

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

**Hebrews 13: 15-17**

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 15 to 17.

Hebrews chapter 13 speaks about a life of love, and verses 7-17 specifically address the discourse on loving God. The author's presentation is quite unique. Generally, our understanding of loving God involves listening to His word and obeying His commands. However, the author's approach is to encourage us to "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." He urges us to imitate their faith and observe their outcome, assuring us that as long as we do not stray from the true path we have received, we will attain the same end.

Why does the author have such confidence? Because every true servant of the Lord will bring the saints they serve before the Lord and help them follow Jesus themselves. Jesus went "outside the camp" to accomplish our redemption, opening a way to the heavenly sanctuary. This allows every believing saint to come before the throne of grace, be justified by God, reconciled with Him, and receive grace and mercy as timely help.

Having intimate fellowship with God in the heavenly sanctuary is exceedingly good, but it is only the starting point. The next step is to go "outside the camp" to follow Jesus and bear the reproach He endured. For Jesus entrusted us with the ministry of building the church, and we must fulfill this duty, filling up "what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." This involves building the church together with the saints around us, which includes preaching the gospel, leading people to salvation, and perfecting the saints to live holy lives.

In this process, we will undoubtedly face suffering, as Paul says in Philippians 3:10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His

sufferings, being conformed to His death." Knowing Christ within the veil and understanding the power of His resurrection requires us to go outside the camp, suffer with Him, and conform to His death. Entering within the veil and going outside the camp is the path every follower of Jesus must take. Moreover, we must recognize that "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." The true building is the city in heaven.

When we build the church on earth into a great city that people admire and revere, it becomes a camp. Since Jesus went outside the camp, we must also follow Him outside. Dear brothers and sisters, why have the great revivals in church history not lasted? Often, it is because they became too successful. The church turned into a city, attracting crowds to visit, and unknowingly became a camp, losing God's presence.

It is hard to remain humble in times of prosperity. In Mark 13, during the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, He left the temple for the final time and went with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. In Mark 13:1-2, as the disciples looked back at the temple, they said with awe and admiration, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Today's church must not become a great city; it is meant to prepare materials for the heavenly city. When the church pursues greatness, it becomes a Tower of Babel, exalting human names and losing God's presence. These will be torn down by God, for He has no enduring city on earth.

Within the veil, we enjoy the hidden manna and submit to the law of the Spirit of life. Ultimately, the life of death and resurrection will reign in us. This life will lead us outside the camp, for anything—people, matters, or things—not aligned with this life will eventually become a camp. May God preserve us, so the church we belong to does not become a camp. You might ask, if the church does not pursue greatness, what should it do? What is its core mission?

**Verse 15: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."**

Here, the author continues his thought: Jesus Christ, our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, serves and intercedes for us. We, as a royal priesthood, must offer sacrifices to God. The first sacrifice is the sacrifice of praise. Old Testament priests offered bulls and sheep, but the New Testament surpasses the Old, and its priests should offer a better sacrifice—praise and thanksgiving to God, a sacrifice of gratitude.

Having experienced God's manifold grace, our hearts overflow with thanksgiving, and we should unreservedly offer praise to Him—continually. Every Lord's Day worship should center on praising God. In our daily lives, when we experience His grace, we should promptly praise Him—with songs, prayers, or a simple "Hallelujah." These please God.

In all circumstances, we should receive them with a grateful heart and offer words of thanksgiving to God. Even in trials, when the environment is unfavorable, we must still, through Jesus, offer the sacrifice of praise—the fruit of our lips. One who confesses the Lord's name sees God's protection and guidance in all things, so their heart is often filled with gratitude. What fills the heart naturally flows from the mouth as words of thanks and praise.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you pray daily before God? If your prayers are full of requests but lack praise, no wonder your Christian life often lacks joy. Come before God again, starting with praise. Psalm 22:3 says God inhabits the praises of His people. When we offer praise, God enthrones Himself in our hearts, driving out pride, bitterness, and resentment. When our hearts belong to God, we transcend the suffering of our circumstances—this is the secret to overcoming adversity.

**Verse 16: "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."**

Doing good and sharing are the second sacrifice we offer. Doing good is personally performing kind acts; sharing is giving material help to others—one involves effort, the other money, both for others' benefit. A person who continually offers praise to God out of gratitude will also frequently help others. As 1 John 3:18 says, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deeds and in truth." Especially in the church, when saints are in need, we must not close our hearts but help with money and effort. 1 John 4:20 adds, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" Doing good and sharing are done for people but offered to God as pleasing sacrifices.

A healthy church should have a ministry of care, attending to the needs of its saints. Through this, those helped can offer praise to God, while those helping offer sacrifices of good deeds and sharing. Though it appears as mutual help among people, it is a joint offering to God by both the helped and the helpers, pleasing Him.

**Verse 17: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."**

The discourse on loving God begins with remembering past servants and ends with those currently serving you. Submit to and obey your leaders—submission emphasizes inward respect and obedience to their authority, while obedience stresses outward compliance with their teaching. The church requires continuity, from past servants to present ones.

"Servants" here is general, not limited to full-time servers. Anyone who has helped you in truth or edified your character is a servant of God. Regardless of whether they hold the office of elder or deacon, you must submit—this is a principle of life. In the church, the mature help the young, and the young submit to the mature; this is the basic order of life.

As the church grows, elders should be appointed, as Paul taught in Titus and 1 Timothy. In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "Elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit to shepherd God's church, bought with Christ's blood. They must be vigilant for themselves and the flock, for they will give account to God.

Thus, the author of Hebrews says they "watch out for your souls." A better translation might be "watch over your souls," as the soul—mind, emotions, and will—governs behavior. Elders care for souls and will account to the Lord at His return. God entrusts the church to elders, and saints must obey and submit, enabling elders to give account with joy, not grief.

If elders give account with grief, it could be due to two reasons: First, they failed to faithfully care for the flock, losing some, allowing wolves to harm others, leaving some malnourished, or not providing space for gifts to develop, resulting in loss at the accounting. Second, saints may refuse to submit to elders' authority or follow their teaching, ignoring their exhortations. At Christ's return, elders will grieve in giving account, and these saints will face their own loss before God. The author urges saints to obey and submit to their leaders.

Peter, in 1 Peter 5:2-4, exhorts fellow elders, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." Elders must exemplify the flock and care for it according to God's will. At Christ's return, faithful elders receive a crown of glory; otherwise, they account with grief.

Dear brothers and sisters, the author paints a picture of a healthy church: faithful servants who know they will account to the Lord, and saints who obey their teaching, offering sacrifices of praise, good deeds, and sharing in daily life.

Let us pray together: Lord, bless the church I belong to. Preserve the saints in charge, that they may care for Your flock according to Your will. Keep every saint willing to submit to the church's authority and live according to its teaching. May our church life be filled with sacrifices of praise to You and mutual love among saints through good deeds and sharing. Let our church life be a beautiful testimony, pleasing to You. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.