

Bold, Part 15: “Commendations”

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

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Sermon Series Introduction

Hi church. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors.

We're currently in our sermon series through 2 Corinthians called “Bold.”

And I have the privilege to preach the Word of God to us today, so let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

Now if you've ever applied to a university or if you've ever applied for a job, then you've probably had to provide a list of people as *references*.

And those references most likely had to write a letter of *recommendation* for you.

And in that letter of recommendation, they'd essentially write about how well they know you, your particular strengths and weaknesses, and how confident they are in recommending you to be accepted by the university or the job position that you're applying for.

We're probably all familiar with the idea of references and letters of recommendation for *schools* and *jobs*.

But think for a moment: What would it be like to have references and letters of recommendation for your *life*?

If the people around you had to give an honest, straightforward evaluation of how you live your *life*, what would they say? What would they commend? What would they praise? What would they question? What would they not admire about you?

Or even more, if you're a *Christian*, what would it be like to have references and letters of recommendation for your *followership* of Christ?

Would others *commend* you as a Christian? Would they hold you up as an *example* of what it looks like to follow Christ? Would they say that you live your life *in accord with* the gospel of Jesus Christ that you profess?

These are all pertinent questions for the passage we're going to look at today, where the apostle Paul essentially writes brief letters of recommendation—or *commendations*—for different people *within* his letter of Second Corinthians.

The One Thing

Be commendable for living according to the gospel.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

The church in Corinth was first started by Paul and his companions, but after he left, the church fell into all kinds of sin, they started following false teachers, and they started rejecting Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ—even though he started the church!

But after several painful letters and visits, Paul got word from Titus that the church had repented and they were eager to see Paul again. So Paul writes this letter of Second Corinthians to send ahead of him before he visits.

We're currently in the middle of chapters 8 and 9, which are all about the official collection of funds that Paul has been organizing among the different *Gentile* (or non-Jewish) churches for the persecuted and poverty-stricken *Jewish* church in Jerusalem.

And Paul is at the point in the letter where he's telling the Corinthian church that he's sending Titus and two unnamed brothers ahead of him before he arrives, so that they can help them get ready the funds that they've *promised* to contribute.

But as he does that, he first gives a series of commendations—or letters of recommendation, if you will—for these three brothers that he's sending to them, explaining who they are and what's commendable about them.

So that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5.

^{8:16} 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. ¹⁸ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²² 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. 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. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

^{9:1} Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

This is God's Word.

Overview

In this passage, Paul commends five parties.

- I. Titus (8:16-17)
- II. "Famous" brother (8:18-19)
- III. Paul and his companions (8:20-21)
- IV. "Earnest" brother (8:22-23)
- V. Corinthian church (8:24-9:5)

So we'll look at this passage in those five parts, but we're going to pay attention more specifically at what they were commended for and how it was in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I want us to see that what *they* were commended for should actually be what every *Christian* and every *church* should be commended for as followers of Christ.

So what were *they*, and what should *we* as Christians and churches, be commended for?

- I. Earnest care for others (8:16-17)
- II. Reputation of gospel service (8:18-19)
- III. Honorability in the sight of God and man (8:20-21)
- IV. Proven earnestness in many matters (8:22-23)
- V. Ready, willing, and generous giving (8:24-9:5)

I. Earnest care for others (8:16-17)

Chapter 8 verses 16-17 say this:

^{8:16} 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.

Titus is the first person that Paul commends. Titus *earnestly cares* for the Corinthian church.

And notice that Paul likens Titus's love for them as "the same earnest care *I* have for you." And just think of the kind of love and care Paul had for them. Remember, Paul was faithful to them even when they rejected him as an apostle, only to listen to other false teachers. Paul continued to visit them and write letters pleading with them to turn back to the gospel even when they responded with hostility.

Imagine you're a father or mother, and the children whom you've loved, care for, provided for, and guided their whole lives, say to you, "You're not my father or mother anymore" and they effectively try to disown you.

Imagine you're a husband or wife, and the spouse whom you've loved, cared for, sacrificed for, and gave yourself fully to, says to you, "I don't love you anymore. I'd rather be with this other person. I don't ever want to see you again," and they file for divorce.

That was the kind of pain and suffering that Paul endured with the Corinthian church that he helped start. Yet, he earnestly pursued them for years, even when things seemed to be getting worse in their relationship with no guarantee that they were ever going to change, until by the grace of God, they finally repented.

That was the earnest care that Paul had for the Corinthian church, and that was the *same* earnest care that Titus had for the Corinthian church.

<pause>

Now how was this earnest care for others in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Simply, that's exactly how *God* has loved us.

- "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).
- "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10 NIV).
- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ is that God created us in love and provided for our every need, but in sinful rebellion, we have all turned away from him. We have despised his mercy and grace in our lives, and each of us has turned to our own way. But because of his abundant love and earnest care for us,

God sent his Son Jesus Christ to live the perfect life we were supposed to live and to die the death we were supposed to die for our sins, so that if we repent of our sins and believe in Christ alone as our Lord and Savior, we can be forgiven all our sins, adopted as sons and daughters of God, and be raised to new and eternal life with Christ.

If you've received *that* kind of love from God—if you've received that kind of *earnest care* from God—then the evidence of having truly received that gospel is a life that overflows with earnest care for others, especially for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

But look again at what Paul says in verse 16: “But thanks be to **God, who put into the heart of Titus** the same earnest care I have for you.”

Paul does not thank *Titus* for his earnest care for the Corinthians, but he thanks *God*. Why? Because *God* put that earnest care in his heart. And *when* did God do that? When Titus *first* experienced God's earnest care for him and *first* put his faith in Christ.

And how can Paul say so confidently that Titus has the *same* earnest care for the Corinthians that he has for them? Because *both* Paul and Titus have experienced the *same* earnest care from God for them through the person and work of Christ.

<pause>

If you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, what do you do when you hit your natural limits of love? What resources do you have beyond yourself to continue to have earnest care for those who hurt you? If you only love those who love you, there's nothing really special or commendable about that (Matt. 5:46-47).

As believers in Jesus Christ, what do *we* do when we hit our natural limits of love? We look to our crucified Savior who said on the cross for sinners like us, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). For believers, if you find yourself at the end of your love for others, look to Jesus to find more love to give. Take your eyes off of the one who has wounded *you* and look to the one *you* have wounded, and see how he still overflows in love for you.

For those who are believers in Jesus Christ, *God* has put into our hearts the *same* earnest care he has for us, so may we live according to the gospel we have received and so show that kind of earnest care for others.

<pause>

So Titus was commended for his earnest care for the Corinthian church. And the second commendation is a...

II. Reputation of gospel service (8:18-19)

Verse 18 says this:

¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

Along with Titus, another unnamed brother in Christ is being sent to the Corinthian church. Even though he's unnamed in this letter, he was apparently “famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.”

Literally, this verse reads “the brother whose praise **in the gospel** is through all the churches.” This brother's activity “in the gospel” perhaps *included* preaching (Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:14; 1 Thess. 3:2), but I don't think we should limit our understanding of his activity “in the gospel” as *only* preaching; it can be understood more broadly as a wide variety of activities for the gospel (cf. Phil. 4:3). That's why the NIV translates this verse like this:

2 Corinthians 8:18 (NIV) = And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches **for his service to the gospel.**

Yes, preaching the gospel is commendable, but so is *any service* to the gospel. Perhaps this brother was a preacher, but I don't think that's Paul's main point. This brother lived in such a way that *served* the gospel—that advanced, uplifted, and held out the gospel. He had a reputation through all the churches for his *service* to the gospel.

<pause>

Now as believers in Jesus Christ, can that be said of us? In showing hospitality to those different than us, in sharing openly about our struggles and our need for Christ, in reading the Bible with others, in praying for the advance of the gospel among the unreached and unengaged, in serving the unwanted in our city, in speaking the truth in love to one another, in building friendships with others in this local church—in all that we do, in any circumstance, are we looking to advance the gospel?

We may not all be famous or praised for our gospel service, but as each of us is looking to serve and advance the gospel through intentionally uplifting it and putting it on display in our lives through everything we do and whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, the gospel will be made known, and in that we rejoice (Phil. 1:18).

The gospel says that we were all once spiritually dead, unable to help ourselves, deserving of God's wrath, and yet God graciously gave us new life that we didn't deserve and could never earn.

Now if *that's* the gospel you say you believe and have received, is your *reputation* in line with it? What kind of reputation do you have among others? Is it one of gospel service? Is it one that uplifts the gospel? Or is it one that actually *undermines* the gospel?

<pause>

I know this may be a bit uncomfortable, but I don't think we should continue until we take the time we need to ask ourselves some hard questions. We need to do an honest heart check—not looking at the person we once *were* when we *first* gave credible profession of faith but looking at the person we are *right now*.

Let's ask ourselves: If Jesus is everything to us, then can Jesus be found on our lips? Is he what we talk about with others, even with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we share openly about our struggles, our godly grief, our repentance, and our joy in the gospel? Or do we put forward a façade of being strong, good, capable, and “put together,” as if we don't really struggle with sin and as if we don't really have much need for a Savior?

If you don't have a desire to love those around you (especially fellow brothers and sisters in Christ), if you don't have a desire to confess your sins and actually *experience* the grace you profess to have received, if you aren't willing to humble yourself to ask for help and to thankfully receive it as a gift from God, I'm not sure you really understand the gospel—no matter how well you may be able to articulate it.

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, if someone were to follow you around for a week, what would they say of you? Would they see you intentionally living in such a way that serves and advances the gospel? Would they see *you yourself* holding fast to the gospel in your own life—or would they not even be able to tell that you're a Christian?

<pause>

For some, I think we need to be woken up from our slumber. You bear the name “Christian,” but you have little intention of *actually* representing Christ in the way you live. For you, I want to plead with you to fix your eyes on the one you call Lord and Savior once again. He says to you, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). You're living with a dangerous false sense of security if you don't stop now to examine your life and see if it's in accord with the gospel you profess.

And the solution is not to try harder, but to repent and rejoice in what Christ has done for you on the cross over and over again. We are *wretched* sinners, and yet God in his love and grace, has made us his sons and daughters. Soak in afresh how worthy and deserving is Jesus Christ of your whole life. And I pray that he would bring you to the place once again when you can say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

If that's you, don't just confess that in private, but *share* that with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ—and let's help each other live according to the gospel that we profess.

<pause>

Now for many others, I really am encouraged and inspired by you as I talk with you and see firsthand how the gospel of Jesus Christ has not only been a one-time profession on your lips but an all-encompassing truth that has permeated your whole life.

I want to thank you for your gospel service and how your life *reverberates* the gospel. You've been honest about your sins rather than trying to cover them up. You've been pursuing friendships with people who are different than you in our church. You've been reminding yourself and others of your identity *in Christ* rather than in family, work, approval, marriage, or other relationships. You've taken steps of faith, even willing to risk social awkwardness, for the sake of loving another person enough to share about Christ with them and invite them to read God's Word with you. You've given sacrificially and generously of your time, treasures, and talents to the local church, to missional initiatives, and to the work of missions.

And I pray that *your* gospel service, *our* gospel service as a whole church, and the gospel service of *all* of God's people would adorn and advance and serve and uplift the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world around us.

<pause>

So for this unnamed brother, he had a reputation of gospel service.

And verse 19 then says this:

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.

This brother was trusted and appointed by the churches to travel with Paul to collect, handle, and transport the large sum of money from the Gentile churches to the needy Jewish church in Jerusalem.

It would have been a dangerous task and a tempting task to handle that much money over a long distance.

So why did they choose this unnamed brother? Again, because he had a reputation of gospel service. If your whole life is saturated with the gospel, you will gain trust with people. If you can be honest about your sins, then you will be honest with money. If you've demonstrated that Christ is your all in all, then money is not your all. If you've shown a life of personal sacrifice and generosity in your time, treasures, and talents, then you have no reason to hoard or steal money.

<pause>

So this unnamed brother was commended for his reputation for gospel service. And the third commendation is...

III. Honorability in the sight of God and man (8:20-21)

Verses 20-21 say this:

²⁰ 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.

Here, Paul is commending himself and his companions, and the steps they're taking to make sure that nobody questions their integrity in handling these funds that are to be delivered to the church in Jerusalem. His aim is "what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." His aim is to be a man of integrity. And so, they take great pains to ensure that they are above reproach in this matter. Paul wrote earlier to them in...

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 = Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. **And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.**

Paul makes sure that the people that carry this gift to Jerusalem are people that *their* church accredits by letter, not people that *Paul* handpicks. And on top of that, Paul doesn't even *assume* that the churches want *him* to go, but only "if it seems advisable." Paul is making sure that *nobody* can say that he mishandled these funds, even as he's the one organizing it.

Is this just Paul caring too much about what people think of him? No, this is the man who said, "If I were trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Paul cared what people thought about him *only inasmuch* as it hindered his gospel witness.

This collection was supposed to *witness* to the gospel unity shared between the Gentile churches and the Jewish church in Jerusalem. This collection was supposed to *witness* to the generous gift that all the churches had received in Christ, which *motivated* their generous giving to their fellow brothers and sisters.

And all of that could have been undermined if they opened themselves up to scrutiny and accusation for mishandling the funds. Rather than *positively* showcasing the gospel of Jesus Christ, it would have *negatively* focused all attention on whether Paul and his companions were honest or not in handling the money.

[²⁰ 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.]

If people reject the gospel because of the *truth* of the gospel, God's Word says that's to be *expected* (2 Cor. 2:15-16; 4:1-4). But if people reject the gospel because the *integrity* of the Christian is in question, that's a *tragedy*. So we should take every feasible effort to do what is honorable in the sight of God and man so that we are above reproach and our integrity is not called into question, because our gospel witness is at stake.

And this is not just in the realm of *financial* integrity, but this is true for every area of our lives.

<pause>

When I was a university student, I decided to regularly wake up early to go to morning prayer before my classes started. But in the winter, it was a long walk through the snow from my apartment to the place of morning prayer.

So one night, after hanging out at an all-girls apartment, I asked if I could sleep over because they lived right next to where morning prayer was held. They were fine with it, so I slept on their couch and I went to morning prayer the next day.

But after morning prayer, one of my friends challenged me about my decision to sleep over the girls' place and, to be honest, I argued with him for a long time trying to justify myself in my decision. I'm thankful he was patient with me.

But then he asked, "What do you think other people would think if they saw you stroll out of the girls' apartment at six in the morning? Would you advise that other people sleep over girls' apartments?" And then I began to see his point. He wasn't necessarily saying I had done anything wrong, but I had acted *unwisely*. I unnecessarily put my gospel witness in jeopardy out of sheer convenience.

Since then, I've taken steps to inconvenience myself a bit from time to time, so as not to risk my gospel witness.

I never want to underestimate my own depravity and I never want anything in my life to be a stumbling block for others to hear and trust in the gospel.

That was Paul's perspective as well, and so it was no bother to him to inconvenience himself a bit and invite accountability for the sake of the gospel.

<pause>

So what areas in your life right now might potentially discredit your gospel witness? What questionable decisions are you making? Where are you *not* above reproach?

Maybe it's the way you spend your time or your money. Maybe it's the way you interact with people of the opposite gender. Maybe it's the way you speak to your family.

Now if you *know* that about yourself, are you willing to inconvenience yourself and invite accountability for the sake of the gospel? If not, why not?

At the end of the day, it's your own decision, but you should soberly ask yourself, "Do I care more about my *own* convenience and comfort than I do about my *gospel witness*?"

This is in the realm of *wisdom*, not sin, so though we should challenge one another in this area, we have liberty of conscience here. Still, God's Word says, "Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor. 8:9), and "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise" (Eph. 5:15), and "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). So we should prayerfully consider how to live in such a way that is *honorable* in the sight of God and man for the sake of our gospel witness.

<pause>

So Paul commended himself and his companions for being honorable in the sight of God and man for the sake of their gospel witness. And the fourth commendation is having...

IV. Proven earnestness in many matters (8:22-23)

Verse 22 says this:

²² 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.

Here, Paul is commending another unnamed brother, and from the next verse, we know that the other churches have *also* appointed him to go with Paul to transport the money collected to give to the Jerusalem church. And this brother is commended for having been "often tested and found earnest in many matters."

If you've noticed, the word "earnestness" in various forms has been used multiple times in our passage, but it's a bit difficult to translate. Other Bible versions translate "earnest" here as "diligent" (NKJV, NASB), "zealous" (NIV), and "eager" (NLT), trying to get at what this word means.

So this brother has been often tested and found earnest—or diligent, zealous, eager—in many matters. Perhaps another way to capture this word is "faithful," not just in *what* he's doing but in *how* he does it. And notice, that's who he is in *many matters*.

<pause>

Now can that be said of *you*? You may be diligent at work, but are you just as diligent at diet and exercise? You may be zealous about growing a startup, but are you just as zealous about serving your spouse and discipling your kids? You may be eager to serve at church, but are you just as eager to serve your family and neighbors? You may be earnest in things that increase your personal gain, but are you just as earnest in doing what is right even at great personal loss?

Why is this important? Because we are *whole* persons. We are not dichotomized beings; we cannot be one person in the *workplace* and then another person in the *home*. Who we are at *work* should be who we are at *home*; who we are in *public* should be who we are in *private*. If that's not how it is for you, then it's only a matter of time when who you *truly* are comes out.

If you get angry in traffic, it's only a matter of time until that anger comes out in your friendships. If you're lazy with your personal discipline, it's only a matter of time until that laziness comes out in your workplace. If you're apathetic in your workplace, it's only a matter of time until that apathy comes out in your family.

I think all of us can be called earnest in *one* or *two* matters, but are we earnest in "*many matters*"? *Earnest* doesn't mean that we're *perfect*, but it means that we're *not* complacent with the status quo in *any* area of our lives, but we diligently, zealously, and eagerly seek *God* to *sanctify* us—to make us more like Christ—in *every* area of our lives. We're crying out to God in our weaknesses and feelings of helplessness to *help* us! We *want* to be more faithful than we're capable of, so we desperately cry out for his grace to make us more *faithful*—more *earnest*—in every area of our lives.

<pause>

So what area are you struggling to be earnest in right now? Your own overall health? Your relationship with God? Your family? Your work? Your church? Your neighbor?

May it never be said of you that you're unfaithful or you're not earnest in "many matters." But, "Whatever you do, *work at it with all your heart*, as working for the Lord, not for human masters... It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24 NIV). "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor. 10:31).

<pause>

So this unnamed brother was tested and proven earnest in many matters, and so he was trusted and appointed by the churches, and he was commended by Paul to the Corinthians.

And verse 23 then says this:

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.

This is basically a summary verse of all of Paul's commendations for Titus and the two unnamed brothers that he was sending ahead of himself to the Corinthian church.

What I want us to notice here is that phrase "the glory of Christ".

Earlier, Paul wrote that the whole purpose of this collection and distribution was “for the glory of the Lord himself” (8:19).

God’s glory is the outward or visible manifestation of who God is. <repeat>

We glorify God, then, by living in such a way that *manifests* or *makes visible* who God truly is. When a father loves his son, we see the glory of God. When a friend forgives and reconciles with a friend who hurt her, we see the glory of God. When we show mercy to those who deserve wrath, we see the glory of God. When we humbly serve others even at personal cost, we see the glory of God.

Here in verse 23, “the glory of Christ” can actually be related to the messengers *or* the churches themselves. Either way, it doesn’t make much of a difference. If the glory of Christ is the outward or visible manifestation of who God is, then these messengers whom Paul has been commending definitely showcase who Christ is, but even more so, *churches* that are made up of those who have given credible profession of faith *ought* to showcase to the world who Christ is.

Christians and churches are only as commendable as they display the truth of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ.

And that leads us to the fifth and last commendation in our passage today...

V. Ready, willing, and generous giving (8:24-9:5)

Chapter 8 verse 24 to chapter 9 verse 5 say this:

^{8:24} So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

^{9:1} Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Here, Paul says that he has been commending the Corinthian church to the other churches about their ready, willing, and generous *desire* to give, but now it’s time for them to *prove* or *show* that what Paul has said about them is true.

Paul has *already* written to the Corinthian church about the collection for the Jerusalem church (1 Cor. 16:1-4), and a year ago, the Corinthians *already* expressed their earnest desire to participate in giving towards their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ (2 Cor. 8:8-10; 9:5). In fact, Paul *told* the Macedonians about the Corinthians’ desire to give, and that *stirred up* the Macedonians to give as well (2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:2).

Now, before Paul comes with some of the Macedonian brothers and representatives from other churches, he’s sending Titus and the two unnamed brothers to make sure that the Corinthians are ready to *follow through* on what they had *promised* to give. Otherwise, what was supposed to be a testimony to the gospel unity they had in Christ across Gentile and Jewish churches would become an *anti*-testimony.

If Paul and his entourage showed up and the Corinthian church did not seem ready to give, no matter what they did in that moment, it would *not seem* like “a willing gift” but “an exaction,” as if Paul was twisting their arms to give or as if they were giving simply to save face.

Of course, Paul *knows* that’s *not* true; he says, “I know your readiness” (9:2) and earlier he wrote that one of the unnamed brothers had “great confidence” in the Corinthian church (8:22).

But even if Paul *knew* it wasn't "an exaction," if the Corinthians weren't *practically* ready to give by the time he got there with the other representatives, that would be the general impression. If they showed up and no money was laid aside, and everyone was just pulling whatever money they had from their pockets, they would not *seem* like the Corinthian church that earnestly desired to give and had promised to give a year ago.

<pause>

Let's say that your good friend owned a restaurant and you highly commended it to your future father-in-law who you know is a foodie. Would you say anything to your friend who owned the restaurant ahead of time? I think most of us would. Is it because we don't think our friend's restaurant is any good? No, we *know* it's good and we *want* our future father-in-law to think so too, so we let our friend know that he's coming and we ask our friend to make every effort to *prove* or *show* themselves to be the good restaurant that we *know* them to be.

I'm sure we've all had bad experiences at restaurants that were recommended to us, and no matter what anyone says us after that *one* bad experience, it's been forever labeled in our minds as a "bad" restaurant. When it comes to restaurant recommendations, you really only have *one* shot to make a good impression.

And that's kind of what was going on here in the passage. The Corinthian church was *genuinely* eager to give, but unless they *practically* had the funds collected and ready beforehand, it wouldn't *seem* that way—and there wouldn't be any way to undo that bad impression. They only had *one* shot at this. So Paul graciously sends Titus and these two unnamed brothers with this letter to go ahead of them to get them ready, so that they can prepare their actions to match their *genuine* intent.

<pause>

And from other Scripture, we actually know what eventually happened. This is what Paul writes in...

Romans 15:26 = For Macedonia and **Achaia** have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

Corinth was the capital of Achaia, and they were *pleased* to contribute to the saints in Jerusalem when Paul and the other church representatives arrived (Acts 20:1-4).

They *completed* what they had earnestly *desired* to do, proving what Paul had commended about them—that they were ready, willing, and generous in giving.

<pause>

Now how was this ready, willing, and generous giving in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Simply, it is at the *heart* of the gospel.

- "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).
- And "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the *gift* of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).
- And again, "For God so loved the world, that he *gave*..." (John 3:16).

God graciously and lavishly gives to the undeserving.

And so, as believers and recipients of the inexpressible gift of Jesus Christ, we should be *characterized by* and *commended for* ready, willing, and generous giving.

A *stingy* Christian or a *hoarding* Christian should be an oxymoron. May we not only have a *desire* to give generously, but may we *follow through*, so that both in our *desire* and in our *completion* of generous giving, we pray *prove* or *show* our genuine love for Christ.

<pause>

So whether as individual Christians or local churches, I pray that we would inspire these five commendations from those around us, so that the gospel will shine forth and the glory of Christ will be made manifest through us.

The One Thing

Be commendable for living according to the gospel.

Life Application

Which of the five commendations are most questionable for you?

- I. Earnest care for others (8:16-17)
- II. Reputation of gospel service (8:18-19)
- III. Honorability in the sight of God and man (8:20-21)
- IV. Proven earnestness in many matters (8:22-23)
- V. Ready, willing, and generous giving (8:24-9:5)

How do you need to repent for misrepresenting Christ and his gospel? How do you need to rejoice in what Christ has done for you in the gospel? Who can you share with and invite accountability from in your followership of Christ?

As a church, let's live such lives together that, in every area of our lives, the *gospel* is *commended* and *Christ* is *glorified* through us.

Conclusion

Let's take some time now to respond to God's Word.