

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

Romans 12: 11-12

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 12. We will read verse 11-12 today.

Romans 12: 9–21 lists the rules that must be practiced in church life. First, the most important mark of church life is love. Divine love draws us near to God and keeps us far from Satan; brotherly love causes us to treat the saints with the closeness of family, while also being an example by giving the saints proper honor. Today we will continue to look at how we ought to conduct ourselves toward God and how we ought to conduct ourselves toward ourselves.

Verse 11: “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; “

In this verse we see three matters concerning our conduct toward God: first, be diligent and not lazy. Second, be fervent in spirit. The Chinese Union Version is not accurate here; it should be “fervent in spirit.” The distinction between the heart and the spirit is extremely important, and many difficulties in the churches arise because people do not understand the difference between the spirit and the heart. Third, we must serve the Lord continually. The word “serve” here refers to serving like a servant serves his master.

From a human point of view, we might think that Paul's order is reversed. We might assume that serving the Lord like a servant should come first, then being fervent in spirit, and finally producing diligence in our bodily service. In theory this is correct—it should move from the inward to the outward, and only then result in outward action. But in actual practice, the order is exactly as Paul presents it.

When we first begin to live the church life, we really do not know how to serve the Lord, nor do we have any burden in our spirit, so we must begin by presenting our body. In Romans 12:1 Paul tells us that every saint must present his body; the body must come into the church life, and this is the starting point of all service. A person may come, yet not know what to do, so he follows the arrangements of the elders or coworkers in the church. At the beginning, most of the service is practical in nature, such as cleaning, meals, audio-visual work, purchasing, finance, and so on. In these kinds of service, the most important thing is to build up a diligent character. A lazy person will accomplish nothing in the world, and he also cannot participate in service in God's house.

The original meaning of the word "diligent" is haste, carrying the sense of doing things quickly. The word "lazy" is connected with delay, especially the reasons for delay, such as slothfulness, lack of ambition, or the inability to initiate action. When we first learn to serve, the most important thing is to build the proper character—to be able to take responsibility and to complete the tasks assigned to us as quickly as possible, without dragging our feet or delaying, and even being able to think about how to do things both quickly and well. This is especially true for the young people in the church. When they first begin to learn to serve, we must help them build a diligent character so they can bear more and more responsibility. For young people, forming a diligent and responsible character becomes a lifelong benefit.

After we have developed a diligent character, what should come next? Paul says that we must be fervent in spirit. The Greek word for "fervent" originally means burning or boiling; it is a very vivid, concrete word. Why are we diligent? Because our spirit is burning, our spirit is boiling, and the burden in our spirit is truly urgent, compelling our actions to keep pace so that diligent service can be produced. Paul does not say "fervent in heart," but "fervent in spirit," because the source is crucial.

We know that after we receive grace and are saved, the Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit. When the Holy Spirit takes the lead and sees a need, He will stir our spirit and bring that feeling into our heart. As I have said before, our heart is our soul plus two "eyes of the heart": one is the good eye, and the other is the evil eye.

When our spirit brings the Holy Spirit's stirring into our soul through our conscience, our emotions become fervent, our mind begins to plan how we should act, and then our will makes decisions that drive our body to begin working diligently. In this way, the service initiated by the Holy Spirit is carried out through the cooperation of our entire being and is ministered to the saints in the church.

If we are fervent in spirit, we will be filled with burden, full of enthusiasm in our service, able to initiate new things, try new ways, and produce laborious work without feeling tired at all. This is because the starting point of our service is the Holy Spirit, and the glory ultimately belongs to God. Although we are doing the work and serving the saints, this is actually serving God. For Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Why does Paul say "fervent in spirit" instead of "fervent in heart"? Because when the heart is fervent, the source may indeed be the Holy Spirit, producing a burning zeal in our hearts through good and upright intentions; but the source may also be the flesh, stirring up our hearts through the evil intentions of personal desires, and this too can make the heart burn with zeal. Perhaps a few examples will make this clearer for the saints. The rise of American megachurches began in the 1980s, and over the past forty-plus years we have witnessed four or five globally famous megachurches. Their common characteristic is a fervent heart, diligently serving.

Think about it: every Sunday there are tens of thousands gathering. Just the traffic flow, ushering, cleaning, audio-visual work, and all kinds of activities involve an enormous amount of service. The saints labor intensely, week after week, with almost no rest at all; they are truly diligent and truly fervent in heart—otherwise how could they have continued for so long? Yet after more than forty years, with hardly any exceptions, every one of these megachurches has changed in nature.

I believe that in the beginning, the fervency in their hearts came from the Holy Spirit. All of these megachurches had very ordinary beginnings: some received a vision, some saw God's purpose, and some saw particular human needs. The stirring of the Holy Spirit made their hearts burn, which led to many initiatives, the launching of new actions, and diligent labor.

Year after year, the church gradually grew, its name spread, but without realizing it, the church's nature changed. The source of their fervent hearts shifted toward rivalry, reputation, wealth, and power. Outsiders may not notice, because the church continues functioning as usual, and the saints are even busier, stretched beyond their limits. But the main coworkers within the church all know that the source of their zeal has changed, and as a result, scandals began to emerge one after another: some were taken to court, some senior pastors resigned, and some coworker teams disbanded.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must regularly and honestly examine our service. It is not only about being diligent in our labor, but we must also be sure that we are fervent in spirit, truly serving the Lord. If our service is truly done unto the Lord, then our condition will be as described in the next verse.

Verse 12: “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;”

This verse speaks to us personally. If we are diligent and not lazy, fervent in spirit, continually serving the Lord, our condition will not be that everyone praises us, that we are frequently interviewed by the media, that churches everywhere come to learn from us, that our name spreads far and wide, and that we are filled with glory that comes from men. Our condition will be that we rejoice in hope, are patient in tribulation, and continue steadfastly in prayer. God has not promised that the church will enjoy honor and riches in this present age. A church that is separated from the world will not be celebrated by the world, but will bear a testimony opposite to it: not following the trends of this age, but focusing on preaching the gospel, bringing people to salvation, building up the church, and waiting for the Lord's return.

When Jesus carried out His ministry on earth, His end point was the cross; the church must also follow in His footsteps, walking the way of the cross, not seeking success in this world, and placing its hope in Jesus Christ. When Christ ascended, He promised His disciples that He would return. Our hope is that when Christ

returns, He will commend us as good and faithful servants, and with such a hope we can live a joyful life. As Hebrews 11:16 says in the NKJV, “But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” This is the common hope we share with the great men and women of faith throughout all generations.

Although our hearts rejoice because of hope, in our daily living we still experience many trials. Every trial is a disguised blessing, for Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:6–7, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Likewise, James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Therefore, we do not ask God to remove our trials, but we ask Him to grant us endurance, so that through many afflictions the character of patience may be cultivated in us.

Jesus already told us in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:11–12, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Paul tells us to be patient in tribulation. He spoke this from his own experience, for his entire life was a life of suffering.

In 2 Corinthians 11:25–29, Paul testifies of himself: “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 went through many trials, and thus he learned to boast in his weaknesses so that the grace of God might rest upon him,

for God's strength is made perfect in human weakness. When we frequently fall into trials and feel unable to bear them, we will offer steadfast prayers to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, toward God we must serve diligently, fervent in spirit; toward ourselves we must rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and through steadfast prayer receive support and help from God. This is the church life we ought to have.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, through Paul's teaching we understand that toward God we must serve diligently, fervent in spirit; and toward ourselves we must rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and receive supply from God through prayer. May we all learn from Paul's instruction and put it into practice in our church life. Help us to truly know that every service is done unto You and is born from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Our hope is not in prosperity in this present age, but in receiving Your commendation when You return. Teach us to support one another and encourage one another with all the saints in the church, walking together on the way of the cross. Bless my church and our church life. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.