

*Old people like me (what a way to start off a sermon) ...*

*More mature people (such as I), will probably remember some names like Jim Baker<sup>i</sup>, - a very well-known tele-evangelist – That is, before he was convicted of fraud. And he's someone who pocketed \$millions from his faithful. Well, he's out of jail now, and guess what he's doing for a living – yep, he's a tele-evangelist again.*

*Or there's the likes of Jesse Duplantis, who appealed to his listeners to donate \$US54Million to buy him a new jet... because apparently Jesus wouldn't be riding a donkey if he was still around today.<sup>ii</sup>*

*Or there's Benny Hinn, who travels the world (once again in the private jet) with his healing shows, raking in \$Millions for not only his ministry, but also (it seems) for him and his family.*

*At 7am (weekdays), you can tune-in to GEM television (here in Australia), & watch Creflo Dollar, who will also appeal to you, for your money. Apparently his private jet is worn out, and he needs a new one. After all, his 2 Rolls Royces<sup>iii</sup> can't fly him to see his various mansions in various cities....*

*And it's not only the blokes. Back in 2004, Joyce Meyer was on a \$US900 000 salary (husband \$450 000). Apparently now there are new arrangements that might leave them better off, because of royalties from books etc.<sup>iv</sup>*

*Now, all these are examples of **big** names, that millions of people have trusted, and donated money to for their ministries... Now, the thing is, **some** people are very quick to trust them, while **other** people, have an alarm bell going off in their head, and they can't understand "Why anyone would give money to them????"*

But you know what? I reckon it's harder to know if we're 'being taken for a ride', when we're dealing with the little guy.

I mean, when the bloke in the fancy suit; and the million dollar smile; and the private jet; several mansions, puts out an appeal for your money, it's pretty easy to spot a fraud...

But what about when someone from Nigeria contacts our church? Or when your town has a visit from somebody from India??? How do we know if they're the 'real deal' or not???

I ran out of time last week, but I really wanted to include today's message in with last week's message... The two go hand-in-hand...

Last week, we were talking about the grace of God in action. Authentic Christians, give generously, to help other Christians who are in dire need... And if, as disciples of Jesus, we don't give generously to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ (who are

in dire need), then there is something seriously wrong with our relationship with God.

And so, the message was about readiness... God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have – He only wants what we do have... He's looking for **readiness** to give generously to the Christian church, who are suffering – To those who are being persecuted, and to those who are in extreme poverty...

And I would hope we have that kind of readiness... But the thing is, we live in a world where greedy / evil, and opportunistic people, are very quick to take advantage of our readiness to support Christians in need.

*My SPAM filter's pretty good, and so they're mostly filtered out now, but for a while there, it was quite common, for me to receive an email, telling me that they'd found the Bush Disciples website, and how wonderful the mission of our church is, and how they would love to partner with us, so we could help them in their ministry... They were after money...*

*In reality, they were probably some organised crime syndicate, trawling the internet, putting out multitudes of appeals, hoping that a few little churches, will take the bait...*

Now once again, for anyone who's a little bit internet-wise, it's generally pretty easy to spot that kind of fraud ...

But then there is an even harder 'cause' to tell...

*What about when we get a personal visit??? Where a person from a poor country comes to our little country town, and shares with us the need that their ministry is trying to meet, in their country, far, far away??? And we hear some tear-jerking stories, and how our donation can make a huge difference, to bring hope, but:*

- How do we know if we should trust them or not???
- How do we know if they're legit?
- How do we know if the money is going to get to where it's supposed to be going?
- They might send a photo to 'prove' that that the \$1000 donated for a bore produced a bore; but
- How do I know that **10** people didn't each give \$1000 to dig the one bore, and the other \$9000 was put in a con-man's pocket???

How can we know if it's 'legit'???

Well, the thing is, we actually can't ... At some level, there has to be trust... **But** we have to make a decision whether this is a person we should trust (or not)...

*A number of years ago, a pastor from India came to town, and he wanted to speak at all the churches, to try and get financial support for (well, anything really)... And that's what I found strange. He was borrowing ideas (on the run) from other aid organisations... ..*

- *You buy someone a sewing machine, so they could earn a living sowing*
- *Rickshaw*
- *Bore well*

- *A church could fund an orphanage*
- *Sponsor a pastor to plant a church*

*Now, at the time, I'm going to confess, "I was dubious". I didn't know whether to trust this bloke or not... To me it seemed strange that somehow, this man from a poor church, could afford to fly to Australia. And I know that my church couldn't afford to send me away to India...*

*And to me, it just wasn't sitting right.*

*Also, something that I really didn't like, was the way, that if you bought a rickshaw, they would put a sign on the rickshaw "Donated by 'so-and-so' from St George Australia", and they'd send that photo to you... And most genuine givers, they don't want their name on what they've given...*

*So, at the time, I was a bit dubious. Also, the main contact person in St George didn't actually have a good reputation for 'playing well' in churches – most preachers he came across, he'd tell them they were wrong because they didn't teach what he believed...*

Anyway, my brother had an opportunity to go to India, and visit the ministry that this pastor was getting support for...

The group he was with, visited villages, and he saw:

- brand new bores that had been dug.
- In some of those villages, there was no interest in Jesus. But in others, new churches were planted, and were

growing.

- They visited orphanages, and saw that ministry in action.
- In one town, they actually saw an older bore with a sign “Donated by ‘so-and-so’ from St George.”
- He saw the push bikes that had been donated for the pastors to ride to their churches...
- He noticed, that the ministry workers didn’t seem to be living in luxury
- He saw lots of evidence of donations getting put into use.

Now, the thing is, he was a little bit like me: He had gone over there, a bit dubious. But he came away feeling “I’m pretty sure this is money well spent on ministry”. He still had to trust, but what he saw, helped to build his trust.

But even with what he saw, he said to me, at some level, it still comes down to trust. You see, if they wanted to pull the wool over his eyes, they could’ve easily done it... When you can’t speak the language, and you’re dependant on translators, and you only go where they take you, you only see what they want you to see...

Charities in Australia have to be registered with ACNC. Even Bush Disciples has to be registered with them. And there’s all sorts of checks and balances that donations are getting used for their intended purpose... But that isn’t the case in India.

And so, at some point, (when we're giving direct to an overseas church) we can only do it, based on trust. But we should **not** have a practice of giving with 'blind trust'.. And in essence, that's what's demonstrated in the Bible reading today.

Paul is organising a collection from the Church in Corinth, to be taken to the church in Jerusalem... But, how could that Corinthian church know that they could trust those who were gathering the offering? Their offering was going to be taken to a place far, far away. How could they trust that it was going to get there? And Paul himself is quite clear:- he's not expecting "blind trust"...

To Paul, integrity means everything...

<sup>20</sup> **We take this course** (we're going to do it this way. And they put in a robust means of accountability) **so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us,** <sup>21</sup> **for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.**

Alright, **we** might have the greatest of intentions. And **we** know that our motives are pure, and **God** (who sees everything) might know that we're doing the right thing... But Paul put together a system, so even in the sight of man, it would be recognised for its integrity / accountability... It wasn't a system of blind trust.

So, what did Paul do, to demonstrate the honour of those who were administering the collection? And what should **we** be looking for, so that **we** can have confidence that those who administer a collection, are honourable??? Alright, we shouldn't be basing it on blind trust... There are too many greedy people, wanting to take advantage of our readiness to give.

*I know a chap who ran ministries in a Western Queensland town. He was full of enthusiasm, and he could talk up the ministry. He'd visit churches in the city, and get big donations... And yet, you talk with someone who's worked with him, and they describe him as 'a crook'...*

And that's not uncommon.

So, how did Paul demonstrate an honourable administration of the collection?

### **1. Well firstly, the trust wasn't to be put in one man alone.**

Paul was promoting this offering, and he was keen for it, but he wasn't the only one involved here. Paul sent to them an envoy, and it wasn't only a one-man envoy. He lists 3 people who went as representatives, to administer this collection.

And the **characteristics** of these men, is how Paul built honour and integrity into the administration of the collection.



## 2. Secondly, he sent **someone they personally knew.**

- He sent Titus.

Titus is someone who's visited them before. He's ministered to them. They knew Titus; they trusted Titus.

## 3. Thirdly, he sent someone who was **well known among the churches for his preaching of the gospel**

These people Paul sent, weren't "professional fundraisers" / security guards. Paul actually says V<sup>18</sup> **With him (along with Titus) we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.**

Alright, this was a well-known preacher. He was famous among all the churches. He was recognised across the churches "This bloke knows Jesus, and He knows the Gospel. And he can communicate the Gospel. We can trust this bloke".

## 4. Fourthly, they were **appointed by the churches.**

They didn't just put up their hands and say, "I might go on a bit of a trip". They didn't decide for themselves that they were going to take up this offering... The churches who knew them – the churches who knew that they could be trusted, **appointed** them.

## **5.** Fifthly, they were **tried and tested**

V<sup>22</sup> And with them (With Titus & with this ‘famous preacher’) 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.

This wasn’t someone who was just along for the ride; He wasn’t a new apprentice; He wasn’t an unknown or an untested quantity –

- He’d been tested in many matters, and
- always been earnest;
- he was always trustworthy;
- He always got the job done;
- he was diligent, and full of zeal...
  
- This bloke was reliable.

And so Paul sums this delegation up like this:

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

And so:

**6.** The envoy that were sent, were people who would **minister to the givers by preaching the Gospel.**

Titus was a **partner and fellow worker** with Paul, for the Corinthians benefit. And the others were **messengers of the churches** (they were preachers). And what was the message? They were making known, **the glory of Christ**

When someone preaches the Gospel in our midst, and it's the wonderful / pure / beautiful gospel of Jesus... When it has the ring of truth to it (and you can see the love in that person's eyes as they deliver the message), that really builds trust (doesn't it?).

And so, they weren't just there to collect. They were there to serve.

And so, there were 2 things here, that really struck me:

**A.** This was a 'whole of church' activity. The wider church recognised these people, and sent them as an envoy – as a delegation, so that the Corinthian church as one, would have full confidence that:

- these were Godly men, taking up a collection, and
- they would see it through, to the point where it was aiding the church in Jerusalem where it was being sent...

**B.** It was a symbiotic relationship. Yes, the Corinthians were giving, but they also received, as the Gospel was preached, and they were ministered to, by the delegates.

Paul wanted to make sure that no allegation of corruption or embezzlement, could ever ‘stick’ (if it was thrown at him)... because something I know, is when you’re a preacher of the Gospel, your integrity means everything...

And so ministers of the Gospel, have to go above and beyond. Doing the right thing, isn’t enough. It has to be obvious for the world to see that : Everything’s open; Everything’s transparent; Everything’s above board...

And for us, when it comes to giving, it’s important for us who give, to keep an eye on integrity as well...

As we learned last week, as Disciples of Jesus, we should have an inbuilt readiness to give generously to our Christian brothers and sisters, when they are in need...

I think the challenge for us today, is to maintain that readiness, even though there are unscrupulous people, who take advantage of that readiness... And so we apply, the test of integrity.

And so, be:

- Less likely to trust a loner – more likely to trust a multiple person delegation
- Be more likely to trust someone we personally know, and have a personal relationship with
- Be more likely to trust someone who is well known (across the churches) as a preacher of the pure Gospel
- We trust those who have been **sent by the church** as envoys (not just those who choose to come of their own accord)
- And they should be tried and tested – and recommended to us by someone in authority, who we already trust and know; and
- We can generally determine their credibility, as they minister to us through the preaching of the Gospel

But you know what??? A relationship like that takes time, doesn't it??? But when we've got that kind of relationship; and that kind of evidence, then we can have every confidence to give, and that we can give exceedingly generously...

Let's be Disciples of Jesus who give, but not in blind trust...  
Let's be disciples of Jesus who take our stewardship seriously, and do a bit of "Due diligence". Let's have Prudence in our Generosity"

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- <sup>i</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Bakker#Fraud\\_conviction\\_and\\_imprisonment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Bakker#Fraud_conviction_and_imprisonment)
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44305873>
- <sup>iii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creflo\\_Dollar#Finances\\_and\\_prosperity\\_gospel\\_teachings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creflo_Dollar#Finances_and_prosperity_gospel_teachings)
- <sup>iv</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joyce\\_Meyer#Salary\\_and\\_finances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joyce_Meyer#Salary_and_finances)