

1 Corinthians 4:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

Analysis

We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Paul presents three contrasts dripping with irony. *Mōroi* (μωροί, "fools")—Paul embraces the term used against him (1:18-25), while Corinthians consider themselves *phronimoi* (φρόνιμοι, "wise/prudent"). The second pair: *astheneis* (ἀσθενεῖς, "weak") versus *ischyroi* (ἰσχυροί, "strong")—reverses worldly values. The third: *endoxoi* (ἐνδοξοί, "honored/glorious") versus *atimoi* (ἄτιμοι, "dishonored/despised")—contrasts public reputation.

The phrase *dia Christon* (διὰ Χριστόν, "for Christ's sake/because of Christ") distinguishes Paul's foolishness from mere stupidity—it results from faithful proclamation of a crucified Messiah. Meanwhile, Corinthian "wisdom in Christ" rings hollow, a self-deceived confidence divorced from cross-bearing reality. Paul's sarcasm exposes their dissociation of Christian identity from Christian suffering—they wanted the crown without the cross.

Historical Context

The honor-shame dynamics of Greco-Roman culture prized public esteem, rhetorical skill, and social status. Philosophy promised wisdom; rhetoric conferred honor; patronage secured power. Paul's embrace of shame and weakness scandalized both Jewish and Greek sensibilities (1:23). His ironic reversal here

anticipates 2 Corinthians 12:10: "When I am weak, then I am strong." True apostolic power manifests in Christ-like suffering, not cultural accolades.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you more concerned with appearing 'wise, strong, and honorable' by worldly standards than embracing foolishness, weakness, and dishonor for Christ?
2. How does this verse challenge the contemporary evangelical emphasis on confidence, influence, and cultural engagement without corresponding emphasis on suffering and marginalization?
3. What specific ways might God be calling you to embrace weakness or dishonor for gospel faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

ἡμεῖς	μωροὶ	διὰ	Χριστῷ·	ὕμεῖς	δὲ	φρόνιμοι	ἐν
We	are fools	for	Christ	ye	but	are wise	in
G2249	G3474	G1223	G5547	G5210	G1161	G5429	G1722

Χριστῷ·	ἡμεῖς	ἀσθενεῖς	ὕμεῖς	δὲ	ἰσχυροί·	ὕμεῖς
Christ	We	are weak	ye	but	are strong	ye
G5547	G2249	G772	G5210	G1161	G2478	G5210

ἔνδοξοι	ἡμεῖς	δὲ	ἄτιμοι
are honourable	We	but	are despised
G1741	G2249	G1161	G820

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 2:3 (Parallel theme): And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

Acts 26:24 (Parallel theme): And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Acts 17:18 (Parallel theme): Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 3:18 (Parallel theme): Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

2 Corinthians 13:9 (Parallel theme): For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

1 Peter 4:14 (References Christ): If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.