

Under compulsion

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Bible text: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Cor. 9:16-23 NAU)

Many truths of the Gospel are expressed in paradoxical form. Paul is not an exception. Rather he is an excellent teacher in this regard. Listen to this: *For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all...* (1 Corinthians 9:19). In other words: I am free to be enslaved; I am free to be a Jew to the Jews; I am free to be like someone under the law to those under the law; I am free to be like someone outside the law to those who are outside the law; free to be weak with those who are weak; free to *become all things to all people*. What kind of freedom is this?

This is the genuine freedom that is ready not merely to accept and celebrate the value and benefits of others but to sacrifice itself for them.

Following Christ, Paul discovered the freedom of servanthood – the freedom to commit himself to the will of Christ.

Paul was *a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God. (Rom 1:1 NRS)*. To proclaim the Gospel - this is the very nature of his commission. Furthermore, Paul is under compulsion to proclaim it; an obligation is laid on him to preach the good news. Preaching the Gospel is not an option for Paul but an obligation, compulsion - an irresistible urge to do it. Paul was forced to proclaim the Gospel. He proclaimed it out of necessity which was laid upon him (KJV translates ἀνάγκη with the English word *necessity*).

For Paul, the proclamation of the Gospel is an indispensable necessity, according to one of the Bulgarian translations. Why indispensable? Someone can think that the answer is predictable – for Paul to proclaim the Gospel was indispensable because he was forced by Christ himself. Do you remember his words during his sudden appearance near Damascus? “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Act 26:14 NAU)

But when Paul speaks about compulsion in 1 Corinthians 9:16, he means a feeling of inward necessity, something that dictates his life from inside. And that *thing* produces a sense of indispensable necessity because it is part of who Paul is as a person and apostle. This necessity to share the Gospel is characteristic for every real Christian. This is a distinctive element of being Christian, of Christian way of living.

Paul was captured by Christ near Damascus, and Paul's life and ministry were shaped by the presence of the resurrected Son of God. Paul started his Christian journey, and step by step, he was transformed after the image of his loving Lord. In his letter to Philippians, Paul offers an amazing definition of life: *For to me, living is Christ.* (Phi 1:21 NRS). Through the grace of God, Paul became more and more Christ-like, and what had been not natural for him before that, now thanks to the energy of the Spirit, was part of his transformed way of being and his genuine identity.

For to me, living is Christ – Christ who shared himself with the world and who wants to be shared through the ministry of his people. We can share Christ with others only if we are connected with him, only if we have a living experience with him. The transformed new life can be spread by people whose life is transformed. One of the fundamental goals of God's transforming work in us is the restoration of our ability to be in communion, to live a shared and sharing way of living. The unchanged horizon of this communion is very well described by Apostle Peter: "...so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4).

One of the most important signs for the development of this process is the indispensable necessity to share the Gospel, to make it accessible for all the people around us, to overcome ourselves, our limits, to go beyond ourselves through the grace of God and to *become all things to all people.*

We Christians are people under compulsion. We are under compulsion of the love of God and woe to us if we do not live and share the Gospel! Not doing it is a betrayal of what we are through the grace freely given to us. Not doing it is a denial not only of Christ but of ourselves. Remember the words of St. Augustine: "I don't want to be saved without you." Remember the words of Paul:

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people...” (Rom 9:3 NRS). This is the authentic, genuine Christian language. This is the authentic way of being Christian. This is the authentic way of being genuinely ourselves. Being under the compulsion of love, we are indeed ourselves.

Thanks be to God.

A LITANY FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR THE WORLD

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, almighty God, that all who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Guide the people of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grand that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as Christ loves us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We ask you to bless our time together, all the speakers and people present, and give us thankful hearts, which are ready to give thanks to you always and everywhere.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We offer these prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(The Book of Common Prayer, U.S.A., 20th Cent., Alt., with additions)