The Money-Handlers

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Paul could write beautiful prose and express the deepest theology with incomparable simplicity, but he also operated with the practical accuracy of a chartered accountant. One often-overlooked aspect of Paul's ministry is the value he placed on the integrity of handling finances and administration.

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 (NIV), Paul describes the team he is sending with Titus to collect the financial gift for the churches in Jerusalem. In this passage, we see both Paul's strong desire that money be handled with care in order that it not hinder the work of the gospel, and, secondly, his deep appreciation for those who serve well in this way. 'And we are sending along with him **the brother** who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.' (2 Corinthians 8:18-19, NIV)

5 Guiding Principles for Leadership and Those Handling Finances

1. The Highest Standards

We must operate to the highest standards of integrity, without exception or excuse. In 2 Corinthians 8: 20-21 (NIV), Paul writes uncompromisingly; 'We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.' Quite simply, we should even take pain to get it right. Sometimes we may feel that doing things 'by the book' is time-consuming and bureaucratic, but we should remember in 2 Corinthians 8:19 (NIV) how he writes that 'we administer in order to honour the Lord himself'. We must pursue effective and efficient processes.

2. Serving Leadership

The team is sent 'along with' Titus. They are there to serve and protect Titus in his apostolic mission, not to control or check on him. Too often, holding the church purse strings has placed power in the wrong hands. In 1 Timothy 3, elders must be beyond reproach and never lovers of money. Those that serve administratively have a vital role in releasing apostles and elders to fulfil their calling, without worrying that they could be under scrutiny for how money is being used.

3. Founded on Trust

In light of this, we need to appoint trustworthy men and women. In 1 Corinthians 16:3-4 (NIV), Paul is willing to give letters of introduction to those approved to carry the gift, and seems happy that he will only go if there is a specific apostolic need for his personal presence. Otherwise he is happy for the approved men to act as auditors and guardians of the funds. We cannot, therefore, simply give the job of handling finances to the nearest willing volunteer. Paul was able to personally endorse those handling the finance, including 'the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel' (2 Corinthians 8:18, NIV) – quite a reference!

4. Deserving of Honour

It was written of those accompanying Titus that '…as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ.' (2 Corinthians 8:23, NIV) Paul urged the Corinthians to treat them with the highest respect, '…show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it' (2 Corinthians 8:24, NIV). I believe that Paul knew the value of those that administered with excellence, perhaps mindful of Jesus' words in Luke 16:11 (NIV), 'So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?'

5. Secondary to the Gospel Message

Although we suspect Paul was writing of Luke, he did not name any of the brothers he was sending with Titus. Perhaps this was because he was clear that the importance of handling money well was effective stewarding of worldly wealth and, as such, simply an enabler to the spread of the gospel. He clearly loved these brothers, but the apostolic mission was the primary goal, and this was the grace upon Titus. Whenever we consider money, there is always the caution to keep the main thing as the main thing. Handling money well honours God, and in this way opens the way to true riches: souls won for Jesus.

I suspect many of us could not readily name those serving faithfully in our churches as stewards of the finances. Yet it is with a deep sense of gratitude that we should honour the brothers and sisters ‘at pains’ (and sometimes it is a pain!) to ensure that we are doing things right ‘not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.’