2 Corinthians 8:16-24

The Messenger and the Stewards

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. 18 We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; 19 and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, 20 taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 22 We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. 24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

# Introduction

Paul is transitioning from the collection of the compassionate gift for Jerusalem to the stewardship of that gift and the cohort who will be traveling to collect it and ensure its delivery to those suffering. We meet two mystery men and find out a bit more about Titus and his relationship with the church in Corinth. While the application for us as general believers in the church in this passage is slimmer than other parts of Paul’s letters there are some key principles we can walk away with. As we study this passage look for the following principles:

* Who is used by God for His work?
* What is stewardship?
* What is diligence in the believer?
* How can you show the proof of your love for others in Christ?

In fear of legalism we have a tendency to shy away from some of these terms, but Paul uses them specifically here for us to learn about spiritual maturity and its impact on our daily lives. Grace is bigger than just liberty or just covering of sin: it motivates us as believers.

# Titus (vs. 16-17)

## Thanks Be to God Who Puts Earnestness On Your Behalf in the Heart of Titus

## He Not Only Accepted Our Appeal, but Has Gone to You of His Own Accord

# The Evangelist (vs. 18-21)

18 We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; 19 and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, 20 taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

*Who is this brother?*

The answer to this question is only fed by speculation and traditions. We really don’t know who Paul was writing about, but since Paul knew his audience would be meeting them in the first person he doesn’t specify. That’s OK, even though we would love to know who Paul was talking about. What we do know is how Paul describes the attributes and character of this brother, and that gives us things to study and ponder and grow in.

## Fame in the Things of the Gospel

We normally associate fame with arrogance or other negative attributes, but Paul’s use here is in a positive light. This brother’s fame or praise is in the things of the gospel – which is not to his own glory, but Christ’s!

*How do you get fame in things of the gospel?*

The things of the Gospel are evangelism related. *What motivates evangelism?* Is it notches in our Bible cover? Is it the demand that every believer be spreading the gospel all the time out of a sense of debt to God? This brother’s reputation is known throughout the region because the people he meets hear the gospel, are wooed by the Holy Spirit and they respond to the message of the Gospel. This brother was an open vessel – abiding – and waiting on the good works of Ephesians 2:10 to be manifested. Grace was such a powerful motivator that he was compelled to share the gospel. He was part of the evangelists Paul wrote to Ephesus about in Ephesians 4:11.

The church in Corinth wrestled with this very thing. As we look at 1 Corinthians 12-14 we see that the church did not understand the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and its application to evangelism. We in the church today can have the same confusion because we think we’re either entirely involved through legalism, or completely uninvolved due to theological constructs like Calvinism. Instead, the biblical model is one of an abiding body of believers who are ready when called, ready when sent, and ready when confronted with those who don’t believe so that when the Holy Spirit woos those we are in contact with He has various ambassadors within the body ready to preach, teach, and disciple those who have been saved.

*When we run into believers who are famed for the gospel (AKA evangelists) how does it make us feel?*

If we’re not evangelists should we never preach the gospel? If we find ourselves feeling regret for not preaching the gospel more often this can be an indicator of one thing: we’re not abiding. As Paul wrote in chapter 7, “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret.” We change our minds in growth, not in regret that we should do better next time. Our feelings [such as regret] about evangelism don’t matter, our abiding does. If we’re abiding our feelings will not be calling the shots, but our reliance on the direction of the Holy Spirit will.

## Appointed by the Churches to Travel with Us in This Gracious Work

The churches in Macedonia appear to have communicated and, despite their poverty, supported and sent this brother who was an evangelist. The idea here of churches working together is only familiar to us within denominational circles in the modern church, but should be a goal, not in ecumenicalism, but in Spirit led unity. The gracious work of preaching the gospel was something this believer was inclined to do anyway, but Paul calls attention to the driving force behind their collaborative ministry: grace!

*How was it that work can be used here but we’re under grace?*

## Which is Being Administered by Us for the Glory of the Lord Himself

Paul had been given a special stewardship as an apostle. This stewardship he worked on with those who were in his cohort, thus the ‘us’ use, and they oversaw its completion during these critical missionary journeys (and later in his imprisonment in Rome). In the larger scheme of things the body has various stewardships that to this day impact the operation of the church. Serving, cleaning, maintaining, ministering to those in need, and general care of things outside of teaching. Beyond that participating in regular fellowship and having ‘Titus moments’ that can help us stay focused and growing together is a κοινωνία [koinonia] stewardship of the sheep (c.f. Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 John 1:7).

*Do you need to work harder to bring God more glory?*

No matter what the stewardship may be for each believer, because of our life in Christ, the outcome of that abiding stewardship is the glory of the Lord! We rest in God’s works that He has prepared for us and rejoice in the glory they bring Him.

## Showing Our Readiness

Paul repeats this idea of readiness three times in chapter 8 and once in chapter 2 (vs: 8:11, 12, 19; 9:2). The Greek word here has the idea of mental preparedness for action, or zeal. As an apostle we’re not surprised by Paul’s readiness, but the body in Corinth seemed to be roiling through various bouts of carnality, so Paul is trying to establish the standard for believers who are walking by the Spirit. Paul is ready, Titus was ready, Macedonia was ready, and his expectation is that Corinth be ready.

*As believers are we ready? If not what change needs to take place?*

## Taking Precaution So that No One Will Discredit Us in Our Administration of this Generous Gift

*What was Paul’s precaution?*

Paul and his cohort were diligent (a word used multiple times in this chapter) to be focused on the Lord and listening to His direction. This was key to their being able to say they were not discredited in their ministry. As the apostle to the Gentiles [Ephesians 3:8] this was critical to his ministry and his purpose. Paul’s precaution was regarding what was honorable in the sight of God’s righteousness as well as those that were in the sight of men.

The gospel, being lopsided in our favor, is a gift that we benefit from eternally and the Lord lavishes upon all believers (Ephesians 1:7-8).

### We regard what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord & Men

Regarding what is honorable in God’s sight requires an abiding mind. It is the only way to achieve the righteousness that God demands.

*What is honorable in man’s sight?*

What is honorable in men’s sight was a different challenge because of the legalism of the Jews. Paul circumcised Timothy to make sure his interactions with the Jews would be unhindered [c.f. Acts 16:3]. Paul’s whole ministry approach was to go to the Jews first, and then the Greeks [c.f. Acts 14:1; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Romans 1:16, 2:9]. His approach was to understand the mind of the lost person and then be able to confront them with what was true (the gospel) in the context of what they understood. This honored God and made the offense to those who were lost the gospel only, not Paul’s life.

# The Diligent Brother (vs. 22)

We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you.

This second brother seems to have been a person the body in Corinth knew. His character was unquestioned since he had been ‘tested’ and found diligent. Beyond that the diligence of his character was encouraged or enhanced because of his confidence in the Corinthians.

*Have you ever had someone ‘go to bat’ for you and been surprised by their confidence in you?*

Any believer is challenged by daily events, but within the intimacy of the body we find that there are those we have encouraged and those that encourage us. In this case the reciprocal encouragement is a powerful encouragement to even us as a third party nearly 2,000 years later: we are encouraged to encourage. We are encouraged to be diligent.

*How can we be diligent without being legal or leaning on works?*

The Greek language is replete with imperatives. Things that the authors of the New Testament fully expected their readers to comprehend, and then do: Loving one another, be unified, putting on the armor of God, etc. As believers we’re called to be abiding so that we’ll not have the desires of the flesh fulfilled [c.f. Galatians 5:16], but then we are empowered by the Holy Spirit [c.f. Ephesians 3:20], motivated by grace [c.f. Romans 5:2,15,21; Romans 11:6], and enabled by our very life in Christ to works that God foreordained [c.f. Ephesians 2:10].

# Titus & The Messengers (v. 23)

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.

## As for Titus, He is My Partner & Fellow Worker Among You

Paul’s reference to Titus as his partner in ministry comes from the Greek word κοινωνός which is to have a share in something. We saw earlier that this very sharing of ministry is part of the body. While Paul’s authority was his own and he was not making Titus an apostle, he went as an ambassador and partner of Paul’s to carry out Paul’s requests and to shore up the body in Corinth.

Paul may not have been able to travel to Corinth, but he was sending his partner, Titus, to minister, love, and equip the saints in Corinth. Something they would have genuinely been thankful for.

## Our Brethren, Messengers of the Church, A Glory to Christ

These brothers that traveled with Titus came as representatives of the church in Macedonia (and possibly elsewhere). Their service would have come with three parts:

1. Ministering as missionary evangelists while on their journey
2. Ministering to believers as equipped-by-Paul saints
3. Protecting the collections for the church in Jerusalem

Whatever they were doing, it was to the glory of Jesus Christ! This is a huge thing for Paul to say because it represents the outcome of our abiding life. When we think about our own lives it is easy to step outside of the idea that we bring glory to Jesus Christ. However, as we review the scriptures we see that Paul has encouraged every believer with the idea of our lives bringing glory to Him: Romans 15:7; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 4:15; Ephesians 1:6; Philippians 1:11, 2:11.

When we realize that even we bring glory to God we can exult in His love for us in a new, deeper way! These brothers and co-ministers of Christ had to have been rejoicing on a journey that may have put their lives in danger over and over, but they knew it was part of God’s powerful, awesome plan.

# The Proof of Your Love (v. 24)

Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

Paul calls out the fact that the church in Corinth is on a national stage with ambassadors from elsewhere joining them in ministry and love. The proof of their love would have come in words, deeds, and in giving towards the church in Jerusalem. It would have come through hospitality as they cared for Titus and the mystery men, it would have come in protection, it would have come in sending off, equipped, the ministers that Paul had sent to the delivery of the much needed provisions for shunned Jewish believers who were being persecuted. That kind of love can only be the benevolent ἀγάπη [agapē] love. Mnemonic: Agape love is the kind of generous love that leaves your mouth agape.

# Conclusion

Paul’s love for the church in Corinth is shared by others in his cohort. The depth of his wrestling with the church in other letters and this letter does not override the depth of his love for them in Christ. Titus and the other two mentioned in this passage are being directed by the Holy Spirit – but also personally eager – to not only minister with the church in Corinth, but also minister to them as messengers with love. The encouragement that we see in and through Titus in this letter should lead us to consider the value of encouragement within the body, especially given the discouragement of the world around us.

*What encouragement do you need today?*

*When you listen to other believers, would you consider looking for opportunities to encourage them as well?*

You are loved, and I can prove it!