

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 (ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων, ho elachistos tōn apostolōn)—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 ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος). The word hikanos (ἱκανός) 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	ἐλάχιστος	τῶν	ἀπόστολος	ὃς	οὐκ
I	For	am	G3588	the least	G3588	an apostle	G3739	not
G1473	G1063	G1510		G1646		G652		G3756
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	G3588	of God						
G1577		G2316						

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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