

“STEWARDSHIP THAT HONORS GOD”
(Text: 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5)

- How ironic that the same week Congress and the President are arguing over raising our nation’s debt ceiling (which is insane economics! Don’t pay off the debts you have. Give yourself permission to spend more!)
 - Like loosening your belt at Thanksgiving so you can eat more and fit more in.
 - That’s the last thing you need to be doing.
- In the midst of all the economic mess in our world, we come to the passage in our study of 2nd Corinthians where Paul addresses the issue of honoring God with our resources.
- God’s **timing** is always perfect and His **truths** are always **perfect** and **pertinent** to the **times**.
 - The Voice of sanity in an insane world.

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

- The context is a love offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem.
- **Chapters 8-9** deal with the subject of this offering and Christian giving.
 - The word “money” is never mentioned.
- **MONEY isn’t the issue when it comes to giving. It’s all about our HEART.**
- In our text this morning, we see the heart of Paul as he addresses some key issues surrounding this offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Stewardship that honors God involves THREE THINGS:

- (1) **INTEGRITY**
- (2) **RELIABILITY**
- (3) **SINCERITY**

(1) INTEGRITY (2 Corinthians 8:16-23)

- **Verses 20-21** are key verses here.
 - “We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.”
 - Paul went to great lengths so he would be completely above reproach.
- In **1 Corinthians 9**, he talked about how he had the right to receive compensation for his ministry just like the false apostles.
 - But he didn’t take it. Instead, he worked with his own hands and “endured anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (**1 Corinthians 9:12-23**)
 - When it came to this “offering,” Paul went way out of his way to show the utmost integrity.

(a) The CHARGE (vs. 16-17)

- Titus had played a key role in the turnaround of the church at Corinth.
- He loved them and they loved him as well.
- Paul asked Titus to go back to Corinth. But Titus had already decided he wanted to go on his own.

Verse 16a. God is the One Who put it in the heart of Titus.

- God leads men and women. He moves in our hearts.

Verse 16b. He had the same zeal and the same passion for the Corinthians that Paul did.

- Asking Titus to accompany this offering was a tremendous mark of integrity.
 - **Paul** was a **Jew**. **Titus** was a **Gentile** – a godly Gentile.
- Remember, the false teachers had been attacking Paul and assaulting his character.
 - So he responds with even **more character** and **integrity**.

1 Peter 2:23, “When Jesus was **reviled**, He did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

- Paul’s being proactive here, before the accusations start flying and being a man of integrity.

(b) The COMPANIONS (vs. 18-23)

Titus wasn’t coming alone.

- We are sending “the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel ... and he has been appointed (literally by a show of hands) by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace” (**vs. 18-19**).
- Some have speculated this was **Tychicus** or **Trophimus** (well known associates of Paul).
 - Others have said it was **Luke**.
 - Since Scripture doesn’t say who it is that means two things:
 - #1 – We’re wasting our time to speculate on who it might have been.
 - #2 – We can rest assured the Corinthians would’ve known him.
- He wasn’t chosen because he was an accountant or because he was good with finances or because he was associated with the local bank or because he owned his own business.
- He was chosen because of his known faithfulness not only to preach the gospel but also to live it.
 - The churches of Macedonia chose him to go (**vs. 19**).

Verse 22. A third man was coming as well.

- Again, we don’t know who this is. (Sosthenes, Trophimus, Tychicus)
- Apparently, he was **also** well known to the Corinthians.
- He had “great confidence in them” (**vs. 22**) and had been “tested and found earnest” (passionate, zealous for the things of God) “in many matters” (**vs. 23**).

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12, “Two are better than one ... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

- Paul was being extra careful. He was going out of his way to be a man of integrity.
 - Stewardship that honors God would demand that.

(c) The COLLECTION (vs. 20-21)

- Paul referred to this collection as a “generous gift” (**v. 20**).
- The word is only used here in the N.T. and means a very large amount.

Dr. Kent Hughes: “Considering the distance and danger of the journey by land and sea, putting this offering in great peril, he was sensitive to criticisms, as his enemies gave him no quarter.”

2 Corinthians 11:7-9. Paul knew that few things could destroy his ministry as much as doubts cast upon his integrity in matters of money.

ILL. For 38 years of ministry, it's always been my practice not to touch an offering plate or offering bag unless I was putting something into it.

- I've never counted an offering, made a deposit to a bank or signed a single check for either church where I have been privileged to serve as Pastor. (31½ years)
 - None of our pastors are signers on the church checking account.
 - They don't sign or approve checks. In fact, they have to get a P.O. if they need a check.
- We have ushers who collect the offerings given here.
 - We have another team of men and women who count the offerings but can't spend a dime of it.
 - We have full time security and security cameras that monitor all of those activities. (30-day loop)
 - 16 years ago, our elders hired an Executive Pastor to specifically oversee the financial area of our ministry. Mel Dietz was charged with the responsibility of representing the elders in giving oversight to all financial matters, hiring a staff that included a full-time bookkeeper and other staff as well.
 - All of this is under the oversight of our elders who receive a monthly report and who have 24-hour access, seven-days-a-week to any aspect of our ministry they choose.
 - The elders also determine the timing for auditors to come in and examine our books and make recommendations for improvements to all of our procedures. (And we're always looking to improve!!)

Why do we do all that?

- Because **Stewardship that honors God involves INTEGRITY.**
 - Paul was determined to avoid all possible criticism so far as this collection was concerned – both as to its collection and its distribution.
 - That's why he added in **vs. 21**, “for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.”

Verse 23, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Stewardship that honors God involves INTEGRITY. It also involves:

(2) RELIABILITY (2 Corinthian 8:24-9:4)

- The responsibility for faithfulness isn't just for leaders. Paul was counting on the Corinthians to be reliable.
 - To **keep their promise** and **fulfill their commitment** to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

- Ironically, their eagerness to be a part of the offering a year earlier, had been one of the motivating factors for the generosity of the Macedonian churches (**vs. 1-2**).

- Paul said, "It's superfluous for me to write to you about this because you were the ones who motivated others to give."

Verses 3-4. Paul wanted them to be ready so there would be no embarrassment for anyone involved.

- Giving should never be a source of embarrassment for anyone because we are faithful and reliable.

1 Cor. 4:2. Paul said that stewards only have one requirement: "Be faithful!" (Trustworthy/reliable)

- The church ought to be the best run financial institution in town and Christians ought to be the best financial managers you can find. Because we faithfully follow God's principles and we're reliable.

ILL. Dr. John MacArthur tells the story of speaking, several years ago for a radio rally held at a school auditorium in Baltimore, MD.

There were about 2,000 people there. And he spoke. He even led the music that night. Before the evening began, the radio manager said, "I'm sure some of these people would like to give to Grace To You." So they looked around backstage to see what they could find and they found a large trash barrel.

At the end of the night, sure enough, people came and gave and filled the barrel to overflowing. After everyone had left the Radio manager tried to give the barrel to John and he said, "I can't take that back on the plane with me. Can you just take it to your office and write a check to GTY?"

So they carried the barrel out to the parking lot and, since they didn't want to take the barrel from the school, they just dumped the money into the radio manager's trunk. They got in the car to head back to the Holiday Inn where John was staying. On the way, they realized they hadn't gotten anything to eat. So, they stopped at restaurant. As they got out, they both realized they didn't have any money. So, John 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."

So they opened the trunk and just as they were getting ready to pick up a ten, the worst possible thing happened. A drunk walked by the car, saw the money and said, "What did you do? Rob a bank?" Dr. MacArthur said he just slammed the trunk and said, "Tom, we need to go to another place."

The only other alternative would've been to say, "No, I'm a pastor and I'm just taking the offering home."

That guy would've probably gone back in the bar and really started drinking!

Stewardship that honors God involves: (1) INTEGRITY, (2) RELIABILITY

(3) SINCERITY (2 Corinthians 9:5)

- Stewardship that honors God involves sincerity in giving. Giving not affected by covetousness.
- NAS: "a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness."
- NIV: "a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given."
 - The word can also be translated "greed."
- There's only one other thing that could've affected their offering: **GREED!**

- Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China said, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

- **John MacArthur:** "If it is God's work, if it is done God's way, and if it deserves your gifts, and **if you have them to give and you don't, sin is the issue.**"

- The word “exaction” used in the **ESV** means “**an excessive or harsh demand. Extortion.**”
- Occasionally, you’ll run into people who say, “All that church wants is my money.”
 - “All that church ever talks about is money.”
- You know what the real issue is: Their own personal **covetousness** – their own **greed**.
 - They don’t want to give because they want to spend the money on themselves.

ILL. Remember JUDAS? (John 12:1-8). When Mary anointed Jesus with that very expensive perfume. Judas said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

GREED. Pure and simple. **COVETOUSNESS.**

- Solomon said that greedy people are never satisfied and never thankful. (**Ecclesiastes 5:10**)
- It’s such an ugly sin that Paul warned in **Ephesians 5:3**, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”
- In **2 Peter 2:14**, Peter speaks of a covetous heart as one “trained in greed.”
 - In other words, you’ve been selfish so long you’ve become habitually greedy.

Stewardship that honors God involves:

- (1) **INTEGRITY**
- (2) **RELIABILITY**
- (3) **SINCERITY**

As we’ve said from the very beginning, when it comes to giving the issue isn’t **MONEY**.

- The issue is our **HEART**.

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your **HEART**, all your **SOUL**, all your **MIND** and all your **STRENGTH**.

- When it comes to **GIVING**, here’s the **HEART** of the matter.
 - It all begins with your **HEART**.