

2 Corinthians 2:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

Analysis

To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life—The doubled phrases *ek thanatou eis thanaton* (ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον, "from death unto death") and *ek zōēs eis zōēn* (ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν, "from life unto life") suggest movement and intensification. For those rejecting the Gospel, spiritual death deepens into eternal death; for believers, spiritual life progresses toward eternal life. The same message accelerates both trajectories.

And who is sufficient for these things?—Paul's question *kai pros tauta tis hikanos* (καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ικανός, "and for these things who is adequate?") expresses the weight of ministry. The rhetorical answer is "no one"—apart from divine enabling (3:5-6). Preaching that determines eternal destinies creates crushing responsibility. Only false ministers approach this casually. Paul's question invites verses 17 and 3:1-6's answer: sufficiency comes from God, not human adequacy. Recognizing insufficiency paradoxically qualifies for ministry, while self-confidence disqualifies.

Historical Context

Ancient rhetoric prized the orator's skill in persuasion. Paul's confession of inadequacy contradicted rhetorical culture's confidence. He rejects both sophistic manipulation (peddling God's word, v. 17) and self-sufficient eloquence. True

ministry acknowledges dependence on God's Spirit, not human technique or charisma.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing the Gospel's life-or-death stakes affect preaching and evangelism?
2. Why is feeling inadequate for ministry actually a qualification rather than disqualification?
3. How does the Gospel's inherent power differ from persuasive human rhetoric?

Interlinear Text

οὗτος	μὲν	όσμη	θάνατον	εἰς	θάνατον	οἵτις	δὲ	όσμη
To	the one	the savour	death	unto	death	To	and	the savour
G3739	G3303	G3744	G2288	G1519	G2288	G3739	G1161	G3744

ζωήν	εἰς	ζωήν	καὶ	πρὸς	ταῦτα	τίς	ἰκανός
life	unto	life	And	for	these things	who	is sufficient
G2222	G1519	G2222	G2532	G4314	G5023	G5101	G2425

Additional Cross-References

John 9:39 (Parallel theme): And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

Luke 2:34 (Parallel theme): And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

1 Corinthians 15:10 (Parallel theme): But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

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