

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

Romans 1: 16-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 1. We will read verses 16-17 today.

Romans 1:1–17 is the introduction to the entire book of Romans. Paul introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, separated to the gospel of God. The gospel of God speaks of one person, that is, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Then he begins to speak to the recipients of the letter, the saints in the church at Rome; at this point, he switches to calling it the gospel of the Son of God. This is a very subtle change, and perhaps most saints do not notice it, but it is Paul's deliberate hidden plot.

The gospel of God is Jesus Christ—He accomplished salvation for us, and all we need to do is believe in order to be born again and become Christians; we do not need to do anything else. Therefore, what the gospel of God emphasizes is what the Lord Jesus has accomplished, which is the judicial redemption; this is what Romans 1:18–5:11 speaks about.

The gospel of the Son of God goes further to explain that after a person receives grace and is saved, he must gradually grow into a son of God—this requires going through the process of sanctification, and ultimately the redemption of the body to receive glory. This is the organic salvation, which requires the active participation of the saints, cooperating with the Spirit's work upon us. This is also what Romans 5:12–8:39 speaks about.

Paul received a complete Greek education; his writings are extremely rigorous, his word choices are precise, his logic is coherent and smooth, and his arguments are interconnected from beginning to end. May we, when reading the book of Romans, be able to grasp every detail—only then can we truly understand the truth that Paul is seeking to convey.

Next, Paul expresses his attitude toward the gospel. Although the gospel is God's free grace given to man, those who have already been saved and have experienced this unmerited grace must become debtors. The creditors are those who have not yet believed—whether cultured or uncultured, whether wise or foolish—we owe them a debt of the gospel. The final two verses of this introduction, verses 16 and 17, are the passage we are reading today. They are a great conclusion to this introductory section and are verses that every saint should commit to memory. These two verses have had a profound impact on the history of Christianity.

Verse 16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

I am not ashamed of the gospel. This is Paul's glorious declaration, and also a bold and heroic proclamation. Today, being a Christian in Western society still carries a bit of honor, because many Christians have borne a beautiful testimony with their lives; therefore, declaring oneself as a Christian does not feel shameful. But in Paul's time, "Christian" was a shameful label—it referred to a group of people who followed a man named Jesus. Jesus came from a small town called Nazareth; He was the son of a carpenter, began His ministry at the age of thirty, and after three and a half years, was sentenced to death—by crucifixion, the harshest form of execution reserved for the most heinous criminals.

Though those who followed Jesus claimed He had risen from the dead, who would believe that? In that era, to be a Christian meant first being persecuted by the Jewish Sanhedrin, and later by the Roman government in a widespread manner. Declaring oneself a Christian was dangerous and sometimes came at the cost of one's life. Yet here, Paul boldly proclaims, "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

Dear brothers and sisters, do you dare to make such a declaration? Do you dare to let your friends and coworkers know that you are a Christian? Do you dare to boldly share the gospel with others? This is not a matter of courage—it is a matter of the level of life.

To become a messenger of the gospel, there must be at least four areas of training and equipping. The first aspect is connected to your experience. We ourselves must first experience the benefits of the gospel; the gospel should no longer be mere knowledge or doctrine to us, but something we subjectively feel and encounter. The second aspect is related to conviction. As our subjective experiences deepen, they gradually produce a strong conviction. When we encounter situation we've been through before, we can affirm them as opportunities for the gospel to flow out, until we reach a point where we can no longer live apart from the gospel. The third aspect is connected to a commission. With that conviction, we naturally have a willingness to share and preach the gospel—it becomes a commission entrusted to us by God. The fourth aspect is related to operation. As we grow in understanding, we begin to realize that all unbelievers are our creditors; and in order to repay the debt of the gospel, we begin to carry out all kinds of operations.

For those who are cultured, there is one way of operation; for those who are uncultured, there is another way of operation. Regardless of the environment or the kind of people we encounter, we are able to generate an appropriate way to operate—in this way, we become messengers of the gospel, and we too can declare, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.”

This gospel is indeed the power of God. The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, and the English word power is derived from it. In fact, the English word dynamite comes from this Greek word. If directly translated into Chinese, it would be something like “explosive force,” able to break every chain and overcome all limitations.

Since the gospel speaks of Jesus Christ, the power of the gospel must first operate in Jesus Christ before it can be applied to us. There are at least three manifestations of the power operating in Jesus Christ: the first is the power of His death and resurrection. Acts 2:32 says, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” The second is the power of His exaltation and ascension. Philippians 2:9 says, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.” The third is the power of universal submission. Ephesians 1:22 says, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.”

The power of God has already operated in Jesus Christ, and today the power of God can also operate in us. Every saint's receiving of grace and salvation is the beginning of God's power working. This power breaks through the many obstacles before us, overcomes the bondage of sin, conquers the temptations of the world, and gives us a new beginning. Every saint will fall into moments of spiritual death many times in their lifetime, but the power of His death and resurrection helps us regain the supply of life, enabling us to live again out of the state of death. The latter part of 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." Christ has become the life-giving Spirit, supplying resurrected life through the Holy Spirit to help us escape the realm of death.

Some experienced saints can testify how the power of resurrection repeatedly helps us escape the realm of death. Sometimes when we face a trial we cannot overcome, we fall into a repeated cycle—dying, living, dying again, and living again. When we enter this kind of cyclical experience, not only do we suffer ourselves, but even the saints who serve us are affected, going up and down with us, entering an unending cycle.

Until one day, we experience the power of His exaltation and ascension, and the difficulties we could not overcome seem to fall away from us. We transcend them, and we also learn to remain continually connected to Christ and to abide in Him. As John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit." In this way, we become increasingly obedient to Christ and begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

But on the other hand, we also recognize that no matter how spiritual we are, the flesh still remains. Only when one day our body is redeemed can we be completely surrendered to Christ. As Romans 8:23 says, "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

We all eagerly await the return of Jesus Christ; at that time, we will be completely surrendered to Christ. Not only us, but the entire church will be raptured and will experience that power of surrender. When the sons of God are revealed, all

creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and will together enjoy the glorious freedom of the Son of God. At that time, the power by which God subjects all things will be fully realized.

This gospel is indeed the power of God to save everyone who believes. It does not regard a person's background, education, culture, social status, or any other condition. As long as one is willing to believe, they can receive grace and be saved. Because the gospel itself carries power that can transcend language barriers and cultural limitations.

Many missionaries who go to cross-cultural missions carry the power of the gospel with them. They go to completely different and unfamiliar countries, and some even go into the Amazon tropical jungle to preach the gospel among indigenous people who have no written language. They can all testify that preaching the gospel does not require language or writing; as long as they live out the gospel life, they can lead people to turn to God.

The power of the gospel can overcome such limitations and bring people to believe. But from another perspective, the power of the gospel can only save those who believe. Belief is a necessary condition—it is the beginning. Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." The power of the gospel must become the lifelong salvation for every believer. From believing in Jesus and being born again, it helps the saints walk the path of sanctification and transformation, ultimately reaching the goal of glorification, which will only be completed when Christ returns and the body is redeemed.

For every saint, being born again is a past event. The daily challenge is how to overcome the dominion of sin, the temptations of the world, and the desires of the flesh. Each challenge is great and difficult, and only by relying on the power of the gospel can one complete the path of sanctification.

Paul confidently declares that the gospel is the power of God to save all who believe. As long as we grasp the reality of the gospel, we can fully receive salvation.

Then Paul tells us the order in which the gospel is to be applied: first to the Jews, then to the Greeks.

The gospel began with Jesus, and His twelve disciples were all Jews. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out, Peter's first sermon led to 3,000 people being saved, and the first church was established in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church was also primarily a Jewish church, so the gospel started with the Jews. It was not until Peter went to Cornelius's house that the door of the gospel was opened to the Gentiles, and the gospel began to turn toward the Gentiles.

Later, Paul was raised up and began preaching. In every city he visited, he first went to the Jewish synagogues and preached the gospel to the Jews. When he reached Antioch in Pisidia, after delivering the only recorded sermon of Paul in the book of Acts, the people were deeply moved and asked Paul to speak to them again the following Sabbath. However, on the next Sabbath, many Jews became jealous and began to speak against Paul.

In Acts 13:46, Paul and Barnabas boldly declared, "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." Thus, Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles. He undertook three missionary journeys and established many churches among the Gentiles. Therefore, the order of the gospel is first to the Jews, then to the Greeks, with "Greeks" representing all the Gentiles.

What is very special is that when the Gentiles began to accept the gospel, the Jews instead closed themselves off to the gospel. Even today, the proportion of Christians in Israel is still less than 2%. In Romans chapters 9 to 11, Paul speaks about the mystery of the gospel and tells us that God's guidance for the Israelites is unique. The Israelites must continue to stiff their necks and go through great tribulation; they will suffer much hardship, and the remaining one-third will also experience severe distress. When Christ returns to rescue them, they will be saved as a whole family. This is the special guidance God has given to the Israelites.

Verse 17: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

God’s righteousness is being revealed in this gospel. Righteousness is an attribute of God, it is the principle by which God operates, and it is the foundation of our salvation. John 3:16, which we are very familiar with, says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Here we see that love is also an attribute of God. Because God loves the world, He was willing to sacrifice His only beloved Son to save mankind. Therefore, love is the origin of salvation, but love is not the foundation of salvation.

You are absolutely right. The sovereignty of love is indeed in God's hands. God's love is an expression of mercy and grace, but He can also decide according to His will whether to continue showing love. As you mentioned, we are all sinners who deserve punishment; if God no longer loves us, we have no words to say. However, God's righteousness is the foundation of His rule and actions. Psalm 97:2 says, "Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." This tells us that God's throne is established upon righteousness and justice, and if God were to violate His righteousness, His authority and reign would no longer exist. Although God's love is vast and boundless, His righteousness is even more firm and unchanging, serving as the fundamental guarantee of His eternal faithfulness. This helps us understand that salvation comes not only from God's love but also from God's unchanging righteousness.

Paul especially emphasizes the relationship between the gospel and God's righteousness; God's righteousness is revealed in this gospel. The gospel given by God must conform to the law of righteousness. The guilty cannot be regarded as innocent, and the wages of sin is death; therefore, it is only right for sinners to face death. If God wants to forgive people's sins, He Himself must pay the price for sin, because God cannot violate His own righteousness. Therefore, in His eternal plan, God resolved to sacrifice His only beloved Son to redeem mankind, so as to manifest God's righteousness. When Christ was nailed to the cross and died, the

demands of God's righteousness were satisfied, and God's righteousness was revealed.

Jesus was nailed to the cross 2,000 years ago, but today God's righteousness must also be revealed in us. We were originally unrighteous and sinful. However, 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When we confess our sins, this process of confession is also a process of being united with Christ. We are united with Christ's death; the price of our own sins has been paid off through this union with Him. God is righteous and cannot punish one sin twice. Since Christ has already paid for us, we become righteous, and God's righteousness is revealed in us.

Dear brothers and sisters, never underestimate the importance of confession; it is a very crucial matter in the growth of a Christian's life. Through confession, we are united with Christ; through confession, our sins are forgiven; through confession, God's righteousness is revealed in us. This righteousness is "from faith to faith." "From...to" is a special expression. In Greek, "from" is ek, which in English means "out of" or "from," and "to" is eis, which in English means "into" or "to." So in English, it is translated as "out of faith into faith" or "from faith to faith." Here we see that faith is the source and also the destination. "From faith to faith" means starting from faith and returning to faith.

When we believe in Jesus, we receive the redemption He accomplished; Christ then becomes our righteousness—this is the objective righteousness, which is the meaning of "from faith." After believing, our faith is tested and begins to grow, and our life grows accordingly, beginning to manifest some aspects of righteousness in us. These are the subjective righteousness, which is the righteousness "into faith." "From faith to faith" describes the growth of a believer's life—starting from the objective righteousness and gradually living out the subjective righteousness. This is how God's righteousness is revealed in a person.

This brings us to the final and most important statement: "The just shall live by faith." It was this verse that Martin Luther firmly held onto, establishing the principle of justification by faith alone, which sparked the Reformation and

changed the entire course of Christian history. This phrase is taken from Habakkuk 2:4, "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the just shall live by his faith." The Chinese translation as "因信得生" (live by faith) is not entirely precise; the English "the righteous shall live by faith" carries two layers of meaning. The first is that by faith one receives life—this life is eternal life, the life of God. Because we believe, we receive a life from God that is eternal. We do not need to do anything else; simply believing grants us this life from God. This refers to the legal or forensic aspect of salvation, as discussed in Romans 1:18–5:11. The second meaning is that the righteous live by faith—that is, by faith they continue to live in this eternal life.

The person who is saved is actually very complex. They have received a completely new life, an eternal life that comes from God; yet their old self still remains, and their former human life is still very active. When faced with circumstances, this person can have two different responses: if they respond with their human life, it results in the flesh bringing sin and death; but if they continue to remain in faith—that is, continually connected to the leading of the Holy Spirit and living in Christ—then this person can respond with the eternal life. In this way, they are walking the path of sanctification and begin to experience the salvation of life, as discussed in Romans 5:12–8:39. "The just shall live by faith" is a very important truth.

In the New Testament, three books all mention that "the just shall live by faith." Romans emphasizes the "just," meaning that after a person is graciously saved, they must go through the process of life to grow into a righteous person; this is what Romans stresses. Hebrews emphasizes "by faith." In Hebrews chapter 11, we see the record of the heroes of faith. Galatians emphasizes "live," especially focusing on the comparison between the law and life.

Martin Luther developed the doctrine of justification by faith because of this phrase, "the just shall live by faith." Today, we not only understand that we must live by faith but also live in the experience of being made righteous by faith—that is, to live a life full of faith. We can walk the path of sanctification, living out subjective righteousness in our lives and bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray together: Lord, grant us such boldness that we can all declare, "I am not ashamed of the gospel!" And also help us to experience the power of the gospel, that this power may enable us to overcome every difficulty in life; help our faith to grow, and also help our life to grow. Through the objective righteousness of Jesus Christ, may we receive eternal life and continue to live by faith, becoming witnesses of righteousness. In this way, we can become messengers of the gospel, testifying to those seeking the way around us. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.