

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

Romans 3: 13-18

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 3, verses 13 to 18.

In the conclusion of his discourse on condemnation, Paul proved the universality of sin. All people are under the power of sin, whether the Greeks who pursue human perfection or the Jews who have an appearance of godliness; as long as they are human, they have a sinful nature within them and are under the power of sin. Paul's conclusion is that there is none, not even one. Paul quoted Scripture, listing seven "nones" to depict the utterly hopeless condition of humanity under the power of sin.

Next, from verses 13 to 18, which is the passage we will read today, Paul describes how people under the power of sin live in a state of total depravity. Verses 13 and 14 speak of the corruption of speech; verses 15 to 17 address the corruption of behavior; and verse 18 speaks of the corruption of the heart. We will examine these three sections.

Verses 13-14: "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

In these two verses, Paul quotes from three Old Testament passages. The first is Psalm 5:9, "For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue." The second is Psalm 10:7, "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity." The third is Psalm 140:3, "They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips." Paul does not directly

quote these passages but synthesizes them in his own words to describe humanity's total depravity.

Paul, like James, begins with human speech. In James 3:1-12, James says that if a person does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body. Though the tongue is the smallest member of the body, it is the hardest to control and has the greatest impact. James says it can "set on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."

Paul's concept is similar. He says their throat is an open tomb, where tombs contain the dead, and when opened, death, decay, and corruption follow. The throat as an open tomb signifies that every word and breath a person utters spreads death, decay, and corruption.

Dear brothers and sisters, I believe we have all encountered people whose words bring all kinds of filth, making you wish you could wash their mouths with soap. Sometimes we see others clearly but are not as thorough in examining ourselves. Therefore, we must regularly reflect on ourselves to prevent our mouths from being linked to death. Paul continues, saying they practice deceit with their tongues, being double-tongued, engaging in deceit, and speaking both blessings and curses from the same mouth. They stir up trouble wherever they go, causing chaos and unrest.

Paul then says that the poison of asps is under their lips; the asp symbolizes Satan. In the Garden of Eden, Satan took the form of a serpent to tempt Eve. When the serpent coiled its tail around the tree with its head hanging down, it resembled a question mark. The serpent's first words to Eve were, "Has God indeed said?" The serpent's initial attack was to cast doubt on God's word. After humanity's total depravity, their tongues, sharp as a serpent's, become Satan's weapon to attack others. Their lips contain the serpent's poison, and every word they speak releases Satan's venom, polluting all who hear it.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must be cautious with our words, for once spoken, they are like water spilled, impossible to take back. Thus, James advises in James 1:19, “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” Even when provoked, we should not respond immediately but season our words with grace before replying.

The Chinese often think that being straightforward and outspoken indicates a lack of deceit, but this is entirely inaccurate. For Christians, being outspoken merely shows the old self taking over, acting in the flesh. It reveals spiritual immaturity and an inability to control the flesh. Paul begins his depiction of total depravity with human speech. Therefore, we must all heed Paul’s reminder.

A totally depraved person’s mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Speech reflects the heart’s intent, so corrupt speech reveals a corrupt heart. However, a corrupt heart, unknown to others, does not harm them. When it becomes corrupt speech—full of cursing, bitterness, and venomous accusations—it fails to edify, only tearing others down and pouring out personal bitterness, often under the guise of victimhood to attack others. This is a sign of the end times, where trust and peace between people are absent.

I believe during election seasons, saints may share my sentiment: watching candidates’ debates on TV, we hear almost nothing but insults, slander, and false accusations aimed at harming others. Yet such people are chosen to hold power, make laws, and govern. No wonder the world’s moral climate worsens, and morality declines. Humanity’s total depravity begins with corrupt speech, which leads to corrupt behavior.

Verses 15-17: “Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.”

These three verses are quoted from Isaiah 59:7-8, “Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths;

whoever takes that way shall not know peace” (NKJV). Corrupt speech causes psychological harm, but corrupt behavior further inflicts physical harm. Their feet run to evil, constantly busy with wicked deeds for their own benefit, even shedding innocent blood to gain unrighteous power and glory. Their paths are marked by destruction and misery, leaving desolation in their wake.

This seems to describe today’s terrorist attacks, where entire villages are indiscriminately slaughtered, raped, and plundered, no different from beasts. Such inhumane acts naturally provoke retaliation from international organizations, resulting in indiscriminate bombings and isolation of other groups, creating humanitarian crises in the name of humanity.

If saints care about world affairs, since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, this cycle has repeated endlessly. Every group believes they are doing what is right, leading to frequent wars, while civilians in war zones suffer endlessly, ignorant of the way of peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must recognize that in a human-ruled world, only the exchange of interests exists, not complete justice. True peace comes only under the law of righteousness. Injustice breeds more vengeful injustice, accumulating hatred and making true peace impossible. We cannot expect peace through unjust means.

When an opponent surrenders due to weakness, the resulting peace is merely a temporary balance of power—a humiliating peace accepted under duress, buying time for a comeback. One side dominates today, but in 20 years, the other may rise again. Everyone builds crooked paths, preparing to strike their opponents fatally. Those who walk such paths neither know nor attain peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the state of the end times. Jesus prophesied on the Mount of Olives about what would happen in the last days. In Matthew 24:7-13, He said, “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be

offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

Thus, we should not be surprised by the depravity of the end times, for Jesus foretold it. He also promised, “He who endures to the end shall be saved.” Jesus does not call us to resist to the end but to endure to the end, for resistance is futile. Human regimes cannot bring true peace. Only when Christ returns will He establish a righteous and just kingdom on earth.

Verse 18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

In addressing total depravity, Paul concludes with “There is no fear of God before their eyes,” which seems peculiar. To understand Paul’s meaning, we must return to his source, Psalm 36:1, “An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.” The preceding phrase reveals that the wicked say in their hearts, “I have no fear of God.” Here, Paul addresses the total depravity of the heart.

In Romans 1:28, Paul speaks of God’s third “giving over,” allowing people to have a debased mind—the ultimate depravity of the heart. In Genesis 6:5, God judged the world with a flood because “every intent of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” The pinnacle of human depravity is the total corruption of the heart.

As long as a person retains a trace of goodness, their conscience can still warn them, leading to shame for their sins. They may confess and seek God’s grace, receiving Christ’s salvation. But if the heart is wholly corrupt, it manifests outwardly as having no fear of God before their eyes. We often describe an arrogant person as having “no one in their eyes,” yet such a person may still be redeemable. But if their arrogance reaches the point of having “no God in their eyes,” they are beyond salvation. Their heart is completely corrupt, fearing neither God nor anything else. They are utterly foolish, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Their

arrogance prevents wisdom's beginning; they feel no guilt for their wrongs, refuse to confess or repent, and thus cannot receive salvation.

As mentioned earlier, the heart comprises the soul with two interfaces: the conscience, connecting to the Holy Spirit; and lust, connecting to the flesh. When a person's conscience ceases to function, the Holy Spirit can no longer touch their emotions or influence their mind, leaving their will entirely dominated by fleshly lusts. They become irredeemable, their heart wholly corrupt.

The heart's corruption follows a traceable path. When a person refuses to heed God's word, Ezekiel 3:7 says their heart gradually hardens. Prolonged hardening turns it into a heart of stone, unresponsive to God's word. Those with a heart of stone need God to perform spiritual heart surgery, replacing the stone heart with a heart of flesh. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Dear brothers and sisters, our hearts were once stone, insensitive to spiritual matters and unable to respond. But thanks be to God, through faith in the gospel, we have received this divine surgery, replacing our stone heart with a heart of flesh, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Thus, we must treasure our hearts, guarding them above all else.

Our heart, connected to both conscience and lust, is the battleground between the Holy Spirit and the flesh. If the flesh prevails, Jesus warns in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." Paul, understanding the heart's importance, concludes that total depravity's final step is the heart's complete corruption, manifested as having no fear of God before their eyes.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for showing us through Paul the state of total human depravity. We know the great grace we have received, for what Paul described was our condition before salvation. We confess that even after being saved, our hearts are often led astray by the flesh and lust, producing corrupt outcomes. Lord, help us and have mercy on us. Guard our hearts above all else. Through daily nourishment from Your Word, let us love, meditate on, and follow Your Word in our daily lives, pleasing You in all things. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.