

2 Corinthians 5:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

Analysis

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him—Philotimoumetha (φιλοτιμούμεθα, "we make it our ambition, we earnestly strive") comes from *philos* ("loving") and *timē* ("honor")—literally, "to be honor-loving," meaning ambitious pursuit of what brings honor. Paul's supreme ambition: *euarestoi autō einai* (εὐάρεστοι αὐτῷ εῖναι, "to be well-pleasing to Him").

Whether present or absent—eite endēmountes eite ekdēmountes (εἴτε ἐνδημοῦντες εἴτε ἐκδημοῦντες)—covers both earthly life and heavenly existence. The goal isn't escaping this world but pleasing Christ in both realms. Paul balances otherworldly hope (vv. 1-8) with present ethical responsibility (v. 9). Faith in future glory doesn't produce passivity but energizes present obedience. The verb is present tense—ongoing, continual pursuit. This grounds Christian ethics: behavior is motivated not by fear of punishment but desire for Christ's approval, grounded in assured future glory.

Historical Context

Greek culture was driven by *philotimia*—love of honor and competitive pursuit of glory. Paul baptizes this cultural value: redirect honor-seeking from human approval to divine pleasure. This counters Corinthian preoccupation with status and Paul's critics who judged by worldly standards (v. 12). True honor is Christ's "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What ambitions currently drive your daily decisions—how do they compare to Paul's singular ambition to please Christ?
2. How does knowing you will stand before Christ's judgment seat (v. 10) affect your choices today?
3. What specific changes would manifest in your life if pleasing Christ became your supreme ambition above comfort, security, or human approval?

Interlinear Text

διὸ	καὶ	φιλοτιμούμεθα	εἴτε	ἐνδημοῦντες	εἴτε
Wherefore	that	we labour	or	present	or
G1352	G2532	G5389	G1535	G1736	G1535
ἐκδημοῦντες	εὐάρεστοι	αὐτῷ	εῖναι		
absent	accepted	of him	we may be		
G1553	G2101	G846	G1511		

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 1:10 (Parallel theme): That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Romans 14:18 (Parallel theme): For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

2 Peter 3:14 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

1 Timothy 4:10 (Parallel theme): For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

Genesis 4:7 (Parallel theme): If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (Parallel theme): And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Isaiah 56:7 (Parallel theme): Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

Acts 10:35 (Parallel theme): But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Romans 14:8 (Parallel theme): For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Romans 15:20 (Parallel theme): Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: