

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

Romans 01: 28-32

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 28 to 32.

Paul points out that for the ungodly and unrighteous, through the universe and all things created by God, they can see God's eternal power and divine nature. Though they clearly know God exists, they do not give Him the glory and thanks due to Him, resulting in their reasoning becoming futile. They turn the partial glory of God they see into idols: either in the likeness of man, or of birds, beasts, or, even lower, various demons and spirits represented by creeping things. This leads to God's three steps of giving them over.

The first step of giving them over is allowing them to infinitely expand the desires of their hearts, resulting in their committing unclean acts and defiling their own bodies. If this does not awaken their conscience, they continue to fall, replacing God's truth with the lie of idols, worshiping created things instead of the Creator, which brings about God's second step of giving them over, handing them over to their shameful passions. As a result, they violate God's created order. Women abandon their proper role, forsaking the natural function God gave them, and men do likewise, lusting after one another, men committing shameful acts with men, violating God's created order. They receive in themselves the due penalty for their error. If they still refuse to repent, this brings about God's third step of giving them over.

Verse 28: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting."

They did not like to retain God in their knowledge. Paul here points out a fact: if a person reasonably observes the universe and all things created by God, from the structure of atoms to the orbits of planets, they will conclude that God exists. If a person examines their own physiological phenomena, the ecosystem they depend on for survival, and the interdependence of species within that ecosystem, they will also conclude that God exists.

This is why, over the past 100 years, the majority of Nobel Prize winners in the natural sciences believe in God, a proportion far higher than in the humanities. Because the humanities are human-centered, when people's minds are distorted, they deliberately refuse to acknowledge God's existence. Thus, Paul says they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, a result stemming from the second step of giving over, where people violate God's created order, considering themselves greater than the God who created them, leading to their deliberate refusal to know God.

Since they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind. The word "debased" originally means "failing to pass the tests," or "not approved." The NIV translates it as "depraved," and the Chinese translation renders "mind" as "heart," though "mind" is more accurate.

As an aside, if you primarily read the Chinese Union Version, whenever you encounter the word "heart," it's best to check the English translation. "Heart" is consistently translated as such, but often "mind," "soul," or "spirit" is also rendered as "heart." If you read the Bible carefully, you'll notice that mind, soul, and spirit have distinct meanings, so it's best to follow the original text.

Here, Paul emphasizes a debased mind; God gave them over to a debased mind, or more accurately, God handed them over to their own debased mind. What a person does, the path they take, and the life they live are typically determined by their mind. If their mind is debased, what they do naturally becomes things that are not fitting, meaning improper or inappropriate actions.

God's third step of giving them over is handing them over to their debased mind. This aligns with God's assessment of ancient humanity in Genesis 6. Genesis 6:5

says: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Their minds were debased, so their thoughts were continually evil. Thus, in Genesis 6:3, it says: “And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh.’”

Being flesh means people became carnal, with their daily thoughts focused on satisfying their selfish desires. Thus, God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.” The Chinese Union Version’s translation is inaccurate; the KJV says, “My Spirit shall not strive with man,” meaning God’s Spirit will no longer contend with man. In other words, God gives up on them, allowing them to do what they want, and His Spirit no longer troubles them. This led to God’s judgment on ancient humanity, flooding that generation.

Dear brothers and sisters, the debasement of the human mind is a serious matter. God values what is within a person far more than their outward actions, as actions reflect inner thoughts. Yet people often do the opposite, valuing appearances over the inner state. Thus, God’s first step of giving over results in people dishonoring their bodies through adultery, a grave sin. The second step results in men committing shameful acts with men, an even graver sin. By the third step, we might expect the outcome to be heinous crimes. Instead, Paul casually says they do “things which are not fitting.” What are these things?

From verses 29 to 31, Paul lists 21 items, four concerning the mind and 17 concerning behavior. If we honestly examine the 17 behavioral items, we must admit we have committed many of them. Here, Paul seems to intentionally remind us that when we condemn others for adultery or homosexuality, we may be worse than they are. Who are we to judge others? With this understanding, let us read verses 29 to 31. This passage is somewhat long but flows as one, so we will read it together.

Verses 29-31: “being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-

mindfulness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.”

Reading these 21 debased thoughts and behaviors in one breath, we cannot help but marvel at Paul’s profound understanding of human nature. I believe he wrote these effortlessly, listing 21 items in one go. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul mentions deeds of the flesh, similarly listing a long series. Thus, whenever we think we are doing alright, we should read these passages to humble ourselves and seek the Lord’s grace of forgiveness.

In the passage we just read, Paul first mentions that when the mind is debased, it becomes filled with four kinds of thoughts. First, unrighteousness: righteousness is God’s principle of action; unrighteousness is scheming to deviate from God’s principles to gain undeserved benefits. Unrighteousness is the root of all harmful thoughts. Second, wickedness: driven by unrighteousness, harboring malicious intent to harm others. Third, covetousness: also driven by unrighteousness, desiring to gain more than what rightfully belongs to oneself. Fourth, maliciousness: driven by unrighteousness, scheming to plot against others.

The first four items pertain to thoughts. When a person’s thoughts scheme only for their own benefit, even bypassing God’s righteous principles, it leads to the following 17 unfitting behaviors. First, envy: unable to bear others being better than oneself. Second, murder: disrespecting others’ lives. Third, strife or contention: a result of envy, openly competing to outdo others. Fourth, deceit: when open means fail, resorting to secret deception to achieve one’s goals. Fifth, evil-mindedness: maliciously judging others’ actions.

Sixth, whisperers: openly slandering others. Seventh, backbiters: speaking ill of others secretly, worse than open slander, leaving no chance for rebuttal. Eighth, haters of God: unwilling to live by God’s principles, opposing and resenting Him. Ninth, violent: maliciously belittling and humiliating others. Tenth, proud: arrogantly thinking oneself superior, looking down on others.

Eleventh, boasters: exaggerating in speech, constantly bragging. Twelfth, inventors of evil things: devising new ways to deceive and seize undeserved benefits. Thirteenth, disobedient to parents: not honoring, obeying, or supporting parents. Fourteenth, undiscerning: not only foolish but failing to use God-given reasoning, unable to learn or discern. Fifteenth, untrustworthy: breaking promises and disregarding past commitments. Sixteenth, unloving: lacking love for family, neglecting familial responsibilities. Seventeenth, unmerciful: unable to show sympathy, being cold and lacking compassion.

Paul lists these many items, and I believe saints reading them feel some sorrow, for don't these describe our frequent conditions? This is the state revealed under God's third step of giving over. Though in God's grace we can be forgiven by confessing our sins, many of these we have not overcome and repeatedly commit. How we need God's mercy and Christ's grace.

Verse 32: "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

This verse brings God's condemnation of the ungodly and unrighteous. They know God's righteous judgment that those who practice such things deserve death, yet they still do them. This shows they sin knowingly, not only committing these acts themselves but also approving of others who do the same. They try to create a false impression that since everyone does it, these acts are unavoidable and not so bad or serious. But we know God's standard is absolute and unchanging, and the wages of sin is death. Unless someone pays the price for our sins, we cannot escape God's condemnation.

Let us pray together: Lord! Seeing Paul describe Your third step of giving over, resulting in a debased mind and unfitting acts, we confess that among the items he listed, many are sins we frequently commit. Lord, we come before You more humbly, admitting that many we cannot overcome. Thank You, Lord, that through

Jesus Christ's grace, if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive all our transgressions.

We are such a blessed people; after our sins are forgiven, You help us treat others' sins with greater generosity. Whether under the first, second, or third step of giving over, we know these conditions stem from human sinfulness. We also know that there is no other salvation given under heaven except believing in Jesus Christ and accepting His accomplished salvation, through which people can receive forgiveness before God.

Help us not to judge or condemn others but to actively share the gospel with those in need. Not only do we benefit from the gospel, but we can also help our gospel friends receive the grace of forgiveness. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.