

Trustworthy Ministers (Discussion Guide on pg.11)

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

In a message about the importance of character in leadership Adrian Rogers said in 1996, "I believe that something happened in the 1960s, the ocean of America began to heave and the tidal wave has just hit the beach. A sociology professor said in a Newspaper and I quote, 'Character has slowly been bred out of many Americans, especially baby boomers and their children.' He argues that decades of pampering, organized activities and feel-good approaches, in which participants do not have to take personal responsibility, have made character almost passé."

If what Adrian Rogers said was true in 1996, if the sexual revolution that we sowed in the 1960s reaped a tidal wave on the shores of America, I want to submit to you that the tidal wave was just a precursor to the tsunami of ungodliness that is flooding our society today. In 1996 sexual perversion was secretly being practiced by adult leaders in the White House. Today sexual pervasion is openly being taught to innocent children in the School House.

In his message, Adrian Rogers went on to say that when it comes to effective godly leadership, ability is desirable, but character is indispensable. The word of God says in Proverbs 29:2, "*When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*" Sadly, although the groans over what ungodly rulers have reaped with the approval of society intensifies, the ocean of moral confusion and corruption continues to spread.

When it comes to leadership today, more and more people in society at large and in the church see character as optional, but ability as indispensable. Money trumps morals, happiness supersedes holiness, and character is compromised for comfort. What seems to work has more value than what is right.

But although compromising character may gain you earthy success, it will forfeit the spiritual capacity to lead with the blessings of God.

Main idea: God entrusts more to followers of Christ who have proven themselves trustworthy.

In this message, we are going to consider from Paul's explanation to the Corinthians concerning the process of delivering their financial gift, five essential qualities of a trustworthy leader.

1. Trustworthy ministers possess earnest care for the needs of others

The first quality of a trustworthy minister is that he/she possesses earnest care for the needs of others. After exhorting the Corinthian believers by the grace of God to follow through with their pledge to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul introduces three trusted men who were put in charge of delivering the funds. To reassure the church of Corinth that their financial gifts were in good hands, he describes the kind of men that were entrusted with delivering their gifts to those in need of it. The first brother that the Apostle introduces is Titus. He writes:

"But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord." 2 Corinthians 8:16-17

Notice that Titus was called to make the difficult journey to Corinth to collect the grace offering that the Corinthians had pledged. The apostle Paul and other church leaders did not order Titus to do it nor did Titus accept the responsibility out of obligation.

Like the Apostle Paul, Titus, who Paul had led to Christ, had the same earnest care from the Lord for the church of Corinth. In other words, he shared Paul's others-oriented heart and committed love that Paul had for the Corinthians.

And remember that the church of Corinth was not an easy bunch. In many ways they were spiritually immature. And this spiritual immaturity showed in the factions that were formed around their

favorite leaders, whom they aligned themselves with based on outward performance, like oratory skills.

The Corinthians were also prone to jealousy and envy which led to strife and division in the church. Moreover, false teachers arose in the church, probably gifted speakers, who opposed the Apostle Paul, even though he planted the church. Yet Paul and his ministry partners, like Titus, remained committed in love to bring them to maturity and ministry.

How many of you know, a true friend is someone who is still there even when everyone else has walked out. A trustworthy minister doesn't accept a ministry position because he/she wants to be served or is on a power trip. Rather they find great joy in serving others. They're in the ministry because God put a love in their hearts and a burden to minister to the needs of others.

Tragically, we have people in the ministry today with great talents, like administrative and speaking skills, but they lack Christ-like character. We have too many stories today of ministers whose lack of character was overlooked because of other skills that appeared to give them success in the ministry. But later their apparent success and lack of character set them up for a fall that brought great reproach to the church of Christ.

If we are going to be a church that remains faithful to the cause of Christ over the long haul, we must never put giftedness over character. More specifically, genuine love for others not business savvy must be what we strive for the most in our own lives and what we value the most in a Christian leader. As Robert Murray McCheney put it: "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."

This brings us to a second quality of a trustworthy minister:

2. Trustworthy ministers make themselves accountable to the church

Notice that along with Titus, Paul identifies a second brother in Christ who was appointed to deliver their love offering to the needy believers in Jerusalem. He continues: *“With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will.”* 2 Corinthians 8:18-19

Ironically, although Paul described the second person charged with the task of carrying the funds to Jerusalem as famous, he remains unnamed. Why he chose not to name him we don't know for sure. What we do know is that he was famous for his preaching of the gospel.

Specifically, what was it about his preaching of the gospel that made him famous? Well, if you are familiar with Paul's writing I think it's safe to say that Paul was not referring to his oratory skills. Rather what Paul likely had in mind was his devotion to spreading the good news of Jesus far and wide in the face of opposition and for the glory of Christ.

Perhaps the reason Paul didn't name him was because the only name that matters to men like him is the name of Jesus, the name that is above every name. This brother was famous for his preaching of the gospel, but his aim for doing so was not to make a name for himself, but to spread the fame of Jesus.

But now although he had a good reputation for his unashamed devotion to the spread of the gospel, and although Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ, these men made themselves accountable to others. Again, concerning this man who was famous for his preaching of the gospel, Paul writes in verse 19: *“And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will.”*

Trustworthy leaders of churches are not self-appointed. They're God called men, but they don't give themselves titles or promote themselves to positions of authority. They place themselves under the God ordained authority of the church and its leadership and wait patiently to be affirmed in their calling and appointment. If they believe they are called to serve the church in full time gospel ministry, they will not wait for a title or a salary to preach the gospel. Whether they have a title or a prestigious pulpit, the love of Jesus compels them to preach the good news wherever they can, on the street corner, to their co-workers, to their neighbor across the street, at a nursing home or anytime the Lord opens a door.

While having lunch with Roy Patterson this past week, he shared a story with me about a deacon in his church who asked to be licensed to preach in his denomination. Roy was inclined to do so. A few months later he asked Roy if he could start the process of ordination to be a minister of the gospel in his denomination. Roy said the young man showed promise but he believed he needed more time to mature in his faith. The bible says, *lay hands suddenly on no man*. After telling the young man that the time was not right yet, his church attendance became sporadic and after a couple of months he left the church. Roy said he ran into him a few years later and asked the former deacon where he was preaching. He replied in a casual way, "I'm not doing that anymore Pastor." Roy thought to himself, that's why he wasn't ready to be ordained.

Again, although the unnamed brother in our text had a good reputation among the churches in his day, he wasn't a maverick. He wasn't a self-appointed leader. He didn't promote himself. He wasn't in the ministry for titles, or to make a name for himself or to make money. He preached because he was compelled by the love of Christ. He was a humble servant of Christ whose work spoke for itself. He was a man who over time demonstrated that he could be counted on to fulfill an important task and to do so with the utmost integrity.

This brings us to a third quality of a trustworthy minister.

3. Trustworthy ministers live with integrity before God and man.

Having explained that the unnamed man who was famous for his preaching was appointed by the churches to carry the grace offering to the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul further explains: “*We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.*” 2 Corinthians 8:20-21

Notice that Paul writes, “*We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift...*” (v.20). What course was Paul talking about? He’s referring to the fact that other churches in Macedonia, who also gave to the need, were involved in the process of appointing those who would carry the generous gift to Jerusalem.

It’s important to note here that Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ appointed by Christ Himself to the gospel ministry. And yet, Paul still made himself accountable to other churches. There are some things we don’t need permission to do. I don’t need permission from the church to witness to my next-door neighbor. Likewise, it would not have been wrong if Paul himself exercised his apostolic authority and appointed those he trusted to carry the love offering to Jerusalem.

But to be above board and to leave no room for his critics to accuse him of any wrong doing, he involved other churches in the process. Paul wanted to be totally transparent about the collection and delivery of the financial gift.

How many of you know, when it comes to money, people can be a little funny? The Corinthians had already demonstrated a reluctance about following through with their pledge to help the poor. One of the reasons they may have been hesitant was because Paul’s critics were projecting on him the greed in their own hearts.

But although Paul had already clearly demonstrated that he wasn’t in the ministry for money and that in fact he labored at great cost to himself to spread the gospel, he still humbly welcomed oversight and accountability.

Watch out for men or women who resists being transparent and accountable to others. Men and women of integrity have no problem being transparent because they have nothing to hide.

Moreover, trustworthy men and women know not to trust themselves too much or to put too much faith in their own integrity. They know to set boundaries in relationships with the opposite sex and they avoid compromising positions that can stir up deceitful desires.

In a message about David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba, which began with putting himself at the wrong place at the wrong time, Adrian Rogers observed: David never dreamed he would do such a thing. Never! But often, sin is a combination of: 1) an **undetected weakness**, 2) an **unexpected opportunity**, and 3) an **unprotected life**. That is why we must do as Christ taught us and pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Matthew 6:13a

Trustworthy leaders seek accountability and prove themselves faithful. How many of you know, as Christians we should be quick to forgive others? But although forgiveness should be graciously given, trust must be diligently earned. A faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted.

This brings us to a fourth quality of a trustworthy minister:

4. Trustworthy ministers are put to the test and are found faithful.

Notice that Paul describes a third brother who was also charged with bringing the collection to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He writes: *"And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you"* 2 Corinthians 8:20

There's an important principle that Jesus highlighted in the parable of the dishonest manager and that we also see in our text. Jesus concluded: *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much"* Luke 16:10

The trustworthiness of a person with godly integrity and character is not affected by whether they've been entrusted with something big or small or with whether something seems inconsequential or very consequential. In other words, a person with godly integrity will not feel comfortable cheating on their taxes, but uncomfortable with stealing an item from a store. They will not be okay with looking at pornography on their smartphone, but not okay with committing adultery.

A person with godly integrity is not focused on the size of the task or the consequence of the sin, but on the greatness of His God. And because God is great and they trust that He knows best, they're going to trust Him in the seemingly little things and the big things.

Moreover, as one bible teacher observed, "God uses little things to test your integrity. We think it's the big things in life that create a leader — but no. The big crises in life *reveal* leadership, but leadership is not built in the big things of life. It's built in the small things. That's where integrity shows up — in the stuff that nobody sees, in the stuff behind the scenes, and in the small, unseen, unspectacular choices of life where you do the right thing even though nobody's ever going to see it. Faithfulness requires integrity, and God tests your integrity in the little things. Jesus is saying, Your public blessing is determined by your private integrity.

Every time a politician has a scandal, you can count on his defenders to come out and say this: "It really shouldn't matter what a guy's private life is like." Have you ever heard that one? "His private life doesn't have a thing to do with him as a leader." It has *everything* to do with him as a leader! Because if a man lies to his wife, he'll lie to his constituents. Believe me! If he'll lie to the person he told, "Till death do us part," he will cheat on you, voter! Count on it!

My public blessing as a leader comes because of private integrity that nobody ever sees. Your public blessing as a person comes from your private integrity that nobody will ever see. God uses little things to test our integrity." Rick Warren

The third brother that Paul describes in our text was tested and proven faithful in many matters. Therefore, he was not only entrusted with the delicate responsibility of carrying the collection for the poor to Jerusalem, but he was also given the privilege of delighting in the life-giving work of the Lord.

Notice also that Paul points out that this third brother was not only very earnest about the things of the Lord in the past, which opened the door for a new faith adventure, he was even more earnest about this new opportunity to serve the Lord. Why? Because he had confidence in the Corinthians who had demonstrated a Christ-like willingness to be part of the relief effort.

This brings us to a final point concerning the quality of a trustworthy minister:

5. Trustworthy ministers believe in their fellow saints and bring out the best in them.

Notice that Paul summarizes his testimony of these three trustworthy men to encourage the Corinthians to follow through with their pledge. He writes: *“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. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.”* 2 Corinthians 8:23-24

Notice that as Paul summarizes the trustworthiness of these three men, he describes Titus as his partner and fellow worker for the benefit of the Corinthians and the other brothers as messengers of the churches, *the glory of Christ*. Beloved, trustworthy ministers sent by God for the good of others are manifestations of the life changing glory of the grace of Jesus.

Again, “it’s not great talents that God blesses, but great likeness to Jesus.” These men were in the ministry not to be served, but because the love of Christ manifested in them compelled them to serve others. The light of the glory of Christ in them and the manifestation of His

glory in the Corinthians motivated them to never give up on the Corinthians. The glory of Christ in them gave them the enduring patience and earnest care they needed to bring this struggling congregation to maturity and ministry.

Furthermore, not only were these faithful men who were sent from the sacrificially generous churches of Macedonia, the glory of Christ, but the Corinthian church was also called to reflect the same glory. Therefore, Paul concludes: *“So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.”* 2 Corinthians 8:24

So, the reason that Paul and these trustworthy men were so earnest about the Corinthians following through with their pledge was not just because of the need in Jerusalem. It’s was also about the Corinthians graduating to another level of faithfulness that would increase their capacity to know the joy of being channels of the grace of Christ for the benefit of others.

“Surveys suggest, I learned recently, “that a third of all church-attenders will be in a different congregation in five years. “Many modern worshipers, said Robert Morgan, “are consumer-driven, and when they grow disgruntled, don’t like the music, have a conflict with someone, or find a church with better programming — they’re off. There are rare occasions when we need to change churches, but sometimes all we need to change is our attitudes.” Robert J. Morgan

Beloved, an increasing attitude of gratitude for the grace of Christ in our lives, who though He was rich became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich, will increase our capacity for generosity. And the more we trust His grace to be givers and not just receivers the more the Lord will trust us with eternal riches that will bless others to the glory of Christ.

Conclusion

Jesus said, *it is more blessed to give than to receive.* May the glory of the grace of Jesus make us trustworthy servants of Christ who He

entrusts with His blessings, so that we step out in faith to be channels of His blessings for the greater fame of His name.

Trustworthy Ministers Discussion Guide

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Main idea: God entrusts more to followers of Christ who have proven themselves trustworthy.

Review

In a message about the importance of character in leadership, Adrian Rogers said in 1996, “I believe that something happened in the 1960s, the ocean of America began to heave and the tidal wave has just hit the beach. A sociology professor said in a newspaper and I quote, ‘Character has slowly been bred out of many Americans.’”

What is causing this erosion of character? When it comes to leadership, why must ability never trump character?

Assess

Why is earnest care for the needs of others an important character quality in godly leadership? Where does this earnest care come from and how do we get it? See 2 Corinthians 8:16-17?

In what way did the Apostle Paul, Titus, and the other brothers mentioned in the text who were charged with delivering the grace offer to the poor, accountable to the churches of Macedonia? Why is making ourselves accountable an important character quality, especially for Christian leaders/ministers? 2 Corinthians 8:18-19

Why is transparency an important mark of integrity in leadership?

How come trustworthy men and women know not to trust themselves too much or to put too much faith in their own integrity?

Why must a promising leader be put to the test before being placed in positions of trust and leadership? See 2 Corinthians 8:22; Luke 16:10

Why does God use little things to test your integrity? What does it mean that public blessing is determined by your private integrity? See 2 Corinthians 8:22; Luke 16:10

How does a trustworthy minister bring out the best in others in the Lord? 2 Corinthians 8:23-24

Application

Does your public persona match your private character? If not, what has to change and how?

How do you need to make yourself more accountable to others to maintain godly integrity?

What Christ-like qualities do you need to grow in the most to be more of an encouragement to others in their walk with God?

In what way is our church called to be *the glory of Christ*? How should we pray to that end? See 2 Corinthians 8:23-24