

In today's passage we find Paul giving a letter of recommendation for the three men who are coming to collect an offering from the Corinthian believers for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. But in the description of these men and the fact that it was someone other than Paul we can learn practical lessons of accountability and the importance of integrity when dealing with finances.

*<sup>16</sup> But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.* 2 Corinthians 8:16 Ezekiel prophesied to the nation of Judah regarding a time in the future when God would come like a shepherd and bring His people back to the land of Israel and care for them there. <sup>11</sup> "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered ... <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. **Ezekiel 34:11,12;14-16**

Jesus boldly declared in John 10 that He is the good shepherd (John 10:11<sup>i</sup>; Luke 19:10<sup>ii</sup>; Psalm 23:1<sup>iii</sup>)! That was the same as saying that He is God who spoke this prediction and was now fulfilling it. His love for the mistreated sheep brought Him to intervene, to feed them with good pasture and clear water and to deal with the false shepherds who had taken advantage of them and muddied the waters, as the Ezekiel passage goes on to describe (Ezekiel 34:18,19<sup>iv</sup>). That is where we get the expression, "You are muddying the waters." It means you are making the main issue unclear. That is what the false teachers had done. It is what they do today for personal gain.

Underlying this prophetic fulfillment is a revelation of the heart of God for His people. That is what God had put in Paul's heart for the Corinthians, and what he declares in this verse he also put in the heart of Titus, *earnest care*! God must put that care into his under-shepherds' hearts because it is not natural. Our natural fallen state is selfishness. But thanks be to God who can put His earnest care in our hearts.

Earnest care is not just concern, but a jealousy to see that the flock is not manipulated by self-promoting peddlers of God's Word whose real concern is only for themselves (2:17<sup>v</sup>). Earnest care does not count the cost to care for the sheep, it generously gives what is needed (John 10:14,15<sup>vi</sup>). It is selfless and counts it joy to see others blessed. That care must be guided by the Holy Spirit so that we do not interfere with what God is doing in others' lives. We do not want to rescue someone whom God is teaching a lesson through difficulty, nor do we want to enable a person to continue in self-destructive ways. But we must always be ready to help when it would draw a person closer to the Lord. That is a heart of earnest care.

*<sup>17</sup> For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.* 2 Corinthians 7:19 This letter shows again and again that Paul does not operate alone. It is not *his appeal*, singular, but rather *our appeal*. His team

together was led by the Spirit to appeal to Titus to collect the offering for the Jerusalem saints. They did not need to twist his arm, as he was very earnest to take on the task. He wanted to be the one to do it. Even though he just made the arduous trip, he was ready to return. That is further proof of how blessed he was at the way they received the letter. Being around humble, sincere, dedicated believers is a joy. It encourages us to have the same attributes. Some of our yearly guests tell us that being at Wayside is a highlight of their trip. They must see some of that same dedication in you. And of course, we are blessed by their presence because they are like minded and have the same spirit.

It was wisdom not to have Paul personally involved. The false teacher had spread doubt about Paul's motives and suggested that he wanted to take advantage of them (12:14-18<sup>vii</sup>). This is a good example teaching us that pastors should have nothing to do with the finances, other than to see that things are handled properly with oversight to avoid temptation.

Kent Hughes tells a humorous story on this subject: *an old miser who called his doctor, lawyer, and minister to his deathbed. "They say that you can't take it with you," said the dying man, "but I'm going to. I have three envelopes with \$100,000 in cash in each one. I want each of you to take an envelope, and just before they close the casket, I want each of you to slip your envelope into my casket." They all promised to do so. And at the end of the funeral they did it! On the way home, the conscience-stricken doctor confided, "I'm building a clinic, so I took \$50,000 and put the rest in the coffin." Then the lawyer confessed, "I kept \$75,000 for a legal defense fund and put \$25,000 in." At this, the preacher said, "Gentlemen, I'm ashamed of you. I put in a check for the full amount!" Ah yes, ministerial integrity.*<sup>viii</sup>

Sadly, a mere accusation of mishandling finances can ruin a ministry. That is why the pastor must take precautions to see that others oversee the faithful use and record keeping of offerings. We must never underestimate the temptation that money presents. The power of its temptation to be the solution to the need of man is the reason Jesus said that we cannot worship both God and money (Matthew 6:24<sup>ix</sup>). We will depend on one or the other. We place our trust in one or the other.

*<sup>18</sup> With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. <sup>19</sup> And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 2 Corinthians 7:18,19* Finances should always be handled by more than one person for accountability. Titus was going to have two others with him. They were unnamed in this passage. We can only speculate who they may have been. The first was famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. He must have been a traveling evangelist.

When I was young, the Baptist churches would dedicate one week a year to a traveling evangelist. Everyone would try to invite their unsaved friends to the daily evening gatherings. Some churches still do that to this day. On the Navajo reservation they have tent revivals in the warm summer evenings.

Verse 19 indicates that he was selected by the churches to travel with Paul's team. The churches agreed together on whom they thought was most trustworthy and who they thought would represent them well, an attempt to be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2<sup>x</sup>).

The collection is called an act of grace *for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will*. There was a two-fold purpose. The first was for the Lord's glory. God is glorified when needs are met as we respond to the grace given to us. If you want to glorify God, then serve one another in love (John 13:35<sup>xi</sup>), for when we serve our brothers and sisters we are serving the body of Christ. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross was a most glorious act for it revealed the greatness of God's love (John 15:13<sup>xii</sup>). When we sacrifice for others, in a small way we are doing a similar thing. We are declaring that God loves them and therefore we give of ourselves for them. Glory is a demonstration of God's goodness, for glory is the outshining of His character.

The second reason was to show their goodwill. It was declaring that they were one in spirit and therefore the need felt in Jerusalem was felt by the churches of Macedonia as well. Their hearts are moved to share by goodwill toward the needy (Ephesians 2:14-16<sup>xiii</sup>). The Jerusalem church consisted of Jews who once held the Gentiles in contempt. This offering was giving evidence of their oneness in Christ and the end of old attitudes.

*<sup>20</sup> We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, <sup>21</sup> for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.* 2 Corinthians 7:20,21 Paul explains the reason for a team of three to oversee the transfer of the offering is so that there might not be any accusations brought against them. The gift must have been quite a large sum of money. Acting with multiple witnesses is honorable in the sight of God and man. We always seek to please God, but, when possible, without compromise, we should act in a way pleasing to man (Proverbs 3:4<sup>xiv</sup>). We do not want to do anything that might hinder people from coming to faith. Nor do we want to give the enemy something he could easily twist to discourage people from coming to faith (2:11<sup>xv</sup>).

*<sup>22</sup> And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.* 2 Corinthians 7:22 Partner number three was the tested brother. His qualification was his being often tested, his earnestness in many matters, and his great confidence in the Corinthians. He was sent because of his zeal and faith in the Corinthians. If you are going to send someone to do a job, make sure they have faith to do the job and passion to see it done well (Romans 12:11<sup>xvi</sup>).

That is quite a team. An elder who had already been successful in steering the Corinthians in the right direction, a brother famous for preaching the gospel and chosen by the churches, and an often-tested man Paul chose because of how earnest he was and his great confidence in the Corinthians. Paul believed the saying in Ecclesiastes about the strength of a team of three (Ecclesiastes 4:12<sup>xvii</sup>).

*<sup>23</sup> As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.* 2 Corinthians 7:23 In this verse Paul summarizes this team of three. He calls Titus his partner. He only uses that term here in all his letters. It is like calling him his colleague. An entire letter was written to him, directing him to ordain elders in Crete (Titus 1:5<sup>xviii</sup>). He also refers to Titus as his fellow worker, a term he uses frequently for those who labor with him for the sake of the gospel (Romans 16:3<sup>xix</sup>, 9<sup>xx</sup>; Philippians 4:3<sup>xxi</sup>). We would use the term co-worker. They have the heart of Christ for God's sheep. Paul adds that Titus labors for their benefit. The implication is that he is unselfishly serving them.

The other brothers he refers to as messengers of the churches. The word is actually apostles, meaning they are official representatives of their churches. They bring greetings along with the financial gifts to Jerusalem. He says they are the glory of Christ. In other words, they represent Christ well. Their actions and words show Christ's heart (4:11<sup>xxii</sup>).

*<sup>24</sup> So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.* 2 Corinthians 7:24 Because these three men are so special, Paul is asking the Corinthians to demonstrate their love and let them see that the boasts from Paul's team about the Corinthians was not an exaggeration.

For people to carry that much money on such a long journey was a dangerous thing to do. Either they would have to hide the fact that they had those funds, or better yet a number of other men would go with them to protect them from bandits. I am sure Paul had confidence that God would protect them. The mission was of God, so they could count on God helping them to complete it (Psalm 121:8<sup>xxiii</sup>; Ezra 8:22<sup>xxiv</sup>).

*<sup>1</sup> Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, <sup>2</sup> for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them.* 2 Corinthians 9:1,2 Paul acknowledges that it seems unnecessary to write to the Corinthians about being ready with the offering, referred to here as "ministry for the saints." That is because they had been preparing for a year for this offering. He had boasted about the Corinthians being so eager to donate which stirred the Macedonians to sacrificially give beyond their means. The zeal of the Corinthian churches had inspired others to be generous. So why is emphasizing in this letter for them to prepare?

*<sup>3</sup> But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. <sup>4</sup> Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident.* 2 Corinthians 9:3,4 Do you sometimes feel you have faith for something, even declare your conviction to others, but then you think about the people involved and wonder if they are as eager as they appeared to be. We are all people of like passion (Isaiah 40:6<sup>xxv</sup>). One day we are excited about something and the next day something else seems more important. Paul was hoping that his faith in them was not misplaced. Faith in God is never misplaced, but when people are involved, freewill can lead to them backing out of something they already agreed to do.

Paul had expressed confidence in them, but if they did not finish the collection and have it ready to go, the Macedonians traveling with Paul would be wondering about Paul's boasting of them. We see the names of three of the Macedonians in Acts 20:4<sup>xxvi</sup>. It would be humbling for Paul, and for the Corinthians. God is always faithful, but man – not so much (2 Timothy 2:13<sup>xxvii</sup>).

*<sup>5</sup> So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.* 2 Corinthians 9:5 To avoid that humbling situation, Paul is sending the three brothers ahead to see that the gift is ready to be sent. Then when Paul and his team arrive, they will see Paul's boasting in them was well founded. Paul did not want it to appear that their gift was given grudgingly, but rather that they willingly gave as a gracious act of love. Paul is declaring he has faith in them, but as practical matter he is sending the

brothers ahead to help them finish the collection and have it ready to be taken to Jerusalem.

This is a very practical passage on giving and being careful not to act in ways that could be criticized. Financial matters must be kept above board and always done with multiple observers so that no fault can be found in the way it is handled. The more respected the people handling the funds the better. However, the preaching pastor should separate himself from handling the funds. It is always better not to know who is giving and how much they give to avoid partiality (James 2:1<sup>xxviii</sup>).

Giving shows the sincerity of our faith. We give to help those in the worldwide church who are in need. We give for the glory of the Lord and because He has given so much to us. And giving shows our unity and common cause. For this team it showed the unity of Gentiles and Jews who were in Christ.

I will close with these thoughts to ponder. The first thought is for the men especially, since we tend to be loners. Who is your Titus? We see how Paul worked together with brothers. Men, we need to come out of our caves and lock arms with a brother or two for the battles we face. That means deliberately setting aside time to meet one on one and getting to know one another.

And finally, does your giving show evidence of your love? We can fool ourselves about our faith, but our giving is evidence where we really are in our hearts (Matthew 6:21<sup>xxix</sup>). And remember this is not just about money, though that seems to be one of the big issues for most people. Someone has said that the last part of a person to be converted is his wallet. However, for many of us it is our watch, or more lately, our cell phone. I want Jesus to have all of me, and I pray that you do too. May we all desire to live what Paul quoted in the previous chapter, to come out from among them and be separate and know God as our Father and experience life as His sons and daughters. May we all desire *to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* 2 Corinthians 7:1

Questions:

- 1 How did Ezekiel describe the hearts of two kinds of shepherds?
- 2 Who gave Titus a heart of earnest care for the Corinthians?
- 3 Why does Paul write, “*our appeal*”?
- 4 How and why was the second person chosen?
- 5 What do the three men have in common?
- 6 What terms does he use for the brothers in verse 23?
- 7 Why did Paul give this introduction of these men?
- 8 If Paul had such confidence in the Corinthians, why did he tell them to prepare?
- 9 What is the step between being willing and doing?
- 10 Review the key points.

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<sup>i</sup> **John 10:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

<sup>ii</sup> **Luke 19:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

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iii **Psalm 23:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

iv **Ezekiel 34:18-19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? <sup>19</sup> And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

v **2 Corinthians 2:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

vi **John 10:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

vii **2 Corinthians 12:14-18 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup> I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? <sup>16</sup> But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. <sup>17</sup> Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

viii R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 164.

ix **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

x **1 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

xi **John 13:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

xii **John 15:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

xiii **Ephesians 2:14-16 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

xiv **Proverbs 3:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

xv **2 Corinthians 2:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

xvi **Romans 12:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

xvii **Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

xviii **Titus 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

xix **Romans 16:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

xx **Romans 16:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.

xxi **Philippians 4:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

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<sup>xxii</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Psalms 121:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Ezra 8:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him."

<sup>xxv</sup> **Isaiah 40:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Acts 20:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **James 2:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Matthew 6:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.