

Carry On

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

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I. The Suitcase v. 7

- a. Treasure - stored up, *treasure the gospel and its glory* = Paul's phrase 'treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. 4:7) contrasts the glory of the divine gospel with the weakness of its human ministers.
 1. knowledge of God's glory (v. 6) or from the gospel (v. 4), the gospel and its glory or the gospel itself (vv. 3-4),
 2. The contrast is skillfully drawn: 1. it confirms the declaration that the preachers do not preach themselves, for in themselves they are despised and persecuted; 2. it works round to a conclusion which is much in favor of the Corinthians (vv. 12-15). 'This treasure' is the illuminating power of the knowledge of Divine glory. The power is limitless, but it is stored in very unlikely receptacle
 3. Paul does not specify what he means by treasure. He could have in mind "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (4:6), but that would also include the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (4:3-4) that is so priceless and cherished by all Christians. It is more likely that means light revealed by the gospel than by his apostolic ministry (3:7-9; 4:1)
- ii. Earthen Vessels - a human being exercising a function, *instrument, vessel*
 - a. contained in earthenware jars." δέ may set up a contrast between ἡ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 6) and human beings as ὀστράκινα σκεύη ("clay pots"),
 - b. As in 4:1, the verb ἔχω denotes possession not in the sense of personal ownership (as though Paul owned the "treasure" and hid it in a container for safekeeping) but in the sense of privileged guardianship. "We are trustees of this treasure."
 - c. The adjective ὀστράκινος, from ὀστράκον ("baked clay," "earthen vessel," "potsherd"), means "made of clay," or more generally denotes breakableness. Such vessels were regarded as fragile and as expendable because they were cheap and often unattractive
 - d. Paul is not disparaging the human body or implying that the body is merely the receptacle of the soul (as in many

Hellenistic texts). For him the σκεῦος (“object,” “vessel,” “jar”) was no more the container in which was placed the “treasure” of the ψυχή than the “outer person” was a detachable outer garment clothing “the inner person” (cf. 4:16) σκεύη refers to whole persons, who, although insignificant and weak in themselves, become God’s powerful instruments in communicating the treasure of the gospel.

- e. Such an image underscores his weakness. An earthen vessel is “quintessentially fragile,” prone to breakage, easily chipped and cracked. A breakable vessel offers no protection for the treasure (except from dust and water). The image therefore serves to emphasize the contrast between Paul’s own pitiful weakness and the great power of God.
 - f. The term earthen vessels (*ostrakinoi skeuē*) implies something fragile, inferior, and expendable. Picturing himself as an ordinary, everyday utensil conveying an invaluable treasure is as striking an image as Paul’s picture of himself as a defeated but joyous prisoner marching in God’s triumphal procession (2:14).
2. Surpassing Greatness of Power - exceeding to an extraordinary degree
 3. Power - potential for functioning in some way, *power, might, strength, force*
 - a. From God
 - b. It is precisely because the proclaimers of the gospel are in themselves frail and fragile (witness vv. 8–9!), relatively insignificant and unattractive, that people clearly recognize that the transforming power (δύναμις) of the gospel is God’s alone and that the strength (δύναμις) of its ministers to endure hardship comes from God alone

II. Checked Bag vs. 8-9; Romans 8:35–39; 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 6:4–10; 11:23–28; 12:10; Phil. 4:11–12

- i. The negated second element does not indicate a mere mitigation of the hardship; rather, it points to an actual divine deliverance (cf. 1:8–9); not simply a change of outlook on Paul's part, but God's intervention.
 - ii. the first element in each antithesis illustrates human weakness, the second illustrates divine power
 - iii. Paul regarded suffering as intrinsic, not extrinsic, to his ministry (cf. 1:4–6; Gal. 6:17; Col. 1:24; Acts 9:16).
 - iv. it is clear that in Paul's estimation, this "hardship catalogue" demonstrates, not his virtuous character or his buoyant self-sufficiency or his steadfast courage amid adversity (as in the case, for example, of the Stoic sage), but his utter dependence as a frail human being on the superlative excellence (ὑπερβολή) of God's power
 - v. In contrast to the lists of hardships that appear later in the letter he speaks here in generalities. In 6:4–10 and 11:23–27 his lists become more specific: floggings, stonings, mobbings, imprisonments, labors, shipwrecks, muggings, sleeplessness, exposure, thirst, and hunger.
 - vi.
- b. Afflicted - to cause to be troubled, *oppress, afflict, distressed*
1. The verb θλίβω, like its cognate noun θλίψις, can refer to physical, psychological, or spiritual pressure or affliction
 - ii. Not Crushed - to be in a circumstance that seems to offer no way out, *be distressed, to confine or restrict to a narrow space, crowd, cramp, confine, restrict*
 1. Although troubles pressed on Paul from every quarter, he never found himself crushed or cornered. στενοχωρέω refers to confinement in a restricted space in either a literal or a metaphorical sense. Because the power of God was active in preserving his life and his spirit, Paul never found himself in a plight from which there was no escape (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). Hampered on all sides—yes, but without room to breathe—no.
 2. Acts 18:12–17
- c. Perplexed - *bewildered, but never at our wits' end*, to be in a confused state of mind, *be at a loss, be in doubt, be uncertain*
- i. Not Despairing - to be at a loss psychologically, *be in great difficulty, doubt, embarrassment- sometimes at a loss, but not a loser*
 - ii. "near-desperate but not wholly desperate" "at a loss but not completely baffled"

- iii. There may be the greater anxiety and perplexity, so that one does not know what to do, and yet confidence that all will end well. Such a state of mind is quite compatible with expectation of death (see on 1:8).
 - d. Persecuted - to harass someone, esp. because of beliefs, *persecute*
 - i. Not Forsaken - to separate connection with someone or something *forsake, abandon; feeling or being forsaken by God*
 - ii. statement means “we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God”
 - e. Struck Down to strike with sufficient force so as to knock down, *throw down*
 - i. Not Destroyed – ruined
 - 1. The obvious illustration of this aphorism is Paul’s stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19–20), when he was (literally!) struck down by a barrage of stones, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. On this occasion the divine aid came to Paul (at least in part) through the eager assistance of his converts in Lystra (Acts 14:20),
 - 2. was a technical term in wrestling (“throw down”), in boxing (“knock down”), and in battle (“strike down”). We are knocked down, but not knocked out,” and Plummer paraphrases, “beaten to the earth, yet not killed outright”

III. Carry On v. 10

- a. Carrying
 - i. Body of Dying Jesus
 - 1. Life of Jesus
 - a. The missionaries were perpetually being delivered unto death for Christ’s sake. They were never free from peril.
 - b. The missionaries were perpetually being delivered unto death for Christ’s sake. They were never free from peril.
 - 2. Manifested in our body - *become visible or known, be revealed* Mk 4:22; 2 Cor 4:10f; Eph 5:13f; Rv 3:18.
 - a. It is both the life that belongs to Jesus (possessive genitive) by virtue of his resurrection (Rom. 6:9–10) and the life that is imparted by Jesus (subjective genitive) through his Spirit (3:6; Rom. 8:2). This life of Jesus is intimately related to the power of God (v. 7),
 - b. Paul is making two important affirmations regarding Christian experience. First, the resurrection life of Jesus is evident at precisely the same time as there is a “carrying around” of his dying. Indeed, the very purpose of the believer’s identification with Jesus in his sufferings is to provide an opportunity for the display of Jesus’ risen life. Second, one and the same physical body is the place

where the sufferings of Jesus are repeated and where his risen power is manifested

- c. In his frail, weary, battered person he ever bears the *dying* of Jesus, in order that the *life* also of Jesus may be exhibited to the world. This may mean that the frequent deliverances from difficulty, danger, and death are evidence that the Crucified is still alive and has Divine power; cf. 1:5; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:13, 5:1.

Word Studies

Treasure - that which is stored up, *treasure the gospel and it's glory*¹

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus often uses 'treasure' figuratively. Since God rewards wholehearted service in the hereafter, it is termed laying up treasure in heaven, which is contrasted with money-making in Mt. 6:19f.; Mk. 10:21 and parallels; Lk. 12:33 (*cf.* Mt. 19:21; Lk. 18:22). As the storehouse of either good or evil the heart controls conduct (Mt. 12:35; Lk. 6:45). A man's heart is where his treasure is (Mt. 6:21; Lk. 12:34), *i.e.* his interests are determined by what he values most.

Paul's phrase 'treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. 4:7) contrasts the glory of the divine gospel with the weakness of its human ministers. Wisdom and knowledge are treasures to be found only in Christ (Col. 2:3).²

Earthen Vessels - a human being exercising a function, *instrument, vessel*³

Surpassing Greatness - state of exceeding to an extraordinary degree a point on a scale of extent (the context indicating whether in a good or a bad sense), *excess, extraordinary quality/character*⁴

Power - potential for functioning in some way, *power, might, strength, force*⁵

Afflicted - to cause to be troubled, *oppress, afflict, distressed*⁶

Crushed - to be in a circumstance that seems to offer no way out, *be distressed*⁷ to confine or restrict to a narrow space, *crowd, cramp, confine, restrict*⁸

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 456.

² L. C. Allen, "[Treasure, Treasury.](#)" ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1202.

³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 927.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1032.

⁵ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 262.

⁶ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.

⁷ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 943.

⁸ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 942.

Perplexed - *bewildered, but never at our wits' end*, to be in a confused state of mind, *be at a loss, be in doubt, be uncertain*⁹

Despairing - to be at a loss psychologically, *be in great difficulty, doubt, embarrassment*¹⁰ *'sometimes at a loss, but not a loser*¹¹

Persecuted - to harass someone, esp¹². because of beliefs, *persecute*¹³

Forsaken - to separate connection with someone or something *forsake, abandon; feeling or being forsaken by God*¹⁴¹⁵

Struck down - to strike with sufficient force so as to knock down, *throw down, strike down*¹⁶

Destroyed - ruined

Manifested - *become visible or known, be revealed* Mk 4:22; 2 Cor 4:10f; Eph 5:13f; Rv 3:18.¹⁷

⁹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 119.

¹⁰ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 345.

¹¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 345.

¹² **esp. esp.** = especially

¹³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 254.

¹⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 273.

¹⁵ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 273.

¹⁶ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 514.

¹⁷ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1048.

Commentary Studies

entrusted to us is contained in earthenware jars.” δέ may set up a contrast between ἡ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 6) and human beings as ὀστράκινα σκεύη (“clay pots”), but more probably it serves here as a simple transitional participle (“now,” “then”; BAG¹⁸D 171c) that may be left untranslated. As in 4:1, the verb ἔχω denotes possession not in the sense of personal ownership (as though Paul owned the “treasure” and hid it in a container for safekeeping) but in the sense of privileged guardianship.¹⁹³ “We are trustees of this treasure.”

Αθησαυρός was a storehouse or strong room for precious things or any receptacle for valuables; hence it referred to anything precious, “treasure.” The word is found only here and in Col. 2:3 in the Pauline corpus. This treasure must be something explicitly mentioned in the context because of τοῦτον, whether it be the illumination that comes from the knowledge of God’s glory (v. 6) or from the gospel (v. 4),²⁰⁴ the gospel and its glory²¹⁵ or the gospel itself (vv. 3–4),²²⁶ or the ministry of the gospel (v. 1).²³⁷ Common to all these proposals is a reference to the gospel.

The adjective ὀστράκιος, from ὄστρακον (“baked clay,” “earthen vessel,” “potsherd”), means “made of clay,” or more generally denotes breakableness.²⁴⁸ In general, ὀστράκινα σκεύη may be “utensils of clay” or even “perishable earthenware,” but in conjunction with the preposition ἐν the phrase must refer to jars or vases or pots made of clay; thus “earthenware containers” or “clay pots.” Such vessels were regarded as fragile²⁵⁹ and as expendable because they were cheap and often unattractive.¹²⁶⁰ So the paradox Paul is expressing is that although the container is

¹⁸BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979)

¹⁹³ Cf. BAGD 333a (citing 4:1, but not 4:7), “have = have someth[ing] over one, be under someth[ing].”

²⁰⁴ E.g., Plummer 126; Bruce 197.

²¹⁵ E.g., Lietzmann 115. To identify the treasure as “apostolic glory” (Cerfaux, *Christian* 339) is too restrictive.

²²⁶ E.g., Barrett 138.

²³⁷ E.g., Rissi 45; cf. Bultmann 112 (“the αθησαυρός is Paul’s διακονία as a διακονία τῆς δόξης”); Gräbe 148 (the treasure is “the ministry in the New Covenant, with everything pertaining to it: the proclamation of the gospel, the knowledge of the glory of God, the being changed, the enlightenment of the heart”); Savage 164 (the treasure is “the ministry of the gospel of the glory of God”).

²⁴⁸ BAGD 587c. On adjectives of material ending in -ίος, see Moulton and Howard 359.

²⁵⁹ In Ps. 30:13 (LXX) the psalmist laments that he has become “like a shattered pot” (ὡσεὶ σκεῦος ἀπολωλός).

²⁶¹⁰ Lev. 11:33 (LXX) stipulates that if an unclean animal falls into a σκεῦος ὀστράκινον (“clay pot”), everything in the pot will be unclean, and the pot must be smashed

relatively worthless (cf. σκεῦη ... ὀστράκινα in 2 Tim. 2:20), the contents are priceless. Although the gospel treasure is indescribably valuable, the gospel's ministers are of little value in comparison. In describing those to whom the gospel is entrusted (1 Thess. 2:4) as "earthenware vessels," Paul is not disparaging the human body or implying that the body is merely the receptacle of the soul (as in many Hellenistic texts).¹²⁷¹ For him the σκεῦος ("object," "vessel," "jar") was no more the container in which was placed the "treasure" of the ψυχὴ than the "outer person" was a detachable outer garment clothing "the inner person" (cf. 4:16). σκεύη refers to whole persons, who, although insignificant and weak in themselves, become God's powerful instruments in communicating the treasure of the gospel. ἵνα ἢ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν. "To make it clear that the extraordinary power is God's and not derived from us." This defines the purpose—also an achieved result—of the stated paradox. It is precisely because the proclaimers of the gospel are in themselves frail and fragile (witness vv. 8–9!), relatively insignificant and unattractive, that people clearly recognize that the transforming power (δύναμις) of the gospel is God's alone and that the strength (δύναμις) of its ministers to endure hardship comes from God alone.¹²⁸² This emphasis on the divine source of power and enablement is reminiscent of 1:1–10, 21–22; 2:17; 3:4–6; 4:1 and anticipates 12:9; 13:4.

Since ἵνα here marks a divine purpose, not an aim devised by Paul, it carries with it the implication that the purpose is achieved. If ἵνα ... ἢ referred to an aim that might or might not be realized, Paul could be suggesting that under different circumstances—if, for instance, the treasure had been lodged in a superior vessel—the transcendent power would proceed from a human source.¹²⁹³ Rather, the sense of ἢ is "may be seen to be": "in order that the surpassing greatness of the power may be seen to belong to God" (Weymouth), "to show the preeminent power as God's" (Martin 82),¹³⁰⁴ "so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God" (NRS³¹V).¹³²⁵ On the other hand, if ἵνα is actually consecutive rather than merely telic, ἢ will mean "is": "so that the immensity of the power is God's" (NJ³³B). If the abstract noun ὑπερβολή ("excess," "extraordinary character," "exceeding greatness," "preeminence," "immensity") is rendered adjectivally, several appropriate words could qualify

(συντριβήσεται). Similarly, a σκεῦος ὀστράκινον touched by a person with a discharge must be broken (συντριβήσεται) (Lev. 15:12). See further SB 1.861; 3.516; and Lambrecht, "Nekrosis" 314 n. 19. Manson finds in ὀστράκινα σκεύη an allusion to the small, cheap, and fragile pottery lamps sold in Corinth ("Suggestions" 156); cf. Savage 165–66.

²⁷¹¹ For example, commentators often cite Philo (*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Solet* 170): τὸ ψυχῆς ἀγγεῖον τὸ σῶμα, "the vessel that contains the soul, namely, the body"; cf. *De Somniis* 1.26.

²⁸¹² Thrall (324–25) rightly recognizes this double significance of δύναμις in 4:7.

²⁹¹³ Similarly Thrall 324 n. 923.

³⁰¹⁴ Similarly Plummer 127; Furnish 252; Thrall 320.

³¹NRSV New Revised Standard Version

³²¹⁵ Similarly TCNT, Moffatt, Goodspeed, Williams, Berkeley, RSV, NEB, GNB, JB, Barclay, NAB¹, NIV, REB. Cf. Lietzmann 114; Spicq, "Image" 229.

³³NJB New Jerusalem Bible

“power”: “transcendent,” “extraordinary,” “overwhelming,” “preeminent,” “incomparable.” In parallelism with ἐξ ὑμῶν, which unambiguously denotes derivation (“[not]¹³⁴⁶ proceeding from/originating in us”), τοῦ θεοῦ could convey the idea of origin, “may be seen to come from God” (TCN^{35T}),¹³⁶⁷ but the construction of εἶναι or γίνεσθαι τινος regularly denotes possession, as in 10:7 (Χριστοῦ εἶναι, “to belong to Christ”) and 1 Cor. 6:19 (οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐαυτῶν, “you do not belong to yourselves”), and this sense is to be maintained here.¹³⁷⁸ Because the gospel treasure has been entrusted to frail mortals who lack inherent power, the δύναμις displayed through preaching and in suffering is demonstrably divine and not human.

4:8–9 In these verses we have a list of trials (περιστάσεις) Paul experienced in the course of his ministry. Similar catalogues of hardships are found in Rom. 8:35–39; 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 6:4–10; 11:23–28; 12:10; Phil. 4:11–12. The literary background for Paul’s use of this device has been found in the Cynic-Stoic diatribe (Bultmann, 1910),¹³⁸⁹ Jewish apocalyptic literature (Schrage, 1974),²³⁹⁰ the OT and Jewish concept of “the afflictions of the righteous” (Kleinknecht, 1984),²⁴⁰¹ or the Greco-Roman depiction of the Stoic sage (Fitzgerald, 1988).²⁴¹² With regard to 4:8–9, some have derived the actual imagery from wrestling²⁴²³ (a possibility for v. 9b), others from the manhunt²⁴³⁴ (this proposal fits best with v. 9a), and yet others from military combat²⁴⁴⁵ (which may accord with v. 9b).

There are four balanced antitheses:

ἐν παντὶ	θλιβόμενοι	ἀλλ’ οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι,
	ἀπορούμενοι	ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι,
	διωκόμενοι	ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι,

³⁴¹⁶ When a ἵνα clause is continued by μή, μή alone is repeated (Robertson 1413).

³⁵TCNT Twentieth Century New Testament (1904)

³⁶¹⁷ Thus BAGD 225d; Robertson 514 (but cf. 497); *Pictures* 226.

³⁷¹⁸ Cf. Winer 195.

³⁸¹⁹ Through his 1910 dissertation, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (19), R. Bultmann popularized the German term *Peristasenkataloge* for these “catalogues of hardships” or “recitals of hazards.”

³⁹²⁰ W. Schrage, “Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer theologia crucis und Eschatologie,” *EvT* 34 (1974) 141–75.

⁴⁰²¹ K. T. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom “Leidenden Gerechten” und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984) 365.

⁴¹²² J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 30, 49–50. Two more recent studies, both of which appeared in 1991, are by M. S. Ferrari and M. Ebner (see the bibliography under 4:7–15).

⁴²²³ E.g., Spicq, “Image” 214–28, followed by Murphy-O’Connor 45.

⁴³²⁴ E.g., Allo 113–14.

⁴⁴²⁵ E.g., Plummer 129 (as a possibility).

καταβαλλόμενοι

ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι.

These eight participles, along with περιφέροντες in v. 10, may all depend on ἔχομεν (v. 7), indicating the circumstances attendant on the apostolic vocation, but it is better to view them as syntactically absolute, standing for the indicative. Such a grammatical usage seems to be typical of 2 Corinthians.²⁴⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the antitheses document what Paul has said in v. 7: the first element in each antithesis illustrates human weakness, the second illustrates divine power. The antitheses are stated as generalities, but behind each there stand numerous experiences that validate the general statement, as we shall see from Acts.

The negated second element does not indicate a mere mitigation of the hardship; rather, it points to an actual divine deliverance (cf. 1:8–9); not simply a change of outlook on Paul's part, but God's intervention. In each case, the second element is an intense or extreme form of the first (Tannehill 84), even when the two verbs seem to be synonymous.²⁴⁶⁷ This intensification is most clearly seen in the paronomastic ἀπορούμενοι ... ἔξαπορούμενοι (v. 8b).

Whether ἐν παντὶ is rendered locally ("on every side," "in every way") or temporally ("at all times"),²⁴⁷⁸ the phrase belongs with all four antitheses.²⁴⁸⁹ Windisch (143) aptly cites Theophylact: ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ καὶ τόπῳ καὶ πράγματι ("at all times and in every place and circumstance"). The constant nature of the afflictions is also reflected in the temporal adverbs πάντοτε (v. 10) and ἀεί (v. 11). Paul regarded suffering as intrinsic, not extrinsic, to his ministry (cf. 1:4–6; Gal. 6:17; Col. 1:24; Acts 9:16). So far from being an anomaly or a proof of the illegitimacy of his claim to apostleship (as some of his Corinthian opponents seemed to believe), his afflictions and hardships were the badge of his apostolicity, evidence that the power of God rested upon him.³⁴⁹⁰

Although participles are generally negated by μή in NT Greek, here four occurrences of οὐ are found. This apparent irregularity may be explained in two ways: οὐ is negating a single concept,³⁵⁰¹ and examples of οὐ with a participle in the papyri reflect "the lingering consciousness that the proper negative for a statement of a downright fact is οὐ."³⁵¹² This irregular, emphatic use of οὐ justifies those translations that render this particle by "never" in vv. 8–9.³⁵²³

4:8 ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι, ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔξαπορούμενοι.

"We are hard-pressed at every turn but not cornered, bewildered but not totally desperate."

The verb θλίβω, like its cognate noun θλίψις, can refer to physical, psychological, or spiritual pressure or affliction. Perhaps it occurs first in the list precisely because it is the most

⁴⁵²⁶ So also Hughes 141 n. 10 (citing 5:12; 7:5; 8:19–20, 24; 9:11, 13; 10:5, 15; 11:6).

⁴⁶²⁷ As in the case of the first pair, since their noun equivalents, θλίψις and στενοχωρία, are conjoined (not opposed) in 6:4 and Rom. 2:9; 8:35 (Furnish 254).

⁴⁷²⁸ Barrett combines both ideas: "At all times and in every way" (136, 138).

⁴⁸²⁹ So, e.g., Plummer 128, Bultmann 113.

⁴⁹³⁰ Cf. Kraftchick 630–31.

⁵⁰³¹ BDF §430[3]; BAGD 590b.

⁵¹³² Moulton 232; similarly Robertson 1137–38.

⁵²³³ TCNT (4 instances), Weymouth (4), Goodspeed (1), Williams (3), NEB (3), GNB (2), JB (4), Barclay (2), NAB¹ (3), NJB (3), REB (4), Cassirer (4).

comprehensive term available to denote any type of distress or tribulation. Although troubles pressed on Paul from every quarter, he never found himself crushed or cornered. *στενοχωρέω* refers to confinement in a restricted space in either a literal or a metaphorical sense. Because the power of God was active in preserving his life and his spirit, Paul never found himself in a plight from which there was no escape (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). Hampered on all sides—yes, but without room to breathe—no. Everywhere and at all times afflicted, but never at the end of his tether. Through divine intervention, he was always able to retain his buoyancy of spirit. Acts 18:12–17 illustrates this general truth. When the Corinthian Jews made a concerted attack on Paul and brought him before Gallio’s tribunal, he was not left without room to operate, for the proconsul dismissed the charge of religious sedition made against Paul, thus enabling him to continue his work in Corinth for “many days longer” (Acts 18:18 RS⁵³V) and his missionary endeavors in the eastern Mediterranean for the next decade (a.d. 52–62) “with the assurance of the benevolent neutrality of the imperial authorities.”³⁵⁴⁴

ἀπορούμενοι and *ἐξαπορούμενοι* are middles used as intransitive actives.³⁵⁵⁵ If *ἀπορέω* means “be at a loss,” in the case of *ἐξαπορέω* (see 1:8 for this verb) the “perfective *ἐξ* shows the *ἀπορία* in its final result of despair,”³⁵⁶⁶ “be totally at a loss.” Paul was frequently “perplexed, but not driven to despair” (RS⁵⁷V, NRS⁵⁸V), “bewildered, but never at our wits’ end” (RE⁵⁹B), “near-desperate but not wholly desperate” (Thrall 320), “at a loss but not completely baffled” (Barrett 136). It is difficult to reproduce Paul’s play on words. Denney suggests “put to it, but not utterly put out” (757). Hughes has “confused, but not confounded” (138 n⁶⁰. 7). We propose “at a loss, but not lost.” The instance from Paul’s life that readily comes to mind as an illustration of this claim is his traumatic experience in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8–10), for he himself admits that at that time he “despaired even of life” (*ἐξαπορηθῆναι ... καὶ τοῦ ζῆν*, 1:8), using the verb which here he negates! We may account for this apparent contradiction by observing that Paul’s Asian encounter with death, when he *did* despair, taught him that there was no need ever again to despair with regard to any circumstance, for “the God who raises the dead” (1:9) was well able to deliver his servant from even extreme peril, if he so chose. On this view, 4:8b states aphoristically the lesson Paul learned from the experience recorded in 1:8–10.

4:9 *διωκόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι, καταβαλλόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι.*

“Persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” In secular Greek *διώκω* regularly means “chase,” denoting the pursuit of an animal in a hunt or of the enemy in battle. Its meaning was naturally extended to refer to persecution, a sense it often bears in Paul’s letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6). The doubly compounded verb *ἐγ-κατα-λείπω* denotes the complete (*κατά*) desertion (*λείπω*, “leave”) of someone who is in

⁵³RSV Revised Standard Version

⁵⁴³⁴ Bruce, *History* 317; cf. his *Paul* 254–55.

⁵⁵³⁵ Cf. Turner 56.

⁵⁶³⁶ Moulton 237. On the perfective function of *ἐκ/ἐξ* in compound verbs, see Moulton and Howard 308–11; Robertson 596–97.

⁵⁷RSV Revised Standard Version

⁵⁸NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁵⁹REB Revised English Bible (1990)

⁶⁰n. note

(ἐν) a situation where aid is urgently needed.³⁶¹⁷ It is used in Jesus' cry of dereliction (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34, citing Ps. 21:2 LX⁶²X) and also of Paul's experience of being "left in the lurch" by Demas (2 Tim. 4:10) and by his potential supporters at his final trial (2 Tim. 4:16). Here the verb is reminiscent of God's repeated promise never to abandon his own people (e.g., LX⁶³X Gen 28:15; Deut. 31:6, 8; Ps. 36:25, 28). So Paul's statement means "we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God" (Barclay).³⁶⁴⁸ Acts 16:16–40 is a vivid example of the truth of Paul's statement. At Philippi, after being hounded for many days by a slave girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination, Paul exorcised the spirit, but he and Silas were then seized by the girl's owners, dragged into the agora, and charged before the local magistrates with creating a breach of the peace. There followed a beating and imprisonment. But so far from abandoning them to their fate, God miraculously intervened on their behalf through an earthquake at midnight, which led to the conversion of the jailer and his household, the release of Paul and Silas, and the public apology of the magistrates.

καταβάλλω was a technical term in wrestling ("throw down"), in boxing ("knock down"),³⁶⁵⁹ and in battle ("strike down").⁴⁶⁶⁰ Thus Barclay renders the antithesis, "We are knocked down, but not knocked out," and Plummer paraphrases, "beaten to the earth, yet not killed outright" (123). But this verb, along with ἀπόλλυμι ("destroy"), has such a wide range of applications that it is unwise to restrict either term or both terms to a particular type of adversity. So the preferable translation is "struck down, but not destroyed" (RS⁶⁷V, NRS⁶⁸V), or in Wand's paraphrase, "beaten to my knees, but not finished off," or, we may propose, "knocked to the ground, but not permanently 'grounded.'" The obvious illustration of this aphorism is Paul's stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19–20), when he was (literally!) struck down by a barrage of stones, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. On this occasion the divine aid came to Paul (at least in part) through the eager assistance of his converts in Lystra (Acts 14:20), so that (miraculously?) he was able to set out for Derbe the following day!

When these four pairs of antitheses are read, as they might be, as illustrations of the thematic statement in v. 7, it is clear that in Paul's estimation, this "hardship catalogue" demonstrates, not his virtuous character or his buoyant self-sufficiency or his steadfast courage amid adversity (as in the case, for example, of the Stoic sage), but his utter dependence as a frail human being

⁶¹³⁷ "καταλείπω *abandon* (perfective) is supplemented with ἐν, pointing to the plight *in* which the victim is left" (Moulton and Howard 305).

⁶²LXX Septuagint

⁶³LXX Septuagint

⁶⁴³⁸ If the background of the metaphor is taken to be a foot race, the meaning will be "pursued, but not overtaken" (Héring 31); if the manhunt, "hunted, but not caught up with" (Allo 113, 115, "pourchassés mais non dépassés"); if battle, "chased from the field, yet not left to the mercy of the foe" (Plummer 123).

⁶⁵³⁹ See Windisch 144; Spicq, "Image" 226.

⁶⁶⁴⁰ Plummer 129: "struck down, either ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ (2 Kings 19:7), or ἐν μαχαίρᾳ (Jer. 19:7), or any other weapon (Hdt. iv.64)."

⁶⁷RSV Revised Standard Version

⁶⁸NRSV New Revised Standard Version

on the superlative excellence (ὑπερβολή) of God's power.⁴⁶⁹¹ Also, it was not a case of divine power revealing itself as weakness or transcending and replacing human weakness, but of divine power being experienced in the midst of human weakness.

4:10 πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, ἵνα καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν φανερωθῆ. “We always carry around in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body.” Vv. 10 and 11 form a theological interpretation of the antitheses of vv. 8–9, so that the phrases ἡ νέκρωσις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (v. 10a) and εἰς θάνατον παραδίδόμεθα διὰ Ἰησοῦν (v. 11a) sum up and explain the experience of being “hard pressed,” “bewildered,” “persecuted,” and “struck down,” and ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (vv. 10b, 11b) accounts for Paul's preservation from being “cornered,” “totally desperate,” “abandoned,” and “destroyed.”

νέκρωσις occurs only here and in Rom. 4:19 in the Greek Bible. It may refer to the act or process of “putting to death” (thus “killing,” “slaying”),⁴⁷⁰² the process of “dying” or of “being put to death,” “death,”⁴⁷¹³ or the state of “deadness” (as in Rom. 4:19, of the “deadness” of Sarah's womb⁴⁷²⁴).⁴⁷³⁵ The first meaning is active (= θανάτωσις),⁴⁷⁴⁶ the second and third, passive (= τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν and θάνατος, respectively). In favor of the second meaning is the fact that physicians used the term to describe the “withering or mortification of the body or of a sick member.”⁴⁷⁵⁷ If νέκρωσις were merely a stylistic variant of θάνατος (as proponents of “death” as the meaning here tend to assume), one would have expected Paul to use his customary word for “death,” θάνατος, in v. 10, then νέκρωσις in v. 11. Perhaps Paul uses νέκρωσις in v. 10 to portray not a single event (the death of Jesus), but a prolonged process, the course of events leading up to Jesus' death (Meyer 496) or the daily trials and hardships that befell Jesus as an itinerant preacher,⁴⁷⁶⁸ either of which could be portrayed as his “being put to death” or “being given up to death” (cf. v. 11a) and would aptly foreshadow Paul's constant apostolic afflictions. That νέκρωσις depicts a process rather than an event also seems indicated by the precise parallelism between vv. 10 and 11,⁴⁷⁷⁹ so that v. 11a restates v. 10a: the νέκρωσις is nothing other than the ἀεὶ ... εἰς θάνατον παραδίδοσθαι (present tense). Paul faced perilous hazards every hour and death every day, as he says in 1 Cor. 15:30–31: “Why are

⁶⁹⁴¹ “While the message about justification and that about the cross focus on the *iustitia aliena* and *sapientia [sic] aliena* (Rm. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5), in the context of Paul's sufferings the emphasis falls on the *vis aliena*, the *virtus aliena*, the *vita aliena*” (Gräbe 153).

⁷⁰⁴² This meaning is defended by BAGD 535d; Meyer 495–96; Windisch 145; Barrett 139–40; cf. de Boer (102, “die Tötung”).

⁷¹⁴³ So, e.g., R. Bultmann, *TDNT* 4.895; Lambrecht, “Nekrosis” 309.

⁷²⁴⁴ Some witnesses (D it syr^{sin}) read νέκρωσις for πώρωσις (“hardening”) in Mark 3:5.

⁷³⁴⁵ So, e.g., Güttgemanns 114–17; Collange 154–55; Thrall 331–32.

⁷⁴⁴⁶ Thucydides 5.9.7.

⁷⁵⁴⁷ R. Bultmann, *TDNT* 4.895, citing Galenus 18.1. And Plummer (130) cites Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 1.5.4, where ἀπονέκρωσις denotes the process of mortification.

⁷⁶⁴⁸ Belleville, “Gospel” 142.

⁷⁷⁴⁹ See below on v. 11.

we in jeopardy every hour? Death is my daily companion!” (cf. Rom. 8:36).⁵⁷⁸⁰ But if the νέκρωσις is seen as a constant “being delivered up to death,” it is not merely the constant *danger* of death or “the daily liability to a violent death”⁵⁷⁹¹ which is envisaged, but the actual experience of “deadly” trials, any one of which could deal the final blow of physical death.⁵⁸⁰² On this view of νέκρωσις, τοῦ Ἰησοῦ is a possessive genitive, “the dying experienced by Jesus.” But for those who see in νέκρωσις a reference to the Christian’s once-for-all baptismal identification with Christ in his death (Rom. 6:3–5),⁵⁸¹³ the daily mortification of the sinful nature (Gal. 5:24; cf. Luke 9:23), or the gradual weakening of physical powers as a result of serving Christ (4:12, 16a), the genitive τοῦ Ἰησοῦ is “general” or relational, simply indicating the appurtenance of the believer’s νέκρωσις to the earthly or risen Jesus.

περιφέρω is certainly an appropriate term for the peregrinations of an itinerant missionary such as Paul, but there is no allusion here to his missionary journeys; περι- simply means “here and there, wherever we go.” Like the participles in vv. 8–9, περιφέροντες should be treated as syntactically independent, functioning as an indicative, especially since it supports a subordinate ἵνα clause (v. 10b). τῷ σώματι in v. 10a and v. 10b is a distributive singular (“our bodies”) (Turner 24).

In v. 10b, whether καί (“also”) is taken with the telic ἵνα or with ἡ ζωή, it points to the simultaneity of the περιφέρειν and the φανερωθῆναι. Just as the two elements in the four antitheses of vv. 8–9 are simultaneous, so also the νέκρωσις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (v. 10a) and the ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (v. 10b) are coincident in the experience of Paul and his fellow workers. ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ refers to the immortal life of the risen Jesus, not the earthly life of the historical Jesus. It is both the life that belongs to Jesus (possessive genitive) by virtue of his resurrection (Rom. 6:9–10) and the life that is imparted by Jesus (subjective genitive) through his Spirit (3:6; Rom. 8:2). This life of Jesus is intimately related to the power of God (v. 7), for both were operative in the preservation of Paul’s body and spirit (vv. 8–9). Perhaps Paul regarded God’s power as being exhibited (ἦ, v. 7) through Jesus’ risen life, which in turn was displayed (φανερωθῆ, vv. 10–11) “in” Paul’s body, that is, by the recurring deliverances from despair and death he experienced. Now it is true that the final display of Jesus’ resurrection life will occur when, as the deliverer (σωτήρ), he will transform the lowly bodies of believers by giving them the appearance and character of his own glorious body (Phil. 3:20–21). But any allusion to the resurrection here is decidedly secondary,⁵⁸²⁴ because νέκρωσις and ζωὴ are primarily concurrent present realities,

⁷⁸⁵⁰ Gal. 6:17 (ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω) is similar in thought to 2 Cor. 4:10, but narrower in reference. The στίγματα were only one instance of the νέκρωσις.

⁷⁹⁵¹ Vincent 820; similarly Louw and Nida (§23.99): “Paul was constantly in danger of dying in the same manner in which Jesus died, that is to say, by violence.”

⁸⁰⁵² But this is not to deny that for Paul “behind the physical suffering lay a ‘dying with Christ’ which gave it meaning” (Barrett 140). Proudfoot has rightly observed that “Paul knows suffering as a *participatio Christi* and not as an *imitatio Christi* only” (160).

⁸¹⁵³ For a discussion of this view, see Thrall 332–34. She herself sees the significance of the περιφέρειν of the νέκρωσις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ as “primarily revelational” (334).

⁸²⁵⁴ Pace Lietzmann 115–16; Guntermann 65; Barrett 140. But v. 14 leads Hodge (95) to believe that a reference to the resurrection is included in v. 10.

and resurrection will be a μετασχηματισμός (cf. Phil. 3:21) of the body rather than a φανέρωσις in the body.

In this verse, then, Paul is making two important affirmations regarding Christian experience. First, the resurrection life of Jesus is evident at precisely the same time as there is a “carrying around” of his dying. Indeed, the very purpose of the believer’s identification with Jesus in his sufferings is to provide an opportunity for the display of Jesus’ risen life. Second, one and the same physical body is the place where the sufferings of Jesus are repeated and where his risen power is manifested.⁸³

7. Ἔχομεν. The Apostle again and again dwells upon the goodly *possessions* of the Christian, and especially of the Christian minister; πεποιθήσιν τοιαύτην (3:4), τοιαύτην ἐλπίδα, (3:12), τ. διακονίαν ταύτην (4:1), θησανρόν τοῦτον (4:7), τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως (4:13), οἰκοδομὴν ἐκ Θεοῦ (5:1), πάντα (6:10), ταύτας τὰς ἐπαγγελίας (7:1); and he often builds an argument upon these goodly possessions.

Ἔχομεν δὲ τὸν θησαυρὸν τοῦνον. The δὲ marks the contrast between the glory on which he has been enlarging and the humiliations about to be described; *‘But there is a great deal to be said on the other side.’* The contrast is skilfully drawn: 1. it confirms the declaration that the preachers do not preach themselves, for in themselves they are despised and persecuted; 2. it works round to a conclusion which is much in favour of the Corinthians (vv. 12–15). *‘This treasure’* is the illumining power of the knowledge of Divine glory. The power is limitless, but it is stored in very unlikely receptacles.

ἐν ὄστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν. The expression σκεῦος ὄστράκινον occurs four times in Leviticus, and ἄγγος or ἄγγειον ὄστρ is common elsewhere in LXX. Here we have to determine the literal meaning of σκεῦη and from this to reach the metaphorical use. The word in its literal sense has a wide range. Articles of furniture in a house (Lk. 17:31), differing greatly in value and use (Rom. 9:21–23; 2 Tim. 2:20), are σκεῦη. Not only a vessel for holding things (Jn. 19:29), but a sheet (Acts 10:11), is a σκεῦος. A σκεῦος is inanimate; it is an instrument or implement, as distinct from a ζῶον (Plat. *Rep.* x. 601 D, *Gorg.* 506 D). It is doubtful whether σκεῦος in its literal sense ever means a body its metaphorical sense in N.T. is commonly assumed to be taken from the meaning *‘vessel,’* but this is not always correct. In Acts 9:15, σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς, *‘a vessel of election,’* *‘a chosen vessel,’* should rather be *‘an elect instrument.’* In 1 Pet. 3:7, ὡς ἄσφενεστέρῳ σκεύελ, *‘as to the weaker vessel,’* should rather be *‘as to the weaker chattel’*: both husband and wife are articles of furniture in God’s house, and one of them is stronger than the other. In 1 Thess. 4:4 the meaning of τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος remains doubtful and does not help

⁸³ Murray J. Harris, [*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 339–347.

us here. In this passages ‘vessel’ is certainly right; treasure was frequently stored in earthen jars, a fact of which Wetstein gives numerous illustrations.^{84*}

If the treasure is the illumining power of the knowledge γῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ, what are the vessels in which it does its work? We perhaps give too limited an answer when we say, ‘the *bodies* of the chosen ministers.’ It is quite true that the human body is often spoken of as a mean vessel or vase which holds the much more precious mind or soul. It is one of those metaphors which are so obvious as to be inevitable. Cicero (*Tusc. Disp.* i. 22), *vas animi*. Seneca (*Ad Marciam Consolatio*, 11) *Quid est homo? Quodlibet quassum vas, et quodlibet fragile ... imbecillum corpus, ad omnem fortune contumeliam projectum*. Philo (*Quod deterius potiori inside. sol.* § 46), τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγγεῖον, τὸ σῶμα. And again (*De Migr. Abr.* § 35) ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἡμέτερος νοῦς περιέχεται ὡς ἐν ἀγγεῖῳ τῷ σώματι. See also the parallel Wisd. 9:15. Marcus Aurelius (x. 38) bids us remember that what is within the vessel, τὸ ἐνδον ἐγκεκρυμμένον is the real ἄνθρωπος, and τὸ περικείμενον ἀγγειῶδες ought not to be included. Chrys., Thdr., and others think that the ὀστρ. σκεῦος here means the human body, and that the epithet ‘earthen’ refers to man being made of the dust of the earth. The reference to the creation of light in v. 6 makes such an allusion not impossible; but in that case we should have expected Χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς (Gen. 2:7) to have suggested either χοϊκός (1 Cor. 15:47), or γηγενής (Wisd. 8:1), or γήινος, rather than ὀστράκινος. Gideon’s ὑδρεῖαι (Judg. 7:16, 19) have no epithet, and they were used to hide light. Tertullian understands the vessels here as meaning bodies; he translates (*De Res. Carn.* 7, 44) *in testaceis vaseulis or vasis*, and adds *scilicet in carne*. Vulg. has *in vasis fictilibus*.

But it is not impossible that here the σκεῦος is the whole personality. It was in the man as a whole, and not in his body in particular, that the Divine treasure which was to enrich the world was placed to be dispensed to others. In this work the body was indispensable, but it was not the only factor. The participles in vv. 8–10 apply partly to the body and partly to the mind, and they apply more to the former than to the latter, because the metaphors are taken from bodily contests; and the epithet ὀστράκινους indicates the general unattractiveness and insignificance of the men who preached the Gospel, and not merely the fragile character of their bodies. The metaphor of earthenware as representing human beings is common in O.T. (Is. 29:16, 30:14, 45:9, 64:8; Jer. 18:6; Lam. 4:2; Job 10:9), and in such passages it is the whole man, and not merely his body, that is contemplated. Cf. 4 Esdr. 4:11; *quomodo poterit vas tuum capere Altissimi viam?* The epithet here is chosen because of the treasure, inestimable worth in a worthless vessel; and ὀστράκινος is sometimes used in the sense of worthless. Epictetus applies ὀστράκινος to discourse, opinions, pursuits, desires; “Your utensils,” he says, “are of gold, and your discourse of earthenware,” χρυσᾶ σκεύη, ὀστράκινον δὲ λόγον κ.τ.λ (*Dis.* iii. 9).

ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ᾗ τοῦ Θεοῦ. ‘(In order) that the exceeding greatness (12:7) of the power may be God’s and not from us.’ Here ‘may be’ means ‘may be seen to be,’ φανῆ or εὔρεθῆ in Rom. 3:4, γινέσθω is used in the same sense, and in Rom. 7:13, γέννηται Cf. οὐκ ἄφ’

^{84*} The words are repeatedly quoted by Jeromoe, who tells Eustochium that her mother Paula often repeated them; *In languoribus et crebra infirmitate dicebat, Quando infirmaor, tunc fortior sum. Et, Hobemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus* (*Ep.* cviii. 19). He often quotes St Paul as the *vas elections*.

ἐαυτῶν ... ὡς ἐξ ἐαντῶν (3:5). 'Of God and not of us' (AV) obliterates the difference between τοῦ Θεοῦ and ἐξ ἡμῶν. 'May be perceived to belong to God and not to originate with ourselves' is the meaning. *Dei, non modo ex Deo; deus non modo largitur virtutem, sed semper praestat* (Beng.). The reading ἐκ τ. Θεοῦ (Baljon and others) is pure conjecture. By ὑπερβολή (see on 1:8) is meant that the power is a great deal more than is sufficient for its purpose; it triumphs over all opposition. The δύναμις is the power of his preaching (1 Cor. 2:4), with which we may perhaps couple the power of his miracles, and certainly that of his endurance,—all the power which produced the conversion of so many in spite of such great obstacles. *Ut sublimitas sit virtutis Dei, et non ex nobis* (Vulg.) is misleading, the sit being misplaced. It is possible to translate 'that the exceeding greatness may be of the power of God and not from ourselves,' but the position of ἧ̃ is against it, and ὑμερβολή without further definition is awkward; superabundance of what? Those who take the sentence in this way give very different answers to this question. Elsewhere Jerome takes the more probable construction; *ut abundantia fortitudinis nostrae sit ex Deo et non ex nobis* (Con. Pelag. iii. 9). So also Augustine; *ut eminentia uirtutis sit Dei et non ex nobis* (Serm. 169, 12). God designed that the power in spreading the Gospel should be recognized as His; He therefore chose humble instruments who could not be supposed to have produced such effects by their own powers.

8–10. The rhythm in these three verses is clearly marked by the balance of the clauses. We have four illustrations of the way in which the frailty of the instruments might have been fatal to any other cause, but in this case were not allowed to be so. The fifth instance is different. They are all taken from the Apostle's own experience.

8. ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι. We have the same words in 7:5; 'in everything pressed.' In 1:6 it was necessary to translate θλιβόμεθα 'are afflicted,' because of the frequent 'affliction' in that passage. But here the radical signification of 'pressure' (Mk. 3:9) must be retained, because of στενοχωρούμενοι. The pressure is that of persecution (1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:6, 7; Heb. 11:37). The indefinite ἐν παντί is to be understood with all the pairs of participles. Chrys. paraphrases, 'in respect of foes and friends, of those who are hostile and those who are of one's own household.' Ἐν παντί occurs ten times in 2 Cor. Elsewhere in Paul, 1 Cor. 1:5 only.

οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι. 'Not in hopeless straits,' not in a plight from which extrication is impossible: *nunquam deest exitus* 1 Cor. 10:13; *in inuis vias salutis invenimus*; ἐν ἀπόροις πράγμασιν πόρους εὐρίκομεν σωτηρίας (Thdrt.) He is speaking of external difficulties, not of mental anxiety: that comes next.

Here we have οὐ with a participle (which is rare in N.T.) four times in two verses; but there are eight other examples in the Pauline Epistles; see on 1 Cor. 9:26; J. H. Moulton, p. 231; Blass, § 75.5. We have στενοχωρία Rom. 2:9, 8:35.

ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι. Once more a play upon words (see on 1:13); 'in despondency, yet not in despair'; *indigemus, sed non perinde indigemus* (Tert. *Scorp.* 13).^{85*} There may be the greater anxiety and perplexity, so that one does not know what to do, and yet confidence that all will end well. Such a state of mind is quite compatible with expectation of death (see on 1:8).

^{85*} Herveius, thought he knows better, suggests for ἀπορούμενοι, laborando sudamus nam poros etc.

9. Διωκόμενοι, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔλκαραιπόμενοι. 'Pursued by men (1 Cor. 4:12), yet not forsaken by God.' 'Pursued by foes, yet not left in the lurch by friends' (Plat. *Symp.* 179 A), might be the meaning, but it has less point. The ruling idea throughout is that God manifests His power in His servants' weakness. Whatever hostile agents, whether human or diabolical, may do, the earthen vessels are able to bear the shock and continue to render service. In LXX, the verb is used of the Divine promise; οὐ μὴ σε ἐγκαταλείπω (Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:5; cf. Deut. 31:6, 8).

καταβαλλόμενοι, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι. 'Struck down, yet not destroyed'; struck down, either ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ (2 Kings 19:7), or ἐν μαχαίρᾳ (Jer. 19:7), or any other weapon (Hdt. iv. 64). It is probable that the last two illustrations, and possible that all four, are taken from combatants in battle or in the arena; 'hard pressed, yet not hemmed in; in difficulties, yet not in despair; pursued, yet not abandoned; smitten down, yet not killed.' But ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι must not be understood of being left behind in a race, nor καταβαλλόμενοι of being thrown in wrestling. The four form a climax.

10. The fifth illustration sums up the preceding four, and carries the climax to the supreme point, 'always dying, yet always alive.' The four kinds of suffering are condensed as ἡ νέκρωσις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, and the four kinds of deliverance as ἡ ζωὴ τ. Ἰ. The emphatic ΠΑΝΤΟΤΕ repeats the emphatic ΠΑΝΤΙ (v. 8) and anticipates the emphatic Αἰΐ (v. 11), from which it should be distinguished in translation; 'at all times' (2:14, 5:6, 9:8).

τὴν νέκρωσιν τ. Ἰ. The meaning of this 'putting to death of Jesus' is explained (γάρ) in the next verse. The missionaries were perpetually being delivered unto death for Christ's sake. They were never free from peril. Enemies were always seeking their lives, as they sought His life, and to a large extent the enemies in both cases were Jews. All this He and they endured, because it was so decreed in accordance with the will of God. They shared His sufferings, including the process which in His case ended in death, and which at any time might so end in their case (see on Phil. 3:10 and 1 Cor. 15:31). This shows that St Paul taught his converts details in the history of Jesus, especially His sufferings ending in death. Here he assumes that they know. In this late Greek the different shades of meaning attached to terminations become somewhat indistinct. See on 1:12, 14 and on 9:10. Here νέκρωσις has the old force of indicating a process, whereas in Rom. 4:19 νέρωσις means 'deadness' rather than 'putting to death' or 'deadening.' Epictetus says that most people take all means to prevent the mortification (ἀπονέκρωσις) of the body, while few care much about the mortification of the soul (*Dis.* 1:5). The Apostle's life, like the Lord's, was a perpetual martyrdom, ending at last in actual putting to death; with this difference, that Christ knew, up to the arrest in Gethsemane, that His hour was not yet come, whereas St Paul had no such knowledge.

Here again the Apostle expresses in mystic and paradoxical language his union with Christ. In his frail, weary, battered person he ever bears the *dying* of Jesus, in order that the *life* also of Jesus may be exhibited to the world. This may mean that the frequent deliverances from difficulty, danger, and death are evidence that the Crucified is still alive and has Divine power; cf. 1:5; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:13, 5:1.^{86*} See on 1 Pet. 3:18, p. 161. Thdrt. and others explain the ἴνα

^{86*} F. A. Clarke (*Sermons*, p. 158) puts it thus; "As Christ's weakness and dying on the Cross opened the gate to a new and glorious life, so in the living death of His servant,

... φανερεθῆ of the hope of a future resurrection and immortality. But ἐν τῇ φνητῇ σαρκὶ ἡμῶν in v. 11, which paraphrases v. 10, compels us to confine the explanation to this life. From the repetition of τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (see on v. 5) we see that St Paul does not separate the historic Jesus from the glorified Christ. To him it is the same Jesus.^{87†} Bengel thinks that St Paul repeats the name Jesus, because *singularitur sensit dulcedinem ejus*. That thought inspired St Bernard's "Joyful Rhythm," *Jesus dulcis memoria*, well known through Caswall's translation, "Jesu, the very thought of Thee," and the *Jesu dulcedo cordium* of the Paris Breviary; to which we may add Newton's "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" (*Olney Hymns*, No. 57, ed. 1779): but it may be doubted whether it is the cause of the repetition here. The point here is that the dying and living of one and the same Jesus are found in one and the same servant of Jesus. In περιφέροντες we have an allusion to missionary journeys.⁸⁸

4:7 Paul begins this unit by announcing that we have this treasure in jars of clay. He writes in 5:1 that "we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."⁵⁴⁸⁹⁷ That building is for a time yet to come. Now is the time for earthen vessels (4:7), affliction (4:17), and being away from the Lord (5:6).⁵⁴⁹⁰⁸ In this aeon treasure is stored and carried in earthen pots. Paul does not specify what he means by treasure. He could have in mind "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (4:6), but that would also include the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (4:3–4) that is so priceless and cherished by all Christians. It is more likely that means light revealed by the gospel than by his apostolic ministry (3:7–9; 4:1). But the treasure may also include his ministry since he describes it in terms of proclaiming the gospel of the glory of God (3:18; 4:4, 6). He understands himself to be a vessel that contains and conveys a message.⁵⁴⁹¹⁹

the cross-bearing in the mortal flesh, there would be made manifest the vigour of an immortal life, the undying energy of faith and love."

^{87†} Only here and in Eph. 4:21 does St Paul put the article before Ἰησοῦς.

⁸⁸ Alfred Plummer, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1915), 125–131.

⁸⁹⁵⁴⁷ See also the verb "to have" in 3:4, 12; 4:1, 13.

⁹⁰⁵⁴⁸ J. Koenig, "The Knowing of Glory and Its Consequences (2 Corinthians 3–5)," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John*, ed. R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 166.

⁹¹⁵⁴⁹ Paul does not have in view that the body is the vessel for the soul or mind (see, e.g., Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I.xxii. 52; Philo, *On Dreams* 1.26; *Migration of Abraham* 193). The word "soul" (ψυχή) does not occur in 4:7–5:10 at all (and only appears in 1:23 and 12:15). Since the vessel suffers psychological distress, Paul does

The term earthen vessels (*ostrakinoi skeuē*) implies something fragile, inferior, and expendable. Picturing himself as an ordinary, everyday utensil conveying an invaluable treasure is as striking an image as Paul's picture of himself as a defeated but joyous prisoner marching in God's triumphal procession (2:14).⁵⁵⁹²⁰ Such an image underscores his weakness. An earthen vessel is "quintessentially fragile," prone to breakage, easily chipped and cracked.⁵⁵⁹³¹ A breakable vessel offers no protection for the treasure (except from dust and water). The image therefore serves to emphasize the contrast between Paul's own pitiful weakness and the great power of God. Second, the image highlights Paul's lowliness. He does not depict himself as an object d'art such as an exquisitely crafted Grecian urn, or bronze vessel, or delicate goblet with gold inlay. He has in mind earthenware jars or, perhaps, the small, cheap pottery lamps. Neither were things of beauty. They lacked any outward luster in contrast to the treasure, and their cheapness would

not consider it to be something solely corporeal (Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:323).

⁹²⁵⁵⁰ The image does not derive from some Gnostic metaphor for the contemptible nature of the human body (W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971] 160–62). Nor does it derive from Cynic-Stoic imagery of humans as weak and perishable vessels (J. Dupont, ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ. *L'union avec le Christ suivant St. Paul: Ière partie: 'avec le Christ' dans le vie future* [Bruges: Éditions de l'Abbaye de Saint André, 1952] 120–24.) E.g., Seneca wrote that our body is a "vessel that the slightest shaking, the slightest toss will break.... A body weak and fragile, naked, in its natural state defenceless ... exposed to all the affronts of Fortune; ... doomed to decay" (*To Marcia* 11.3). But Furnish points out that Paul has no intention to contrast the mortal body to the immortal soul (*II Corinthians*, 278). It most likely is that the image derives from Paul's intimacy with the OT, which begins by avowing that God formed man from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7; see 1 Cor 15:42–48) and typically views God as a potter (Job 10:9; 33:6; Isa 29:16; 41:25; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1–10; Rom 9:21–23). The image of God as potter is even more prominent in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 11:22; 1QH 1:21–23; 3:20–21; 4:29; 10:5; 11:3; 12:24–31; 13:15–16).

⁹³⁵⁵¹ J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogue of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 167–68. The fragility of the clay vessel is the point of comparison in Job 4:18: "If God places no trust in his servants, / if he charges his angels with error, / how much more those who live in houses of clay, / whose foundations are in the dust, / who are crushed more readily than a moth!" See also Lam 4:2: "How the precious sons of Zion, / once worth their weight in gold, / are now considered as pots of clay, / the work of a potter's hands!" and Isa 30:14: "It will break in pieces like pottery, / shattered so mercilessly / that among its pieces not a fragment will be found / for taking coals from a hearth / or scooping water out of a cistern." Also Jer 19:1, 10–11: "This is what the LORD says: 'Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate.... Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.'"

disguise the fact that they contained anything valuable at all.⁵⁵⁹⁴² The contrast would emphasize the priceless value of the treasure compared to Paul's relative worthlessness. What the earthen vessel contains is the only thing that gives it importance.

Third, the image highlights Paul's expendability. Earthen vessels had no enduring value and were so cheap that when they were broken no one attempted to mend them. They simply discarded them. Broken glass was melted down to make new glass; an earthenware vessel, once hardened in a kiln, was nonrecyclable.⁵⁵⁹⁵³ Easily broken, they were also easily replaced and not worth repairing. But the vessel is essential. A later rabbinic tradition makes this comparison: Just as wine cannot keep well in silver or gold vessels, but only in the lowliest of vessels—earthen ones—so words of Torah do not keep well in one who considers himself to be the same as silver or gold vessels, but only in one who considers himself the same as the lowliest of vessels—earthen ones.⁵⁵⁹⁶⁴

One therefore should not take Paul's image to mean that ministers are cheap and worthless, though they tend to be regarded or treated that way by the world and even by other Christians. Paul knows that as a minister of the new covenant he is a bearer of good tidings, a glorious divine treasure, even for those who despise him. In 2 Tim 2:20–21 he writes: "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work." Solomon's drinking vessels were said to be made of gold (2 Chr 9:20). The vessels into which God pours his treasure are not gold but clay, made from the dust of the earth. They are not only sufficient for the job (see 2:16; 3:5); they are far more valuable than a golden receptacle because of the treasure they contain. But they are also vital because the medium is the message.

The image of clay jars expresses the wisdom of God, who "chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong, the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are (1 Cor 1:27–28). Why put treasure in an earthen pot, and divine treasure at that? To show that the treasure has nothing to do with the pot, "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." The result is that no one, including apostles, may boast before God

⁹⁴⁵⁵² C. Maurer refers to a story in the Talmud (*b. Ta'can. 7a*) in which the Roman emperor's daughter mocks the outward ugliness of a rabbi by saying "glorious wisdom in a repulsive vessel" ("σκεῦος," *TDNT* 7:360). Plummer cites Epictetus (*Dissertations* III.9.18), who told a visiting rhetorician that his utensils (vessels, σκεύη) are made of gold but his discourse (word) is made of earthenware (ὄστράκινον τὸν λόγον; *The Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 127).

⁹⁵⁵⁵³ According to Jewish purity laws, it was impossible to render an earthen vessel ritually clean when it became defiled, so it was simply broken and discarded (Lev 6:28; 11:33–34; 15:12). A rabbinic tradition makes an argument about whether a heretic can be reformed from the premise that broken potsherds cannot be joined together again. Only vessels that have not yet been baked may be reformed (*Gen. Rab.* 14:7).

⁹⁶⁵⁵⁴ *Sipre Deut.* 48 to 11:22 (R. Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986] 193).

(1 Cor 1:29). Paul's image therefore captures "the paradox of his ministry: the glorious gospel borne about by those who are comparatively inferior, the powerful gospel by those who are weak."⁵⁵⁹⁷⁵ He basically admits to being a cracked pot, one rejected, and afflicted, and subject to destruction. But "his weakness and vulnerability is necessary to the proper conveyance of the treasure of the gospel."⁵⁵⁹⁸⁶ All can see that the power he imparts for the salvation of the world (Rom 1:16) does not derive from him but from God alone.

Paul continues his defense for exercising his apostolic right to criticize frankly the Corinthians by first pointing out that his all too conspicuous weakness that so annoys some of them is divinely intended to highlight God's strength. God houses this treasure in such lowly vessels so that others may see the true wellspring of the treasure and power and know that God can mightily use anyone. Paul has been talking of the sufficiency, glory, and boldness of his ministry, but the danger is that one (and particularly the Corinthians) might be tempted to reverence the conveyer of this spiritual power rather than the divine source. Putting this treasure in unremarkable household articles keeps "the pretensions and accomplishments" of the gospel's ministers from obscuring the fact that the power does not belong to them.⁵⁵⁹⁹⁷ Paul confesses that no one looking at him would mistake him for something grand or be so taken by his grace and comeliness that they would then miss the source of power that was working in and through him to reconcile the world. In this way he undercuts his showy, bombastic, and pretentious rivals, whose manner was so different from his.

Second, Paul would affirm that God's power is only manifest in humans in their weakness and shame. Savage asks why Paul wrote "is" (*ē*, present subjunctive) in v. 7 rather than "might be manifest" or "might appear" or "might be found." He suggests that the answer is that Paul means to say that "it is only in weakness that the power may be of God." Paul's weakness "in some sense actually serves as the grounds for divine power."⁵⁵¹⁰⁰⁸ If that is so, then 12:1–10 provides a helpful commentary on this verse: "The very existence of Christ's power in Paul was conditioned on the apostle's prior humility and weakness."⁵⁵¹⁰¹⁹ Human arrogance and pride make unwelcome divine power because "divine power does not manifest itself by making the believer powerful." Paul will make this clear in 12:9, where he claims that "power does not drive out weakness; on the contrary, it only comes to its full strength in and through weakness."⁵⁶¹⁰²⁰ Paul therefore contends that he is most powerful when he is least reliant on his own resources and power.⁵⁶¹⁰³¹

⁹⁷⁵⁵⁵ Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 166.

⁹⁸⁵⁵⁶ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:324.

⁹⁹⁵⁵⁷ Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering*, 56.

¹⁰⁰⁵⁵⁸ Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 166.

¹⁰¹⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁰²⁵⁶⁰ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 329.

¹⁰³⁵⁶¹ B. Beck relates the circumstances surrounding the rebuilding of a bombed medieval church in London with just one wall and parts of two others left standing. One person in favor of rebuilding the church vociferously argued: "God must triumph in every situation. Never must he come off second best. That includes not letting terrorism triumph at St. Ethelburga." Beck thinks it would be a better witness to the gospel if the church were left a ruin. God does triumph: "But he does so precisely through the

Third, v. 7 prepares readers for Paul's list of hardships that follows. If such a brittle vessel can survive intact the knocks and bangs that his ministry provokes, the credit does not belong to the durability of the pot but to the sustaining power of God. This, Paul would say, is the only explanation of why he has not been destroyed by all his afflictions. The afflictions have caused some stress fractures in the earthen vessel, but it remains whole because a divine glue holds it together.

Sadly for Paul, some in Corinth have failed to perceive any of this significance. Their response to him (see 1 Cor 4:8–13) is little different from the world's response to his message of Christ crucified, which is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor 1:23). Paul looks like a fool even though he is one for Christ's sake. He is weak, disreputable, hungry, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, and easily dismissed as refuse and the dregs of all things (1 Cor 4:1–13). He hardly serves as an attractive endorsement for the advantages of becoming a Christian. They would, perhaps, more readily accept the counsel and censure of someone with a more regal bearing and a greater show of wisdom, strength, and honor. The Corinthians have therefore failed to see God's power at work in Paul's suffering, which suggests that they have failed to grasp the full meaning of the cross. They had differing views about how divine power should manifest itself in an apostle; and some apparently were asking, How can such a worthless vessel claim to be the agent for the glory of God? Plummer comments, "Those who get the treasure should not mock the shabby appearance of the vessel which brought it to them."⁵⁶¹⁰⁴² But more important, they should be able to see through the shabby appearance and behold God's glory in the one who suffers as Christ did.

When God entrusted apostles with the eternal treasure of the gospel, he did not endow them with immunity from illness, torment, or other human afflictions. The jar does not protect the treasure, nor the treasure the jar. But Paul's metaphor breaks down at this point. The treasure contained within can sustain them through every affliction, and his list of hardships makes this very point.

In contrast to the lists of hardships that appear later in the letter he speaks here in generalities. In 6:4–10 and 11:23–27 his lists become more specific: floggings, stonings, mobbings, imprisonments, labors, shipwrecks, muggings, sleeplessness, exposure, thirst, and hunger. These experiences of hardship in carrying out his ministry generated Paul's listing of his afflictions rather than some intent to follow a presumed literary pattern of hardship catalogs. The parallels with other Greco-Roman authors who recounted their hardships, however, reveals that Paul's readers would have been familiar with such catalogs. Horsley contends: "Because life was difficult for the vast majority of people in antiquity it is not surprising that the variety of adversities encountered was a common literary and philosophical preoccupation."⁵⁶¹⁰⁵³

ruination of the cross, which stands forever in its starkness to witness what he has done" ("Reflections in 2 Cor 5:11–6:2," *Epworth Review* 21 [1994] 92).

¹⁰⁴⁵⁶² Plummer, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 43.

¹⁰⁵⁵⁶³ G. H. R. Horsley, "Review of Fitzgerald's, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*," *AusBR* 37 (1989) 83–84.

Therefore we should be cautious before accepting the claim that Paul is adopting a rhetorical convention in listing hardships to vouch for his legitimacy as an ideal sage.⁵⁶¹⁰⁶⁴

The attitudes of other ancient moralists toward their hardships, however, help to throw in sharp relief Paul's distinctive attitude toward his afflictions. He differs significantly from the Cynic and Stoic philosophers of his day.

1. They appealed to their maltreatment or adversity to prove their superiority over circumstances. Epictetus believed that difficulties (*peristaseis*) "show what men are."⁵⁶¹⁰⁷⁵ What they endured exhibited their true grit and moral constancy. For Paul hardships do not disclose what humans are made of but what God's power is like. They lay bare human weakness and reveal that the power, beyond all comparison, belongs entirely to God and not to any human however gallant he or she might be. While the sage claims to know his own strength and is full of self-confidence because of his self-sufficiency, Paul never boasts of his own stamina, self-discipline, or fortitude.⁵⁶¹⁰⁸⁶ He can take no credit and knows that the gospel does not

¹⁰⁶⁵⁶⁴ Horsley's review of Fitzgerald's *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel* sharply critiques it for identifying a literary catalog of hardships everywhere an allusion to suffering surfaces and for being indiscriminating ("an omnium gatherum approach") in the selection of passages (ibid., 82–87). For earlier research on tribulation lists, see A. Fridrichson, "Zum Stil des paulinischen Peristasenkatalogs. 2 Kor. 11, 23ff.," SO 7 (1928–29) 25–29; and "Peristasenkatalog und res gestae: Nachtrag zu 2 Kor. 11, 23ff.," SO 8 (1929) 78–82, who argued that the Greco-Roman descriptions of the wise sage is the primary background. For those who see the OT and Jewish apocalyptic as primary in determining the content, if not the form, of the catalog of trials, see Collange, *Énigmes*, 149; W. Schrage, "Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton: Die Peristasenkataloge als Merkmale paulinischer theologia crucis und Eschatologie," *EvT* 34 (1974) 141–75; and K. T. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte. Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom 'leidenden Gerechten' und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus*, WUNT 2/13 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1984) 208–304. R. Hodgson recognizes that Paul was not circumscribed by Stoic philosophy or by Jewish apocalyptic ("Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists," *ZNW* 74 [1983] 59–80); and S. R. Garrett argues that Paul was influenced by both Stoic philosophy and the Jewish tradition as reflected in the *T. Job* ("The God of This World and the Affliction of Paul: 2 Cor 4:1–12," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* [ed. D. L. Balch, et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990] 99–117). Paul's direct quotation from Ps 115:1 (LXX) in 4:13 and Isa 49:8 in 6:2 would argue that the OT provides the primary framework for his understanding of his tribulations. On Paul's view of his suffering, see also E. Kamlah, "Wie beurteilt Paulus sein Leiden?" *ZNW* 54 (1963) 217–32; and C. G. Kruse, "The Price Paid for a Ministry Among Gentiles: Paul's Persecution at the Hands of the Jews," in *Worship, Theology, and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. M. J. Wilkens and T. Paige (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 260–72.

¹⁰⁷⁵⁶⁵ Epictetus, *Dissertations* I.24.1.

¹⁰⁸⁵⁶⁶ Seneca wrote: "What element of evil is there in torture and in the other things which we call hardships? It seems to me that there is this evil,—that the mind sags, and bends, and collapses. But none of these things can happen to the sage; he stands erect

depend on human strength for its success. If he is stouthearted in the face of tribulation, it is only because of God's comfort and grace. Paul therefore knows only God's strength and is confident only in God (1:9–10).

2. The Stoic and Cynic philosophers referred to their hardships to show how such troubles had no impact on their philosophic equilibrium or serenity. They assumed that an individual gained inner strength from holding philosophical convictions that enable one to endure hardships and be happy. For Epictetus, difficulties are overcome by reason and courage.⁵⁶¹⁰⁹⁷ He wrote: "Show me a man who though sick is happy, though in danger is happy, though dying is happy, though condemned to exile is happy, though in disrepute is happy. Show him!... I fain would see a Stoic!"⁵⁶¹¹⁰⁸ By contrast, Paul does not think that some intellectual creed gives him the edge in overcoming suffering, and he never speaks of personal happiness.⁵⁶¹¹¹⁹ Again, it is God's power as revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus that energizes and reinforces him. Consequently, he thinks only in terms of service (4:5), faith (4:13), hope (4:14), thanksgiving (4:15), bringing glory to God (4:15), and the desire to make God happy (5:9). His abundant joy comes as a by-product from giving himself to his Lord, who loved him and died for him, and from giving himself to others.

3. In contrast to others, Paul does not downplay his suffering as trifling and make it a matter of indifference. Harvey comments: "The Stoic philosopher—and still more the Cynic—prided himself on his indifference to physical and mental suffering, and would often give a recital of what he had been through in order to demonstrate the power of the philosophy to make one able to rise above such purely external and short-term vicissitudes."⁵⁷¹¹²⁰ Paul regarded his suffering as inconsequential only when compared to the eternal glory that awaits him (4:17). In the meantime he freely confesses that he is not untouched by despair (1:8; 4:8), sleeplessness, or anxiety (11:27–28). He is not dispassionate about what has happened to him and has prayed fervently to God for things such as the thorn in the flesh to be removed (12:8). He does not believe that nothing is disastrous if only one has the right attitude toward it (such as apathy). The vocabulary in his list has affinity with the language of the suffering righteous one found in the Psalms (see 4:13) and the suffering servant in Isaiah (see 6:2).⁵⁷¹¹³¹ In contrast to secular

under any load. Nothing can subdue him; nothing that must be endured annoys him" (*Moral Epistles* 71.26).

¹⁰⁹⁵⁶⁷ Epictetus, *Dissertations* IV.7.6–15.

¹¹⁰⁵⁶⁸ Epictetus, *Dissertations* II.19.24. Plutarch wrote that the wise sage "is not impeded when confined, and not under compulsion when flung down a precipice, and not in torture when on the rack, and not injured when mutilated, and is invincible when thrown down in a wrestling and is not blockaded under siege, and is uncaptured while his enemies are selling him into slavery ("Conspectus of the Essay," *Moralia* 1057D).

¹¹¹⁵⁶⁹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 282.

¹¹²⁵⁷⁰ Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering*, 15–16.

¹¹³⁵⁷¹ See C. M. Pate, *Adam Christology as the Exegetical and Theological Substructure of 2 Corinthians 4:7–5:21* (Lanham/New York: University Press of America, 1991) 92–96.

writers, Paul, like the psalmist, “speaks of deliverance, not of inward immunity.”⁵⁷¹¹⁴² What he goes through weighs him down with a crushing load of sorrow, but he is buoyed by the supreme assurance that God will deliver him through the suffering, if not from it. He also knows that, as an apostle, God may deliver him but only to suffer another day. Ultimate deliverance must await the moment when God will raise him with Christ.

This last point may be the most important for understanding Paul’s purpose in listing his adversities. He is not simply trying to prove his legitimacy, to evoke empathy, or to show that he heroically risks “all for the gospel and for his congregations.”⁵⁷¹¹⁵³ He wants those who see him only as “crushed, despairing, forsaken, or destroyed” to take a closer look. All his suffering has not destroyed him, not because he has made himself immune to it but because he rests secure in the hands of God, who upholds him. He faces rejection and dejection, but nothing will ever ultimately defeat him or destroy him because of God’s love and power. To be sure, such an outlook on hardships accords with the view of Epictetus that God endows the individual with the internal strength “to enable us to bear all that happens without being degraded or crushed thereby.”⁵⁷¹¹⁶⁴ But Paul’s thought is primarily determined by Scripture and Christ’s death and resurrection. The list therefore recalls the biblical motif of God helping the righteous. Daniel responds to the king, who asks:

“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” ... “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king” (Dan 6:20, 22).⁵⁷¹¹⁷⁵

Paul responds to his detractors that his suffering does not discredit his ministry. Instead it attests to the power of God as he conforms his life to the cross of Christ. Roetzel’s observations are helpful: “Ambiguous in their bare form, therefore, afflictions could be read either as signs of weakness, alienation, mortality, baseness, failure, and even divine rejection; or they could be viewed as symbolic participation in the death of Jesus (4:10).”⁵⁷¹¹⁸⁶ Paul interprets his suffering, “the dark side of human experience,” as but the dark side of the cross that leads to resurrection. The catalog of experiences in 4:8–9 are presented in terms of dying and remaining alive and are directly connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus in 4:10–11. Even though Paul may look like death, his suffering is really the way to life and the way God has chosen to reveal and spread the gospel.⁵⁷¹¹⁹⁷

¹¹⁴⁵⁷² Ibid., 329. The attitude found in *T. Jos.* 1:3b–7 is therefore closer to Paul’s with its emphasis on God’s saving acts.

¹¹⁵⁵⁷³ Against Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 388.

¹¹⁶⁵⁷⁴ *Epictetus, Dissertations* I.6.40. He also said that trials are necessary “because he [God] is training me, and making use of me as a witness to the rest of men” (*Dissertations* III.24.113). Paul understood his trials similarly but saw the witness of his sufferings as pointing away from himself to Christ and to God’s redeeming power.

¹¹⁷⁵⁷⁵ “For the Lord does not abandon those who fear him, neither in darkness, or chains, or tribulation, or direst need” (*T. Jos.* 2:4).

¹¹⁸⁵⁷⁶ Roetzel, “As Dying, and Behold We Live,” 9.

¹¹⁹⁵⁷⁷ In 4:10–11, the word “life” occurs three times.

4:8–9 The four pairs of participles set in antithesis in 4:8–9 illustrate what Paul means about being fragile and how power comes from God to save him. The NI¹²⁰V translates the phrase “in every way being afflicted” (*en panti thlibomeoni*) as applying only to the first contrast rather than all four; and since the exact phrase appears in 7:5, this rendering may be correct. But it may also apply to all four afflictions as outlined in our structure of the passage. The first term, “being afflicted,” recalls Paul’s opening reference to his recent affliction in Asia, which nearly dealt him a deathblow (1:8); and the theme of affliction dominates the letter. The noun “affliction” (*thlipsis*) appears nine times (1:4 [2x], 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13) and the verb (*thlibein*) three times (1:6; 4:8; 7:5). The fragile vessel is therefore “afflicted in every way,” but the divine power goes to work, and he is “not crushed.”⁵⁷¹²¹⁸ The noun form of the verb “crush” (*stenochōria*) is used as a synonym for affliction, but the verb here means “being confined or pressed.” The REB aptly translates it “hard-pressed but never cornered.” He is not crushed internally. His internal spirit is not gasping for breath.

The fragile vessel is “perplexed” (REB, “at wit’s end”). Paul is not stoical about all of his troubles. He confesses to discouragement (see 1:8; Gal 4:20). Bauckham recognizes that such feelings can descend on any minister:

Even without the physical dangers of Paul’s career, anyone who throws himself into the work of Christian ministry of any kind with half the dedication of Paul will experience the weakness of which Paul speaks: the times when problems seem insoluble, the times of weariness from sheer overwork, the times of depression when there seem to be no results.⁵⁷¹²²⁹

But the divine power comes into play, and he is “not driven to despair.” It is difficult in English to capture Paul’s play on words *aporoumenoi—exaporoumenoi*. The *ek* is perfective: “perplexed to the final degree,” and it may be paraphrased “stressed, but not stressed out.”⁵⁸¹²³⁰

The fragile vessel is “persecuted,” but the divine power engages, and he is not “forsaken” (NI¹²⁴V, “abandoned”), that is, by God. The same verb “forsaken” translates Jesus’ cry on the cross (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46, quoting Ps 22:1). Paul knows from his experiences that God does not abandon his own (Deut 4:31; 31:6, 8).⁵⁸¹²⁵¹ That is why Paul is not crushed, despondent, or destroyed, even when the Corinthians seemed to have abandoned him. God sustains him through it all and enables him to continue to speak for God (4:13). Paul also knows that in death God will not abandon him but will raise him (4:14; 2 Tim 4:16–17).

¹²⁰NIV New International Version

¹²¹⁵⁷⁸ The negative οὐ appears with the participles when we would normally expect μή. The οὐ may be intended to make the antithesis more emphatic: “by no means” (so Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 166; Savage, *Power through weakness*, 171; and Robertson, *Grammar*, 1137–38). Thrall, however, contends that it reflects the absolute use of the participle standing in the place of the indicative (see 5:12; 7:5; 8:19–20, 24; *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:326).

¹²²⁵⁷⁹ R. Bauckham, “Weakness—Paul’s and Ours,” *Themelios* 7 (1982) 5–6.

¹²³⁵⁸⁰ Furnish tries to capture the play on words with the translation “despairing, but not utterly desperate” (*II Corinthians*, 254).

¹²⁴NIV New International Version

¹²⁵⁵⁸¹ See also Gen 28:15; Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:5; 1 Chr 28:20; Pss 16:10 (LXX); 36:25, 28 (LXX); Jer 15:20; Sir 2:10; and Heb 13:5. See Hab 3:17–18.

The fragile vessel is “struck down.” The verb *kataballein* can mean “laid low by a blow or a weapon, abused or bullied, cast off or rejected, stricken with an illness, or even slain.”⁵⁸¹²⁶² In his persecutions Paul suffered physical violence many times, but the divine power is always at work so that he is knocked down but never knocked out (Phillips).

The assorted and sundry blows have caused some obvious stress fractures in this earthen vessel, but it remains intact because it is held together by God. Fitzgerald helps us to see the theological thrust of Paul’s argument:

Viewed as a whole, then, the hardships that Paul lists in his catalog have, as it were, caused cracks in him as an earthen vessel, but the vessel itself remains intact. The vessel is held together by the power of divine adhesive, and the light that shines (4:5–6) through these cracks is none other than the light of the life of Jesus (4:10–11).

God’s use of a fragile, cracked vessel such as Paul is explicable only in light of the divine folly displayed in the crucifixion. God’s action vis-à-vis Paul’s weakness is consonant with God’s action in Christ. Indeed, it is precisely because his ministry exhibits the disparity between lowliness / weakness and exaltation / power found in the cross that it is itself a part of the message about Christ that he proclaims.⁵⁸¹²⁷³ Meeks points out that it is less precise to refer to this disparity as paradoxical.

That is, things ordinarily taken as signs of weakness are not simply redefined as powerful because they emulate the weakness of the crucified Jesus, although some of the statements by Paul may plausibly be taken that way. More often the pattern is dialectical or sequential: the Christ was first weak, then powerful; so too the Christians are weak and afflicted today but will be vindicated and glorious.⁵⁸¹²⁸⁴

It bears repeating that through the cracks the divine light shines to enlighten others. If Paul were a superman, faster than a speeding bullet and able to leap over tall buildings with a single bound, he could hardly proclaim the message of the cross. His weakness and God’s power working in and through his weakness, however, is consonant with the folly of the cross. Christ crucified is not only his message, but it is also his model. He has become the suffering apostle of the suffering Messiah. We can learn from his example that ministers do not have to be wonderful, just faithful. Many labor under the enormous burden of trying to be wonderful in the eyes of others rather than simply trying to minister to them. Many a minister suffers burnout from trying to run a sparkling program, keeping up attendance while keeping down conflict, and preaching catchy sermons instead of preaching Christ. Paul knew suffering beyond the imagination of many but endured because he also knew the power of the resurrection (13:4). Most persons of average piety would be broken by such adversity. Yet piety does not rally him; it is the power of God at work within him. The task demands all he can give. And when he has given his all and finds it is not enough, God’s power carries him through. This truth prevented Paul from thinking that he could do it all alone. But it also prevented him from avoiding doing anything except what was cautiously safe to avoid looking weak or like a failure. He knew that God works even through his limitations and failures. As one controlled by the love

¹²⁶⁵⁸² Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 255.

¹²⁷⁵⁸³ Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 176.

¹²⁸⁵⁸⁴ W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 182.

of Christ, he dared to reach beyond his limits because he trusted God’s power to redeem all that he did.

4:10–11 Paul sums up his apostolic ministry with these words: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus.” In 4:11 Paul comments on what he says in 4:10.⁵⁸¹²⁹⁵ Paul’s normal term for death is *thanatos* (see 1:9–10; 2:16; 3:7; 4:12; 7:10; 11:23). The term “death” (*nekrōsis*) is stark and may signify putrefying flesh that is stiff, swollen, and eaten away. It can refer to the process of either dying or decay or the final condition of death (see Rom 4:19). Perhaps Paul has both ideas in mind. He refers to the physical death and suffering of Jesus on the cross that is replicated in his own dying and being crucified with him (Gal 2:19). Paul’s suffering continues to reveal God’s saving activity as he carries around Christ’s death and displays it for all to see. It is possible that he depicts himself here as the pallbearer of Christ.⁵⁸¹³⁰⁶

Duff offers the intriguing suggestion that Paul is using the imagery of Greco-Roman epiphany processions in which the devotees sought to attract attention and new converts to their cult with a parade. Such pageantry grew increasingly lavish, as devotees carried the symbols, sacred objects, and images associated with the rites and the saving action of the god or goddess. If Paul has such common religious spectacles in view, he employs another striking metaphor for evaluating his sufferings.⁵⁸¹³¹⁷ It parallels his other reference to a procession, the Roman triumph, in 2:14.

who always (time element)	always
leads [us] in triumph (procession)	carrying around the dying of Jesus
us in Christ (involvement of Paul)	in our body
and (conjunction)	so that
the scent of his knowledge	the life of Jesus
[he] manifests through us.	may be manifested in our bodies.

In contrast to the ostentatious golden vessels used in pagan processions, the gospel is unimposing and needs no swanky window dressing or pomp and circumstance.⁵⁸¹³²⁸ The danger

¹²⁹⁵⁸⁵ J. Lambrecht, “The *NEKRŌSIS* of Jesus: Ministry and Suffering in 2 Cor 4, 7–15,” in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL 112 (Leuven: University Press, 1994) 326.

¹³⁰⁵⁸⁶ So Fitzgerald, drawing the parallel between a νεκρόφορος and the verb περιφέροντες (*Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 178).

¹³¹⁵⁸⁷ P. B. Duff, “Apostolic Suffering and the Language of Processions in 2 Corinthians 4:7–10,” *BTB* (1991) 158–65.

¹³²⁵⁸⁸ Duff cites Plutarch’s complaint about gaudiness of processions so that the important elements of the rite are “buried under what is useless and superfluous.” (“Apostolic Suffering,” 161).

of such displays is that people will be so distracted by all the tinsel and glitter of the vessel that they will ignore what the vessel contains.

Paul is an earthen vessel, and his life and dying point to Christ. He does not strive to imitate Christ's sufferings as Ignatius did (see *Ign. Rom.* 6:3), but the sufferings of Christ are working themselves out in his life.⁵⁸¹³³⁹ Harvey comments: "Physical debility and decay, instead of being in apparent contradiction to the promise of life proclaimed in the gospel, are now found to be a means by which the believer identifies with Jesus in his final hours of dying and so makes 'manifest' the new life which was the consequence of that death."⁵⁹¹³⁴⁰ Paul preached Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23), and his life and ministry are conformed to Jesus' humility and shame.⁵⁹¹³⁵¹ Consequently, his suffering "because of Jesus" should not be disparaged. For Paul, his "apostolic suffering and fragility are not just human pain caused by opposition and persecution. No, the dying of Jesus himself is present in it, visible in the body of the apostle."⁵⁹¹³⁶²¹³⁷

4:7. The message of salvation and the results it produces are glorious and divine. By contrast the bearer of the message is a mere mortal person. The contrast is like a great **treasure** contained in common **jars of clay**. A deepening sense of his own unworthiness, compared with the grandeur of his message, characterized Paul's life (cf. Eph. 3:7–9). God intended this sharp contrast so that no one would question the source of the gospel and its **all-surpassing power**. Salvation is the work of **God** not men (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5; 3:7).

4:8–9. In his earlier letter Paul had compared himself and his fellow apostles to "men condemned to die in the arena" (1 Cor. 4:9). The metaphors employed here evoked the same imagery to describe the demands of the ministry, contrasting human helplessness on one hand with divine enablement on the other. The contrasts include physical (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8–9; 6:5, 9) as well as psychological affliction (cf. 6:4, 8; 7:5–6). **Hard-pressed** is the participle *thlibomenoi*, related to *thlipsis* ("trouble, pressure, hardship"; cf. 1:4). Interestingly the words **perplexed** and **in despair** render two similar Greek words: *aporoumenoi* ("despairing") and *exaporoumenoi* ("totally despairing"). Without God's intervention these troubles would have broken Paul (cf. 1:8–10).

¹³³⁵⁸⁹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 285.

¹³⁴⁵⁹⁰ Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering*, 59.

¹³⁵⁵⁹¹ The verb παραδιδόμεθα ("handed over," "given over," NIV) is part of the tradition that Paul passed on to the Corinthians about Jesus' death with the phrase "the night he was handed over" (1 Cor 11:23; see Mark 9:31; 10:33). Paul's statement γὰρ ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες εἰς θάνατον παραδιδόμεθα ("we who are alive are given over to death") closely parallels Isa 53:12: παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ("his soul is given over to death").

¹³⁶⁵⁹² Lambrecht, "The *NEKRŌSIS* of Jesus," 325.

¹³⁷ David E. Garland, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 220–232.

4:10–11. The paradoxes in verses 8–9 dramatically contrast the weakness which marked the humiliation of Jesus’ earthly life and the power associated with His heavenly exaltation (13:4). In 1 Corinthians Paul had said the content of his message is “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23). In this letter he referred to his own life as a demonstration of this humiliation, a constant reminder that through human weakness the power of God is seen to greatest effect (2 Cor. 12:9–10). In his own **body** he carried **around ... the death of Jesus**, that is, he suffered intensely for Jesus and bore physical scars resulting from wounds inflicted by beatings and a stoning because of his testimony **for Jesus’ sake** (cf. 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 6:5, 9; 11:23–25; Gal. 6:17). He was **always being given over to death**, that is, he constantly faced death (cf. 2 Cor. 1:9). Paul noticed that God usually chose weak people to serve Him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26–29). He subsequently argued for the genuineness of his apostleship on the basis of his sufferings (2 Cor. 11:23–24) and his weakness (11:30; 12:5).

However, **the life of Jesus** was also **revealed in Paul’s body**, that is, it was evident that he was alive spiritually (cf. 4:16). By means of these experiences his transformation into Christlikeness advanced (3:18).¹³⁸

¹³⁸ David K. Lowery, [“2 Corinthians.”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563–564.