

2 Cor 8:16-24 Diligent Partners and Fellow Workers, part 2

Most of us have probably had the rather embarrassing experience of receiving a late payment notification. We had bought something, agreed to pay for it, and had been late in sending in the payment. We usually try to take care of those situations as quickly as possible.

You may recall that chapters 8-9 of 2 Corinthians deal with an offering that Paul is collecting in Greece for the poor Christians of Jerusalem. The people of Corinth had agreed to participate in this offering, but as of yet had not actually contributed. You might say that they were late in making their payment.

In today's passage, Paul mentions some men that he sent to Corinth to collect this offering. In this section, Paul is recommending Titus and the other messengers as his trustworthy agents to take care of this offering. Paul is trying to show the Corinthians that his colleagues are trustworthy, reliable people.

As we approach the text this morning, we should ask ourselves if we have these same qualities or virtues. Would anyone recommend you for a job like this? Are you the kind of person that others see as trustworthy and honest? These are the kinds of Christian virtues that should be evident in those fulfilling any kind of ministry within the church.

We've seen three characteristics necessary for those who serve the Lord—*diligence, approval by the church, and faithful administration*. The church needs people with these qualities to serve. These are the kinds of people that we want to be serving in the various ministries of the church.

Today we'll consider two more of these qualities necessary for those serving the Lord.

I. .20-21 Honest financial operations

I've mentioned previously a couple of examples of modern day churches who were guilty of financial fraud and mismanagement. One of the main criticisms of churches these days is abuse and misuse of church finances.

- A. Paul wanted to avoid any accusations of financial mismanagement or fraud. He wanted to avoid any suspicion that he might be mishandling this money or using it for himself. He knew that he had to be very careful and cautious in his administration of this money.

B. How do we maintain a high degree of integrity in financial matters? Several things we can do, as reflected in the text here:

1. .20 Avoid blameworthy behavior. The word “blame” (μωμάομαι) refers to a “blemish, stain; fault, criticism, discredit.” He didn’t want there to be any accusations of mishandling these funds. He’s taking precautionary steps to avoid any kind of criticism over this offering.

And it appears as if this offering is rather substantial; he calls it a “lavish” gift—the word means “abundant, plentiful, large.” It was a sizable amount of money. Because of that, he wanted to avoid any kind of accusation of fraud or mismanagement. He wanted to remove any cause of suspicion regarding the collection or use of these funds.

App: Whenever we are handling other people’s money—and especially money that people are giving for the work of the Lord—we need to be especially careful and cautious. That’s one reason we always have two people count the offering. We provide financial reports for the church because we want to be transparent and honest in reporting about how we use the money that people give.

It’s important to avoid the kind of behavior that others would see as faulty or fraudulent. Avoid even the appearance of evil.

Quote: Money matters are notorious for generating trouble in marriages, businesses, and even in churches. Churches and Christian ministries must be above reproach in all aspects of their operations in order that one should be able to discredit them.¹

2. Involve multiple people in the project.
 - a) Vs. 16 mentions Titus.
 - b) Vs. 18 – “we have sent with *him* the brother”—that might have been Luke.
 - c) Vs. 22—“we have sent with *them* our brother” – this is apparently another unnamed person. No one has any idea who this person may be, other than one of Paul’s co-workers.

This person has proved to be diligent “in many things.” I.e., he’s well qualified to participate in this project.

¹ Michael A Cox, “Maintaining Financial Integrity.” A sermon on 2 Cor 8:16-24.

- d) So it appears that at least three people are involved in collecting and caring for this offering.
- e) When we consider what other passages say about this offering, we find out that about seven people (Acts 20:4-5) were involved in collecting it and transporting it. Paul selected some of these men himself, and others were chosen by the churches.
- f) The involvement of all these men would insure that the money was handled properly and securely.

App: There is usually better accountability when multiple people are responsible. When dealing with money, it's usually best not to have just one person handling the funds.

3. .21 Act honorably both in the sight of God and in the sight of men.

- a) “providing” (προνοέω) – using forethought, thinking ahead, planning ahead, making provision for something. He's thinking ahead to make sure that everything is done in an honorable way. He's carefully considering this project and planning for it in advance.
- b) .21a The most important thing is that we do things that are honorable in God's sight. .19 “for the glory of the Lord Himself.” Our ultimate goal is to bring glory to God. We must operate in a way that is honorable in God's sight.

Quote: We glorify God by using what He gives us the way He wants it used. If the people who manage church finances are not [aiming] to glorify God, they will soon be using those funds in ways that dishonor God.²

We must insure that those handling money are dedicated to the glory of God above all else.

Ex 18:21 [Jethro's advice to Moses:] *Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers*

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 658.

- c) .21b We must also do things honorably in the sight of other people. It's important that people see that we are doing things honestly and honorably.

We should strive to be above reproach and blameless in all areas, and especially when dealing with money and financial matters.

Trans: All of us should strive to do things honorably in the sight of God and man. Our aim should be to glorify God and to maintain a good reputation. If we have these goals, it will prevent us from many potential problems. The greater our responsibilities, the greater need we have to do things honestly and honorably.

II. .23 Cooperative partnership

Paul is trying to show that the men he's sending to collect this offering are qualified men who are worthy of trust and confidence.

A. Paul calls Titus his partner and fellow worker.

1. The word "partner" is based on the same root word for "fellowship" (κοινωνός). Paul and Titus had much in common; they had worked together on various ministry projects. They were close companions in the ministry.

Also interesting to note is that Titus is the only person Paul ever described as "my partner." He had good things to say about his other colleagues, but Titus is the only one he called "my partner." Titus and Paul must have enjoyed a very close personal relationship of trust and confidence. It's really quite a complement.

2. A fellow-worker (συνεργός) is exactly that—a person engaged in the same work. Titus had worked with Paul for a long time; they had a lot of experiences together as they served in Gospel ministry. Titus was a team player; he worked well together with others.

App: Serving together with partners and fellow workers is a wonderful experience. When people have the same commitments and are pursuing the same goals for the glory of God and for the good of the church, it's a real blessing.

Would anyone describe you as a partner and a fellow-worker in the work of the Lord? Are you involved? Do you participate? Maybe you are a partner and fellow-worker in family matters, in business or in recreation, but what about in the Lord's work?

Do others even want to work together with you? Some people have a reputation for being hard to work with; I hope that does not describe you. I would hope that others would want to be our partners and fellow-workers.

B. He calls his other colleagues “our brethren, ... messengers of the churches.”

1. The word for “messengers” is actually “apostles” (ἀπόστολοι). An apostle is a “sent one,” a person sent out with for a special task.
2. The word “apostle” can be used in various ways.
 - a) The 12 original apostles. These original disciples followed the Lord during his earthly ministry and were eyewitnesses of Jesus after the resurrection. Paul was not one of these, but Jesus appeared to him in person on the road to Damascus. Paul is considered an apostle to the Gentiles.
 - b) A few others associated with the apostles; fellow-workers with them, like Titus.
 - c) People who are commissioned and sent out by a church for Christian ministry could be said to be apostles in a sort of generic sense. E.g., missionaries are sent out to do Gospel ministry.
 - d) All believers are sent out to proclaim the Gospel—the Great Commission.

These messengers were representatives of the churches sent out for a special task. They did not have the same office/status as Paul, but they were engaged in the same work. They were reputable, trustworthy people.

3. These men were “messengers of the churches,” i.e., they were sent by the churches and accountable to the churches. The churches appointed them and expected them to do this job faithfully.

App: Anyone serving in any aspect of Christian ministry must see himself as a servant of the church. You are accountable to God and to the church for your ministry. Accountability to the church is very important. We are servants of the church and accountable to the church.

We believe in the preeminence of the local church. God’s program in the world today is the local church, and we should serve the Lord as representatives of the church.

Sadly, many people engaged in Christian ministry today have virtually no connection to a church. They are independent workers who have no accountability to a church. That's not the way things should be. Virtually all Christian ministry should have some kind of connection to and accountability to the local church.

- C. .23end, cf. 19end, .21. They are serving for “the glory of Christ.” The grammar here suggests that these men are an honor to Christ, a credit to the Gospel of Christ. They were involved in this project for the glory of Christ, not for themselves.

Once again, we see the main goal—the glory of Christ. 1 Cor 10:13

App: Christian ministry requires cooperative partnership. The more people are involved in ministry, the more we can do. “Many hands make light work.” All of us ought to see ourselves as partners in the ministry of this church. We can all do something; we can take on some part of a responsibility. We can work together on various tasks and projects. We should all be partners and fellow-workers in the ministry of this church.

I hope that if anyone were describing any one of us, they would say something like what we find in vs. 23—“they are partners and fellow workers, they are servants of the churches, and they are serving for the glory of Christ.” I hope we all have those qualities and are seeking to serve God and the church in those ways.

Perhaps some of us would have to admit that these qualities are not evident in us. I would hope that you would want to change that. I would hope that we all want to develop these virtues or strengthen them so that others could describe us this way.

And let me once again put in a plug for vocational ministry. Some people here today perhaps could dedicate their lives to doing vs. 23—being a partner and fellow working in full-time ministry, serving the church for the glory of Christ. That would be a very meaningful way to spend your life.

.24 Paul finishes this section by exhorting the Corinthian believers to treat these messengers properly. These are honorable men, and they deserve to be treated with respect and esteem. The Corinthian church must welcome them and cooperate with them.

Paul uses the word “demonstrate” (ἐνδείκνυμι) a couple of times—“show” and “the proof” (ἐνδειξιν).

Show/demonstrate “your love” – probably referring to their love for Paul and for the Gospel. How they treat these messengers would be a reflection of their love and loyalty to Paul and for the Gospel ministry.

App: We don’t have apostolic messengers show up here very often, but we do have missionaries. Whenever we have missionaries visiting here, we should show them our love for their work. If these are honorable people who are serving in Gospel ministry, we should honor them and demonstrate love for them. E.g., participate in a love offering

Show/demonstrate that they are worthy of “boasting.” If the Corinthians treated these men properly, they would be worthy of Paul’s “boasting.” He had told other churches how well the Corinthian church was doing. He could continue that boasting about them if they treated these messengers properly.

They must do this “before (lit. “in the face of” -- εἰς πρόσωπον) the churches.” These messengers would eventually return to their own churches and report on how they were received in Corinth. Paul had boasted about the Corinthian church to the other churches. Now it was time for the church at Corinth to show that it was worthy of Paul’s high expectations. If they treated these men with respect and honor, it would show that they were worthy of Paul’s pride in them.

App: Like all churches, our church has a reputation among other churches, and I hope and trust that it is a good reputation. Some churches that I am aware of have a bad reputation. Some churches can’t keep a pastor because the people are so contentious and combative. They don’t demonstrate high regard for their spiritual leaders, and that’s one reason they can’t keep a pastor.

Our desire as a church should be that we maintain a good reputation. Maybe nobody boasts about our church is, but other churches should have the sense that we are a solid, Bible-believing, stable church.

What qualities should we look for in those who serve in the ministries of the church?

Diligence—an eager and earnest care for others

Approval by the church—our aim should be to provide a beneficial service for the church.

Faithful administration—those serving should be able to take care of their responsibilities faithfully and reliably.

Honest financial operations—do things honorably in God’s sight and before other people; we are not liable to accusations of mismanagement or fraud.

Cooperative partnership—able to work together with others for the benefit of the church and for the glory of Christ.

When a church has people with these virtues, it stands as an example to other churches and is worthy of praise.

I wonder what people say about us. Would anyone describe us in this way: His or her “praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches.” Would they use words like diligence, honesty, and faithfulness to describe our service for the Lord and for his church? Do we work together with others for the glory of Christ and the benefit of the church? Are we good administrators of the church’s resources? Are we doing our work diligently and with care? These are the qualities toward which all of us should aspire.