

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

Romans 14: 10-12

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 14 and today we will read verses 10 to 12.

Regarding the final message on church life, Paul focuses on receiving others; he hopes that we will all retain a deep impression about this matter of receiving. I believe that saints who have served in the church life for some time could easily mention other matters that seem more important—such as the church's vision and mission, the church's education and heritage, the development of missionary and gospel work, and so on. Yet Paul devotes a chapter and a half to discussing receiving.

The theme of chapter 14 is receiving according to God's receiving. In this great family of God, we do not have the right to choose our brothers and sisters. It is God's sovereign authority that brings people into the church life; it is Jesus Christ who shed His blood and gave His life for them so that their sins could be forgiven; it is God the Father who receives them as His children; it is the Holy Spirit who works within them, moving them to call God "Abba, Father." Therefore, the most basic and most important principle is this: since God has already received them, we must receive them according to God's receiving.

Paul then says that we must receive the one who is weak in faith, and that we should not argue about doubtful matters. We receive the person, but we do not need to receive the person's teachings. Every saint who has received grace and salvation, when they come into the church life, is our brother or sister. We receive them as members of the Body of Christ, to partake together of the bread and the cup that Christ has established for us. But every church has its own practices, and we must hold firmly to our own practices; we do not need to change our teachings or practices in order to accommodate believers who come from elsewhere.

The Head of the church is Christ, who died for us and rose again; He is the Lord of both the dead and the living. The church must submit to the sovereignty of Christ—this is a church according to God’s heart. Whether it is a large church of tens of thousands, or a small church of a dozen members, as long as two or three are gathered together in the Lord’s name, God is in their midst; we absolutely do not need to belittle ourselves.

In today’s passage, Paul presents a new requirement for receiving others: we must receive others in the light of the judgment seat. We can see that Paul truly labors with great care concerning the mutual receiving among the saints. He especially warns those who are unwilling to receive others to clearly recognize their true condition.

Verse 10: “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Paul seems to be a bit blunt here—right from the beginning he directly asks, “Why do you judge your brother? And why do you despise your brother?” In 14:3, Paul has already mentioned that those strong in faith tend to despise those who are weak in faith, while those weak in faith tend to judge those who are strong. But Paul has absolutely no interest in debating the issue itself—whether the one strong in faith is right or the one weak in faith is right. This is a trap we easily fall into; we often want to win an argument, to prove that we are the ones who are right.

But what Paul truly cares about is the mutual receiving among the saints. So Paul simply asks: Why do you judge? Why do you despise? Do you not know that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God? Paul does not clearly define what “the judgment seat of God” is, but he says that we all must stand before it. Since he says “we,” he is referring to the saints who have received grace and salvation.

Therefore, this judgment seat is not the great white throne in Revelation 20:11–15; that takes place after the millennium has ended, when all the dead will rise to be judged, and anyone whose name is not found in the book of life will be cast into the

lake of fire—this is the second death. Thus, the great white throne judges the unbelieving world; the judgment of the saints comes earlier, because Peter says in 1 Peter 4:17, “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” God will first judge those who belong to Him.

Some inaccurate teachings quote 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, which says that the saints who have died will be resurrected and, together with the saints who are alive, will be caught up and will forever be with the Lord. Therefore, some Bible teachers use this verse to say that the saints do not need to go through judgment, but that is not accurate. The passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 speaks of the time in the new heaven and new earth, when we will forever be with the Lord.

But before the new heaven and new earth, there is still the millennial kingdom, and the return of Jesus Christ takes place before the millennial kingdom. When is the judgment that Peter says must begin at the house of God? Let us first look at the words of Jesus Christ Himself. In Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Jesus speaks about the conditions of the end times. In Matthew 25, Jesus gives two parables—the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the three servants—and both parables speak about the judgment of Christians when Christ returns. In the parable of the ten virgins, the five foolish virgins did not prepare enough oil. This indicates that they were saved, yet they did not experience the renewing of the Holy Spirit nor allow the Holy Spirit to fill their vessels. Therefore, when the Lord delayed, they still needed to go and buy oil, causing them to miss the return of Christ.

Concerning the parable of the three servants, the one who received 1,000 talents used the gift God had given him in the world, and was therefore called a wicked and lazy servant by God. He would miss the opportunity to reign with the Lord in the millennial kingdom. And 2 Corinthians 5:10 tells us even more clearly: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” This judgment seat of Christ is the “judgment seat of God” mentioned in Romans 14:10. Perhaps when Christ returns, we all—whether dead or alive—will be caught up to the judgment seat of Christ to receive Christ’s judgment. For in John 5:22, Jesus said that the Father does not judge but has committed all judgment to the Son.

How then will Christ judge the saints? The clearest passage should be 1 Corinthians 3:12–15: “If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Therefore, Christ’s method of judgment is very simple—by fire. This fire will test the work of every saint’s life. If he has built with gold, silver, and precious stones, this work will endure the fire, and he will receive a reward. But if he has built with wood, hay, and straw, the work of his whole life will be burned up, and he will suffer loss. Although he will still have a share in the new heaven and new earth—because God’s salvation is eternal—yet he will be as one who passes through fire.

This is also what Revelation 2:11 says to the church in Smyrna: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” This clearly tells us that the overcomer will not be hurt by the second death. Conversely, those who do not overcome—although they will not go into the lake of fire, for that is the second death—yet at the judgment seat of Christ they must pass through fire. They will taste the pain of seeing the work of their whole life burned up. Some traces of the fire—some marks of passing through it—are what it means to be “hurt” by the second death.

Paul makes it very clear here: every saint must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Therefore, in our living and our actions today, we must prepare for that Day’s judgment. This means that today we must live in the light of the judgment seat. Since only Christ has the authority to judge, how could we have any qualification to judge a brother? How could we have any qualification to despise a brother?

Verse 11: “For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.’”

Paul is quoting the words of Isaiah 45:23, “I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.” Paul also quoted this verse when he wrote Philippians. In Philippians 2: 9–11, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Therefore, this passage should refer to when Christ returns and brings all things into one under Him, which is also what Ephesians 1:10 says, “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.” Thus, that is a glorious scene. All things in the universe are brought under Christ; every knee will bow, every tongue will confess and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord.

Verse 12: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

This verse follows immediately after the previous one which says: “Every tongue shall confess to Me.” We see Paul’s interpretation of Scripture, and it truly leaves us in awe. Although the verse clearly refers to every tongue praising Christ, Paul extends its meaning to say that each one of us must explain our own matters before God, or give an account. I do not know if the saints have noticed Paul’s particular intention here. That day should be a great day of universal celebration, with praises rising from everywhere, yet it is also the time when we must present our own matters before the judgment seat. How exceedingly joyful will be those saints who receive rewards, and how deeply regretful will be those who suffer loss! Dear brothers and sisters, let us hope that while we still have today, we will live for the Lord properly—especially in matters of receiving the saints, learning to receive according to how God receives, not judging and not despising.

Let us pray together: Lord, You have said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay." The Father has entrusted the authority of judgment to the Son, and when Christ returns, not only will the saints be raptured, but they will also be brought before the judgment seat of Christ. After we have received grace and salvation, our daily living and actions will all need to be accounted for on that day. Therefore, help us learn to live today in the light of the judgment seat—not storing up wrath for ourselves, but asking the Lord to preserve us, to grant us forbearance, to grant us patience, and to grant us more love. Enable us to love all the saints around us, especially those who are particularly unlovable, because the Father has already received them, and thus we must receive them. Bless the church where I am, that it may be a church filled with brothers and sisters loving one another. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!