

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

Romans 8: 12-13

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 8. We will read verses 12-13 today.

Today we come to the final two verses of the sanctification stage. Sanctification is a process that every saint who has received grace and salvation needs to experience throughout their lifetime. Paul also devoted a lengthy passage to describing this process, from Romans 5:12 to 8:13, totaling 71 verses. Among them are many difficult and obscure scriptures, as well as many verses that can be interpreted quite differently under various theological frameworks. I have always believed that God is infinite, far greater and more encompassing than you or I can imagine. Therefore, God cannot be defined by a single theological framework, and it is the responsibility of every saint to find the interpretation that best suits them while maintaining an inclusive attitude toward different interpretations.

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, there are seven churches. Each church has different practices, faces different environments, and encounters different problems, but all seven churches believe in Christ, serve God, and the Lord calls them churches, personally walking among the seven golden lampstands. The saints in a church must be able to come together to study the scriptures, serve together, produce a unified vision, and fulfill God's commission for them; these are the foundations of church unity. As for the practices and directions of other churches, that is not our concern. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the Spirit's words to the churches, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," are repeated several times. This clearly tells us that admonition, oversight, and correction are the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, not for us to meddle in. However, what the Spirit says and does in the churches can serve as a reference for other churches.

Thanks be to the Lord, over the past six weeks, we have read through the scriptures on sanctification together. I believe God has surely spoken some words of revelation to you through these scriptures, allowing you to see fresh light; perhaps He has also given you new experiences, new desires, and new pursuits. I hope you can take some time to write down your insights, which are testimonies of your spiritual growth that can help others and serve as a reminder to yourself. I will take this opportunity to summarize the sanctification process, and then we will read today's scriptures, which are Paul's final exhortations to the saints regarding sanctification.

In Romans chapters 1 to 5, Paul first describes the legal redemption accomplished by Christ. We only need to believe and accept it to receive the grace of redemption, begin living the Christian life, and start experiencing organic salvation. As descendants of Adam, we are born with a sinful nature, which accompanies us throughout our lives, often activating and causing us to commit sinful deeds. Overcoming this innate sinful nature is the theme of organic salvation.

First, Paul tells us that the gift in Christ is far greater than the inheritance in Adam. Paul deliberately uses several different Greek words to describe the gift, as if outlining the process of sanctification and the trajectory of spiritual growth, and this process is hidden within the Greek word for gift. Paul clearly tells us that on the path of sanctification, we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. However, our growth depends entirely on Christ's gift, or more directly, the reward in grace. Of course, we need to receive it in faith and apply it in our daily lives.

Throughout the New Testament, Paul uses four Greek words to describe the gift: the first is *dorea*, the gift of life, which is the beginning of sanctification; the second is *dorema*, the gift of maturity; the third is *charisma*, the gift of operation; and the fourth is *doma*, the gift of constitution. We must recognize that sanctification comes entirely from Christ's gift. Paul uses four different Greek words to describe the four stages of the gift's fulfillment, which correspond to the four stages of our sanctification.

Then, in chapter 6, Paul tells us that sanctification begins with union with Christ: united with Christ in the likeness of His death and also in the likeness of His resurrection. Every saint who has received grace and salvation declares this union at their baptism; this declaration of union is positional. After this positional union, we must subjectively experience the reality of union with Christ. This requires three steps: knowing, reckoning, and presenting.

Objectively, we must know that our old man was crucified with Christ 2,000 years ago; subjectively, we must know that Christ has been raised. With these two knowings, we must reckon ourselves alive to God and dead to sin, and present ourselves to God, as well as the members of our body to God as instruments of righteousness. Union with Christ is a process from objective fact to subjective experience, requiring knowing, reckoning, and presenting.

With this understanding, when saints truly put it into practice, they will inevitably encounter difficulties and struggle with sin. Because in the old man, we were accustomed to being independent from God, liking to take charge in all things; on the surface, this is independence, but in reality, we were submitting to Satan and taking Satan as our husband, which constituted the old man. Once we receive grace and salvation, our old man has been crucified with Christ, we become a new man, and Christ becomes our new husband. We should stand in the position of a wife, no longer taking charge, but with Christ as our covering.

Though we have this understanding, in experience, we still cannot overcome the sinful nature, so that resolving to do good is within our power, but carrying it out is not. This is why we fall into pain, failing to do the good we want and doing the evil we do not want. Paul uses his own experience to tell us that this is the operation of laws. Human resolve is momentary and cannot withstand the operation of laws. Laws are constant, ever-present, and the only thing that can contend with a law is another, stronger law.

Paul discovered that a person's behavior is essentially influenced by four laws. Externally, there is God's law, for all things in the universe were created by God and thus operate according to God's law. God's law is the principle of His operation.

Within us, there are three laws: in the flesh, there is the law of sin in our members; in the soul, there is the law of the mind desiring to do good, which delights in God's law. When the law of the mind desiring to do good is activated, the law of sin in our members is also immediately activated, and it is far stronger than the law of the mind desiring to do good, causing the will to submit to the law of sin in our members. This leads to sin and plunges us into pain. The only law that can overcome the law of sin in our members is the law of the Spirit of life in our spirit, which can deliver us from the law of sin and death.

For the law of the Spirit of life to overcome the law of sin and death in us, two conditions must be met. First, the environment for the confrontation of these two laws must be created, meaning our soul must not take charge, and the law of the mind desiring to do good must not be activated. Because once we desire to do good, the old man comes alive, the law of sin in our members is activated, and it overcomes the law of the mind desiring to do good. Therefore, we must continually rely on Christ, remaining in the new man with Christ as the head. The second condition is to follow the spirit, not the flesh—that is, to set the mind on the spirit, focusing on the things of the spirit, not the things of the flesh.

Corresponding to the four stages of experiencing Christ's gift, Paul, in chapter 8, also divides sanctification into four stages, distinguished by the enjoyment and experience of the riches of the Triune God brought by the indwelling Holy Spirit. First is the Spirit of life, corresponding to *dorea*. The Spirit of life is received at regeneration and operates in us through the law of the Spirit of life. This Spirit of life can supply life to our soul and even to our mortal body. However, the Spirit of life and our flesh are at enmity, constantly contending for control of the soul. Therefore, saints must practice setting their mind on the Spirit of life, not on the flesh, to progress on the path of sanctification.

The second stage is the Spirit of God making His home, corresponding to *dorema*. When we learn to set our mind on the Spirit of life and focus on the things of the spirit, to the point that our mind becomes the mind of the spirit, the Spirit of God can make His home in us. He can flow freely from our spirit through the channel of conscience into our soul, so that our entire being lives under the spirit's governance,

and we become a person in the spirit. When we live in the spirit, we can endure various temptations. As James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life.” Saints at this stage can receive the crown of life.

The third stage is having the Spirit of Christ, becoming those who belong to Christ, corresponding to *charisma*. The Spirit of Christ makes the ministry accomplished by Christ a reality in us. Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body. When we serve in the church, various aspects of our soul that displease the Lord are exposed. If we have the Spirit of Christ and become those who belong to Christ, the work of Christ’s cross can operate in us, removing the aspects of our character that displease God and constituting Christ’s beautiful character in us, enabling us to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

When we become those who belong to Christ, our service aligns with the Lord’s heart, and we can become examples to the saints in the church. In 1 Peter 5:3–4, it says: “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.” Saints at this stage can receive the crown of glory.

The fourth stage is having the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead, supplying life to our mortal body, corresponding to *doma*. Every saint has a God-ordained mission and commission, and we must first discover our own mission and commission and spend our lifetime fulfilling God’s ordination. In this process, we will surely face temptations, afflictions, and even challenges beyond what we can bear. But the Holy Spirit indwelling in us brings the full riches of the Triune God, the most glorious of which is the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit can supply life to our mortal body, helping us overcome various afflictions, strengthening our feeble legs and drooping hands, enabling us to fulfill God’s ordained mission and commission.

In this matter, Paul is our best example. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–29, Paul describes the afflictions he experienced: “Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more

frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” Paul endured countless hardships to fulfill the commission God gave him as the apostle to the Gentiles. In all his afflictions, he experienced the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus, strengthening his mortal body, enabling him to complete his life’s journey.

At the time of his martyrdom, he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7–8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” If we, like Paul, strive to fulfill the mission and commission God has given us, we can also experience the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus supplying us, helping us overcome the limitations of our body. If we remain faithful throughout our lives, we too can receive the crown of righteousness in the end. After briefly summarizing the entire sanctification process, let us read today’s scriptures.

Verse 12: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”

Having finished discussing the journey of sanctification, Paul now gives his final reminder and instruction. Brethren, Paul is not only speaking to the saints in Rome but to every saint who has received grace and salvation. Therefore, this is a summary of all Paul’s previous discourse on sanctification. We are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. Paul recognizes that the flesh is our greatest enemy, and submitting to the flesh is our greatest challenge. Thus, he reminds us

once again to see the truth: Jesus Christ has paid our debt of sin in the flesh, and we are no longer debtors to the flesh. Therefore, we should not live as we did before salvation, in the flesh, as if in debt. We can be released from the flesh and delivered from the law of sin in our members.

Verse 13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Throughout our lifetime, the flesh is always present and will be a lifelong challenge. Overcoming this challenge means following the spirit, not the flesh. The result of following the flesh is death. Paul has said this many times before, but now, concluding his discourse on sanctification, he reminds us once again not to live according to the flesh but to put to death the deeds of the body by the spirit. The Chinese Union Version translates “Spirit” as “Holy Spirit,” which is inaccurate, as the original text uses *pneuma*, referring to our human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit; we must put to death the deeds of the body by the spirit.

If we rely on the spirit and follow the spirit, the flesh naturally has nothing to do and becomes unemployed, and the members of our body become instruments of righteousness serving the Lord. However, Paul tells us here to put to death the deeds of the body. Note that Paul does not say “deeds of the flesh” but “deeds of the body.” The body was created by God but became the flesh after the fall. Now, as we follow the spirit and rely on the spirit, though the flesh is unemployed and the members of the body have a new master, past habits of sin may still unconsciously produce evil deeds. Thus, Paul says we must put to death the deeds of the body by the spirit, cutting off any opportunity to follow the flesh again. Especially when saints first begin to make the flesh unemployed and let the spirit take charge, the flesh will use every means to tempt and entice. Therefore, we must be even more diligent in putting to death the deeds of the body. In every matter we encounter in life, we must let the spirit take the lead, and thus we will live.

The Greek word for “live” is *zaō*, the verb form of *zōē*, meaning to live out eternal life, spiritual life, and heavenly life. When Jesus ministered on earth, He lived out

this holy life. If we can put to death the deeds of the body by the spirit, we too can live a life full of holiness. This is the final result of sanctification—living by the spirit. It sounds simple, but it is something every saint must spend a lifetime learning, ultimately living simply in the spirit.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for guiding us through the experiences necessary for the sanctification of saints via the Book of Romans. Lord, help us not to remain in mere knowledge and doctrine but to let what we know become our experience in life. Let us learn to follow the spirit, not the flesh, in all things. In the process of sanctification, may we continually experience Christ's grace, so that the law of the Spirit of life can operate in us, enabling the Spirit of God to make His home in us. May we also, through the Spirit of Christ, remove the things in us that displease God, and have Christ's beautiful character constituted in us. May we experience the supply of the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus, giving life to our mortal body, enabling us to overcome bodily limitations and fulfill the mission and commission God has given us. Lord, this is what we desire; help us walk step by step on the path of sanctification. Bless our lives today. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.