

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

Romans 3: 9-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 3. We will read verses 9-12 today.

Paul was like a meticulous lawyer, prosecuting all of humanity in a cosmic courtroom, with God as the judge. Paul's accusations were based on two standards: whether one is godly toward God, and whether one is righteous toward others. This directly echoes Jesus' response to the lawyer who tested Him. In Matthew 22:34–40, it is recorded that a lawyer, testing Jesus, asked, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” From verses 37–40, Jesus answered, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Jesus' answer was simple and clear: first, love God; second, love your neighbor as yourself. A person who does not love God cannot truly love others as themselves. The two standards Paul used in his prosecution also involve both God and man—one must be godly toward God in order to be righteous toward others. A person who is not godly toward God cannot be righteous toward people, because righteousness is the principle by which God acts. Only those who are godly toward God can partake of the attributes of God that can be shared, such as love, light, holiness, righteousness, and so on. In Romans 1:18 to 3:8, Paul indicts three groups: the ungodly and unrighteous, those who like to judge others, and the Jews. Then from 3:9 to 20, Paul begins his final summation in this cosmic courtroom.

Verse 9: “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.”

“What then? Are we better than they?” Paul was sent by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Though he was originally a Jew, he now stood together with the Gentiles. Therefore, when he says “we,” he is referring to the Gentiles, and “they” refers to the Jews. Paul had just finished his indictment of the Jews, and he was concerned that the Gentiles might begin to think they were better. So Paul turns back to the Gentiles and asks, “Are we better than they?” Certainly not. Paul often used this kind of rhetorical question and answer to emphasize his point.

Then Paul begins his final summation, for we have already proven that both Jews and Greeks are under sin. A closing argument is naturally a summary of the points previously made. So here we need to review Paul’s earlier argument. Concerning the ungodly and unrighteous of the world, Paul pointed out that through nature itself, people can perceive God’s general revelation. If one has a humble heart, they will seek God and receive His special revelation—that is, to see the redemptive grace accomplished by Jesus Christ. By believing in and accepting Jesus as the Savior of their life, they can be delivered from the state of ungodliness and unrighteousness.

But if people do not honor or give thanks to God as God, and instead exchange the glory of God for idols, their reasoning becomes futile, and their minds become darkened and lose their proper function. This leads to God’s threefold giving them over, and in the end, they become a people with depraved hearts, who practice unrighteousness, falling under God’s condemnation and judgment.

The ungodly and unrighteous are the worst kind of people—they have no God in their hearts and are unjust toward others. Their end is condemnation and destruction. The Greeks believed themselves to be superior to these ungodly and unrighteous people. The Greeks pursued human perfection: since the body needed to be strong, they initiated the Olympic Games; since the mind needed to be sound, they developed philosophy, science, and art, establishing a human-centered system of thought.

The Greeks indeed made significant contributions to human civilization, but the human-centered system of thought they advocated was relative. Since it is relative,

it leads to comparisons, and each person uses themselves as the standard, thus becoming self-righteous. Toward those who are worse than themselves, they criticize and judge. In fact, Paul's earlier discourse about those who like to judge others was directed at the Greeks. He had already proven that these self-righteous people's relative standards cannot withstand God's judgment according to truth; therefore, the Greeks were condemned.

Today, the ideology of liberal thinkers is also centered on man. These human-centered ideologies, if not grounded in the absolute value system established by God, will ultimately fall into the end of the self-righteous—condemnation and judgment.

The Jews are God's chosen people under the Old Covenant. They held the Law of God in their hands, bore the mark of circumcision on their bodies, and outwardly had the priestly system established by God to lead them in worship toward Him. If the Jews truly kept the Law according to God's command with sincerity, they would realize that they had no ability to fully obey it. This would lead them to seek God's mercy and to see the redemptive grace accomplished by Christ.

Unfortunately, because the Jews could not fully keep God's Law, they turned the Law into a set of regulations, elaborately listing 613 rules to teach the Jews to observe outwardly. This resulted in legalism—keeping the Law before men while doing evil behind their backs. They became a group of hypocrites. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, called them a brood of vipers. During His earthly ministry, Jesus Himself most strongly condemned this group of hypocrites. Their unrighteousness toward others revealed that their supposed godliness toward God was false—they were a group of falsely pious and unrighteous people.

Today, the mindset of conservatives is centered on strictly upholding tradition. However, within tradition, if there is no leading of Christ, they will become true-to-name religious people—possessing only the rituals of worship but lacking the reality of worship. They too will be condemned.

So Paul concludes that both Jews and Greeks are under sin, meaning that all people in the world are under sin. Saints, please take note that here the word “sin” appears

in the singular form. As we have said, the Greek word for sin is ‘hamartia’, which originally means missing the mark—that is, deviating from God’s purpose and design for mankind. The singular form of sin refers to the sinful nature of man, meaning that the power of sin rules from within and becomes a person’s disposition. People do not need to be taught to sin; if left uncontrolled, the actions produced by the sinful nature are sin itself. Then, from verse 10 to verse 12, the passage flows continuously, so let us read it together.

Verse 10-12: “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’”

Paul uses these three verses to prove the universality of sin, just as it is written in Scripture. In this passage, Paul references three Scriptures. The first is Psalm 14:2, “The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.” The second is Psalm 53:1–3, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.” The third is Ecclesiastes 7:20, “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.” Paul does not directly quote these three passages but holds them in his heart, synthesizing their meaning and expressing it in his own words.

I personally believe that Paul did not specially look up these Scriptures as he spoke; he was already thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament and spoke naturally, with Luke recording his words. According to the Chinese translation, in this passage Paul used the word “none” or “no” seven times. First, there is no righteous person. The standard of righteousness is measured according to God’s truth—the absolute

standard being the life Jesus Christ lived on earth. Apart from Jesus, no one in the world can meet this standard; therefore, there is no righteous person.

Second, not even one. This is an emphatic expression. Perhaps someone, in a certain matter or at a specific moment, may meet Christ's standard, but God's principle of judgment is that breaking one commandment is equivalent to breaking them all. Only if a person lives like Jesus Christ at all times, in every place, and in every circumstance can they truly meet God's standard. Therefore, there is not even one.

Third, there is none who understands. Human thoughts are corrupted, and reasoning becomes futile; therefore, human reason is unreliable. No one understands God's will or comprehends the truth. Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, people cannot even grasp salvation.

Fourth, there is none who seeks God. The first response of man after the fall is to hide from God. As a result, man's fall deepens further and further, but in His mercy, God comes seeking man and brings salvation to him.

Fifth, they have all turned aside together and become useless, meaning they have no value. The right way is to follow God's path. If a person turns away from God and does not seek Him, they have deviated from the right way. Therefore, in God's plan, that person becomes useless. God created man to represent Him and to steward all creation. When a person turns away from God's way, they cannot fulfill their purpose or accomplish God's will and design.

Sixth, there is none who does good. We must understand that the concept of "good" in the Bible is different from the Chinese understanding of good. In Chinese thought, doing good often means acts like building bridges, repairing roads, helping the poor, and other outwardly good deeds. Throughout one's life, a person may do several great good deeds and help many people. But the "good" in the Bible is not simply doing good works as understood culturally. The Greek word for good here, 'chrestotes', means "useful kindness," referring to meeting real needs in God's way and in His timing—that is, responding to true needs according to God's method and appointed time.

So, a truly good person is one who belongs to God and, under God's guidance, at God's appointed time, uses God's prepared way to meet people's real needs. In truth, every person's deepest need is the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Therefore, preaching the Gospel and leading people to salvation is the true act of doing good. Seventh, not even one. This is Paul's way of emphasizing once again that there is not even one person who does good. Because people will not seek God on their own, saints must become doers of good by preaching the Gospel to those in need.

Paul used seven "nones" to prove the universality of sin. This also reminds every saint to rise up and share the Gospel with those around them—whether family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors—because all have sinned, and all need Jesus.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for letting us see the universality of sin, which also makes us deeply realize how precious the salvation You accomplished on the cross truly is. Because all mankind has sinned, and there is no righteous person, everyone needs to hear the Gospel. Only through confessing sin, repentance, and faith can sins be forgiven. Thank You for entrusting us with the ministry of sharing the Gospel. Please remember the family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors around me, and give me opportunities to proclaim the power of the Gospel to them. Use my own life testimony to help others know You and believe in You. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.