

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

Romans 13: 5-7

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 are going to read Romans Chapter 13 and today we will read verses 5 to 7.

The gospel must be preached throughout all inhabited places, and the church must be established in every society where people gather. The church must become a stabilizing force in society, become light and salt, and bear testimony for Christ—drawing God's children back to the church to build up the church together and to welcome the return of Christ.

Speaking of the relationship between the church and society, Paul first helps the saints recognize from a macro perspective that God is the One who governs human history. All governing authorities, whether good or bad, righteous or evil, play a certain role in human history and ultimately fulfill God's will and reach God's purpose. Therefore, Paul charges the church to submit to the authorities that are above us; to resist the ruling authorities is to resist God's ordination and arrangement.

Then Paul narrows the scope, addressing those officials who have authority over the saints in the church. They are God's servants, established by God to maintain social order. They reward good and punish evil, which is beneficial to the church. In their hands is the authority to enforce the law—they can punish evildoers and bring justice to those who are persecuted.

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

Punishment comes from men, but the feeling of conscience comes from God. The saints should refrain from doing evil not only because they fear being punished, but even more because they fear having an uneasy conscience. We must honor God more than we honor men; we must fear God more than we fear being punished. Therefore, the saints must practice keeping their conscience sensitive; the conscience must become our first line of defense against doing evil. Next, Paul goes on to address a very practical matter: paying taxes.

Verse 6: “For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.”

“Paying grain,” this term is an outdated translation. In ancient China, taxes submitted to the government were mainly paid in grain, so the Chinese Union Version translated it as “paying grain.” But the Greek original simply means paying taxes. The Greek word for “taxes” is phoros, referring to the annual, regularly collected taxes such as property tax, land tax, and poll tax. We must pay taxes, and this is also for the sake of conscience. For government officials are God’s servants; they maintain social order so that the church may live in peace. Therefore, the saints should pay taxes honestly. These tax revenues are used to cover the expenses needed for government operations. The government is established precisely to manage such matters, and this is also the result of human society gradually developing under God’s sovereign authority.

If we follow the classifications of Dispensationalism, before entering eternity, time can be divided into seven periods. The first is called the Age of Innocence—this was in the Garden of Eden, the period before mankind had sinned. Before man sinned, there was frequent and intimate fellowship between human beings and God. The second period is the Age of Conscience—from the time man sinned and was driven out of the Garden of Eden until God judged the world with the flood. During this period, people acted according to their conscience; therefore, this period is called the Age of Conscience. The third period is called the Age of Human Government—after the flood, from the time of Noah until the time of Abraham, human rulers

arose to govern mankind. The fourth is the Age of Promise—from when Abraham received God’s promises until Moses. During this period, God gave promises to people, and the chosen ones lived according to the promises of God.

The fifth period is called the Age of Law—from Moses until Jesus. Moses received the Law given by God, and God governed His people according to the Law. The sixth period is the Age of Grace—this is the period from Jesus’ first coming until His second coming. During this time, people can receive grace and salvation through believing in Jesus and can gather together to build the church. The seventh period is called the Age of the Kingdom—this refers to the time when Jesus Christ returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom and reign together with the overcoming saints. These seven periods are classified from the perspective of God’s called people.

But for the people of the world, they have remained in the Age of Human Government. From the beginning, there was absolute monarchy; later, influenced by the church, democratic politics developed—built on the principle of the separation of powers (judicial, legislative, and executive) established according to Isaiah 33:22. Through the checks and balances of power, the idea of “the people ruling” is achieved. Whether it is an autocratic system, a democratic system, or any political system in between, all are used by God as His servants to maintain social order and stability. These governments all need to collect taxes from the people to keep the government functioning.

Paul tells us that no matter what type of system we live under, we must pay taxes honestly. In Paul’s time, the Jews considered themselves God’s chosen people. Since they had already paid the temple tax, some Jews encouraged others not to pay taxes to the ruling Roman government. Paul here presents the opposite view, telling the saints to pay taxes honestly.

When Jesus was carrying out His earthly ministry, the Pharisees insisted that taxes should not be paid to the Roman government, while the Herodians believed that taxes must be paid. These two groups, though opposing each other, united to test Jesus. They asked Him whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked them for a tax coin and said, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They answered,

“Caesar’s.” Matthew 22:21, “Jesus said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” This established the principle for how the church should relate to earthly governments. Paul followed this same principle: what belongs to Caesar should be given to Caesar. Since our earthly life enjoys the order and stability provided by the earthly government, we naturally should pay taxes honestly.

Verse 7: “Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

Paul here gives a conclusion regarding the relationship between the church and earthly authorities: whatever is owed to a person should be given to him—this is the most basic principle. The church is made up of citizens of God’s kingdom; we must not owe anything to anyone. Whatever a person deserves, we must give. Paul then divides this into two major categories: First matters related to material things, and second matters related to the spiritual or intangible.

Let us first look at the first category: “Render to all what is due: taxes to whom taxes are due.” As mentioned earlier, this is an older translation. In today’s terms, it refers to personal taxes—such as property tax, land tax, and poll tax—that should all be paid fully and honestly.

“Customs to whom customs”: this refers to goods taxes or usage taxes. For example, when buying or selling goods, customs duties must be paid; when using public facilities—such as highways, shipping, or transportation—usage fees are required. These taxes that arise from commercial transactions or from using publicly provided resources must also be paid honestly.

The second category concerns matters of the spirit: “to whom fear is due, fear; to whom honor is due, honor.” Earthly authorities are used by God to govern earthly citizens. The saints in the church have a dual identity: on the one hand, they are God’s heavenly people, but since they still live on earth today, they must also fulfill their responsibilities as earthly citizens. Toward earthly officials, we must have

fear—lest we commit wrongdoing and violate earthly laws, which would bring punishment from earthly authorities. “To whom honor is due, honor”: God has given earthly rulers the authority to govern people. Therefore, we should show them appropriate respect and submit to their administration. Paul’s teaching is that the church should maintain a harmonious relationship with earthly authorities; whatever they are owed should be given to them.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for the teachings You gave to the church through Paul. Although we are heavenly citizens, we still live on the earth today and are under the jurisdiction of local governments. Help the church where I am to maintain a harmonious relationship with earthly authorities. Help us to pay the taxes we ought to pay, and to offer the reverence and respect that are due—honestly and respectfully. By maintaining a harmonious relationship with the governing authorities, may we live peaceably and become a positive, stabilizing force in society—being the light of the world and the salt of the earth. May we bear testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ in our locality and attract the sons of peace back to the church, building up the church together with us. Bless the church where I am and our church life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.