

2 Corinthians 11:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

Analysis

For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. Paul's fivefold catalog of the Corinthians' submission to abuse is devastating. Each *ei* (εἰ, 'if') clause describes what they tolerate from false apostles while rejecting Paul's loving service. The repetition of *tis* (τις, 'someone/a man') emphasizes the agents of abuse.

Bring you into bondage (katadouloī, καταδουλοῖ)—enslaving them to legalistic requirements or human authority. **Devour you** (katesthieī, κατεσθίει)—consuming their resources like predators. **Take of you** (lambaneī, λαμβάνει)—seizing what belongs to them. **Exalt himself** (epairetai, ἐπαίρεται)—arrogantly promoting himself. **Smite you on the face** (eis prosōpon derei, εἰς πρόσωπον δέρει)—insulting and humiliating them.

The verbs progress from spiritual enslavement through financial exploitation to personal abuse. This is what the Corinthians 'gladly tolerate' from impressive false teachers while questioning Paul who enslaved himself to serve them freely. The tragic irony: they submit to tyranny disguised as authority while resisting genuine apostolic care.

Historical Context

The false apostles apparently established authoritarian control, demanded financial support, promoted themselves shamelessly, and treated the Corinthians with contempt. Ancient rhetoric valued powerful, dominating speakers. The Corinthians, influenced by this cultural value, mistook abuse for authority and service for weakness.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do contemporary Christians sometimes tolerate spiritual abuse, financial exploitation, or authoritarian control from charismatic leaders?
2. Why might people submit to domineering leaders while resisting servant-hearted pastors—what cultural values create this inversion?
3. What are warning signs that a Christian leader is 'devouring' rather than serving, 'exalting himself' rather than Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἀνέχεσθε γὰρ εἴ τις ὑμᾶς καταδουλοῖ εἴ τις
ye suffer For G1487 G5100 you bring G1487 G5100
G430 G1063 G5209 G2615

κατεσθίει εἴ τις λαμβάνει εἴ τις ἐπαίρεται εἴ τις
devour G1487 G5100 take G1487 G5100 exalt himself G1487 G5100
G2719 G2983 G1869

ὑμᾶς εἰς πρόσωπον δέρει
you on the face smite
G5209 G1519 G4383 G1194

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 2:4 (Parallel theme): And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

Galatians 4:3 (Parallel theme): Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

Galatians 4:9 (Parallel theme): But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Galatians 5:1 (Parallel theme): Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

2 Corinthians 1:24 (Parallel theme): Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

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