

2 Cor 8:16-24 Diligent Partners and Fellow Workers, part 1

Occasionally, I have the privilege of recommending people for various positions. A church might contact me to see if I could recommend someone as a pastor. Just a few weeks ago, I received an email asking if I could recommend someone for a position at a church in Michigan. I recommended a former youth group member who had been serving as an assistant in another church. I would not recommend someone I did not have absolute confidence in. I need to have a high level of trust in someone before I'd recommend him for any pastoral position.

In today's passage, Paul says a few things about his representatives to the church at Corinth—Titus and two unnamed men. Paul sent letters back and forth to the church through Titus, and Titus would be going back there again, accompanied by these two other men, to collect an offering. So in this section, Paul is recommending Titus and the other messengers as his trustworthy agents to take care of this offering.

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

As we read the text, we'll find several descriptive words pertaining to Titus and the other messengers. These are good men, faithful men, trustworthy men. These are the qualities that all people who serve the Lord should display.

And in particular, the topic of this text is financial integrity. Paul is affirming the reliability of his colleagues. They will be showing up to collect this offering, and the Corinthians need to have complete trust and confidence in these men. They will handle the money appropriately and securely.

As we consider money management in our church, we must insist that those who handle the money—the offerings of the church—are credible, responsible, and accountable. We must avoid any kind of financial mismanagement. We must handle finances wisely.

Obviously, the people that handle the money must be of the highest Christian character. In fact, everyone who participates in Christian ministry must be of high moral standards and operate with honesty and integrity.

Let's consider various character qualities we should look for in the lives of those with ministry responsibilities. If we are serving the Lord, these qualities/virtues should be evident in us as well. Do you have these qualities? Would anyone recommend you for a job like this? These are the kinds of Christian virtues that should be evident in those fulfilling any kind of ministry within the church.

I. .16 Diligence .16, 17, 22

Paul uses this word or a variant of it four times in this passage. So clearly, diligence is a significant characteristic or virtue necessary for those who serve God.

A. .16 Titus had “earnest care” (σπουδῆν) for these people. It’s the same root word as “diligent” (vss. 17). The word refers to eagerness, enthusiasm, readiness to expend energy and effort. A diligent person is ready to make every effort to complete a task.

Titus was diligent/earnest in his “care” for the people. He cared more about them than he did about their money. But because he cared about them, he would also be diligent to care for this offering.

B. .17 “more diligent” (σπουδαῖος)—eagerness, earnestness

C. .22 “often proved diligent (πολλακις σπουδαιον) in many things ... more diligent” (πολυ σπουδαιοτερον)

D. .16 Origins of this diligence—God put it into his heart. Titus had a God-given desire to serve these people. Titus cared for the people and eagerly wanted to serve them.

App: People who serve in church ministry should do it because they care about others. They are not doing it for themselves; they are doing it for the benefit of others.

Concern for others and a readiness to expend effort for their benefit is a wonderful quality that those who serve God ought to have. If you have no concern for others—if you are not ready to expend effort and resources for them—then you are likely not suitable for Christian ministry.

If you don’t have concern for others or a desire to serve them, I’d have to ask, “What’s wrong with you?” These are basic Christian virtues that we all ought to have.

E. How is this expressed?

1. .17a He expressed his diligent care through voluntary cooperation.

He welcomed the invitation—i.e., Paul’s request to travel to Corinth with the letter, collect the offering and bring it back to Paul. This would be a difficult task, but Titus was willing to do his best.

He was “more diligent” about this, i.e., more eager, more fervent. He was more than willing to take on this project.

App: Those who serve must be willing to accept the invitation, to take on the responsibility. Unfortunately, some people express *interest* in a project or a task, but then decline to get *involved* when given the opportunity.

Sometimes people claim that they want to be involved in various ministries, but when given the opportunity, they decline the invitation. That initial interest does not carry through to actual participation. In theory, they’d like to be involved. But in practice, they can’t be bothered. “I didn’t mean that I would head up that project; I didn’t mean that I would participate...”

Titus did not do that. He accepted the invitation and got involved with eager willingness to spend effort and resources on behalf of people he cared about. That’s Christian ministry. You need that kind of caring diligence to succeed in ministry.

2. He expressed his diligent care through personal initiative.

“he went to you of his own accord (αὐθαίρετος)” – this speaks of personal involvement, being freely willing, taking on the responsibility for himself. He accepted the “exhortation” (παρακλήσις) and took personal responsibility for the task.

App: Those who serve God in Christian ministry freely take on personal responsibilities and manage them carefully. They accept the invitation to serve and they dive right in and get going on the project.

Sometimes people volunteer to do something, but then they never show up to do the job. They say that they’ll help, but then when you need help, they are nowhere to be found. Diligent people don’t do that. They volunteer to take on a task and then show personal initiative in carrying it out.

Trans.: Diligence is an important virtue; Paul repeats it here four times. Diligent people accept responsibility and take it as a personal duty to make sure the job is done right. They care about the task and about the people they are serving.

If you have a position of service for the Lord, make sure that you are diligent about it. Do your work with earnestness and eagerness. Show that you care about the people you are serving by investing time and effort in them.

II. Recognition from the church .18-19

- A. .18 Paul mentions “the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches.” He’s not talking about Titus here; some other person is in view who will be accompanying Titus.

Paul does not name the individual, but apparently the church at Corinth knew who he was talking about. Some think this may have been Luke, but no one knows for sure. Paul had a number of colleagues working with him, so it could have been any of them. But there is an interesting note in the KJV at the end of the book that mentions Luke.

- B. This man’s praise is “in the gospel.”

1. Others had noticed this man—he was praiseworthy. He was held in high reputation for his Gospel work.
2. He’d been active in gospel ministry; he’s been serving the Lord and spreading the Gospel or doing something in connection with the Gospel of Christ. E.g., preaching, teaching, starting churches, helping others, serving in various ways in support of Gospel ministry.

App: One of the marks of a person suitable for Christian ministry is that he is involved in Gospel ministry. He’s not just a spectator, sitting on the sidelines. He’s involved; he participates. He wants to support Gospel ministry however he can. E.g., Larry Pieri.

Those most suitable for Christian ministry are those who want to be involved, those who participate. They are actively contributing; they find something to do. They are participating “in the gospel.”

- C. Notice that “his praise is ... throughout all the churches” (.18) and this fellow was “chosen by the churches to travel with this gift” (.19). He has a good reputation and is highly esteemed by all the churches.

1. The word “chosen”—(χειροτονεω) “to stretch out the hands and so to vote in public.” The idea is that this brother was chosen by the churches, not by Paul.¹ The churches appointed this man as their representative, and Paul agreed that this brother would be a trustworthy agent to care for this offering.
2. So this is a person who is well-known and respected among all the churches. He’s selected and appointed by the churches for this task. He was there to help guarantee that this collection was handled properly.

App: Those pursuing Christian ministry should seek validation through the approval and appointment of the church. If the church does *not* approve of someone, it’s probably best for that person *not* to pursue ministry.

How does a church recognize someone for pastoral ministry? Usually through the process of ordination.

One of the marks of a person who is called to Christian ministry is the recognition by the church. A local church should be able to discern who among them may be suitable for vocational ministry. If an individual fails to gain recognition/approval from his church, then it’s highly unlikely that he is suitable for ministry.

One of the common questions asked at an ordination council: “If the church does not ordain you, will you still pursue the ministry?” Often, the candidate will claim that he’s called by God to preach and will do so even if the church chooses not to ordain him. I think that’s a big mistake. If the church does not approve and appoint a person, then he should not pursue ministry.

Churches ought to channel qualified people into ministry. We ought to be on the lookout for spiritually minded people as they grow up and challenge them with the prospects of vocational ministry. In the best case scenario, a church would raise up pastors from within the congregation. We wouldn’t need to import people from outside the church because people from within the church are being prepared to take over that role when needed.

Trans: Recognition/approval from the church is a major consideration. The church should be able to recognize, approve, and choose those among them who are qualified to serve.

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Co 8:19.

III. Faithful administration

.19b “which is administered by us...”

.20end “which is administered by us”

Paul and his colleagues are actively administering (διακονουμένη) this gift. The word means “to take care of, to organize.” Paul and his colleagues were stewards/managers of this money. They were not collecting it for themselves. They would take care of it and secure it until they got back to Jerusalem.

App: Anyone active in Christian ministry has to know how to administrate—take care of—various responsibilities. He/she has to be faithful in doing the job and caring for the people and the materials under his or her care.

If you don’t care about the things of God, then you have no business having any responsibilities in the church.

Some people are apathetic—they simply don’t care. And because they don’t care, they don’t take care of things or people. They often use things, ruin things, and fail to fix things they break. They don’t care about other people or their needs.

The Bible demands that everything done in the church must be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). We don’t do things carelessly. We pursue the work of the ministry with diligence and with good administrative practices, not thoughtlessly or casually. Those who don’t care should not be anywhere near Christian ministry.

But if you are a good administrator and if you care about people, you have the qualities necessary to serve in Christian ministry.

Review: We’ve seen three characteristics necessary for those who serve the Lord—diligence, recognition/approval by the church, and faithful administration. Anyone serving in any ministry should have these qualities. The church needs people with these qualities to step up to the plate and take some initiative. These are the kinds of people that we want to be serving in the various ministries of the church.

When we see these qualities in a person, we should encourage him/her to serve. Often, it’s people with *other* qualities that we invite to participate. It’s the person with money or a good education or a high-status position that we think would be suitable for a position within the church. But those are not the virtues that qualify anyone for service in the church.

If you *don't* have these virtues, you should be working to develop them. If you *do* have these virtues, you should be actively serving God in some capacity within the church. We need people like this to serve.

Paul mentions two more qualities that are necessary for those who serve, but we'll wait until next time to consider them.