

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

Numbers 15: 37-41

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time to read the bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 15. Today, we are reading verses 37 through 41.

Yesterday we read that when a person openly defies God's commandment, God does not tolerate it, and He laid down a very severe punishment: this person is to be cut off from among His people. The original Hebrew for "openly defies" is "to act with a raised hand," meaning to provoke God while doing the deed, and it is therefore a very evident defiance of God's authority.

God, lest people should not know the seriousness of this matter, immediately gave an example: there was a man who went out on the Sabbath day to gather sticks, and he was found by others and was brought to Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation of Israel also gathered, to see how the matter should be handled. In the incident of the failure at Kadesh, as for those 10 spies who brought the bad report, God Himself acted, causing them to die of the plague.

Now, in the hands of the Israelites there was the law God had given, and it very clearly indicated that this man was to be cut off from among his people — but how was he to be cut off? Moses was not certain, so he temporarily held him in custody and went before God to inquire. God then charged Moses that the whole congregation of Israel was to stone him to death outside the camp, and the Israelites did so.

This is an extremely serious and fearful incident. So openly transgressing God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances can have consequences this severe. I believe the whole congregation of Israel fell into an atmosphere of sorrow and fear. They would think: what if a family member, in a moment of impulse and rashness, defied God's law — what then would be done? Or if someone were enticed, and

being unsteady in will transgressed the law, and was seen by others — what then should be done?

God is a God full of grace and lovingkindness; He knew the anxiety of the Israelites, and immediately issued the command concerning the tassels on their garments. This was to help the Israelites, in their daily living, to be continually reminded to keep God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances.

Verses 37-38: "Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners.'"

God charged the Israelites that on the corners of their garments they were to sew tassels, and on the tassels of the corners they were also to fasten a blue thread. We can imagine that in the actions of daily life, with every movement of an Israelite, these garment tassels would also swing from side to side along with the movement, drawing people's eyes very much, and that blue thread would become the focal point of the gaze.

Blue typifies the heavenly. Although the Israelites lived on earth, God was watching their every move. God was also reminding them: they are God's people, they are to walk a heavenly road and to live a heavenly life; they are not to be entangled by the things of earth, not to be numbed by the enjoyments of earth, not to be drawn along by their own lusts. That blue thread is their link with God, linking their living on earth to God's heavenly promise.

God's promise to the Israelites in the wilderness was that they would be able to enter the good land. God, lest they forget, inserted a visible reminder into their daily living. The lower corner of the garment tassels is the position closest to the earth; that is to say, when they were handling earthly affairs, they were to add tassels and also to fasten a blue thread, so that they would consider the heavenly influence: in every decision they made, was it pleasing to God?

Verse 39: "And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined,"

God here very directly tells the Israelites that the tassels and blue thread added to their garments are not for the sake of beauty, but that upon seeing them they are to remember all the commandments of the LORD. The ordinance God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness, the Israelites have kept right up to today.

Many years later, the Jewish rabbis gathered together all the passages in the five books of Moses concerning commandments, statutes, and ordinances, and after synthesizing and categorizing them, listed 613 commandments. Among them 248 are affirmative, that is, things they ought to do; the other 365 are negative, that is, things they ought not to do. In order to remind the Jews to keep these regulations in their living, they laid down the method of making the garment tassels.

The Hebrew word for "tassel" is tsitsith, which is composed of three Hebrew letters. Every Hebrew letter has a corresponding number, and adding these numbers together gives 600. The tassel must be braided from 8 threads, and on it 5 knots are to be tied; added together the total comes to exactly 613: the meaning is that as soon as a Jew sees this tassel, he is to think of these 613 commandments. This is consistent with the words of this verse: "And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them."

The garment tassel was originally a dress code, a regulation of clothing, that God established for the Israelites. These garment tassels really are very beautiful and very attractive. When performers today perform on stage, their costumes also often have glittering tassels added to them; this is entirely for the sake of beauty and has no spiritual significance whatever.

The Pharisees in the time of Jesus understood that the garment tassels were to remind them to keep the law, and they deliberately made their garment tassels long, with the aim of showing off before people that they were keepers of the law. Jesus then condemned them, in Matthew 23:4-5: "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move

them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments."

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for laying the requirements of the law upon others while they themselves would not move even one finger. Therefore, the garment tassels are to remind oneself — upon seeing them one is to think of God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances, and not to follow one's own heart, committing acts of harlotry, as you have been accustomed to do.

God here hints at the mechanism of man's sinning: it goes from the eye to the heart, and then to action. When a person sins, usually the eyes see something first, which draws the person's attention; then the person's heart begins to think it over and over, and lust follows and is set in motion; finally the will makes a decision, and so the person's body begins to act and commits the sinful deed. So the mechanism of sinning goes from the eye to the heart, and finally brings forth the action of the body.

God therefore, in His wisdom, ordained that the garments of the Israelites were to have tassels sewn on them, with a blue thread added, precisely in order to attract people's eyes; so that besides seeing the enticing thing, they would also see this heavenly reminder. The hope is that this reminder can interrupt the mechanism of sinning; this is God's special grace.

For the New Testament saints, God has not put forth requirements concerning clothing, but God has given us a more advantageous weapon, able to directly oppose the mechanism of sinning, and this weapon is the Holy Spirit. Everyone who believes in the salvation of Jesus Christ has obtained regeneration from the Holy Spirit; that is, the Holy Spirit comes in and dwells within him and gives him a new spiritual life. This new life comes from God, and therefore it is naturally able to live out a heavenly life, a life that conforms to all the requirements of the law.

The difficulty lies in this: this new life is in our spirit, and it must pass through the conscience before it can direct our soul. Satan is the ruler of this world, and Satan also wants to direct our soul by means of this world. Old John, in 1 John 2:16,

categorizes the world as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; these three are the tools Satan uses to entice our soul.

Paul in Galatians 5:17 tells us that the Spirit strives against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit, and these two are contrary to one another. And the battleground of this war is in our soul. In this war, the key to the saints' being able to overcome lies in Colossians 3:2-4, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

If we can constantly set our mind on the things above, and learn to be constantly hidden in God, then we can put off the old man and put on the new man; and this new man can gradually be renewed and transformed into the image of the Lord. Thanks be to the Lord, God has placed the Holy Spirit in each one of us, so that we may, relying on the Holy Spirit, live an overcoming life.

Not only so, but God has also placed us in the church life, letting us see many saints who have put on the new man and who come together to live a church life of saints loving one another; this is the best safeguard for our being able to keep God's commandments, and therefore we should especially give thanks to the Lord. The Israelites of the Old Testament made tassels on their garments to remind them to keep God's commandments; the saints of the New Testament, in the church, see every saint putting on the new man. May we all be able to receive God's reminder and live a life on earth as it is in heaven.

Verse 40: "and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God."

The Israelites sewed tassels on their garments and fastened blue threads, so that they would remind one another to keep all of God's commandments. Thus they would be able to be holy, belonging to the LORD. The New Testament saints all have the indwelling Holy Spirit within, and outwardly they can also put on the new

man, so the church can become holy, be the body of Christ, and belong to Christ the Head.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ has already completed God's plan of redemption, so that we can be saved by grace through believing. Now Christ still intends, through the church, to complete God's plan of heading up all things. In Ephesians 1:10: "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." This is God's plan of heading up all things. This plan is to begin from the church, that is, every saint in the church is able to submit and be headed up under the authority of Christ.

If the saints in the church can all be of one heart and one mind, together submitting to Christ the Head, it will be just as Ephesians 1:22-23 says, "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." So the church is to be the body of Christ, to be filled by Christ, and after that Christ is still to be head over all things for the sake of the church, causing all things to be subject under Christ's feet. If the church today does not submit to Christ, how then can it cause all things to submit to Christ? Therefore, the church occupies a most important role in God's plan of heading up all things.

Verse 41: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God."

This is the conclusion of this chapter. God emphasizes again and again: "I am the LORD your God." God bestowed on the new generation of the people of Israel a supplement to the law, helping them not merely to keep outwardly the commandments God established, but even more to be able, through experiencing God's grace, to have their faith in God increased, so that finally they could all declare: the LORD is their God.

The LORD led them out of Egypt, and now in the wilderness He leads them, wanting them to be holy, belonging to the LORD. Every Israelite had tassels on his garment, and this tassel was the mark of their grace, and also the mark that they belonged to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have all experienced God's grace. Jesus Christ paid an exceedingly heavy price to buy us back and redeem us to God. So what is there upon us that is the mark that we belong to God? Seeing the garment tassels of the Israelites, we should think about whether we ourselves are wearing the new man, whether we are full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit — this is the mark that we belong to God.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for leading us to read Numbers chapter 15. Help us to see that the garment tassels of the Israelites were to remind them to keep God's commandments. We have experienced a greater grace: Jesus Christ has already died for us, and after His resurrection and ascension He also sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. This Holy Spirit reminds us to live a heavenly life, to be full of the fruit of the Spirit upon us, and this is the mark that we have put on the new man. We ask God to help us, through reading the Lord's word every day, to help our life to grow, and to have a good testimony in our living, so that others can see that we are people who belong to God. Bless my living. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.