

## The Detour

I had the privilege of going on a 5<sup>th</sup> grade field trip to the Capital with my daughter a few weeks ago.

- We had the opportunity to caravan with the bus or make our own way there.
  - I wanted a drink, and got a late start, so I followed my own route...
- I followed my GPS rather than the Bus & got LOST!
  - Totally sent me down some weird back roads.
  - I later discovered that many others had been lead astray by their GPS in their phone.

What do we do when our plans, our directions, get changed? When we encounter obstacles?

*I will come to you after I pass through Macedonia —for I will be traveling through Macedonia— <sup>6</sup> and perhaps I will remain with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I go. <sup>7</sup> I don't want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, **if the Lord allows.** <sup>8</sup> But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me —yet many oppose me. <sup>10</sup> If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear from you, because he is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, no one should look down on him. Send him on his way in peace so he can come to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.*

<sup>12</sup> *About our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to come to you with the brothers, but he was not at all willing to come now. However, he will come when he has an opportunity.*

1 Corinthians 16:5-12

Background:

Plan A: Paul would visit Macedonia & on his way back to Jerusalem he would spend the winter months in Corinth

Plan B: (2 Corinthians 1) He would travel to Corinth, stopping for a bit on his way to Macedonia, and then on his way back from Macedonia stop in Corinth again.

Plan C: Turned out to be a very quick & PAINFUL visit to Corinth and then he returned to Ephesus.

- He did not end up spending as much time with the Corinthians as he had hoped.

Go with God's plan.

What about our Plan? Should we even have a "plan"?

- We are NOT flying by the seat of our pants. Paul had a vision for his missionary journey, he was going to stop at Corinth after visiting Macedonia.
  - Pauls' plan had definitely changed but at least he had a PLAN!
- Sitting on our sofa eating cheese balls, waiting on the phone to ring is NOT a solid "plan"....
- Equally as bad as having no plan is refusing to adjust "your" plan. We should not be so rigid that when God moves we don't move also.
  - This was not the case with Paul.
  - It was the same for Apollos. God was doing a good work where he was currently at so when the Lord moved him on he would go but until then he was reaping a harvest for the Kingdom.
- Absolutely Plan. Strategize. But leave room for God to shuffle things up. Be flexible 😊

Personal application of me being led into the CHAPLAINCY but instead ended up in local church ministry.

Go with God's plan with our life opportunities.

Q: What makes up the church? A: Not these walls. You & me do. WE are the church...

#### With our Finances

- Paul isn't shy about instructing the CHURCH to GIVE FINANCIALLY to help pay for living expenses & travel costs for not only him but other Timothy.
  - When he asks this he isn't talking about some vague trust fund. He is talking about hard working individuals, folks like you & me to step up & support them.
- Point Blank: If you are not giving regularly to Kingdom causes, you are missing out. PERIOD. I don't care if you have \$1 or \$1 million God has made it pretty clear in His word we aren't to be hoarders. We are to givers, not simply receivers. Givers of our TIME. Our TALENTS. Givers of our Finances.
- And so when God presents an opportunity for us to help someone or to share in a ministry expense. We are to do so.
  - For example: I had to make an unexpected trip to Topeka on Friday with a friend & we needed a ride. Tom Faudere drove us up there. Paid for his own gas. Paid for the toll out of his own pocket. That's just a simple example of how...

Go with God's plan with our finances... (remember we are stewards/managers, not owners)

Last but not least....

#### With our Faith

Go with God's plan & share our Faith!

- Paul wanted to be in Corinth BUT God was opening great opportunities for him to share the Gospel in Ephesus!

- Friends, I believe that we REGULARLY have opportunities to share our faith. The question is
  - 1) do we realize it?
  - 2) Do we capitalize on it?
- I work very part-time for the Funeral Home but recently started driving as a Substitute Bus Driver.
  - Day 1 on the job I had opportunities to pray for a co-worker who's husband is sick.
    - Nearly EVERY DAY on that job I been able to have a spiritual conversation with a co-worker.
      - It's not because I am a Pastor. It is because I ask spiritual questions.
        - Where do you go to church?
        - How can I be praying for you?
        - To you, who is Jesus?
    - I serve as a soccer coach. The assistant coach & I hit it off & I invited his family to church. (Turns out they go to a solid Christian church already.)
- Enough about me... I say these things not to brag but to encourage you all to be looking for opportunities to share your faith. God gives us divine opportunities.
- His plan is for you to be a light in the darkness within your sphere of influence!

Go with God's plan when it comes to sharing our faith.

Summary: I could have followed the bus & made it safely to the museum but instead I wanted to do my own thing; go my own way, make my own path on my own time line.

- We are guilty of this in our spiritual lives.
  - We see God's path, His example but we decide to take shortcuts.

- We co-habitate before getting married thinking we know what is best.
- We spend our money our own way, leaving nothing for the Lord, because we know how to help others better than the church or that mission's ministry....
- We fret, whine, & even fight about a medical report we don't like rather than getting on our knees & asking God to guide us through the storm.
- Maybe some of you aren't where you saw yourself 5 years ago.
  - Is there sin you need to repent of?
  - Is there a spiritual truth that God is trying to teach you?
    - Patience. Perseverance. FAITH?
  - Is there a new path God is trying to direct you down but you are stubbornly refusing to go on?
    - A call to ministry?
    - Career change?

Go with God's Plan.

Invitation:

Have you been going with your own plan? Doing your own thing in your own time?

## Opportunities (1 Cor. 16:5–9)

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15–16, NIV). Paul was as careful in his use of time as he was in his use of money. Someone has said that killing time is the chief occupation of modern society, but no Christian can afford to kill time or waste opportunities.

Paul informed his friends at Corinth of his plans for future travel and ministry. It is worth noting that his statements were very tentative: “It may be suitable . . . it may be . . . wherever I go . . . but I trust.” Of course, **the entire plan was dependent on God’s providential leading**: “if the Lord permit.” Paul’s attitude toward his future plans agreed with the injunctions in James 4:13–17.

Paul was at Ephesus when he wrote this letter. His plan was to travel to Macedonia for a time of ministry (*pass through* in 1 Cor. 16:5 means “travel in a systematic ministry”), winter at Corinth, and then go to Judea with the collection. From November to February, it was impossible to travel by ship; so it would have been convenient for Paul to stay at Corinth and be with his friends. There were some problems to solve in the church and Paul had promised to come to help the leaders (1 Cor. 11:34).

However, various circumstances forced Paul to revise his plans at least twice. His “Plan B” was to visit Corinth, then travel through Macedonia, passing through Corinth a second time on his way to Judea (2 Cor. 1:15–16). Instead of one long visit, he planned two shorter visits; but even this plan did not materialize. “Plan C” turned out to be a quick and painful visit to Corinth, after which he returned to Ephesus. He then went to Troas to wait for Titus (who had been sent to Corinth, 2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5ff), visited Macedonia, and then went to Judea. He did not spend as much time at Corinth as he had hoped or as they had expected.

**What do we learn from this difficult experience of Paul’s? For one thing, a Christian must use his common sense, pray, study the situation, and seek the best he can to determine the will of God.** Proverbs 3:5–6 (“lean not unto thine own understanding”) must not be interpreted to mean, “Put your brain in neutral and don’t think!” God gave us our minds and He expects us to think, but He does not want us to *depend* only on our own reasoning. **We must pray, meditate on the Word, and even seek the counsel of mature Christian friends.**

**Second, our decisions may not always be in the will of God.** We may make promises that we cannot keep and plans that we cannot fulfill. Does this mean that we are liars or failures? (Some of the believers at Corinth thought Paul was deceptive and not to be trusted. See 2 Cor. 1:12–2:13.) In my own ministry, I have had to change my plans and alter my schedule because of situations over which I had no control. Did this mean I had been out of the will of God in making my plans? Not necessarily. Even an apostle (who had been to heaven and back) occasionally had to revise his datebook.

There are two extremes we must avoid in this important matter of seeking God’s will. One is to be so frightened at making a mistake that we make no decisions at all. The other is to make impulsive decisions and rush ahead, without taking time to wait on the Lord. After we have done all we can to determine the leading of the Lord, we must decide and act, and leave the rest to the Lord. If we are in some way out of His will, He will so work that we will finally have His guidance. The important thing is that we sincerely *want* to do His will (John 7:17). After all, He guides us “for His name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3), and it is *His* reputation that is at stake.

Paul had an open door of ministry in Ephesus, and this was important to him. He wanted to win the lost in Ephesus, not go to Corinth to pamper the saved. (On “open doors,” see Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8.) Paul was neither an optimist nor a pessimist; he was a realist. He saw both the opportunities and the obstacles. God had opened “a great door for effective work” and Paul wanted to seize the opportunities while they were still there.

An ancient Roman proverb says, “While we stop to think, we often miss our opportunity.” Once we know what to do, we must do it and not delay. We can usually think of many reasons (or excuses) not to act. Even though Paul was in danger in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32), he planned to remain there while the door was open. Like a wise merchant, he had to “buy up the opportunity” before it vanished and would never return.

The stewardship of opportunity is important. The individual believer, and the church family, must constantly ask, *What opportunities is God giving us today?* Instead of complaining about the obstacles, we must take advantage of the opportunities, and leave the results with the Lord.

### People (1 Cor. 16:10–24)

Often at the close of his letters, Paul named various people who were a part of his life and his ministry; and what a variety they were! He was not only a soul winner, but he was a friend maker; and many of his friends found their way into dedicated service for the Lord. Evangelist Dwight L. Moody possessed this same gift of making friends and then enlisting them for the Lord’s service. Some of the greatest preachers and musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were “found” by Moody, including Ira Sankey, G. Campbell Morgan, Henry Drummond, and F.B. Meyer.

Money and opportunities are valueless without people. The church’s greatest asset is people, and yet too often the church takes people for granted. Jesus did not give His disciples money, but He did invest three years training them for service so they might seize the opportunities He would present them. If *people* are prepared, then God will supply both the *opportunities* and the *money* so that His work will be accomplished.

**Timothy (vv. 10–11).** Timothy along with Titus, was one of Paul’s special assistants, usually sent to the most difficult places. Timothy had been brought up in a godly home (2 Tim. 1:5), but it was Paul who had led the young man to Christ. Paul usually referred to him as “my own son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). When John Mark abandoned Paul and returned to Jerusalem, it was Timothy who was called to work as Paul’s assistant (Acts 16:1–5).

Timothy learned his lessons well and made great progress in Christian life and service (Phil. 2:20–22). Eventually, Timothy took Paul’s place at Ephesus, a most difficult place to minister. (It would not be easy to be Paul’s successor!) At one point, Timothy wanted to leave the city, but Paul encouraged him to stay (1 Tim. 1:3).

The advice Paul gave the Corinthians about Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10) would suggest that the young man had some physical and emotional problems (1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:4). He needed all the encouragement he could get. The important thing was that he was doing God’s work and laboring with God’s servant. A church should not expect every servant of God to be an Apostle Paul. Young men starting out in service have great potential, and the church should encourage them. “Let no man despise thee!”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [\*The Bible exposition commentary\*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 622–624). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## 16:1–24

After the grandeur of chapter 15, anything is bound to be something of an anticlimax. The contents of this chapter are essentially practical and therefore prosaic. A closer look will yield fascinating insights into the life of the New Testament church. These insights can best be summarized, not so much by consecutive exposition of the text, as by a more panoramic overview of the chapter as a whole. We thus discover:

### 1. A church which is international but also interdependent

Although Paul has mostly personal comments to make, the context is markedly international. At least five Roman provinces are mentioned: Galatia (1), Judaea (3), Macedonia (5), Achaia (15) and Asia (19). These areas of the Roman Empire reflect very different cultures and conditions: European and Eastern, Jew and Arab, Greek and Roman, urban and rural. We see a church which has penetrated into all these situations, such is the power of the Christian gospel. It is fascinating to note how mobile this international church proved to be in the Mediterranean world of the first century. This mobility was immeasurably improved by the efficiency of the Roman Empire. Roman roads radiated throughout the provinces. Roman legions ensured that travel was reasonably safe: indeed, *pax Romana* (the peace of Rome) became a byword. The Romans also had a very effective postal system, and various hostelries dotted the main roads. Throughout the whole region the Greek language was the *lingua franca*. The vision and dedication of men and women, married couples, businessmen and missionaries produced an international church which took full advantage of the situation.

The interdependence of this far-flung church was expressed in several ways. In this chapter we see a generous sharing of both money and ministry. The chapter begins with Paul's heartfelt concern for the church in Jerusalem (1–4). He was burdened with the needs of the mother-church, which had been facing very straitened circumstances for a long time as a result of a severe famine (this had been foretold by Agabus in a word of prophecy), a natural disaster that would have hit Judaea particularly hard because it was not a very wealthy area, especially around Jerusalem. In every church for which he was responsible Paul stressed the opportunity, privilege and responsibility of thus meeting the needs of *the saints* (1) in Jerusalem. There was no better or more tangible way of cementing relationships between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

In order to regularize and organize this *contribution* (1), Paul urged on the Corinthians the habit of setting aside a regular amount each week. The reference to *the first day of every week* (2) shows that he saw such disciplined giving as part of the regular worshipping-life of the church at Corinth. The amount should be determined by what each Christian experiences at God's hands by way of prosperity. But the fact that Paul instructed *each of you* to take part indicates that relative poverty should not prevent such planned, systematic giving. In fact, Paul seems to see such giving as combining the systematic with the spontaneous: the spontaneity controlling the amount given, the system ensuring regularity. Paul made it plain (3–4) that everything thus collected would be scrupulously handled—a model which needs to be constantly emulated.

Sharing our material prosperity is only one way of demonstrating our interdependence in the body of Christ. This chapter also reveals the generous way in which the early church shared its resources in personnel. Paul's own travelling ministry is obvious (5–7), but we read of an imminent



visit from Ephesus to Corinth by *Timothy* (10–11). That would not have been without considerable cost for Timothy: he was a sensitive, nervous and hesitant minister, who constantly needed a boost to his morale. Clearly, Paul believed that Timothy had an important ministry to bring to the church at Corinth. He encourages them to put him at his ease and, his work done, to send him on his way rejoicing.

Paul refers also to *Apollos* (12), who had already brought great strength to the fledgling church at Corinth. He is more than ready to make another visit to Corinth, *with the other brethren* if necessary (the same travelling-companions are referred to in connection with Timothy's visit: cf. verse 11). Although Apollos was not ready to go to Corinth at that particular moment, *he will come when he has opportunity*.

The traffic was not all one way: Paul has been greatly *refreshed* by the visit from Corinth to Ephesus of *Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus* (17–18), even if other news from Corinth has caused him much heartache. One further reference underlines the importance of this interdependence in the churches of the Mediterranean: *Aquila and Prisca* (19). This couple had been of immense importance in nurturing the church in at least three key-centres: Rome, Ephesus and Corinth. The New Testament evidence indicates that they were involved in a family business which entailed a lot of travelling. Wherever they settled, they became the focus for *the church in their house*.

Such giving and receiving of ministry between churches in completely different cultures are equally constructive today. In particular, the church in the West, which has for nearly two centuries been exclusively on the sending side of shared ministry, stands in urgent need of learning to receive ministry from Third World churches. There is still a patronizing attitude amongst many western Christians towards brethren from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Until this is repented of and renounced, the spiritual riches in these continents will remain distant.

## **2. A church which faces opportunities but also opposition**

*A wide door for effective work has opened ..., but there are many adversaries* (9). Paul is describing the situation during his two and a half years at Ephesus, recounted in Acts 19. He spent longer there than anywhere else. One of the main reasons for his long stay was the number of openings for the gospel he discovered. He 'dialogued' daily in a public lecture-room, the hall of Tyrannus, which he used during the midday siesta period (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.). As a result of this public teaching, the whole of the province of Asia 'heard the word of the Lord'—a wide-open door indeed. It seems likely that Epaphras, a resident of Colossae in the Asian hinterland, was converted to Christ during his lunch-breaks from his business in the city. He then returned home and founded churches, not just in his home-town, but in the neighbouring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Not surprisingly, Luke tells us that 'the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily' in Ephesus. Paul talked eloquently of the thorough, sacrificial and costly ministry which he pursued in Ephesus: the account is in his farewell speech to the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus.<sup>7</sup>

If Paul faced great opportunities in Ephesus, he also met bitter and concerted opposition. To this he also bears testimony in his farewell speech: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews.' Luke's account in Acts 19 tallies with Paul's own reference to fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus. This vicious opposition was focused in three particular experiences. First, Paul's confrontation of evil powers in many Ephesians led to some very dramatic experiences, culminating in a public bonfire when the books

of magic arts so rife in Ephesus were consigned to the flames. Anyone who has found himself face to face with occult forces in Christian ministry will testify to the immense cost involved: opportunities, indeed, but also immense opposition.

The second focus for opposition to Paul and to the gospel was the guild of silversmiths, led by Demetrius. The preaching of the gospel was so powerfully successful that their lucrative trade of making silver statues for the worship of Artemis was dramatically diminished. Quite simply, Ephesians in large numbers were turning from idolatry to serve the living God, and no longer wanted to have silver statues of the local goddess around the home. Demetrius and his colleagues were understandably furious with Paul, raised a public outcry against the evangelists, and dragged Paul and his companions into the local amphitheatre, where they were all but lynched. Wherever the gospel is faithfully preached, it always challenges economic vested interests and will make many wealthy and influential people very nervous. **The true church has always been opposed, not by the poor, but by the wealthy.**

The third source of opposition in Ephesus was the Jewish hierarchy, representing the religious establishment of the day. The history of the church from the outset has shown clearly that all times of strategic opportunity for the gospel have been accompanied (and sometimes actually caused) by opposition from official leadership in religious matters.

There is one simple lesson, above all others, to be learnt from Paul's experience: **the presence of opposition does not mean that we have moved out of the will of God.** There were many in Corinth then, as indeed there are many today, who at least intimated that everything goes smoothly when we are properly in touch with the Lord. The New Testament teaches differently.

### **3. A church which has resources but also responsibilities**

We have already seen Paul's insistence on the Corinthians' responsibility to share their financial resources. We have also noted the way Aquila and Prisca made their home available to the fellowship of believers. The most penetrating comment on such responsible sharing of resources comes with Paul's description of 'the household of Stephanas' (15–16): *they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and labourer.*

Barrett sees these apparently innocuous phrases as the beginning of what we now know as the Christian ministry.<sup>11</sup> Stephanas' extended family (the contemporary meaning of the word *household*, *i.e.* relatives and retainers included) had seen the priority in the Christian community of simply being available, with the gift of hospitality, to wait on the needs of *the saints*. So they *devoted themselves* (the word speaks of a dedicated and disciplined lifestyle) to serving others. As these folk began to meet the needs of their fellow-Christians, people began to recognize in them the marks of true Christian leadership. Paul felt able to urge the Corinthians *to be subject* to such people, *i.e.* to respect their leadership gifts.

This insight challenges our notions, but particularly our practice, of leadership. We tend to give leadership to those who have received one particular kind of education, who have a measure of articulacy and general ability to think and speak on their feet, who measure up to worldly criteria of leadership. Do we ever take with proper seriousness the perspective Paul provides on leadership as service? Jesus taught the same truth: 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.' **This indicates that the authentic, solid leadership of a local church will come from people who give themselves to serving the saints. Such leadership does not depend on education, qualifications, degrees, or natural charisma. It comes from the grace of God equipping his people**

with gifts which enable them to be servants of others in the fellowship of believers.<sup>13</sup> The whole household of Stephanas lived like that: as a family they served others—adults, teenagers and children; master of the house and domestic servants; the elderly and the very young. Indeed, Barrett's conclusion that 'since the household of Stephanas have taken upon themselves the service of the saints, they must be adults'<sup>14</sup> must be rejected. Children are very good at serving others; they often relish the opportunity and seize it without being solicited. One of the most effective testimonies to the reality of the risen Christ is the servant-lifestyle of a Christian family.

Such resources for Christian ministry are present in every local church. Every home, every person is a resource and therefore constitutes a responsibility for those resources to be used for the glory of God. This chapter speaks of the body's responsibility to minister to its ministers, as well as the ministers' responsibility to the body. Both are vital, if the church of God is to grow up to maturity.

Such growth is always close to Paul's heart, and his instructions to the Corinthians in verses 13–14 summarize the responsibility incumbent upon every Christian: *Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.* In the course of this letter he has pinpointed many areas of discipleship where they have either fallen asleep, or started to totter, or lost their nerve. He has challenged them to take firm action to put right what has gone wrong. Above all, he has stressed the absolute priority of love for everything they do as a church. These words stand, therefore, as the nub of Paul's instructions to a lively, divided, exuberant and precarious church. They articulate accurately what lay close to Paul's heart.<sup>2</sup>

THE BODY OF the letter has ended. Paul now concludes his letter with personal remarks (vv. 5–12) and closing greetings (vv. 13–24).

As frequently in his letters, Paul's personal remarks concern his current ministry itinerary (or about those of his representatives, when he was later imprisoned); these serve as a transition to his formal closing (e.g., Rom. 15:14–33; 2 Cor. 13:1–10; Eph. 6:19–22; Col. 4:7–9; Philem. 22). His goal of coming to Corinth after revisiting Macedonia (v. 5) did eventually materialize (Acts 20:1–6), but not as quickly as he had first hoped. The evidence of 2 Corinthians demonstrates that Paul made an intervening visit to Corinth between the two trips described in the book of Acts (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1) and probably wrote an additional letter between our 1 and 2 Corinthians to deal with a particular antagonist in the church there (2 Cor. 1:15–17; 1:23–2:4). Second Corinthians 8:10 and 9:2 state that the instructions just surveyed on the collection took place "last year," suggesting that a number of months have intervened since 1 Corinthians. While here he anticipates leaving Ephesus shortly, the trip described in 2 Corinthians 7:5, which finds Paul at last en route to Corinth, must have taken place at least nine months later. If 1 Corinthians was written in the spring of A.D. 55, then Paul would have originally hoped to come during that

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<sup>2</sup> Prior, D. (1985). [\*The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church\*](#) (pp. 278–284). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

same calendar year, whereas in fact he did not arrive for his prolonged stay until some time in 56.

His initial desire to spend a full winter in Corinth (vv. 6a, 7a) may still have been fulfilled, however, even if delayed by a year. (His letter to the Romans from neighboring Cenchrea is probably best dated to A.D. 57.) Paul's motivation was at least twofold: (1) He wanted to have a significant period of time with the troubled Corinthians in hopes of substantially improving the situation in the church there; and (2) he hoped to avoid having to travel during that season of the year in which the high seas were generally impassable and travel overland was much more arduous. The verb translated "help . . . on my journey" (v. 6b) means "send me forth" and probably implies material assistance—food, money, and possibly even traveling companions for his trip. "Wherever I go" reflects the same uncertainty as in verse 4; as noted above, later Paul definitely decides to accompany the collection to Jerusalem. Yet in all this planning he knows full well that he must leave the door open for the Lord to change his itinerary (v. 7b).

Verses 8–9 inform us of Paul's current location (Ephesus) and enable us to date the writing of this letter to the time of the events of Acts 19 (see the Introduction, p. 21). There we see ample illustrations of the two principles of verse 9—"a great door for effective work" and "many who oppose me." The former included remarkable conversions and turning away from idols; the latter, occult opposition and town riots. The uprising instigated by Demetrius, however, has probably not yet occurred, since Paul seems to have left town shortly after that event (Acts 20:1), while here he envisions staying on for a while. "Pentecost" (v. 8) was the annual Jewish harvest festival (the Feast of Weeks). On that day the Holy Spirit descended on 120 of Jesus' followers fifty days after his resurrection, to inaugurate the era of the new covenant (see Acts 2). Whether Christians had started to celebrate it as a festival is impossible to determine from this reference; it may simply be Paul's natural way to refer to that time in late spring.

"If Timothy comes" in verse 10 is probably too indefinite, in light of Paul's earlier statement that he *is* sending Timothy (4:17). "*Whenever* he comes" would be a better translation. Paul's concern over how Timothy will be received is certainly related to their conflict with Paul himself, and it is probably heightened by Timothy's youthfulness (1 Tim. 4:12) and possibly even by his personality. Second Timothy 1:7 seems to suggest that Timothy was a naturally timid person, though this may be inferring too much. "Refuse to accept" (v. 11) is literally "despise." "Send him on his way" employs the same verb as "help me on my journey" in verse 6. The unnamed "brothers" probably include Erastus (Acts 19:22), the town clerk of Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and they would have been known to the Corinthians.

Verse 12 appears to respond to the final question the Corinthians had raised in their letter to Paul (cf. 7:1). Not only does Paul again say "now about," but it is unlikely that he alone would have taken the initiative to urge Apollos to return to Corinth in light of the danger of inflaming the sectarian divisiveness there all the more. Did the Corinthians suspect that Paul was hindering Apollos from coming when they really wanted to see him? "Strongly" could also be translated "often." The "brothers" are the same as in verse 11, plus Timothy. Apollos' reluctance to go could reflect his concern to wait for a more opportune time when things had settled down in Corinth. "He was quite unwilling" is more literally, "it was entirely not the will," leading some to suggest that we should think of God's will instead of Apollos'. Presumably Paul would have thought the two coincided in this instance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). *1 Corinthians* (pp. 331–333). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

## Building Context

PAUL'S DESIRES IN verses 5–7 reflect his concern to spend “quantity” and not just “quality” time with his spiritual children. As he consistently did in his ministry, he wants to revisit this church he has founded, so that he can minister by way of follow-up, training them in discipleship. Paul was never merely content to evangelize, make converts, and move on, even when it meant risking his life to return to the cities in which he previously ministered. Compare, most notably, his ministry in Lystra in Acts 14:19–20; this was a region he visited on each of his three missionary journeys.

Paul's willingness to ask for financial support (implied in verse 6) fits his practice of accepting provisions from Philippi while he was ministering in Corinth (see above under 9:1–18). Although he had offended or upset some Corinthians, most likely including the powerful patrons in the church there, by not accepting money for ministry while in town, he was happy to use their help to minister in other places where “strings” were less likely to be attached.

“If the Lord permits” (v. 7) is a key proviso that should qualify every Christian's plans and prayers (cf. Matt. 6:10; James 4:13–15), though this does not necessarily mean that we should speak it formally in every situation in which it is applied. People who overly punctuate their conversation with “God willing” often dissolve the meaning of those words into a mere cliché. But neither is there any scriptural warrant for deliberately excluding this qualifier from certain prayers, as if one would be perceived as vacillating in faith.

Paul's twofold rationale for staying in Corinth in verse 9 provides a powerful model for Christians in many times and places trying to decide where to perform ministry or exercise their spiritual gifts. An open door and much opposition often go hand in hand, and they may jointly signify that God's Spirit is mightily at work. To be sure, at times God brings blessing and prosperity for short intervals without significant antagonism. On other occasions, he allows seemingly unmitigated hostility, perhaps even for somewhat longer periods of time. But a prolonged lack of results in ministry more often than not suggests that it is time to move on, while prolonged prosperity without any difficulty should make one question if the full-orbed gospel with all its demands is clearly being preached.

Verses 10–11 further Paul's emphasis on Timothy as his surrogate model (see under 4:16–17 and 11:1). His words here remind us to treat representatives and subordinates of Christian leaders with the same respect and consideration that we give to the leaders themselves.

Verse 12 demonstrates Paul's remarkable willingness to put the unity of the church and the interests of his coworkers above his own personal desires and fears. One is reminded of his equally remarkable concession in Philippians that he rejoiced at those who were preaching the gospel out of rivalry to himself (Phil. 1:15–18), apparently since the word was truly going forth and people were being saved. Apollos' sensitivity reminds us, however, that it is not always in the best interests of our congregations to accede to all their requests, particularly if they stand a good chance of exacerbating factiousness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 333–334). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

## Contemporary Significance

DISCIPLESHIP IS A lost art in many Christian circles today. We have numerous prominent evangelists whose messages seemingly bring many to Christ but whose mechanisms for follow-up unfortunately leave a majority to fall by the wayside. The discipleship programs that we do institute often substitute programs and packaging for personal modeling and intimacy. As Christians, we too need quantity as well as quality time with each other, all the more so in our fast-paced, transient, and fractured society. Ours is an age in which the average length of a pastorate is shrinking rather than growing, and in which youth pastors have a short average stay in ministering to an age group that needs long-term modeling the most. Surely we need to recover an emphasis on “hanging in there” in ministry with the same group of fellow believers, through thick and thin and over the long haul. Similarly, church members must resist the inclination to “church hop” when things get tough and should recommit themselves to staying and working in difficult situations for positive resolutions of problems.

The ministry of giving to itinerant Christian workers and providing hospitality for them when they are in our own communities can go a long way to rekindling some of the spirit of familial intimacy that Paul tried to instill in his churches. Giving to churches is good and should be generous, but it should often be supplemented by giving to individuals who have to raise their own support for ministry and by providing lodging and provision for visiting missionaries.

We must find ways to avoid treating church staffs as so hierarchical that the associate and assistant pastors are given less respect than our senior leaders. We must guard against treating those more dynamic or charismatic leaders as somehow inherently better or more worthy of respect than the quieter and less flamboyant ones. It is sad to observe the difficulty that many gifted and dedicated seminary graduates have in finding a job in full-time Christian ministry if they are fairly modest and unassuming. Age too must not necessarily be held up as a criterion of maturity or effectiveness in ministry, though clearly there are certain correlations in certain situations. Sometimes, younger pastors do a better job at certain ministries, most notably in youth work.

The seemingly innocuous caveat, “if the Lord wills,” should probably play a more prominent role in most of our thinking and planning than it presently does. Surely we must resist the heresy that demands us simply to “name it and claim it” and at times even declares that adding a clause about God’s will actually violates that will!

It would be wonderful too if more Christians and churches could see that part of God’s will often involves doing the work of ministry through their “rivals.” Even if motives for ministry are not always exemplary (consider, e.g., the powerful sway financial remuneration holds for some today), if the genuine gospel is being preached with positive results, we should rejoice. Duplication of ministry, particularly in the West, runs rampant. Churches compete for the same parishioners, publishing houses try to outdo each other with the latest editions of Bibles or commentary series, missionary organizations fight each other for the best footings in newly opened mission fields, and so on. We need to encourage one another not to overlap so much when there is so much of the world largely unreached by each of these spheres of ministry. Then we can rejoice when others succeed, even if they hold slightly different theological perspectives

than our own. On the other hand, outright heresy needs to be exposed, in love, as fraudulent, no matter how well-intentioned its practitioners.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 334–337). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.