

2 Corinthians 11:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

Analysis

Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? The rhetorical questions reveal Paul's empathetic identification with the churches' struggles. *Tis asthenei, kai ouk asthenō* (τίς ἀσθενεῖ, καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ, 'who is weak, and I am not weak?')—he feels others' weakness as his own. *Tis skandalizetai, kai ouk egō pyromai* (τίς σκανδαλίζεται, καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι, 'who is caused to stumble, and I do not burn?').

Weak (asthenei, ἀσθενεῖ) refers to spiritual weakness, struggling faith, vulnerability to temptation. Paul doesn't respond with superiority but solidarity—their weakness is his. **Offended** (skandalizetai, σκανδαλίζεται, 'caused to stumble') describes spiritual damage from false teaching or bad example. **I burn** (pyromai, πυροῦμαι, 'I am set on fire')—either burning with indignation at the offender or burning with shame-share at the offense.

This is radical pastoral empathy: Paul's identity is bound to his churches so completely that their sufferings are his, their failures his shame. This follows Christ who took our weaknesses and bore our infirmities (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17). True shepherds don't observe the flock's struggles from safe distance but enter into them, suffering with and for those they serve.

Historical Context

The Corinthian church's weaknesses and stumbling—tolerating immorality (1 Cor 5), lawsuits (1 Cor 6), division (1 Cor 1-4), doctrinal confusion (1 Cor 15), vulnerability to false teachers (2 Cor 11)—all caused Paul profound grief. His letters reveal emotional investment bordering on parental anguish (cf. Gal 4:19). Ancient patronage relationships created bonds; Paul's are deeper.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's empathetic identification with his spiritual children's weaknesses and stumbling challenge professionalized, emotionally distant ministry?
2. In what ways might we need to 'burn' with indignation at offenses that cause God's people to stumble rather than tolerate them?
3. What would it look like to feel others' spiritual struggles as your own rather than maintaining self-protective emotional distance?

Interlinear Text

τίς ἀσθενῶ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ
Who I am and not I am Who is offended and
G5101 G770 G2532 G3756 G770 G5101 G4624 G2532

οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι
not I burn
G3756 G1473 G4448

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 9:22 (Parallel theme): To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 8:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

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