

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrew 04: 09-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. This week we'll be reading Hebrew chapter 4, and today we'll read from verse 9 to verse 12.

The author of Hebrews references the history of the Israelites to explain what God's rest is. This rest is a promise given by God to His people, but the Israelites in the Old Testament did not obtain it. Those who followed Moses out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea but perished in the wilderness never entered the promised land of Canaan. They did not receive true rest. Even the Israelites who followed Joshua into the promised land, up until the time of David, while they received an inheritance in the land and were no longer wandering in the wilderness without a settled home, still did not obtain true rest.

Verse 09-10: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."

Here, the author draws a conclusion that the true rest promised by God—referred to by the author as the "the rest of the Sabbath rest"—was not attained by the Israelites in the Old Testament. Instead, this rest is reserved by God for His people. So, what exactly is this "the rest of the Sabbath rest"? The author provides a definition: God rested from all His works on the Sabbath, and for God's people to experience this Rest, they too must cease from all their works. Only then can they experience true rest.

We know that the Old Testament is a picture, and this picture serves as a foreshadowing. The reality is revealed in the New Testament. By systematically examining the correspondence between the foreshadowing in the Old Testament

and its fulfillment in the New Testament, we can attempt to understand what this "rest" truly represents in the New Testament.

The Israelites being enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt serves as a foreshadowing of humanity being enslaved by Satan in the world. Pharaoh used the power of Egypt to enslave people, while Satan uses the power of sin and death to hold people in bondage. The Israelites' observance of the Passover, their exodus from Egypt, and their crossing of the Red Sea prefigure a person accepting the salvation of Jesus Christ, being baptized, and thereby, in position, leaving the dominion of the world.

The Israelites, due to their unbelieving and evil hearts, witnessed many of God's works in the wilderness but failed to understand His ways. Consequently, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and ultimately perished there. This symbolizes some Christians who, after being baptized, fail to sustain the faith they had at first. While they may know of God's works, they do not progress to understanding His principles. As a result, their souls remain restless and unsettled, unable to find a place of rest, much like those who fail to settle into the church as their spiritual home. Although these individuals are recipients of grace and salvation, few among them achieve victory. However, it is important not to arbitrarily conclude that those who did not enter Canaan were all failures, as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam also did not enter. Nevertheless, in general, New Testament Christians who, after baptism, fail to consistently participate in church gatherings and ministry find it difficult to become overcoming Christians.

Crossing the Jordan River with Joshua and entering the promised land symbolizes the experience of believers who, after believing and being saved, undergo baptism, journey through the wilderness, and allow their old self to be dealt with to some extent—symbolically buried in the Jordan River. This enables the new self to follow Christ and settle into the life of the church. This is far better than the Christians who, after baptism, do not attend gatherings or engage in church life. However, even these individuals may not yet attain true rest. True rest is found in completely laying down one's own works, taking on the yoke of the Lord, and carrying His burden. In such a person, only the Lord's work is present, and their own efforts are absent. Only those who live in this way can enjoy true rest.

Verse 11: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

The author speaks to the Hebrew saints, as well as to those today who gather in the church, serve in the church, and have settled their lives within the church community. The author encourages us to diligently strive to enter that rest, lest anyone follows the example of unbelief and falls. Here, we encounter what seems to be a contradictory message: entering rest involves ceasing from all our own works, yet it requires diligence to do so. The ideas of diligence and ceasing work appear to be opposites.

How, then, are we to strive diligently to enter into the rest of ceasing from our own works? The true answer lies in verse 12, which provides a response that completely changes our perspective. Many interpreters, constrained by their theological frameworks, have offered various distorted explanations in an effort to rationalize or preserve their theological constructs. These numerous differing interpretations have made verse 12 one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. Therefore, before we delve into verse 12, we need to lay some groundwork to better understand its profound meaning.

In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." While many Chinese translations render this as "you will find rest in your heart," the English Bible more accurately translates it as "rest for your soul." The word used here is "soul," not "heart," indicating that it refers to the soul rather than the heart. Therefore, a more precise translation would be, "you will find rest in your soul." The secret to having rest in the soul lies in taking up the Lord's yoke and bearing His burden. Within our spirit, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, so finding rest in the spirit is usually not an issue.

However, our soul encompasses our mind, emotions, and will. These faculties of the soul are often influenced by the world, which interacts with the body, and are frequently drawn by the desires of the flesh. This leads to an affection for worldly things, which in turn influences the mind to rationalize things that should not be

loved. Consequently, the will becomes indecisive and wavering, leaving the soul without rest. Thus, true rest requires ceasing from our own works. This means stopping our natural struggles and efforts, particularly those connected to the flesh and its desires. Instead, we are to learn from the Lord, take up His yoke, and bear His burden.

But our experience tells us that it is truly difficult to stop. The natural self is so powerful that it is hard to restrain what it wants to do. For this reason, the author of Hebrews exhorts us to strive. Notice, this striving is not about forcing oneself to stop acting out of the natural self, because that is essentially impossible. If you don't believe it, you can try. Tell yourself to strive not to think about things you shouldn't think about, or strive not to eat things you shouldn't eat. Perhaps you can succeed once or twice, but it is impossible to sustain in the long term. Therefore, the author urges us to strive to do only positive things.

In chapter 3, the author has already mentioned two things we must hold firmly to the end, and these are the things we must strive to do. The first is in 3:6, which says, "But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." This can also be translated as "holding fast the assurance and boasting of hope to the end." We all hope that one day we will follow our Captain of Salvation, Jesus Christ, into glory. We must have confidence in this hope and frequently speak of it to the saints around us, holding this hope firm to the end. If we strive in this way, we will indeed become God's house.

The second striving is found in Hebrews 3:14: "For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end." This striving involves continually holding firmly to the confidence we had at the beginning. This faith helps us to draw upon the grace of Christ, enabling us to persevere to the end. By striving in this way, we can partake of Christ in life, in nature, and in expression. We become companions of Christ, even sharing in partnership with Him. When we reach this point, we will be able to take up the Lord's yoke and bear His burden, and our souls will find rest.

Verse 12: “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Since striving to enter that rest is indeed difficult, the author, under the revelation of the Holy Spirit, writes about this wonderful realm. The key to entering true rest is to separate the soul from the spirit, and only God’s Word can help us accomplish this separation.

Here, we will first discuss the structure of man. In theological discussions about human composition, whether in dualism or trichotomy, philosophical and cultural traditions are often referenced. However, let us set these aside and look simply at the biblical passages, as this is God’s most direct revelation and speech. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul blesses the Thessalonian saints, hoping they would be fully sanctified, meaning their entire being—spirit, soul, and body—would be preserved by God. Paul clearly tells us that a complete person involves these three aspects: spirit, soul, and body.

The body is our means of interacting with the material world, and this is an experience everyone has daily. Therefore, the distinction between the body and the spirit and soul doesn’t require much explanation, as everyone understands it. However, the distinction between the spirit and the soul is not so easy. Brother Watchman Nee, in his book *The Spiritual Man*, gathered all the scriptures that mention the soul and the spirit, and summarized the primary functions of the soul and the spirit. The soul has three main functions: emotions, mind, and will. The emotions, according to your nature, tell you whether you like or dislike certain people, things, or situations. The mind, in your reasoning, considers things. The will is the final decision made after balancing emotions and thoughts.

The soul is relatively clear to us, but the spirit is the means by which humans communicate with God. The human spirit also has three main functions: conscience, intuition, and fellowship. These three functions correspond to the three

functions of the soul: conscience corresponds to the will, intuition corresponds to the mind, and fellowship corresponds to the emotions. This scripture compares the soul and spirit to the joints and marrow, indicating that the spirit is contained within the soul, just as marrow is contained within the bones.

Of course, on the outermost layer, there is the human body. The actions of the body are governed by the soul. When something happens, the emotions in the soul are usually the first to activate, letting you know whether you like or dislike something. Then the mind starts to weigh the consequences of doing or not doing something. After the mind and emotions reach a certain balance, the will makes a decision about whether to act and, if so, how to act. Because every person has a different natural character, the final balance point and the decisions made will naturally differ.

In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God warned Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because eating from it would surely bring death. After Adam ate, he did not die immediately, but he lived for another 900 years before dying. The death God spoke of was the death of his spirit, meaning his spirit lost its function and could no longer communicate directly with God. Adam was then driven out of the Garden of Eden. All of Adam's descendants were born with a spirit that had no function, retaining only a small sense of conscience in the spirit. Therefore, those who are not saved are relatively simple, as their spirit is not functional. Their soul is then governed by the needs and desires of the body.

And outside of man, there is the world constructed by Satan. The system of this world is divided in 1 John 2:16 into three aspects: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These correspond exactly to the three aspects of human needs: emotions, thoughts, and will. A person who is not saved, living in the world system built by Satan, balances his body's needs with the rules of this world system. This creates a mode of operation for emotions, thoughts, and will, which becomes that person's spiritual world, entirely unrelated to God. The person's spirit is dead and has not been activated. Interestingly, religion is also part of this spiritual world. Religion is a product of human thought, while God is beyond religion, higher than it.

Of course, believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:45, "The last Adam, who is Christ, became a life-giving spirit." This spirit enters into the human spirit, activates it, and the human spirit receives life. The human spirit is within the soul, and the interface between the spirit and soul is the conscience. The spirit can influence the soul through the conscience. The soul is originally governed by the body, and the body is influenced by the world system. This forms the old man. However, after being saved by grace, the soul can be influenced by the human spirit, and the spirit is governed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is the new man.

At this point, a person becomes truly complex. The soul can follow the flesh, or the soul can follow the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul says in Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." The word "lust" in the King James Version is translated as "flesh" in English, so it can also be translated as "the flesh." This clearly tells us that the Spirit is at odds with the flesh, and they constantly fight for dominance over the soul. When the soul follows the flesh, it leads to death, but when the soul follows the Holy Spirit, it leads to life and peace. This is when a person can have true rest.

Because the soul has become accustomed to following the flesh, it often cannot distinguish whether the influence is from the Holy Spirit or from the flesh. Therefore, there is a need to separate the soul from the spirit, and this separation requires God's word. This verse tells us that God's word is living, full of life, and capable of enlivening people, giving them life perception and sensitivity. In John 6:63, Jesus says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." Thus, God's word is not only living, bringing a rich sense of life and awareness, but it is also effective, filled with power to bring about operation and yield results.

God's word is sharper than any two-edged sword, as described in Hebrews 4:12. In Ephesians 6:17, God's word is compared to the sword of the Spirit. A sword has two edges, while a knife only has one, meaning a knife is used for coarse work like chopping wood or cutting meat. A sword, however, with its two sharp edges, is capable of precision and fine work, being able to penetrate deeply and separate

with great accuracy, even more precisely than a surgeon's scalpel. Since the Spirit is the one wielding the sword, God's word is one with the Spirit, effectively distinguishing between the soul and the spirit.

Just as a sharp sword can pierce bone and marrow, God's word is able to penetrate deep into the soul, revealing the spirit that is enclosed within it. The soul contains the spirit, just as bone contains marrow. The reason for separating the soul and spirit is to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Thoughts refer to our reasoning, logic, and intellectual processes, which come from the soul. Impulsive people are often led by emotions, while mature people make decisions after deep consideration, guided by the will. Intentions, as translated in different Bible versions (e.g., "intents," "attitude," "motives"), refer to the underlying causes behind our thoughts, representing the desires or motivations that drive us.

A saved person's soul can be led by either the flesh or the Holy Spirit. The intention is the key factor that determines this direction. Only when the soul is pierced and separated can we discern whether the mind is governed by the Holy Spirit or by the flesh. A mature spiritual person has a bright and clear spirit that can receive and convey the Holy Spirit's will to the soul through the conscience, free from any impurity. This divine intention then influences the mind, leading to reasoning aligned with God's will. Ultimately, the will makes the decision, and the body carries it out through action. This is the operational pattern of a spiritual person.

If you have a background in science and engineering, the operation of the spirit, soul, and body is easy to explain. Isaac Newton, who discovered the laws of motion, was a devout Christian. He invented calculus to describe the relationships between acceleration, velocity, and the trajectory of motion. For a spiritual person, the differential of the trajectory of their physical actions is the reasoning of their soul's mind, which is what the scriptures call "thoughts." The differential of the thoughts of the soul is the intention in their spirit. This is a very rich verse, and tomorrow we will continue with some examples, hoping to gain a general understanding of the distinction between soul and spirit, as this is the key to attaining true rest.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, how much You desire for our souls to find rest, to bear Your yoke and carry Your burden. Help us cease our own works, allowing the Holy Spirit to have complete sovereignty over us. But we admit that we are often mixed, and the thoughts in our souls often contain fleshly elements, causing our actions to frequently fail to please You. Help us understand the distinction between spirit and soul. How much we need Your word to carry out the separating work! Thank You! Your word is living and effective, purifying and sanctifying our souls, so that our lives may be pleasing to You. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!