

THE INSIDE LOOK AT A MINISTER (PART I): A COMPULSION TO PREACH AND TO MINISTER 1 CORINTHIANS 09:16–23

Introduction

This passage is an excellent look at the minister and what it is that compels him to minister.

- I. His compulsion: to preach the gospel (v. 16).
- II. His accountability: judgment and woe if he fails to preach (vv. 16-17).
- III. His reward: to gain the satisfaction of preaching the gospel freely (v. 18).
- IV. His method: to become all things to all men (vv. 19-23).

I. 1 Corinthians 09:16 Ministers Preach the Gospel

The minister's compulsion: he must preach the gospel. Paul did not boast because he was called to be a minister. Being a preacher of the gospel was not a reason for boasting, any more than being a business man or a professional is a reason for glorying. He very clearly says, "yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast."

Paul was compelled (*epikeitai*) to preach the gospel. The word means to be pressed, laid upon, constrained, required, duty-bound to preach the gospel. God had called Paul to preach the gospel; therefore, it was his charge, his work, his business, his call in life. He could not do otherwise: he was compelled to preach. His preaching was not a matter of choice; he had not chosen to be a preacher. His preaching was a matter of duty. If he did not preach, he would be disobeying God and would miss the very purpose for his life upon earth.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Acts 4:20 "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 26:16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.'

1 Cor 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

Isa 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Isa 62:6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest.

Jer 20:9 But if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (cp. Gen. 12:1; Exo. 3:10; Judg. 6:14; 1 Kgs.19:19)

II. *1 Corinthians 09:16–17 The Compulsion to Preach*

The minister’s accountability: he faces judgment and woe if he fails to preach. This explains the necessity and compulsion to preach. One of the major reasons Paul was driven to preach the gospel was the terrible judgment that he would face if he failed. The word “woe” means that when he stood before God, he would have to face some terrible...

- regret
- denunciation
- distress
- grief
- disaster

No person who has ever been called by God is exempt from this coming judgment. This is made clear in what is now said (v. 17).

If Paul preached the gospel willingly, he had a reward. But if he preached unwillingly, “a trust of the gospel [was still] committed to him.” This simply means he was *still responsible* to preach the gospel even if he did it unwillingly or if he refused to do it. The word “trust” (*oikonomia*) means a stewardship, a dispensation. The steward was the manager of a large household or estate. The minister of God is the manager of God’s household and estate (church).

Once God had called Paul to preach, the stewardship and trust of preaching was his. Whether he followed through and preached did not matter; he was still responsible for preaching. There was no release from the call and duty. He would stand accountable for preaching the gospel or he would stand accountable for not preaching the gospel.

Thought 1. The call to preach the gospel is an awesome responsibility. God places the stewardship of the gospel into the hands of the person He calls. Just think about it: whatever the minister does with the gospel is all that will be done with the gospel — nothing more, nothing less. God has placed His gospel — the stewardship of it — into the hands of the persons He calls. Only what they do with the gospel will be done. What an awesome responsibility!

Col 1:25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

1 Th 2:4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

1 Tim 1:11 That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Titus 1:3 And at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.

III. *1 Corinthians 09:18 Reward of Preaching the Gospel*

The minister's reward is that he gains the satisfaction of preaching the gospel freely. Paul had the power, that is, the *right*, to be paid by the Corinthian church; but he did not receive payment. Why? Because he wanted the reward of preaching the gospel free of charge. What was the reward?

=> The privilege of seeing people saved free of charge.

=> The confidence of the people in him, that he was free of greed.

=> The removal of any charge that he was in the ministry for comfort and money.

Thought 1. This does not mean that a minister is to work for nothing, nor that a church is not to pay its minister and pay him well (see 1 Cor. 9:1-15). It was simply Paul's strategy to keep those who opposed him so much from being able to charge him with preaching for comfort and money.

The lesson for us is clear: we must preach out of necessity and not for money. We must minister for the purpose of helping people and not to get gain. We must serve people and not use people.

Thought 2. Paul did sometimes support himself in the ministry.

Acts 18:3 And because he was a tent-maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.

Acts 28:30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

1 Cor 9:15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.

1 Th 2:9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

2 Th 3:8 Nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

Thought 3. The minister of the gospel should constantly search his heart and make sure his heart is pure and cleansed of any wrong motive.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

1 Pet 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

IV. 1 Corinthians 09:19–23 Preaching Method

The minister's method is to become all things to all men. Paul says that he was "free and belonged to no man"; that is, he was not obligated to conform to any man's ideas or opinions. He had been set free in Christ and was obligated only to be conformed to Christ. But Paul surrendered himself, actually made himself a servant to all men. Why? So that he might win more men to Christ.

Note: Paul's going along with the opinions and customs of others does not mean he was compromising his convictions or being two-faced. It means that he was getting next to men, gaining their confidence and trust so they would pay attention to his witness for Christ.

1. Paul became as a Jew to the Jews, that is, to those who were under the law. When Paul was ministering to the Jews, he went along with their customs and laws just as long as nothing violated his walk in Christ. Note that Paul was not under the law.

Rom 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul's standard was Christ, not the law. But he placed himself under the law when ministering to the Jews in order to get next to them and win their confidence and trust so he could witness to them. Note: Paul compromised with the Jews and all others when a principle was not involved. Acts 21:18-27 is a good example of just how far he would go to gain an entrance for the gospel. However, when a principle was at stake, he would not budge an inch (cp. Gal. 2:3-5).

2. Paul became a non-religionist to those who did not observe the law. But note a critical fact: he does not mean he became lawless and immoral. He still obeyed the law of God; that is, he was as always *under the law to Christ*. He still obeyed the will of Christ which actually includes the commandments of God and more. But Paul went along with the customs and life-style of the heathen just so they were not a violation of the law of Christ. He lived as a Gentile when among them in order to get next to them and win them to Christ.
3. Paul became weak to the weak Christians. That is, he went along with their petty rules and regulations. He refrained from doing some things that were perfectly legitimate. He conformed to their ideas and opinions just to have an open door to help them grow in Christ. He laid his personal liberty and rights aside in order to reach the new and weak Christians. He would not dare become a stumbling block to them, nor would he cause them to shut him out of their lives by offending them and thereby lose his opportunity to help them. He became as one of them in order to win them.
4. Paul clearly states his purpose for conforming to the customs and opinions of men:

1 Cor 9:22 I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul is declaring that he went to the extreme when necessary in order to reach people for Christ. Note the word “this” (v. 23); it is usually translated “all things.” Paul declares that he did “all things” for the sake of the gospel. What mattered in life was not him and his rights, but the gospel. The gospel was the *consuming passion* of his life. Why? That he might partake of the gospel with other believers. By being faithful to the gospel he would share in the redemption of the gospel with other believers.

Mat 4:19 *“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Mark 10:43-44 *“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”*

Rom 14:21 *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

1 Cor 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Phil 2:4 *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Prov 11:30 *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

Dan 12:3 *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ■*