

2 Corinthians 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

Analysis

For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause—Eite gar exestēmen, Theō; eite sōphronoumen, hymin (εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῷ· εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν). Existēmi (ἐξίστημι) means "to be out of one's mind, ecstatic, beside oneself"—possibly referring to mystical experiences (12:1-4), speaking in tongues, or apostolic zeal misinterpreted as fanaticism. Sōphroneō (σωφρονέω) means "to be of sound mind, sober, reasonable."

Paul's point: whether experiencing spiritual ecstasy or exercising rational sobriety, his orientation is pure. Ecstatic experiences are between Paul and God (Theō, dative—"for God")—private devotion, not public display. Sober teaching serves the Corinthians (hymin, dative—"for you")—practical edification. This answers critics who either dismissed Paul as irrational fanatic or condemned him for lacking impressive spiritual manifestations. Paul refuses to weaponize private spiritual experiences for public credibility, demonstrating ministerial maturity.

Historical Context

Corinthian culture prized ecstatic religious experiences, particularly in goddess cults and mystery religions. Some Christians apparently valued spectacular spiritual manifestations (tongues, prophecy, visions) as status markers (1 Corinthians 12-14). Paul consistently subordinates spectacular gifts to love and edification while affirming their legitimacy (1 Corinthians 14:18).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Do you parade private spiritual experiences to gain credibility, or reserve intimate encounters with God for Him alone?
2. How do you balance pursuit of authentic spiritual experience with sober, rational service to others?
3. Are you tempted to judge ministers by spectacular manifestations rather than faithful teaching and character?

Interlinear Text

εἴτε	γὰρ	ἐξέστημεν	θεῷ.	εἴτε
or whether	For	we be beside ourselves	it is to God	or whether
G1535	G1063	G1839	G2316	G1535
σωφρονοῦμεν	ὑμῖν			
we be sober	it is for your cause			
G4993	G5213			

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 12:6 (Parallel theme): For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

2 Corinthians 12:11 (Parallel theme): I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

2 Corinthians 11:1 (References God): Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.

Romans 12:3 (References God): For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

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