

Romans 15 : 1-3

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. This week, we'll read Romans chapter 15 and today, we will read verses 1-3.

We are almost at the end of the book of Romans. Chapter 15 can very clearly be divided into two sections. The first section, verses 1–13: Paul continues to unfold his final burden, which is the receiving among the saints. This week we will read this portion. The second half of chapter 15, verses 14–33, is the conclusion of the whole book of Romans. Paul declares his own burden, and through his experience and journey testifies of the gospel. The last chapter, chapter 16, is Paul's greetings to the saints in the church in Rome.

Last week, we read Romans chapter 14. Paul stressed that we must receive all the saints in the church according to God's receiving; especially we must receive those who are weak in faith and not to despise them, for they also have been bought back by Christ with a heavy price. To receive people requires wisdom—we must separate the person from his teachings; to receive a person does not necessarily mean to receive his teaching. One day we all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ; therefore today we should receive others in the light of judgment, lest in the future, when we give account, we ourselves suffer loss. Besides this passive receiving, we must also receive in the principle of love: not placing any stumbling block before a brother, and also removing proactively the snares that may cause him to fall.

Finally, we must know that the church life should transition into the kingdom life. And the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in the church life today, toward God, we must practice that all things according to God's righteousness without any debt; toward man, we pursue peace with all and build together; toward ourselves, we are filled with joy from the Holy Spirit. If we keep ourselves from destroying the work of God

by any earthly matter, then we are receiving according to God. According to our thought, this already seems complete—can there still be something higher? Yes, it can.

In Romans 15:1–13, Paul goes further and presents a new thought: to receive according to Christ. In the working of the Triune God, the Father plans, the Son executes, and the Spirit applies. To receive according to God is to acknowledge the Father's sovereignty in choosing; since they are the Father's children, they are our brothers and sisters, and thus we receive them. This is the first step. There is absolutely no requirement toward the person, nor should we try to change people. If this step cannot be reached, there is no need to talk about the next. To receive according to Christ means that on the basis of receiving according to God, we do more—sacrifice more—to help others be built up. A person's true change seldom comes through others' demands; often it comes through others' sacrifice, which causes him to change voluntarily.

Verse 1 : “We then who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

“We who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.” Returning to the example of food: those strong in faith believe all things may be eaten; Paul himself believed this. Paul says that we must not only receive those who do not eat meat, understanding their weak faith, but go a step further to bear their weakness. To bear is to help others carry their burden, and to accompany them, walking with them. That is, to accompany them in not eating meat, and in the process comfort them, supply them, and encourage them, until their faith is strengthened and they come to know the truth. The strong are willing to bear the weaknesses of the weak, not pleasing themselves; they are willing to sacrifice themselves, to suffer themselves, only that the weak may grow out of weakness.

Dear brothers and sisters, the growth of every saint's spiritual life must pass through many crucial turning points. Because he is weak, he easily seeks outward supports, yet does not know how to rely on God. A strong and experienced saint will accompany him, bearing his weakness—without reproach, without demands, only accompanying, not even proactively offering suggestions, lest he become the weak one's dependence. Rather, he prays with him often, reads the Bible with him, helping him to obtain answers from God's word, and to be willing to do God's word and pass through that crucial point. Only thus can the weak be built up. The church needs many who are strong in faith, willing to bear the weaknesses of younger saints. When the weak saints are perfected, in turn, they can other help those who are weaker in faith than they are.

Verse 2 : “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

“Let each of us please his neighbor”—neighbor here refers to those who are weak in faith: perhaps they are newly saved saints, or perhaps they have not been in the church life for a long time and have just returned. They lack subjective experience of God and therefore do not know how to follow God. Paul exhorts the more experienced and stronger saints to please them first, that they may receive benefit. Note the order: first to make them feel comfortable, then lead them to edification; this benefit is spiritual, not material.

Many times we are eager to help others grow, giving them many spiritual assignments, thinking these will help them. But if they are not pleased, they have no motivation to learn, and no amount of teaching can help. Thus Paul emphasizes here the supply of life—first satisfying their various needs, then in an atmosphere of joy and satisfaction, supplying spiritual benefit. Only then can the benefit become nourishment to their growth in life, and the result is edification.

This is the Chinese Union Version translation, but the original text does not contain the words “virtue.” (德行) Here I must add a word, which may also be difficult for many Chinese-speaking saints. When we read the Bible, we must come out of the

Confucian and Mencian mindset. Their teaching regards virtue as the ultimate goal; therefore the translators of the Chinese Union Version, perhaps unconsciously, added the words “establish virtue.” But this is not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible wants our life to grow that we may live out God’s life. Then in our living there will naturally be the virtues of Christ, and naturally a life full of virtue.

But virtue is not our goal; to live like God is our true goal. Therefore this verse tells us that we must help those in the church who are not strong—make them pleased, cause them to receive edification—and the result is that they are built up. This is a building in life. The church is the Body of Christ; this is the greatest building in the whole universe. Christ is the Head; the saints in the church are members of the Body, and every member has his function. Only when a member grows and matures can he properly fulfill his function. Therefore we must spare no effort to help every saint around us be built up into the Body of Christ and to function as a member.

Verse 3 : “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’”

“For even Christ did not please Himself.” Christ, according to the will of the Father, became a man, suffering man’s mockery, ridicule, and scorn; He did not seek His own pleasure. In Gethsemane, when He prayed, He ultimately said, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” Christ did not please Himself; and finally Christ walked to the cross for those who persecuted Him, accomplishing the grace of forgiveness and redemption. Christ did not seek His own pleasure, but only our benefit—we who were corrupt—so that we might have the opportunity to receive grace and be saved.

“As it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’” Paul quotes Psalm 69:9, “For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.” This was originally David’s prayer when he suffered for God; yet Paul quotes only the bottom half of the verse to show that Jesus Christ, on the cross, bore the reproach and suffering that should

have been ours. We were weak, sinful, fallen, and deserving of death; but Christ bore our weakness and took upon Himself the punishment we deserved, that we might receive grace and be saved, and in God's grace become those strong in faith. Paul encourages us to be like Christ, bearing the weaknesses of those weak in faith, seeking their pleasure, and for their benefit, that the church may be built up.

Dear brothers and sisters, in God's wisdom, after each one receives grace and is saved, he is placed into the church life, to be built together with the other saints as the Body of Christ. This is God's special arrangement and His wisdom: placing saints who need help together with those who can help, that the experienced may learn, according to Christ, to receive the weak and bear their weaknesses, seeking their pleasure, giving them benefit, so that the church may be built up. The true building up of the church is that every saint grows in life and that every member's function is manifested. Christ is the Head; the saints are members of the Body, operating organically under the direction of the Head. Thus the church may express Christ's beauty and become His testimony.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, after reading Romans, help us to realize how important the matter of receiving is. Not only to receive according to God, but also to receive according to Christ—that is, to bear others' weaknesses in our receiving, that their life may grow and their gifts be developed, that the church may truly be a living organism. Bless the church where I am—that every saint, whether experienced or young, whether needing help or able to help others, may be properly coordinated together under the leading of the Holy Spirit, that the church may become a beautiful testimony on the earth. Bless the church where I am. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.