

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

Romans 12: 16-18

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Romans chapter 12, verses 16 to 18.

Yesterday we read the first half of how to treat the saints in church life. In the saints' lacks, we should fellowship and supply; we should seek opportunities to host saints from out of town; if persecuted, we must not curse but bless them instead; we should regard the saints as members of the body; rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Today we continue with the second half of how to treat the saints, from verse 16 to verse 18.

Verse 16: "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion."

To be of the same mind toward one another—if translated according to the original—is to mind the same thing, or to have the same mind. According to ordinary human situations, every person has a different upbringing, different educational background, different social status—how is it possible to mind the same thing, let alone reach the same mind? Yet this is Paul's instruction to the church.

In theory we can understand it: because we are all members of Christ's Body, if every member obeys the command of the Head—that is, if all the saints take the mind of Christ as their mind—then naturally all the saints will be able to mind the same thing and reach the same mind. But in practice it is truly not easy.

Paul points out a direction for us in Ephesians 4:13, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” When all come to oneness in the truth and in the knowledge of the Son of God, we will be able to mind the same thing and have the same mind.

The only way to reach oneness in the truth is for all the saints to labor on the word of God, to be constituted with God’s word, to understand God’s will for the church from God’s word, and for all to obey God’s word. Only in this way can the oneness of mind among the saints be produced. It is not the minority obeying the majority, nor the elders lording it over the saints, but all fearing and obeying God’s word. Mature saints bear with the young saints, young saints submit to the mature saints—not by compulsion or difficulty, but together following the leading of the Holy Spirit in the church.

This kind of situation is not easily attained in ordinary churches. Yet I believe that if saints go through the process of building a church or purchasing a meeting hall, they will, to a greater or lesser degree, have experiences of being of one mind with one another—that is something unspeakably good. But in most churches, after being established, they gradually lose that one accord.

Of course, the root reason is that the saints do not continue pursuing and being equipped in God’s word, so they cannot reach a unified knowledge of the truth—that is, what should be done is not done. From another angle Paul gives a more direct reason: doing what should not be done.

Paul continues, “Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.” The Chinese Union Version’s translation here is not very accurate. According to a Greek-English interlinear, the first part is minding the same thing, then not minding the haughty things but going along with the lowly. Do not mind high things, but associate with lowly things or lowly people. It turns out that division in the church begins when people start minding high things and forget to associate with lowly things or lowly people.

The building up of the church is saints coming together, considering one another, and together considering how to build the church. In that process individuals are willing to set aside their own opinions in order to reach one accord. Once the church is built, some people with high ambitions come to lead the church: some exalt the church's vision, some exalt the church's mission, some list urgent things that need to be done, some advocate targeting certain groups for evangelism. Taken individually, every matter or proposal looks very good and scriptural, but when put together they leave a church with limited resources not knowing which way to go, and may even cause disputes.

Paul tells us: do not mind high things. The church is formed by every saint contributing his portion; therefore we must begin from lowly things and lowly people, help every saint to grow, and together develop the church's vision, mission, burden, and commission.

Paul reminds us that the church is living, and the growth of the church is organic. Step-by-step organic growth may be slow, but it is solid; because the growth of every saint is the building up of the church. The example of modern mega-churches in America tells us that focusing on high things may, in a short time, gather large crowds, build huge ministries, and produce great influence, but lacking the support of life, it ultimately cannot endure.

Paul adds one more sentence: "Do not be wise in your own opinion." The church is the household of God, the Body of Christ; every saint is a child of God and a member of Christ's Body. To serve the saints is to bring the saints before God and help them develop their gifts so that they can function in the Body—this is the principle ordained by God for the development of the church.

We must not use our own little cleverness to violate God's principle. For example, if a saint has financial difficulty, we cannot ignore it, otherwise it would be as James 2:15–16 says: "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" Because we are fellow members, we cannot ignore it. But on the other hand, we cannot take full

responsibility ourselves so that this saint depends on you instead of depending on God, thanks you instead of thanking God. These two extremes are both what Paul calls “little cleverness.”

Therefore, even in helping the saints, we must depend on the Lord and seek the most suitable way so that the saints receive supply and return to God. In helping the saints, Paul acted completely according to God’s leading. On the one hand he encouraged the Corinthian church to imitate the Macedonian churches and give diligently. In 2 Corinthians 8:1–3 Paul says: “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.”

But toward the Thessalonian church Paul had a different leading. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”

Verse 17: “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”

Repay no one evil for evil—here the Greek word for “evil” is *kakos*, evil in nature or morally evil. That is, when saints in the church violate morality and do evil to us, Paul tells us not to repay evil for evil. Moral evil is sin; another’s sin cannot become the reason or excuse for us to sin. Therefore we must not repay evil for evil, but find a way to help the evil-doing saint to turn back.

In Matthew 18:15–17 Jesus very clearly tells us how to handle it: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one

or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

Jesus clearly tells us that from beginning to end the principle of handling it is how to gain back our brother. Even at the very end, if he will not hear the church, regard him as a Gentile—this is not abandoning him, but saying that his salvation is in question; a person unwilling to confess sin has not truly received salvation.

We may have sin that we cannot overcome, but when sin is exposed we must draw on the precious blood of Christ, and through repentance and confession let our sin be forgiven. This is the most basic knowledge and exercise of every Christian. A person whose sin is exposed yet refuses to confess should be regarded as a Gentile—that is, hoping he can hear the gospel again, receive the gospel, and become a true Christian.

On one hand we must not repay evil for evil but help people repent and confess; on the other hand, have regard for good things in the sight of all men. That is, we must not just follow what everyone says; even things everyone considers good we must not blindly follow, but “have regard” for them. “Have regard” is actually one Greek word *pronoeo*—a compound verb: *pro* means before, *noeo* means to think; together it means to think beforehand, then decide whether to do it or not.

Paul here tells us a very important principle: every saint must actively follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. For every matter that comes, we must personally consider whether it matches our conscience: if yes, do it; if no, we cannot do it. Because in the end God will judge us according to what we have done. If we often exercise in this way, our conscience will become very sensitive and we will not just follow the crowd.

The church must be one, but not one under human leadership; it must be one under the headship of Christ. When the saints in a church cannot decide how to act according to their own conscience, that church has a problem—she is no longer the Body of Christ. The principle of the Body is that Christ the Head can direct every member. Therefore the church should not be bound by what leaders think is moral

or what they think is truth, but everything must be tested through each saint's own conscience. Even things all men consider good must be carefully considered before deciding whether to do them.

Verse 18: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

It is hard to imagine that this word is spoken to all the saints in the church. Is not the church the household of God? Are not all the saints members of Christ's Body? Why is Paul so uncertain—first saying "if it is possible," then exhorting everyone to do their utmost to maintain peace with all men? Is it really that difficult?

To truly understand Paul's heart we must look at Paul's own experiences. As the apostle to the Gentiles, building churches among the Gentiles, Paul's greatest difficulty did not come from the Gentiles but from the Jews. Going further, the ones who caused him trouble were not unbelieving Jews but people who came from the Jerusalem church, from James. This is what Paul himself says in Galatians 2:12.

These believing Jews could not let go of the law and traditions handed down from their ancestors; not only did they keep them themselves, they forced the Gentile saints to keep them also. In order to clarify the truth of the New Testament, Paul had to debate the truth of the gospel with these Jews who held to the old covenant traditions—this is what led to the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. Although the council reached a conclusion, these Jews did not abide by it and still frequently caused trouble for the Gentile churches.

Against this background Paul still says "if it is possible"—that is, within the sphere that he himself could control, he was to do his utmost to seek peace with all men. Paul wrote Romans near the end of his third missionary journey. He was hurrying to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost, once again to have fellowship with the elders in the church. And this time he was bringing a large offering collected from the Gentile churches to help the poor in the Jerusalem church. Paul truly did his utmost to keep peace with all men.

Dear brothers and sisters, today in the church we may not encounter the difficulties Paul faced in his day. It is precisely because of Paul's insistence that we have the complete New Testament in our hands. The truth of the New Testament has already been revealed; nevertheless, the interpretation of the truth has not yet reached oneness. Saints may have different interpretations of Scripture; all the more we must follow Paul's instruction: if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

On one hand we must respect the leading the Holy Spirit gives us; on the other hand we must also allow the Holy Spirit to work in other saints. All should do their utmost to maintain fellowship and seek oneness in the truth. This may require a process of seeking together, but in attitude we must be tolerant, believing that the Holy Spirit will gradually bring all to oneness in the truth.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You! After we were saved by grace, You placed us in the church life so that we may learn to live the church life together with all the saints and seek Your will together. Especially through all the saints laboring in Your word and through reading the Scriptures, cause all to reach oneness in the truth and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In this process help us not to set our mind on high things but to sympathize with and associate with lowly people and lowly matters. Not to be wise in our own opinion, but in all things to act according to our conscience and do our utmost to live peaceably with all men. For the church is Your Body, bought with a great price by You; You love the church—cause us also to learn to love every brother and sister beside us. Bless the church where I am. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.