

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

Romans 2: 19-24

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 19-24.

Yesterday, we read that Paul condemned the Jews, noting that since they rely on the law, they should understand God's will from it and delight in things that are good in God's sight. For today's application to saints, we have the Bible, which contains all of God's words. We should understand God's will from the Bible and, in every choice we face in life, choose what is good—things that align with God's will. After addressing the function the law should have for the Jews themselves, Paul continues by discussing the function the law's instruction can have for others.

Verse 19: “and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,”

“And are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind”—the blind refers to unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says: “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ should shine on them.” Unbelievers have their minds blinded by the god of this world, preventing them from knowing the true God who created the universe. The Jews believe they are guides to the blind because, when their ancestor Abraham was called to the land of Canaan, God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him, as recorded in Genesis 12:3. As Abraham's descendants, the Jews know the true God and believe they can guide the blind, serving as a light to those in darkness.

Matthew 6:22-23 states: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body

will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Since unbelievers' minds are blinded by the god of this world, their eyes are bad, and their whole body is in darkness. Because the Jews know the true God, their eyes are good, and their whole body is full of light. They are confident they are a light to those in darkness and aim to guide others, leading them out of darkness.

To be a guide to the blind, one essential condition is ensuring you are not blind yourself; otherwise, as Jesus said in Luke 6:39: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?" Paul's words to the Jews also apply to today's saints. We should guide unbelievers, helping them see light in the darkness, but the prerequisite is that we ourselves are in the light and can see the path ahead.

Dear brothers and sisters, often our gospel preaching lacks fruit because we ourselves are in darkness. How can the blind lead the blind? We must first enjoy the benefits of the gospel, filled with the light and joy it brings, to become competent guides. If our own lives are chaotic and disorderly, how can we lead others to believe in the Lord? Preaching the gospel is not about persuading with doctrine but bearing witness to the Lord in our lives.

Verse 20: "an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law."

"An instructor of the foolish"—the foolish are not those with low intelligence but those who do not know God. Proverbs 9:10 says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Thus, those who do not know God are foolish because they do not know the true God who created the universe, cannot comprehend spiritual matters, and end up worshiping idols made by human hands.

The Jews are instructors of the foolish and teachers of babes. Babes refer to those whose minds are immature and need further learning. However, worldly knowledge, though diverse, is vain and elementary. As Paul says in Colossians 2:8-

9: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Paul warns that if knowledge is not according to Christ, it is vain and elementary. Such knowledge sees only phenomena, not the Creator’s intent behind them. Knowing Christ enables one to experience the fullness of God’s nature, understand the value of human existence, and see the purpose of the universe.

Paul then says they have the form of knowledge and truth in the law. The Chinese Union Version translates this as “model,” but the Greek word is ‘morphe’, meaning “form” or “appearance.” Translating it as “model” is too strong. In 2 Timothy 3:5, the same Greek word is used for “having a form of godliness,” translated as “appearance.” When the Bible refers to a model or an example, such as in 1 Timothy 4:12, where Paul urges Timothy to be an example to believers, the Greek word is ‘typos’, meaning “type” or “model,” encompassing not just outward behavior but inner character.

Thus, Paul tells the Jews that they have the law, which is the outward expression of the knowledge and truth they possess. In other words, since they consider themselves instructors of the foolish and teachers of babes, teaching knowledge and truth, the law they hold is the form of that knowledge and truth. If they truly have knowledge and truth, their actions will align with the law.

In the next four verses, from 21 to 24, Paul directly points out the Jews’ error of knowingly committing wrongs.

Verse 21: “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?”

“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” This is Paul’s direct accusation: one who teaches God’s word must first teach themselves, not merely knowing but also obeying and practicing it.

Dear brothers and sisters, Paul's accusation against the Jews is also a reminder to New Testament saints, especially those with teaching responsibilities in the church. Teaching is not just transmitting information but bearing witness in life. Thus, we should not preach grand principles we cannot practice but honestly expound the truth, its impact on our lives, the help it brings, and areas where we still struggle. We are all growing saints, and admitting our shortcomings is not shameful. The church is a gathering of imperfect Christians learning, encouraging, and growing together, building up the body of Christ to testify for Him where we are. The worst is to act superior, preaching lofty doctrines while behaving poorly—Paul condemns such Jews.

Paul then directly points out their knowing transgressions. “You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” Stealing is secretly taking what does not belong to you. Stealing money or goods is obvious, but using godliness as a means of gain is also stealing; seizing fame or praise through false testimony is stealing; and drawing attention during worship with ostentatious performance is stealing God's glory. If we teach others not to steal, we ourselves should not steal.

Verse 22: “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”

“Do not commit adultery” is the seventh commandment. Inappropriate sexual behavior outside marriage is obvious adultery. We tell others not to commit adultery, and we must not commit it ourselves. However, in the New Testament, adultery has a deeper meaning. Matthew 5:27-28 says: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” In the New Testament, Jesus raises the moral standard, stating that we must not commit adultery in our hearts. 2 Corinthians 11:2 states: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Paul goes further, likening saints to a chaste virgin betrothed to Christ. If saints love the world, they commit spiritual

adultery. Thus, when we teach others not to commit adultery, we must humbly confess before Christ the adultery in our hearts and the spiritual adultery in our lives.

Next, Paul says, “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” Gentiles love to worship idols, adorning them lavishly with gold and silver. In Paul’s time, there were likely cases of Jews stealing from pagan temples. During his third missionary journey, Paul spent two years in Ephesus, where the gospel was highly effective, reducing the number of worshipers at the temple of Artemis. This caused a riot among those who profited from the temple’s business, who seized Paul’s coworkers.

The city clerk of Ephesus calmed the rioters, saying in Acts 19:37: “For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.” No temple treasures were found on Paul’s coworkers. This note suggests that some Jews did steal from pagan temples. Perhaps they did not worship idols and recognized their falsehood; they might have claimed stealing temple treasures was to show pagans the idols’ inability to protect themselves or their worshipers. This seems reasonable on the surface, but as Paul says in Romans 3:8, doing evil to achieve good is unacceptable.

Verse 23: “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?”

“You who make your boast in the law”—because the Jews are God’s chosen Old Testament people, entrusted with the law, they often boast in it and take pride in it. But the law is not for boasting; God commanded them to obey His commandments, yet they broke the law, knowingly sinning and dishonoring God.

Verse 24: “For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.”

Gentiles know the Jews have God's law, yet see them breaking it, causing God's name to be blasphemed among them, as written. This likely refers to Ezekiel 36:17-20: "Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds; to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity. Therefore, I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.'"

The Israelites' failure to keep God's law provoked His wrath, leading to their exile among the nations, where their captivity caused the Lord's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. The same applies to New Testament saints. When people know we are Christians and see us do evil, we cause God's name to be shamed, blaspheming it. May God help us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Through Paul's direct accusation of the Jews, who held God's law yet broke it, we see they dishonored God and caused His name to be blasphemed. Dear Lord, we confess we often do these things. We have received grace, become Your children, hold the Bible, and have the indwelling Holy Spirit. We should understand Your word and live a life that testifies to You. But we confess that too often our lives do not match Your word. Lord, have mercy on us, grant us a sensitive spirit and a teachable heart, and help us apply the truth we know to daily life. When our lives fall short, Lord, remind us promptly to repent. Help us examine ourselves often to live a life pleasing to You; help me be a beautiful testimony in family life, at work, and in the church. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.