

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

Romans 1: 24-27

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Romans chapter 1, verses 24 to 27.

For those who are ungodly and unrighteous, they recognize God's existence through His general grace but fail to glorify and thank Him as God. As a result, their reasoning becomes futile, their hearts are darkened, they become self-centered, and they turn the partial glory of God they see into idols to satisfy their own needs.

Yesterday, we read that God's greatest punishment for humanity is to give them over. When people do not worship God or place Him first, the result of God's giving them over brings about all kinds of corruption. Yet, even in His giving over, God is full of mercy. He does not allow people to fall into the worst state all at once. God has three levels of giving over, and today we will read about the first two.

Verse 24: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves."

"Therefore" is a connecting word, summarizing the preceding discussion: people exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, or creeping things. God's general grace is meant to lead people to His special grace, which is the salvation of Jesus Christ. However, if people refuse to seek Christ's salvation and instead carve idols for themselves, it leads to the conclusion introduced by "therefore."

Why do people refuse to seek Christ's grace and instead carve idols for themselves? The reason is simple: coming before Christ requires acknowledging Him as Lord and obeying Him. But when people carve idols, the idols cannot rule over them; idols

naturally obey people because people are self-centered. Thus, God gives them over to the lusts of their hearts.

As we mentioned yesterday, the word “lusts” is somewhat over translated. God allows people to follow the desires of their hearts, which may be good or bad. Remarkably, even desires that start as good, when human-centered, lead to a corrupt outcome, resulting in unclean acts. Dear brothers and sisters, we must recognize that since our ancestors sinned in the Garden of Eden, every person is born with a sinful nature. Without God’s intervention, even with good motives or beginnings, we will produce corrupt results.

In traditional Chinese families, we have seen too many such tragedies. Family members often act for each other’s good but do so in their own way, unaware that what they think is good is not what the other needs. Thus, misunderstandings lead to conflicts, conflicts lead to disputes, disputes cause mutual harm, and ultimately, unclean acts result.

Here, Paul connects idolatry with sexual immorality, stating that the result of idolatry is the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. Historically, the first collective idolatry of the Israelites is recorded in Exodus 32, when Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive God’s commandments and the blueprint for the tabernacle. The Israelites below, seeing Moses delayed, began to cast a golden calf and declared it the god who brought them out of Egypt. Exodus 32:6 says: “And they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” This led to all kinds of immoral acts.

Idolatry and sexual immorality are like twin brothers, often appearing together. Returning to Paul’s context, when he wrote Romans, he was in Corinth, a city notorious for idolatry, with many temples housing temple prostitutes who provided services to worshippers. When human desires are unrestrained, and temples provide an environment that appeases consciences under the guise of worship, the result of such worship is immorality, dishonoring their bodies among themselves.

Verse 25: “who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

Following God’s first act of giving them over, they exchanged the truth of God for the lie. They replaced God with idols, substituting the true with the false. All idols are created things, and they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. This is putting the cart before the horse, replacing the primary with the secondary, the true with the false, and the truth with a lie.

In the beginning, after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they realized they were naked and felt ashamed, so they sewed fig leaves to cover themselves. This sense of shame is tied to the human conscience, a warning light God gave after sin. When people do something against their conscience, they feel shame; if they heed the warning, they stop to avoid further wrongdoing.

Among all violations of conscience, the most severe is failing to treat God as God and replacing Him with idols; this is the greatest lie replacing the greatest truth. Once a person’s conscience becomes accustomed to this gravest transgression, as 1 Timothy 4:2 says, their conscience becomes “seared with a hot iron,” losing the sense of shame for other sins.

Dear brothers and sisters, replacing God with idols is a serious matter. Today, with our good education, we no longer worship visible idols, but desires in our hearts can unknowingly become idols, such as wealth, status, fame, or power. These may be necessary for survival, but if they take a higher place than God in our hearts, they become idols. If not addressed promptly, they lead to severe consequences.

When reading the Song of Songs, we said that God’s greatest punishment for the world is giving them over, and His greatest punishment for saints is withdrawing His presence, leaving saints feeling no sense of God’s presence during prayer, Bible reading, or devotion. This means experiencing no joy, peace, or satisfaction in daily communion with God—an alert from God. We must examine our hearts to see if we harbor idols that we need to actively remove.

When God created humans, He gave them free will and does not force anyone to do anything, even allowing people to choose to leave Him. Since humans have free will, they bear corresponding responsibility to actively choose to follow God and place Him first in their lives.

When Paul saw these ungodly and unrighteous people worshiping and serving created things instead of the Creator, his heart was deeply grieved. He could not help but add his own worship: “who is blessed forever. Amen!” This is Paul’s heartfelt, genuine worship. Paul was truly a godly apostle; even while writing to expound truth, he maintained communion with God. When mentioning those who do not worship God, he immediately added his own worship, setting a beautiful example as one who worships the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, how often, when we discuss the depravity of this age, do we feel grieved or even angry? Too often, we jump to the next step, wanting to do something to reverse the situation, which frequently leads to the undesirable outcome of doing evil to achieve good. We must learn from Paul: when others do not worship God, we should rise to worship Him; when others do not serve God, we should rise to serve Him. We should make an opposite testimony in ourselves, letting people see that in this fallen age, there are still those who love the Lord with a pure heart, rising to worship and serve Him. This is enough.

As for whether God leads us to do something, that is the next step and secondary. Because God grants everyone free will, allowing them to choose freely, what truly pleases God is seeing fallen people choose to repent, accept Jesus Christ as their lifelong Savior, and bring about true change.

Reforms in laws, systems, or politics are external and cannot truly change people; only Jesus Christ can change people. Instead of spending much time and effort on systemic reforms, it is better to invest that time and effort in preaching the gospel. Such change, though slow, is the most solid.

Verse 26: “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.”

“For this reason” is a connecting word, indicating that because the ungodly and unrighteous exchanged the truth for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature instead of the Creator, it leads to God’s second act of giving them over. God gave them up to vile passions. The Chinese translation adds “gave up to indulgence,” which is not in the original text. The meaning of “gave them up” is that God no longer intervenes, handing them over to vile passions. “Indulgence” implies people still have control to indulge themselves, but the original text conveys that God ceases to intervene, handing them over to their inner passions.

The word “passions” is entirely negative, translated as “lust” in English. These are not just passions but vile passions, meaning lust takes control, ruling the person. Paul highlights a crucial truth here: people overestimate themselves, thinking they can be their own master and free without God. They do not realize they are like a weakling who cannot stand without God; Satan then takes the form of lust to rule over them.

In other words, people can leave God and have the freedom to sin, but once trapped in sin, they lack the freedom to not sin, and their sins worsen progressively. When vile passions rule these ungodly and unrighteous people, the result is that their women exchange the natural use for what is against nature.

What is the natural use of women? The Chinese translation uses “natural,” which may be unclear, but in English, it is simply “natural,” meaning natural function. The natural function of women returns to Genesis 2, when God created Eve and assigned her natural roles, which can be summarized in two points: first, to be a companion to man, helping him; second, to be united with her husband, becoming one flesh. Humanity’s initial fall occurred when Eve stepped out of her role, taking the lead, which gave the serpent an opportunity to tempt her.

Thus, Paul mentions God’s second act of giving over, starting with women, who change the natural function God assigned them, overstepping the natural order

God established. They begin to rule over their husbands and engage in unnatural sexual relationships outside their marriage, committing the sin of immorality.

Paul's description of women's immorality is relatively vague, stating only that they exchanged the natural use for what is against nature, meaning they violated God's original natural order. Many commentators believe Paul refers to female homosexuality here, and I cannot say he does not mean this, but in the next verse, when addressing male homosexuality, Paul is very direct and explicit, while here he is quite reserved.

Therefore, I believe Paul emphasizes that women first disrupted God's established natural order, just as Eve first ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, women must be especially cautious not to overstep God's natural order. In Paul's time, women's status was low, and married women typically stayed at home. Examples of female homosexuality were likely rare and hidden, so Paul subtly mentions exchanging the natural use for what is against nature.

Verse 27: "Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

"Likewise also the men": when Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, her eyes were opened, and she gave it to Adam, who ate and became like her. Initially, the woman took the lead, violating God's natural order, and the men followed suit, abandoning the natural use of the woman, burning in lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful. Paul here directly and explicitly describes homosexual behavior. In God's first act of giving over, those who worship idols result in immoral outcomes. In Paul's context, this likely occurred in temples, where men who worshipped idols engaged in immoral acts with temple prostitutes.

In God's second act of giving over, men were no longer satisfied with immorality with women but burned in lust for one another, leading to men committing

shameful acts with men. Do not think homosexuality is a modern phenomenon; it was prevalent in the Roman Empire, especially during courtly banquets, where groups of men and women engaged in various immoral acts. Several Roman Caesars had male lovers. Paul categorizes such shameful behavior under God's second act of giving over, as it violates the natural order of God's creation.

Immorality destroys families, while homosexuality further undermines society's stability, as societal stability depends on healthy future generations. Homosexual behavior cannot produce offspring, ultimately threatening societal stability. Additionally, immorality and promiscuity lead to various diseases, causing those who engage in such acts to receive in themselves the due penalty for their error. In modern society, homosexuality is often viewed as a lifestyle choice, sometimes granted legal protections. However, in the church, we must rely on Scripture. Paul clearly states that this violates God's created order, a result of God giving people over to their fallen state.

If someone with homosexual tendencies comes to the church today, how should the church respond? This is a challenge many churches face. Saints with roles in the church should seek God and, through thorough fellowship, develop an appropriate response. We know the biblical principle is to hate sin but love the sinner. As for practical implementation, this is the responsibility of church leaders. May the Lord help us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through Romans, You help us see that when a person sees Your general grace but does not seek Jesus Christ as their lifelong Savior, choosing instead to worship idols, it leads to Your two acts of giving over: falling into immorality or, further, violating Your created order. Lord, we thank You. We were once ignorant of You, but You granted us the wisdom of salvation, not only leading us to accept salvation but also placing us in the church to learn to worship and serve You with the saints.

You have entrusted the church with preaching the gospel, leading people to salvation, and helping them grow in holiness. Bless my church with a passion for preaching the gospel and helping people commit to the church. When someone

with homosexual tendencies comes to the church, Lord, grant us wisdom to bring each person before You, for You desire all to be saved and none to perish. As for practical implementation, Lord, we look to Your grace; show us what to do, for You are the head of the church. Bless my church. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.