

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

### **Romans 13: 8-10**

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 8-10 today.

Romans chapter 13 speaks of the testimony the church should have in daily life. In verses 1–7, Paul first sets forth the attitude the church should have toward those in authority on earth: submission. Because God is the sovereign over human history, whether the society in which the church finds itself is authoritarian or democratic, those who are in authority are established by God. In Paul's day the Roman regime had already begun large-scale persecution of the church, yet Paul still commanded the saints to submit to those in authority, to pay taxes on time when due, to fear them, to honor them, and not to resist. Because God is the all-knowing God, His arrangement must have His good pleasure; God's will is higher than our will, and God's wisdom is higher than our wisdom—we do not need to be God's counselors.

In modern times some churches actively participate in politics, hoping that by uniting the churches they can exert influence and bring about political change. Personally I do not agree; I believe Paul's teaching in this chapter is very clear. If we put ourselves in Paul's position, we know his situation was absolutely not easy. Yet Paul faithfully conveyed God's word. He was willing to suffer himself, and willing for the churches he served to suffer, just so that Christians in later generations could receive God's pure word. It was Paul who paid an extremely great price so that we have the New Testament in our hands today. Therefore we should seek to understand what Paul meant and obey the word God spoke through Paul.

Our citizenship is not being of this world, yet as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and as citizens of earthly kingdoms, we should obey what Jesus said: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are

God's." (Matthew 22:21 NKJV). Even in tribulation we should ask for God's protection so that we may live peacefully and have a healthy church life. We neither adopt the method of resistance nor join with the world, but allow God, through our submission, to make His will manifest.

Next, from verses 8–10, Paul speaks of how to get along with the people of the world. This passage is simple and direct; it is easy to understand when read. The harder part is how to position it. Following the logic of Paul's writing of the epistle, I am convinced that this passage refers to getting along with the people of the world. Because the principles for how saints get along in church life have already been covered in detail and completely by Paul in Romans 12:9–21, there is no need to add another three verses here. Moreover, what these three verses say is already included in the principles for how saints get along in church life.

I believe God leads us to read chapter by chapter, verse by verse, precisely to prevent us from taking verses out of context. We must clearly define every passage—who Paul is speaking to and in what context—so that when we apply it we will not put the hat on the wrong head. As we read today's passage, I will especially emphasize Paul's audience and compare it with 12:9–21, to help us enter into Paul's thought, so that we do not misinterpret God's word.

**Verse 8: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."**

When speaking of how saints get along in church life, Paul begins in Romans 12:9–10 by presenting the two great commandments: love God and love the brothers and sisters. Because the saints in church life all have life from God, only when a saint's relationship with God is right will his relationship with people be normal. But toward the people of the world, Paul does not start with loving God; instead he says "owe no one anything," and that in everything we must owe no one anything. We must not take advantage of others, nor owe the people of the world.

The next sentence—"except to love one another"—is not accurately translated in the Chinese Union Version, and this has caused Chinese-speaking saints to misunderstand the audience of this verse. "Love one another" is the new commandment Jesus gave to His disciples, because God's children all have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and life from God, and only then is it possible to love one another.

Toward the people of the world, you can love them, but how can you require them to love you in return? According to a literal Greek-English interlinear, this sentence reads: "To no one anything owe, if not one another to love." The Chinese Union Version omitted the phrase "if not" (except), so the meaning when read is exactly the opposite. The NIV translation is much more accurate: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." That is, owe no debt to anyone except the continuing debt of loving one another.

Paul clearly knew that with the people of the world it is impossible to reach mutual love; this debt will definitely remain outstanding. Yet we should have the sense of owing this debt and, as much as possible, love the people of the world—knowing it cannot be done yet still doing it, and doing it with all our strength. This is Paul's charge. For "he who loves another has fulfilled the law"—this statement further proves that Paul's audience here is the people of the world, because teaching toward Christians is always two-sided and orderly: first love God, then love your neighbor as yourself; only with these two can the law be fulfilled. But toward unbelieving people of the world who do not know God, Paul does not mention loving God; rather, toward them we must first achieve owing no one anything, not owing anyone's debt, and perhaps on top of that, love them as much as possible—this fulfills the law.

**Verse 9: "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"**

Discerning saints will surely notice that Paul is quoting the Ten Commandments. The first four of the Ten Commandments concern loving God, but since the audience is the people of the world, there is no need to mention them. The last six concern loving people, yet Paul only mentions “You shall not murder” (6th), “You shall not commit adultery” (7th), “You shall not steal” (8th), and “You shall not covet” (10th). Paul seems to have deliberately omitted the 5th and 9th commandments. The 5th is to honor your father and mother—parents are family, so naturally they cannot be regarded as “the world.” The 9th is not to bear false witness against your neighbor—this refers to perjury in court to frame someone, and this is already included in the basic principle of owing no one anything, so of course saints must not do it.

But why did Paul deliberately omit them? Perhaps Paul felt that not only must we not bear false witness, but even to protect our own rights by taking worldly people to earthly courts is improper. Why can we not accept loss? If our loss can help someone turn to Christ, would that not be of far greater value? Therefore afterward Paul adds, “and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The Greek word translated “person” in the Chinese Union Version originally means “neighbor.” The “any other commandment” mentioned here perhaps refers to the statutes and ordinances developed from the Ten Commandments. All God’s commandments concerning human relationships can be summed up in one sentence: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

#### **Verse 10: “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”**

This is Paul’s conclusion on how to treat the people of the world: love does no harm to a neighbor. The “neighbor” here is the same as in the previous verse. If we read these two verses together, to love your neighbor as yourself means you should not do harm to your neighbor. Then how should we define “neighbor”?

In Luke 10: 25–37 it is recorded that a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. This lawyer clearly knew that the law consists of loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said to him, “Do this and you will live.” The lawyer then asked a very challenging question: “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus did not answer directly but told the parable of the Good Samaritan: a certain man fell among thieves, was beaten half-dead, stripped of his clothing, and left at the roadside. A priest passed by and went over to the other side; a Levite passed by and also went over to the other side. A Samaritan came, bandaged his wounds, set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and paid for him. Then Jesus asked the lawyer, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” Of course, in this parable Jesus likened Himself to the Good Samaritan—He is the neighbor.

If we think about our own situation, which of us was not beaten half-dead in the world, stripped of our clothing, left at the roadside with no hope at all? It was Jesus Himself who came to meet us, bandaged our wounds, brought us into the church, and paid the full price of redemption for us. It was Jesus Christ who had compassion on us, so that we could be saved by grace.

Today Jesus also wants to send us to be neighbors to those who are wounded in the world. If we are willing to love the worldly people around us—and true love comes from Jesus Christ—then we should help them receive the salvation of Jesus Christ. Only the love of Christ can truly fulfill the law.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for teaching us through Paul how we should get along with the people of the world. We must not owe anyone anything; we must go further and love people, and the highest expression of loving people is to preach the gospel to them, so that they too may know Jesus Christ and receive Christ’s salvation—not only having their sins forgiven but also receiving eternal life. Only with the love of Christ can the law be fulfilled. Help us all to become ambassadors of the gospel, able to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those around us who do not yet know Him. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.