

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

Romans 15:14-16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read second half of Romans chapter 15. Today, we will read verses 14-16.

The Epistle to the Romans is very unique. Among Paul's other twelve Epistles—whether written to churches or to individuals—he wrote with clear spiritual authority, because those churches had been established through his ministry, and those individuals were his coworkers who had received help and perfecting from him. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, however, he had not yet visited the church in Rome, even though there were many coworkers there whom he knew well. Paul carefully kept proper measure and faithfully fulfilled his apostolic function, richly supplying spiritual truth in order to help the saints in Rome fully enjoy the benefits of the gospel.

Only after he had expounded the complete gospel did he begin to engage in more direct dialogue with the saints in Rome. In these interactions, we see the proper expression of a servant of God. Paul's maturity, seasoned character, and principles in dealing with people are a model for every servant of the Lord. Toward a church he had never visited, he was full of appreciation and trust; toward his own ministry, he was full of burden and faithfulness—truly something admirable. He made plans for the road ahead, yet entrusted everything fully into God's hands. His greetings to the saints were fitting, warm, and full of respect. From every angle, we see a mature and seasoned servant of God who had been thoroughly constituted with Christ.

Verse 14: “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

Although the church in Rome was not established through Paul, he knew that every church is built by God and redeemed by Christ at a great price. Therefore, Paul was full of appreciation and trust toward the church. Of course, every church has its shortfalls and difficulties. Paul was a spiritual man, with spiritual insight and discernment, and he certainly knew the church's deficiencies and problems. Yet he deliberately chose not to focus on these negative aspects. He knew that God's grace and mercy are sufficient to make up for any lack, and that God's power and supply can overcome every difficulty. Therefore, he viewed the church with God's perspective, and his heart was filled with appreciation and encouragement.

"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness." Paul affectionately addressed the saints in Rome as his brethren and expressed confidence that they were full of goodness. Goodness here does not refer to moral virtue, but to the goodness that comes from God. Only when a person receives the supply from the Holy Spirit and Christ's virtues are produced in the soul can one be worthy of such a commendation. Paul's very first praise of the saints in Rome was remarkably high: he said they were rich in the Spirit with God's fullness, to the extent that they could express the virtues of Christ and be full of goodness toward people, matters, and things around them.

The second commendation is that they were "filled with all knowledge." Knowledge refers to a person's understanding and recognition in the mind. Here Paul is specifically referring to the knowledge of God—understanding God's will, knowing what God is doing, and being willing to submit to and cooperate with God by accepting His leading.

The third commendation is that they were "able also to admonish one another." The Greek word for "admonish" is a compound verb formed from nous, meaning "mind," and tithemi, meaning "to place" or "to set." Thus, its meaning is "to place the mind," or to help set the mind in its proper position. Admonition, therefore, is helping others place their mind where it should be. When church life is filled with spiritual riches, when the Holy Spirit has the authority, and when the knowledge of God overflows, the saints' souls are willing to know God and submit to His leading.

Only then can a church life of mutual admonition be produced. This is a very high spiritual expression of the church.

Generally speaking, we are afraid of offending others. When we see saints in improper conditions, we often only dare to pray for them privately, without having the courage to admonish them directly. Yet Paul was confident enough to praise the saints in Rome as being able to admonish one another. When a saint's mind is misplaced—for example, when a saint begins to love the world—mature saints will come to help, restoring that person's mind to its proper place, putting God and the church back in the foremost position. Genuine admonition is a spiritual battle. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Admonition is precisely to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Today it is very difficult to see a situation of mutual admonition in the church. At best, people protect themselves and only pray secretly; at worst, they go along with the flesh and vent together. For example, when a husband and wife argue, a saint may go to mediate, but instead ends up joining the battle—either criticizing the husband together with the wife, or ignoring the wife's feelings together with the husband. A saint's mind has a proper position. Romans 8:6 says, "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." To be spiritually minded, according to the original language, is to set the mind on the spirit. This brings life and peace. Paul held the saints in Rome in very high regard: they were rich in spirit, filled in soul with the knowledge of God, and this resulted in a corporate practice of mutual admonition in their church life.

Verse 15: "Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,"

Paul's wording here is extremely careful. We see how he kept proper measure. Because the church in Rome was not established by him, yet he longed to visit them and have fellowship with them, he said, "I have written more boldly to you on some

points, as reminding you.” Paul knew many of the saints in Rome personally, and he was confident that the saints there also knew him. He had already completed three missionary journeys, established many churches among the Gentiles, and written several Epistles that were widely circulated among the churches. Therefore, when Paul wrote Romans, he did have a certain confidence—but that confidence was not in himself or in how much work he had done for God. Rather, it was in the special grace given to him by God.

This special grace refers to his apostleship to the Gentiles. This was God’s calling to him, and it was something well known among the churches. Paul specifically mentions this in Galatians 2:9, “and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” In Paul’s understanding, his being gifted as an apostle to the Gentiles was entirely due to God’s grace. The Greek word for grace is *charis*. When grace is experienced to the point of fullness, it produces *charisma*—the suffix *-ma* in Greek indicates completeness. When grace reaches fullness, it becomes a gift. The word *charisma* emphasizes operative gifts—gifts that function and operate within the church.

Verse 16: “that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

This verse is extremely important. It is the clearest verse in which Paul describes the ministry of his entire life, and it is also a pattern of ministry that every person who desires to serve God should develop. The source of Paul’s ministry was grace. When he fully experienced grace and was constituted with grace, a gift was produced, and he could then begin to fulfill his ministry.

The object of his service was the Gentiles—today, we would say unbelievers. He became a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles and a priest of the gospel of God. Here Paul speaks of his dual identity: he was both a minister and a priest. The Greek

word for “minister” is a compound noun formed from leitōs, meaning “belonging to the people,” and ergon, meaning “work.” Its direct meaning is “public servant.”

Paul was a minister of Christ Jesus, fully under Christ’s commission. He was sent to be a public servant to all unbelievers. That is why Paul says in Romans 1:14, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” Paul owed the debt of the gospel to those who did not believe. On one hand, he was a minister of Christ Jesus to serve unbelievers; on the other hand, he was a priest of the gospel of God. The Greek word for “priest” is also a compound noun, formed from hieron, meaning “temple,” and ergon, meaning “work.” It refers to one who serves in the temple.

Paul was not an Old Testament priest offering animal sacrifices; he was a New Testament priest—a priest of the gospel of God. The church is the New Testament temple, and in the church there is the need for New Testament priests to serve. A priest is a mediator between God and man. The function of the priesthood is first to bring God to man, and then to bring man to God. A New Testament priest brings God’s gospel to people. God’s gospel is not a thing, but a person—Jesus Christ. The gospel of God is Jesus Christ Himself, including who He is and what He has done: He is the Son of God, and He became the propitiation for human sin. This is the gospel of God.

The New Testament priest first brings the gospel to people; once they believe and receive it, they are baptized and added to the church. Then the New Testament priest presents that person to God. According to Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Every saved saint who is added to the church must present his body as a living sacrifice—this is our service. Of course, a newly saved saint is still full of sin, the world, and the flesh, and needs the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the responsibility of the priest is not only to help people be baptized and join the church, but also to help them walk the path of sanctification—through the growth of spiritual life, gradually becoming holy, with the soul filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the offering of the Gentiles becomes acceptable to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is Paul's description of his ministry, and it is also the ministry that every willing servant should develop. We must experience God's grace, be filled with grace, and be constituted with grace into a ministry. From experiencing grace to being constituted with grace into a ministry requires God's special work. Just as all of us may enjoy reading, but not all become writers; all may enjoy sports, but not all become athletes. Those who become writers or athletes do so because of intentional training, willingness to devote themselves, and commitment—until they are ultimately constituted by what they love.

The same process applies to being constituted with grace. God has a specific calling for every saint, and within that calling, God supplies grace. We must recognize our calling and respond to it, allowing ourselves to be constituted by God's grace into a specific ministry. Some speak for God; some lead the saints in worship; some help others understand the truth; some serve practical needs in the church; some shepherd younger saints. Whatever the need in the church, God will raise up specific ministries to meet those needs.

We must recognize that service in the church is related to ministry, not to position. The greatest damage to the church occurs when someone occupies a position without having a ministry—unable to supply life maturely or to help others mature so that the saints around them rise up to serve God together. This explains why churches are often weak and lacking vitality. Many think that as long as they spend a few years earning a theological degree, they can serve the church—but this falls far short.

Serving the church is not a profession; it is a ministry. The source of ministry is grace; the content of ministry is the gospel; the object of ministry is unbelievers or younger saints in the church; the work of ministry is to bring God to people and to bring people maturely to God; the power of ministry comes from the Holy Spirit; the result of ministry is to help people become holy and to present them maturely to God; and the purpose of ministry is to please God.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we serve people, we are ministers of Christ Jesus and priests of the gospel of God. We must be careful ourselves, learning from Paul's

example, so that our words and conduct can be appreciated and even admired, drawing others to come and know Jesus. If our own lives are in disorder, it will be difficult for others to know God through us, and our service will bear little fruit. To be a priest of the gospel is to be a messenger of the gospel. We represent the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, we need a good testimony in our living and a character refined by God—being kind to others and pleasant to be around.

In the church, the constituting of ministry requires many years of the Holy Spirit's work. Therefore, every saint who joins the church should seek opportunities to serve, gradually discovering their gifts through service, and experiencing the rich supply of God's grace so that their gifts may be perfected. Only when gifts are perfected can a ministry be developed. A healthy church will have many saints with ministries. When they function properly, the saints will be full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another. May God help us.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, through Paul's description we deeply admire his ministry. He was a servant of God and a priest of the gospel—not only bringing the gospel to people, but also helping them be perfected through the gospel, becoming holy, and then presenting them to God for His pleasure. What a surpassing service this is. Help me also to learn to serve in the church, according to the burden You have given me, serving others and bringing them before God. Bless the church where I am, that it may be filled with brothers and sisters loving and serving one another, and that the church may grow into a beautiful testimony. We pray in the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.