

Handle with Integrity

2 Cor 8:16-24

Men of mystery. We often come across people who are important but people never know who they actually are. Until recently the heads of MI5 and MI6 were always top secret. Sometimes people who give evidence in court have their identities protected. Sometimes people prefer to do things under pseudonyms or even initials. Sometimes there's evil intent in it, like criminals who use false names.

Rarely do people do good things without anybody knowing who they are. On telly we have the "Secret Millionaire" but of course he or she reveals themselves at the end so they can get a bit of glory! Rarely do people do good things but remain anonymous except to a few who know them.

Yet here in 2 Corinthians we find a man who was known to them but who is never referred to by name. In the latter part of 2 Corinthians 8 we see that the money collected from Corinth and from "the other churches" is going to be delivered by two people; one was Titus, Paul's associate. The other is just referred to as "the brother who is highly respected" or "our esteemed brother".

Who was he? We don't have a clue. Why does he remain anonymous? We can only speculate.

I'd like to think he was so well known his name didn't need to be mentioned. Think on this as an accolade - or mark of respect. In church and in society we come across people not by name but just as function, title or reputation. In many churches the Pastor is just referred to as "Pastor". In the army officers are referred to as "Sir". He was so well known that they didn't need to mention his name, his integrity spoke for him. The church at Corinth and other churches locally were happy to entrust this man with a lot of money because of the respect in which they held him.

There's even a contrast in this package. Titus was a high profile member of Paul's team. Even so Paul commends him and uses his name a lot in this letter. He needed to because there were those who were trying to destroy Paul's reputation and Titus was his associate. The "esteemed brother" needed no recommendation - his reputation spoke for him.

Here's the challenge for us. What is our reputation? When people see each one of us, what do they think? What word would they use to describe us?

So, we may not have his name but we know much of his character; he was someone who the Corinthians trusted. It wasn't just their church either. *9 And besides that, he has been chosen and appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this service of love for the sake of the Lord's glory and in order to show that we want to help.* He represented all the churches in the area. A man that everyone knew would act with integrity and deliver the cash to Judea, including Paul.

Why did Paul go to all this trouble to make sure someone with integrity would assist him with delivering the money to Judea?

- Firstly because he had been accused of lacking integrity himself. As far as he was concerned, he was totally blameless of the accusation smf has mounted a pretty fearsome defence in the early chapters of the letter. Taking someone of integrity with him that everyone in Corinth trusted would dispel any rumours that Paul might misuse the money himself.
- Secondly, it gave transparency to the dealings. The brother would accompany the cash, see how it was used in Judea and be able to report back to the churches in Corinth and elsewhere on how the money had been managed and spent.

It's important in God's work to always act with as much transparency as possible, however much we trust people. I believe that God's people should always show the highest standards in our dealings, within the church or within the world so we are trusted as people of integrity.

Finally the passage tells me another aspect of giving - and that is when we give, we must be able to trust those stewarding it. Please pray for those in the church who have the responsibility of stewarding the money.

It's the Lord's money, given as a love offering to Him. Pray that it will be used in a way that builds up the work of God here and abroad. Pray for wisdom to the those that have responsibility for making spending decisions. Paul finishes with these words: *As for Titus, he is my partner and works with me to help you; as for the other brothers who are going with him, they represent the churches and bring glory to Christ.*

Praise God for the resources that He has given us. Let's pray that we use our resources to bring glory to Christ.

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 23/10/11
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