalm 112:2), has wealth in his house (Psalm 112:3) and does not fear evil tidings (Psalm 112:7). He is light arising in the darkness (Psalm 112:4); he is gracious and lends his money (Psalm 112:5); and he freely gives to the poor (Psalm 112:9, quoted in 2 Corinthians 9:9). The implication is that the reason he is strong and wealthy is because he gives and lends. That is, he is not attached to his worldly possessions, and there is a great deal of wisdom in this.

In Isaiah 55:10, the prophet spoke about how the Lord's ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts as much as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8-12). In the context of the epistle lesson, the implication is that the Lord has the foresight to see the long-term fruit of one's generosity, very much like a crop that can be harvested. The imagery Isaiah used were rain and snow as compared to the Word of God. The rain and snow come down from heaven, water the earth and make it sprout with seed and thus bread before returning to heaven (as evaporation). So also the Word does not return empty without accomplishing what He desires and succeeding in that which He sent.

A Cheerful Giver

Paul used this reference to Isaiah in connection with giving alms and tithes. The seed that we sow, like rain and the Word of God, will return. If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly; if we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). There is an analogy here to the 6th year crop (Leviticus 25:18-22). The Lord will see to it that "all grace abounds toward us that we may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8), and that we "are enriched in everything for all liberality" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

However, God is not a tax collector; we are not forced to do this. In the Early Church, people were not forced to sell all that they had. God loves a cheerful giver, not one doing so "grudgingly or of necessity" (2 Corinthians 9:7). A cheerful giver is like the camel that passes through the eye of the needle easily because his pack or burden comes off easily (Matthew 19:22-26). To understand what this means, we need to understand how ancient cities were constructed

The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and flame proofing. At night, the gates were closed and locked with a bar on the inside and not opened until morning. Travelers that arrived late in the day after the gates were closed were forced to spend the night outside the city unless there was some provision for them to get into the city. Outside the city, law and order did not exist at night and travelers were at the mercy of outlaws. This is still the case today in some third world countries.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a “needle’s eye gate” which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus²³. A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

The statement Jesus made, that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle’s eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, made use of the above imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The parable of the sower refers to this pack as “the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas (one of the Seventy) sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

A cheerful giver, then, is one whose pack or burden comes off easily (Matthew 19:22-26). This aspect of the Christian life has been little understood in our generation in the West.

To be a cheerful giver takes faith. As John Chrysostom said²⁴, “Many persons are afraid to give alms, saying, ‘In case I become poor; in case I need aid from others.’” To give when one expects a return is an investment; even tax collectors do that! To give without expecting a return is being god-like²⁵. As Chrysostom said²⁶,

“If one is doing work of virtue, and yet all that is done is of necessity, it is shorn of its reward; with reason also Paul labors at this point.”

John Chrysostom noted²⁷ that when, “All that believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), this early Christian community was a collection of cheerful givers. The result was very beneficial not just to them but also to the community. They immediately obtained a reward, that is, the ‘hundredfold’ that Jesus spoke of (Mark 10:29-30), for having left everything for Christ’s sake. In this case, the reward was ‘the favor with all the people’ (Acts 2:47).

“They had become angels all of a sudden, all of them; continuing in prayer and hearing, they saw that spiritual things are common, no one there had more than another, and they speedily came together, to the same thing in common. This does not mean that they were together in one place, but that this was an angelic commonwealth, not to call anything of theirs their own. The root of evils was cut out; by what they did, they showed what they had heard. This was what he said, ‘Save yourselves from this perverse generation’ (Acts 2:40), and ‘daily continuing with one accord in the temple’ (Acts 2:46). Daily they went up as to a sacred place, and frequently we find Peter and John doing this; for at present they disturbed none

²³ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, pp. 24-25.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, v. 8.

²⁵ See also the Gospel Lesson for the 2nd Sunday of Luke.

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, v. 7.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, VII, v. 46.

of the Jewish observances²⁸. Observe the increase of piety; they abandoned their riches, rejoiced and had great gladness, for greater were the riches they received without labor. None reproached, none envied, none grudged; no pride, no contempt was there. As children they accounted themselves to be under teaching; as newborn babies, such was their disposition. No talk of ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ then. Gladness waited at their table; no one seemed to eat of his own, or of another’s. The poor man knew no shame, the rich no haughtiness. This is gladness! The latter deemed himself the obliged and fortunate party; the others felt themselves as honored by this, and closely were they bound together. When people make lots of money, there are apt to be insults, pride, grudging; therefore Paul said, ‘Not grudgingly, or of necessity’ (2 Corinthians 9:7). See of how many things Paul bears witness to them! Genuine faith, upright conduct, perseverance in hearing, in prayers, in singleness, in cheerfulness! Two things there were which might deject them, their abstinent living, and the loss of their property²⁹. Yet on both these accounts did they rejoice, and they ‘had favor with all the people’ (Acts 2:47). For everyone loves men of this character, as common fathers! They conceived no malice toward each other; they committed all to the grace of God. There was no fear even though they had taken their position in the midst of dangers. By singleness, he denotes their entire virtue, far surpassing their contempt of riches, their abstinence, and their perseverance in prayer. Thus they offered pure praise to God! Observe here how they immediately obtain their reward by ‘having favor with all the people’! They were engaging, and highly beloved. Who would not prize and admire their simplicity of character; who would not be linked to one in whom was nothing underhanded?”

Removal of Our Sins

There is a greater benefit to giving alms than most people realize. In the giving of alms there is a working of relief from our sins. Christ had said, ‘He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet’s reward’ (Matthew 10:41). John Chrysostom stated³⁰ that there are similar rewards for giving alms; in doing so with the right motive, we receive relief from our sins. This takes some discernment, however, and it is not at all a case of purchasing indulgences by giving alms. If the Judge actually receives us into His eternal Kingdom for seeing Him hungry and feeding Him (Matthew 25:34-40), there must be a removal of our offenses involved in the proper giving of alms. However, we should not be overly curious about who it is that we give alms to and whether he is deserving of such. Imposters and con men can sometimes appear to be more deserving than Christ Himself.

“If one gives alms as if granting a favor to the receiver, it would be better for him not to give at all. For my concern is not that the saints may be supported. Even if you don’t give, someone else will. What I want is that you may have a relief from your own sins. But he that gives as if it were a favor will have no relief.

²⁸ This is interesting to note that their worship in the Temple did not bother the Jewish leaders, only their teaching about Jesus. This suggests that they used a liturgy similar to the Old Testament liturgy, and even participated in the on-going Temple liturgy.

²⁹ See also Mark Kern, *The Life of the Evangelist Mark*, St Athanasius Press, 2005. The Evangelist Mark founded a number of monasteries in Alexandria in the late 40’s AD, where the lifestyle of everything in common was patterned after the early Christian community in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, I, v. 7.

For it is not the giving of alms that is doing alms, but the doing it with readiness; it is the rejoicing, and the feeling grateful to him that receives. ‘Not grudgingly’, Paul said, ‘or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9:7). Except one give in this manner, let him not give at all; for that would be a loss, not a giving of alms. If you know that you (the giver) will gain, not they (the receivers), be assured that your gain becomes greater. The body of those receiving your alms is fed, but your soul is approved; for them, not one of their sins is forgiven when they receive, but for you, the greater part of your offenses is removed.”

“Let us share with the poor in their great prizes. Adopt Christ in your almsgiving, and you shall have great security. If there is any of the rulers of the church that lives in abundance and needs nothing, though he is a saint, don’t give to him, but prefer to him one that is in need, though he is not as admirable. Christ wills this, as when He said, ‘If you make a dinner, don’t call your friends, or your kinsmen, but call the maimed, the lame and the blind, that cannot recompense you’ (Luke 14:12-14). One needs discernment in paying such attention to the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, those who need clothing, strangers, and those who from riches have been reduced to poverty. For He said not simply, ‘I was fed’, but ‘I was hungry’, for, ‘You saw Me hungry and fed Me’ (Matthew 25:35). There are two parts to the claim, both that he is a saint and that he is hungry. For if he that is simply hungry ought to be fed, much more when he is a saint that is hungry. If then he is a saint, but not in need, don’t give; for there is no gain for you in this. And neither did Christ ask you to do it; or rather, he is not a saint if he is in abundance and allows himself to receive. Do you see that these things have been said to you for your profit? Feed the hungry, that you may not feed the fire of hell. The hungry man, eating what is yours, sanctifies also what remains” (Luke 11:41).

“Think how the widow maintained Elijah; she did not feed more than she was fed; she did not give more than she received. This also takes place in a much greater thing. For it is not a ‘barrel of flour’, or ‘a jar of oil’ (1 Kings 17:14); but ‘a hundredfold and eternal life’ (Matthew 19:21, 29) is the recompense for doing so. You become the mercy of God; the spiritual food; a pure leaven. She was a widow; famine was pressing, and nothing hindered her. She had children, and she still did not hold back (1 Kings 17:12). This woman has become equal to her that cast in the two mites (Luke 21:1-4). She didn’t say to herself, ‘What shall I receive from this man? He stands in need of me. If he had any power he would not be hungry; he would have broken the drought; he would not have been subject to this suffering. Perhaps he too offends God’. None of these things did she think of. Do you see how great a good it is to do well with simplicity, and not to be overly curious about the person who is benefited? If she had chosen to be curious she would have doubted; she would not have believed.”

“Abraham also, if he had chosen to be curious, would not have received angels. For it cannot be, that one who is exceedingly nice in these matters, should ever meet with them. Such people usually invite impostors. The pious man does not desire to appear pious, and does not clothe himself for show, and is likely to be rejected. But the impostor, as he makes a business of it, puts on a great deal of piety that is hard to see through. So that while he who does good, even to those who don’t seem to be pious, will fall in with those who are pious; he who seeks out

those who are thought to be pious, will often fall in with those who are not so. Therefore, I ask you; let us do all things in simplicity. Let us even suppose that he is an impostor that comes; you are not asked to be curious about this. ‘Give to everyone that asks you’ (Luke 6:30); and, ‘Deliver them that are led away to death, and redeem them that are appointed to be slain; be sure to help’ (Proverbs 24:11 LXX). Yet most of those that are slain suffer this for some evil they are convicted of; still he said, ‘Deliver them’. For in this shall we be like God, thus shall we be admired, and shall obtain those immortal blessings, which we all wish to be thought worthy of.”

John Chrysostom addressed³¹ widows in the Church and how they can help with hospitality. Be sure to do it yourself, like Abraham, not delegate it to a handmaid; otherwise you lose your reward. The stranger may feel bashful and unwilling to impose on us; we need to approach him as if we were receiving Christ, and as if we were receiving the honor of His Presence. In doing this for the poor stranger, the greater part of our sin is removed.

“The hospitality here spoken of is not merely a friendly reception, but one given with zeal, cheerfulness and readiness, going about it as if one were receiving Christ Himself. The widows should perform these services themselves, not commit them to their handmaids. For Christ said, ‘If I your Master and Lord have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another’s feet’ (John 13:14). And though a woman may be very rich, of the highest rank, of noble birth and family, there is not the same distance between her and others, as between God and the disciples. If you receive the stranger as Christ, don’t be ashamed, but rather glory. But if you can’t receive him as Christ, don’t receive him at all. ‘He that receives you’, He said, ‘receives Me’ (Matthew 10:40). If you do not receive him in this way, you have no reward. Abraham was receiving men that passed as travelers, as he thought, and he did not leave it to his servants to make the preparations for their entertainment, but took the greater part of the service upon himself. He commanded his wife to mix the flour, though he had three hundred and eighteen servants born in his house (Genesis 18:6-7, 14:14), of whom there must have been many maidservants. But he wished that himself and his wife should have the reward, not of the cost only, but of the service. Thus we ought to exercise hospitality always by our own personal exertion that we may be sanctified, and our hands blessed. And if you give to the poor, don’t hesitate to give it yourself, for it is not to the poor that it is given, but to Christ. Who is so wretched as to scornfully refuse to stretch out his own hand to Christ?”

“This is hospitality; this is truly to do it for God’s sake. But if you give orders with pride, though you ask the stranger to take the first place, it is not hospitality; it is not done for God’s sake. The stranger requires much attendance, much encouragement, and with all this it is difficult for him not to feel bashful; for so delicate is his position, that while he receives the favor, he is ashamed. That shame we ought to remove by the most attentive service, and to show by words and actions, that we do not think we are conferring a favor, but receiving one. So much does good will multiply the kindness! He, who considers himself a loser, and thinks that he is doing a favor, destroys all the merit of it. So he, who looks upon himself

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XIV, vv. 9-10.

as receiving a kindness, increases the reward. ‘For God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9:7). You are rather indebted to the poor man for receiving your kindness. If there were no poor, the greater part of your sins would not be removed. The poor are the healers of your wounds; their hands are medicinal to you. The physician, extending his hand to apply a remedy, does not exercise the healing more than the poor man, who stretches out his hand to receive your alms, and thus becomes a cure for your ills. You give your money, and with it your sins pass away. Such were the Priests of old, of whom it was said, ‘They eat up the sin of My people’ (Hosea 4:8). Thus you receive more than you give; you are benefited more than you benefit. You lend to God, not to men. You increase your wealth, rather than diminish it.”

How Can We Obtain a Better Perspective?

Who are some of the great examples of people who can be characterized as selfless givers? John Chrysostom gave³² two examples of people who excelled at generosity: the poverty-stricken woman who gave her last two mites to help the poor (Luke 21:1-4), and the woman who fed Elijah with the last handful of flour she had (1 Kings 17:10-16).

“Once you have lived 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 woman³³, who gave the two mites, while you are anxious about what is sufficient for your needs. She soared higher than this; for what was to have been her support; that she cast in, all of it. Will you then still distress yourself about necessary things; and do you not blush to be outdone and left far behind by a woman? For she did not say the things we say, ‘But what if when I have spent all, I am compelled to beg of another?’ In her generosity she stripped herself of all she had. What shall we say of the widow in the time of the prophet Elijah? The risk she ran was not of poverty, but of death, and not her own only, but her children’s too. She had no expectation of receiving anything from others, but she expected to die shortly. ‘But,’ one said, ‘she saw the prophet, and that made her generous.’ But you see saints without number! You see the Lord of the prophets asking alms, and yet you do not become humane; even though you have coffers spewing one into another, you do not even give out of your excess. Was he a prophet that came to her, and did this persuade her to so great a generosity? This deserves much admiration, that she was persuaded that he was a great and wonderful person. For how was it that she, a barbarian woman and a foreigner, did not say, ‘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. If the Jews are suffering this punishment of famine because of sins, why does this man suffer?’ But she entertained none of these thoughts; but opened her heart and her house to him, and set before him all she had. She put nature aside, disregarded her children, and preferred the stranger to everyone. Consider then how great punishment will be laid up for us, if we are weaker than a foreigner, a barbarian woman, who knew nothing of the things, which we know! Just because we have strength of body, we

³² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, XIX, v. 9.

³³ The poor widow who Jesus commended for contributing two mites to the Treasury for the help of the poor (Luke 21:1-4).

are not automatically manly persons. Hear how Christ proclaims her! For He said, ‘There were many widows in the days of Elijah, 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 did not ‘run to the herd’ as he did (Genesis 18:7), but by that ‘handful’ (1 Kings 17:12) outstripped all that have been renowned for hospitality. For in this was Abraham’s excellence that he entertained God; but hers, in that for the sake of the stranger she did not spare her children, even though she did not look for the things to come (Hebrews 11:9-10). But we, though a heaven exists, though a hell is threatened, though God has done such great things for us, we sink back listlessly. Let it not be so; 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 wealth of him that gives.”

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, had³⁴ some encouragement and admonition to those who give compassionately to others. There are dangers such as pride, vainglory, and self-centeredness to watch out for, and there is a knowledge of and concern for those they serve to pay attention to. There are many references to this in the Scriptures that Gregory had words of illumination on. The bottom line is that giving is a work of God and it requires the insight of the Holy Spirit regarding when and what to give.

“Those who already give compassionately of their own should be admonished differently than those who desire to seize even what belongs to others. For those who already give are to be admonished not to lift themselves up in swelling thought above those to whom they impart earthly things. They should not think themselves better than others because they see others supported by them. Those who give should acknowledge themselves to be placed by the Lord as dispensers of temporal supplies, and to do their work all the more humbly from their understanding that the things which they dispense are not their own. When they consider that they are appointed for the service of others, by no means let vainglory elate their minds, but let fear depress them. Also it is needful for them to take anxious thought lest they distribute what has been committed to them unworthily; lest they bestow something to those on whom they ought to have spent nothing; or much to those on whom they ought to have spent little. Some dangers are that by hastiness they scatter unprofitably what they give; by tardiness they mischievously torment petitioners; or lest the thought of receiving a favor in return creep in. Other dangers are that the craving for transitory praise might extinguish the light of giving; that accompanying gloominess harass the offering of a gift; and that when they have done everything right, they give something to themselves, and so lose all the benefit they have accomplished.”

Gregory commented on references to giving in the Scriptures as follows:

- If any man serves as a deacon, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies (1 Peter 4:11). Donors should not attribute to themselves the virtue of their liberality.

³⁴ Gregory the Great, The Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 20.

- When you shall have done all those things, which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable slaves, we have done that which was our duty to do’ (Luke 17:10). Donors should not rejoice too much in benefits they bestow.
- God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Gloominess should not spoil a donor’s liberality.
- Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matthew 6:3). Donors should not seek transitory praise for a gift bestowed.
- When you give a dinner, do not ask your friends, your brethren, your kinsmen, or your rich neighbors, lest they invite you back, and you are repaid. But when you give a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and you shall be blessed; for they cannot repay you (Luke 14:12). Do not let the glory of the present life mix itself with the liberal giving of piety. Donors may not require a return for benefits bestowed.
- Do not say to your friend, go and come back, and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you (Proverbs 3:28). Donors should not supply too late what should be supplied at once.
- He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly (2 Corinthians 9:6). When much is necessary for donors to give, little should not be given.
- I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that your abundance may supply their lack, and that their abundance also may supply your lack (2 Corinthians 8:13, 14). When donors ought to give little, they should not give too much, lest afterwards, badly enduring want themselves, break out into impatience.
- Give to everyone that asks of you (Luke 6:30). Donors should avoid giving nothing at all to those on whom they ought to bestow something.
- Give to the godly man, and do not help a sinner; do well to him that is lowly, but do not give to the ungodly (Ecclesiasticus 12:4-5 LXX). Donors should give nothing, not even something little, to those on whom they ought to bestow nothing at all.

John Chrysostom noted³⁵ that men return one favor with another; God will certainly do the same to us if we give even a little from our abundance. Some people worry that they will not have enough if they give to others. Chrysostom encouraged his people to try to live with just essentials.

“A man who has received from you will not overlook the gifts, but will return the favors if he can; much more will Christ do so. If He routinely gives without receiving any return, how will He not give after receiving from you? ‘What then,’ said 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 don’t give a penny. Promise to strip yourself of everything and then ask questions about such men. As long as you are stingy and give little of your substance, why throw out excuses and pretenses? I am not leading you to the lofty peak of complete poverty, but for the present I ask you to cut off your excess and to desire just sufficiency, which means using just those things, which it is impossible to live without. No one bars you from these, nor forbids you your daily food. I say food, not feasting; clothing, not

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, v. 9.

ornament. If one should inquire accurately, this is in the best sense really feasting. Consider which we should say more truly feasted, he whose diet was herbs, and who was in sound health; or he who had the table of a Sybarite³⁶, and was full of disorders? Very plainly the former! Therefore let us seek nothing more than this. Let him that can be satisfied with beans and can keep in good health, seek for nothing more. Let him who is weaker and requires a diet including garden herbs, not be hindered by this. But if anyone is even weaker than this and requires the support of meat in moderation, we will not bar him either. We are not trying to injure anyone, but just trying to encourage men not to require more than they need.”

The Fruits of Righteousness

Paul prayed not for riches nor for abundance, but for all sufficiency. In fleshly things, he asked for a sufficiency for them; but in spiritual things for abundance. Not in alms giving only but in all other things also, ‘unto every good work’ (2 Corinthians 9:8).

John Chrysostom gave³⁷ an example that is equally appropriate for the 4th Century and the 21st Century. Noticing what people do with their money, he said,

“Do you not see how much others give to actors and harlots? Give at any rate the half to Christ as what they give to dancers. As much as they give for seeing vain shows on the stage (or screen), so much at any rate one ought to give to the hungry. For they clothe the sex kittens with untold gold; but not even with a threadbare garment the flesh of Christ, and that though beholding it naked³⁸. What forgiveness does this deserve? How great a punishment does it not deserve, when he indeed bestows so much on her that ruins and shames him, but not the least thing on Him that saves him and makes him brighter? As long as one spends it on his belly and on drunkenness and dissipation, one never thinks of poverty. But when there is a need to relieve poverty, he becomes poorer than anybody. When feeding parasites and flatterers, he is as joyous as though he had fountains to spend from. But if he happens to see a poor man, then the fear of poverty besets him”.

There are other things one can sow besides generosity (or lack of it). One can sow righteousness; doing so reaps kindness (Hosea 10:12). On the other hand, one can sow wickedness; this will reap injustice and lies (Hosea 10:13). Therefore, it behooves us to sow what we wish to receive. As a country, the United States has been a world leader regarding charitable giving of all kinds, and this has not been limited to Christians. This fact alone has greatly helped the United States to maintain godliness, prosperity and justice because it teaches an unselfish attitude to the world. On the other hand, some surveys indicate that people in the United States spend large amounts of their income on various forms of entertainment. We can all do better by directing a little more of our income from entertainment toward feeding the poor.

³⁶ Sybaris was an ancient Greek city in Southern Italy, founded in 720 BC and destroyed in 510 BC. It was famous as a center of luxurious living.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, v. 9.

³⁸ The reference here is the ‘least of these My brethren’ (Matthew 25:38-40).

Chrysostom concluded³⁹, “For this is the thing to be admired, that when they are kept, they are lost; but when dispersed abroad they abide forever. Now by ‘righteousness’ (2 Corinthians 9:10), here, he means love toward men. For this makes men righteous, consuming sins like a fire when it is plentifully poured out”.

Cyprian stated⁴⁰ very strongly that there is a relationship between one’s salvation and the giving of alms, and he illustrated this with the examples of Zacchaeus and Abraham. One who gives alms implicitly believes in God; he shows his faith by his giving of alms and exhibits the fruits of righteousness. Those who don’t are barren and unfruitful. This may appear to Western Christians today as a works-based salvation, but perhaps they neglect to consider what is really going on in men’s hearts. On the other hand, some people may fear that their estate may become exhausted if they give alms; this only shows unbelief and lack of faith. A larger concern is that we may lose our own soul out of a love for mammon if we refuse to give alms.

“Christ called those people the children of Abraham whom He sees aiding and nourishing the poor. For when Zacchaeus said, ‘Behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have done any wrong to any man, I restore fourfold’. Jesus answered and said, ‘Salvation has this day come to this house, for he also is a son of Abraham’ (Luke 19:8-9). For if Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness⁴¹, certainly he who gives alms according to God’s precept believes in God, and he who has the truth of faith maintains the fear of God. Moreover, he who maintains the fear of God considers God in showing mercy to the poor. He labors thus because he believes; he knows that what is foretold by God’s word is true, that unfruitful trees, that is, unproductive men, are cut off and cast into the fire, but that the merciful are called into the Kingdom. He also, in another place, calls laboring and fruitful men faithful; but He denies faith to unfruitful and barren ones, saying, ‘If you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to you that which is true? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?’” (Luke 16:11-12)

“If you fear that your inheritance might be exhausted by your liberal dealing, and you may be reduced to poverty, be of good courage in this respect; that cannot be exhausted where the service of Christ is supplied, where the heavenly work is celebrated. I don’t speak for this on my own authority; but I promise it on the faith of the Holy Scriptures, and on the authority of the divine promise. The Holy Spirit speaks by Solomon, ‘He that gives to the poor shall never lack, but he that turns away his eye shall be in great poverty’ (Proverbs 28:27), showing that the merciful and those who do good works cannot lack, but rather that the sparing and barren come to be needy. Moreover, the blessed Paul says: ‘He that supplies seed to the sower, shall both supply bread for your food, and shall multiply your seed sown, and shall increase the growth of the fruits of your righteousness, that in all things you may be enriched’ (2 Corinthians 9:10-11). And again, ‘The administration of this service shall not only supply the needs of the saints, but shall be abundant also by many thanksgivings to God’ (2 Corinthians 9:12). While

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, v. 9.

⁴⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, VIII, 8-11.

⁴¹See Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 20-22, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23 for more discussion.

thanks are directed to God for our almsgivings and labors by the prayer of the poor, the wealth of the doer is increased by the retribution of God. And the Lord in the Gospel, already considering the hearts of men of this kind, and with foreseeing voice denouncing faithless and unbelieving men, bears witness, and says, 'Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? What shall we drink? How shall we be clothed? For these things the Gentiles seek. And your Father knows that you have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:31-33). All these things shall be added and given to them who seek the kingdom and righteousness of God. For the Lord says, that when the Day of Judgment shall come, those who have labored in His Church are admitted to receive the kingdom."

"If you are afraid that your estate should fail if you begin to donate liberally from it, there is another thing to fear. While you fear for your family property, life itself, and salvation are failing. While you are anxious about your wealth being diminished, you do not see that you yourself are being diminished, in that you are a lover of mammon more than of your own soul. You fear, for the sake of yourself, that you should lose your inheritance, you yourself are perishing for the sake of your inheritance. Therefore, the apostle well exclaims, 'We brought nothing into this world, neither can we carry anything out. Therefore, having food and clothing, let us be content. For they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many and hurtful desires, which drown a man in perdition and in destruction. For covetousness is a root of all evils, which some desiring, have made shipwreck from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows'" (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

"When has it ever happened, that resources have failed the righteous man, since it is written, 'The Lord will not slay with famine the righteous soul?' (Proverbs 10:3). Ravens fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kings 17:4-6); and a meal from heaven was made ready for Daniel in the den⁴², when shut up by the king's command for a prey to the lions (Daniel 6:7-27). Are you afraid that food should be lacking to you, laboring and deserving well of the Lord, although He Himself bears witness, for the rebuke of those whose mind is doubtful and faith small? He says, 'Behold the fowls of heaven, that they do not sow, reap, or gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not of more value than they?' (Matthew 6:26). God feeds the fowls, and daily food is given to the sparrows; and to creatures, which have no sense of things divine there is no lack of drink or food. Do you think that to a Christian, a servant of the Lord, one given up to good works, that to one that is dear to his Lord, anything will be lacking?"

John Cassian noted⁴³ that the fruit of our righteousness is not due just to our own efforts, but it has a great deal to do with the mercy of God in many ways. Using the example of a farmer, hard work is necessary, but this is of no avail without the right amount of rain, freedom from insect damage and accidents. Even our good thoughts come from God! We need to humbly follow the mercy of God, and the fruits of our obedience will become apparent with our efforts.

⁴² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

⁴³ John Cassian, 3rd Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, II, xiii, 3.

- The farmer cannot ascribe the produce of the crops and the rich fruits to his own exertions. He finds that these are often in vain unless opportune rains and a quiet and calm winter aids them.
- Divine goodness does not grant these rich crops to idle farmers who do not till their fields by frequent plowing; working all night long is of no use to the workers unless the mercy of the Lord prospers it.
- Human pride should never try to put itself on a level with the grace of God, so as to fancy that its own efforts were the cause of Divine bounty, or to boast that a very plentiful crop of fruit was an answer to the merits of its own exertions. Crops sometimes fail either from too much or from too little rain.
- Even when vigor has been granted by the Lord to the oxen, and bodily health and the power to do all the work, and prosperity in undertakings, still a man must pray lest there come to him, as Scripture says, ‘a heaven of brass and an earth of iron’ (Deuteronomy 28:23).
- Insects can cause devastating results, such as, ‘What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten’ (Joel 1:4).
- The farmer in his work needs God’s help also to avoid accidents, by which the man may be deprived of what he has hoped for and actually loses the abundant fruits, which he has already gathered and stored in the barn.

From which we infer that the initiative of our actions and good thoughts comes from God, who inspires us with a good will to begin with, and supplies us with the opportunity of carrying out what we rightly desire. ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights’ (James 1:17), who both begins what is good, and continues it and completes it in us. ‘But He who gives seed to the sower will both provide bread to eat and will multiply your seed and make the fruits of your righteousness to increase’ (2 Corinthians 9:10). But it is for us, humbly to follow day by day the grace of God which is drawing us, or else if we resist with ‘a stiff neck’ (Exodus 32:9), and ‘uncircumcised ears’ (Acts 7:51), we shall deserve to hear the words, ‘Shall he that falls, not rise again? And he that is turned away, shall he not turn back again? Why have my people turned away with a shameless revolting, and strengthened themselves in their willfulness, and refused to return?’” (Jeremiah 8:4-5).

Helping the Poor with “Unrighteous Mammon”

In commenting on the Parable of the Unjust Steward, Jesus made some statements about serving God versus serving mammon, where mammon generally represents the things of this world and specifically it represents all the resources of money directed to various pleasures⁴⁴. In saying thus, Jesus made a statement about making “friends by unrighteous mammon”, which is a difficult statement to understand. The text of what Jesus said is:

“So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are shrewder in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon,

⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VII, 12.

that when it fails, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. If you have not been faithful with unrighteous mammon, who will commit true *riches* to your trust? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:8-13).

Christ explained that whatever is done to one of His disciples, He accepts as if done to Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). He also said, “He that receives you; receives Me; and he that doesn’t receive you, rejects Me” (Matthew 10:40, Luke 10:16). He continues, “Despise not one of these little ones; for their angels always behold the face of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). And in another place, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom of heaven” (Luke 12:32). Similarly also He says that “the least in the kingdom of heaven”, that is His own disciple, “is greater than John, the greatest among those born of women” (Matthew 11:11). And again, “He that receives a righteous man or a prophet in the name of a righteous man or a prophet, shall receive their reward; and he that gives to a disciple in the name of a disciple a cup of cold water to drink, shall not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:41-42). This is the only reward that Christ specifies is not lost.

Clement of Alexandria commented⁴⁵ on these statements by Christ to say that He wants us to seek out those to be kind to with our gifts, since we are, in effect, giving to Him. By delighting in giving to Him, we are exchanging the perishing things of this world, the unrighteous mammon, for eternal life. The poor man that we donate to ends up being a friend of God in that he receives our gifts on behalf of God. This may sound to some like it is perilously close to the selling of indulgences for forgiveness of sins, but actually it is a way of life that is 180 degrees different. The point is in considering the real value of the things of this world as compared to the Kingdom of God.

“Christ shows that by nature all property, which a man possesses in his own power, is not his own. From this unrighteousness it is permitted to work a righteous and saving thing, to refresh someone of those who have an everlasting habitation with the Father. He has not commanded you to wait to be asked, but commands you to seek those who are to be benefited and are worthy disciples of the Savior. Excellent also is Paul’s saying, ‘The Lord loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9:7), who delights in giving, sparing not, sowing so that he may thus reap, without murmuring, disputing, and regret, which is pure benevolence. But better than this is the saying spoken by the Lord in another place, ‘Give to everyone that asks you’ (Luke 6:30). Truly such is God’s delight in giving. And this saying is above all godliness, not to wait to be asked, but to inquire oneself who deserves to receive kindness.”

“He appoints such a reward for liberality, an everlasting habitation! One purchases immortality for money; and, by giving the perishing things of the world, receives in exchange for these an eternal mansion in the heavens! Sail to this supermarket, if you are wise, O rich man! If need be, sail around the whole world.

⁴⁵ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 31-33.

Do not spare peril and work, that you may purchase here the heavenly kingdom. Why do transparent stones and emeralds delight you so much, and a house that is fuel for fire, a plaything of time, the sport of the earthquake, or an occasion for a tyrant's outrage? Desire to dwell in the heavens, and to reign with God! This kingdom a man imitating God⁴⁶ will give you. By receiving a little here, a little there, He will make you a dweller with Him. Ask that you may receive this benefit; for Christ (in the poor man) is not commanded to receive, but you to give. The Lord said to make a friend, but a friend proves himself such by long intimacy. It is not faith, love, hope, or the endurance of one day, but 'he that endures to the end shall be saved'" (Matthew 10:22).

"Who is it that is the friend of God and how then does he give these things to us as we donate to the poor? Do you judge who is worthy or who is unworthy to receive your alms? It is possible you may be mistaken in your opinion. It is better to do good to the undeserving for the sake of the deserving, than by guarding against those that are less good, you fail to give to the good. For by sparing some, it is possible for you to neglect some that are loved by God. By offering to all that need, you must find someone of those who have power with God to save. 'Judge not, then, that you be not judged. With what measure you use, it shall be measured back to you; good measure, pressed and shaken, and running over, shall be given to you' (Matthew 7:1-2, Luke 6:37-38). Open your compassion to all who are enrolled as the disciples of God; not looking contemptuously to personal appearance, nor preferring young or old. Do not fret in soul and turn away if one appears penniless, ragged, ugly, or feeble. Within may dwell the hidden Father, and His Son, who died for us and rose with us."

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁷ that Jesus was definitely speaking of almsgiving when He spoke about "making friends by unrighteousness mammon". The "unrighteous mammon" refers generally to all kinds of ill-gotten gains, and Chrysostom addressed what to do about it once one has ceased his acquisition of the ill-gotten gains. The answer is to spend this "unrighteous mammon" by lending it to God in the form of almsgiving.

"When Christ said, 'Make friends for yourselves', he did not stop at this only, but He added, 'by unrighteous mammon' (Luke 16:9); that the good work may be your own; for it is nothing else but almsgiving, which He has here signified. For what He said is like this: 'Do you have ill-gotten gains? Spend well! Have you gathered by unrighteousness? Scatter abroad in righteousness'. And yet, what manner of virtue is this, to give out of ill-gotten gains? God, however, being full of love to man, condescends even to this and if we do this, promises us many good things. But we are unfeeling, that we don't give even of our unjust gain; plundering without end, if we contribute the smallest part, we think we have fulfilled everything. Have you not heard Paul saying, 'He who sows sparingly, shall also reap sparingly?' (2 Corinthians 9:6) Why then do you spare? If you had to till a rich and deep soil, that was capable of receiving much seed, you would both spend what you had, and would borrow of other men, since withholding investment in such a case would be a loss. But when it is Heaven, which you are to cultivate,

⁴⁶ That is, he imitates God by being "one of the least of these My brethren" (Matthew 25:40).

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, V, 8-9.

which is exposed to no variation of weather, and will surely repay your outlay with abundant increase, you are slow and backward. You do not consider that it is possible by withholding investment to lose, and by being generous to gain.”

“Disperse therefore, that you may not lose; spend, that you may gain. If your treasures are hoarded, you will surely throw them away; entrust them to God, for then no man plunders them. When you do business, you don’t know at all how to gain; lend to Him who gives an interest greater than the principal. Lend where there is no envy, accusation, evil design, or fear. Lend to Him who lacks nothing, yet has need for your sake; who feeds all men, yet is hungry, that you may not suffer famine; who is poor, that you may be rich. Lend there, where your return cannot be death, but life instead. For His interest is the herald of a kingdom, while this world’s interest speaks of hell; one comes of self-denial, the other of covetousness; one comes of humanity, the other of cruelty.”