

1 Corinthians 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

Analysis

And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it. The verb *kopiōmen* (κοπιῶμεν, "we labor to exhaustion") emphasizes strenuous toil. *Ergazomenoi tais idiais chersin* (έργαζόμενοι ταῖς ιδίαις χερσίν, "working with our own hands") was countercultural—manual labor was considered servile, beneath philosophers and teachers. Paul's tentmaking financed his ministry and modeled self-sufficiency.

Three participial clauses follow: *loidoroumenoi eulogoumen* (λοιδορούμενοι εὐλογοῦμεν, "being reviled, we bless"), *diōkomenoi anechometha* (διωκόμενοι ἀνεχόμεθα, "being persecuted, we endure")—this is Christ's Sermon on the Mount ethic in practice (Matt 5:10-12, 44; Luke 6:27-28). Rather than retaliating against abuse, Paul blesses his persecutors. *Anechometha* ("we endure") could also mean "we bear it patiently" or "we hold ourselves back" from retaliation. This radical non-retaliation distinguishes Christian suffering from mere stoic resignation—it actively returns good for evil.

Historical Context

In honor-shame cultures, responding to insult with blessing was shameful weakness, not virtue. Romans expected violent retaliation or legal recourse for dishonor. Paul's conduct fulfills Jesus's new covenant ethic, turning Roman values upside-down. His manual labor also defied expectations—rabbis often worked trades (Jesus was a carpenter), but Greek philosophers considered manual labor

degrading. Paul's self-support prevented accusations of greed and demonstrated love for his converts (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7-9).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. When reviled or persecuted, what is your first instinct—retaliation, self-defense, withdrawal—rather than blessing and patient endurance?
2. How does Paul's manual labor and financial self-sacrifice challenge contemporary Christian expectations of compensation and comfort in ministry?
3. What would it practically look like for you to 'bless those who curse you' in a specific current relationship or conflict?

Interlinear Text

καὶ κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ιδίαις χερσίν·
And labour working G3588 with our own hands
G2532 G2872 G2038 G2398 G5495

λοιδορούμενοι εὐλογοῦμεν διωκόμενοι ἀνεχόμεθα
being reviled we bless being persecuted we suffer it
G3058 G2127 G1377 G430

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 3:9 (Evil): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Romans 12:14 (Blessing): Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Matthew 5:11 (Evil): Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Acts 18:3 (Parallel theme): And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Romans 12:20 (Parallel theme): Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Luke 6:28 (Blessing): Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Matthew 5:44 (Blessing): But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Luke 23:34 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

1 Peter 3:14 (Parallel theme): But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

1 Peter 2:23 (Evil): Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: