

1 Corinthians 9:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

Analysis

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: If Paul preached voluntarily—a freely chosen profession rather than divine compulsion—he would deserve the reward of material support (the *misthos*, μισθός, "wage" of v. 18). But Paul does not preach willingly in that sense; he preaches under apostolic commission. **But if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.** The Greek *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία, "stewardship, administration") denotes management of someone else's household or estate.

Paul is a steward, not an owner—entrusted with the gospel treasury but not free to dispose of it as he pleases. Like Joseph managing Potiphar's house or a slave managing a master's affairs, Paul must faithfully discharge his commission whether he feels like it or not. This removes personal glory from preaching itself. His reward (v. 18) comes not from preaching (that is mere duty) but from the manner of preaching: freely, without financial burden on new converts.

Historical Context

Greek *oikonomia* referred to household management, especially by a trusted slave who oversaw the master's estate. This steward had authority but no ownership—he managed resources on behalf of another. Paul uses this metaphor to describe his apostolic calling: God entrusted him with the gospel (1 Thess 2:4), and Paul must distribute it faithfully. Unfaithfulness means divine judgment (1 Cor 4:1-5).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does viewing ministry as stewardship (not ownership) protect against pride and abuse?
2. What is the difference between voluntary service (deserving reward) and compulsory duty (fulfilling obligation)?
3. How does Paul's "unwilling" preaching (divine compulsion) paradoxically result in greater devotion than voluntary service?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	γὰρ	ἐκὼν	τοῦτο	πράσσω	μισθὸν	ἔχω·	εἰ	δὲ
if	For	willingly	this thing	I do	a reward	I have	if	but
G1487	G1063	G1635	G5124	G4238	G3408	G2192	G1487	G1161
ἀκων	οἰκονομίαν		πεπίστευματι·					
against my will	a dispensation		of the gospel is committed unto me					
G210	G3622		G4100					

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 2:7 (Parallel theme): But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;

1 Corinthians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

Colossians 1:25 (Parallel theme): Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

1 Corinthians 4:1 (Parallel theme): Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Matthew 10:41 (Parallel theme): He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Isaiah 6:8 (Parallel theme): Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

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.

Nehemiah 11:2 (Parallel theme): And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 3:14 (Parallel theme): If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1 Chronicles 29:5 (Parallel theme): The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?