

2 Corinthians 6:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

Analysis

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults (ἐν πληγαῖς, ἐν φυλακαῖς, ἐν ἀκαταστασίαις, en plēgais, en phylakais, en akatastasiais)—This second triad specifies concrete forms of persecution Paul endured. Plēgē means a blow or wound, referring to literal beatings (see 2 Cor 11:23-25: five times 39 lashes from Jews, three times beaten with rods by Romans). Phylakē (imprisonments) Paul experienced multiple times (Philippi, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Rome). Akatastasia (tumults/riots) refers to violent public disturbances, like those at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41) or Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36).

In labours, in watchings, in fastings (ἐν κόποις, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, ἐν νηστείαις, en kōpois, en agrypniais, en nēsteiais)—The third triad emphasizes voluntary hardships Paul embraced for the gospel. Kōpos denotes exhausting toil or hard labor—Paul supported himself through tentmaking while planting churches (Acts 18:3; 1 Thess 2:9). Agrypnia literally means 'sleeplessness' or 'watchings'—Paul sacrificed rest for prayer and ministry (cf. 2 Cor 11:27). Nēsteia (fastings) likely refers both to involuntary hunger due to poverty and voluntary fasting for spiritual purposes.

Verses 4-5 complete three triads (nine hardships total), moving from general to specific, from imposed suffering to voluntary sacrifice. Paul doesn't merely endure these trials passively but actively embraces hardship as the arena where apostolic ministry proves genuine. This contradicts both the Corinthians' triumphalism and modern prosperity theology.

Historical Context

Acts records multiple instances of Paul's sufferings: beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24), riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41), multiple assassination plots (Acts 23:12-15). Paul's own summary in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 provides even more detail: shipwrecks, rivers, robbers, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold. These were not theoretical afflictions but the daily reality of apostolic ministry in the first century.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What voluntary hardships is God calling you to embrace for the sake of the gospel—whether 'labours,' 'watchings,' or 'fastings'?
2. How does Paul's willingness to suffer for Christ challenge your own comfort-seeking and risk-avoidance?
3. In what ways might the modern church need to recover Paul's model of ministerial credibility through suffering rather than worldly success?

Interlinear Text

ἐν πληγαῖς	ἐν φυλακαῖς	ἐν ἀκαταστασίαις	ἐν
In stripes	In imprisonments	In tumults	In
G1722	G4127	G1722	G181
κόποις	ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις	ἐν νηστείαις	
labours	In watchings	In fastings	
G2873	G1722	G70	G3521

Additional Cross-References

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

Acts 17:5 (Parallel theme): But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

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