

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

Session 19: The Open Door

I would like to take this time to remind us of what we are doing. We are not studying 2 Corinthians for study's sake, but that through this study we might understand the doctrine, and apply it corporately as a church, and individually in our everyday lives, so that the life of the Lord Jesus is made evident in us. As we are conformed to His image, we are being prepared not only for life here and now, but especially for the life to come in the heavenly places. This is what we are doing, and my hope and my prayer is that the time we spend together will assist us to that end.

What is 2 Corinthians about? We are looking at the eight categories of the sufferings of Christ in the phase 2 attacks of the policy of evil (PoE) against Paul (attack the messenger), and the doctrinal remedy for them.

What are we doing in chapter 2? Previously, we examined the second category of the sufferings of Christ, which accused Paul of three things: 1) not having genuine love for the Corinthians, which Paul addressed in verses 1-4, and 2) not caring for them, which Paul addressed in verses 5-11. Now, we will take up the third and final accusation against Paul; that he was not concerned with what they were going through. Paul will demonstrate his honest concern for the church in verses 12-13.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

We know the background to this. Paul was rebuffed at his last visit to Corinth. He leaves and goes up to Macedonia. Instead of returning to Corinth as he had planned, Paul went to Ephesus, where he wrote the severe and tearful letter. Afterward, Paul sent Titus to Corinth to see what, if any, effect the letter had on the Corinthians.

Paul is waiting at Ephesus and he is very concerned about what kind of response the church at Corinth will have to his letter.



Paul's great concern for the Corinthians moves him to journey from Ephesus up to Troas, in hopes of meeting Titus and hearing news of the Corinthians.

Let's talk about Troas for a moment. It was founded before 300 BC and in Paul's day, it boasted a population of around 40,000. When it

came to travel, Troas was strategic geographically. It was the main seaport in Northwest Asia Minor. Troas was the departure city for those going to Neapolis in Macedonia. And why is that important? Because from Neapolis ran the Via Egnatia, the main highway to Rome.

This made Troas an ideal spot for ministry. Troas is mentioned four times in the Bible and Paul passed through it several times on his travels. (It was from Troas that he received "the Macedonian vision" (Acts 16:8-11)).

The trip to Troas recorded in 2 Corinthians 2, is not recorded in the book of Acts.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, **when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel**, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

Notice Paul uses the phrase "Christ's gospel." Eleven times Paul uses the phrase "the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16, 15:19, 29; 1 Corinthians 9:12, 18; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 9:13, 19:14; Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). Paul uses the phrase "Christ's gospel" only once, here in verse 12. Other times Paul talks about "my gospel," when he is distinguishing between the gospels, which Christ revealed to Paul for the Gentiles (in the dispensation of grace) and what Christ gave to the twelve apostles (for the nation of Israel in the prophetic program).

Don't let anyone make the argument that the comparison is between Christ and Paul, because it isn't. Why not? Because Christ is the author of both gospels. Christ gave the gospel of the kingdom to the Twelve to preach to Israel under the Law. Christ gave the gospel of Christ to Paul to preach to everyone under grace.

The difference is between the gospel of the kingdom (that Jesus is the prophesied Christ) and the gospel of Christ (Christ died for our sins). Is there a difference between the gospel of Christ, Christ's gospel, and Paul's "my gospel?" No, there is not; they are all referring to the same message, the gospel given to Paul by Christ Himself. After His death, burial and resurrection, Christ Himself appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, saved him and commissioned him to be the apostle to the Gentiles and to preach the interruption of the program with Israel to the Jew first; and to preach the word of reconciliation to the whole world on the basis of Christ's vicarious death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:5 For **we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord;** and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

When the dispensational change took place, there was also a change in the message of the gospel. We do not preach the gospel of the kingdom because we are not connected with the Messianic kingdom on the earth; we will inhabit the heavenly places where we will "reign with Him" throughout eternity.

Galatians 1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, look back at 2 Corinthians 2:12.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and **a door was opened unto me of the Lord,**

I want to spend some time on this issue of a door being opened unto Paul. This terminology has been hijacked by many who do not understand what Paul is saying here. Notice, Paul does not say, "...a door was opened unto me by the Lord." That is how people understand it, but that is not the preposition Paul uses.

For most believers today, God opening a door means that God is making things easier, or guiding us into His will. If things get harder, then that is a sign that God is “closing the door.” Of course, none of this is what the Bible is teaching. They are taking Bible terminology and misinterpreting and misapplying it.

The (erroneous) idea is that if “God is opening a door” by giving us some success (such as, people being receptive to the message) or by some beneficial circumstance (such as, a provision for housing or base of operation), then we are supposed to think it is God’s will for us to be here and do this.

For example, when they read 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, they think what Paul is saying is that God was arranging things behind the scene to make sure that Paul’s preaching was well received by the people in Troas. But God is not violating anyone’s free will in Troas. All those prayers to God about making someone get saved or making them receptive to the message are off-base because they are asking God to violate their free will, which He will not do.

Some would say this was also an indication of God’s blessing on Paul’s ministry because he went through the open door. They would say the open door is the sign that Paul was doing God’s will. In other words, the “open door” is the way for Paul to discern what God wants him to do. But this is not what the “open door” is about.

On the other hand, they would say God was forcing Paul out of Ephesus by using the riot that took place there. They would say God “closed the door” on Ephesus, but then God “opened a door in Troas.” But that is not what the open door issue is about; it is not about God guiding Paul to be in His will.

Today, people are using their circumstances to guide them to what they think God wants them to do, and this would constitute for them, the issue of an open door.

Instead of looking at the scriptures to see what the Bible says is God’s will during this dispensation of grace and what God is doing to carry out his plan and purpose, and how God is dealing with us as members of the body of Christ; instead of making wise sonship decisions based on the scriptures rightly divided,

they are looking outside of the Bible for guidance by interpreting their circumstances as “God’s voice” telling them what to do.

For example, if they encounter difficulties, roadblocks and rejection, then they determine this is God’s way of “closing the door” here, and they need to look for a new door to open up somewhere else. If we don’t encounter much opposition, then God must be opening a door for us which means this is where God wants us to be. Is this how Paul sees it? Not at all.

In the entire New Testament, when it comes to this issue of “a door being opened,” when it is not referring to a physical door, there are only three references in Paul’s epistles. The first one is 1 Corinthians 16:9.

Take a look at 1 Corinthians 16. Paul does not define an “open door” as easy sailing, with few difficulties or easily overcome obstacles.

1 Corinthians 16:9 For **a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and *there are many adversaries.***

In the context, Paul is talking about Ephesus. We know from what Paul writes that he encountered terrific problems at Ephesus and his very life was in danger several times. Paul said he “fought with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32). Paul was not using the difficulty of circumstances to tell him if he was in God’s will or not in Ephesus.

An “open door” is not something God has arranged, so that we will know His will. I want us to get that idea firmly in our minds. Stop thinking that any of these “open doors” are God’s way of guiding Paul by arranging for good things to happen. Here is what it is: when Paul says a door was opened unto me, he is reporting on how people are responding to the gospel message: that they are believing it. In other words, he is having some success.

He is not saying that God is arranging it, he is reporting on how people are responding to his message. If he says a “great door and effectual was opened unto me,” he is saying that people are responding positively to his message.

The second verse is in 2 Corinthians 2.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

Verse 12 says that Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel. And when he got there, a door was opened unto Him. That means that people in Troas were receptive to Paul's message. It does not mean God arranged for them to be receptive. God is not violating anyone's free will. God is not making people be saved. And God is not guiding Paul by having people believe Paul's gospel.

When Paul says a "door was opened," he is simply stating the fact that the people were receptive. He is telling us how they responded to his message. But Paul preached in places where they were not receptive. In those places he did not say "a door was opened unto me." But he preached in those places too, which means he wasn't using the "open door" or the receptivity of the people as his guide as to where he should go, or to decide if it was God's will for him to preach the gospel in such a place.

When we read in the scriptures about people being saved, what do they say about God's will?

1 Timothy 2:4 **Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

The scriptures say it is God's will for everyone to be saved. If that is the case, then what is God's will about preaching the gospel of Christ? It should be preached everywhere, to everyone. Even in places where only a few are receptive? Yes. Even in places where it is difficult? Yes. Why? Because God isn't using the receptiveness to the gospel as a means of guiding us into His will.

Paul is making a sonship decision to preach the gospel everywhere, regardless if the people are receptive or not. And he is in God's will by doing so. The "open door" is Paul's report of how people responded to his message.

The third mention of an “open door” is in Colossians 4:3.

Colossians 4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

But really, we need to look at the whole passage so we can get the verse in its context.

Colossians 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

³ Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

⁴ That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Paul is asking the saints to pray for him. What is he asking them to pray for? The answer is in verse 4, that Paul would boldly proclaim the message of the mystery. This is not Paul waiting around to see if God is going to “open a door of opportunity.” So, what is Paul doing by asking the Colossians to pray for him?

So, I see two things here: 1) Paul wants them to partner with him by asking them to pray for him to have the boldness to speak the message. Notice in verse 4, “as I ought to speak.” This would not be the first time Paul asked for their encouragement.

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; ¹⁹ And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

This sounds exactly like his request in Colossians 4.

So the first thing the Colossians ought to do is partner with Paul in his ministry by encouraging him, just as this assembly constantly does for me.

Paul also has something else in mind here, 2) Paul wants their prayer to produce a duplicate performance on their part. By asking them to pray that a door of

opportunity will be opened for him to make known the mystery of Christ, Paul knows that if they will stop and do that, their prayer will produce a performance of that same doctrine on their part.

What Paul is counting on is that as the Colossians stop and pray for Paul to have boldness to make known the mystery where he is, that they will see that they also should boldly make known the mystery of Christ where they are.

Do you see it? If I pray for you to be strengthened in your inner man so that you are not overcome by some kind of suffering circumstance, if I am going through my own situation, then it naturally occurs that I need to be strengthened in my inner man so that I am not overcome by my circumstance.

But there is something else here as well, and that is the principle that when we pray for something, we are obligating ourselves to do something in connection with the answer to that prayer. So, what can the Colossians do? They can encourage Paul to be bold, to make known the mystery.

What else is happening as they pray for Paul? Paul means for his request to jog their own consciousness to make known the mystery where they are. Prayer is meant to produce performance of the doctrine.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

What is the point Paul hopes will be taken away from these two verses? That Paul is so concerned about the Corinthians that even though a door was “opened unto him” to preach the gospel, he had no rest in his spirit. Paul’s unrest was so great that he departed from Troas and he continued toward Macedonia to meet Titus all the sooner, and hear of what was now happening with the Corinthians.

In these 17 verses, Paul has pointed to his own behavior to prove that he does genuinely love the Corinthians. He does care about them, all of them, even those who have wronged Paul, and wronged the church and sinned against God to such

an extent that the church must withdraw their fellowship. But Paul knows the purpose of church discipline; the restoration of an errant brother.

You have heard the old adage: actions speak louder than words. Paul is counting on that.

Finally, Paul is showing them just how concerned he is over their spiritual condition; so concerned that he cannot fully commit himself to the evangelistic campaign in Troas.

In spite of the great receptiveness of the people at Troas to the gospel, Paul leaves Troas and continues on the way to intercept Titus so that he can learn how the Corinthians have responded to his severe and tearful letter.

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