

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

Romans 1: 10-15

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 Romans chapter 1, verses 10 to 15.

Paul, though he had not yet visited the church in Rome, was filled with concern for the saints there, giving thanks to God for their faith and the testimony of their faith. And God can bear witness for Paul, how he constantly mentioned the saints of the Roman church in his prayers. Paul said he served God in the spirit, and praying for the church was part of his service to God. God's will is to gain the church as the bride of Christ, and therefore the church must be adorned and prepared.

Paul, being considerate of God's will, cared for the churches in various places, including the church in Rome. Though he had not yet been there, he first served in the spirit through prayer, and through prayer, he subjectively experienced the gospel of God's Son; at the same time, he also named the saints of the Roman church before God, hoping that they too might partake in the benefits of the gospel of God's Son.

Verse 10: "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you."

Making request in prayer continually. Besides praying for the Roman saints, asking God to remember them, Paul also had a burden in his heart, causing him to constantly make requests to God in prayer. Paul served God in the spirit, magnifying God; before doing anything, he first prayed to God. He was unwilling to walk ahead of God; he had to pray in the spirit first, and only when his heart was at peace would he make a decision.

If by any means now at length by the will of God, I might have a prosperous journey to come to you. Often, we have a mistaken notion that a spiritual person must be strong, courageous, decisive, and unwavering; but many times, that is merely the courage of the flesh, which cannot fulfill God's will. On the path of serving God, Paul had learned much; having completed three missionary journeys, he had learned not to make decisions about where to go, how to go, or with whom to go, but to seek God's leading in prayer.

During his second missionary journey, Paul's original plan was to preach the gospel throughout Asia Minor, but as recorded in Acts 16:6-8, "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas."

Remarkably, while Paul was preaching in Asia Minor, the Holy Spirit forbade him. How did Paul know? It must be that Paul had a habit of regular prayer. He had planned to preach in a certain city in Asia Minor, but while praying, he felt great unease in his heart—this was the sign of the Holy Spirit's prohibition. He accepted the Spirit's leading and passed directly through Phrygia and Galatia. Thinking the Spirit did not want him to preach in large cities, which were too comfortable, and being willing to suffer for the Lord, he intended to go to Bithynia in the north, a mountainous and difficult region, but the Spirit of Jesus did not permit it.

So he continued forward until he reached the port of Troas, where there was no further road. That night, he saw the vision of Macedonia and realized God wanted him to preach the gospel in Europe. On his missionary journey, he constantly sought God's will and followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. Dear brothers and sisters, if Paul had not obeyed the Spirit's guidance back then and brought the gospel to Europe, we might not have had the opportunity to hear the gospel in the centuries that followed, as it spread from Europe to the rest of the world.

Today, Asia Minor is entirely under Islamic influence. So we must thank Paul for not being overly confident in himself and for following the Spirit's leading at all times.

Here, he longed to visit the Roman church and frequently made requests to God in prayer, but even at the time of writing Romans, he had not yet received God's permission. He hoped for a prosperous journey—a peaceful path in his heart—but God had not yet allowed it.

From the later chapters of Acts, we learn that God's will was for Paul to go to Rome in chains, not as a free man, but to be imprisoned. God's purpose was for him to be still, so he could write the prison epistles during that time.

Verse 11: “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established.”

Paul deeply desired to visit the Roman church, earnestly longing to see the saints there and to impart some spiritual gift to them. This sounds somewhat astonishing. We often think of gifts as abilities for service, tied to a person's talents—how could a gift be imparted to others? For example, if a brother has a musical gift and serves God by playing the piano, how could he impart that gift to another saint who cannot play? This likely reflects our initial misconception, revealing that we do not truly understand what a gift is.

What is even more remarkable is that, in the KJV translation, which is closer to the original text, “some gift” uses “some” as a plural adjective, but “gift” is singular. Whenever we encounter such difficulties, we should not pass over them lightly, for they conceal profound truths.

The Greek word for gift is Charisma, and we know the Greek word for grace is Charis. In Greek, words ending in -ma refer to the result of a process, such as Maxima for the maximum value after maximization or Optima for the optimal value after optimization. Similarly, when a saint experiences much grace, Charisma—a gift—is produced in them. Thus, the source of a gift is grace.

Paul, having experienced abundant grace, produced rich gifts in himself. When he served the church with his gifts, those who received his service were brought to the

source of the gift—grace. No matter how varied the gifts, they lead to the same source: the grace of Christ. Every saint who is served is a vessel, and when that vessel is filled with grace, it manifests differently according to the vessel's talents. Like a breath of air blown into a flute, it produces a clear and beautiful sound; into a trumpet, a bold and resounding note; into a saxophone, a deep and emotive tone.

After experiencing grace, each person, according to their talents, produces different gifts. Thus, when Paul served with his gifts, the saints received grace. When this grace filled them, it manifested as various gifts. Grace can be imparted through the function of gifts, but the manifestation of gifts cannot be directly shared.

Paul's desire to impart some spiritual gift to the Roman saints was to establish them. How can someone be established through another's service? When Paul served in his gifts, the vessels of those served were filled with grace, manifesting the function that the vessel was meant to have, thus establishing the person. Our service must lead people to Christ to receive His grace. When they reach the point of serving with their own gifts, they are established.

A person who serves is connected to the church. One who only attends meetings but does not serve is rootless in church life and easily drifts away when facing difficulties. Thus, the church must provide ample opportunities for service, allowing every willing saint to participate.

Verse 12: "That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

Paul hoped to visit the Roman church to preach the complete gospel, which is essentially the message of the book of Romans. This would cause both his faith and the faith of the Roman saints to grow and be comforted together, meaning both the preacher and the recipients of the gospel would partake in its benefits. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." The Chinese saying, "teaching and learning grow together," conveys a

similar idea. But Paul speaks of something deeper than the mere transfer of knowledge—sharing in faith, building one another up.

Paul provides a blueprint for building, a golden triangle. The apex is Christ, and the two base corners are Paul (or the server) and the Roman saints (or those served). The server first comes to Christ in prayer, seeking fellowship, and receives grace from Him. With this gift, the server serves those who are served.

Those served are brought to Christ and receive grace from Him. When this grace fills their vessel, they produce their own gifts and begin to serve others, forming another triangle. The apex of each triangle is connected to Christ, with servers at the base serving those who are served, who then become servers themselves, serving others. Layer by layer, this forms a network of building. The top is always connected to Christ, and the network is filled with faith. Each person draws grace through faith and serves in faith. Thus, both the server and the served are established in faith and comforted together.

Dear brothers and sisters, if the church can form a network through the mutual service of the saints, with the top connected to Christ, it becomes a net that catches men like fish. The church is built up through the saints' mutual service and perfecting of one another.

Verse 13: “Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.”

Paul, burdened for the Roman church, spoke directly to its saints. Brethren, I would not have you ignorant, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you. Earlier, Paul mentioned that he constantly named the Roman saints in prayer and frequently requested a prosperous journey to visit them, as he earnestly longed to see them. He had purposed to go several times but had not succeeded; even when writing Romans, he was still hindered. He did not specify what hindered him.

We know he had completed three missionary journeys by this time. Perhaps he was too busy, or perhaps circumstances did not permit his planned trips to Rome. These hindrances could be God's will or Satan's obstruction, but even Satan's obstruction is permitted by God. As great an apostle as Paul was, he still sought God's guidance constantly. Despite his great burden, without God's leading, he dared not act on his own. This is an excellent example for us in serving God.

In John 7:6, when Jesus' brothers urged Him to go to Jerusalem to make Himself known, "Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready." A person wholly following God is not free or convenient, for they must submit to God's arrangement.

Verse 11 mentions Paul's desire to impart spiritual gifts to the saints in Rome, while this verse speaks of having some fruit among them, as among other Gentiles. During his three missionary journeys, Paul established many churches among the Gentiles. The Roman church's origin can be traced to Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Some Jews from Rome, visiting Jerusalem for the feast, heard Peter's preaching, were saved, and began meeting upon returning to Rome, forming the Church in Rome. Later, when Peter opened the door to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house, the Roman church began preaching to Gentiles, and by this time, it included many Gentile believers. Paul's desire to have fruit among them, as among other Gentiles, likely refers to preaching the gospel to Gentiles, leading them to salvation and joining the Roman church—a fruit of labor.

Jesus told His disciples in John 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Here, we see the Lord's requirement not only to bear fruit but for that fruit to remain. This is a particular point for today's churches to heed.

Many churches misunderstand the Great Commission in Matthew 28, thinking it is only about preaching the gospel and baptizing, leading to great zeal in evangelism and baptisms, with numbers increasing yearly. However, new believers often lack proper nourishment and shepherding, resulting in high attrition rates. If a church,

established for over five years, maintains a steady attendance, it is likely because baptisms and losses cancel each other out.

In the early church, where Jews and Gentiles coexisted, issues about keeping the law arose. Even in churches Paul established among Gentiles, questions about whether Gentile believers needed to observe Old Testament rituals and laws were common. This may have been part of Paul's motivation to bear fruit in the Roman church.

Thus, Paul wrote Romans first, clearly expounding the complete gospel. On a personal level, it means bearing the fruit of the Spirit, as described in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." Note that "fruit" here is singular, with nine manifestations.

On a corporate level, as Romans 15:9-11 states, "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written : For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name. And again he says: Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people. And again: Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" These are the fruits of lips offering praise.

Verses 14–15: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

These verses reveal Paul's attitude toward preaching the gospel. Greeks had a high cultural standard; though the Roman Empire was strong in military and politics, its cultural heritage came from Greece. Literature, science, philosophy, and art all stemmed from Greece, so Greeks represented cultured people, while Barbarians were uncultured. The wise and unwise refer to higher and lower distinctions within a cultural group.

In short, Paul's view was that for all who had not yet believed, whether cultured or uncultured, wise or unwise, he was a debtor to them, owing them the debt of the gospel. This attitude explains why Paul preached the gospel relentlessly. He saw all unbelievers as his creditors, himself as their debtor, obligated to repay the debt of the gospel.

We know the gospel is God's free grace to man—Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for us, and we receive salvation by God's free grace, owing no debt to God. But Paul tells us that once we are saved and experience the benefits of the gospel, we become debtors—not to God, but to those who have not yet believed, owing them the gospel. When a creditor has a need, the debtor naturally strives to meet it, repaying the debt.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you were saved through campus ministries in North America, you likely have vivid memories of Christian student groups. Arriving at an unfamiliar campus, strangers to the area, a group of Christians you never met warmly welcomed you, picked you up from the airport, arranged housing, and helped with shopping, seeking no reward but hoping to share the gospel with you. These campus Christians treated you as their creditor, repaying the debt of the gospel.

Remarkably, repaying the gospel debt is a lifelong task, like parents who owe a lifelong debt to their children. After a child is born, parents plan their growth, education, and independence. After independence, the relationship shifts from caregiving to coaching, then to friendship—a lifelong burden.

To the Thessalonian church, Paul was like a nursing mother, gentle, and a disciplining father, exhorting, comforting, and charging. Having served Gentile churches this way, Paul was willing to expend all his strength to preach the complete gospel to the Roman church, repaying his gospel debt.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing Paul's beautiful example before us. Paul preached the gospel as if repaying a debt, doing his utmost to share the benefits of the gospel with those who needed it—not only at the moment of

salvation but also in their growth and perfecting afterward. He was willing, through his service, to impart spiritual gifts to those he served.

Lord, have mercy on the church where I am, that the saints may be filled with the beautiful scene of mutual service. Weave the church into a net without gaps or holes, so that gospel friends and seekers who come among us may know and receive the gospel, grow in the church, and participate in service. Bless the church and the church life where I am in. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.