

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

Romans 12:1

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read Romans chapter 12:1-8. Today, we will read verses 1.

The structure of the Book of Romans is highly logical and precise. Chapters 1–5 speak of sinners being justified through faith, receiving judicial redemption—being condemned and justified. Chapters 5–8 speak of believers being sanctified through faith, experiencing the organic salvation through faith—being sanctified day by day and glorified at the end. Chapters 9–11 reveal the wisdom of God's election, leading us to submit to His divine arrangement in mercies. Now we come to the final section of Romans, chapters 12–16. These five chapters concern being committed to the church life, growing, being transformed, and maturing to become God's testimony.

Once a believer receives grace and is saved, God commands us not to forsake assembling together, for a solitary Christian is like a lost sheep—such a one does not live long nor go far. Satan, like a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour—the sheep that is isolated. Therefore, in this final section of Romans, Paul focuses on corporate salvation—that is, the church life.

The first eight chapters of Romans speak of personal salvation—from believing and being justified to being sanctified and glorified. Chapters 9–11 speak of God's sovereignty. Beginning in chapter 12, Paul builds on the foundation of the previous eleven chapters to tell us that in His sovereignty, God gathers the believers together to form the church, that in the place where the church is, there might be a testimony for Christ. Thus, the believers in the church are not randomly assembled, nor are they gathered merely by personal choice, but by God's sovereign selection. He deliberately brings together people of different backgrounds, with different burdens, needs, measures of life, and gifts, that they might together fulfill His particular mission and commission.

From the perspective of individual believers, once we are saved by grace, we begin to walk on the path of sanctification. Sanctification concerns the soul—how we may increasingly resemble Christ in our mind, emotion, and will. Yet this process of sanctification is inward and invisible. Others cannot see it, and even we ourselves may have a wrong perception, thinking that we are doing fairly well. Therefore, in His sovereignty, God places us in the church and surrounds us with certain believers to help us grow—especially those who often disagree with us or seem to trouble us.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we learn to view the believers around us from God's perspective: every one of them is placed there to help us grow, especially those who give us the greatest headaches. When you encounter such believers, do not think of leaving the church, for if you do, you lose your opportunity to grow. Sanctification is inward, but God uses the outward interactions in the church life to adjust and transform us. Transformation, on the other hand, is outward—something visible to others and even to ourselves.

The inward sanctification, together with the outward transformation, results in conformity. Romans 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." To be conformed to the image of Christ means to be molded into His likeness. When we have the likeness of Christ, we bear the fruit of the Spirit—something others can see and we ourselves can testify to.

Being conformed to Christ's image is the lifelong lesson of every believer. Some may reach one percent likeness to Christ, others ten or twenty percent. The measure to which we are conformed to Him determines the measure of glory we will share in the future. As we read the final section of Romans—on church life—may we each reflect on our own local church and actively participate in its service, applying Paul's description to our own church life. Let us not demand change from others but begin with ourselves, becoming seeds of revival within the church.

The secret of church revival is contained in this portion of Romans. There is no need to look far away. Some believers are zealous to visit famous churches to learn their methods and bring them back to their own congregation, hoping to reproduce

revival. Yet I have never seen a church that could replicate another's revival. True revival does not come from methods or practices but from believers living a healthy church life. The principles of a healthy church life are all found in Romans chapters 12–16. May God open our eyes and help us put these principles into practice. If we are willing to begin with ourselves, God will surely pour out His blessing.

Verse 1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

This verse opens Paul's exposition on the church life, and it is a crucial one. May all believers commit it to memory. Let us unfold it carefully, that each saint may enter into Paul's burden. The verse begins with “therefore,” meaning Paul is summing up the previous eleven chapters: receiving the judicial redemption of Christ through faith, being baptized, saved by grace, and then actively pursuing sanctification so that the law of the Spirit of life may govern daily living. We have also experienced the inseparable love of God and seen that in His sovereignty He has temporarily set aside unbelieving Israel so that the gospel may come to the Gentiles—like wild olive branches being grafted into the good olive tree.

Paul then warns the Gentile believers not to become stubborn or indulge in worldly pleasures, lest they also fall into unbelief and be set aside, while Israel is grafted back in. Here Paul unveils God's mystery: when the fullness of the Gentile church has come, all Israel will be saved. Then Christ will bring in the millennial kingdom—the kingdom of heaven so often mentioned in Matthew's Gospel.

With such understanding, Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren.” This is Paul's affectionate appeal to every New Testament believer. Fearing that even one might fall behind, he calls tenderly to each one: “Brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God.” Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, could have commanded or ordered us, but instead he pleads with us. He desires that, having understood the truths of the first eleven chapters, we would willingly receive his exhortation. What he says is not from himself but “by the mercies of God.”

The word “mercies” in Greek here is *oiktirmos*, appearing in the plural. Most English versions translate the word as *mercies* or *compassion*, yet the term *mercy* here is not the common Greek word *eleos*. The word *eleos* is frequently used in the New Testament—appearing 27 times as a noun and 32 times as a verb. However, Paul does not use *eleos* in Romans 12:1; instead, he employs a completely different Greek word. Whenever Paul makes such a deliberate choice, it must carry a special significance. Darby’s Bible renders it as *compassions*, and if you look at the Greek–English interlinear, it is also translated *compassions*. This word expresses an intense, deep emotion. For now, we will follow the rendering of the Chinese Union Version.

This term *oiktirmos* appears five times in the New Testament—four of which are used by Paul. The first is here in Romans 12:1. The second is in 2 Corinthians 1:3, “the Father of mercies”, The Chinese Union Version still translates it as “the Father of compassion.” The Father, in His compassion, grants us all comfort, because within the Father there abides a depth of intense feeling. This deep emotion becomes the source and reason for all the comfort He bestows.

The third is in Philippians 2:1, “if any affection and mercy.” The Chinese Union Version does not translate this verse very accurately—it renders “mercy,” but the word translated “affection” (or “bowels” in older versions) is actually a different term. The KJV translates it as “bowels and mercies,” while Darby’s translation is the most precise: “bowels and compassions.” What is “bowels”? This word also appears in Philippians 1:8, where Paul says, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.” In Scripture, the “bowels” (or inward parts) denote the deepest, most tender, and most direct feelings of love—love that has reached the depth of compassion.

The fourth occurrence is in Colossians 3:12, in this verse, the Chinese Union Version translates it simply as “mercy,” which again is not an accurate rendering. The KJV translates it as “bowels of mercies,” while Darby’s translation reads “bowels of compassions.” This makes it even clearer that compassions arise from the inward parts—the deepest affections of one’s being.

We may conclude, then, that compassions or *oiktirmoi* refers to the most delicate, rich, direct, and intense emotion within God’s heart. Out of His compassions He

grants mercy; and mercy, in turn, produces concrete action. God Himself came to those without hope, paralyzed in the valley of the shadow of death, and extended mercy to them. Having received mercy, people gain strength to act, and then God bestows grace—the gift of His beloved Son. Through mercy, man is lifted to the position of grace to receive salvation in Christ.

Thus, from God's side there are three steps: first compassion, then mercies, and finally grace. We often wonder why people refuse to accept the wonderful grace of Christ. Many times it is because they are still in darkness and lack the strength to receive grace. They must first experience God's rich compassion, then His abundant mercies, before they can rise from paralysis, break free from darkness, and receive grace.

Therefore, sinners need God's rich compassions and mercies to be saved; likewise, Paul beseeches us by those same compassions. We must enter into Paul's burden: although we have already received grace and been saved, we must by no means be like the Israelites, who were temporarily set aside by God. We must actively take the next step—to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

The word "bodies" is plural, indicating that every believer must present his or her own body; yet "a living sacrifice" is singular. Paul is telling us that when each believer presents his or her body, together we become one living sacrifice—the corporate offering God desires. Without any one brother or sister, the offering of the church is incomplete. Understanding this helps us grasp why God works according to the principle of the remnant.

In a large church of thousands, it is difficult for everyone to present themselves fully; therefore, the sacrifice offered is incomplete. An incomplete offering weakens the church, which then must rely on regulations and forms to maintain an appearance of testimony, gradually departing from the principle of life. In contrast, the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7–13, though having "a little strength," was loved by the Lord, kept from the hour of trial, and promised the crown of glory—because they were a living sacrifice. The Lord exhorted them to hold fast what they had, that no one might take their crown.

When Paul speaks of church life, he becomes intensely practical. He urges every believer to present the body, for when the body is there, the heart, soul, and spirit are there also. Some say, “Though I cannot attend the meeting, my heart is with you,” or “My spirit stands with you.” But Paul makes it clear: if the body is absent, so are the heart, soul, and spirit.

Of course, some believers have genuine limitations preventing them from attending corporate worship. In such cases, the church should extend its care to them, bringing the church to their homes. The church is not a building or a place but the gathering of believers. Some congregations, seeing that certain saints must work during Sunday services, arrange another time of worship on their day off—thus extending the church to their homes.

In the church of my youth, after the breaking of bread each Lord’s Day, certain serving saints would bring the bread and cup to elderly members who could no longer attend, praying and partaking with them. This brought deep comfort to their hearts.

For most believers, however, we must realize that no matter how busy or tired we are, we must not neglect the meetings. Even if we are so weary that we doze off during worship, it is still better than staying in bed at home, for when our body is present, it represents our whole being—our spirit, mind, emotion, will, and body—as well as all that we possess: time, strength, and resources. God desires our whole person. Only by offering our whole being can we build a proper vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with the saints. This constitutes the true church. Then the church can follow God’s leading and become a living sacrifice unto Him. We are both the priests who offer and the sacrifices offered. Each one must willingly present himself to God.

Romans 6:13 says, “Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” The word “present” in both verses is the same Greek term, *paristēmi*, meaning “to stand beside.” To present ourselves is to stand beside God. We often think presenting ourselves means doing many things for God, but that is our human idea, often mixed with the flesh. What God desires is that we stand beside Him, listening to His command and commission.

People love to do things to show their value, but God delights in those who stand with Him to bear testimony. May we lay aside the working mentality and simply depend on God, standing with Him.

In 2 Timothy 4:17, as Paul faced martyrdom, he said, “But the Lord stood with me.” The Greek word there is the same *paristēmi*—the same “present.” Paul thus reveals that when we present ourselves to God, God also presents Himself to us. Paul spent his life standing with the Lord. Though no one else stood with him at the end, the Lord stood beside him—a comfort beyond measure and a glory beyond words.

We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the priest killed the offering and placed it on the altar, where it was wholly consumed by fire, producing a sweet aroma ascending to God. That was a dead sacrifice. In the New Testament, the priests offer living sacrifices—not once for all, but daily. The Old Testament priest offered the body of the animal; the New Testament believer offers himself. The animal’s body was burned once to ashes, but our old man is more stubborn—it must be offered and burned daily until it becomes ashes. The fragrance in the Old Testament typified Christ’s resurrection; in the New Testament, it is the fragrance of believers who experience resurrection and manifest the knowledge of Christ.

Since the church is a living sacrifice, it no longer lives to itself but to Christ. It places itself on the altar of death so that Christ may live out from among the believers. Practically, this means the church follows God’s will, does not compromise with the world, is not bound by the law, and exalts the cross of Christ, bearing witness to a life of death and resurrection. This is “holy and acceptable to God.” Both adjectives describe the living sacrifice. When every believer offers himself and stands with the Lord as one living sacrifice, it is holy and pleasing to God. The focus of the church must be God Himself; it must be holy in order to be offered to Him. And the purpose of offering sacrifices is to be well-pleasing to God.

God’s intention from beginning to end has always been to reclaim the lost. From the time Adam failed in the Garden of Eden, God began to carry out the redemption plan that He had established before the foundation of the world. Now, at the end of the age, if there is a church where all believers present their bodies as a living

sacrifice, wholly separated unto God and holy, how deeply satisfied the heart of God must be! Remember Paul's word: Israel will be saved when the Gentile church reaches the fullness of Christ's stature. If in our local church the believers present themselves fully, that church will manifest the fullness of Christ and bear a beautiful testimony for God.

We do not know how God measures the fullness of the universal church, nor do we need to know. Just as in Revelation 2–3, God judges each church individually and calls overcomers in each, so we need only to stand in our appointed place, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices pleasing to God.

“Which is your reasonable service.” Grammatically, the “service” here refers to the living sacrifice itself. True service is not doing many things for God or organizing many activities, but standing with the Lord as a living sacrifice—a living testimony. Dear brothers and sisters, may we see that to serve the Lord is to live with Him, standing by His side in all things, joined to Him and to the saints, becoming a vibrant testimony of life. Such service is truly reasonable.

The Greek word translated “reasonable” is *logikos*, the adjective form of *logos*, meaning “according to the Word,” “filled with the operation of the Word.” It implies that our service must be in harmony with God's Word—it is thus reasonable, logical, and right. God's Word is living and powerful; it not only supplies life but brings man into God's eternal purpose. Therefore, service to God must be rooted in His Word. Only that which accords with the Word is reasonable and acceptable.

The word “service” itself originally means “worship,” especially the priestly ministry of standing between God and man—bringing God to man and man to God for mutual worship. Paul tells us that every believer is a priest of the gospel, and Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:5 that we are “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This “spiritual sacrifice” is the same as the “living sacrifice” in Romans 12:1.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we grasp Paul's central burden—that we must present our bodies to God. This is the duty of every believer.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for the earnest exhortation through Apostle Paul—that after receiving Your salvation, we should not only pursue personal sanctification but also participate in the church life, actively presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice with all the saints, worshiping You together. This is our reasonable service. Bless my church, Lord, and raise up every believer with this vision. May no one be missing in the church life. Teach us to love and support one another, and in every gathering may You receive all the glory. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.