

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

Romans 13: 1-2

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 Romans chapter 13. Today, we will read 13: 1-2.

Romans chapter 12 speaks of church life, and the chapter concludes with submission to God's sovereignty. Romans chapter 13 then continues by speaking of the testimony the church should have in social life. Paul continues the matter mentioned near the end of chapter 12—submission to God's sovereignty—and in chapter 13 he extends this to the attitude the church should have toward earthly governmental authority.

Before entering the main passage, we must first look at the important matter of "authority." God is the Creator of the universe and of all things; therefore, He naturally has absolute sovereignty over all created things. In His authority, God established the order that the universe should have. When God created man, He said in Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." When man was created, he inwardly bore God's image and outwardly His likeness, and he was to represent God in ruling over the earth and all living things God had created.

The source of authority is God. The authority God gave to man was representative authority—authority exercised on God's behalf. In the Garden of Eden God placed two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If man had eaten of the tree of life, he would have been joined to God's life and thus been able to properly represent God in ruling over the earth. However, man was tempted by Satan and violated God's command by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Thus man fell and lost the ability to represent God; he also lost the authority of representation. Sin entered the world through one man, and Satan

became the ruler of this world, using sin and death to govern the earth that God had created.

God foreknew man's fall and, before the foundation of the world, ordained a plan of redemption—to pay the price of sin for man through His only begotten Son; and after His resurrection to bring forth a new creation, and through this new creation to restore order to the earth so that God's authority might again be executed on the earth. Therefore, when Jesus fulfilled His earthly ministry, He taught His disciples to pray beginning with the restoration of God's authority on earth. In Matthew 6:9–10, the Lord's Prayer begins with, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

God's Son, Jesus Christ, lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, giving us the best example of how to represent God and carry out His authority. During His earthly ministry, His work included healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the gospel. Healing the sick was the exercise of authority over the body; casting out demons exercised authority over the soul; and preaching expressed authority over the spirit. Jesus grew up in Nazareth of Galilee and, in the eyes of men, was merely a carpenter with no family background, social standing, or position. Yet Matthew 7:28–29 records, "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Because Jesus was continually joined to the source of life, He was able to represent God. Therefore, when He taught, His words were full of authority.

Here we must understand the difference between authority and power. Authority comes from the source of life. When a person who possesses true authority exercises it, power will be manifested. However, power may be derived not only from true authority but also from status and position. Under normal and healthy conditions, status and position should proceed from the authority of life—this is the condition that ought to exist in the new creation. But in Satan's old creation, status and position come from the world's value system. Thus Jesus and the priests, scribes, and Pharisees of His time formed a sharp contrast. Jesus, though having nothing in the eyes of men, spoke with authority. The priests, scribes, and Pharisees

had high status and were respected in Jewish society, but they did not possess the authority of life; rather, they possessed the power that came from position. They used that power to persecute Jesus and eventually crucified Him.

The church is God's new creation and the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the church, the authority of the church, and the One every believer must submit to. God has also set certain representatives of authority in the church—elders and deacons—to maintain order in church life. Authority in the new creation comes from spiritual life. If an elder or deacon lacks maturity in spiritual life yet insists on exercising power, the result will be great harm to the church. This is also the deepest cause of disputes or even divisions in the church.

Authority in the church should be based upon the measure of life. However, the measure of life has no objective external standard; rather, it must be recognized subjectively through each believer's experience in church life. Therefore, the healthiest practice is that the older ones learn not to rely on power, and the younger ones learn to submit to authority. Thus the first step for anyone entering the church life is to find authority to which they can submit. A Christian who can find no authority in the church to submit to will not grow in a healthy way.

Another very practical question arises: What should one do if the representative authority in the church becomes fallen? Jude 1:9 gives us an excellent example: "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" The devil here is Satan; before he fell, he was an archangel and Michael's superior. When the devil fell, Michael did not follow him but maintained purity and submission toward God. The verse speaks of Michael disputing with the devil over the body of Moses. Scripture does not tell us why the devil wanted the body—perhaps to use it to establish a new religion to ensnare Israel.

Michael submitted to God and prevented the devil from succeeding; yet on the other hand, he did not dare speak reproachful or reviling words, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" for final judgment belongs to God. Although the devil had rebelled, Michael still stood in the place he should stand. Therefore, if church

leadership becomes fallen, we must not follow them in their fall, but neither should we judge them. Instead we should pray for them and commit everything into God's hands; in His time He will manifest His will. Of course, this may be a painful time of testing. Today God desires that Christ reign in the church. When the church first submits to Christ's authority, the result will ultimately be that all things are brought under Christ.

Having understood the principles of authority within the church, we now consider how the church should face governmental authority in the world.

Verse 1: "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."

"The governing authorities" refers to the civil authorities on earth who are above us and administer over us. Paul does not distinguish between good governments or bad governments, democratic or authoritarian governments, or even legitimate or illegitimate governments. Paul simply says that everyone must be subject to the authorities over them. The word "everyone" certainly includes Christians, "for there is no authority except from God."

Paul here clearly tells us that the reason we must submit to government is because these authorities are from God. That means God rules over human history—the rise and fall of nations, the appointment and removal of rulers, the development of political systems, even elections in democratic societies. Every believer in the church must submit to governing authorities, for their authority has been established by God. In Paul's time, the Roman government was authoritarian and brutal, and persecution of Christians had begun. Yet Paul did not call believers to unite and resist, but rather instructed Christians to submit to the ruling authorities.

The same applies today. Whether we like those who govern or whether they persecute the church, their position is set in place by God's sovereign wisdom. What we consider "good" or "bad" is based on human evaluation and limited to a short time span. God's arrangement is based on His eternal purpose and His specific

timing. We may not understand presently, but if we lengthen the timeline, we may gradually discern God's intention. Therefore Paul says that everyone must submit.

The phrase "everyone" in the KJV is translated literally as "every soul," following the original language. The Bible often uses "soul" to refer to man, because the soul is the major part of man and the seat of personality, unaffected by time. But Paul writes "every soul" to show that submission is a matter that takes place in the soul. The Greek word for "be subject" is a compound verb consisting of two words: hypo, meaning under, and tasso, meaning arrange or appoint. Thus the word means "to submit," that is, to place oneself under God's appointed arrangement. Therefore, submission is directly related to God's ordering of authority, and it requires that our will in the soul submit to God's arrangement in government.

This submission refers primarily to the attitude of our soul—we are willing to submit. If the authorities issue commands forbidding Christians to preach the gospel, our attitude should remain respectful and submissive; however, our actions may not comply, because such demands violate God's command. For example, in Acts 5:29, when the Jewish council forbade the apostles to preach in Jerusalem, Peter boldly responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Peter used a different word—the Chinese Union Version translates it "obey," referring to actions. When governmental regulations conflict with God's commandments, our attitude must remain submissive, while our actions may refuse compliance.

Verse 2: "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

Because governing authorities are established by God's decree in human history, we may not understand why God has arranged things as they are, but we must submit to His arrangement. "Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God." The "ordinance" refers to God's decree or arrangement. The order established under God's authority becomes part of that authority. Therefore, we must not oppose the governing authorities; those who do will incur judgment, meaning they will face the legal consequences established by the authorities. If a

ruler has obtained power unlawfully or abuses his authority, God Himself will deal with him, for God is the Lord in human history. God has not instructed the church to oppose or overthrow governments.

In modern times many churches have become involved in political action—urging believers to take to the streets to protest certain policies or oppose political figures. Personally, I believe this is improper. Each believer, as a citizen, may express personal convictions according to his conscience, but that should be his own decision. The church, as God's house, should not mobilize believers to become a political force to reshape government; this is not Paul's teaching. When government becomes corrupt, the church should pray for it. The rise and fall of authorities must be left to God, who is the Ruler of history.

The church must obey God's word. If governing authorities issue decrees contrary to Scripture, what should the church do? To disobey God's word is to offend God. This violates His righteousness, deprives us of holiness, and if unrepented of, leads to loss of fellowship and halts spiritual growth. This results in the loss of God's testimony and the church's purpose for existence. Therefore, the church must obey God's word. However, to disobey governmental commands is to resist governmental authority, which means resisting God's arrangement—yet this is not the same as offending God Himself.

When one offends God's order, one may still remain in fellowship with God—but one cannot receive perfecting from the order God has appointed. The most balanced course, therefore, is to obey God's word while seeking to avoid direct conflict with those in authority. Perhaps through this process we may come to understand God's purpose in establishing that authority. Perhaps God intends to use governmental pressure to refine His church. If we gain such a vision, the church will obey God's word even while suffering under unjust rulers, and through suffering the church will become holy.

Beloved brothers and sisters, we must be assured that God is in control of the human history. All authorities are arranged and established by Him. As long as governmental commands do not violate God's word, we should submit to those in

authority. Submission does not mean flattery; it simply means receiving the administration of those in office with a submissive attitude, while maintaining the moral and spiritual bottom line of not violating conscience or righteousness. This is not easy, especially today when many political leaders are morally corrupt and of poor character. Yet we must understand that they are still set in place by God, and His purpose must be good. We are not required to understand that purpose; we are only required to obey Paul's instruction to submit to governing authorities.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You for placing us in the church life and for establishing within the church the measures of spiritual life so that we may learn submission to the authority of life. May the mature ones lead by example without relying on power, and may the younger ones learn to submit, so that the church may be filled with the order of life. While the church remains in the world, it must also face worldly authorities. Through Paul's teaching we see that all authorities are from God, appointed and arranged by Him. Therefore, as long as they do not violate the principles of God's word, we submit to those in authority, praying continually for them and maintaining a harmonious relationship so that the church may carry out its life according to God's appointment. Even when facing authorities who abuse their power, grant us patience. Bless our church and church life. We pray in the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.