

INTRODUCTION

Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth was tenuous. Paul spins the entire letter, all 15 chapters, admonishing them, castigating them, and saying there's some real problems in that church. When he comes here to the end of this letter, he begins to make some personal remarks. If you could read somebody's mail, you could learn a lot about them. Paul makes some very personal remarks in this letter, and we learn a lot about him just from reading his mail.

First Corinthians 16:5-14 says:

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. ⁶ Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ For 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. ⁸ 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. ¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. ¹¹ No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. ¹² Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. ¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

I. PAUL'S CHARACTER

In these personal remarks that he makes, we learn something about Paul's character. And I think that we would all agree that the apostle Paul was one of the most usable servants God has ever had in the kingdom, because he was such an effective servant of the Lord. We can learn some things about his character that we want to emulate. In fact, it was the apostle Paul who said to "be imitators of me."

1. Make bold plans

Paul says, "I'm coming to Macedonia, or I may go somewhere else. And when I come, I'm going to stay there. I may stay the winter with you. And then I may stay in Ephesus for a while." He's already planned out his future itinerary, his future ministry. I say that because there are some people that say you don't really need to make plans. You just need to trust God. I want you to know that the apostle Paul was the kind of guy that would have carried a daytimer with him all the time. He

would have kept all of his appointments up to date. The Bible says we ought to make plans. James chapter four says you must be careful when you make plans. If you leave God out of your plans, you're in trouble, but we need to make plans. A good friend of mine was talking about our long-range planning committee in this church, and he said he didn't believe in making plans. He didn't think we should have a planning committee in our church.

I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because I don't think you have to. You ought to make plans. You ought to just trust God." Did you know when Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he said he hoped to go beyond Rome, even to Spain. Spain was the Western-most part of the civilized world at that time, Paul says, "I want to go to the ends of the earth. I'm going to make some bold plans. How about you?"

Have you made any plans about what you're going to be doing for the Lord? You heard about the old man who stopped at a country store to get a Coca-Cola. And he looked on the side of this old barn and there were a lot of bullseye targets. And in the center of every bullseye was a bullet hole. He was standing there drinking his Coke, and he mentioned to another old fellow sitting there, "Well, somebody around here is an expert marksman. Look at that. There's a bullet hole in every target." The old fellow laughed and said, "Not exactly. We shoot the bullet holes first. And we draw the target around that!"

Some people live that way. They don't make any plans, and wherever they end up, they say that was the plan. I believe that you ought to make bold plans for God. This is what I'm planning on doing. Some say you should just sit back and wait on the Lord, and he'll direct and guide you. The phrase "wait on the Lord"...especially in Isaiah 40... is not a passive waiting. It is an active verb. Waiters are actively serving people and saying, "How can I help you? How's your food? Can I get you anything else?" That's what it means to wait on the Lord, to be active and available to the Lord.

I firmly believe that God best uses people who are moving in a certain direction. Now God may change your direction, but if you're moving along, it's easier to change your direction. It's like a sailboat. A sailboat has a rudder to steer it, but that boat can be sitting still in the water and the rudder doesn't affect it at all if it's not moving forward. The boat has to be proceeding forward before it can be steered. The best way for God to guide you is to be going in a certain direction. And then as you're moving along with your plans, that's when God can steer you. And so Paul made some bold plans.

2. Remain flexible

Make bold plans, but be flexible in your plans and allow God to change your direction and to steer you. The text shows you how flexible Paul was. Look at verse. He uses the word. In verse six he says, "I'll stay with you a while." He's flexible...he says "I hope to spend..." and "If the Lord permits..." You need to

make plans, but all of your plans need to be under the umbrella of those four words: If the Lord permits. I heard somebody say one time that there's a beatitude that you don't read in the Bible that goes like this: blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape!

Whenever you do mission work, you've got to remain flexible. You can't be hardened in your expectations or hardened in your attitudes. Now I'll admit I can make my wife madder than a hornet by acting a certain way. Here's what I can do to make her mad. Let's say we're going out to eat somewhere and we've already decided where we're going to go eat. Let's say we're going to Liangs, and we get in the car and I say, "How about somewhere else? Do you really want to go to Liangs?" I try not to do it, but you know what I am doing? I'm just trying to be flexible. Well, I've learned that when it comes to our marriage and where we eat, I don't need to be flexible. We need to make plans and decide this is it. We're going to go there to eat, come hell or high water.

But when it comes to serving the Lord, you can start off in a direction, but remain flexible. Paul says, "This is my plan, but God can redirect me."

3. Be persistent

When facing opposition, be persistent. Verse 9 says, "I'm going to stay in Ephesus for a while because a great door for effective work has opened to me." And he's excited about it. Then he mentions there are many who oppose him. Wait a minute. Wouldn't you expect Paul to say, "I've got a lot of opposition. So I'm getting out of here in a hurry"? Wouldn't you expect him to say, "I'm leaving as soon as I can, because there are many who oppose me"? But that's not what he says. He says there's a great door of opportunity. It is a truth from the word of God that when you are faithfully and effectively serving God, there will always, always be opposition.

Dr. G Campbell Morgan was a prince of preachers and has written some wonderful commentaries. He was speaking to a group of pastors in London about opposition and you know what he said? He said, "If you're serving the Lord and there is no opposition, you're serving in the wrong place." If you're going in the same direction as the devil, you won't meet any opposition. It's when you go in the wrong direction that you come up against the devil. That's when you face opposition. It's like rubbing the cat the wrong way. But I say let the cat turn around if it's headed toward hell! Whenever you serve the Lord, like Paul did, there's going to be opposition. Billy Graham once wrote these words: "The door of opportunity always swings on the hinges of opposition." Paul says, "I'm facing opposition, but I'm hanging in there. I'm going to stay right here in Ephesus, because there's a great opportunity as well as great opposition." And you must have that kind of positive attitude when you face opposition.

I heard about a platoon of soldiers in the middle of a battle that was surrounded by the enemy. The Sergeant looked at all of his soldiers and said, "We're surrounded.

So let's don't let one of the enemy escape.” We’re going to be positive. Even though we face opposition, we're going to take charge. You know, through the years I have really enjoyed reading biographies of great men. And I try to find some things in the character of these men to learn from. And I'll never forget as a schoolboy reading the biography of John Paul Jones, who is the first Naval hero in the history of America. And John Paul Jones was in a battle with another British Man of War during the Revolutionary War. In battle back then, one ship would pull up next to another ship firing cannons at each other point blank. John Paul Jones’ ship was falling apart, it was sinking and on fire. And the British general sent a message over to John Paul Jones that said, “Are you ready to surrender?” He sent a message back to the British general that said, “Sir, I have not yet begun to fight.” And he ended up winning the battle. That's what I call persistence in the face of opposition. Anytime you face opposition serving the Lord, just remember that. You have to be persistent and be faithful. And that's what the apostle Paul was. And we can learn something from that.

4. Be helpful to your friends

You're going to make a lot of friends along the way as you serve the Lord. And you'll make a lot of enemies as well. And you need to always be helpful to your friends. Now, beginning in verse 10, all the way through verse 19, Paul mentions by name seven different individuals who are important to him. And he has a special word about each one of them. I want to look at two of them.

First of all, he says something about Timothy, who was coming to be with them there in Corinth. He says, “I want you to treat him so kindly. And I want you to receive him with such a welcome that he doesn't have to be afraid.” What do we know about young Timothy? Well, we know from reading 1 and 2 Timothy, the letters Paul wrote to Timothy, that he was a young man who was prone to fear and worry. That's why Paul had to write him a letter that says, “Timothy, don't be afraid. God is not giving you the spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind.” We know that that Timothy was prone toward anxiety and that he even had stomach problems. That's why Paul had to say to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake. Here was Timothy, a young man trying to serve the Lord, but yet he was prone to anxiety and fear.

And Paul says to the church at Corinth to receive him the same way they would receive Paul. There's a wonderful ministry called the ministry of recommendation. Do you know somebody that's a brother or sister in Christ that maybe you could recommend to help somebody? As a pastor, I do that all the time. Here's somebody that's got a problem or an opportunity. And here's somebody else that needs to link up with that person. And I love getting the two of them together. You know, one of the greatest success stories that we're going to see in the City of Tyler is Breckenridge Village out near the airport. Jean Breckenridge and our church have

had a vision for years of using her property as a home to care for adult mentally retarded people.

One of the greatest fears that parents of mentally retarded people have is that the parents are going to die and there's going to be nobody to take care of their retarded children. And so Jean had this vision and she came to the church and asked if we could support and build this home. And our church leaders prayed about it but didn't think that was the kind of ministry that we could take on. I went to the Smith County Baptist Association and asked if our association could take it on. And it didn't seem to work out. But then I heard about the South Texas children's home down in San Antonio. And I talked to some of the leadership down there and they said, "We've been thinking about establishing a home like that." And they even had some property over in Van that they were going to use. And so the simple thing that I did was say there's this lady in our church and she's got some property in Tyler that she would really like to use for that. And it is a joy to my heart to see that now Jean Breckenridge and South Texas children's home got together. And if you saw the news just a few weeks ago, there was groundbreaking at the Breckenridge Village, and it is a work that will continue for many years. There's going to be a beautiful facility out there where about a hundred wonderful people will live and work and be productive members of our society. And all I did was just recommend some people to get together.

That's what the apostle Paul was doing. He said, "Timothy, get together and take care of one another." Throughout life, look for opportunities to help your friends. Paul did.

II. PAUL'S COMMANDS

In verse 13, like a machine gun, Paul gives these four staccato commands. Up to this point, everything has been a little bit negative. He's been saying, "This is what you're doing wrong. This is what I don't like about the church." And now he's like a general giving marching orders for them going into battle as he finishes this letter. Here are his orders:

1. Be alert for the enemy

Verse 13 says to be on your guard. Now that word means "to be vigilant." First Peter chapter four, verse eight has Peter saying, "Be alert, be sober for our enemy. The devil is roaming about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour over." In Mark chapter 14 Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and he says to the disciples, "Stay alert. Keep watch that you will not enter into temptation." One reason Christians fall into temptation and fall into sin because they lower their guard. They quit being on guard. They quit being on alert status. And as a Christian, we ought to be ready to resist temptation. But when you get lazy and you're not ready to resist the devil, that's when you fall. So he says, stay alert.

2. Be firm on the word

Verse 13 says to stand firm in the faith. When he uses the word “faith” here, he's not talking about saving faith. He's not talking about belief. He's talking about faith when Jude writes about “earnestly contending for the faith”—a body of doctrine and belief that was “once for all delivered to the saints” and we need to fight for it. Now the Mormons don't like to hear that. They like to say there's some new doctrine and some new truth added to the Bible. But no, the Bible says the faith was once for all delivered to the saints And Paul says to stand firm on it.

Don't let anybody push you off center. You stand on the word. Paul is telling these Christians don't ever deviate from the word of God. Through the years, I appreciate Christian church members even to this day who admonish me and sometimes correct me when I may say something that's not right in line with the word of God. Believe it or not, there are folks that correct me at times. And I appreciate it. If they're following the word of God and if I have deviated and I've not stood on the word for an hour, I want to be corrected. I do not want to deviate from the word.

When I was 18 years old, I was the interim pastor of a little church in South Alabama. And looking back on that, I cannot believe that I was because I preached some of the sorriest sermons! You just can't imagine how bad they were. I can't imagine how bad they were. When I had graduated from high school, this little church kept me on as interim pastor. Even when I was going to Samford university as a freshman, I would drive back and forth for several months to preach on weekends at this church. And then drive back to Birmingham. I can't come up with enough things to preach!

Grady Nutt spoke at our chapel at the university one time and he was good and funny. I remember he spoke on the story of Pinocchio about how all Pinocchio ever wanted to be was a real person. And you go through a lot of trials, but it's possible like Pinocchio to become a real person through Jesus. When I heard that, I thought, “That's a great message.” So the next Sunday, I went down to those farmers in South Alabama. And guess what I preached on?

I didn't even open the Bible and didn't even have a text. I just told the story of Pinocchio, like Grady had. And I was amazed when those people didn't like it. They sat there looking at me like a calf and a new gate. I'll never forget at the end of the service what Ms. Ethel Wiggins said. She was a saint of God who carried a huge King James Bible with her all the time. She walked with God. She never said anything publicly about it, but she backed me into a corner after everyone left. She was about 10 inches shorter than I was. And she looked up in my face and she said, “Son, preach the Bible. Just preach the Bible.”

And you know what? I thank God for Ms. Wiggins who corrected me. You know why? I wasn't standing on the word. I was preaching some story and then trying to make an application. But since that time I've tried to stand on the word. And that's what Paul says. Stand firm on the faith.

3. Be strong against adversity

Verse 13 says to be men of courage, be strong. And why does he say that? There's a battle going on. I want to remind you that the Christian life is not a playground. It's a battleground, and you can't have victory in Jesus unless there's a battle going on. And because there is a battle, you need to be courageous and strong.

Compare what he says here in chapter 16 with what he wrote in chapter three. Earlier he wrote, "I cannot write to you as spiritual men, but as babies. You folks are so spiritually immature. I can't even write to you as spiritual adults." And so what he's saying to this church is to be mature. He doesn't want to have to treat them like spiritual babies. You know, the sad fact is we have a lot of babies who are attending church and they're adults. We have some 200-pound babies. What I mean by that is people who've been Christians for 10, 20, 30 years but couldn't find Ecclesiastes in the Bible. They don't know if it's the Old Testament or New Testament. You tell them to open their Bible to the book of Hezekiah, which isn't even a Bible book, and they're going to start looking for it. They don't have any biblical knowledge. They've not grown up in the faith.

There's no shortcut to spiritual maturity. There's not a pill you can take. There's not a weekend course. The only thing that brings about maturity is daily, daily, daily, getting in the word...and praying, spending time alone with God. And Paul says, "You're going to have to be mature. You're going to have to be strong because there's a battle going on."

4. Be loving in everything

Verse 14 says to do everything in love. Paul repeats the importance of love. You remember when he talked about spiritual gifts? He says, "If I can preach the stars down, if I can pray in tongues of men and angels, if I give everything I have to the poor, if I give my body to be killed as a martyr, if I do everything and have faith to move mountains...but I don't have love...I'm nothing. I'm a sounding brass. Tinkling cymbal."

You say, "Well, that's easy for Paul to say because it seems to me like Paul was loved by everybody. And so he loved everybody." No. Just go back and see how the church at Corinth treated Paul. They were the ones saying he wasn't really an apostle. They pointed to Peter and said he was a real apostle, but not Paul. They split into groups and some people did not like Paul. Everywhere Paul went, there was a group of Jews who were trying to put him to death. In Jerusalem, there was a group of Jews who were so intent upon Paul's death that they said, "We're not going to eat another bite of food. We're not going to drink another drop of liquid until we kill Paul." Paul suffered and faced persecution. He faced abuse, but you know what Paul said? He said to do everything you do in love. Don't retaliate. Don't seek revenge. Just love. So we learned something not only from Paul's

character, but we also can learn by obeying the command that Paul has given under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

I. PAUL'S CHARACTER

- 1. Make bold plans**
- 2. Remain flexible**
- 3. Be persistent**
- 4. Be helpful to your friends**

II. PAUL'S COMMANDS

- 1. Be alert for the enemy**
- 2. Be firm on the word**
- 3. Be strong against adversity**
- 4. Be loving in everything**