

2 Corinthians 4:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

Analysis

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed (en panti thlibomenoi all' ou stenochōroumenoi, ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι)—Paul begins four rapid-fire contrasts showing pressure without crushing. Thlibō (θλίβω, 'to press, afflict') describes external pressure; stenochōreō (στενοχωρέω, 'to be confined, restricted, crushed') means internal collapse. Pressure comes from all directions (en panti, ἐν παντὶ, 'in everything'), but no confinement follows.

We are perplexed, but not in despair (aporoumenoi all' ouk exaporoumenoi, ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι)—aporeō (ἀπορέω, 'to be at a loss, uncertain') intensifies to exaporeō (ἐξαπορέω, 'to be utterly at a loss, in despair'). Paul admits bewilderment without despondency. The clay pot shows cracks but doesn't shatter—evidence that the power preserving it is divine, not human.

Historical Context

Paul's litany of sufferings was no exaggeration. He faced riots, beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, hunger, and constant threat (11:23-28). In a shame-honor culture where such treatment indicated divine disfavor, Paul's reinterpretation was revolutionary: suffering proves divine power, not divine abandonment. This passage likely addresses specific accusations about his hardships in Asia (1:8-10).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Which of Paul's contrasts resonates most with your current experience— pressured but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing?
2. How do you distinguish between being 'troubled' (which Paul accepts) and being 'distressed' (which he resists through God's power)?
3. What evidence in your life shows that you're sustained by divine power rather than human resilience?

Interlinear Text

ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ στενοχωρούμενοι
on every side We are troubled but not distressed
G1722 G3956 G2346 G235 G3756 G4729

ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι
we are perplexed but not in despair
G639 G235 G3756 G1820

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 12:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 7:5 (Parallel theme): For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

Psalms 37:33 (Parallel theme): The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

John 14:18 (Parallel theme): I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (Parallel theme): There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Proverbs 14:26 (Parallel theme): In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

2 Corinthians 6:4 (Parallel theme): But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

1 Samuel 30:6 (Parallel theme): And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

1 Samuel 28:15 (Parallel theme): And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

Proverbs 18:10 (Parallel theme): The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.