Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Stewardship with Integrity, Part 2
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:13-17
Code: 47-61

In 2 Corinthians we're looking at chapter 8 verses 10 through chapter 9 verse 5, in a section on stewardship, giving. In fact, chapters 8 and 9 address that subject. And we are in second...actually the second message of a series taking us through these verses that I've entitled, "Stewardship with Integrity...Stewardship with Integrity."

As I noted for you last time there are almost endless appeals to us trying to get us to give money to projects, even within the framework of Christianity. And people are obviously becoming very concerned about the integrity of these organizations and these ministries, the integrity of the issues that people are raising money to accomplish and achieve. And that's very wise. We need to be careful. We're careful and responsible about our money on other fronts. We work hard to earn a good leaving. We do the best we can to maximize our earning potential, to make as much money as we can because we understand the value of that and what it provides for us. We do our best to save carefully and thoughtfully to protect ourselves in the future and against some kind of cataclysm in our lives and to even provide for a spouse in the event of death, or for our children. We do our best to spend our money wisely. We find the sale and the lowest price and we're thoughtful about those matters. In fact, those are the issues that dominate our thinking daily. You do more thinking about money every day of your life than anything else...how to get it, how to keep it, how to save it, how to spend it, how to keep somebody in your family from spending it, and so forth and so on.

And as much as you think about money on all those fronts, you should be thinking about how to give it. And it's not that we don't think about that, in fact I sometimes feel like I have to fight off all of the opportunities. There are more appeals to me than I can ever meet. There are more quote/unquote ministries that demand funding than I can even bother to assess. We have to be careful. We have to be prayerful. We have to be prudent. And, of course, the environment where the Lord intended our giving to be done primarily was in the local church where we have the opportunity to know the people and know the ministry and to know the issues that are at hand. But nonetheless it's important for us to even understand the issues in our own church life so that we can give as God would have us to give and be freed up from any concerns, anxieties, doubts, fears or questions with regard to those issues.

We are asking the question...how do we know when a stewardship campaign....how do we know when an opportunity to give really has integrity? How can we identify that? What is stewardship with integrity? What is an honest, true project? That's really what we're asking. What kind of campaign

can we get involved in and know it's sound and solid and biblical? And as we work through this very interesting passage that on the surface appears to be nothing more than some passing notes on something that occurred two thousand years ago, but as we look at it more deeply it gives us the standards for stewardship with integrity. It's going to take us today and next week to get through this and when we're done and we wrap it up, you're going to see how really comprehensive this interesting text is.

Now starting in verse 10 and going on down into chapter 9 verse 5, there really shouldn't be a chapter break there. If they wanted to put one in they could have put it after verse 5 where there is a break in thought. But going through this whole text I'm going to give you the key elements that are standards of stewardship with integrity. Let's go back and review the three that we've already looked at.

First of all, stewardship with integrity calls for giving that is voluntary. Verse 10, Paul says, "I give my opinion in this matter for this is to your advantage who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this but also to desire to do

it." It came out of your heart. It came out of your heart's desire. It is to your spiritual advantage and I'm just giving you my opinion in the matter. This is not a command that you give a certain amount, as we have been saying. This is the character of a genuine ministry of integrity, a genuine stewardship of integrity.

No compulsion, no confiscation, no reallocation, no redistribution, no legal requirement, no percent, no set amount, no manipulation, no intimidation...look, Paul says it's up to you, you give whatever you want, realize this, it is to your advantage. Why? Because it is more blessed to...what?...to give than to receive. Because if you give God will give to you pressed down, shaken together and running over. If you sow bountifully, you'll reap bountifully, as chapter 9 says. So you give voluntarily out of your own heart whatever you want to give, but remember this, it is to your advantage, and my opinion is that you need to abound in this gracious work, as he says in verse 7, you need to be generous in this gracious work. I am not speaking, verse 8, as a command. But you need to be generous because of the tremendous spiritual advantage. You want a rich life here, you want a rich life in eternity, then give generously. But stewardship with integrity does not manipulate, it does not coerce, it does not intimidate, it does not demand, it does not assess or tax, it does not redistribute, it simply leaves the individual to do what his heart or her heart dictates.

Secondly, stewardship with integrity calls for faithfulness to complete the commitment. Evidently the Corinthian church had said we'll give a certain amount. We don't have that specifically but it seems to be the case since in verse 11 Paul says, "Finish doing it." In verse 10, you were the first to begin a year ago, or last year, now finish it. Verse 11, and just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it.

In other words, finish what you started. Listen, if God was in it at the beginning and you saw that and you responded to that, it's the same project, finish it...finish it. All of the original intentions mean nothing if you don't complete the commitment, if the collection is not completed. That's why he tells them in 1 Corinthians 16:2 to come and bring money every first day of the week and set it aside so that systematically they can accumulate the money so that when he comes for the third time to visit them and get the money they won't have to take any special offerings then, they will have already accumulated it.

From initial willingness and enthusiasm and excitement to the completion should be the commitment. And that is always, always the challenge. When you propose to people something, they get excited at the beginning and then that excitement can diminish as they go and just like the Corinthians, you need to be reminded to be faithful to complete what you believe God is in, as excited about it at the end as you were at the beginning.

Thirdly, stewardship with integrity calls for amounts proportionate to what one has. The end of verse 11 he says, you are to give by your ability...by your ability. Literally, according to what one has. Verse 12, "For if the readiness, or willingness, or eagerness, is present, it is acceptable." All God really is concerned about is your heart attitude and if you're willing to give and eager to give and ready to give, that pleases God. According to what a man has not according to what he doesn't have. God isn't trying to get out of you what you don't have. God is not like the TV evangelists who goes after the poor widow's last money, promises her health, wealth and prosperity and healing. He's not like the charlatan who goes after the people on a pension, manipulating their giving to support himself and some agenda of his own. There's no intimidation here. That is never biblical. You're not trying to get more than a person has the capability to give. God wants you to have what you have so that you can live off it. God wants you to enjoy life. He wants you to have enough. He wants you to give according to what you have.

Somebody obviously in the Corinthian church was prone to say...Well, Paul is asking too much, you know, Paul is always talking about the offering. First, Titus come and talks about the offering, then Paul writes a letter and talks about the offering, and then Titus comes back and talks about the offering and then Paul writes another letter about the offering and sends Titus and a couple of friends about the offering. That's all he wants is money, money, money. He doesn't understand. He's asking too much of us. And Paul reminds them that all God wants is a willing heart and for everybody to give according to what he has, not according to what he doesn't have. But according to what he has means if you have a lot, you give a lot. That's according to what you have. God measures the heart. Whatever your love, whatever your devotion, whatever your trust, whatever your submission, whatever your obedience calls for, that's what you give. And that means there's a lot of praying and planning and personally working through those issues all the time, every week.

So stewardship with integrity demands giving that is voluntary, faithful to the finish and proportionate to what you have. If you have a lot, you give a lot. If you have a little, you give a little. And God looks at the heart.

Now let's start with a new point for today, number four. This is very important. Stewardship with integrity calls for giving that balances resources in the body of Christ...that balances resources in the body of Christ, or in behalf of those in need. Here is...here is a very important section, sometimes misunderstood. Verses 13 to 15, I'm going to read it to you.

"For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction by way of equality...but by way of equality, at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, `He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'"

Now what in the world is this talking about? Well let's presuppose that Paul knows what their reaction is going to be. Here's a typical reaction. Remember now, there are hostile people in the Corinthian church who are very anti-Paul and one of them is likely to start this sort of gossip going. "Well, Paul is constantly asking us for money for those poor people over there because, remember folks, he's basically Jewish and he has this preferential attitude toward the Jerusalem church, not only is he Jewish but he was in on the very beginnings of that situation over there, he persecuted the Jews over there, he killed the Jews over there, he's not only Jewish and has a natural propensity toward Jews but he's got a lot of guilt feelings because he breathed out threatenings and slaughter on the church over there, he was a persecutor of the Jerusalem church, he was a killer of the Jerusalem church. And he feels a lot of guilt and so he wants to do anything he can to elevate their economic situation. They're a persecuted church. They're a pilgrim church. They're a deprived church. And they're his people, his church. So he's a little out of balance there. And what he really wants to do is raise their comfort level at our expense. He wants to take our resources and give them to those people so they can become more comfortable. He really is seeking to help his friends at our expense. And why should we become burdened financially so that somebody else can be at ease?"

Now with that go to verse 13. Here's Paul's answer. "For this is not for the ease of others." Boy, he anticipates objections very well, doesn't he? It's kind of a trademark of his. Somebody is going to say he's putting a huge financial burden on us, making us make these sacrifices so somebody else doesn't have to sacrifice. Well Paul anticipates well that potential criticism and he says the purpose of the collection is not to make life easy for anybody...it is not to make easy for those Jews. It is not to impoverish the Corinthians to enrich the Jews. This is not to call for an exchange of places to make the rich poor and the poor rich. Paul, perhaps they said, thought we don't have any financial problems, well he doesn't know, things have changed since he was here. He doesn't understand us. He's just got these special friends over there.

Not so. It is not for the ease of others, follow verse 13, and it's not for your affliction. Get that. I'm not trying to hurt you, I'm not trying to make you suffer, I'm not trying to make life easy for them. The issue is "but by way of equality." Now as soon as I say the word "equality" all kinds of red flags go up. That word is so loaded in our culture that I'm not sure I can unload it sufficiently for you to understand it.

So if I might be given some license in the translation here, I would prefer to substitute the word "balance...balance," that's really what he's asking here, or even equilibrium, if you like because that is the word that he uses. That is the word. It's the word for balance, isotes. You know the science of isostasy, that's the study of the balance of the earth. Paul says, you know, there are highs and lows in life, just like on the earth, there are high mountains and deep seas and God in designing the earth balanced the earth so that when it rotated it wouldn't rotate like an oblong ball or like something out of balance when it rolls it rolls in a cockeyed response to its imbalance. The earth is perfectly balanced, the height of the mountain, the depths of the sea, the weight of the water, the weight of the land, all of that makes the earth perfect so that it rotates exactly the way God designed it to rotate in perfect balance. That's the term Paul uses here. The issue here is to sort of find some balance on the highs and the low sides. You've got people who have more than they need and people who have less than they need and it is a function in the body of Christ to make sure that there is some equality there...some balance.

You know, that's a big deal in our own country today. We get carried away with the thing to the point where we want to, we want to reallocate funds and redistribute funds from the rich to the poor in our society, but originally that was all built on the Christian principle that you take care of the people who have need and the people who have more than they need are the great contributors to meeting the people's needs who must be met. I mean, that was a Christian principle that has gone awry and it has turned really to be a system that does nothing but produce indigent people. That's never what it was intended to be originally. That's...but that's the vestiges of a Christian principle.

Well in the church it is still alive and well and functioning as it ought to function. And Paul is saying as part of the body of Christ you are looking at people with a need and you're in a position to meet it, that becomes your spiritual responsibility as you express the love of Christ. John the Apostle said if you see your brother have need and you don't meet his need, then we have every right to question whether the love of God dwells in you at all, whether you're even a Christian.

Paul says, "Look, I'm not trying to...I'm not trying to redistribute money here, when I talk about equality," he's saying, "I'm not talking about equality like a liberal politician would. I'm not talking about equality like a homosexual advocate would. I'm not talking about equality as a woman's right person might. I'm not talking about equality like a communist would, or a socialist...a socialistic economist would. I'm talking about equality in a Christian sense. This is not absolute economic

egalitarianism like Karl Marx. What I'm saying is we just need to bring some balance here and you that have more than you need provide for those that have less than they need."

And that is the...that's the beautiful reality of life in the family of God. It's not to make life hard on you and it's not to make life easy on them. It's...it's just to bring some balance...some balance.

If you want to see how that really works out in a specific statement of Scripture, look at 1 Timothy chapter 6 and here, I think, comparing this text will help elucidate on what Paul said. He's not saying I want the rich to be poor, I want to strip them naked, I don't want them to have anything. He's not saying that. He's not trying to reduce everybody to bare subsistence level. Somebody's got to have the wealth. Somebody's got to have it to multiply it, to create the jobs, to employ people, to put it into the economy. It's got to be in somebody's hands and why not the hands of God's people if their attitude is right toward it and if they're willing to use it to bring the balance?

Well look at 1 Timothy 6:17, here is the message, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world." Now by the way, all riches are combustible. We understand that? They're all combustible. They all burn up. Whatever your net worth is now, it won't be when you're dead and it won't be when the earth is burned up. This is all very transient. So it's short-term stuff. But if you are rich in this present world, if it just so happens that by hard work or inheritance or a little bit of providence, being at the right spot at the right time with the right idea, whatever happened, you happen to be rich in this present world, that's fine. There's just a few things you need to know. Don't be conceited about it. Don't let it make you prideful as if you're better than somebody else. And don't fix your hope on the uncertainty of riches. You better not bank your whole future on something as volatile as earthly possessions, earthly riches.

Then the third thing he says, you must rely on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. The God who gave it all to you is the one you want to trust. So it's fine if you're rich, don't be proud about it. Don't put your hope in it. Here's what to do. Verse 18, "You tell those rich people, do good, be rich in good works...and here it comes...be generous and ready to share." That's all that's asked. That's all that's asked. And if there is some need, you that have it put it in that need. That's how the church works. Nothing wrong with the Corinthians having more money than the Jerusalem Jews. But there would be something wrong if they were unwilling to share it so their needs might be met.

When you became a Christian you became a member of the body of Christ, the church, the family of God. We're not isolated, independent people, we are members of one body and we are responsible to meet the needs of each other in love. Our church is like that. Our church is like that. I think about our facilities, for example. This marvelous facility right here seats between 3500 and 4000 people, it's a great facility, we all enjoy it. We're all blessed by it. It's a very unique building. It has the longest single steel span in the city of Los Angeles, two massive beams running from the wall behind me to the wall in the rear, and they are to the very inch that the law allows, the building law. It's as big as

we can make it without creating a web steel construction or putting some kind of pillars in the middle so you can't see the preacher. The people who invested in this made great sacrifices. We built this building, you'd be interested to know, for $750 thousand including all the furnishings, okay? At the same time, at the very same time the Crystal Cathedral was being built for seventeen million and it seats less. So we were frugal stewards providing this thing.

But we went the extra mile with that $750 thousand, it probably would have only cost us $600 and some thousand but we were...we wanted to go beyond the earthquake code. We wanted to exceed that because we didn't want something to crack or snap or something like that and would cost us more to fix it, so we exceeded all those codes and the engineer, I remember, said to us one day, "In the event of a major earthquake this building is so strong it won't collapse, it will just roll over on its side intact." And believe me, we'll just go on with the service, right?

So, you know, look at this building, you enjoy this building. How much of an investment did you make in it? There were people who put $20 thousand in this building, $50 thousand in the building of this building, and some who put...some little children who put $2.00, and some people who put $10, and some people who put $500, and some people who put $35, but in the end we're all here and that's how the body of Christ works. And we built all those educational buildings, and I'll tell you what...it's my guess that the people who have the most children in there put the least money in because they don't have it. In fact, when we built most of those buildings, the people who are putting most of the kids over there weren't married. But that's how the body of Christ works. You see, in the world, it's, you know, me for me, isn't it? And I'm not doing for you. But in the church it's...it's balanced in the body. We want to take those who have the resources and provide those resources for those that don't. This goes on all the time...all the time in the life of the church.

We have a Deacons' Fund, the money goes in the Deacons' Fund from people who have extra money. At the end of every communion service we collect that money and we keep, I don't know, how much money in there, maybe $10 thousand or something, $5 thousand, and we dole that money out week after week for people's food and clothing. And that's because they don't have the ability to meet those basic needs. That's the idea.

Now we have a principle to keep in mind as we do this. Second Thessalonians 3:10, Paul was very clear about this. He said, "Even when we were with you we used to give you this order," here's a standing command that he repeated over and over, "If anyone will not work, neither let him...what?...eat." Because the danger, folks, the danger in any kind of operation where you have generous people giving money to those in need is that you have a tendency to create indolence.

Somebody soon figures out...If I don't do anything, somebody else will take care of me. And that's not acceptable to God. In one sense it is an assault on the image of God in created man because the image of God is productive and energetic and fruitful. It is intolerable. So you...we're not saying you

just dole out money. That's what's happened in our culture. We have created a mass of people who were just on the public welfare roll, have no intention of working. If you don't work, Paul said, you don't eat. We're not trying to create laziness. We're not trying to create a generation of takers who don't know how to give. Paul says we're simply trying to meet the needs of people who have made every effort but the environment they're in will not allow them to succeed in meeting their basic needs. And the body brings balance to that.

This is a disclaimer, by the way, against favoritism. It's a disclaimer against communism. We're not talking about, as I said, pure absolute economic egalitarianism here. We're just talking about sharing in everything. And that's what we do. Our legacy campaign, we have received this tremendous heritage of this magnificent campus from all kinds of people who poured their money...I remember when young couples would give me their honeymoon money when I first came here and they were not taking honeymoons. It got into a little deal where couples getting married at Grace Church didn't take honeymoons, they gave their money to the church because they believed so much in those early years in our growth and development. And now we're all reaping the blessing of those generous people. That's how it is in the church.

That's how it still is. You give in the offering, and you know what you say...Well I'm a single person and I give in the offering, where does my money go? It goes to educate somebody else's kids over there on a Sunday morning in Sunday school, it goes into an AWANA program on a Wednesday night so that other little children can learn the Word of God and be a blessing when they grow up. That's your contribution to the larger body. You see, the world says I will do with my money what I want, what suits me, what fulfills my dream. That's not how Christians are, is it? That's all Paul's talking about here. He's not talking about some kind of communism, he's talking about the need to find some balance between those who have and those who have not.

Verse 14, he follows it up. "At this present time," a little reminder, "At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want." Please notice the word "want," it is the key word here. He's not talking about making them rich, he's just talking about meeting their lack or their lack would be another translation. In other words, they don't have the basics. So at this time he says, "You Corinthians have the abundance that meets their want in order that their abundance may become a supply for your want that there may be equality."

You know what he's saying? He's saying things change, folks. Things change. Riches have a way of flying. The fortunes of life change. The tables could be turned. And the time may come when persecution breaks out in Corinth and Christians are being slaughtered in Corinth by the hostile Roman government. And all of a sudden you have desperate need and where will you turn? You will turn to the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and they will hear of your plight and you having supplied their lack, their hearts will be ready to supply your lack. That's how it is in life that there may be balance. That's the issue.

And then he illustrates it. In verse 15, "As it is written, `He who gathered much didn't have too much and he who gathered little had no lack.'" That's a wonderful statement. He just says it works out this way, you who have much don't have too much anymore because you gave to the one who didn't have enough. That's just a balance. But the interesting thing about verse 15 is the little statement "as it is written" because it's a direct quote from the Old Testament.

In fact, let's look at what he's referring to. Back to Exodus 16, do you remember when the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness? And, of course, needed to have provision, God brought them water from the rock and brought them manna from heaven to feed them. Well this is about that. Exodus 16 verse 14, there was a layer of dew in the morning, they got up one morning and there was a layer of dew all around the camp of Israel out in the desert, the wilderness. And so when they came out, verse 14, the layer of dew evaporated. It doesn't take long when the sun comes out in that part of the world. It evaporates the dew. And it says, "Behold, on the surface of the desert, or the wilderness, there was a fine flake-like thing." It's an interesting translation, "Fine as the frost on the ground." A fine flake-like thing was there. "And when the sons of Israel they saw it, they said to one another...What is it?" You know why, there had never been anything like it, never been anything like it. It didn't...are you ready for this...it didn't come from a plant, it didn't come from an animal, it came from God. It was God who made it. The closest thing would be angel-food cake or something like that, I suppose, with a slight variation.

And they said, "What is it? For they didn't know what it was. And Moses said to them, `It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.'" Now, folks, I like bread and earthly bread is plenty good, but can you imagine what heavenly bread would be like? This is what the Lord has commanded. "Gather of it every man as much as he should eat. He should take a omer, a piece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent."

In other words, you go out there and you gather a omer, which was a measurement, a large amount, plenty to supply a full day's food for someone, for each person in the tent. So they did. They went out in verse 17 and some gathered a lot, and some gathered a little. Why? Well because that's just the way...that's just natural. Young strong men would gather more than old weak ladies. Adults would gather more than kids. So when they got all done, I mean, it wasn't that everybody was going to have the same amount. Also some of them were hedging against the future wondering whether there might not be any more of this stuff and they've got to make the opportunity last as long as possible. When it all came in, verse 18, when they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man gathered as much as he should eat.

Do you know how it worked out? Some people gathered too little, some people gathered too much, but when it was all measured out there was enough for everybody. That's the principle. And that's

how it is in the body of Christ. Some have more, some have less, but in the end we make sure that everybody has enough to eat.

And Moses said to them, "Let no man leave any of it until morning, eat it all." Now if you're wandering in the desert, you get...you get a little fearful about the future. And the only hope you've got for food is to wake up some morning and find some stuff you've never seen and don't know what it is on the ground, and you're going to in your mind say, "You know, if I only eat half this deal I'll have some for tomorrow in case it doesn't show up again." Which would be a direct act of distrust toward...whom?...toward God. But some of them did that.

Verse 20, "They didn't listen to Moses, some left part of it until morning and not only did that leave them hungry for this day but they had nothing for tomorrow anyway cause it bred worms, became foul and Moses was angry." So they learned their lesson. They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat. But when the sun grew hot, it would melt. They would have to gather it, eat it, and it was...when the gathering was done and the sun came out, the rest melted away. I don't know what this stuff was, it's interesting, isn't it? You can eat it but it melts away into nothing.

So they had to go out and gather it. They only had a certain period of time to gather it, very early in the morning. They couldn't go out and get it all day long. And they got enough and in the hurry-scurry to gather, there were some who would get more, some who would get less, they'd measure it out. Everybody had enough. And it went like that day by day. And that's the principle he's referring to. In fact, it's that very passage he's referring to, and now you can turn back to 2 Corinthians, when he says, "He who gathered much didn't have too much and he who gathered little had no lack." That's taken from verse 18.

That's the way it has to be. That's precisely how God wants the basic needs of His children met, and that's what He's talking about, basic needs, like food. Let's go to a fifth point and we'll end with this one, this is very important.

A fifth point, where you have stewardship with integrity you not only have a voluntary giving, you not only have completed giving, finishing the job. You not only have giving according to your ability. You not only have the corporate meeting of needs and the sharing of the common things in life and ministry. But, fifthly, stewardship with integrity calls for pastoral leadership, or spiritual leadership. I always ask that question. When I hear about a financial operation, there's a church somewhere that needs money, there's a ministry that needs money, there's a person's missionary work that needs money, there's this project, that project, endlessly. I want to ask the question...who is behind this? Because I want to give my money to people who are godly leaders, who pastors and elders and overseers, those who have been given to the church for the oversight of the church. What is the accountability of this ministry to the church? What is the accountability of this ministry to elders? To

godly men? To men who have sound theology? To men who understand the Scripture? To men who walk in the Spirit, who walk with Christ? That's the issue.

Listen, strong leaders, strong dynamic forceful entrepreneurial, clever guys with a lot of ingenuity and creativity, powerful communicators, motivators and mobilizers can line people up by the thousands to fill their coffers. But the question is, not what is the power of this man, but what is the collective leadership that is in spiritual oversight? What are they like? That's why it's so important to give in the church and a church you trust. And when I came here those twenty-seven years ago, as a young guy, I knew that one of the things I had to be afraid of in the ministry was myself because I contend to be strong and forceful and confident and aggressive and just go. And one of the things that I knew was biblical and that I knew was essential for me was to build around me a plurality of godly men.

So from the very beginning we said we are going to have godly elders, I shared this with them right from the start, we're going to have a godly group of men and every decision we make will be unanimous. And we won't do it until all of us agree. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has only one mind, God has only one will in every issue. God is not divided against Himself or He couldn't stand, right? So God has one will and godly men must discern that will. And I need the insulation, and I need the protection. And admittedly there have been many times when I would have preferred to just charge ahead rather than wait for these guys to come to the right conclusion. But when all is said and done, the collective affirmation of godly leadership makes the case. It fortifies the decision. It gives people confidence. That's why you want to surround yourself when you're in spiritual leadership with the most mature, the most wise, the most godly, the most careful, the most knowledgeable men when it comes to the Word of God because they are going to know the mind of God and in the end that's what you want to do anyway, right? That's crucial. You always want to know what people are behind this, what elders, what pastors, what spiritual leaders, and what is their accountability? And what do they believe? And what is their doctrinal position? That's crucial because all of that impacts what they're going to do in this project. They have to start with a precise theology, an understanding and a discerning mind, according to God's will, carefulness, certain amount of humility, frugality in the handling of money.

And, you know, that's another accusation and Paul anticipated it. Somebody is going to say, "Oh Paul, you know what Paul is, he's a one-man show, he runs around the world, you know, he's just calling his own shots, he's got his own project here and his own project there, and he answers to nobody. I mean, who is over Paul? Nobody. In fact, when he speaks he says God told me this and God told me that and Jesus came and told me this, and Jesus told me that. That gets a little old because it's so hard to argue with." And it really was true. You know, Paul does his own deal all the time, how can we know we can trust him? Remember now, there was this coterie of people still existing in the Corinthian church who were anti-Paul. So the whole enterprise needed to somehow get beyond Paul to have credibility.

That brings us to verse 16. "But thanks be to God who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus for he not only accepted our appeal but being himself very earnest he has gone to you of his own accord."

What is this? This is the great affirmation that Titus is in this thing also. You see, Paul was the leader, the dominating force, this hard-driving man, this great mind, this visionary, this man able to embrace the whole of the redemptive purposes of God, the plan of God doctrinally, and also to embrace the whole of the church. He was bigger than life, but Titus was more like them. We never hear him preach. We don't have any of his sermons in Scripture. We don't see him leading any meetings. He's just always serving, serving, serving. They must have seen him not as some kind of a powerful entrepreneurial man, some kind of great mover and shaker and motivator and mobilizer but as a man who loved God, who loved them, a man who knew the truth. And so Paul happily says to them...Titus agrees with the plan.

How important that is. The whole enterprise for the benefit of the Jewish poor and the Corinthian church was not just Paul's passion, it was no one-man concern. Paul wants them to know that Titus whom they knew so well and whom they loved so deeply was whole-heartedly in agreement. Go back to chapter 7 verse 13, "For this reason we have been comforted and besides our comfort we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus," remember Titus had just come back from being with them, "because his spirit had been refreshed by you all." And then he says in verse 15, "His affection abounds all the more toward you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling." They loved Titus. They opened their arms to Titus. They treated him with fear and trembling. What does that mean? Reverence...reverence, honor, respect. They believed he was a man from God. They believed he was the Lord's servant, this Titus. Titus was the first to introduce the offering to him. Titus had been there telling them about it. Titus brought them the first Corinthian letter. He brought them the severe letter. He brought them this second letter called 2 Corinthians. It was Titus that had gone back and forth so many times and found his place in their hearts. And Paul says Titus is in agreement, and that matters a lot.

Would you please notice verse 16 he gives the credit to God, "But thanks be to God who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus." Does God work in people's hearts? Yes. Does God lead people? Yes. Does He move their hearts? Yes. Does He express His will somehow through the influences of His Holy Spirit in the heart? Yes. There was no bell or whistle that went off when God was doing that, but Paul knew that Titus' commitment to this project was a result of the work of God. Thanks be to God who put the same diligence, spoude, the same zeal, the same passion in the heart of Titus. And that's very important.

Hey remember, Paul is a Jew and we're back to that deal...Well, he just cares about the Jews. Well, Titus is a Gentile. And here's a Gentile and not just a Gentile, a godly Gentile, and not just a godly

Gentile, but a godly Gentile that you know and you love deeply. And he is in on this too.

It's very important because that strengthens the whole enterprise and dispels any needless doubts. Titus wasn't operating under compulsion. Verse 17, he not only accepted our appeal, and sure it was there, and, you know, he would have done it any way. I mean, out of respect, if Paul had said...Titus, this is the plan and you need to do it. Even if he didn't want to do it he would have said, "Yes, Paul," out of respect, "Yes, sir, I'll do it, I certainly will, if you say so." But it wasn't under those conditions at all. He did accept the appeal but being himself very earnest he went of his own accord. He believed in it...he believed in it.

This is so important. Paul is a strong leader. I don't imagine they get any stronger. He could have acted unilaterally, he had the force and the authority and the position. But he sought unanimity and the Lord gave it to him in the hear of his companion, Titus. And he is going, literally, he is going voluntarily, the end of verse 11...er, verse 17, he is going voluntarily.

It is so encouraging, beloved, when pastors agree in unanimity. It is so encouraging when godly men all affirm something and move in that direction. Then you can give assured this is the purpose of God. Stewardship with integrity involves then these five things, and I summarize. Giving that is voluntary and from the heart. Giving that is faithful to complete their project and meet the need. Giving that is proportionate to what one has, if you have a lot you give a lot. Giving that balances needs. And giving that has pastoral support and oversight.

Now that's not all. In fact, from verse 18 to 23, a large section, he's going to say another very important thing about giving and that is that giving is to be handled with seriousness and accountability, and he shows how that is done. And we'll look at that next time. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, it's been so good again to worship You and to praise You and to be with these precious friends. It's such a blessing, Lord, to share all that we share because of the giving that goes on here, for our church and all its ministries, to share in a staff of pastors and support staff, secretaries, and workers and interns and seminary residents and all that do the ministry, missionaries all around the world, school teachers, to share in their lives, to share in this facility, to share with people who have need, to help folks who can't quite make it. It's so wonderful, Lord, that we can share all these things. It's so wonderful that we can give in whatever way our heart tells us. And like the Macedonians, we can do even more than might have ever been expected. And we give only out of what we have and You look at our heart. And, Lord, what a privilege to see something clear through to the end and complete it. It's not done until we've met the challenge.

Thank You, Lord, too that our giving can be directed and led by godly men who carefully and prayerfully seek Your will and know no one, not even me, can run off on his own. We thank You,

Lord, for that kind of stewardship, that kind of oversight. We thank You for the privilege of bringing some balance as we express our love mutually to each other. Much more to come, Lord, and we sit at Your feet to be taught that we might give in ways that please You for Christ's sake. Amen.

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