

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

**Romans 13: 3-5**

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 13. We will read verses 3-5 today.

We live in this world, yet we do not belong to this world. We need to face all kinds of problems and challenges in the world, so we must ask the Lord to keep us from being defiled by this world. Therefore, when we come to Romans chapter 13, Paul deals with the relationship between the church and society, and the first thing he addresses is how to face governing authorities.

We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, yet we live in earthly nations. The constitution of the heavenly kingdom is the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus proclaimed in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. The constitution of the heavenly kingdom applies to life in the church, but it cannot be implemented in earthly nations; we must wait until Christ comes again and establishes a righteous and just millennial kingdom—at that time the constitution of the heavenly kingdom will become reality. Today, every earthly nation has borders and citizens, and every earthly government exists to seek the greatest welfare for its own country. When one nation expands its own welfare, it will infringe upon the welfare of other nations. Yet up to this day, there is still no reasonable arbitration mechanism between nations, so conflicts of interest are inevitable: political, economic, cultural, and many other levels.

If these conflicts cannot be resolved, military conflicts will arise, and military conflicts can spread from two nations to regional conflicts or even further erupt into world wars. In the last century, two world wars already occurred—how many people lost their lives, how many were displaced? The situation was tragic, yet this is precisely the inevitable outcome when fallen mankind lives in the world system controlled by Satan. It will be the same before Christ returns.

Jesus foretold in Luke 21:10–11 the scenes that will occur at the end of the age: “Then He said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.’” Therefore, we should not expect human civilization to produce lasting peace, because selfishness and self-interest are the fallen nature of man. Driven by this nature, conflict is inevitable. This selfish, self-interested nature can expand from the individual to the family—this is the responsibility a householder should bear; it can further expand to the ethnic group, and the person becomes a national hero; it can expand to the nation, and the person becomes a martyr for the country. Yet within human civilization, almost nothing exceeds nationalism.

Only God can declare “God so loved the world,” because every person is created by God; God’s love therefore transcends racism, nationalism, and goes beyond politics, economics, culture, and all other levels. The church consists of citizens of the heavenly kingdom; it is the gathering of God’s children. As children of God, our nature must be redeemed, transformed, and enlarged to be like God’s, and ultimately it must also transcend racism, nationalism, politics, economics, culture, and all other levels.

In essence, the church and earthly governments are different to a certain degree. Yet God has never called the church to rise up and change earthly governments; instead, He wants the church to submit to earthly governments and to recognize that God is the sovereign Ruler of human history. God uses earthly governments to accomplish His will, and in this process, God will surely maintain His righteousness, using flawed earthly governments to fulfill God’s eternal purpose. This process is extremely complex and extremely hidden—far beyond human imagination. We need to look at Old Testament history to help us slightly perceive how God uses earthly governments. May the saints focus on the degree of complexity and intricacy involved; those who are not personally in the midst of it can hardly imagine it.

Beginning with Abraham, God already foretold that He would send His only begotten beloved Son to earth to accomplish the redemption of mankind. Yet from

Abraham to Jesus there were roughly 2,000 years. During these 2,000 years, God's operation had only one purpose: to bring forth the birth of Jesus Christ. In these 2,000 years, God used countless earthly governments to accomplish the purpose of Jesus' birth. First, Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. Later, when famine struck the good land, God used the Pharaoh of Egypt at that time to receive Jacob's family of seventy persons, so that the Israelites could continue to multiply—because God had already promised that Jesus Christ would come from Abraham's seed.

Later, when Pharaoh began to enslave the Israelites, God raised up Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness; He then raised up Joshua to lead Israel into the good land of Canaan. After the land was divided, there were years of warfare until the time of King David, when the kingdom of Israel was finally established. It was not until Solomon that the temple was built. When Solomon dedicated the temple, Israel's national strength reached its peak; the land that God had promised to Abraham 1,000 years earlier was fully possessed only in Solomon's time.

Yet after Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel forsook God, so God raised up the Assyrian empire to discipline the northern kingdom; the northern kingdom was destroyed, and the ten tribes of the north were exiled into Assyrian territory. When the king of Assyria also wanted to swallow up the southern kingdom of Judah, this exceeded God's limit; God sent His angel and destroyed the Assyrian army, and the Assyrian empire declined. Later, the southern kingdom of Judah also forsook God, so God raised up the Babylonian empire to discipline Judah. The southern kingdom was destroyed, and the people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon.

Matthew chapter 1 tells us that from Abraham to David there were 14 generations; from David's beginning to reign until Jeconiah was carried away to Babylon, another 14 generations. After Jeconiah, David's descendants could no longer sit on the throne; the line was secretly passed down for another 14 generations until

Joseph, who was the husband of Mary. Who would have thought that nearly 2,000 years of development was for the purpose of producing this one man, Joseph?

On the other side, David had another son named Nathan, who did not sit on the throne. Luke chapter 3 tells us that after Nathan, through 41 generations, Heli was born, and Heli was the father of Mary. This line was completely hidden, yet it was God's most important arrangement, because Mary was to conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to Jesus Christ, while Joseph became Jesus Christ's legal father. From Abraham to Jesus, the entire development of human history had the purpose of producing Jesus.

When Jesus' ancestors were carried away captive to Babylon, in the time when Belshazzar was king of Babylon, he drank wine from the vessels taken from the temple and offended God; that very night he was killed. God raised up the Persian empire to replace the Babylonian empire and moved Cyrus king of Persia to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple; this brought forth Zerubbabel, who led the first group of returning Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

In the Persian empire, God also raised up the Jewish woman Esther and made her queen to King Ahasuerus of Persia. Through her, the plot of the prime minister Haman to massacre the entire Jewish people was thwarted; her uncle Mordecai was promoted to replace Haman as prime minister of Persia. This led to the second return of the Jewish remnant under Ezra. Ezra restored the law and the priestly service. Later there was a third return under Nehemiah, who rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem. Only thus could the Jewish remnant who returned to the land of Judah settle down and multiply for 400 years.

Until Mary was born in Nazareth of Galilee and betrothed to Joseph of the same city. God's eternal purpose was that the virgin Mary would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to Jesus, and that Joseph would be arranged as their covering to protect the infant Jesus. Throughout these 2,000 years, countless historical events occurred—all for the purpose that Jesus could be born in Bethlehem and accomplish God's plan of redemption through Jesus. In these 2,000 years, how

many Israelites went through how many things? Who could imagine that so many complicated and winding events occurred for one single purpose: to bring forth Jesus from the virgin Mary and to have Joseph as their covering.

Today, when we look back along the track of history at everything that happened, we can see that God truly is the sovereign Ruler of history. He used different empires and different kings, using earthly governments to accomplish God's eternal purpose and plan and to reach God's goal. Seeing God's marvelous arrangement, we cannot but praise the greatness of God. Yet among the Israelites who were involved throughout these 2,000 years, who knew God's plan?

In the same way, after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven and sent down the Holy Spirit to build the church, the purpose is to bring forth the second coming of Jesus Christ. Today, the development of the entire world situation—the rise or decline of different governments—all serves the same single purpose: to bring forth Christ's return. We, as God's New Testament people and members of the church, live in the midst of this—how many of us can understand God's plan? Actually, it does not matter if we cannot understand; we only need to maintain a watchful and waiting heart so that when things happen, we may have insight from the Holy Spirit and discern that it is God's doing. Just like Simeon and Anna recorded in Luke chapter 2: they continually watched and waited, and thus they recognized that the infant Jesus was the coming Christ.

We have reviewed so much Old Testament history in order to help the saints be assured that God is the One who controls human history. We may not understand—probably we cannot understand—but we must be certain that God is reigning; in this way we can submit to the governing authorities that God has established and appointed. Moreover, these authorities are still tools that God uses to cause the gospel to be spread to all inhabited places and to cause the church to grow to a certain stature so that the number of the overcomers may be filled up.

Paul first tells us from a macro perspective that everyone who is in authority has been ordained and arranged by God. Then Paul narrows the scope and tells the saints how they should live under the authorities established by God.

**Verse 3: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.”**

Under normal circumstances, those in authority maintain public order and good customs in society through the law. Therefore, rulers are not a terror to those who do good but to those who do evil. As long as we do good, we will not fear the authority and will even receive praise from the same. In fact, if we live a sanctified life according to Paul’s teaching, this standard far exceeds human law. Human law merely rewards good and punishes evil; therefore, under normal circumstances, the saints in the church should all be model citizens in society.

Paul tells us to maintain a harmonious relationship with those in authority and to build a good reputation; in this way the church can avoid interference from political power, and the saints can pursue spiritual growth and the perfecting of their gifts in a relatively free church life.

**Verse 4: “For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”**

God is the source of authority; those who rule on earth are God’s ministers. The word “minister” in Greek is diakonos, which can generally be translated as servant or steward. Those in authority are God’s servants, God’s stewards; therefore they are for our good. Of course, sometimes we also encounter evil servants; nevertheless, since they are God’s servants, God Himself will discipline them—we do not need to stand up and judge.

If you do evil, you should be afraid, because those in authority do not bear the sword in vain. The sword is a symbol of power; to bear the sword means to be able to execute power. If we violate the law—that is, do evil—we should fear those in authority, because in their hands is the power to enforce the law. They not only enforce the law but must also punish those who do evil, so that the authority of the

law may be established and the effect of restraining evil may be achieved; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Generally speaking, the law is the lowest standard for people to get along with one another; crossing the boundary of the law causes others to suffer loss. The most important responsibility of those in authority is to execute judgment with a fair attitude. In the process of execution, both sides should be allowed to present testimony and explanations, together with objective evidence, and only then should a verdict be made according to the law. As Christians, Jesus Christ's charge to His disciples is not only not to harm people but to love people; therefore this far exceeds the standard of earthly law. If we all require this of ourselves, we will naturally not fear those authorities who bear the sword.

**Verse 5: "Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake."**

Paul tells us that we must be subject to those in authority for two reasons: the negative reason is that we do not want to suffer punishment; the positive reason is that we do not want to violate our conscience. In Romans 2:15 it says, "who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them." The conscience spoken of here that distinguishes right and wrong is our conscience.

This is what remained after Adam sinned in the garden of Eden: man could no longer positively exercise the function of dominion. Yet under God's sovereign authority, man was still left with conscience—a capacity to know right and wrong; when one knows he is wrong, it also produces a feeling of shame. This is why, after Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves coverings to hide their shame. Of course, leaves could not provide real covering, so God made tunics of skin from a lamb and clothed them, thus taking care of the shameful feeling of their conscience. The skin of the lamb speaks of the lamb having been slain to pay the price for their sin. Of course, this was only a type; the real Lamb is God's Son, Jesus Christ.

As Christians, fearing punishment is the bottom line; even better is to maintain a pure conscience. Conscience is a function of the spirit. When conscience is touched, it must pass through the translation of the mind in our soul before we can discern what matter has triggered the reaction of conscience. If we are willing to exercise in this way regularly, we can maintain the sensitivity of our conscience, and we will not easily do things that violate conscience through carelessness. If we continually go against conscience and ignore the feeling of conscience, Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:19, “having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck.” Rejecting conscience means one cannot sail onward in the faith, just like a ship that is wrecked. Therefore, rejecting conscience causes our faith to collapse and sink; we cannot continue onward in the faith. Therefore, we must all seek to keep a good conscience without offense.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. On one hand, cause us to truly know that everyone in authority is established and arranged by You. Under normal circumstances, those in authority are God’s ministers; they reward good and punish evil, executing wrath on those who do evil, establishing the majesty of the law, maintaining certain boundaries so that people can survive and live together in peace within them. Help the church where I am to establish a harmonious relationship with those in authority; help the saints in the church to maintain a conscience without offense. Build up a healthy church life so that in the society where we live, we may be a beautiful testimony. This prayer is in the holy name of my Lord Jesus Christ.