

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

Romans 12: 9-10

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 12:9–21. Today, we will read verses 9-10.

Romans 12:1–8. Paul first presents four essential principles for experiencing the corporate salvation in church life.

1. Every believer must present his body, forming together a living sacrifice. This is our reasonable service; it is also our worship.
2. All the saints must seek together God's will for the church. We must not be shaped by the trends of this age; rather, in a renewed mind and a transformed life, we must discern God's will together.
3. Every saint must remain humble, realizing that he is but one member in the Body, functioning according to the measure of faith God has apportioned him. Each one must fulfill his function, and must also be joined to the other members, receiving the direction of Christ as the Head.
4. All the saints receive grace in the church, develop their gifts, and together build up the Body of Christ.

The seven gifts necessary in the church include: the gift of prophecy, which sets the direction and development of the church; the gift of service, which cares for the needs of different groups within the church; the gift of teaching, which helps younger believers understand the fundamental truths; the gift of exhortation, which assists believers facing difficulties to grow healthily; the gift of giving, which provides financial support; the gift of leading, which oversees the administrative matters of the church; and the gift of mercy, which supplies practical care to those with special needs—such as the sick, the elderly without support, and orphans.

Following this, in Romans 12:9–21, Paul lists the general principles believers must observe in church life. Paul established many churches among the Gentiles and personally participated in church life. He knew very well the kinds of difficulties that could arise within the church. He also knew that New Testament believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit, who personally teaches them to walk in what is proper. Therefore, unlike Moses in the Old Testament, who gave laws, commandments, and statutes, Paul instead offers fellowship and reminders—sharing with the believers the matters they must pay attention to. His desire is that his reminders would also help today’s believers, so that we may learn together to receive and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and live out a healthy church life.

These thirteen verses seem, at first glance, to be loosely connected without a fixed structure; different interpreters divide them in different ways. The division I appreciate most is that of Brother Titus Chu, who arranges the verses into a logical sequence. I will follow his division in my fellowship with the saints. These thirteen verses can be divided into five sections:

Section 1: verses 9–10, showing that love is the most important principle in church life. Section 2: verse 11, directed toward God. Section 3: verse 12, directed toward oneself. Section 4: verses 13–18, directed toward the saints. Section 5: verses 19–21, recognizing God’s sovereignty.

Today we will read the first section, verses 9–10: love is the most important principle.

Verse 9: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

“Let love be without hypocrisy.” The Greek word for “love” here is agape—God’s love: unconditional, expecting nothing in return, eternal. Every believer has been saved because of God’s eternal love and has been gathered together into the church because of this same love. Jesus says in Matthew 22:37–40, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Jesus summarized the entire Old Testament—including the Law and the Prophets—as loving God and loving one’s neighbor.

Jesus also says in John 13:34–35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The new commandment given to New Testament believers is to love one another. Therefore, the very first rule Paul presents for church life is love—love without hypocrisy. The banner of the church is love, a love without pretense.

Our society today is full of cheap love, exaggerated love, love spoken only in words, love used for appearances, political love, gilded love—these are exactly what Paul calls hypocritical love. What ought to be manifested in the church is the eternal and genuine love that comes from God.

Dear brothers and sisters, you may ask, How can we manifest God’s love? In Luke 7:36–50 we find a remarkable account. A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to dine. During the meal, a woman known publicly as a sinner came, stood behind Jesus weeping, and washed His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair and anointing them with fragrant oil. Simon looked down on her and reasoned in his heart that if Jesus were truly a prophet, He would know she was a sinner and would condemn her. But Jesus said to Simon that this woman loved Him more than Simon did, because she had been forgiven much, and therefore she loved much. This is a revolutionary insight—our love for the Lord is determined by how much we have received forgiveness.

In truth, each believer commits many sins every day—some we know, but many we do not. Often it is because we are dull or simply indifferent that we do not regularly confess before the Lord. When we receive little forgiveness, we love the Lord little. Only when we truly see our own corruption and frequently experience the grace of forgiveness through confession do we receive much of God’s love. Then in church life, God’s love will naturally flow out from us.

When we have God's love, two results follow: first, we abhor evil; second, we cling to good. Paul tells us: "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." This is not merely moral evil or moral good. Of course, moral evil should be rejected, and moral goodness pursued. But Paul does not speak of moral categories until the last verse of chapter 12, verse 21. In verse 21, the Greek word for evil is kakos—evil in nature or morality. But in verse 9, the word "evil" is an entirely different Greek word: poneros.

The same Greek word poneros appears in Matthew 5:37, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." There it refers to the evil one. It also appears in Matthew 6:13, in the Lord's Prayer: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Thus, poneros refers to the source of evil—Satan.

"Abhor what is evil." The word "abhor" in Greek is a very unusual word used only once in the entire New Testament. It means not only to hate but also to flee out of fear. This is very close to Jesus' own teaching in the Lord's Prayer that we must be delivered from the evil one. Paul here is not speaking of moral evil but of the source of evil—Satan. There is a deeper meaning hidden behind his words.

Moral evil is obvious and rarely becomes the primary difficulty in church life. For example, if a brother commits adultery and returns to the church confessing his sin, seeking restoration, he comes ashamed; and the church, receiving a repentant brother, does not lose holiness, for the blood of Jesus cleanses every offense. Because of testimony, such a brother should not serve as deacon or elder, but the moral wrong itself is not what destroys the church. The true dangers in the church are not moral failures but evils originating from Satan.

Satan's evil is disguised—often clothed in garments of light, making it hard to detect. Once Satan's influence enters the church, it produces corruption and destructive outcomes. For example, during election seasons some candidates champion Christian values—some emphasize opposing abortion, others emphasize caring for the poor. Both are indeed central Christian values. But when some saints import these issues into church life, trouble begins. Outwardly it seems right for believers

to care about social issues, especially those related to Christian values. But we must realize that the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one. To bring the trends of this age into the church life is to bring the evil one himself into the church.

Some saints begin to value anti-abortion advocacy more; others regard caring for the poor as more important. The result is division, and the church can no longer express God's love. Therefore Paul clearly instructs us to reject Satan and not allow his influence to enter church life.

"Cling to what is good." If evil refers to Satan, good refers to God. To cling to good means to be tightly joined; that is, believers must closely unite with God through the Holy Spirit. The church's greatest expression of God's love is that all turn away from Satan and cling to God. This matches Jesus' summary of the Law and the Prophets: first, love God, and loving God naturally causes us to turn away from the evil one. In the church, the definition of good and evil is simply: being joined to God or being joined to Satan. Anything that turns believers toward God is good; anything that turns them away is evil.

If we hold to this basic definition, it becomes much easier to discern what should and should not be done in church life. In the church, we must strive to help believers love the Lord, offer themselves, serve, fulfill their function, develop their gifts, and be built together as a living sacrifice to bear testimony to Christ. Whatever hinders believers from functioning, whatever obstructs healthy spiritual growth, whatever damages the building of the church—all these are from the evil one and must be rejected and removed.

Verse 10: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

In this verse Paul extends God's agape love and applies it among the believers, for the church is a gathering of believers, and the relationships among the believers determine the condition of the church. "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love." The Greek word here is *philadelphia*—brotherly love. In the

previous verse, Paul begins with agape, defining divine love in the church. Here he begins with philadelphia, defining brotherly love in the church.

“Be kindly affectionate to one another”—this word “kindly affectionate” is also unique, appearing only once in the New Testament. It is a compound adjective: philos, meaning friendly or loving; and storge, meaning family affection—kindred. Thus the word means to be attached like family.

Paul gives here the best definition of brotherly love: the saints in the church, though unrelated by natural blood, love one another as members of the same family. We all share the same eternal life in the Spirit; when this life flows into our soul, it produces a family-like closeness among us. This relationship is even stronger than natural ties because it originates from eternal life.

“In honor giving preference to one another.” Within a family, closeness can sometimes become too casual or lacking in proper regard. Therefore, Paul adds another aspect to brotherly love: mutual respect. It means to lead by example, taking the lead to show respect. In other words, in treating the brothers and sisters in the church, we must be as close as family, yet also take the lead in giving proper respect. Every saint has been purchased by Christ’s blood, indwelt by the Spirit, and possesses eternal life from God.

With just two verses, Paul defines both divine love—agape—and brotherly love—philadelphia—in the church. Love is the banner of church life. I would like to close with the words of the apostle of love, John, in 1 John 4:10–12, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, through Paul’s teaching we see that love is the most important mark of church life. On one hand, we must have divine love—drawing near to God and staying far from the evil one. On the other hand, we must love the brothers and sisters, being as close as family and showing proper honor to one another. When the church is filled with love, seekers who come among us will

say, "Truly God is among you." Bless the church I belong to with an atmosphere of love and the reality of love, so that love may become the testimony of our church life. This prayer, petition, and thanksgiving we offer in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.