

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

Romans 13: 11-14

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 13. We will read verses 11 to 14 today.

Romans chapter 13 speaks about the testimony the church should have in its social life. Jesus said that we live in the world but are not of the world, and Paul very practically tells us how, as God's children, we should live in the world. First, toward those who hold authority over us, we must submit and fulfill the obligations we ought to fulfill, such as paying taxes honestly and giving officials proper respect and honor. Second, toward the people of the world, we must owe no one anything; if it is possible, we should do our best to love them and show them mercy. To love our neighbor as ourselves is to fulfill the law. Such a testimony of love can draw people to the church to know Jesus Christ and also become children of God.

Finally, in Romans 13:11–14, Paul speaks about the kind of discipline the saints should have in their daily lives, so that they may be separated from the world and bear a testimony that stands in contrast to it.

Verse 11: “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”

We should understand the present age. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ came into the world, just as Luke 1:78–79 says, “Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Yet after Jesus Christ completed redemption, rose, and ascended, this age again fell into darkness, waiting for Christ's second coming. Paul reminds the saints that now it is time to awake from sleep. While the people of the world are still sleeping in darkness, we have already received new birth and should be fervent in spirit,

diligently serving the Lord. Therefore, we must wake up early, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

In Paul's understanding, salvation is a process. The moment we first believe is the beginning of salvation, and this process of being saved must continue until Christ returns; when our bodies are redeemed, only then will our salvation be complete. Paul explains this most clearly in 2 Corinthians 1:10, "who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us."

Paul here divides salvation into three stages. The first stage is that "He has delivered us from so great a death." This refers to the time when we first believed, when the Holy Spirit came in, enlivened our spirit, and dwelt within our spirit. We then received regeneration, being born of the Spirit, gaining God's life. This aspect of salvation is a matter of the spirit; as long as the Holy Spirit dwells within and we possess eternal life, we have already been delivered from so great a death—meaning eternal perdition and the judgment of the lake of fire. As long as a person believes and receives the salvation of Jesus Christ, he can avoid eternal perdition and the judgment of the lake of fire and have a share in the new heaven and new earth to come.

The second stage is the salvation we are experiencing right now. This is the salvation of the soul, which is also our process of sanctification. It means allowing the Holy Spirit, through our spirit, to enter into our soul so that our mind may be renewed, our emotions may come to love spiritual things, and our will may submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit within our soul. This process of salvation—or, more precisely, this process of sanctification—must continue without stopping until we finish our life's journey.

When Jesus ascended, He promised that He would return. In Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Jesus Himself also foretold the signs that would appear when He comes again. In Matthew 24:32–33, He says, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" Expositors agree that the fig tree putting forth tender leaves refers

to the restoration of Israel. This has already happened—in A.D. 1948, after Israel had been destroyed for more than two thousand years, the nation was miraculously restored. Jesus tells us that the day of Christ's return is near, even at the doors.

When Christ returns, the saints who have died will all be resurrected, and the saints who are living will be caught up together with them; at that moment our bodies will be redeemed, and only then will our salvation be complete. Therefore Paul says that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Paul was a man who waited for the Lord's coming, and in his sense, it seemed as if the Lord was about to come.

When we read the epistles of Peter and John, we see that they felt the same way—that the Lord was about to come. Yet the Lord has delayed almost two thousand years and still has not come. Not only was this the feeling of the apostles in the early church, but throughout all generations, whenever mature and spiritual saints lived their days on earth, they were always people who waited for the Lord's coming. If we read their writings, we can see everywhere the expression of a heart that felt the Lord was about to return.

But why is the Lord still delayed? Were they all wrong? Not at all. For each person, the time to wait for the Lord's coming is a lifetime of labor. Before they see the Lord, they have already prepared themselves, and they begin to earnestly long for the Lord's return. For them, once earthly toil ceases, time stops; when they rise again, it is the time of the Lord's coming. So for them, the day of the Lord's return is truly near.

Dear brothers and sisters, today we often hope that the Lord would delay a little longer because we are not yet ready. But when the day comes that we also feel prepared, we must still say, the day of the Lord's coming is near. Yet when the Lord will return is determined by the Father; that day and that hour, we do not know. Therefore, we must quickly equip ourselves, so that we too may become people who long for the Lord's coming.

Verse 12: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ”

“The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.” Now is the time when Satan rules; the whole world is under the hand of the evil one, and therefore the entire world is in darkness. But the night is already deep, the day of the Lord’s coming is near, and His return will bring the daylight. If we know that the day of the Lord’s coming is near, that the daylight is at hand, we ought to put off the deeds of darkness: those actions that cannot see the light, cannot be told to others, and cannot stand before the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, if we examine our hearts, are there still things in our daily lives that we cannot let go of, sins that we cannot rid ourselves of? These are all deeds of darkness. Paul encourages us to put off the deeds of darkness and take up the weapons of light, or to put on the armor of light. What is the armor of light? Paul gives a very detailed description in Ephesians 6:14-17: “Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Verse 13: “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

Since we are children of light and have put on the armor of light, our conduct must be upright—that is, proper and orderly. We must not take shortcuts, seek easy gains, or use unscrupulous means. Every action we take should be done in the light and able to withstand the scrutiny of others. We must not, like the world, indulge in reckless feasting and drunkenness, giving in to the pleasures of the flesh; we must avoid lust and immorality, honor the sanctity of marriage, abstain from unlawful sexual relations, and shun all forms of impurity and lewdness; we must not be contentious or envious. We are to maintain harmonious relationships with

others, avoiding quarrels and disputes, genuinely appreciating the strengths and achievements of others; we must not envy or seek personal glory.

These things, which are common among the world, should not appear in the life of the church. The church is the gathering place of God's children, the place where the Holy Spirit has sovereign authority, and the place where the saints together bear witness for Christ. Naturally, it should be filled with light, so that it feels as if one has come into the brightness of day.

Verse 14: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

We must always put on the Lord Jesus Christ; to “put on” means to wear. So how should the saints put on Christ? When we believe, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit brings Christ into our spirit. When we are baptized, we enter into Christ’s death and resurrection, being united with Him in the likeness of His death and also in the likeness of His resurrection.

We begin to walk the path of sanctification by the Holy Spirit organizing the nature of Christ within our soul, so that our thoughts increasingly resemble Christ, so that we grow to love what Christ loves, and so that our will chooses to follow Christ. All of this is an inward transformation, growing more and more like Christ; others may perhaps sense it through contact with us, but they cannot see it at a glance.

But putting on Christ is different; others can see at a glance what you are wearing today. Likewise, the behavior, conduct, and speech of the saints should all manifest the virtues of Christ, so that others can immediately see that we have put on Christ. Just as Paul says in Philippians 1:20-21, “According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ,”—at that time, when others saw Paul in prison in Rome, they could see Christ being manifested and magnified. This is the reality of an individual putting on Christ.

Paul also tells us in Colossians 3:10-11 about the reality when the church puts on the corporate Christ: “And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” When the church puts on the new man—that is, the corporate Christ—there will no longer be distinctions of race, culture, religion, status, wealth, or class, but Christ will include all and dwell in each one; outwardly, it is Christ, and inwardly, it is also Christ.

If we all put on Christ, we will no longer arrange for the flesh to indulge in selfish desires. What Paul emphasizes here is the battle within each saint between the Spirit and the flesh. Both the Spirit and the flesh vie for the dominion of our soul, just as Paul says in Galatians 5:16-17: “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” Therefore, in church life, the saints should encourage one another not to cater to the flesh or indulge selfish desires, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to have dominion in us, so that we can put on Jesus Christ and together bear witness for Him.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Thank You for allowing Paul, through Romans 13, to show us the testimony the church should have in the world today. We know that the night is far spent and the day is at hand, so in these last days, we ask You, Lord, to keep us able to put off deeds of darkness and put on Christ; to fill the church with a beautiful testimony, becoming a bright light in the darkness, able to attract those who desire to seek the true way to come into the church. Bless the church I belong to, that it may bear a testimony of light in this crooked and perverse age. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ!