

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

Romans 12: 3-5

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue reading Romans Chapter 12, and today we will read verses 3 to 5.

Starting from Romans chapter 12, Paul teaches the saved believers how to gather together to live the church life and experience God's corporate salvation. The first step is that all the saints must present their bodies as a living sacrifice. This is our service and also our worship.

The second step is to seek God's will concerning the church. This is not an easy matter—it requires a process of seeking. This process includes three steps: First, the saints must not actively bring the trends of this age into the church, nor passively be conformed to the pattern of this age. Second, the saints' minds must be renewed, and they must think about the matters of the church from a transformed life. Third, the saints must gather together to discern what the will and leading of God are for the church; and this must meet three conditions—it must be good, life-perfect (complete), and well-pleasing to God.

Then, in Romans 12:3–5, Paul very practically tells us how to discern God's will for the church and how to carry out the commission God has entrusted to the church, especially focusing on how each believer should regard himself and how to regard the fellow saints around him.

Verse 3: “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

In this verse, Paul teaches us how we should view ourselves: “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you...” Paul had received grace from the Lord and, within that grace, was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. This was the gift Paul had received and also his mission and commission. Therefore, Paul was speaking to the Gentile believers in the capacity of the apostle to the Gentiles. In other words, Paul could have commanded them by virtue of his apostolic authority. Yet, he chose instead to speak humbly, saying that he spoke through the grace given to him by God.

Paul first set an example of humility to teach the Gentile believers how they should view themselves in the church life. The first principle to observe is humility—not to think of oneself more highly than one ought to think. Our attitude toward things, and our attitude toward other believers, must both be humble. When it comes to the direction of the church or the development of various ministries, one’s personal understanding or opinion cannot represent the church. Each of us is merely a member within the church, and we must come together with other believers in fellowship, discussion, and mutual agreement before a direction for the church can be established.

The greatest difficulty in serving together in the church is pride. When one thinks he is stronger than others, insists that his opinion must be accepted, or demands that his method be implemented, this brings endless strife to the church. I believe that many experienced Christians who have been in church life for some time can easily name a few such people—those with strong wills who never consider matters from others’ perspectives and always insist on their own ideas. If such people become deacons or elders, they can become a disaster for the church.

To serve in the church, the first and most essential character one must possess is humility—acknowledging that we are only one member among many. On one hand, we should be willing to offer our thoughts, but on the other hand, we should not insist on them. We should be objective and fair, able to accept opinions from various sides—not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. Of course, we must also avoid self-deprecation. If a person truly had nothing at all, how could he have been called to bear God’s commission?

Next, Paul tells us how we should view ourselves: "...as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." The phrase "measure of faith" (translated in the KJV as the measure of faith) is closer to the original text. A more accurate rendering would therefore be "the measure" or "the proportion" of faith. This measure of faith is distributed by God to each person individually. Here, the word faith does not refer to the initial faith we exercised when we first received Christ as our Savior. Rather, it refers to the faith that comes after we have been saved by grace, once the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The Holy Spirit continually imparts the faith of Christ into us, and through this impartation we receive a certain measure of faith.

The essence or definition of faith is given in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Thus, the measure of faith refers to the capacity to make real what we hope for, and the ability to give visible testimony to things unseen. For example, consider a sister in the church who serves in the children's ministry. She is able to help each child develop the potential they should have. Such a sister is a faithful servant with great faith in her service to the children—her measure of faith is large.

Each of us, then, should view ourselves according to the measure of faith that God has distributed to us, and "think soberly." The phrase translated as soberly literally means "to be sober-minded"—that is, to have a clear and balanced understanding. Every believer, having been saved by grace, possesses a portion of faith given by God. We must recognize the measure of our own faith—not thinking too highly of ourselves, nor too lowly—but viewing ourselves clearly and appropriately. The church, as a living sacrifice, is composed of all the saints who have offered their bodies to God. Each saint has a necessary function within that living body. Therefore, everyone must know the measure of faith that has been given to them and have a sober and balanced self-assessment. And why is this sober assessment necessary? The next verse tells us the reason.

Verse 4: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function."

In this verse, Paul compares the church to a body, and the believers to the members of that body. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans around A.D. 57. It was not only a letter to the church in Rome but also a message to every church throughout time, including ours today. No matter what kind of church we belong to—whether a large church with tens of thousands of people or a small church with only twenty or thirty members—the analogy of the church as a body applies to all. Every local church represents the concept of a body. Paul already had this concept when he wrote 1 Corinthians around A.D. 55. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, Paul teaches that the church is a body and the believers are its members. The relationship between the church and the believers is just like the relationship between a body and its members.

Paul explains this very vividly in 1 Corinthians 12:14–18, “For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” Paul’s description here is very vivid and concrete.

Two years later, when Paul wrote Romans, he again used the analogy of the body in Romans 12:4–5. In verse 4, he emphasizes the diversity within the body; in verse 5, he emphasizes the unity of the body. Then, four years later, around A.D. 61, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians. By that time, his vision had broadened. In Ephesians 1:22–23, he wrote: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Here, Paul presents the universal church as the Body of Christ, and Christ as the Head of the church. Thus, Paul’s understanding that “the church is the Body of Christ” developed progressively over time. Through long contemplation and revelation, he grew deeper and broader in his grasp of this divine truth.

In Romans 12:3, Paul tells every believer to view themselves with sound judgment, according to the measure of faith that God has allotted to each one. In particular, when a believer receives a burden from the Lord, God will surely grant grace to

fulfill that burden. We must, by faith, receive that grace and then turn grace into gifts. With those gifts, we are able to carry out our function. Paul uses the analogy of the body to illustrate that every believer is a member of that body.

Some preachers have compared believers to the cells of the body, but this is not appropriate—because cells do not individually function as members, and many of them die daily. Believers are not mere cells but members—at the very least, they are like organs, each with a definite and necessary function in the body. The church is formed by God’s own will—He gathers the individual members together to make up the church, which becomes one body. Therefore, every believer in the church is a member with a specific function, and not all members have the same role or use.

Here, Paul particularly emphasizes the diversity within the body. Believers come from many different backgrounds, each with a unique journey of growth and learning. When they come together as the church, they are able to serve in diverse ways. Such diversity allows the church to reach different people and meet various needs.

Therefore, no believer should feel inferior, saying they cannot contribute—because no one is unnecessary in the body. At the same time, no believer needs to envy others whose functions appear more visible or prominent. Each believer only needs to recognize, according to the measure of faith God has given, their own place in the body, and faithfully fulfill their function there.

Verse 5: “so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

This verse emphasizes the oneness of the Body. Many individuals have become many members, yet together they are one body in Christ. Christ is the Head of the Body, and all the members are joined together in Him, taking direction from the Head. Though there are many members, they are united as one in Christ. Only Christ is the Head, and only He has the authority to command. Every member must listen

to the Head's direction and fulfill its own function—only then can the church become a healthy Body.

In principle, the church does not need any human organization, for it is a living organism full of life. Every member, being joined to the Head, should receive direct guidance from Him. However, in practice, the spiritual maturity among believers varies—some younger believers have not yet learned to obey the Head's direction. Therefore, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul speaks about establishing the office of elders in the church. The elders serve as the representative authority of the church. Since they represent authority, they cannot replace Christ's authority as the Head. Thus, the duty of the elders is not to rule over the believers, but to teach them to submit to the authority of Christ. The elders themselves must first be examples of submission to Christ, so that they can help the younger believers learn to obey Him as well.

In the church, no single member can represent the entire body, but every member can affect the body. For example, when a small, seemingly insignificant little finger is injured, the whole body feels the pain. Or if the eyebrows, which may seem useless, are shaved off, then during sweating, the salty sweat will flow into the eyes, making them hard to open and preventing clear vision.

Therefore, Paul goes on to say that believers are “members one of another.” This shows that the members of the body are interdependent and complementary. Paul clearly points out that every member must be vertically connected to Christ, following His leading, and horizontally joined to other members, mutually needing and supporting one another to function together. In the church, no member can stand alone; even those who seem weak are indispensable. Thus, the church should cultivate an atmosphere like a family, where every believer feels at home—close, needed, and mutually dependent.

Believers must lay aside individualism, overcome their insecurities, and open themselves to the fellowship of the family of God. The saints in the church should form a warm and loving network, so that all—both believers and seekers—can experience peace, joy, and rest when they come among them. Dear brothers and

sisters, in just three verses, Paul portrays the beautiful picture of church life. Every believer should be humble, not thinking too highly of themselves nor becoming proud, but evaluating themselves appropriately according to the measure of faith God has given. They should recognize their gifts and calling, and function faithfully as members of the Body. There should be no sense of superiority born of pride, nor inferiority born of insecurity. Rather, every believer should rightly relate to the Head, Christ, faithfully fulfilling their function and harmoniously coordinating with others. In this way, the church will manifest a sweet and beautiful life together—this is what the church is meant to be.

If your church life feels as monotonous and dull as going to work; or as busy and mechanical as a factory, leaving no time for rest; or as stressful as a hospital, always rushing to treat the wounded; or as exhausting as a battlefield, fighting without end—then this shows that the church life has already strayed from God's intention. May every believer in the church willingly and gladly place themselves into church life, and together with all the saints seek before God, so that every member in the church may function properly according to what God has given. Only such a church life can please God.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for letting Paul so simply portray what church life ought to be. Help the church I belong to, that the saints may be fitly joined together, mutually dependent, and helping one another, so that seekers who come to God's house may be deeply attracted and become willing to commit themselves to the church life. Bless the church I belong to. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray.