

2 Corinthians 6:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God,
in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

Analysis

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God (ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ συνιστάνοντες ἐαυτοὺς ὡς θεοῦ διάκονοι, all' en panti synistanontes heautous hōs theou diakonoi)—The verb *synistēmi* means to commend, demonstrate, or prove genuine. Paul uses this verb repeatedly in 2 Corinthians (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 7:11; 10:12, 18; 12:11) in his self-defense. Unlike false apostles who commend themselves through self-promotion, Paul's commendation comes through suffering endured with godly virtue.

In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses (ἐν ὑπομονῇ πολλῇ, ἐν θλίψεσιν, ἐν ὀνάγκαις, ἐν στενοχωρίαις)—This begins the first triad of hardships (vv.4-5 list nine total). *Hypomonē* ('patience' or 'steadfast endurance') heads the list as the overarching virtue that characterizes Paul's response to all subsequent trials. *Thipsis* (afflictions/tribulations) refers to external pressures and persecutions. *Anankē* (necessities) indicates compelling hardships or constraints. *Stenochōria* (distresses) literally means 'narrow space,' conveying the feeling of being hemmed in or under crushing pressure.

These opening terms are general categories that the following verses specify. Paul's catalogue functions apologetically (proving his apostolic authenticity) and pastorally (modeling Christian endurance). The Greek preposition *en* ('in') repeated throughout vv.4-10 indicates the sphere or circumstance in which apostolic ministry operates—not comfort and ease but suffering and paradox.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture valued honor, status, and strength. Suffering was viewed as shameful, a sign of divine disfavor or personal weakness. Paul radically inverts these values, showing that apostolic suffering validates rather than invalidates his ministry. The 'hardship catalogue' was a known rhetorical form in Stoic philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, but Paul fills it with distinctly Christian content.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's commendation through suffering challenge contemporary church culture's emphasis on success, comfort, and celebrity pastors?
2. In what specific trials is God calling you to demonstrate 'much patience' and thereby prove the genuineness of your faith?
3. How do you respond when God's calling involves distresses and necessities rather than blessing and ease?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ'	ἐν	παντὶ	συνιστώντες	έαυτοὺς	ώς	θεοῦ	διάκονοι
But	in	all	things approving	ourselves	as	of God	the ministers
G235	G1722	G3956	G4921	G1438	G5613	G2316	G1249

ἐν	ὑπομονῇ	πολλῇ	ἐν	θλίψεσιν	ἐν	ἀνάγκαις	ἐν
in	patience	much	in	afflictions	in	necessities	in
G1722	G5281	G4183	G1722	G2347	G1722	G318	G1722

στενοχωρίαις

distresses

G4730

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 4:8 (Parallel theme): We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

2 Corinthians 11:27 (Parallel theme): In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

1 Corinthians 3:5 (Parallel theme): Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

2 Corinthians 12:12 (Parallel theme): Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

2 Corinthians 3:6 (Parallel theme): Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Joel 2:17 (References God): Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?