

1 Corinthians 16:5-9 ⁵ But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; ⁶ and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. ⁷ For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; ⁹ for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Paul is wrapping up this letter with plans of continuing to personally minister to this church in Corinth. We might be tempted to think that the only thing Paul did was write letters. Actually most of his time was spent with the saints in discipling them and taking the gospel of out to the lost.

Keep in mind that this letter was written to the Corinthians on his third missionary journey while he is in Ephesus. In fact, when you go to the book of Acts you get an account surrounding this particular time in which Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthians.

As we see in verse 5 of our text Paul is making plans to visit the Corinthians after he passes through Macedonia which is the southern tip of Europe. And so, his intention is that he will pass through this region as he encourages the churches in this area which includes Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.

Then, as he travels south he'll come into Achaia which is present day Greece and then end up spending some time in Corinth which is in Greece. Remember, that part of the reason Paul is making this trip is to gather money for the church in Jerusalem.

And so, throughout his travels he will be taking up a collection from all the churches to minister to the believers in Jerusalem because of the persecution which they have been enduring for some time.

But Paul is not simply on a collection tour. He knows that the enemy is always trying to thwart the work of the gospel as he tries to infiltrate the body of Christ with false teachings, division and all sorts of tactics to keep believers more concerned with the things of this world rather than being concerned with the kingdom of God.

And so, in verse 6 of our text he makes it clear that he doesn't want to just fly into town and then simply eat and run, if you will.

1CO 16:6-7 "Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go..
7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits."

In the back of Paul's mind he is always planning. But his planning always revolves around the work he is doing for Christ. And so, if he's going to be in a particular region of the world it's precisely because of where the Lord wants him to be to either bring the gospel to that region or because he needs to minister to the saints.

In the case at Corinth he knows they need more than a passing visit. They need to have Paul spend time with them to deal with some of the specific problems they have. And that's why he tells them that he would like to spend the winter with them.

Now, there is pragmatism involved with his desire. In that part of the world, especially in the Mediterranean Sea, you cannot travel safely on the water during the winter months. And since Corinth is a great launching off point to the Mediterranean this would have been an ideal place to end up before he moves on to other churches he can reach by the Mediterranean.

And so, if he's got to spend the winter anywhere Corinth would be the place so that he can give them the time they need before he moves on. In fact, we know that this is precisely what happened according to the account in Acts.

ACT 20:1-3 "When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia.. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece,. 3 where he stayed three months. ..."

By the way, the uproar Luke addresses in Acts 20:1 is the riot that took place in Ephesus because of Paul preaching the gospel. And we'll get back to that in a moment. But there's something else I want to touch on in verse 7 of our text, and it has to do with Paul's understanding of the Sovereignty of God.

All of us can make plans, and we can even make plans to do the Lord's work, but there must always be the flexibility to go as the Spirit leads. This is why Paul adds at the end of verse 7, "I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits."

Now, I know that there are factions within the church-at-large today who subscribe to the idea that we should never pray or say anything that would be misconstrued as a negative confession. In other words, if we pray for someone's healing we should never end our prayer, "if it is the Lord's will that you be healed."

The thinking is that it is always the Lord's will to heal. And they take you back to that passage in Isaiah which they suggest deals directly with this promise of healing found at the cross of Christ.

ISA 53:5 "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and *by his wounds we are healed.*"

If you go back to the context of Isaiah 53 the entire passage is dealing with our sin which separates us from our God. In fact, just in verse 5 alone, sin and its punishment are mentioned three times; "*pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities; punishment that brought us peace was upon him.*"

And so, to suggest that the thrust of this entire passage which includes, "by his wounds we are healed", is primarily a physical healing, is to miss the primary thrust of Isaiah which the apostle Peter makes clear when he quotes this very passage as it relates to a spiritual healing found in Christ taking our sin.

1 Peter 2:24-25 ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; *for by His wounds you were healed.* ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Does this mean that God can't or won't heal as we come to Him to ask that someone be touched physically by Him for healing? Of course not. We are actually commanded by the Lord to approach Him for physical healing.

JAM 5:14 "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."

And of course this is to be done in faith with the express purpose of trusting that God can and will heal that person. But that is different from a guarantee that the Lord must heal in every case.

I'll give you just two examples. It was precisely because of an illness that the people in Galatia received the gospel of Jesus

Christ. And guess who was ill? The apostle Paul himself. You mean to say, that this great man of faith, who we know had the gift of healings and miracles, was not miraculously healed of an illness?

That's exactly what happened. And Paul recognized that his illness was allowed in his life by God so that he might end up in Galatia where a church would be established.

GAL 4:13-14 "As you know, *it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you..* 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself."

For his illness to be a trial to these Galatians it had to be an extended illness which was designed by God to not only get Paul to Galatia, but also to be used in the life of those people to trust that God is Sovereign.

Imagine this scenario. Paul goes to Galatia to preach the gospel and the Lord works through his life to miraculously heal many people in Galatia. They see Paul's ministry being accompanied by power, and yet he remains ill.

Would it surprise us as to why the Galatians would see Paul as an angel of God or Jesus Christ himself if the Lord were actually working through Paul in this powerful miraculous way? But can you also see how the Galatians would have seen his illness as a trial in their lives as the Lord does not heal Paul miraculously?

Paul's point is that despite how the Lord heals or doesn't heal He uses all things in our lives for our good and the good of others, and ultimately to His own glory. Obviously, Paul recovered from that illness, but it probably ran its course naturally instead of him being delivered supernaturally.

One more example; and there are others, but let's look at just one more. Paul's friend Trophimus. Trophimus was a man who was a fellow servant of Paul's and interestingly enough he was an Ephesian, which means that while Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthians Trophimus was undoubtedly there with Paul ministering to him and with him.

And yet, when Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him in his ministry he ended his first letter to him in this way.

2TI 4:19-20 "Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.. 20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, and *I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.*"

How could Paul leave his dear friend and fellow servant sick in Miletus if in fact Paul had the gift of healings and miracles, which he did? The reason is because those gifts cannot be turned on and off at our good pleasure without God providing the power as He desires according to His will.

Did Paul pray for Trophimus before he left his sick friend there in Miletus? He would have been cruel if he didn't. But the Lord didn't heal Trophimus miraculously. Was Paul's faith inadequate? Did he not believe that the Lord could heal Trophimus? That's like asking Arnold Palmer if he can hit a golf ball.

Paul's faith was not the problem. Trophimus' faith was not the problem. He had undoubtedly seen Paul heal many people. What was the problem? There was no problem. God simply decided he wanted Trophimus in Miletus for whatever reason, and the way He kept him there was through this sickness.

"If it is the Lord's will" is something that Paul came to understand intimately in his life. He was simply content to do whatever the Lord wanted. And if the Lord didn't want to heal then Paul went on with life and continued to do the work the Lord called him to do with the grace He provided.

And so, as much as Paul wanted to see the Corinthians and as much as he planned to be with them he also understood that it would only happen if the Lord permitted it. After all, we know that Paul had made plans before to go and do the work of the gospel in other regions, and the Lord stopped his plans to direct him somewhere else during his second missionary journey.

ACT 16:6-10 "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

I like the way John MacArthur puts it when he says, [Paul] "had to change his plan, but he had a plan to change. Flexibility is not a sign of weakness but of humility."

But he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God who knows what He's doing. This is why our Lord's own half-brother, James, could write what he does in his letter to the church.

JAM 4:13-16 "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."

I might add that to boast that it is the Lord's will to always heal falls into this same category. That attitude excludes God's Sovereignty and places more importance on your gift or ministry than it does on what God may desire to do through your gift or ministry.

Paul would never boast in such a way, but would always plan to go forward with his ministry and yet would always be willing to plan to change if that's what the Lord desired, which meant he was always sensitive to the leading of the Spirit.

It's when we assume and presume upon God that the Spirit of God is usually taken out of the equation and we end up serving in the flesh instead of in the Spirit.

And so, Paul's desire is to spend more than a week or two with the Corinthians. He wants to spend the winter if the Lord desires so he can begin to correct some of the problems they had. And so he continues in our text.

1CO 16:8-9 "But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,. 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."

This is very interesting as Paul gives us some insight into his perspective for effective ministry. First, we note that he still desired to minister to those who opposed him. Those who opposed him were primarily the Jews. And yet, he is willing to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost.

Now, we usually associate Pentecost with that famous day we read of in Acts chapter two where the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit in power to go out to serve the Lord. It was this same day that Peter spoke to the crowds in Jerusalem and three thousand came to Christ by faith that day.

But Paul is not mentioning Pentecost here with the idea of celebrating that event found in Acts, as important as it was, despite the significance it held for Paul. Paul's heart was always going out to his Jewish brethren, and Pentecost was a Jewish festival.

"Pentecost was the feast of the harvest celebrated seven weeks after Passover (Lev.23:9-16). This would be in the second part of May or the first half of June. Exactly a year later [from the time Paul wrote this to the Corinthians], Paul traveled to Jerusalem and arrived in time for Pentecost (Acts 20:16)." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

To Paul this was a great opportunity to celebrate with his Jewish brethren and share with them the one who is bringing in a great harvest of souls into the kingdom of God through His Son Jesus Christ.

MAT 9:37-38 "Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Paul was taking our Lord's word literally as he saw himself as a harvester during this time of Harvest, this time of Pentecost among the Jews. What better time to have them all gathered together in one place than during such times of celebration.

And so, as Paul shares with these Corinthians that a great door for effective work has opened for him, it would certainly include Pentecost, but it wouldn't be limited to it. But the strange thing here is how Paul sees opposition as a door for opportunity.

Often when we encounter opposition there is the temptation to think that maybe we're in the wrong place or the wrong ministry. Not so with Paul. He sees it as a door wide open. In fact, he uses this same type of imagery throughout his ministry.

ACT 14:27 "On arriving there [the church at Antioch], they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how *he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*"

2CO 2:12 "Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that *the Lord had opened a door for me*, 13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia."

COL 4:3 "And pray for us, too, *that God may open a door for our message*, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains."

Paul understood something about the way in which God works. He understood that God opens and closes doors through which we need to be willing to pass despite how hard the task might be.

This is why we don't want to confuse an open door from the Lord with an easy success. An open door is simply another way of stating the Lord's will. And so, we could conceivably say that the Lord opened a door to the Galatians with the gospel through Paul's sickness there. His sickness was an open door.

Paul would hardly say that that particular time in his life was a cakewalk. But because he was willing to walk through that door the Lord ultimately used it for His glory. In the same way, you and I may be asked to walk through doors the Lord opens up for us which may seem hard and difficult. But it doesn't make the door any less open.

The opposition Paul received through this open door in Ephesus may very well have included the problems he ran into with the Ephesian silversmiths. Remember the incident?

ACT 19:23-31 "About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.. 24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.. 25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business.. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.". 28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!". 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius Aristarchus, Paul's traveling

companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater."

With this attitude among the locals in Ephesus, how do you continue to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ? You do it in a way that depends upon the grace and strength which God supplies.

Now again, someone might look at this situation and simply conclude that God has now closed the door to ministry. And yet, Paul saw it wide open. It's true that he left shortly after this incident, but the ministry continued with the disciples he left behind in Ephesus. But you can be sure that the opposition was happening well before this riot.

In fact, John MacArthur quotes G. Campbell Morgan as saying, "If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you're serving in the wrong place."

If this is the case, then I can say unequivocally, we are serving in the right place. It has amazed me how such a small church can seem to draw the attention of Satan and his cohorts as they have tried to destroy this work over the years, and yet it is obvious to me that the door is still wide open at this point as the Lord has continued to encourage and sustain us.

The reason for such opposition from the enemy is because we are doing exactly what the Lord has called us to do, not unlike what the Lord called Timothy to do, which Paul addresses in his second letter to him.

2TI 4:2-5 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

The time in which men will not put up with sound doctrine is today, and like many other places this area is no exception. Does this mean the door is closed to us? It wasn't closed for Timothy

when Paul wrote to encourage him to continue walking through the door the Lord opened for him despite how people, even back then, would not listen to the sound teaching of the word of God.

People didn't listen to Isaiah or Jeremiah as they brought God's truth to Israel, and yet they were always encouraged by the Lord to continue to point people to the truth of God's word.

I'm certainly not suggesting that we're the only ones in this area who are teaching the whole counsel of God's word without compromise, but it does amaze me when people who are truly interested in such teaching have gone all over this area and have concluded that few if any are doing just that.

Can it be discouraging? Yes, if you let it discourage you. But when God opens the door that is something to rejoice in because He goes through it with you. And no matter what we may see or not see the door is still wide open no matter how much opposition we get.

But unless we see it as an opportunity, as did Paul, through his trials in Ephesus and other places, we'll only see the discouragements. We won't see the victories. God has called us to a work. He has opened the door, but He expects us to walk through the door as we do the work in His power.

But we must understand that "work" is a verb, and unfortunately for many, a four letter word. Unless we're willing to get our hands dirty and get into the trenches only a select few will experience the blessing of being a worker in the kingdom of God.

But what a blessing it is to see the fruit of our labors. The Lord is with us and He is the door we pass through so that this world might be blessed through this work we're involved in.

All glory to God!