

2 Corinthians 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Analysis

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (echomen de ton thēsauron touton en ostrakinou skeuesi, ἔχομεν δὲ τὸν θησαυρὸν τοῦτον ἐν ὄστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν)—the thēsaurus (θησαυρός, 'treasure') is the gospel of God's glory in Christ (v. 6). Ostrakinou (όστρακίνοις, 'clay, earthenware') describes cheap, fragile pottery used for common purposes. The contrast is stunning: infinite treasure in disposable containers.

That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (hina hē hyperbolē tēs dynameōs ē tou theou kai mē ex hēmōn, ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν)—hina (ἵνα, 'in order that') reveals divine purpose: human weakness is the stage for divine power. Hyperbolē (ὑπερβολή, 'surpassing greatness, extraordinary quality') describes power so obviously beyond human capacity that God alone gets glory. Our fragility isn't failure—it's the divinely chosen means of displaying grace.

Historical Context

Clay lamps were ubiquitous in the ancient world—cheap, easily broken, quickly replaced. Everyone understood their fragility. Yet these humble vessels carried light. Archaeological finds show Corinthian pottery was mass-produced and utilitarian. Paul's metaphor would be immediately clear: apostles are common clay pots carrying divine light, disposable containers for eternal treasure.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do you typically respond to your own weaknesses and limitations—as problems to overcome or as designed displays of God's power?
2. In what areas are you tempted to present yourself as 'golden vessel' rather than embrace being 'earthen vessel'?
3. How does this verse challenge the modern church's emphasis on polished, professional ministry presentations?

Interlinear Text

Ἐχομεν δὲ τὸν θησαυρὸν τοῦτον ἐν ὄστρακίνοις
we have But G3588 treasure this in earthen
G2192 G1161 G2344 G5126 G1722 G3749

σκεύεσιν ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ἡ τοῦ
vessels that G3588 the excellency G5236 G3588 of the power G1411 may be G3588
G4632 G2443 G5236 G1722 G5600

θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν·
of God and not of us
G2316 G2532 G3361 G1537 G2257

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 5:1 (References God): For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

1 Corinthians 1:28 (References God): And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

Colossians 2:3 (Parallel theme): In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Lamentations 4:2 (Parallel theme): The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Colossians 1:27 (References God): To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Ephesians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Matthew 13:44 (Parallel theme): Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

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 4:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 Timothy 2:20 (Parallel theme): But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.