

2 Corinthians 11:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

Analysis

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Paul's mock shame at being 'weak' continues the irony. Kata atimian legō (κατὰ ἀτιμίαν λέγω, 'I speak according to dishonor/shame') introduces his confession: hōs hoti hēmeis ēsthenēsamēn (ώς ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἡσθενήσαμεν, 'as if we have been weak'). In worldly eyes, Paul's servant ministry without domineering or exploitation was shameful weakness.

Yet Paul reframes this: his 'weakness' is actually strength because it displays Christ's power (12:9-10). The false apostles' bold self-assertion is actually weakness because it relies on human impressiveness. Paul's irony exposes the inversion at the heart of gospel ministry—true strength comes through weakness, true authority through service, true honor through shame.

Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold (ho d' an tis tolma, ὁ δ' ἀν τις τολμᾶ) introduces the actual 'boasting' catalog. With the parenthetical reminder en aphrosynē legō (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ λέγω, 'I speak in foolishness'), Paul matches the false apostles' boldness. But his boldness will boast of sufferings, not achievements.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture associated power with domination, honor with status, and strength with impressiveness. Jesus and Paul subvert these values entirely—the first shall be last, the weak are strong, servants are great. The Corinthians, still thinking worldly, needed this ironic reversal to see clearly.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the world's equation of servanthood with weakness blind people to the strength displayed through Christlike service?
2. In what ways might the church today value worldly 'boldness' (domineering leadership, impressive credentials) over gospel boldness (suffering service)?
3. When have you been tempted to view your service or sacrifice for Christ as shameful weakness rather than honorable strength?

Interlinear Text

κατὰ	ἀτιμίαν	λέγω	ώς	ὅτι	ἡμεῖς	ἡσθενήσαμεν
as concerning	reproach	(I speak	as	though	we	had been weak
G2596	G819	G3004	G5613	G3754	G2249	G770
ἐν	ῳ	δ'	ἄν	τις	τολμῶ	ἐν
foolishly	G3739	Howbeit	G302	any	I am bold	foolishly
G1722	G1161		G5100	G5111	G1722	G877
						(I speak
						G3004
τολμῶ	κάγω					
I am bold	also					
G5111	G2504					

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 10:10 (Parallel theme): For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

2 Corinthians 11:17 (Parallel theme): That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

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