

1 Corinthians 9:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Analysis

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; Paul explains why he cannot boast in preaching itself—he is under divine compulsion. The Greek *anankē* (ἀνάγκη, "necessity, compulsion") denotes inescapable obligation. Paul's Damascus Road encounter (Acts 9) imposed a commission he cannot refuse. Preaching is not optional or voluntary; it is obedience to divine appointment.

Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! The word "woe" (Greek *ouai*, οὐαί) expresses divine judgment, not mere regret. Paul echoes the prophets (Jer 20:9; Amos 3:8) who felt compelled to speak God's word despite opposition. Paul cannot claim credit for preaching—it is duty, not voluntary service. Therefore, his "boast" (v. 15) lies not in preaching but in how he preaches: freely, without charge, renouncing rights to remove barriers. This is voluntary sacrifice beyond the call of duty.

Historical Context

Ancient prophets understood divine compulsion. Jeremiah could not keep silent despite persecution (Jer 20:9). Amos insisted, "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). Paul stands in this prophetic tradition—gripped by God, commissioned by Christ, unable to

remain silent. This separates true apostles from mercenaries: apostles must preach; hirelings preach for profit.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between preaching as compulsion (v. 16) and preaching freely without charge (v. 18)?
2. How does Paul's sense of divine "necessity" protect him from pride and ensure faithfulness?
3. What does it mean to be under "woe" if we fail to fulfill our calling (cf. Ezek 33:1-9)?

Interlinear Text

ἐὰν	γάρ	εὐαγγελίζωμαι,	οὐκ	ἐστὶν	μοι	καύχημα·
though	For	I preach	nothing	have	I	to glory of
G1437	G1063	G2097	G3756	G2076	G3427	G2745

ἀνάγκη	γάρ	μοι	ἐπίκειται·	οὐαὶ	δέ	μοι	ἐστὶν	ἐὰν
necessity	For	I	is laid upon	woe	yea	I	have	though
G318	G1063	G3427	G1945	G3759	G1161	G3427	G2076	G1437

μὴ	εὐαγγελίζωμαι,
G3361	I preach
	G2097

Additional Cross-References

Romans 1:14 (Parallel theme): I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

Colossians 4:17 (Parallel theme): And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

Jeremiah 20:9 (Parallel theme): Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Acts 4:20 (Parallel theme): For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Luke 9:62 (Parallel theme): And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Acts 9:6 (Parallel theme): And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Amos 3:8 (Parallel theme): The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

Acts 9:15 (Parallel theme): But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Romans 15:17 (Glory): I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

Isaiah 6:5 (Parallel theme): Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.