

1 Corinthians 15:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Analysis

For I am the least of the apostles (οὐ εἰμὶ ικανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος)—The superlative elachistos means "smallest, least significant." Paul's humility stems not from false modesty but sober assessment: **I am not meet to be called an apostle** (οὐκ εἰμὶ ικανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος). The word hikanos (ικανός) means "sufficient, worthy, adequate."

Because I persecuted the church of God (διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ)—Paul never forgot his violent past (Acts 8:3, 9:1, 22:4, 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6). The verb ediōxa (ἐδίωξα, "I persecuted") indicates aggressive, systematic opposition. He authorized executions (Acts 22:4, 26:10), entering houses to drag believers to prison. This wasn't theological disagreement—it was violent suppression. Paul's apostleship is pure grace.

Historical Context

Saul of Tarsus was commissioned by the Sanhedrin to hunt Christians beyond Jerusalem's borders (Acts 9:1-2). His persecution was so notorious that early believers feared him even after conversion (Acts 9:13, 26). His transformation from 'chief of sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15) to apostle demonstrates resurrection's power.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's frank acknowledgment of unworthiness model healthy Christian leadership?
2. Why doesn't Paul's past disqualify him—what does this teach about grace and calling?
3. How should leaders today balance confidence in calling with humble awareness of past sin?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμὶ ὁ ἔλαχιστος τῶν ἀπόστολος ὃς οὐκ
I For am G3588 the least G3588 an apostle G652
G1473 G1063 G1510 G1646 G652 G3739
εἰμὶ ικανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν
am meet to be called an apostle because I persecuted G3588
G1510 G2425 G2564 G652 G1360 G1377
ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ.
the church of God G3588 G2316
G1577

Additional Cross-References

Acts 8:3 (Parallel theme): As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

2 Corinthians 12:11 (Parallel theme): I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

Galatians 1:23 (Parallel theme): But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

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