

## Taking Thought

“But thanks be to God who putteth the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he accepted indeed our exhortation; but being himself very earnest, he went forth unto you of his own accord. And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches; and not only so, but who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace, which is ministered by us to the glory of the Lord, and to show our readiness: avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us: for we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have many times proved earnest in many things, but now much more earnest, by reason of the great confidence which he hath in you. Whether any inquire about Titus, he is my partner and my fellow-worker to you-ward: or our brethren, they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ. Show ye therefore unto them in the face of the churches the proof of your love, and of our glorying on your behalf” (2 Cor. 8:16-24).

This lengthy citation from 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 deals primarily with Paul’s commendation of three men to the Corinthians who came with this letter as they are finishing the final gathering of Corinth’s funds for poor Jerusalem saints. These three men are Titus, whom Paul identifies as his “partner and fellow-worker to you-ward,” and indeed he had been. He was likely the bearer of both letters to Corinth; certainly the latter one. He had been a worker with Paul for many years. He was a gentile and the “test case” of whether Gentiles should be circumcised to be faithful Christians (Gal. 2:1, 3). Paul urged him to return to Corinth with the letter, but he really needed no urging: he went forth to them of “his own accord” (2 Cor. 8:17). He is not named as among the messengers accompanying Paul to Jerusalem, but that does not within itself rule out that possibility. For some reason or other Luke did not name him in the book of Acts, yet we know he was with Paul at the “Jerusalem Conference” (Acts 15; Galatians 2:1) and again with him in Macedonia in Acts 19-20 for the events this letter mentions. Perhaps he was a messenger, or perhaps Paul needed him for another work other than to be a messenger carrying funds to Jerusalem. We do not know.

Two other “brothers” also accompanied Titus back to Corinth but we know less about them than we know about Titus. We do know Titus’ name! Were these two men among the seven whose names appear as Paul’s companions in Acts 20:4? Very likely so. All we know of these is that the first mentioned brother’s praise in the gospel was spread through all the churches and that he “was appointed by the churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace” (2 Cor. 8:19). The second brother was one whom Paul had “many times proved earnest in many things” (2 Cor. 8:22). These two brethren, if any inquired of them, were “the messengers of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:22).

This collection was a huge undertaking for Paul and the contributing churches. He was concerned how the Jerusalem Christians would react to their gift and he asked Romans to pray that “the ministration would be acceptable to the saints” (Rom. 15:31). He was ever conscious that his many detractors would like nothing better than to find some way

to fault his handling of these funds. It must have been a huge sum for the cost of sending these messengers would have within itself been a staggering amount. Even if some churches used the same messenger (and very likely some did), sending these men and providing for their needs over the extended number of months it would take them to go and come would have been a considerable sum. In it all Paul was determined that he would “take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21).

Such should always be our intent and motivation. Christians are “lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 4:15-17). Christians can live in such a way that they cause God to be blasphemed, just as some Jews did in the first century (Rom. 2:24). We should desire in all things to bring glory to the name of Christ. The world has a callused slant on everything Christians do, ascribing to them evil, selfish motives; never crediting them to be sincere and earnest in the things they do. Paul wrote Titus, “To the pure all things are pure, but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience is defiled” (Tit. 1:15). May we all have the noble ambition of Paul!

Jim McDonald