

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

Romans 2: 11-15

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 2, verses 11 to 15.

Yesterday, we read that God renders to each person according to their deeds. Those who seek God's glory, honor, and immortality, God rewards with eternal life, and they receive glory, honor, and peace. Those who are self-centered, pursuing their own interests by not obeying the truth but instead following unrighteousness to gain profit, God rewards with wrath and indignation, and they fall into tribulation and anguish.

Regarding these two groups of people God rewards, Paul adds a declaration of order: first the Jew, then the Greek, with "Greek" representing all Gentiles. Today, we will spend some time examining Paul's stated order: first the Jew, then the Gentile. The Jews are God's chosen people in the Old Testament, descendants of Abraham, inheriting the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through Moses, God gave the Jews the law and repeatedly instructed them to keep and obey it.

For example, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, it says: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." The law of Moses governed the lives of the Jews.

After Moses, God used David to establish the kingdom of Israel and make Jerusalem its capital, and He used Solomon to build the temple. The Jews indeed received

God's abundant grace and blessings. However, in the Old Testament, the Jews were consistently a stiff-necked people, ultimately falling into the fate of national exile. Yet, in God's mercy, a small remnant of Jews became the returning remnant, raised up by God to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and restore the altar and priestly service, planting the seed for God's eternal redemption plan.

With the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, came the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." After Malachi, God was silent for 400 years; the Jews had no more prophets or words from God.

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem experienced what the prophet Daniel had foretold centuries earlier in Daniel 7:5-7: "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

As Daniel described, these Jewish remnants endured the rule of the Persian Empire, like a great bear raised up on one side, then the Greek Empire, like a swift leopard, and finally the Roman Empire, like an unnamed, terrifying beast, strong and powerful, devouring and crushing with its great iron teeth.

This period was a winter season for the Jews, preparing the way for the coming Messiah. When the time came, the virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to a son, naming Him Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins. At this time, God initiated His redemption plan, predetermined before the foundation of the world.

As Malachi prophesied, John the Baptist was raised up as the contemporary Elijah, preparing people's hearts for Jesus Christ's coming. When Jesus reached the age of 30, He began His ministry, surrounded by 12 apostles and nearly 500 disciples, all Jews. After Jesus completed His redemptive work, He rose and ascended, sending the Holy Spirit. The 12 apostles began their ministry, establishing the first church in Jerusalem, composed entirely of Jews. This is what Paul meant when he said that God gives glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, first to the Jew.

Later, the apostle Peter opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house, and the gospel began to spread to the Gentiles. Paul was specially raised up by God as the apostle to the Gentiles, establishing many churches among them through three missionary journeys. The saints in these churches also received glory, honor, and peace, which Paul refers to as "then to the Greek."

As the gospel began to flourish among the Gentiles and disciples were first called Christians, Jewish Christians, bound by Old Testament ceremonial laws, saw the truth become mixed, and the vibrant power of life gradually waned. The gospel seemed to lose its due power in Jewish society. Consequently, Jews began to form factions, not obeying the truth but following unrighteousness, leading to much tribulation and anguish. In AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army, the temple was razed, and Jews were scattered among the nations. Their tribulation and anguish continued for nearly 2,000 years until 1948, when God gathered them to form the state of Israel. Even today, less than 2% of Jews believe in the gospel. Because they forsook God, they first faced tribulation and anguish, as Paul said, "first to the Jew."

During this time, the gospel found an open door among the Gentiles, and churches were established worldwide, Christ's name was exalted, allowing all nations to hear the gospel. Now, at the end of the age, various heresies are rising, persecuting the church, and the truth within the church is becoming mixed. Christians are gradually losing the vibrant power of life, thus losing influence over the world. The world's trend is toward factionalism, not obeying the truth but following unrighteousness.

During the great tribulation at the end of the age, God will judge the world with tribulation and anguish, which Paul refers to as “then to the Greek.”

We have spent much length explaining Paul’s statement, “first to the Jew, then to the Greek.” Whether enjoying glory, honor, and peace or suffering tribulation and anguish, this is God’s ordained order, and the world unfolds according to His established plan. First the Jew, then the Gentile, which leads to verse 11.

Verse 11: “For there is no partiality with God.”

God is just and fair; He shows no partiality. Whether Jew or Gentile, God treats all justly and fairly. However, God’s timeline is vast, while humans are very limited, so people often complain about God’s unfairness within their limited time and unchangeable circumstances. But Paul plainly tells us that God shows no partiality.

The reason people face tribulation and anguish is due to their own choices, for God renders to each according to their deeds. When a person chooses not to pursue God, not to persevere in doing good, not to value eternal glory and honor, but instead centers on themselves, pursuing their own interests through unrighteous means, the outcome is tribulation and anguish.

If a person can still complain today, it shows God is still exercising longsuffering and forbearance toward them. This is God’s special mercy, guiding them to accept His goodness, enabling a new beginning in their life to accept Jesus Christ’s salvation and live a life pursuing imperishable glory and honor. To explain that God shows no partiality, Paul uses God’s judgment to prove His justice and fairness.

Verse 12: “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.”

Let us first look at the second half of the verse, which addresses the Jews. God gave the Israelites the law through Moses, a law every Jew knows. In Jewish tradition, at

the coming-of-age ceremony—13 for boys and 12 for girls—they undergo a ritual, after which boys become *bar mitzvah* (son of the law) and girls become *bat mitzvah* (daughter of the law). In orthodox Jewish education, the law is a mandatory subject; every Jewish adult knows and understands it, and it governs their lives. Thus, those who sin under the law will be judged by the law, which is clear.

Now, let us return to the first half of the verse, addressing those who sin without the law, referring to the Gentiles. They do not have a written law from God, so how should their sin be addressed? They will also perish without the law. The Chinese Union Version's translation is awkward and easily misunderstood as "not perish," but the KJV is clearer: "perish without law." Since Gentiles lack God's written law, they cannot be judged by it.

However, sin is sin, and they will still perish. If they cannot be judged by the law, how are they condemned? Paul explains this in verses 13 to 15, which elaborate on verse 12. This passage can be seen as a parenthetical insertion to help readers understand Paul's meaning.

We know that Romans was dictated by Paul and written by Tertius. We can imagine that after Paul spoke verse 12, he paused, reflected, and realized he needed to explain further for readers to grasp his intent. In modern punctuation, verses 13 to 15 would be enclosed in parentheses.

Verse 13: "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified."

Paul has already clearly stated that God renders to each according to their deeds. Here, he repeats that in God's sight, it is not the hearers of the law who are justified, but the doers of the law. Every Jewish adult knows the law, but knowing it does not justify them; only those who practice it benefit from it and are justified. Here, Paul seems to warn the Jews, who take pride in being God's chosen Old Testament people with His law in hand. But Paul directly tells them that merely knowing the

law is not enough; they must practice it to be justified. Next, Paul shifts his focus to the Gentiles.

Verse 14: “for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves.”

Gentiles do not have the law, but they are not without guidance; they can, by nature, do the things in the law. In other words, their nature enables them to know what to do, and by following it, they can perform deeds consistent with the law. Paul points out a fact: all people are descendants of Adam. When God created Adam, He made him in His image and likeness. This image developed into human nature, and the law testifies to God, reflecting the Creator’s original character, which aligns with human nature. Of course, after Adam sinned, human nature was corrupted, and Paul addresses this in the next verse.

Here, we see Paul reasoning like a meticulous lawyer, developing his argument step by step. If a person follows their nature, their actions naturally align with the law. Thus, Paul reaches a preliminary conclusion: Gentiles, though without the law, are a law to themselves. In God’s original creation, this was designed within humans; by following their nature, they can do what is consistent with the law, which should be unproblematic. The real issue is how people, after the fall, can act according to their nature, which leads to the next verse.

Verse 15: “who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”

This verse is very rich, and through it, we can attempt to infer the components of human constitution in Paul’s understanding. I believe saints have heard debates about dichotomy and trichotomy, with some even accusing trichotomy of deriving from Greek philosophy. In reality, debates about biblical truth require no external

books or theories; the Bible itself provides all the answers. We need not look outside or hastily label others with unfounded accusations.

The previous verse mentioned human nature, left from God's creation, but after humanity's sin, this nature could no longer govern behavior. This nature likely refers to the breath God breathed into man during creation; this breath, God's spirit, became man's spirit within him, serving as the means of communion with God.

Thus, before Adam sinned, he could directly commune with God in the Garden of Eden, a time of joy and peace. God warned Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day he ate, he would surely die. But Adam ate, and on that day, his spirit died, meaning it lost its function. He began to fear and hide from God. At the same time, he realized he was naked and felt ashamed, a function of the conscience.

The human spirit lost its function and could no longer govern the mind. But in God's mercy, the conscience's function remained, causing shame when a person sins. This function of the conscience is what Paul calls the work of the law. The law's function emphasizes external regulation; the conscience's function emphasizes an internal sense.

God gave the Jews the law, which externally regulates their behavior. But Gentiles, without the law, are still God's creation; even after the fall, the conscience's function remains. Paul says this function is written in their hearts. The heart governs behavior and includes thought, emotion, and decision-making—mind, emotion, and will—the core of the soul. Beyond the soul, Paul says the heart also includes the conscience's function, written within it.

The conscience is a function of human nature, originally linked to the spirit. When the spirit lost its function, only the conscience remained, capable of triggering feelings. Thus, the conscience is a connection between spirit and soul, or a window or channel. The conscience enables people to discern right from wrong—whether to obey or disobey God—and can stir feelings in the soul, letting people know what to do if they follow their nature.

Their conscience bears witness, but the Chinese Union Version's translation as "conscience of right and wrong" is not objective, adding excessive interpretation. The original text simply says "conscience," which indeed discerns right and wrong, but translating it as "conscience of right and wrong" can mislead readers into thinking it refers to the heart.

The heart and conscience are distinct. As we said, the heart includes the soul and two interfaces, one being the conscience, the interface between soul and spirit. The conscience carries the spirit's ability to discern right and wrong, linking to the soul's emotions, enabling people to know how to act according to their nature, bearing witness to the law's work. But often, acting this way may harm personal interests, so the mind in the soul becomes active, as the verse says, with the conscience and thoughts accusing or excusing one another.

This interplay between conscience and thoughts is beautifully translated in the KJV: "accusing or else excusing one another." This is a struggle within the soul, and after reaching a conclusion, it is passed to the will in the soul for a final decision. The will, through the soul-body interface, directs the body to act.

This verse clearly outlines human constitution and operation. Before salvation, the spirit is dead and non-functional. Thus, when the conscience battles the mind, the conscience often loses, leading to actions contrary to nature, causing sin and perishing outside the law for not following the conscience.

After salvation, the Holy Spirit dwells in the human spirit, reviving it. The conscience then not only feels shame but becomes a channel, supplying various provisions from the spirit, through the conscience and faith's operation, to the mind, influencing decisions aligned with God's will, leading to bodily actions that enable saints to live a godly life.

Dear brothers and sisters, through Paul's argument, we understand how we operate as humans. As Paul repeatedly emphasizes, knowing is not enough; we must act to receive the reward of glory, honor, and peace.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for Paul's exposition, helping us see human constitution clearly. Help us, after salvation, to receive the Holy Spirit's manifold supply in our spirit. May these supplies, through a clean conscience, be transmitted to our soul, enabling our mind to think of God's things, our emotions to delight in God's will, and our will to make decisions pleasing to God. May we live a godly life. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.