

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

Romans 12: 19-21

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 verses 19-21 today.

In Romans 12:19–21, Paul lists the principles that must be followed in church life. These are not regulations but insights that Paul, having established many churches and shepherded many churches, summarized from years of living together with the saints—his personal experiences. This is also, in Paul's mind, what a healthy church should look like.

First, love is the mark of church life, including love for God and love for people. To love God is to draw near to God and keep far from the evil one; to love people is to treat all the saints as family—with affection, and also with appropriate honor. Next comes what every saint should be toward God, toward himself, and toward all the saints. Toward God: be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord diligently; toward oneself: rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and continue steadfastly in prayer to maintain uninterrupted fellowship with God.

Regarding the saints around us, Paul has much to say. Know the needs and lacks of the saints and meet those needs through fellowship and generous giving. If someone persecutes you, bless him; if someone rejoices, rejoice with him; if someone weeps, weep with him. Be of the same mind with all the saints; do not set your mind on high things but associate with the humble; do not be wise in your own opinion. If someone does evil and offends you, do not repay evil for evil but help him repent and confess. Even things that everyone thinks are good cannot be done blindly; you must carefully consider whether they accord with your own conscience before deciding whether to do them.

Paul concludes his exhortations concerning the saints by advising them that, as far as it depends on them, they should always do their utmost to live peaceably with

all people. Verse 12:18 can serve either as the conclusion of how saints get along in the church or as the introduction to the next section. Paul knew that maintaining peace with everyone is truly difficult, so he exhorted the saints to do everything possible to keep the peace. He knew that under God's sovereign authority, God seems to delight in arranging unreasonable people or situations around us in order to help us learn to submit to God's authority. This opens the final section of the passage: submitting to God's sovereign authority.

Verse 19: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

In this section, Paul begins with "Beloved" (dearly beloved brothers)—a tender call from Paul and also a reminder. The saints in the church are all our brothers and sisters; even if someone offends you, he is still your brother or sister. This connection of eternal life comes from God, so the final solution must also come from God. If the one who offended you will not listen to counsel, then do not avenge yourself any longer. You must not repay evil for evil, nor do you need to keep defending yourself; rather give place to wrath—make room for the wrath of God and let God Himself make it manifest.

Then Paul quotes the words of Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense." Human teaching is always: If I do not offend others and others do not offend me, fine; but if anyone offends me, I will repay tooth for tooth and eye for eye. People always want to seek what they consider justice within the time and space they themselves determine. Human justice is relative; God's justice is absolute. Yet God's justice does not necessarily occur within the time and space we determine; rather, according to His omniscience and omnipotence, God has set the time when He will avenge and the way He will repay—this is God's sovereignty.

Therefore, when we encounter unreasonable treatment and it cannot be resolved through normal channels, we must hand it back into God's hands and give God room. Let God, according to His own time and according to His plan, avenge for us.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is not an easy lesson, yet it is a gateway every one of us must pass through for spiritual growth. As our life gradually matures and we begin to bear some responsibility in church life, we will certainly encounter helpless situations. Sometimes we suffer personal loss—that is still relatively easy; sometimes our service is interrupted; sometimes the saints we serve are hurt; sometimes even the church's testimony is damaged, and we are powerless to do anything—that situation is truly difficult.

If there are saints who have been in church life for some years, they may have gone through leaders in the church making mistakes, or through church splits, or—worse still—both sides of a split taking the church's property to court. In these difficult and helpless situations, to refrain from vengeance, to give place, to leave room for the Lord's wrath is truly hard.

But God's word is very clear: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." Sometimes, under God's sovereign authority, God's vengeance and repayment do not come quickly but will only be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ. Take the example of Brother Watchman Nee, whom I deeply respect: because of his faith he was imprisoned for over twenty years and falsely charged with many unspeakable crimes; in the end he was martyred in prison. After his death, those false accusations were still used by others as evidence to attack him. Even until today, God seems not yet to have vindicated him.

But I believe Brother Watchman Nee himself was completely at peace. While still alive he was unwilling to defend himself, because in his youth he had already expressed his heart through a hymn: "Each day I look expectantly toward the light at the judgment seat; may all my life and work on that day stand the test of fire." Long ago Brother Nee had decided he would wait until the judgment at Christ's seat, where God Himself would vindicate him. May we also learn from Brother Watchman Nee's example: rather give place to wrath, leave room for the Lord's anger, and wait for the Lord to avenge us.

Verse 20: “Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’”

This verse is Paul quoting Proverbs 25:21–22, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you.” It is noteworthy that when Paul quotes Proverbs, he omits the last clause, “and the Lord will reward you.” Paul seems to be telling us: do not do these things for the sake of God’s reward, but rather according to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5:44, “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.”

The way to love your enemies is: if he is hungry, give him food; if he is thirsty, give him drink; if he has material needs, meet them. Even though he regards you as an enemy, you must still regard him as a brother or sister and take the initiative to show kindness by meeting his physical needs.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the principle for resolving conflict in the church. Generally speaking, it is the more mature ones who should be willing to take the initiative to show kindness, because in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. This does not mean literally placing burning coals on someone’s head but is a figurative expression: when he is hungry you feed him and when he is thirsty you give him drink—these unexpected acts of kindness will move him, produce shame in him, and convict his conscience, so that it will be as though coals of fire are heaped on his head, making his scalp tingle and leaving him no place to hide his face. Your kindness can then bring about his repentance and confession.

Dear brothers and sisters, our problem is always that we want to fight for that last breath of pride. When we think we are in the right, we absolutely refuse to yield; even when we are in the wrong, we still want to even the score. The result is tit-for-tat confrontation with no possibility of reconciliation. Perhaps next time there is conflict, try Paul’s method. If you are in the wrong, of course take the initiative to confess and repent; but if you feel you have done nothing wrong, would you also

try once—take the initiative to show kindness, be as good to him as possible, and see whether you can heap coals of fire on his head.

We must recognize that the relationship between brothers and sisters is eternal because we share one eternal life. Any offense or wrong done is only in time—it is temporary. If we can often stand in the perspective of eternity to consider the problems we face, the answers will often become much simpler and clearer.

Verse 21: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

This is Paul’s concluding word concerning how saints get along in church life: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” The word “evil” here is *kakos*—evil in nature, moral evil; the word “good” here is *agathos*—good as God’s attribute. By using the verb “overcome,” Paul shows that this is a war, and the battlefield is the mind in our soul.

The Holy Spirit wants to supply God’s attribute of goodness into our soul, and this must pass through the channel of our conscience. If our conscience is pure and open, our soul can receive the good supplied by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, our flesh, influenced by the world—whether the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life—channels evil through the passageway of the desires and stirs up liking in our emotion.

At this point our mind begins to calculate: on one side is the good that comes from the Holy Spirit; on the other side is the evil that comes from the flesh. This is a battle, and the mind is the battlefield. Paul exhorts us: do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. If our conscience is sensitive enough and the Holy Spirit’s supply flows without ceasing, good will overcome evil. Our will then makes the decision to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and reject the temptation of the flesh and the world.

Dear brothers and sisters, such warfare continually takes place within us. If you have never noticed it, it probably means you are a captive of the flesh and usually

surrender without a fight. If you have begun to feel regret over defeats, thank the Lord—you have grown and now have the capacity to fight. Though you may still be a frequently defeated general, as long as you confess and repent, gradually hand over your own sovereignty, stop being the general yourself, and submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit, you will gradually recover lost ground in your soul and be filled with the goodness of the Holy Spirit. And this is the process of sanctification for every one of us.

Especially in church life, through fellowship with many brothers and sisters, we have numerous opportunities to face warfare, and this accelerates the pace of our sanctification. Therefore, brothers and sisters cannot leave church life. May the Lord help us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through Paul's teaching we know how to live a healthy church life. Especially at the end, we must recognize God's sovereignty. Nothing that happens to us is accidental. God gathers all kinds of saints into the church in order to help our life grow. Lord, grant us grace not to avenge ourselves; when we encounter unreasonable things, may we be willing to take the initiative to show kindness, so that we may often experience: not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good. Bless the church where I am and our church life, that it may truly be full of the scene of brothers and sisters loving one another. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ!