

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

1 Peter 2:11-17

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 to read 1 Peter Chapter 2, verses 11 to 17.

1 Peter is not easy to divide into sections because Peter is describing a picture, and the main elements in this picture are interrelated and cause and effect of each other. Therefore, different Bible expositors can develop completely different yet complementary messages based on their own understanding and particular burden. Perhaps Peter himself also knew this difficulty, so he specifically left traces in the letter to let readers know about the transition of his thoughts. This trace is the phrase "Beloved brethren." This book starts with an introduction from 1:1-2, and then Peter offers a great, wonderful, and profound praise to God; that is from verses 3-12. This was originally a long sentence. In this long praise, he takes the living hope as the main theme and specifically focuses on the salvation of the soul.

Then from verse 13 to 21, he encourages the saints to pay attention to three things in living a holy life: The first thing is towards God, to focus on hoping for the appearing of Jesus Christ; The second thing is towards oneself, to have a heart of obedience and learn to be holy like God; The third thing is towards the world, to live the days of sojourning in the world in the light of judgment, as if Peter first puts his three main burdens before us. Then from 1:22-2:10, Peter further explains the second point: how to learn to be holy like God, which is also the path of sanctification for every saint. On the individual perspective, one should desire the pure milk of the word through the living and abiding word, so that life may grow and mature; from the corporate perspective, one should be transformed into living stone and be built up as a spiritual house.

This section ends with a beautiful declaration, bringing out the fourfold identity of New Testament saints: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His

own special people.” And it also brings out a common mission, which is to proclaim the praises of Jesus Christ. Then from 2:11-4:11, Peter further explains the third point, which is how to live the days in the world as a sojourner.

Verse 11: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

"Beloved brethren" is Peter's affectionate call to New Testament saints, urging them not to forget their precious identity in the Lord. This identity is spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. But on the other hand, the saints today are still living in the world and are still on earth. Peter reminds again that the saints are sojourners and pilgrims on earth. Being sojourners indicates that we have a destination and a direction. Our destination is the better country, a heavenly one; and our direction is to go upward all the way. Being pilgrims indicates that our stay on earth is temporary. Since it is temporary, there is no need to be too particular, not to be entangled, and no need to add too many unimportant things, lest they affect your journey. Being sojourners and pilgrims emphasizes our mindset.

Then Peter more practically exhorts us on how to abstain from the desires of the flesh. Although we have been saved by grace and are walking on the path of sanctification, these are matters in the spirit and soul. Our flesh is still there, and sin still dwells in our flesh, stirring up the desires of the flesh from time to time. Peter did not further explain what these desires are, but Paul clearly pointed them out one by one. In Galatians 5:19-21, even the most experienced saints often need to remind themselves, and the best reminder is to read this passage aloud: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like." If we are honest, we will admit that there are still several items among them that we have not yet overcome.

Peter says, "fleshly lusts which war against the soul," The Chinese Union Version translates it as "spirit-soul," but this word in the original text is actually "psuche,"

and a better translation is "soul." Both the KJV and NIV translate it as "war against the soul." Peter's wording is indeed very vivid, but there is a very important detail here that most saints easily overlook, which is that when describing the same thing, Peter and Paul have different descriptions.

In Galatians 5:16-21, Paul instructs the saints, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The "lust" used by Paul and the "desire" used by Peter are indeed the same Greek word. However, in verse 17 of chapter 5, Paul points out that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and these two are contrary to one another. The Chinese Union Version translates "Spirit" with the word "聖靈" ("Holy Spirit"), but in the original text, there's no "聖" ("Holy") in front of "Spirit." It should refer to the human spirit, and for the saved, the Holy Spirit dwells within the human spirit, leading it to war against desires.

By combining Peter's and Paul's descriptions, we can paint a complete picture. Humans have a body, a soul, and a spirit, with the soul being in between the body and the spirit. Sin resides in the body, arousing various lusts, while the Holy Spirit dwells within the human spirit. Paul states that the spirit and the flesh are at odds, highlighting their positional enmity, with the soul being the battleground between them. The process of sanctification involves the spirit entering the soul, enabling the soul to obey the will of the spirit. Conversely, the process of corruption occurs when sin residing in the body tempts the soul, leading it astray. The spirit and the flesh are in opposition, and the soul is where they clash. As Peter aptly puts it, the battle begins within the soul.

Dear brothers and sisters, our soul is the battlefield between the spirit and the flesh, between the Holy Spirit and sin. Within our soul, there are three main functions: for rational individuals, the mind is the primary battleground; for emotional individuals, it is the emotions. Until one side prevails, the will makes the final decision. Therefore, the will is the key to victory; it can either lead the entire soul to submit to the spirit or be swayed by the desires of the flesh. Peter advises us to be wary of the desires of the flesh, which is our soul, and not to be led astray by them.

Verse 12: "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."

The passage here mentions "you are among the Gentiles." In general usage, Gentiles are contrasted with Jews. This is especially so in the Old Testament, because the Jews were God's chosen people in the Old Covenant, and God separated the Jews from the Gentiles. But in chapter 2, verse 9, Peter introduces a concept that New Testament saints are also God's chosen race, God's heavenly chosen people. Therefore, Peter here uses Gentiles to refer to unbelievers in general, that is, we should have good conduct among unbelievers. In other words, our words, actions, and behavior should all be seen by people as good and respectable, without leaving any handle for people to criticize. That is to say, among unbelievers, we should have a good testimony.

It is common for Christians to be slandered because they are sojourners on earth. They do not follow the customs of this world and are often misunderstood as being eccentric or unsociable, accompanied by false accusations and even malicious slander. Christians cannot repay evil with evil, but instead should continue to witness for Jesus Christ with their good deeds. If they do so, they will glorify God in the day of visitation.

This sentence is not easy to understand. The subject of this sentence is the unbelievers who slander Christians, and the Greek word for visitation is "episkopēs." "Epi" means "upon," and "skope" means "look intently" or carefully observe. These two words combined mean "oversee" or "visit." One function of elders is to oversee, and here it refers to God's visitation. In the day of God's visitation, glory can be given to God.

This sentence can have two interpretations. The first is to apply it to the present. All people are created by God. From this perspective, God is the great shepherd of all created beings and often comes to oversee or visit these created beings, even including those who slander Christians. Perhaps in one of God's visits to them, seeing the good deeds of Christians, they will be moved and believe in Jesus Christ,

giving glory to God. I believe many Christians can testify to this, especially when these opponents are their relatives. People who grow up in traditional Chinese religion will initially face rejection and opposition from their relatives when they believe in Jesus, even to the point of saying they do not respect their ancestors or are not filial to their parents. If they can continue to witness with good deeds in their lives, allowing these opposing relatives to see their transformation, and finally, in the day of God's visitation, in the day when God visits their relatives, these opposing relatives will also believe in Jesus Christ and give glory to God.

This is looking at the word from a positive perspective. Another interpretation is to apply it to the time of judgment. If these people who slander Christians are not saved in this life, then in the future, at the time of judgment, they will also be speechless because of the good deeds of Christians and accept God's judgment. This also manifests God's righteousness and will give glory to God. However, this is the negative aspect. Then, from verses 13 to 16, Peter changes the topic to how Christians should treat those in authority.

Verses 13-14: "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good."

Christians are sojourners and pilgrims on earth, which is spoken from a spiritual perspective. But since Christians live on earth, they must have another identity, which is that they are also citizens of earthly countries. Peter exhorted the saints at that time to be law-abiding citizens. At that time, the Roman regime had fallen into the hands of the cruel and tyrannical Nero. Peter did not want the saints to resist or revolt, but wanted them to submit to all human institutions for the Lord's sake, including the supreme king and the officials appointed by the king at all levels. Peter said that we should submit to those in authority for the Lord's sake.

In Romans 13:1-2, Paul further says, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist

are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Paul tells us that the rise and fall of empires, the change of dynasties, and the course of history are all in God's hands. God is the ruler of human history. If God does not allow it, no one can gain authority, because the source of authority is God who created the universe and all things. Therefore, submitting to those in authority is submitting under God's authority.

The establishment of political systems and the appointment of officials were originally intended to reward good and punish evil, which is absolutely necessary for people who are born with a sinful nature. Otherwise, human society would fall into the nature of the weak being prey to the strong without restraint. God allows the establishment of various systems in order to allow people to survive, and when the time is fulfilled, He sent His only begotten beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so that people can become children of God by believing. This is God's plan established in eternity.

Therefore, whether the political system is autocratic or democratic, and whether the resulting regime is wise or corrupt, Peter says that we should submit to all those in authority for the Lord's sake. We can submit in this way because we know that God will execute judgment. For example, in the Old Testament, because the nation of Israel broke God's covenant, God raised up the Assyrian Empire and the Babylonian Empire to discipline the people of Israel. However, when the Babylonian Empire overstepped God's boundary, God raised up the Persian Empire to destroy the Babylonian Empire and moved the king of the Persian Empire to allow the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the holy city.

It is the same today; God will avenge His people. In today's democratic system, Christians have the opportunity to participate in the election of leaders and the enactment of laws because of their earthly citizenship. In this regard, Christians must be especially careful to make appropriate considerations before God and make decisions according to their own conscience. They must never impose their own identified values on others and declare it to be God's will.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:21 is: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." So, in a democratic system, who is Caesar? I personally feel that Christians only need to vote according to their individual conscience, without influencing others or being influenced by others. The one who is ultimately elected is God's will, and that person is the Caesar allowed by God. God has not allowed human society to get better and better; in fact, quite the opposite, moral standards will only get worse and worse, to the point that Christ must finally come again to execute judgment. We place the direction of human history, this great question, in God's hands and firmly believe that God will govern everything and will care for every child of His living in it.

Verse 15: "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

This passage tells us our responsibility: under various systems, God's original intention is for us to do good, and our responsibility is to proclaim the virtues of Jesus Christ. How do we proclaim? Through our living, words, actions, and behavior, let people see the glory and beauty of Christ. In this way, for those who have a heart to seek, they can believe in Jesus Christ because of our testimony. This can also shut the mouths of those who are confused and ignorant. Peter wrote this letter around AD 64. At that time, the Roman Emperor Nero set fire to the city of Jerusalem himself, but blamed it on the Christians, which led to widespread persecution of Christians. In this context, Peter strongly exhorted the saints to have good deeds and a living testimony, so that they could shut the mouths of those who were confused and ignorant, or those who deliberately slandered.

Verse 16: "As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God."

Through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, Christians not only have their sins forgiven but also are freed from the bondage of the law, becoming truly free

people. But this freedom is freedom in Christ, not freedom without law, and definitely not using freedom to cover up one's own malicious thoughts. Paul also says in Galatians 5:13, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh." In Romans 6:1, he also tells us that we cannot "continue in sin that grace may abound." Through the efficacy of Jesus Christ's cross, we are no longer slaves to sin and no longer slaves to the world. We have true freedom, and after that, we should follow the example of Jesus Christ. Mark 10:45 says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus came to serve people and gave His life for people. He redeemed us, and we should also learn to serve like Jesus, no longer being our own masters but becoming servants of God. Peter served God all his life. He was a servant of God and also exhorted us to be servants of God.

Verse 17: "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

This is Paul's conclusion to this passage. For all people, for those around you who do not believe, you should respect them. For the brothers and sisters in the church, you should love them. The love here refers to "Agapo," which means loving others with God's love. The Chinese Union Version translates it as "brothers in the church," but a better translation of the Greek original is "Brotherhood," which broadly refers to all saints who have received grace and are saved. It is usually not difficult for us to love the brothers and sisters in our own church. What Peter is saying here is to love all saints who have received grace and are saved, because they are God's children, they are the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and we should love them with the love that comes from God. The third is to fear God, on the one hand, to respect, and on the other hand, to fear. Why fear? For fear that we will fail God's great grace upon us. And the last one is to honor the king, all those in authority, their authority comes from God, so you should respect them.

Let us pray together: Lord, we are sojourners and pilgrims on earth. In our journey of running the heavenly path, help us to abstain from fleshly lusts, so that we may have a good testimony among the unbelievers; when You visit them, they will

glorify God because of our testimony. Also help us learn to submit to those in authority, whether they are pleasing to us or not; the authority of the kingdom comes from You, and we are willing to submit to it. May the Lord bless us in our days of sojourning, that we may all be pleasing to You; we pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.