

1Corinthians 19-01-27b

Let's continue our study now in 1st Corinthians chapter 15. We're resuming now in verse 10. We've seen a very interesting, if indirect, allusion to the nature of divine guidance in circumstances.

There are some decisions that Paul says he has made. There are other decisions that he is waiting to make. And when he says, if the Lord permits, you remember, you know, James makes a point of saying, you know, people shouldn't be too confident if the Lord wills.

But how do you know if the Lord wills? And there are some people who believe that they are guided by signs. And look, if the arrangement between them and God is signs, then that's great. I think the more mature course, perhaps, rather than two doves flew south over my house this morning, that means I should, you know, go to Texas.

A more likely normal avenue for guidance is that God puts us in circumstances where we look at priorities, we look at our goals and values, we look at where God has opened a door of opportunity, and we are currently able to exploit it. It's not pie in the sky, by and by. It's not, well, I think it might turn into something.

Where today is God enabling me to bear fruit and shining the light of His grace and pruning the branches so that I can bear more fruit? Where is that currently happening? If it seems that my work here is done, or this opportunity has been largely fulfilled or exhausted, now might be the time for a change. Some fresh factor comes to bear. There is a request.

There is a new potential. And it seems that God will begin to ease the door shut when it is time for us to stop walking through it and exploiting the opportunity. We need not only the presentation of a new destination or a new option, but also some sense of conclusion of the existing circumstance.

And that much seems fairly clear as we look at Paul's allusion to his own opportunities and his own decisions, those that have been made and those that await making. So now he continues in verse 10, and if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear, for he does the work of the Lord as I also. Without fear.

See that he comes without fear. Why would Paul say this? Evidently, this is a potentially fearful prospect for Timothy to go unaccompanied by Paul to Corinth. Why would this be? Well, we know that from Acts 19, verse 22, that Timothy had gone with Erastus from Ephesus to Corinth, but he had to go through Macedonia.

This is all Acts 19, look at verse 22 there, or at least note it and look at it later. But Paul isn't sure that even though he's been sent to Corinth, he's going to reach there, because he's going to pass through Macedonia on the way. And it is not clear if Timothy ever did arrive in Corinth.

Paul says, if he comes, and there's no allusion to him having been there. In 2 Corinthians, we see that Titus made it to Corinth. Turn a few pages forward in 2 Corinthians to chapter 7, verse 13, we've been comforted in your comfort and we rejoice exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

For if in anything I boasted, etc. But Titus made it. In between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Titus showed up, Timothy did not.

Now, Paul sends Timothy in that direction, but he doesn't get there. Our observation here is still related to God's will and divine guidance. Paul thinks it's a good idea for Timothy to go to Corinth and sends him there.

We know this from Acts, but he evidently doesn't get there. Some possibility exists in the previous verse there in 2 Corinthians 7. Paul is talking about godly sorrow and that something went awry and amiss, and it is somewhat vague. We don't know the details of this, but Paul says in 7.11 of 2 Corinthians, observe this very thing, that you sorrowed a godly sorrow, you sorrowed in a godly manner.

What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication. In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter, whatever the matter was. And godly sorrow is an interesting topic all unto itself.

You can see it mentioned up in verse 10. But verse 12 is what we're looking at. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

Somebody got wronged in Corinth. We don't know the details. There's some possibility that maybe Timothy, after passing through Macedonia, made it to Corinth, and Paul's request that he be welcomed without fear didn't happen.

And one or more people, one person in particular, he who did the wrong, bullied him, climbed all over him. We know that he was young, because Paul is going to write to Timothy in 1st Timothy 4.12, and we think that the letter to Timothy was written about eight years after this. And he still says, you are a neotes, you are young and inexperienced.

And he's encouraging Timothy to stand up for himself. Well, eight years earlier, Timothy may have just been a teenager. And if he got there, and we know that Paul often encourages Timothy to be strong, be courageous, take charge, have some guts, grow a spine, type of encouragements.

Well, in his earliest days, it may have been too soon for him to show up at Corinth, and in God's will, he didn't show up at all. Or if he did show up, it was the occasion for a bad scene. And somebody picked on him, and Paul has to write about that in 2nd Corinthians.

We don't know. There's some speculation there. What do we know? Whether or not Timothy arrived would be in the will of God.

And even though Paul sends him in that direction, the will of Paul is not always the will of God. Paul often wishes to go places himself, and the Lord does not permit. And the same is, of course, true of us.

So, circumstances are going to provide factors on which we make decisions, and through which we try to understand God's will. And what are we looking for? Is there fruit? Is there ongoing effectiveness where we are now? If Timothy was involved in a good work, and was sort of indispensable to what Paul was doing, then Paul wouldn't send him away. Or if Paul did send him away, that wouldn't have been a good choice.

We also need to look at the idea of preparation. Whether Timothy showed up and was bullied, or whether God prevented him from going, the Corinthians are a strong crowd. Strong-willed, capable of errors, of insensitivity.

We know this from what we've seen in the letter, right? They're insensitive to each other. What would they do to an outsider who isn't necessarily a strong presence? So, God might overrule. Paul might think it's a good idea for Timothy to come in and be a representative.

God might say, I know some things you don't know. This is not a good idea. If it is allowed to take place, harm may come.

Bad things may happen. Of course, God can work that together. If Timothy is the one in 2 Corinthians 7 verse 12, then this becomes an occasion for Paul to write a couple of verses of inspired scripture.

And if and when we study 2 Corinthians, we can look into that further. But for our purposes, in 1 Corinthians 16, if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear, for he does the work of the Lord as I also. Timothy's welcome and his presence should be measured and treated according to the work of the Lord, not his youth, not his presence, not his eloquence or lack thereof.

What is the factor? It's the work of the Lord. What did we see in Paul's great and effective door? It's the work of the Lord. If Paul stays or if Paul goes, if he goes to Jerusalem, why should it be? The work of the Lord.

Something that Paul needs to be on the scene to accomplish, the work of the Lord. That's the key. Decision making, option analysis for us, where is the work of the Lord? How can we, you know, there's, I've said before that I'm not a fan of the Experiencing God program.

Henry Blackaby, this thing has been a trend and a happening, especially in the Baptist world for some years now. But the theme of that whole thing is, find out where God is at work and join him in his work. We've been in that program, not willingly and ultimately not allowed to remain

in it by others, but I've had enough exposure to it and I've got the books on my shelf.

Find out where God is at work and join him in his work. What do we see here by contrast? Am I accomplishing God's work now? If so, remain. If there is an open door for effective work and where I'm currently stationed, my work is largely complete, that would be a good time to move.

That would be a good time to realize that God is shifting my opportunity in a different direction. My current opportunity is complete, exhausted, almost fulfilled, and here is a new one. The work of God is the key throughout these verses.

The great and effective door has been opened. Notice he says there are many adversaries back up in verse 9, I didn't mention, there are many adversaries. Remember back in the earlier part of this letter, Paul said, if I fought wild beasts at Ephesus, you remember that? I don't have the verse at my fingertips, you can find it.

Wild beasts at Ephesus, this could well be a reference to that opposition. Notice that opposition is not a factor in deciding to leave. He says the door is open and it's great and effective, and there are many adversaries.

This is almost given as a plus for staying. There's a lot of adversity here, but he doesn't say, well I was going to stay, but adversaries and wild beasts, so I'm leaving and I'll see you soon. Adversity or difficulty is not a reason to leave by itself.

Adversity and difficulty, adversaries, we saw in Psalm 23 that God makes provision in the presence of adversaries, right? Provision of some kind. Could be meal provision on a table, it could be defensive weapon provision ordered in front of me. But whatever it is, the presence of the adversaries is not a time to go back through the valley of the shadow in the other direction and find a green pasture to lie down in.

There is a remaining in the presence of the enemies because there is provision from God, right? That much is common ground. Well here, there are many adversaries in Ephesus, but he says I'm going to tarry. Great and effective door has been opened here.

Adversaries notwithstanding, I'm holding the ground. But if Timothy comes, see that he may not face a bunch of adversaries. I don't want Timothy to have to fight wild beasts in Corinth, so to speak.

See that, this is blepete, see to it that he may be with you without fear. He does the work of the Lord as I also. Therefore, verse 11, let no one despise him.

Let no one despise him. We're back to the earlier exhortations about the Lord's Supper and insensitivity, outright bullying and selfishness leading to wrongs being committed against fellow believers. And Paul sees that potential and he says, if Timothy comes, you need to look out for him.

Don't let him be afraid. Don't let him be bullied. Don't let anyone treat him with contempt.

Now, this is a group responsibility. What if gossip or backbiting or character assassination arises in the context of Christian fellowship? Is this a good thing? Is this a part of the work of the Lord to tear somebody down or to dwell on their shortcomings or their failings? To do the well bucket thing and grab the rope and pull yourself up by sending somebody else down? There is no warrant for this in the Word of God. On the contrary, let fellow believers not be despised.

They should not be in fear. They should not be intimidated. There are people who try to intimidate with their knowledge, their spirituality, the supposed accomplishments of their church.

Oh, where do you go to church? Oh, well, our church has this and has that. It's bullying in some contexts. Not wrong to talk about what your church does or doesn't do, but if you use it as a means of social combat, it is wrong.

If it becomes fear or intimidation, if someone ends up being looked down on, despised, send him on his journey in peace. Paul tells the Romans, I hope you can send me on my journey to Spain. He tells the Corinthians, I hope if it happens you can send me on my journey to Jerusalem.

And he says, send Timothy on his journey in peace, that he may come to me, for I am waiting for him with the brethren. Timothy has been sent through Macedonia. Paul said, if you can swing it, go through Corinth, but in any case come back to me.

So Paul is waiting to hear from Timothy. And this is a subtle allusion to the fact that the treatment that Timothy receives if and when he arrives in Corinth is going to be reported back to Paul. Paul is going to find out whether or not they heeded this.

What is our encouragement when we think about our fellow believers and how they're treated, and when we endeavor to look out for them and shield them from the despising and the fear-mongering of others? It's not just don't despise him yourself, and don't put him in fear yourself. He says, see to it that he is not subject to these. And that may mean that you run some interference, you do some blocking.

If Timothy's a very small and lightweight running back, then you'd better block some of the adversaries so that he can make the progress he needs to make. And Paul says, you know, send him on his journey in peace, he's coming to me, I'm waiting for him with the brethren. Not only am I going to hear how he was treated, but so are the brethren.

And we know that in our case, our behavior and our treatment of one another isn't just going to be reported back to an apostle or to another group of brethren. In another place we have, let your moderation be known unto all, the Lord is at hand. Doesn't mean his coming is at hand, it means he's at hand, he's here.

You need to be moderate in your behavior, the Lord is watching, the Lord is in our midst. Now, verse 12, concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time. However, he will come when he has a convenient time.

This is very interesting because Paul is an apostle, Apollos is not, but in the same way that James was very well respected in the Jerusalem church, may have even been its pastor, so to speak, certainly has a position of leadership, probably accorded to him because of his half-brother relationship to the Lord Jesus, but the Lord Jesus didn't call his brother James. The argument in defense is James was probably not yet a believer in Jesus until the Lord was raised. You remember in the last chapter, Paul says that the Lord appeared to James, and it may be at that point that his half-brother James had something of a Damascus Road experience, and we know from the first chapter of Acts that the Lord's brethren gathered with, so not only James, but possibly also Jude and the others that we know of, came to faith, but not in time to be numbered among the disciples or the apostles.

Was there an authority granted by the Lord Jesus? We don't know, we just know that he is mentioned in the same breath with Peter and John, as we saw over in Galatians when Paul visits, and we have the book of James, which is included in inspired scripture, so something is there that we're not fully apprised of. But Apollos has a similar non-apostolic standing and respect, and so Paul says, our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was unwilling to come at this time. When Paul sent Timothy and the others, as you see recorded in Acts, he said, Apollos, won't you go with them? Why would this be? Well, if Timothy's a little bit timid, if he's got a little bit of problem assuming and exerting authority, if he's the neotes that Paul tells him he is eight years later, Paul may have wanted to reinforce the presence and the strength of this delegation by sending Apollos, but Apollos says he refuses to go.

So Paul has a desire, Paul is looking ahead and anticipating a potential problem, is my guess, and why he asked Apollos to go with him. What does he lead with? Take care of Timothy when he comes, watch out for him, don't let him be afraid, don't let anybody pick on him, don't let him be despised. Well, that was probably the message to Apollos, please go with him and make sure that this stuff doesn't happen.

Apollos says, I'm not going. Why would Apollos say this? Well, assuming Apollos to be in the will of the Lord and being the healthy and effective minister of the gospel that we know him to be from scripture, he has applied the very principles we've been looking at here. He is part of exploiting an open door and an effective fruitful ministry and he doesn't want to be pulled off to babysit Timothy and the others when he, before the Lord, is doing an effective and functional work.

He's been requested by an apostle and he says no. He's not blindly saying, well, you know, there are people who say, well, that's what my pastor says, so that's what I'm gonna do. You

can't do that.

Here's a man who is fulfilling his responsibilities before the Lord, even to the extent of rejecting a request by a well-known God-inspired apostle. Timothy is not going to be accompanied by Apollos because when Paul says, hey, Apollos, please go with him, Paul says, nope, can't do it. No intermediate human authority up to and including apostles.

People say in the Catholic Church, well, the Pope says, it's your responsibility before the Lord and Apollos knows what his is and he says, I'm not going. And notice Paul respects that. Paul doesn't declare him anathema.

He doesn't say, depart from me, you worker of iniquity. He says, although I urged him to come to you with the brethren, he was quite unwilling to come. Not unable, unwilling.

He doesn't see that as being God's will for him. However, he will come when he has a convenient or propitious time. When will he have a convenient or suitable time? The convenient is a little bit shaded in our, you know, well, I find that inconvenient.

It means suitable, suitable time. How will Apollos know when there's a suitable time? Same way Paul will know. Same way we can know.

You look at circumstances and watch for God's leading and he doesn't lead by, to my eye, I don't find this in scripture. He doesn't lead by signs. He doesn't lead by spooky internal impulses.

You can't trust those. What if I misread or misinterpreted a sign? What if I misread or misunderstood an impulse? Or what if that impulse was of my own making? People try to misconstrue the verse that says, you know, the God will give you the desires of your heart. Well, if my heart desires a thing, God gave me that desire.

That's not what it's saying. God will fulfill the things that you're hoping for if you are qualified. He doesn't give you the hopes.

He doesn't plant the desires in you. Well, I think I need to go gamble in Las Vegas because I just feel that desire in my heart. Maybe I'll be able to witness to my fellow gamblers.

You try to justify it all kinds of ways. Your desire is a very untrustworthy thing. We are all together corrupt.

We are conceived in iniquity, born in sin. We're made of dirt. It is only the grace of God that lifts us out of all of that.

But you can't trust impulse and you can't trust desire. You can't trust craving. You can't trust passion, even when it seems to all be roses.

Just think about a giddy, late teenage girl who gets infatuated with a guy. What's the desire of

her heart? You know, she's ready to do anything to capture this guy and be in his good graces. And it can override judgment.

It can override standards. It can override morality. It can override anything.

You can't go by desires. So what do we go by? Where is the work of God taking place? We're not blackabee looking for it and trying to join it. We're looking for where it already is.

What am I already doing? If I don't know what future responsibilities I should undertake, if I don't know where I should go, well, what ones do I currently have? The idea has been introduced that I should go to seminary or be a missionary or take a new job or go to a new town or make some other change in my life. Well, what are my current responsibilities? Where is God's will currently being accomplished? And if the opportunities and the abilities to do that? Take the very important situation of marriage. Should I stay in a quote broken marriage or should I leave? Well, somebody got smacked.

Okay, that's a license to leave. Somebody committed an act of immorality. Okay, that's a license to leave.

No. Is the work of God possible and is it accomplished where you are? If you are a slave, Paul says, remain a slave. If you're a master, remain a master.

Because you can do the work of God as a slave. You're God's slave. If you're a master, you're God's servant.

Remember that? Remain as you are so long as this open and effective door is something to be exploited. Apollos is going to stick where he is. Paul is going to stay where he is for the time being.

And that's the reason. So, interesting, even in these details, we see wonderfully applicable principles for ourselves. We're not apostles.

We're not deciding whether or not to go to Corinth or pass through Macedonia or accompany somebody. You could make a strong argument. Paul could have pleaded with Apollos about Timothy's need and Apollos' ability to fill it.

But Apollos has to make a decision, doesn't he? Yeah, that's a potential. I might be able to go, but I suspect these wild beasts in Corinth are kind of like the wild beasts in Ephesus and God's going to have to make a different kind of... it's not going to matter if I'm there or not. It may not be too wise for Timothy to go there at all.

Instead of pulling me off of my duties to go accompany a guy that's not yet mature enough to handle it, maybe he shouldn't go either. Why don't you wait and go back yourself? Wait till Pentecost. You go to Corinth.

You know those people. You've lived with them for two years. Don't be sending proxies that

aren't going to be able to get the job done.

So we have to speculate a bit in this, but it's a fascinating suggestion here in this portion. Well, this brings us to verse 13 and final exhortations, and that's what we're going to pick up next time. But it's fruitful to reflect on these verses, 5 through 12, specifically in the realm of divine guidance.

What do we do and what do we not? What do we ask others to do and what do we not? Each one must carry his own load. You know, there's bear one another's burdens and second verse after that says each one must carry his own load. And there's a sense in which you have to respect the decisions that believers make before the Lord.

I need to stay where I am or this opportunity no longer yields any useful fruit in the work of the Lord. It's time for me to move on. That's what the Lord Jesus did.

He would stay in a town for a while and then leave. How did he know when to leave? When he perceived prayerfully and objectively that, spiritually speaking, there's not much more that can be done. I could do a whole lot of healing.

I could do a whole lot of miracle working and, you know, razzmatazz here that's going to dazzle people, but that's not the work my father sent me to do. That's what we want to look for. What is the work that God has assigned us to do? Are we able to do it effectively where we are? Has that come to an end? And this is not always an entirety.

Sometimes it's parts of our life. We may not be moving geographically, but moving employment-wise or relationship-wise or education-wise or socially. We've been a part of a group, but we're going to pull back.

We haven't contributed to a group, but now we're going to invest. It can be in areas. It's not always the entirety of your presence in your life, but these are helpful observations in seeking to live our lives in a way that pleases God, reflects His glory, and furthers His work in that portion of it that's been assigned to us.

So I encourage you to do what I am doing, which is to reflect on this in the light of my own personal assignments and opportunities and try to focus on the ones that are producing fruit and de-emphasize and set aside the ones that aren't. This is obviously helpful for us all. Let's close here in a word of prayer and we'll pick up in verse 13 next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your Word. Thank you for the wonderfully powerful way it illuminates our path. It puts words with which the voice of the Holy Spirit can speak to our hearts and help us to navigate the circumstances and the details and the opportunities of our lives.

We pray that as we do reflect on this in the light of our own assignments, that your Holy Spirit will help us to see the pertinence and applicability so that we can, in fact, be in the very center

of your will, present ourselves living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable and that transform us by the renewing of our minds and enable us to see the good and acceptable and perfect will that you have for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.