

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

Romans 12: 13-15

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 to read Romans Chapter 12, and today we will read verses 13 to 15.

The most important principle in church life is love. This love includes two aspects: Divine love, which means drawing near to God and staying away from the evil one; and brotherly love, which means treating the saints with the intimacy of family while also giving appropriate respect. Following this, each believer must remain fervent in spirit, diligently serving the Lord; and toward oneself, one must rejoice in hope, endure in tribulation, and entrust everything to God through prayer, looking to Him. Next, Romans 12:13–18 begins to describe how to live church life together with the saints, with particular emphasis on interactions among believers. Today we will read the first part, Romans 12:13–15.

Verse 13: “Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

The word “distributing” in this verse comes from the Greek word *koinoneo*, which is translated in English as fellowship. In Chinese it is usually rendered as communication or sharing. If we translate it directly from the original text, it means to have fellowship concerning the needs of the saints. In church life, the saints are like family—very familiar with one another. Therefore, when a believer has a need or a lack, others should be able to notice it. On the other hand, a believer who has a need should also have someone with whom they can fellowship. In fact, this is the first indicator of whether a church life is healthy.

Dear brothers and sisters, we all need to pause and examine our own church life. Do we know the needs of the saints around us? If we ourselves have a particular need, do we have someone we can open our hearts to? The church should be like

a family—this is not just a slogan. It means that when there is a need, there is someone to talk to and someone to help. Of course, these needs may be: Physical needs: lacking clothing or food, or needing a place to rest. Soulsh needs: when feeling lonely, having someone to accompany; when sad, having someone to comfort; when discouraged, having someone to encourage. Spiritual needs: needing spiritual nourishment, cultivation in spiritual life, or perfecting in spiritual gifts. A healthy church life is one in which needs in all three areas—body, soul, and spirit—can be met.

The leaders of the church must especially care for the spiritual needs of the saints. Ideally, from among the leaders there should arise those who can minister spiritual nourishment, so that the word of God would not be scarce in the church. Through the supply of spiritual food, the saints can be brought into a common burden, making it easier to maintain the church's oneness.

Those in the church who are more mature in life should particularly care for the soulsh needs of the younger believers. We must recognize that the growth of every believer is not easy—it is a journey filled with tests. When their faith is weak, they may become discouraged, and in those times they especially need comfort and encouragement. Experienced saints can share their own spiritual experiences, helping younger believers remove inward anxieties so they do not fall behind in the church life.

The saints who are materially well-off should pay special attention to the needs of those who are poor. Your timely help may very well be the answer to their prayers. The material help you supply can become a spiritual blessing—not only helping those in need, but also building you up.

The second half of the verse says, “given to hospitality.” The word guest in CUV refers to brothers and sisters who come from other places. In the early church, believers were often persecuted, and many saints, because of their faith, had to leave their homes and go to unfamiliar cities. Concerning these displaced saints, Paul says that we should be “given to hospitality.” According to the original text, this means to pursue opportunities to welcome and care for travelers.

In this same verse, Paul extends the care for the saints in one's own church to also receiving saints from outside. Welcoming those whom we have never met is one of the best testimonies of God's children. We receive them because they also have God's life within them; they are God's children just as we are. Their outward culture, background, or language may be different, but in the spirit we can be moved together. This proves that we have the same heavenly Father and that we are all members of the Body of Christ. When one member suffers, the whole Body suffers. By receiving those suffering members who come from other places and giving them practical help, the whole Body no longer suffers.

Hebrews 13:2 tells us, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." What a promise this is! When we receive saints who come from elsewhere, we may unknowingly receive angels. From our hospitality, we will receive the blessing of angels—what a wonderful promise.

Verse 14: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

In the early church, persecution was very common. When someone is persecuted, it is natural to respond with cursing. But Paul tells us to bless those who persecute us, and not to curse them. Paul's teaching is completely consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:43–46, it says: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?"

Paul's teaching and the Lord Jesus' teaching are written plainly and clearly, leaving no room for ambiguity. God wants His children to give a testimony that is contrary to the world — when we are persecuted, we do not retaliate, but instead pray for those who persecute us and bless them. Perhaps through our prayers and blessings, they too may come to know our God.

Acts 11:19–26 records how the church in Jerusalem was greatly persecuted after the martyrdom of Stephen. Because of this, many believers left Jerusalem. These scattered believers were like dandelion seeds blown by a strong wind—drifting into Gentile lands, taking root there, and producing new dandelions. The church in Antioch was established in this way. Later, with the addition of Barnabas and Paul, a new chapter began in which the gospel was carried to the ends of the earth.

The persecution faced by the modern church is different from that of the early church. In the free world especially, believers are no longer confronted with physical persecution. However, mental and cultural persecution has not decreased. Pressures from cultural trends, political ideologies, business values, and economic interests are forms of persecution that are often subtle and difficult to foresee. In facing these mental and cultural pressures, the teachings of Paul and Jesus Christ still apply.

On the one hand, we must ask God to keep us pure—just as Paul reminded Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5—to maintain a good conscience and an unfeigned faith. On the other hand, we must still pray for those who persecute us and bless them, rather than launching cultural wars, legal battles, or political fights. We must recognize that the real enemy is never the people themselves, but Satan and the evil spirits who operate behind the scenes. If we respond to these mental persecutions by waging battles of our own, we fall into Satan’s snare and lose both the position and the ability to testify of the gospel to those who oppose us.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:12–13 that in the last days, lawlessness will increase and people’s love will grow cold. Is this not exactly the environment we face today? Yet Jesus encourages us that those who endure to the end shall be saved. May the Lord help us to endure to the end, continually pray for those who persecute us, and offer blessings. This is the strong and shining testimony that should belong to the children of God.

Verse 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Being able to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep is the testimony that the saints in the church should have among one another. We have the same life and the same goal. Although the paths each person walks may be different, we can share with one another, empathize with one another, support one another, and encourage one another. If someone is wounded and weeping, we should be able to weep with them. Perhaps our own spiritual life is more mature, and perhaps we know their weeping is only temporary; yet we do not need to stand on a high level of truth or morality to tell them not to cry. Instead, we should, out of an empathetic feeling, weep together with them—this best expresses the tenderness of our humanity.

In John chapter 11, in the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus clearly knew that Lazarus would soon live again. But in John 11:32–35, when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, Jesus groaned in His spirit and was troubled. He groaned because of their unbelief, but in His sorrow, He was able to weep with them. This is the best expression of weeping with those who weep.

Not only should we weep with others, but we should also rejoice with them. From a human standpoint, it is relatively easy to weep with others, but it is truly difficult to rejoice with others. This is because in our old self, we always love ourselves more than others. When we see others reaching the peak of their lives and rejoicing, our hearts inevitably have some jealousy arising from competition, which makes it hard for us to rejoice with them. But here Paul elevates our view: we are all different members of the same Body. When one member receives glory, it is the glory of the whole Body; and the glory of the Body is our glory. Only with this vision can we truly rejoice with others.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we, the next time we see the brothers and sisters in the church, regard them not only as family members, but also as members of the Body of Christ. Their weeping is our weeping, and their joy is our joy. Having such a sense of the Body is what real church life is.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You. After saving us by grace, You did not leave us to be Christians alone, but placed us in the church life. Please bless the church where I am, that the saints may meet one another's needs; that in the church we may rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. When the church is persecuted, may we not retaliate or confront, but pray for those who persecute us and bless them. Help the church to live at a higher level, bearing a testimony that is opposite to this world. Bless the church and our church life. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!