

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

## **Numbers 5:5-10**

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 5. Today, we are reading verses 5 through 10.

God desires to dwell with His people. God first revealed to Moses that every person needed to know where to camp, the order in which to set out, and the responsibilities and commissions each one was to bear. These outward arrangements had to be put in proper order first. Then God revealed to Moses that the various situations that damaged the unity of God's people had to be dealt with. Because God dwelt in the camp of Israel and God is holy, anything inconsistent or incompatible with His nature had to be removed.

First, situations that defiled the holiness of the entire camp had to be dealt with. God specifically identified three categories: those with leprosy, those with a discharge, and those who had touched a dead body. They were all to be put outside the camp until they were cleansed, after which they could be received back into the camp. Second, to preserve the unity of the people, anything that disrupted peace among them had to be dealt with. There could be no offenses or wrongs committed against one another.

**Verses 5-6: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty,'"**

More than two million Israelites were living and traveling through a wilderness where resources were scarce. It was difficult to avoid situations in which people wronged or offended one another. Yet, to preserve the unity of the entire camp, every action that damaged harmonious relationships had to be properly dealt with. God told Moses to speak to the children of Israel about any man or woman who

committed a sin that people commonly commit. In other words, these were things people might do so frequently that they no longer thought much of them, yet such things were not permitted among God's people. For example, taking advantage of someone, using dishonest weights or measures in business, or gossiping about others behind their backs may be commonplace in other communities. But among God's people, such things damage unity. They not only wrong other people but also constitute unfaithfulness against God.

Here we see a very important spiritual principle: whenever we wrong or offend someone and damage a harmonious relationship with that person, we have actually also sinned against God. We become guilty before Him. Dear brothers and sisters, we must be reminded that in the house of God, we should make every effort to preserve harmonious relationships among the brothers and sisters. We should frequently examine ourselves to see whether we have unintentionally wronged others. This is especially true for saints who have responsibilities of service in the church; they must seek to treat others graciously in every matter in order to preserve the unity of the church. If we wrong another person, we also sin against God. Then how should sin be dealt with?

**Verse 7: “then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.”**

This verse tells us very clearly that when we have wronged someone, three things must be done in order to restore a harmonious relationship with that person. First, we must confess the sin we have committed. Confession is the first step, and it has two aspects: confessing to the person and confessing to God. When we do something wrong, we have not only offended another person but have also sinned against God. Therefore, we must confess to the person, and we must also confess to God. Even if the matter is small and the other person has not noticed it, if we sense that our conscience is troubled, we should deal with it immediately.

Second, after confessing the sin, we must make full restitution to the person we have wronged. The Lord Jesus further warns us in Luke 12:59, "I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite." Therefore, our confession should not consist merely of words; it must also be carried out in action. Whatever loss we have caused another person, we must repay in full. We must not leave behind an unpaid debt of wrongdoing. If, because of a material wrong in this life, we lose the reward of the age to come, the loss is far greater than the gain.

Third, one-fifth must be added. The person was not only to repay the full amount of the loss but also to add another one-fifth. Here we see that the biblical concept was far ahead of other writings from the same period. When we occupy another person's resources, we deprive that person of the opportunity to use those resources. By the time we confess and make restitution, a period of time has already passed. Therefore, an additional 20 percent must be paid to compensate for the person's opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is a foundational concept in modern economics, yet Moses recorded it in the Bible 3,500 years ago and even set forth a method of compensation.

**Verse 8: "But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him."**

God tells us very clearly the amount of restitution that must be made. If the person who was wronged is no longer living, the amount of the loss, plus one-fifth, must be given to that person's relative. If the person has no relative, the restitution must be given to the priest who serves the LORD God. In short, when we have wronged someone, we cannot simply keep what is owed in our own possession. Perhaps the matter happened a long time ago, but the debt does not disappear. Perhaps the person who was wronged is no longer living, but the debt still does not disappear. If we truly cannot find anyone who can receive the restitution, then the restitution must be given to God and received by the priest who serves Him. In this way, the wrong can be cleared.

God's priest is a mediator between God and man, handling matters between people and God on their behalf. The restitution mentioned earlier only repays the loss caused to another person. But when a person sins, he has not only wronged another person; he has also sinned against God. He must still make atonement before God by offering the ram of atonement. That is a separate matter. Here God solemnly teaches His people to maintain a conscience without offense toward both God and man. If a person has sinned, he must repay the loss suffered by the other person and also offer a ram to make atonement before God. Only then can the charge of sin be removed.

Dear brothers and sisters, God deals with the sins of His people in such detail because He wants us to truly understand that sin carries a cost. In the New Testament, we receive the grace of forgiveness in Christ because Christ paid an exceedingly great price for us so that our sins could be forgiven. For us, it is free grace; for Christ, the cost was His life—Christ became the sin offering presented to God for us. When our sins have been forgiven before God, we must still make restitution to those we have wronged, paying the amount owed plus one-fifth. Only by maintaining a conscience without offense toward both God and man can we fully clear away what we owe.

**Verse 9: "Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his."**

In this passage concerning the removal of wrongdoing in order to preserve harmony in human relationships, God seems to place particular emphasis on the priestly office. The priests did more than help the Israelites offer sacrifices to God; they also played an important role in preserving the unity and holiness of Israel. When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place wearing the ephod to meet with God, he bore the twelve tribes of Israel on his shoulders and carried the twelve tribes of Israel over his heart. He brought the Israelites before God. Therefore, preserving Israel's holiness before God was an important responsibility of the priests.

Among the sacrifices the Israelites offered to God, the sweet-smelling offerings made by fire had to be burned on the altar and presented to God, while portions of the other sacrifices were given to the priests. The Chinese Union Version translates this verse as saying that the heave offering shall belong to the priest. In fact, the term “heave offering” does not appear in the original text here. Rather, the verse means that a portion of what the Israelites offered was to belong to the priest.

For example, Leviticus 7:30-34 says, “His own hands shall bring the offerings made by fire to the LORD. The fat with the breast he shall bring, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron’s and his sons’. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings. He among the sons of Aaron, who offers the blood of the peace offering and the fat, shall have the right thigh for his part. For the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering I have taken from the children of Israel, from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and I have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons from the children of Israel by a statute forever.”

This tells us very clearly that when the Israelites offered a peace offering to God, the fat was to be burned on the altar for God, while the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering were to belong to Aaron and his sons. Only the remaining portion was enjoyed together by the Israelite who brought the sacrifice and his family.

**Verse 10: “And every man’s holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his.”**

The translation of this verse in the Chinese Union Version is not very accurate. English translations are basically consistent: the holy things an Israelite sets apart remain his, but whatever he gives to the priest belongs to the priest. Here God specifically reminds the children of Israel that when they offer sacrifices, they must remember the priests.

The same is true in the church today. For God's people to dwell together in unity and enjoy the sweetness of a church life in which they love one another, they must care for the priests who faithfully fulfill their ministry among the saints. These servants supply God's word, preserve the holiness of the church, and bring God's children before Him. Naturally, God's children should also care for their needs in daily life.

Dear brothers and sisters, there is a prerequisite for brothers and sisters to love one another in the church life: wrongs committed against one another must be properly dealt with. Any wrong that is left unresolved will eventually become a breach or crack in the church life, causing the church to lose the grace and peace that come from God. Therefore, in the church life, the saints must frequently examine themselves and promptly deal with any way in which they have wronged others, so that the unity of the church may be preserved. The unity of the church is a necessary condition for receiving God's blessing; a cracked vessel cannot contain heavenly blessings.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, bless the church life where I am. Help every saint in the church life to examine themselves frequently and promptly deal with any way in which they have wronged others. Also bless the saints who serve in the church. Through their service and supply, may every saint live together in harmony and display the beautiful testimony of the church. May the name of Christ be exalted, so that the seekers who come among us may all say that God is truly among you. Bless my local church and our church life. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.