

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

Romans 1: 18

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 1:18–32. Today, we will read verse 18.

Sinners receive the judicial redemption by faith—they are condemned and then justified. This one sentence encapsulates Romans 1:1–5:11. Among these, Romans 1:1–17 serves as the introduction to the entire book of Romans, which we read last week. It speaks about the gospel of God. Paul, as a servant of God and an apostle to the Gentiles, was separated to the gospel of God. When Paul began to carry out his ministry, on one hand he served God in his spirit, and on the other hand, he brought people into the gospel of God's Son. That is, through the gift of the apostle, he turned the objective truths of the gospel into enjoyable grace to strengthen the saints. Both the minister and the ones being ministered to receive comfort together in the faith.

This introduction concludes with two important declarations: First, the gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. Second, “the just shall live by faith.” Romans emphasizes the term “the just.” How does the just receive life? He must receive judicial redemption. How does the just live? He must experience organic salvation.

Let us first look at judicial redemption. Paul is like a meticulous lawyer. Though judicial redemption is a great work already accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ, each believer must first receive it by faith in order to obtain the grace of redemption. How does one receive it by faith?

First, he must acknowledge that he is a sinner, completely unable to save himself. Second, he must believe in the salvation that Jesus accomplished on the cross. In this way, he can receive judicial redemption. Paul, fearing that we might not realize

we are sinners, dedicates Romans 1:18–3:20 specifically to the matter of condemnation.

Before entering the main text, let us first examine sin and condemnation. The Greek word for sin is hamartia, which originally means “missing the mark”—like someone shooting an arrow but missing the bullseye, failing to hit the target. This differs from our usual concept of sin, where we think a person sins only when he does something wrong. But the Bible defines sin as deviating from the mark. What is that mark? When God created man, He gave him a high status and mission. Man was created in the image of God, after His likeness—both inwardly and outwardly like God. God wanted man to represent Him and to rule over all that He had created. This is the target God gave man. When man deviated from that target, he sinned.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us that Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command in the Garden of Eden and deviated from God’s purpose in creating man. At that moment, mankind sinned. The first sin in human history was a monumental event. Sin entered and took up residence in man, becoming man’s sinful nature—an evil disposition. This sinful nature was passed down through generations. Anyone born of human parents inherits this sinful nature because the parents themselves have it.

I believe all the saints who have children can testify to this. A newborn baby is truly adorable, yet without anyone teaching them, they will naturally manifest their sinful nature. Typically, the first word a baby learns to say is “no,” and the second is “more”—demonstrating rebellion and greed. Therefore, a person does not become a sinner because he sins; rather, he sins because he is born with a sinful nature. This sinful nature leads him to commit sins outwardly—acts of sin.

In the Bible, when it speaks of sin, sometimes it refers to the sinful nature, and other times it refers to sinful acts. This distinction is not clear in Chinese, as the same word “罪” is used. But in English, it is very clear—sin refers to the sinful nature, while sins (plural) refer to sinful deeds. Paul is very precise in his usage throughout Romans. In Romans 1:18–5:11, the word “sins” is mostly in the plural, because this

portion deals with acts of sin. From Romans 5:12–8:39, the word is mostly singular, “sin,” because this section addresses the sinful nature.

Jesus shed His blood and gave His life on the cross as a substitute, paying the price for our sins so that all our sinful acts may be forgiven—if we are willing to confess our sins. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Note that the word “sins” here is in the plural—it refers to our sinful deeds. John 7:38–39 says, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Jesus declared that once He was glorified through resurrection, those who believed in Him would receive the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit dwelling in us wars against our fleshly lusts. If a person obeys the Holy Spirit, he will be able to overcome sinful deeds.

Now that we understand sinful nature and sinful acts, let us look at condemnation. The Greek word is *krino*, usually translated in English as judge or condemn, and in Chinese as “定罪.” Generally speaking, when a person’s speech or behavior violates the boundaries of the law, he can be condemned according to that law. However, as we mentioned earlier, the Bible’s concept of sin is not merely about violating laws, but about deviating from God’s will and purpose.

Therefore, condemnation in the Bible is not merely about violating God’s laws, but something even more fundamental—when man leaves God and is without God, he is already condemned. John 3:18 says, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” In fact, unbelief in Jesus Christ is the very reason a person is condemned.

In the Bible, faith means to accept. Jesus Christ has already completed salvation; as long as we believe and receive it, we will obtain salvation, and our sins can be forgiven. But if one does not believe and refuses to accept salvation, then their sins remain, and they are condemned.

Now that we understand what sin and condemnation mean in the Bible, let us come to today's verse, Romans 1:18.

Verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Let us first examine a special phrase here: "ungodliness and unrighteousness." In Chinese, the meaning of "ungodliness" may not be so clear, but in English, it is very direct—ungodliness, meaning "lacking the character of God"; that is, not giving God the glory and honor He deserves. This speaks of man's attitude toward God. Godliness is to honor God; ungodliness is to not treat God as God.

Unrighteousness, in English, is also direct—unrighteousness, which refers to one's words and actions that violate God's righteous laws. This pertains to how a person conducts themselves in their living environment. Godliness concerns a person's vertical relationship with God; righteousness concerns a person's horizontal dealings with others.

Godliness and righteousness thus form two axes: The vertical axis is about whether we are godly toward God. The horizontal axis is about whether we are righteous toward others. These two axes create four quadrants, which divide all people into four categories:

Quadrant One: Those who are godly toward God and righteous toward people—these are the redeemed saints. When a person is godly and has a good relationship with God, then God's communicable attributes—such as love, light, holiness, and righteousness—can be shared with them through fellowship. When the saints constituted these divine attributes into their character, they produce human virtues.

Thus, they are able to live a righteous life toward others, with a standard that aligns with God's righteousness.

Quadrant Two: Those who are godly toward God but unrighteous toward people. This immediately raises a problem. If a person is truly godly toward God, then they cannot be unrighteous toward people. A tree is known by its fruit; a good tree bears good fruit, a bad tree bears bad fruit. Since they are unrighteous toward others, it reveals that their godliness is only outward and not genuine. Thus, this quadrant can be called false godliness and unrighteousness.

Quadrant Three: Those who are ungodly and unrighteous. That is, they neither respect God nor act rightly toward others. This is exactly the kind of people today's passage refers to: those who are ungodly and unrighteous.

Quadrant Four: Those who are ungodly toward God yet consider themselves righteous toward others. Because someone who does not honor God and does not treat Him as God cannot possibly possess true righteousness. Therefore, their righteousness is only self-righteousness, using themselves as the standard, which falls far short of God's standard.

Paul was a highly rigorous lawyer. In order to prove that all people have sinned and are under condemnation, he divides unbelievers into these three types using the standards of godliness and righteousness:

- He begins with the ungodly and unrighteous (Quadrant Three), which is the section we are studying this week—Romans 1:18–32.
- Then he deals with those who are ungodly and self-righteous (Quadrant Four)—people who love to judge others. Romans 2:1–16 addresses these people.
- After that, Paul deals with those who are falsely godly but unrighteous—the Jews who were hypocritical. Romans 2:17–3:8 addresses the issue of the Jews.
- Finally, Paul brings his conclusion: concerning all who do not believe—Romans 3:9–20—Paul states the conclusion: “There is none righteous, no, not one.”

Once we understand how Paul brings all people under God's condemnation, we return to verse 18: "For the wrath of God..." The Greek word for "wrath" is *orge*. This is not a fit of rage, not an emotional outburst that God cannot control. Rather, it is a determined, continuous, controlled, and intense emotional response, usually directed at a specific offense. When this emotion reaches a certain intensity, God will reveal His righteous wrath from heaven upon those who are ungodly and unrighteous.

For example, in Genesis 19, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were overflowing with wickedness, and God had to execute judgment. God cannot violate His own righteous nature. Yet there was a righteous man, Lot, in Sodom. So God specially sent angels to bring Lot, his wife, and daughters out of Sodom before He rained down brimstone and fire from heaven and destroyed both Sodom and Gomorrah. Even in His wrath, God was willing to save that one righteous man who was grieved over sin. The ungodly and unrighteous are those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Dear brothers and sisters, isn't this the very condition we were in before we were saved? We did not believe in Jesus; we did not give God the honor and glory He deserved. When someone preached the gospel to us, we resisted the truth. At the time, we were even self-satisfied, thinking that we had committed no serious offenses, and that minor ones were understandable. Yet we failed to realize that we were using our own standards to define "major" and "minor" offenses, standards which completely fall short of God's absolute standard.

According to God's law, whoever stumbles in one point is guilty of all. And the wages of sin is death. Therefore, when we did not believe, we were all under the wrath of God. But one day, when we accepted the gospel, we were transferred from the realm of unrighteousness to the realm of righteousness. This is not because we became better, but because Jesus paid the price of sin for us; the resurrected Christ has become our righteousness. As Colossians 1:13 says, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, how grateful we are! We were once the ungodly and unrighteous—resisting the truth, not honoring God, living by our own standards—yet we did not realize that such standards could never meet the righteous requirements of God. Thank You, Lord! God gave us the wisdom unto salvation, and we accepted the gospel and were transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Because Jesus bore our sins, Christ became our righteousness. God declared us righteous, and now we have the standing to enter God's house, to become His children, and to learn to worship together with other saints, to learn to serve together, and to grow in life together. This is such a marvelous grace.

O Lord, please bless the gospel friends around me. Grant them also the wisdom unto salvation, that they may soon accept You as their Savior for life. Let the church be full of the blessings of begetting and nurturing. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.