

2 Corinthians 12:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

Analysis

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: Paul voices pastoral anxiety about his upcoming third visit: mutual disappointment. **I shall not find you such as I would**—he fears finding them unchanged, still embracing false teaching and tolerating sin. Conversely, **I shall be found unto you such as ye would not**—they fear finding him stern, exercising apostolic discipline (13:2, "I will not spare") rather than the permissive teacher they prefer.

The vice catalog is devastating: eris (ἔρις, "debates," quarrels), zēlos (ζῆλος, "envyings," jealousies), thymoi (θυμοί, "wraths," outbursts of anger), eritheiai (ἐριθεῖαι, "strifes," selfish ambitions), katalalalai (καταλαλαί, "backbitings," slander), psithyrismoi (ψιθυρισμοί, "whisperings," gossip), physioseis (φυσιώσεις, "swellings," arrogance), akatastasiai (ἀκαταστασίαι, "tumults," disorder). Eight relational sins—primarily speech sins (debates, backbitings, whisperings) and pride sins (envyings, swellings).

This list diagnoses the Corinthian church's ongoing dysfunction: they haven't resolved the factionalism from 1 Corinthians 1-4. Paul's fear is legitimate—without repentance, his third visit will require painful discipline instead of joyful fellowship.

Historical Context

The Corinthian church struggled with division from its founding (1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 3:1-9). Despite Paul's severe letter and Titus's mission producing some repentance (7:8-11), deep-seated relational dysfunction persisted. Paul's catalog of sins (especially speech-related: backbiting, whispering, gossip) suggests the congregation remained fractious, gossipy, and proud—precisely the soil where false apostles thrived.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's fear of mutual disappointment ("not finding you as I would / being found as you would not") model honest pastoral expectations versus naive optimism?
2. Why are six of the eight vices speech-related sins (debates, backbitings, whisperings, etc.)—what does this reveal about how relational dysfunction manifests?
3. What does Paul's willingness to be "such as ye would not" (stern, disciplining) teach about pastoral courage to confront sin despite losing popularity?

Interlinear Text

φοβοῦμαι γὰρ μήπως ἐλθὼν οὐ οἵον θέλετε· εὑρεθῶ
I fear For lest when I come not such as I would I shall
G5399 G1063 G3381 G2064 G3756 G3634 G2309 G2147

ὑμᾶς κάγὼ εὑρεθῶ ὑμῖν οἵον οὐ θέλετε· μήπως
you and that I I shall unto you such as not I would lest
G5209 G2504 G2147 G5213 G3634 G3756 G2309 G3381

ἔρεις ζῆλοι, θυμοί ἐριθείαι καταλαλιαί ψιθυρισμοί
there be debates envyings wraths strifes backbitings whisperings
G2054 G2205 G2372 G2052 G2636 G5587

φυσιώσεις ἀκαταστασίαι.
swellings tumults
G5450 G181

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:1 (Parallel theme): Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

Romans 1:29 (Parallel theme): Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

1 Corinthians 1:11 (Parallel theme): For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

Galatians 5:15 (Parallel theme): But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Proverbs 16:28 (Parallel theme): A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

2 Corinthians 12:21 (Parallel theme): And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already,

and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

Jude 1:16 (Parallel theme): These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

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