

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

Romans 14: 18-23

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 14. We will read verses 18-23 today.

The saints who have received grace and salvation gather together to become the church. On one hand, this is so that the saints may have a sense of belonging to a home and receive feeding and perfecting in the home, growing to maturity; on the other hand, it is for the sake of God's will—to bring all things into oneness in Christ. This process of bringing into oneness begins with the oneness of each local church, then the oneness among churches, then the oneness of the kingdom, and is ultimately consummated in the New Jerusalem as the eternal testimony of the oneness of God and man.

Therefore, every saint must commit himself in the church where he is, learning the lesson of accepting others according to God, in order to reach the oneness of the church. When Christ returns, church life will transition into kingdom life. In verse 14:17 Paul tells us that the kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking—these earthly matters. Eating and drinking are only examples, and the most basic examples; everything derived from eating and drinking—culture, economy, politics, military affairs, education, entertainment, enjoyment, and so on—has no share or part in the kingdom of God.

The reality of the kingdom is Christ reigning and establishing a truly righteous and just kingdom. In God's kingdom there are only three important matters: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Every saint must ask himself whether he has fallen short of God's righteousness, whether he has reached peace with others, and whether he is filled with joy from the Holy Spirit; for this is the requirement of the kingdom. Therefore, it should also be the goal we practice and attain in our church life today.

Verse 18: “For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.”

“To serve Christ in these things”—Paul truly wants to turn our concept. We all think that serving the Lord is preaching the gospel, leading people to salvation, and building the church. Many saints take these things as the goal of serving the Lord, spending their entire lives helping to build large church organizations with abundant finances, exquisite programs, great influence—even able to affect earthly politics and culture.

But these may have nothing to do with the kingdom, because what the Lord asks is: Does it accord with God’s righteousness? Does it maintain peace with people? Is it filled with joy in the Holy Spirit? The one who truly serves the Lord always puts God first and will never violate God’s attribute of righteousness. If a person accords with God’s righteousness, he will naturally be able to have peace with others, and his own joy will come from the satisfaction of the Holy Spirit, for such things are pleasing to God and approved by men.

Verse 19: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

Toward God righteousness is upward—only God knows; toward oneself joy is inward—we ourselves know; toward others peace is horizontal, and it is what we must actively pursue in the church. So Paul says we must pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

“Edify another”—these two characters are added by the Chinese Union Version translators; the original text does not have these two characters. A better translation is simply “build up one another.”

In today’s church life, we must learn to establish a harmonious relationship with the saints around us and, in such a relationship, build up one another and supply one another. When you have difficulty, I bear it with you; when I have abundance,

I share it with you. Regard every saint as a member of the Body; functions may be different, yet they can coordinate and cooperate, supplying one another, so that the Body may be built up. This is entirely building in life, having nothing to do with morality.

We said earlier that according with God's righteousness is the first step; since it accords with God's righteousness, there will be no lack in morality. Therefore, Paul's emphasis here is building in life; this has nothing to do with morality—especially supplying one another and encouraging one another with the saints around us, building up the Body in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Today's church life is a foretaste of kingdom life; if we cannot reach oneness in church life, how can we reach oneness in the kingdom?

In Ephesians 2:20–21, “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Every church must be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets—that is, the entire New Testament. And with Jesus Himself as the cornerstone, when Jesus returns, He will be able to join all the walls together and build them into the Lord's holy temple.

We today only need to fulfill our responsibility to reach complete oneness in the church where we are; the joining and blending is the Lord's matter. I have some confidence that the fire at the judgment seat of Christ will burn away everything that is out of man's will and will melt the building of gold and silver, so that all the churches may be headed up in Christ.

Verse 20: “Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.”

The church is God's work that He is building. The church is composed of the saints; each saint's lifelong work is also a work. Just as it says in 1 Corinthians 3:12–13, “Now 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." The building of the church is a work; the building of each person's life is also a work. Therefore, each saint's building is the church's building; each saint's growth is the church's growth.

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food." Here, the work of God specifically refers to God's work in each saint. Paul returns to the example of food because this is the basic need for survival and was the most troubling issue in the church at that time. Those who are strong in faith believe that all things may be eaten, for they know that all things are clean. Yet if they eat food and cause others to stumble—that is, if they eat what they consider unclean in front of saints weak in faith and stumble them—it is sin for those who are strong in faith. It is not sin because they eat food but because they cause others to stumble.

All things are indeed clean and may be eaten. Yet in the freedom of eating, we still need to consider the feelings of the saints around us; we cannot cause others to stumble because of our freedom, for this would cause us to fall into sin.

Verse 21: "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."

This verse brings out Paul's conclusion: whether eating meat, drinking wine, or anything else, if it causes a brother to stumble, it is better not to do it at all. For those saints whose life is mature, what they truly care about is not what things they can do or cannot do, but whether doing them will stumble the saints around them. Because they care for the welfare of the saints, they are willing to sacrifice their own freedom rather than leave a cause for stumbling to others.

In this verse, Paul specifically expands eating meat to drinking wine and then to anything else; this is extremely important for today's church life. Eating meat should not be a problem for saints in today's church. Drinking wine is a problem for some churches that have clearer regulations. The Bible does not directly tell us we

cannot drink wine but says we cannot be drunk with wine, for wine causes debauchery and indulgence of the flesh. Though we may drink wine, when eating with a saint who has been troubled by alcohol addiction, we should avoid drinking wine, because for him wine is a forbidden thing he cannot touch. Giving up our freedom for the benefit of the saints is oneness.

Paul further expands to “anything else”; these other things we can add many to—for example, clothing: on the Lord’s Day for worship we should dress neatly and cleanly so as not to affect the atmosphere of worship in the church; therefore we cannot destroy God’s work because of clothing. We can also add others: do not destroy God’s work because of entertainment, do not destroy God’s work because of words, do not destroy God’s work because of direct sellings. I believe the saints can add more. What we truly need to consider is not to stumble the saints around us.

Paul reminds us not to destroy God’s work because of anything, because every saint who has received grace and salvation was redeemed by Christ at a great price and is a treasure of the Father; they are God’s work in His hand. Therefore Jesus said in Matthew 18:6–7, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” Offenses in the church are unavoidable, but we must remind ourselves not to be the one who causes others to stumble.

Jesus even proposed a very unusual way of death: to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea. Why a large millstone? A large millstone is the tool that grinds wheat ears into flour. The truth we know is wheat ears. We cannot throw wheat ears to newborn babies expecting them to eat and digest them. Therefore, we must first spend time and effort to grind the wheat ears into flour, then make the flour into food; only then can we help young saints gradually understand truth and enter into truth.

Therefore, the church always needs a group of good cooks of spiritual food who can make heavenly truth into all kinds of delicious foods to feed young saints and help them grow; only then can the church ultimately reach oneness in truth.

We often ask what things we can do and what things we cannot do, but this is the Old Testament principle and is based on Moses' law listing what things cannot be done. When we come to the New Testament, the law is written on our hearts, and what can be done and what cannot be done is different for each person; there is no uniform standard. Paul gives us a new principle, which is according to faith. In the next two verses, Paul further explains.

Verse 22: "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."

If you have faith, you should thank the Lord and keep it before God—that is, be responsible to God. We do not need to, nor should we, force other saints to have the same faith as we do, nor should we impose what we believe on other saints. In faith we do what we consider permissible; after doing these things, if we still do not condemn ourselves, we are happy. Here Paul still appeals to man's conscience to test what we do. We feel in faith that we can do it, so we do it; after doing it, we must still examine whether faith has any condemning feeling. If we do not condemn ourselves, we are happy; we will not be condemned in what we do.

Verse 23: "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."

If there is doubt and one still eats, he is condemned. This refers to those who are weak in faith and have doubt about whether food is clean, but seeing others eat, they also eat. For others it may not be condemnation, but since he had doubt, he should not eat; if he still eats, he is condemned. Because he does not eat from faith.

Paul here brings out a conclusion: whatever is not from faith is sin. Actually, it is not only food; in the many decisions we make every day, as long as it is not from faith, it is sin. Then what is from faith? It is the Holy Spirit initiating, the Holy Spirit leading and directing in the process—this is from faith, and the result will surely give glory to God. Whatever is not from faith is sin brings out another conclusion: whatever does not have God is sin. If we truly have this realization, we will discover how many sins we commit every day. How many things do we do without God in them? Strictly speaking, these are all sins; then how can we have one day without confessing sin? May the Lord have mercy on us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You let us know that the kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking but in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Help us in today's church life to practice toward God not violating God's righteousness, toward people being full of peace, and toward ourselves being filled with joy in the Holy Spirit. Especially in pursuing peace with the saints, may we be willing to lay aside our own freedom and in all things be careful not to become a difficulty to the saints around us. And learn in everything to be joined to the Lord, not doing things that do not please God, not going to places that do not please God; let church life be filled with the scene of brothers and sisters in peace with one another. Bless the church where I am; I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ!