

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

Stewardship with Integrity, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:18-24

Code: 47-62

It's our privilege this morning to continue our series in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 which we've entitled "Stewardship with Integrity." Raising money has always been a part of God's purposes, giving His people a chance to participate in the ongoing of His kingdom. God's people have always given because their hearts are moved to do so out of gratitude for their salvation. But they have always sought to know where to give, what to give, how to give. And all of that is being addressed in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.

We all wonder about campaigns to raise money. We've seen so many scandals, so many millions of dollars have been given to churches and ministries and the money has been unaccounted for and misused or used for purposes that aren't really biblical, aren't priorities. It makes us all a little gun shy.

I was sitting in a hotel in the Ukraine in the city of Kiev with another pastor from our church and a gentleman came in who was obviously an American and sat down with us. And we just introduced ourselves, first name only. And we said, "What are you doing here in the Ukraine?" And he said, "Oh I'm here from Evangelist So-and-so," well known television evangelist over here. And he said, "We're here with a camera crew." And I said, "Well what are you doing?"

"Well we're just taking pictures. We're just going everywhere and taking pictures of conditions and people and all of that, taking pictures of church services and so forth."

And I said, "Well what is the purpose of all of that?"

"Oh, we just take it home and show it on television and we estimate it will bring in about five million dollars. No ministry, just a way to raise money.

We know that goes on. You know that goes on. I know that goes on. And it makes us queazy about financial campaigns, makes us suspicious. We hear all the time about embezzlements. We hear about corruption in businesses and corporations, in small companies and large companies. We're very much aware of the fact that we have a society that is materialistic, that the love of money which is at the root of all kinds of evil is rampant in our culture. And we are justifiably leery. We wonder if the things that we hear are really true about certain ministries, are they really doing what they say they're doing. Are they really ministering in that way, or helping in that way? Those are questions

that we need to ask and we need to have answered.

Paul in this particular portion of 2 Corinthians in chapter 8 from verse 10 down through chapter 9 verse 5 helps us by giving us some standards by which we can measure a stewardship effort. Standards by which we can measure appeals, solicitations and our own giving as well. In fact, this section covers those people who are collecting the money, those who are ultimately to receive it and those who are to give it. It just sort of wraps up the whole concept of a stewardship campaign.

The whole section, by the way, chapter 8 and 9, is about giving. And in specific the giving that is being done here is to relieve the poor saints in Jerusalem who don't have the basic necessities of life because of persecution and because so many of them are pilgrims from other parts of the world who when they arrived at Jerusalem were converted, stayed and have no employment. Their poverty caused the Apostle Paul to want to take a collection from the Gentile churches. He also wanted to cement the Jewish and Gentile relationship and he knew that a generous gift to the Jewish believers would go along way into unifying the church at heart.

So, Paul is in the midst of this collection. And the Corinthians are involved in it. They've been involved in it for over a year, as is indicated to us in this text, verse 10, where he says you began a year ago or last year. And so they've been involved in it for a while. They're already understanding of the need. They have already made a commitment probably to a certain amount and Paul is in the process of making sure that they meet their original commitment and that the money is collected.

But something is going on as we know underneath the surface. And what is going on is an assault on Paul's character. It is a severe attack on his integrity. And because of the severity of that attack and because of the implication, should it be believed, Paul is very careful to deal with how he is handling this money. People would love to be able to scandalize the church and scandalize God's people and scandalize God's ministers because they can uncover some mishandling or misappropriation of money. It is indeed scandalous. And the enemy is always looking for that to expose it and discredit the church.

So because there are those who want to assault and attack and destroy Paul, his collecting of this large amount of money, we're talking about a large amount of money, you're talking about thousands of believers in the Jerusalem church, there were probably over twenty thousand of them within a matter of weeks after the church was born on Pentecost. Now some years have gone by, we don't know how large that church is, but we're talking about a large offering. So large that all the churches that are in the Gentile world have been solicited to participate and the Corinthians should have been at it for a year and there was still more time before the Apostle would come and collect just their part. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 16:2 he says they need to set aside money every week, every individual so that when he finally comes the whole thing will be completed. You're talking about a very large amount of money.

This would be a perfect point of criticism, a perfect place to discredit the Apostle Paul. And so in the light of that in chapter 8 and verse 10 he begins to discuss how he is going about this offering. How he is, if you will, operating this stewardship drive.

Now as I told you, this is a very unusual portion of Scripture. It appears as a rather unimportant set of comments about an issue two thousand years ago that doesn't really have any value to us, but on a second look it exudes standards of stewardship that have integrity and becomes extremely important to us.

Now let me review what we've already learned here about stewardship. And again he goes in and out involving all kinds of issues, but they're all strategic to the full picture. First of all, stewardship with integrity calls for giving that is voluntary. He said that in verse 10, I'm just giving my opinion in this matter, it is to your advantage. This is not a command, he said back in verse 8. There is not a prescribed amount. This is completely up to you, it is to your advantage, it is for your benefit...no amount, no percent, no compulsion. That's how stewardship should be done. It should be done individually, each person making up his own mind or her own mind what to do and doing it.

Secondly, stewardship with integrity calls for completion of the project...completion. Verse 11, "Finish doing it," he says. Verse 10, "You were the first to begin a year ago, not only to do it but desire to do it, now finish doing it as there was a readiness to desire it in the beginning so there should be a completion of it." In other words, stewardship should be complete. If you were moved to the rightness of it and credibility of it and the appropriateness of it and you made the commitment then see it through, that's stewardship with integrity.

Thirdly, stewardship with integrity calls for amounts that are proportionate to what one has. Verse 11 he says at the end of the verse, "By your ability," in other words, according to your capability give. "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has not according to what he doesn't have." In other words, God is not asking for what you don't have. God is not trying to make you poor. God is not trying to strip you and take away your food or your clothing or your place of rest. That isn't the idea. It's according to what you have. It is proportionate. If you have little, give little. If you have much, give much.

And then the fourth point, which we already discussed by way of review, stewardship with integrity calls for giving that balances resources, that balances resources on behalf of those in need. Verse 13 he says, "This is not for the ease of others and it is not for your affliction but by way of equality or balance."

Now remember, the critics would say, "Well, Paul's just trying to take money away from us to make us poor so he could make his Jewish friends rich. He's trying to make their life the life of ease, and ours

a life of affliction." He says that is not the case. I'm not asking for more than you can give. I'm only asking that you give according to your ability, only that you give voluntarily, only that you give what you said you would give. That's all. And only by way of equality. And he means by that not a communistic equality, as we saw last time, but a balancing of resources. Verse 14 says, "At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want." In other words, they're in want and you've got more than you need, so share with them and that balances the resources. And he says, "In order that their abundance also may become a supply for your want." In other words, the tide may turn and things may change, persecution may break out in Corinth and you may lose all your livelihood and you may have to turn to the Jerusalem church some day to meet your need.

The end of verse 14, "That there may be equality again." Balance...in other words, those who have more than they need give some to those who have less. And then he quotes the principle taken from, as we remember, the book of Exodus in chapter 16 verse 15 it says, "As it is written, he who gathered much did not have too much and he who gathered little had no lack," and he's referring back to when they gathered the manna. Obviously young men could gather more than older women and in the end of the day they shared so that everybody had enough. And that's exactly the point. Stewardship with integrity calls for giving that balances resources. And when you're going to do things in God's Kingdom, that's how it works. In all honesty, that's how it works most of the time. Some of you can only give a little, and some can give a lot, but you share the same ministry, don't you? You share the same leadership, you share the same facility.

When I look at the Master's Seminary, for example, some come to the seminary and they are capable of paying their full tuition. Some are not. And so there are folks who have more money than they need and they give it to underwrite the schooling of men who have less than they need. That's just how the body of Christ works, isn't it? At the Master's College, for example, it costs us much more to educate a student than a student pays, and that's made up by people who have more money than they need giving to a scholarship fund to underwrite those students so that they can get their Christian education. That's the sharing of resources.

We send missionaries to the field knowing full well they can't earn a living over there to support themselves. So we support them who have more than we need. And we share that in the commonality of the life of the church.

And then a fifth and last point we concluded with last time, stewardship with integrity is under pastoral leadership...it is under pastoral leadership. Always know that whatever it is you're giving to is under the leadership of a team of godly shepherds and pastors. You'll notice that is the case here in verse 16, "Thanks be to God...says Paul...who put the same earnestness or zeal or diligence 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." Titus agrees with the whole enterprise. He agrees with the suitability of it and he agrees with the integrity of it. He agrees that it is right. He agrees that it is being handled

right. He agrees that you need to participate in it. And so he has the confirmation of the godly Titus who is well known to the Corinthian church. He has made numerous trips there delivering letters, and they know Titus and they love Titus, as was confirmed back in chapter 7 in this very letter.

And this dispels another criticism potentially and that is that Paul acted unilaterally, and that he just kind of ran his own show and everybody just lined up lock step or got booted out of the team. That's not the case. God put the same zeal in the heart of Titus and when God is involved in an enterprise, He will put that into the hearts of those who lead. We saw that last time. It is important that in any financial program the godly pastors are led by God to believe it is right. And they are leading in response to the leading of God Himself.

You need to look and make sure there are godly pastors, godly shepherds. You need to make sure their theology and their doctrine is right so that they are demonstrating the mind of Christ in what they do. The early church, you'll remember, laid their money at the Apostles' feet every Sunday because they wanted to put it into the hands of the godliest men. Honest, God blessed fund raising is in the control of godly teachers and preachers who have sought the mind of the Lord and walk intimately with Him. This is so very important...so very important.

The pattern then that we've seen unfold is that giving is to be voluntary and from the heart. It is to be complete. It is to be proportionate. It is to balance resources. And it is to be under pastoral support and pastoral leadership.

Now let's come to number six. And now we come to the large section in Paul's thought, giving has another element that must be there. Stewardship with integrity...listen carefully...must be handled with accountability...it must be handled with accountability. Now again I remind you, all these are answering potential criticisms. When Paul said you give whatever you want, he was answering the criticism that Paul is trying to put some burden on you. When Paul said give only out of what you have, he was answering the potential criticism that he's trying to take the very little we have and give it to his friends. Not at all, he's simply trying to balance resources. And when he would be criticized about acting unilaterally, he says no, God put it in the heart of Titus and he sees it as the purpose of God as well. All of these are directed at answering potential criticisms.

And there is another huge potential criticism and that is that Paul will misuse this money. It is a huge amount. It is referred to in this chapter as a generous gift down in verse 20. And that is a word only used there in the New Testament and means a very large amount. And the accusation immediately would come that Paul is a deceiver and Paul is a liar and Paul is in it for the money, and you're going to turn over all this money to this guy? Remember now, they had been making an effort to discredit him now for a long time, found some believers, and even though the Corinthians in the main had been convinced that the false teachers were in error and it reaffirmed their support of Paul, the seeds of that dissension were still there and the accusations ready to surface at any moment. Paul must

deal with that and in doing so he starts in verse 18 to show the accountability with which the money is handled...very, very important.

Verse 18, "And we have sent along with him," stop there for a moment. Him being Titus, remember now Titus is going to deliver 2 Corinthians after its written. Paul is still writing here in chapter 8, he's not done and he says here, I'm going to send along with him, that is along with Titus who is going to come, bring the letter and help you with the giving, help you with the collection until I get there, I'm going to send along with Titus the brother. The brother is unnamed. I've heard people say it might be Tychicus, or it might be Trophimus. Some have said it probably is Luke because it says, "Whose fame in the gospel has spread through all the churches," and they think it's probably a reference to Luke's gospel. The problem with that, Luke's gospel was not in circulation yet when 1 Corinthians was written, so the people wouldn't have known of Luke's gospel, so it's not Luke. We don't know who it is. The name is not given, but they would know who it is.

You say, "How would they know?" Because he would be standing there with Titus when he delivered the letter. They would know him and they would recognize him. He didn't need to give his name because he was well known. It says he is the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches. He doesn't name the man and there's no way to know who he was for us, but clearly the Corinthians knew him and they knew him as a man who was famous for preaching the gospel, a distinguished preacher known and esteemed by all the churches, a prominent and unimpeachable brother who was sent with Titus to receive and transport the money.

And by the way, he is just another preacher, another shepherd, another elder, another pastor that adds to the credibility of this whole thing because you have a plurality of godly men who believe it's right. Here's another one of them. And he is given the care of this money. It's not just Paul's enterprise. It's not just Titus collecting it. It's Titus and this brother, this unimpeachable brother famous through all the churches.

I might stop for a moment to note. Churches are foolish to give the care of the money to lesser men. In the New Testament the care of the money, the choices of how it is spent were always given to the godly leaders, the preachers, the teachers, the Apostles, they were always the most trustworthy servants of God, they were always chosen to care for the funds. I grew up in a situation where churches typically had a pastor and a pastoral staff, under them or alongside of them serving were deacons who cared for the spiritual ministry and then there were the trustees and they handled all the money and they didn't have to be qualified to be deacons spiritually, they weren't qualified to be elders or pastors in terms of their giftedness, but they handled the money. And that's a tragic way to do things because you've put the money in the hands of those who are third in the chain of spiritual strength and biblical insight. You want to put the responsibility for that in the hands of those people who know the most about Scripture, who know the most about the mind of God, who walk most closely with Him.

So he says we chose this brother not because he was an accountant, we chose this brother not because he was good in finances, not because he worked for the local bank, and not because he owns his own business. We chose this guy because he was a famous preacher and his character is unimpeachable through all the churches.

Verse 19 adds, "And not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work." It wasn't just Paul's choice, it wasn't just Titus' choice, although perhaps they were a part of initiating the interest in this man, it came to the churches to appoint him.

Somebody might say, "Well, Paul, I mean, Paul and Titus and they're in collusion and they picked one of their buddies. Not the case. He has been appointed by the churches. Not just Paul's man, there's no personal control on the Apostle's part. It was not, by the way, listen carefully, it was not that Paul couldn't be trusted, he could. It wasn't that Titus couldn't be trusted, he could. It was that people couldn't be trusted. They can't be. There's always people looking to criticize, right? This isn't to protect Paul, this isn't to protect Titus, this is to protect Paul and Titus from false accusations that they're mishandling the money. Paul could be trusted. Titus could be trusted. But the people seeking to destroy Paul couldn't be trusted. And they didn't...they didn't stop, they were relentless. They wanted to make an accusation stick and this would be a great one.

So you put in place unbiased people appointed by the churches whose responsibility it is to stick with the whole procedure and know it inside out. This brother has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work...he says...which is being administered by us, we're administering it, but he is there so that the churches have a representative to see how carefully this whole process is being attended to.

When I think about how we do things here at Grace Church, the pastoral team gets together and determines how the money should be allocated to what ministries. The elders come alongside and affirm all of that. There is a finance committee on the elders that looks carefully at all the financial issues so that they know exactly what is being spent and how it's being spent and they discharge their oversight of that. Every month a report is given to the elders of that procedure. There is an internal audit committee, that is a group of people selected from out of our congregation who are not a part of our staff at all, and they audit constantly the financial condition and the financial statements of our church which are under the care of skilled accountants who keep all the records. And then externally there is also an audit company, a world-class audit firm that audits our books every year to attest to the validity of our financial accountability, it attests to our practices and that our purposes are fulfilled within all the guidelines of appropriate conduct financially. So we have the finance committee, we have an internal audit committee and an independent audit committee.

And somebody might say, "What's the matter, don't you trust yourselves?" No we don't trust the criticisms of those who would tear us down and tear down the gospel. Furthermore we are a charter member of E.C.F.A. which is Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, which is the highest standard setting group for financial accountability of Christian ministries in America. We have been a member since the initiation of that group, so is the Master's College and Grace To You a member, because we want no person to be able to look at anything which we produce financially and not see the complete integrity of everything. That's just because we want to be wise against those who would seek to slander, slander Christ.

And so, in verse 19 Paul says, "This brother, this gospel preacher with the unimpeachable character has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work." He's a permanent auditor, he's there all the time. Its being administered by us, but he's there overseeing it. And then he gives a two-fold goal, "For the glory of the Lord Himself and to show our readiness." He says we're administering this for the glory of the Lord Himself. We don't want any reproach to fall on Christ. We don't want any disrepute on His name. We don't want anybody criticizing how we handle money. We don't want any false accusations that can stick. And to maintain the glory of the Lord we have this guy traveling with us as we carry out this entire operation so that the Lord is never dishonored, never justly criticized and no accusation can stand and additionally, to show our eagerness.

In other words, you remember in Galatians 2:10 they said remember the poor, and Paul is simply saying we're taking all these careful, careful steps so that you can see our eagerness and our readiness to meet the need of those poor saints in Jerusalem. We take these pains for the sake of the Jerusalem church so that they can get all the money and for the sake of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the right reasons, for the sake of the purpose of the giving and the sake of the glory of the Lord we have this accountability.

Financial matters demand honesty. We live in a world today that is consumed with consumption, materialistic, self-indulgent. The love of money has produced all kinds of evil in our society. There is robbery on every front imaginable...imaginable. The single greatest crime in America outstripping all other crimes, consuming more money illegally is cheating on Income Taxes, and from there it goes to the outright machine-gun robbery of banks and everything in between, all kinds of embezzlements, all kinds of thievery, that's just part of our culture. It finds its way into the church in horrible scandals that we all know about and read about. The Apostle Paul wants none of that at all, and so he says we chose a man who was affirmed and appointed by all the churches to secure people's confidence against the false accusations.

Verse 20, "Taking precaution," and here he says it specifically, "that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift." He had to take these precautions. It isn't that he couldn't be trusted, or Titus couldn't be trusted, it was that his enemies couldn't be trusted.

If you look, for example, at chapter 11 of this epistle, just a brief look at verse 7, it seems as though the accusations against Paul had been around a long time, maybe even from the beginning. There were some who accused him of doing it for money, that was typical of false teachers, that was typical of philosophers and sort of transient roaming teachers. They would elicit money from their pupils. And maybe they thought Paul was like everybody else, he was just in it to make a buck, just in it to get rich and he was clever enough to be more successful than others in order that he might be richer than others. But look what he says, and this is in verse 7 of 2 Corinthians 11, it kind of indicates from the very start he was sensitive to this accusation. "Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?"

From the very beginning, remember back in 1 Corinthians 9 he said, "I had a right to take money but I didn't take it, I did not want to make the gospel chargeable to you. You had too many people coming along teaching you and taking your money, you had too much of that, I didn't want to get cast in that same light. In fact, just to sustain my ministry...he says in verse 8, and it's a little bit tongue and cheek...I robbed other churches." That implies to me that somebody had accused him of robbing them and he's sort of playing off of that a little bit sarcastically. He says I had to rob other churches and take wages from them to serve you. When I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone. Even when I had a need I didn't tell you about it, for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need. And in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so.

Apparently from the very beginning there was this idea that Paul was in it for the money. And from the start he dealt with that by taking nothing from them. Over in chapter 12 of the 2 Corinthian letter, you'll look down at verse 14, he says, "For the third time I'm ready to come to you, I will be not be a burden to you." I'm not going to be a burden, I haven't been a burden. You know that. "I do not seek what is yours, but you." I don't want your possessions, I don't want your money, I never have. "For children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children." And he gives them a little analogy there.

In fact, verse 15 he says, "I will most gladly spend everything I have and be expended for your souls." You've got it backwards. I'm giving up all I have for you. I don't want what you have for me. And then he gets sarcastic in verse 16, "But be that as it may, I didn't burden you myself, nevertheless crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit." What? He says, "How in the world could I be a crafty fellow who took you in by deceit?" Which is obviously an accusation against him. "If I didn't take anything from you?" How can that be true?

Verse 17, "Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?" Somebody comes up and says, "Oh you didn't do it personally, but you sent somebody and they took all our money and took it back to you." Have I done that? I haven't done that. I urged Titus

to go, sent the brother with him, the brother we're learning about, the famous preacher. Titus didn't take advantage of you, did he? Nobody did.

But all of this indicates these swirling accusations against Paul's misuse of their money. Boy, somebody just kept it up all the time...kept it up, kept it up, kept the criticism up, kept it going, kept it going. Paul had so many enemies who wanted to destroy him and wanted to destroy people's trust in him and they wanted to attack him on the money thing. So he's sensitive to that. And that's why he takes the precautions.

Back to chapter 8 verse 20, "Taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift." Generous gift, again, interesting word, hadrotes, it means an abundance, a bounty, it's a huge amount.

Why all of this precaution? Why all of this? Verse 21, "For we have regard for what is honorable." There is the reason. For what is beyond question, for what is beyond suspicion, for what is noble. "Have regard" could be translated "we take into consideration." We're careful and thoughtful to consider what is honorable...here it comes...not only in the sight of the Lord but also...what?...in the sight of men.

Now somebody might say, "As long as we act appropriately before God, who cares what people think?" Paul does. It really matters. It matters greatly because the enemies of the gospel and the enemies of the truth and the enemies of the ministry of the church can criticize and be believed unless we can remove all their suspicion because of our accountability.

I suppose one of the most lingering criticisms of Christianity has been that it takes money from the people and sometimes criminally. That's true. Paul wants none of that. He wants not only the Lord to look and be pleased, but he wants to make sure that anybody who looks is going to see the integrity. We must handle money in the open so that people can see our honesty and see our integrity as a manifestation of our righteousness.

In Proverbs chapter there are statements about obeying the commandments, keeping the teaching of Scripture, writing it on your heart, verse 4, "So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man...and man." It is important what men think. They're the ones we are trying to reach.

Listen to Romans 12:17, "Respect what is right in the sight of all men." Respect what is right in the sight of all men. And sadly so many who seek money have no accountability, the truth is never known about how they handle it until they show up on "60 Minutes," or "20/20," or Hard Copy, or whatever other program and are exposed in their fraud.

Paul's not done. Verse 22, "And we have sent with them our brother..." Now we've got a third member in the delegation. This is another one and we don't have his name either, but that would obviously be known to them as soon as he arrived. He describes him with some glowing terms, "Whom we have often tested." That's that word dokimazō which means to be approved after testing, like testing metals and having them come out proven. We have tested him and he has passed. "We have found him diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you."

Just to take the extra precaution, here's another one. Again no name is given, but a great commendation, "Whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things." What does that mean? Diligent is zealous, passionate. He's just a...he's a zealous person. Just in general, he's passionate. He's devout. "But now even more diligent, more zealous than normal because of his great confidence in you." Perhaps he had heard the wonderful report of Titus in response to the "severe letter" and the restoration of their relationship to Paul. He heard that the Corinthians indeed proved to be teachable, responsive, responsible, repentant and loyal. He had heard such good things and he was not so encouraged he wanted to be a part of the whole enterprise.

So now you've got Titus and you've got the brother whose fame spread through all the churches because of his preaching. And now you've got a brother many times tested and found zealous, and now committed to this whole process as well with a greater zeal. Very, very careful accountability.

Now Paul sums it up in verse 23, this is the summary of this little group of this little financial committee. "As for Titus, let's go over it again, he is my partner and fellow worker among you." He's my partner. He's my koinonos. He's my close companion. And he's fellow worker among you, sunergos. You know him, he's been there, he's worked with you and you love him and you know his character and you know his heart. "As for our brethren, these two brothers, the preacher and the man tested and proven, they are messengers of the churches." And again that reminds us of back in verse 19, appointed by the churches. They are messengers of the churches.

I want to stop at that point and just make a couple of comments that are really very important. The word "messenger" here is apostolos, it's apostles. They are apostles of the churches. What does that mean? Well it's a term used to refer to somebody who was officially authorized to be a representative. Likely the churches in mind here are the churches of Macedonia. Apostle or messenger is someone charged or commissioned with an official duty. And his role, listen, can only be understood by knowing who commissioned him and for what. If you want to understand what the meaning of their apostleship is, you have to know who commissioned them and for what.

For example, there were originally twelve apostles, same term, twelve messengers, twelve apostolos. They were unique because they were one commissioned by whom? By the Lord Jesus Himself personally. They were all commissioned by the Lord Jesus Himself personally. And, of course, later

Paul was added to the group. And Christ commissioned him personally on the Damascus Road. They all had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They were commissioned personally by Christ for...what?...to be witnesses of the resurrection and to preach the gospel. The twelve Apostles commissioned by Christ to be witnesses of the resurrection and preach the gospel.

But here are two apostles here. They were not commissioned by Christ to be witnesses of the resurrection and preach the gospel. They were commissioned by the churches to go with Paul and Titus to help secure the money and bring it all the way to Jerusalem. So they are messengers of the churches. So you don't include them with the Apostles. They are official men commissioned by the churches, not Christ, and for the purpose of securing the money and taking it to Jerusalem.

But I want you to notice the caliber of men who were given to this task. The end of verse 23, this has got to be the single best, the single highest compliment ever given to a believer. They are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Wouldn't you like that on your epitaph? What more could be said? They are a glory to Christ. They bring glory to Christ. By their holiness, by their virtue, by the excellencies of their spiritual commitment, by their obedience to the Word of God, they bring honor to Christ. They are a glory to Christ, the best of men. You put the money in the hands of the best of men, lesser men have some risk. Those who bring Christ glory could never bring His church shame.

Stewardship efforts with integrity carefully entrust the money to the trustworthy and the godly who by their known character are above and beyond suspicion, who are the preachers and the teachers and the best articulators of biblical truth, who walk most closely to Christ, who are those of whom it can be said they are an honor to Jesus Christ. And when they take care of the finances, critics trying to undermine the gospel are silenced-silenced.

People have a right to that kind of accountability. They really do. And people have a right to be suspicious when it isn't there. I remember one time I was in Baltimore, Maryland, holding a radio rally, it was kind of a strange thing because the radio station there said, "We want you to hold a radio rally." I said, "I'm just here by myself, I'm all alone." They said, "Well that's...the people just want to meet you anyway, so we'll just fill up an auditorium."

So they had a school auditorium that seated about two thousand people jammed pack and I was the only person there. There was nobody to play the piano, there was nobody to do anything. There was nobody but me. So I just stood up and said, "I'd like to introduce myself, I'm John MacArthur and I'm it for tonight." And we went on for about two and a half hours. I led some songs and spoke and then answered questions and we had an absolutely great night.

Before the meeting, you know, the radio station manager said, "You know, I'm sure some of these people would like to give some money to Grace To You, to the radio ministry." And I said, "Well that

would be wonderful, it would be great, but there's...how am I going to collect the money, I'm the only guy here and how are we going to do it? We don't have any plates or anything."

And so we said, "Well let's scrounge around and see what we can find." Looking back stage before the thing I found this huge big trash barrel, just a huge thing. So I said, "We'll just put this...we'll just put this out in the auditorium and when the deal's over, people can just go there and put money in it."

And I don't know how much they'll give, but we'll just...this will be big enough. It was a huge thing...bigger than the one I have at home, you know, it was a big one.

So when the deal was over, sure enough people were putting their money in it. I was up front talking. We had a barrel watcher, you know, the station manager went back and just kind of stood there because it could be a temptation for the wrong person. But anyway when it was over, we went to the place and the thing was jammed with money and it was over the top, you know, it had crested, it was just money.

And I said, "Hey, what are we going to do with this? I can't...you know, I can't stuff this in my...and I can't take a barrel of money on the airplane, that's for real sure."

And he said, "Look, I don't want this money, I don't want to drag this money around. This isn't safe to have this much money." And he said, "You know, you probably need some accounting."

I said, "Look, I trust you, what we need to do is...look, you need to take this back to your office and then you need to have somebody count it and then just send Grace To You a check."

"Oh, he said, I don't know about that." He was so reluctant. He was so nervous about all this money. And so we said, "Well that's the only thing we can do."

"I can't haul it back."

So he said, "Well, okay."

So I said, "Look, let's just put it in your car while you take me back to the Holiday Inn." I was staying at the Holiday Inn. And so we went out to his car with this...carrying this thing together, and we didn't know what to do, we didn't want to steal the barrel from this school, so we just dumped it in the trunk and it completely filled the whole trunk of his car...just this huge pile of money. And we were the last people to leave, obviously, you know, because we had talked to the last person, so we got out of there with all this money and dumped it in the trunk and then took the barrel back in.

And we were headed back to the Holiday Inn, it was like ten thirty at night, and both of us were hungry and so we thought...Well, we need to get something to eat. And I said, "Yeah, I don't have

any cash, you know, my wife...my wife gives me three dollars on Monday and wonders where it is when I ask her for three more on Thursday," you know. So I didn't have any cash. And he said, "I don't...I don't think I have any either." I said, "I don't think it's a problem. I think Grace To You would probably allow us to pick a ten out of that pile."

And he said, "Well," he said, "okay." So we pulled into this restaurant, I'll never forget it. It's dark, we're in the parking lot and we...it was one of those places that's still open, you know, so we pulled in there and I said, "Well, look, pop the trunk thing and I'll find a ten in there." And so the trunk is up and I'm trying to find a ten and sure enough the worst possible thing happens, a guy comes out of the restaurant and he's been drinking and he walks by the back of the car and I didn't see him coming until he's standing there looking, and then I...oh no, the worst possible. And he looks, he says, "What did you do, rob a bank?" And I just slammed the trunk and got in the car and said, "Tom, we need to go to another place."

I mean, that was a normal...I would have concluded that. If I had said to him, "No, I'm a pastor, and I've just...I'm just taking home the offering."

"Oh sure."

I don't remember if we ever did eat anything. And Tom was in a big hurry to get home and not have a flat tire and have to have somebody get in his trunk and find the jack, you know. Anyway, if I remember right, they did send a check to Grace To You and I think all is well.

But, you know, the guy even though he was, you know, three sheets to the wind, the guy that came out and said, "What did you do, rob a bank?" I mean, he had a right for an explanation, didn't he? And it only would have been worse if I had said, "No, I'm a pastor and I'm just taking home the offering." That would have fulfilled all of his expectations and driven him to further drink, probably.

It's a kind of a silly story but it illustrates the fact that anything that we can do to...to protect the integrity of the way we handle money is appropriately done. And that's exactly where the heart of the Apostle Paul is.

Now, I'm going to close with one final point in verse 24, and then we'll finish up the first five verses of chapter 9 next time. Stewardship with integrity exhibits giving that is an expression of love. Stewardship with integrity exhibits giving that is an expression of love. Verse 24, "Therefore because of all this accountability, because of all that's at stake, openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you."

Look, we've taken all the precautions. We've given you all the instruction, give voluntarily, give according to the proportion of what you possess, give to complete the situation, give under the

leadership of the godly men that are involved, give trusting the integrity of how it's handled, therefore give and do it openly. Literally the Greek says, "In the faces of the churches." Let everybody see how generous you are. Let everybody see how magnanimous you are. Let them see the proof of your love.

You say you love, prove it. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," Jesus said. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you're My disciples if you have love one for another." Let's see your love, put it on display for all the churches. This is the opportunity to give visible demonstration of your love for the saints, of your love for the church, of your love for the Lord of the church. Our testimony is linked to our love.

When people look at a church and say, "That's a generous church, that's a giving church," that seals their understanding of our love. When you out of the generosity of your heart give money and build seventeen churches in eastern Europe, believe me, those people never forget it. Nobody can question your love to them. They've seen it.

I got another little letter on my desk from Russia this morning from a church thanking us for a recently sent gift to help them. They know we love them. That's how we prove it. We don't...we don't indulge ourselves to a fault. I think about that when I look at so many churches that are built by millions and millions and millions of dollars, all the money that's gone into that isn't going into something else. Something else may be more compelling and less comfortable.

He simply says, "Let everybody see the proof of your love." And they weren't going to question love. I mean, they knew all about love, after all, Paul had written them in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 the greatest definition of love that's ever been penned. They knew about love. And they also knew that when you love you give. I mean, when you fall in love, you give to a ridiculous extent. When you love your children, you can hardly restrain yourself from giving to them. When you love your friend, you want to give to give to your friend. When you love one another, you give. That's how love acts. That's how it responds. That's how it reacts.

Paul says, "Let everybody see your love and our reason for boasting about you." We've told them about your love. We boasted about your love. Put it on display. Let everybody see how much you love.

Why? Because when they see your love they'll know you belong to Christ, right? They'll know the validity of your faith. You can say you love but if you don't demonstrate it like 1 John 3, if you close your compassion, "How dwells the love of God in you?" How can we possibly make people believe you love when you don't give?

We've been boasting about your love. We've been boasting about it, now put it on display. Nothing is more characteristic of love, absolutely nothing, then generous, lavish giving. And so, at the end of this chapter he really goes to the beginning because that's behind it all. You give voluntarily out of love. You give proportionately out of love. You give responding to the godly leadership out of love. You give willing to balance your much with someone's little out of love. It's appropriately cared for by those who are godly and careful stewards of it. And you give openly and eagerly because you want all to see your love for each other. It's the greatest way we can demonstrate our love.

When you see someone in need, you meet their needs. This happens all the time. One of our seminary students from South Africa, his wife wrote me a letter and said, "I just want to tell you, we've never experienced anything like the love we received when we came there. We didn't have enough money for seminary, so people gave us money. We didn't have a car to drive, so someone gave us a car. We didn't have furniture for our place, they gave us furniture. It just was an outpouring the whole time we're there." Now they're back and have just been accepted as pastor of a church in South Africa.

They go away knowing your love. You showed it openly to them. And that's essential to giving that has real integrity. It is voluntary, faithful to the need, proportionate to what we have, balancing out resources. It responds to godly leadership. It is handled by godly men and cared for with great accountability. And it exhibits a genuine spiritual love that is willing to be humbled and to give. That's stewardship with integrity. Two more for next time.

Father, thank You for our time this morning. Very practical and helpful instruction. We are continually amazed as we go through the Scripture how comprehensive it is and how it touches on everything...everything. It's an astonishing book and when You said it was complete, it was really complete. Nothing is left out that we need to know for life in Your Kingdom and life in this world. Thank You for instructing us on these practical matters even this morning.

And now, Father, we pray that You might apply all these things to our hearts that indeed we might be obedient to what Your Spirit prompts in our giving. Thank You, Lord, for a church which such accountability, for folks who really with a passion protect and guard the stewardship of resources. And thank You, Lord, for all that You've accomplished here through these precious giving people. We know, Lord, their reward awaits them in the glory of Your presence. They are rewarded in time as You pour out blessing, but the main reward is laid up in heaven. To that we wait and give with thanksgiving in Christ's name. Amen.

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