

2 Corinthians 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

Analysis

So then death worketh in us, but life in you (hōste ho thanatos en hēmin energeitai, hē de zōē en hymin, ὥστε ὁ θάνατος ἐν ἡμῖν ἐνεργεῖται, ἡ δὲ ζωὴ ἐν ὑμῖν)—Paul draws a stunning conclusion: apostolic dying produces congregational living. Energeō (ἐνεργέω, 'to work, be effective, operate') shows death actively working in Paul but its fruit is life in the Corinthians. This is vicarious, sacrificial ministry—not penal substitution but life-through-death mediation.

The pattern is Christ's: His death produced our life. Now apostolic death (smaller participation in Christ's larger death) produces spiritual life in believers. This demolishes any ministry model centered on leader comfort or self-preservation. True spiritual fruitfulness comes through death to self, not self-actualization. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die (John 12:24).

Historical Context

This verse would convict Corinthian Christians who judged Paul's sufferings as divine disapproval. Paul reverses the evaluation: your spiritual vitality (life) comes precisely through my sufferings (death). If they rejected suffering apostles, they rejected the means of their own spiritual life. This addresses the broader Corinthian pattern of despising weakness (1 Cor 4:8-13).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's principle that 'death in us produces life in you' challenge self-protective ministry or leadership?
2. Where have you benefited from someone else's sacrificial dying (literal or metaphorical) that produced life in you?
3. What 'deaths' might God be calling you to embrace so that life might work in others?

Interlinear Text

ὥστε	ὁ	μὲν	θάνατος	ἐν	ἡμῖν	ἐνεργεῖται	ἡ	δὲ	ζωὴ
So	G3588	then	death	in	us	worketh	G3588	but	life
G5620		G3303	G2288	G1722	G2254	G1754		G1161	G2222
ἐν	ὕμῖν								
in	you								
G1722	G5213								

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 13:9 (Parallel theme): For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

Acts 20:24 (Parallel theme): But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

1 John 3:16 (Parallel theme): Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 Corinthians 4:10 (Parallel theme): We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

Philippians 2:17 (Parallel theme): Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

2 Corinthians 12:15 (Parallel theme): And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

Philippians 2:30 (Parallel theme): Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

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