

Victory in the Open Door (#42)

1 Corinthians 16:7-9

As we have studied Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we have seen that there is more than one way to live the Christian life. Paul has made it perfectly clear that there is the way of carnality, and there is the way of spirituality. There is salvation, and there is full salvation. There is the forgiveness of sins, and there is deliverance from sin. These ways are different, and God's purpose is that all of us should live the Christ life.

The truth of Scripture often lies beneath the surface, waiting only for prayer and study to reveal it to the hungry heart and open mind. This is clearly true of verses like these that we are studying tonight.

News of the sad state of affairs in Corinth has been brought to Paul at Ephesus by members of the household of Cloe (1:11). The letter we have been studying is Paul's reply. In closing, he speaks to them of his future plans, especially his hope of returning to Corinth. As to the time of that visit, he is uncertain, for he is sure that at the present moment he is in the will of God where he is, as seen in verses 8-9, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."

Paul rejoices in this assurance, because God had opened for him a door of opportunity, and there are many adversaries. He is not saying, "But there are many adversaries, and therefore I had better quit," but rather, "and there are many adversaries, therefore I must stay." **In other words, the adversaries were simply part of the opportunity, and were just as much a reason for him staying at Ephesus as was the open door.**

Now I want to consider Paul's open door and his adversaries with you. On the one hand, many of us talk far too lightly about God's open doors of service without even realizing what is involved in them. On the other hand, we are apt to become much more easily discouraged by the adversaries and give up instead of holding on.

To get the background of this situation, it is well to remember that, according to Acts 16:6, the door to Ephesus had not always been open. A few years previously Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia, and was sent to Macedonia. Acts 18:19 tells us that later, on his way from

Corinth to Jerusalem, he spent one day at Ephesus, and told them he would return again if the Lord willed.

Many things happened before the door was opened to Paul. For one thing, the eloquent preacher from Alexandria, Apollos by name, arrived at Ephesus. He met that delightful couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had come with Paul from Corinth on his way to Jerusalem, and had stayed at Ephesus until he should rejoin them. Acts 18:26 tells us that they took Apollos aside "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." As a result of this, his preaching became more powerful and fruitful; Acts 18 closes by telling us that he "mightily convinced the Jews...showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

It would be wonderful if there were some way for us to look past our outward circumstances and see the hand of God at work. But God's plan has always been that we walk by "faith and not by sight." The door to Ephesus shut to Paul; before he went there God sent another preacher to break up the heavy ground in preparation for Paul's arrival. **Ephesus was shut to Paul because Ephesus was not ready for him.**

Now Ephesus is ready, and Paul is ready. It is God's time to strike, and a blow that is struck in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, in His time, is worth a million struck in the power of the flesh.

A church can get the world's greatest preacher, but if that church is not ready to go on with God, then there will be no movement. It is when a prepared man, goes to a prepared place, that God can really do His greatest work!

Look back at chapter 15:52, where Paul says, "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." **Remember this; Satan does not sit still while the cause of Christ is being advanced!**

What are some ways that Satan seeks to hinder the work of God in the local church?

First, he causes people to become complacent concerning God's will for their lives. The Word of God gives us this warning, "Woe unto them that are at ease at Zion." You see, Satan knows that when a person feels unwanted and not needed, they become complacent. And pretty soon they will start missing church, and if no one calls to check on them Satan will make them feel neglected and hurt. And the next step is to ignore God's will for their lives as it

relates to their spiritual responsibility, and they become an "inactive Christian." Inactive to church, inactive to God, and inactive to the cause of Christ.

Secondly, Satan seeks to hinder the work of God in the local church by getting us to become jealous over our money. The Bible does not assume that it is wrong to have money, but rather that God allows men to make money. Money is actually one of God's gifts. The truth of the matter is that God wants you to have money. He wants you to have enough to live on so that all your needs are met.

But, if Satan can cause us to become jealous over our money, then that which was a gift and a blessing actually become a curse that causes us to sin. And one of the ways that jealousy over our money causes us to sin is that we become critical of church spending.

Now listen and get this, if you are a thither, regardless of how much money we spend on missions, buildings, ministry, or salaries, it will not cost you any more than what you are giving. I have found that most of the time, not all of the time, but most of the time, the people who complain the most usually give the least. Why? Because they are jealous over their money.

Thirdly, Satan seeks to hinder the work of God in the local church by making us afraid to take a stand for Christ. Remember, the Bible teaches that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." God has never called us to be afraid of the world in which we live, but to keep ourselves from getting so entangled in its affairs that we lose our witness.

Fourthly, Satan seeks to hinder the work of God in the local church by causing people to be critical of what is happening. You see, the church is the only effective tool that God has to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Satan can get a bunch of lukewarm, indifferent Christians, to run down the church and the staff, then he will have crippled the far-reaching arm of the Gospel.

Fifthly, Satan seeks to hinder the work of God in the local church by getting us to quench the moving of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 we are warned, "Quench not the Spirit." The Greek word for "quench" carries the significance of putting out a fire, and literally means, "Do not extinguish the Spirit's fire."

Therefore, the manifestation of the Spirit in the church or in the individual, whether it be in praise, prayer, or prophecy is not to be quenched.

Sin is not necessarily the result of a premeditated plan. The work of God is often hindered because Satan is always watching for an opportunity, and when he finds it he moves in that direction. Sin often comes into the life of a believer because we fail to recognize the nature of the conflict in which we are involved.

Paul recognized this danger in Ephesians 4:27 when he warned us, "Neither give place to the devil." **There is never a moment, day or night, day in and day out, when our footsteps are not being "dogged" by an adversary who is watching every move we make.** The first time you provide him with an opportunity he will establish himself in your life to begin his work in seeking to hinder the work of God in your life and in your church.

But, remember this, he cannot do it unless you provide him with the opportunity. He cannot overpower the defenses of the Holy Spirit nor can Satan penetrate the armor that has been provided through the Word of God. *David* gave him an opportunity by taking a second look. *Peter* provided him a toehold by being afraid. *Ananias* gave him a beachhead by harboring greed and fostering a lie. Those who provided Satan the opportunity found out that he was ready to occupy the territory.

God is doing a great work here in our church. But if we are to stand against our adversary as he seeks to hinder God's work here, we must be serious minded, that is, recognizing the nature of the conflict in which we are engaged. We must be, watchful, recognizing that Satan is dogging our steps every moment we live. We must maintain an unbroken dependence upon the Spirit of God. We must use the armor that God has provided that we might be able to stand against the fiery darts of the wicked one. Therefore, because of the nature of our adversary, be sober, and be vigilant.

God has truly provided us with an "open door" with which to minister the Gospel, and to change lives. May we never be guilty of allowing Satan to use us to close it!

If you are not saved, why not tonight?