

1 Corinthians 16:5-12

PREFACE

Reading v5 of our passage, where Paul states that “I will come to you...,” “I am going through Macedonia,” I can’t help but recall something Dwight Eisenhower said, as the Republican nominee for President, in a speech on October 24, 1952. Referring to his resolution to “forego the diversions of politics and to concentrate on the job of ending the Korean War—until that job is honorably done,” Ike said,

That job requires a personal trip to Korea. I shall make that trip. Only in that way could I learn how best to serve the American people in the cause of peace. I shall go to Korea.

Well, President Eisenhower kept that pledge. The apostle Paul did not—not as planned, anyway.

Tensions between Paul and the church in Corinth remained. It is lying beneath the surface of this text, revealed only when adding in accounts from The Acts of the Apostle and Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Though we will not take the time to dwell on the evidence, sadly, we cannot even make an easy, gracious exit from this lengthy letter without being reminded that the tension remained.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-9.

vv5-7

But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 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. 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.

Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus; not only do we know that from v8, but in v19 he passes along greetings from Aquila and Prisca (or Priscilla), who were natives of Corinth, but are now in Ephesus ([Acts 18:24-26](#)). He is quite definite as to his plans; if we didn’t know better from other sources we would conclude this itinerary was “chiseled in granite”: “I will,” “I am going through Macedonia.” But we shouldn’t miss the contrasting words of *less* certainty: “**perhaps** I will stay,” “**wherever** I may go” (v6); “I **hope** to remain with you,” “**if** the Lord permits” (v7; emphasis added). As it turns out, the Lord did *not* permit.

In his second extant letter Paul expresses his disappointment that he was unable to do this—in fact, the evidence in that letter indicates that he pretty much followed the *opposite* route to subsequently visit them.

The term Paul uses when he writes “so that you **may send me on my way** wherever I may go” (v6), *propemsete*, includes the idea of outfitting someone for a journey. He did not permit them to support him while he lived in their city ministering to them (1 Corinthians 9:12); he now asks them to support his ministry trip to other churches with funds and/or necessary supplies. And “just in passing” (v7) does not mean waving to them from the highway as he passes the city, but making it a short visit, rather than the longer previous visit of eighteen months.

w8-9

But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

In vv5-9 we have a profitable illustration for how the believer is to balance good intentions and planning with a recognition that we must always bow to the Lord’s sovereign will. Simply because God is God and we are not, the Christian is not to float through life, never planning ahead but just sitting back, waiting for the Lord to manually press him into service. It takes nothing away from our subservience to the Father and Christ Jesus to actively make plans for our service in Their name. Both can peacefully coexist.

Sidebar: Years ago I was commissioned to write a three-act musical for a church. I spent quite a long time writing and planning the production. But as the day approached to begin rehearsals, the music director, filled with apprehension and dread over my expected response, called me to report that the production had to be canceled because the two leads he had been planning for had just bowed out. The music director anticipated a sermon from me all about wasted time and work. My actual response surprised him. “His will be done.” And the following year, the production went ahead, with the music director and his wife taking the leads, and the author directing the drama rehearsals and the choir in performance. Clearly the Lord had His reasons for delaying the production a year.

The Lord may come for His church within the hour, before we dig into our Sunday pot roast—but we still make plans for evening dinner. Even if not stated outright, the Christian is always to make plans with the mental proviso, as Paul, “...if the Lord permits” (v7). Nonetheless he plows ahead making his plans, intending to remain “in Ephesus until Pentecost.” That reference probably points to a season (i.e., 50 days), rather than a specific date, with the practical application that he would be waiting for summer to arrive—a time more favorable to travel.

His thought closes in v9 with a statement assigning rather odd qualities to “a door.” *Young’s Literal Translation* makes it, “for a door to me hath been opened—great and effectual,” which the KJV translated, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me.” Most of our more modern translations delegate those qualities to the *opportunity*, rather than the door itself by inserting either “service” or “work.”

...and there are many adversaries.

Recall what Paul wrote in the previous chapter.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:30-32.

It is clear that the gospel was being met with fierce opposition in Ephesus. In Chapter Fifteen Paul speaks metaphorically, referring to his struggle with the opposition as fighting “with wild beasts.” Here he refers to it with the word “adversaries” (*antikeimenoι*, to lie opposite, to be in opposition to); the verb is in the present tense and plural—the opposition was still going on as he wrote, and coming from multiple sources.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:10-12.

v10-11: TIMOTHY

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am. So let no one despise him...

Our common translations are divided on whether *ean* should be translated “if” or “when.” It *can* be translated either way, but the consensus seems to be that since Paul earlier explicitly states that he has sent Timothy to them—“For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord...”—then it would follow that he probably refers here to *when* Timothy will arrive, rather than whether he will or not.

What follows that first phrase is extraordinary indeed. Opinions vary on why Paul makes the statement “see that he is with you without cause to be afraid.”

Sidebar: The ESV, following the RSV of 1946, softens this beyond recognition with “see that you put him at ease among you,” which sounds like they should cordially invite him to tea. This translation of v10 in the ESV (and RSV) stands in contrast to v11 in both, and the rest of our common versions, with “So let no one despise him.”

Timothy was with Paul when he was first in Corinth ([Acts 18:5](#)), so the younger man was no stranger to them. Why should Paul feel it necessary to issue these warnings? In this I side with Fee and MacArthur, who posit that this really had little to do with Timothy at all, but is based on the tension and, in some cases, outright animosity coming from the Corinth church toward Paul. This would be in line with everything we have learned about the church during this study—along with what we read in his second extant letter to them. *Some* of this may have to do with his youth, but I don’t think that alone would explain the strength of these warnings from the apostle (“be afraid,” “despise him,” i.e., treat with contempt).

Note: the NIV84 softens this way too much with “refuse to accept him.”

But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.

If certain quarters of the Corinth church could be contentious with the apostle himself, there would certainly be no holding back with his younger emissary. So Paul had to smooth the way for Timothy as much as he could by long distance. Earlier in this letter Paul explained *why* he was sending Timothy to the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.

Verse 16 may sound arrogant, but there are two reasons why it is not.

1. In vv9-13 of Chapter Four the apostle has just itemized what it is to live as an apostle of Christ, and that is mostly a list of hardships. He wants the Corinthians to learn to live that way.
2. Since Paul's model for living was Christ Jesus, the Corinthians wouldn't go wrong modeling their lives after the apostle.

Paul expects them to treat Timothy with respect, listen to what he has to say, and send him back to the apostle "in peace" with supplies for his needs for the journey.

v12: APOLLOS

But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

Verse 12 is a bit of a mystery. Why is Paul bringing up Apollos? Did the Corinthians ask about him in their letter to Paul? Was he expected to be traveling with Timothy? Who are "the brethren"? And where does he expect them to meet him? The answer is that we simply do not know, and there is no good reason to spend our time guessing. So we are left wondering how Timothy's visit went. Let's close this passage with some follow-up discussion by Gordon Fee.

Fee: One is left to wonder how this visit by Timothy turned out, since there is no further mention of it in Paul's letters. In any case, two things are certain. First, shortly after this letter Paul goes absolutely contrary to the plans here laid out and pays a sudden, unexpected visit to Corinth. Why he did so is purely a matter of conjecture, but that he should so radically alter his plans suggests that perhaps the return of Timothy gave him reason for even greater alarm with regard to this church. The fact that the visit turned out to be such a blowup, apparently under the leadership of one person in particular, and that the visit was so painful for Paul that he refused to return for the time being, seems to give this suggestion some merit.

(Footnote: This is based on an understanding of 2 Corinthians 1-7 that sees the material from 1:8 to 2:14 and 7:2-16 as basically a chronological recounting of Paul's and their most recent exchanges. If so, then the man in 2:5-11 who needs their restoration is probably the same one in 7:12 who injured someone else. If the injured party is Paul, all of this makes a great deal of sense.)

Second, what Paul did do was to send Titus back to Corinth instead of either himself or Timothy (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6-7). At some point in the near future, and for reasons not fully available to us, neither of them (Paul or Timothy) is a *persona grata* to the community; it also means that Titus must have been a person of extraordinary grace. This, at least, is one viable attempt to make some sense of these very fragmentary pieces of historical data.