

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

Romans 15: 25-28

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Romans chapter 15, verses 25 to 28.

Paul's epistle closings and greetings are a manifestation of his beautiful humanity. A spiritual person does not become so spiritual that he forgets how to be human. On the contrary, when Paul expounds truth, he is truly full of light and revelation, supplying people's spiritual needs; when he greets and inquires after the saints, he is also extremely thoughtful and considerate, causing people to feel the warmth of his heart. For saints in later generations, these closings and greetings provide precious historical data, helping people understand at what time, in what place, and under what circumstances Paul wrote this epistle.

We must compare the things Paul mentions in his various epistles with the records in the book of Acts in order to sketch out the trajectory of Paul's life. This not only helps us know this great apostle Paul, but also helps us know how truth was manifested through Paul's experiences. Yesterday we read that Paul's desire was to bring the gospel to Spain. From the eastern shore of the Mediterranean to Spain one must pass through Rome, so he hoped to first visit the Roman church and then, being sent by them, go to Spain to preach the gospel and establish churches.

Verse 25: "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints."

This verse tells us that when Paul wrote Romans, he had just finished his third missionary journey and was preparing to set out for Jerusalem; this was Paul's fifth visit to Jerusalem. Paul had once studied the law in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel, so he must have been very familiar with Jerusalem; but at that time he was extremely zealous for the law and became a persecutor of the church. He even

received letters from the chief priests and went to Damascus to arrest those who called on the Lord's name. On the way to Damascus he encountered a great light and was saved by grace; in him there was a 180-degree reversal, and he became one who proclaimed the gospel. After Paul was saved by grace, he visited Jerusalem a total of five times, all recorded in Acts. Let us spend a little time looking at the background of these five visits to Jerusalem so that we can understand why the fifth visit to Jerusalem was so important to Paul. After Paul was saved by grace, his first visit to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 9:26–27 (NKJV): “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.”

Before this Paul had persecuted the church and was notorious; now that he was saved by grace and came to Jerusalem wanting to join the disciples, everyone was afraid of him. Only Barnabas received him; Barnabas became Paul's very close co-worker afterward. The second visit to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 11:30 (NKJV): “This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

After they arrived in Jerusalem they stayed for a time until 12:25 (NKJV): “So when Barnabas and Saul had completed their ministry, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John whose surname was Mark.”

The background of the second visit to Jerusalem was that Paul and Barnabas were already serving in the church in Antioch; when they learned that Jerusalem was suffering famine, the Antioch church collected an offering and sent Barnabas and Paul to deliver the money to Jerusalem. They were well received in Jerusalem and personally witnessed several major events that occurred in the Jerusalem church. Only after completing their ministry of supply did they take Mark back to Antioch.

The third visit to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 15:2 (NKJV): “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.”

This visit was the well-known Jerusalem council. This event occurred after Paul completed his first missionary journey and returned to Antioch; just then some men came from Jerusalem and taught the Gentile saints that they must be circumcised to be saved. The church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this matter with the church and the elders there. In the end James ruled that Gentile believers do not need to be circumcised.

The fourth visit to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 18:22 (NKJV): “And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.” This was after Paul completed his second missionary journey. He hurriedly left Ephesus and went directly to Jerusalem. He wanted to fellowship again with the elders of the Jerusalem church concerning matters of the Old Testament law. Because although there had been a decision during the previous visit to Jerusalem, only Paul observed it unilaterally. The Gentile churches Paul established were still constantly disturbed by Jewish saints coming from Jerusalem. Therefore Paul felt he must fellowship with the elders once more; he set aside the work of expanding the gospel and hurried to Jerusalem, only to find no one there. The Bible simply records: he greeted the church and then returned to Antioch. Thus the issue of keeping the Old Testament law was not resolved, and the Gentile churches continued to be disturbed.

In Romans 15:25 Paul says he is going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. This is Paul’s fifth visit to Jerusalem. It was right after the end of his third missionary journey and was the last time in Paul’s life that he went to Jerusalem. Paul still remembered that on his previous visit to Jerusalem he saw no one, so this time he went to great lengths, even bringing money collected from the Gentile churches to help the poor in the Jerusalem church. Moreover, he hurried to reach Jerusalem at Pentecost so that he could meet with the elders.

Among Paul’s previous experiences visiting Jerusalem, the second time, when he brought an offering, seemed to produce the sweetest fellowship. Therefore this time Paul hoped to bring the offering from the Gentile churches so that the Jerusalem church could feel the love of the Gentile churches; perhaps this could pave the way for fellowship concerning the law and lead to a beautiful conclusion.

Verse 26: “For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”

The center of Paul’s third missionary journey was in Ephesus; he was also in the school of Tyrannus doing disciple training for two years. While in Ephesus he wrote 1 Corinthians, emphasizing Christ and His cross to deal with all kinds of problems in the Corinthian church. Afterward he went to Macedonia to visit the churches in the Macedonian region. It should have been at that time that he began collecting money among the Gentile saints to help the poor in the Jerusalem church.

The saints in the Macedonian churches responded enthusiastically, which deeply moved Paul. When Paul came to Philippi he wrote 2 Corinthians there, encouraging the Corinthian saints to also join in the offering to help the Jerusalem church.

Let us personally read Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 8:1–4 (NKJV): “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

We know that Philippi was a Roman garrison city; most of the saints in the church were soldiers with modest incomes, yet Paul says that in their deep poverty they abounded in the riches of their liberality, giving beyond their ability and freely willing—this is truly touching.

Paul sent Titus to the Corinthian church to handle the collection of the offering. Probably when Titus had nearly finished the matter, Paul went to Achaia, stayed in the Corinthian church, and during that time collected the offering from the Corinthian saints. Paul wrote Romans during that stay in Corinth, so in 15:26 Paul says: “For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.” Here we see that Paul spared no effort to connect the Jerusalem church with the Gentile churches,

using the loving offering from the Gentile churches to help those in need in the Jerusalem church.

The word translated “contribution” is *koinonia* in Greek, which originally means fellowship or communion. What Paul truly valued was not merely material help but, through material help, to produce a sharing of life—this is the original meaning of “fellowship.” Whether Jewish saints or Gentile saints, they all have life from God; yet because of barriers of race, language, culture, and region, it is not easy to have true sharing of life. If through material help the helpers and the helped can together share and receive love, this can bring forth further sharing of life, which is of very high value.

Verse 27: “It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”

It pleased them indeed. “Them” refers to the Gentile saints in Macedonia and Achaia; they received the gospel and had life from God. When they heard that the Jewish saints in the Jerusalem church had needs, they were willing to give to help these Jewish saints they had never met. Paul says this pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors.

Why debtors? Because the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. The gospel came from Israel; after Jesus Christ resurrected, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out, the Jerusalem church was established, and nearly all the saints in the church were Jews. As the Jerusalem church began to prosper, persecution arose, forcing the Jewish saints to leave Jerusalem.

Just at that time Peter went to the house of the Italian centurion Cornelius and opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. Thus these Jewish saints scattered because of persecution began to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

The Antioch church was established under such a background. Later, with the help of Barnabas and Paul, the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Afterward the Antioch church sent Paul out to preach the gospel and establish churches among the Gentiles.

Because the Jewish saints suffered persecution and had to leave their homeland, they brought the gospel to the Gentiles, causing the Gentiles to receive spiritual things. Therefore the Gentile saints are debtors to the Jewish saints—owing a spiritual debt—and it is proper to repay it with material things. In Romans 1:14, Paul says he is a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, to wise and to unwise; he owed the debt of the gospel. Paul set a beautiful pattern: every saint is a debtor to those around him who do not yet know the gospel; we all owe the debt of the gospel. Therefore preaching the gospel to our relatives and friends around us is not optional but necessary, because we owe them the debt of the gospel.

But from another angle, after believers are saved by grace, toward those who led them to salvation and helped their spiritual life grow, they also are debtors—owing the debt of spiritual benefit. Therefore we should attend to their daily living needs and minister material things to them in order to repay the debt. Dear brothers and sisters, this is Paul's heavenly financial logic.

Those who minister owe those whom they minister to the debt of the gospel; they must help those ministered to experience the full gospel—from believing, being baptized, and being justified by God, to daily sanctification and ultimately glorification—so that every one ministered to can become holy and mature, offered to God. At the same time, those ministered to owe those who minister the debt of spiritual things: they must minister material things and attend to the daily living needs of those who minister.

With such heavenly financial logic, the church can achieve “he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.” Whether in spiritual supply or in the ministering of material things, all can supply one another mutually—this is a healthy church. It is the church's shame when those who preach the gospel live in financial straits; it is the shame of those who preach when the

church is not spiritual. Spiritual supply and the ministering of material things do not come from contracts but from the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Only when the Holy Spirit can be Lord and reign in the church is it a church according to God's heart.

Verse 28: "Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain."

Paul was preparing for his fifth visit to Jerusalem; he says, "when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit." The "fruit" Paul speaks of is the money he collected in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia; it was the fellowship in love from the Gentile saints toward the Jerusalem church.

Paul was probably bringing a considerable sum, preparing to go to Jerusalem. Paul says he must first perform this and seal it to them. "Sealed" in the Greek original uses two verbs equivalent to English accomplish and seal—meaning to safely deliver the money into the hands of the elders of the Jerusalem church and have it properly acknowledged before it is considered complete. Here we see how careful the spiritual Paul was when dealing with financial matters.

If we read the corresponding passage in 2 Corinthians 8:16–24, we will find that Paul himself did not handle the money but entrusted it to three brothers. The first was Titus, Paul's co-worker, who represented Paul in promoting and collecting the offering in the various churches. Another brother served among the churches and was recommended by the churches. This establishes a principle: in handling church finances it is best to have two people so that they can bear witness to each other. Perhaps because the sum was large and involved many churches, Paul added another brother who had been proven in many things and was zealous in serving. Among the three brothers handling the finances, one was Paul's co-worker, and the other two were selected from among the churches.

These three brothers handled the financial matters, while Paul served in an overseeing role. He had to wait until this was performed and acknowledged by the Jerusalem church before it was complete. Paul himself was wholeheartedly wanting to go to Jerusalem, bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, and pass through Rome to have intimate fellowship with the Roman saints. Here we see a spiritual person who balanced spiritual supply and the ministering of material things, and in the details was extremely careful and open, leaving no opportunity for any hidden corruption. This is incomparable to modern churches that often have disputes over finances and even end up in court. We see that Paul was not only so rich and heavenly in spiritual matters but also so open and cautious in handling finances—he was truly a mature spiritual person.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for allowing us to see the heavenly financial logic revealed by Paul. Toward those around us who have not yet believed, we all owe the debt of the gospel; and toward those who have helped us spiritually, we also owe them the debt of spiritual things. Paul uses the concept of debt to remind us that preaching the gospel and attending to the needs of those who preach are not optional but necessary. Bless the church where I am, that every saint may have heavenly financial balance in income and expenditure. May the church be filled with spiritual riches and mutual help in material things; may an atmosphere of brothers and sisters loving one another be produced in the church—this is a healthy church. Bless the church where I am and the church life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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