

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

Hebrews 13: 7-10

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Hebrews chapter 13, verses 7 to 10.

Hebrews chapter 13 is about living a life of love. The author handles this theme with great wisdom; he does not start with a definition of love, for Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 has already provided the best definition of love, nor does he comprehensively discuss the application of love in every aspect of life, because he only has one chapter's worth of space. The Bible will later use the apostle John's writings—1, 2, and 3 John—through which the saints will gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to live in love.

In the limited space, the author mentions only three things. The first is that brothers should love one another, which is also the new commandment Jesus gave to the church. However, to obey Jesus' command to love the saints around us, the author knows that two other things are needed: the second is to love ourselves, and the third is to love God. The prerequisite for loving ourselves is to honor marriage, not be greedy for money, and rely on God. We discussed this at length yesterday, so we won't expand on it now.

Loving God can be said to be the central focus of this chapter, spanning from verse 7 to verse 17, a total of 11 verses. The author wants the Hebrew saints to begin by remembering the preachers who led them in the past and to end by submitting to the preachers leading them now. This section can be divided into three parts: verses 7 to 10 call them to remember and imitate the past preachers, verses 10 to 14 urge them to follow Jesus, and verses 15 to 17 encourage them to offer spiritual sacrifices and submit to current preachers. Today, we will read verses 7 to 10.

Verse 7: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

“Those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you” refers to the preachers who served among them in the past. Perhaps most of the Hebrew saints lived in Jerusalem and nearby cities in Judea. By the time the author wrote Hebrews, around AD 64 to 68, Christians had begun to face widespread persecution, and many Hebrew saints were gradually shrinking back, returning to Judaism.

“Those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you” may refer to the events recorded in the first 12 chapters of Acts. On the Day of Pentecost in the year Jesus was crucified, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and Peter stood up to preach his first sermon, resulting in 3,000 people being saved. This opened the door of the gospel to the Jews and marked the beginning of church life in Jerusalem. Initially, preaching the gospel was highly effective; the Jerusalem church soon grew to tens of thousands of members and flourished greatly. Even when persecuted by the Jewish Sanhedrin and the high priest, they did not retreat; instead, they preached with great power, cast out demons, healed the sick, and even many priests came to believe in this way.

However, starting with Stephen’s martyrdom in Acts chapter 7, the persecution the church faced grew increasingly severe. By Acts chapter 12, the apostle James was martyred, and the Apostle Peter left Jerusalem. Thus, some of the preachers who initially proclaimed the word to the Hebrew saints were martyred, while others departed, causing many Hebrew saints to gradually shrink back due to weakened faith.

At this time, the author steps forward and says to these backsliding Hebrew saints, “You should remember those who served you—the preachers. Think about the core of their preaching, their godly lives, the power of their prayers, the effectiveness of their work, and their complete dedication to the church’s perfection.” Not only should you remember their character and deeds, but you

should also imitate their faith. Remembering stirs a longing in the heart, while imitating requires action, and this action stems from faith.

Please note, brothers and sisters, it's not about imitating their actions, which has little value because actions are dead. They were effective in their time, but now the circumstances have changed, and the same actions won't yield the same results. Therefore, it's not their actions but their faith that we should imitate. We need the same faith and, in faith, follow God's leading; God Himself will guide them to the actions they should take now.

Dear brothers and sisters, in modern churches, when there's a successful case, that church often promotes and publicizes it widely, attracting many other churches to come learn and imitate. Yet, very few manage to replicate the success. The reason is that we shouldn't imitate outward practices; without the right people, external methods are useless. What should be imitated is faith, and this verse says to imitate the faith of those preachers who served you. It's hard to imitate the faith of someone with whom you have no spiritual connection, because faith is entirely subjective—faith is the substance of things hoped for. If what you hope for is objective to you, you cannot substantiate that hope with faith. You can imitate someone's faith only when their hope becomes your subjective hope. Thus, the author immediately introduces the third step: consider the outcome of their conduct.

These preachers who served the Hebrew saints—some faithfully completed their journey of faith, leaving behind a beautiful testimony. For example, when Stephen was martyred, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, gazing into heaven, and saw the glory of God. Others, despite many tribulations, continued to run tirelessly, serving the church—like Peter, who at that time was faithfully ministering to the churches in Galatia and Asia Minor. The author says to consider the outcome of their conduct.

This aligns with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Labor in the Lord is never in vain;

it will surely receive the Lord's reward. The glorious outcome of those who served us should become our hope, enabling us to imitate their faith.

Verse 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

This is a simple declaration, yet it is the most powerful one. Especially when our faith is weak and we don't know how to move forward, we should boldly proclaim: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever—He never changes. Remember, imitate, and consider the outcome of the preachers who served us. Just as Jesus Christ preserved them to the end, never changing, He will also preserve us to complete our journey of faith.

In a world ruled by Satan, everything changes, often in dazzling and overwhelming ways. Everything in the world is temporary, conjuring up various false images to capture your attention and lure you to pursue them until you exhaust your life, only to gain nothing because they are illusions. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever—only what is eternal is real and unchanging.

The author inserts this significant declaration here to remind the Hebrew saints to discern what is true, what is eternal, and what is worth pursuing with their whole life. Then he introduces his warning.

Verse 9: "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them."

"Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines." The truth of Jesus Christ is simple, steady, and unchanging. Saints who recognize eternal value will walk steadfastly, savoring God's word slowly—like how we read Scripture verse by verse, not missing a single word from God. This is slow, meticulous work, the necessary path for spiritual growth. Some seek shortcuts, developing various strange doctrines with clever names, promising quick results. We must recognize

that spiritual growth is never cheap and is always slow; if you seek instant success, you'll end up with nothing.

The strange doctrines the Hebrew saints faced at that time were likely related to dietary regulations. In Leviticus of the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites various dietary laws—clean and unclean foods. The clean could be eaten, the unclean could not, distinguishing the Israelites from the Gentiles through diet. God's purpose was to maintain the racial purity of the Israelites so that Jesus Christ could be born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, as the prophets foretold.

The purpose of these dietary laws was to bring forth Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus Christ has come, there is no longer a need to observe dietary regulations. Thus, Jesus told His disciples in Mark 7:18-20: "Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man." Jesus clearly declared that all foods are clean.

Paul developed this further in Romans 14:14: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Since all things are clean and can be eaten, if someone considers something unclean, they should abstain for the sake of their conscience. Based on this understanding, eating or not eating follows a new standard. Paul says in Romans 14:20-21: "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."

The teaching about food in the New Testament is very clear. Eating or not eating no longer follows the Old Testament dietary laws but, in the New Testament, is based on grace—namely, not causing a brother to stumble. The heart is established by grace, not by keeping rules. We are all saved by Christ's grace, and our interactions with brothers and sisters should overflow with Christ's grace, bearing with one another, not placing heavy yokes on other saints, allowing each saint to follow God freely in grace.

To ensure other saints have freedom, I am willing to sacrifice my own freedom—this is the principle of grace. It’s not about dietary regulations; those who focus on food—carefully adhering to dietary rules—have never profited from it. They lose their own freedom and cause others to lose freedom with them, which is entirely unprofitable. Paul declares clearly in Romans 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Dear brothers and sisters, for the Hebrew saints of that time, the strange doctrine was dietary regulations, which the Jews had followed for 1,500 years and found hard to abandon. We are not Jews, so dietary laws aren’t our main issue. What, then, are strange doctrines for us? Usually, they aren’t teachings directly opposed to Scripture, as those are too easy to discern, and saints wouldn’t be deceived. Today’s strange doctrines are often plausible but misleading—things found in Scripture but spoken in specific contexts, under specific conditions, to specific people. Some take these teachings out of context, ignoring their original limitations, and present them as universal truths for all saints to follow.

For example, when Peter preached to Gentiles at Cornelius’ house, speaking in tongues became evidence of their being filled with the Holy Spirit; this led to the teaching that all Gentiles must speak in tongues to be filled with the Spirit—a strange doctrine. Another example is Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:1 encouraging people to desire the greater spiritual gifts, like prophesying. This resulted in some establishing “prophet training classes” in churches, aiming to train every saint to prophesy, pulling New Testament saints back into an Old Testament framework and disregarding the truth that gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit according to His will. There are many such strange doctrines, too numerous to list; saints must discern clearly and not blindly follow.

Verse 10: “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.”

The Hebrew saints faced some strange doctrines about diet. On one hand, the author refutes these strange doctrines, warning them not to be carried away; on

the other hand, he tells them, “We have an altar.” Here, “we” likely includes the author and the Hebrew saints together, as they are all New Testament saints, and it includes you and me as well. We have an altar—a better altar—the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is the atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice that those who serve at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

The author’s description suggests that these Hebrew saints were in Jerusalem and nearby cities, where the priests’ offerings in the temple had not yet ceased. According to Leviticus, except for the burnt offering and the sin offering on the Day of Atonement, other sacrifices—like the grain offering, peace offering, and trespass offering—had portions for the priests, who were to eat the sacrifices and offerings in a holy place. This was something the Jews respected and were accustomed to.

But the author points out here that in the New Testament, Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice, a sacrifice that the priests serving in the temple could not eat because they were not qualified. However, for New Testament saints, Jesus revealed in John 6:53-58: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” These words of Jesus were hard to understand—not only did the Jews of that time fail to grasp them, but the priests serving in the temple now couldn’t understand them either.

How can people eat Jesus’ flesh and drink His blood? At the time, Jesus gave a spiritual explanation in John 6:63: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” Jesus likened Himself to the Word of God. But a fuller explanation came after Jesus died and rose again, completing the great work of redemption, when His words were fully unveiled to the church.

Thus, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”

Today, the saints of the church gather every Lord’s Day, worshiping and praising the Lord together, eating the bread and drinking the cup, commemorating the Lord’s death until He returns. This is a privilege unique to New Testament saints, a meal that the priests serving in the temple have no right to eat. Only the saints saved by grace are qualified to partake—what a blessed group we are.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You are the same yesterday, today, and forever, never changing. You have placed many spiritual predecessors among us, and You want us to remember them, imitate their faith, and consider the outcome of their conduct. Just as You showed them grace, You will show us grace too, for we, like them, were redeemed by You at a great price. Today, You remain the Great High Priest, supplying us daily with bread and wine. Help us, through daily spiritual eating and drinking, to grow in the stature of life, bearing witness to You in our lives and glorifying Your name. Guard my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.