

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

Romans 3: 19-20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We are continuing reading Romans Chapter 3, verses 19 to 20.

Paul's discourse on condemnation reaches its final two verses—the most important verses in this entire section on condemnation. The purpose of this discourse is simply to reveal the true condition of mankind, so that no one dares to boast in themselves or argue back, but instead would fall prostrate under God's judgment, and from there, begin to seek God's mercy and grace. This naturally leads into Paul's teaching on justification. Condemnation is not God's ultimate goal—rather, it is to bring people to the knowledge of sin, so that they might seek salvation and receive God's justification.

Verse 19: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

Paul's discourse on condemnation reaches its final passage, where he once again brings up the Law—which, to the Jews, refers specifically to the Law given by God to Moses. This was something every Jew knew well and treasured deeply. As for the Gentiles, though they didn't possess the written Law, God had inscribed the function of the Law upon their hearts, giving them a conscience to bear witness. Thus, the Gentiles essentially became a law unto themselves.

Paul brings up the Law at this final point as a foundation for God's justification, because the Law is the basis of God's judgment. The Jews exalted the Law, but they misunderstood its true essence. In the end, they compounded it to 613 regulations, retaining only the letter of the Law, while losing the spirit and purpose of God's original intent in giving the Law. As for the New Testament believers, sometimes in

our emphasis on grace, we may develop a skewed view of the Law—thinking that now that the age of grace has come, the Law is no longer needed. Therefore, it is crucial that we develop a correct and balanced understanding of the Law.

Before we delve into the main passage, let us take some time to examine the nature, purpose, and content of the Law: God is a righteous God, and righteousness is the principle of all His actions. The Law was given by God and entrusted to Moses, who in turn taught the people of Israel to observe it. The Law reflects the very nature of the One who gave it. God is good, so the Law is also good. The Law bears witness to God—by looking at the Law, we can understand what kind of God He is.

God gave the Law to Israel to become the standard for daily conduct. This is why God repeatedly commanded Moses to teach the Israelites to obey it. God is the ultimate Judge, and His judgment is based on the Law. The Law is also the basis for His government. Only when everyone lives under the restraint and order of the Law can there be a stable and structured environment, where life can be sustained—and in God's appointed time, it would prepare the way for the coming of the Redeemer—the Messiah.

The purpose of the Law is not to condemn—condemnation is only part of the process. The Law is meant to help people recognize themselves, to clearly see their true condition, and to realize that they have no ability to keep the Law in its entirety. In turn, this leads them to turn to God and seek His mercy. Every human society that lives in community needs laws—as a standard for interactions between people and as a basis for judgment and governance.

So, what is the best system for human society? Human society has existed for nearly 6,000 years, and for the vast majority of that time, monarchies and centralized authority have dominated. It is only in the past 500 years that democratic systems have begun to be practiced. But even the principle of separation of powers in democratic systems actually originates from the Bible. Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us.”

The prophet Isaiah tells us what the most perfect system is. This also describes the condition that will exist in the millennial kingdom when Christ returns and

establishes His rule on earth. In this one verse, we see the three main branches of government needed to govern a nation: judicial, legislative, and executive. A perfect kingdom, as described in this verse, is one in which: The Lord is our Judge — He is the judicial authority; The Lord is our Lawgiver — He is the legislative authority; The Lord is our King — He is the executive authority. Only when Christ returns and establishes His millennial kingdom on earth—when He gives the laws, executes judgment, and reigns as King—will there be a truly righteous and just kingdom.

In today's human societies, if the legislative, judicial, and executive powers are concentrated in one individual—this is monarchical absolutism. If the ruler is a good king, a centralized system can be more efficient and bring about a prosperous and flourishing society. In Chinese history, there have indeed been a few good kings, such as during the reign of Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing of the Han dynasty, and the Zhenguan era of the Tang dynasty. However, the vast majority have been bad rulers—because power corrupts, and absolute power brings absolute corruption.

Democracy seems to be a bit wiser—it adopts a system of checks and balances by separating the powers of legislation, judiciary, and administration, so that no single branch holds excessive power. From its nature, democracy is not efficient. But even if the elected leaders are wrong, the damage will be limited because of the checks and balances in place.

Centralized power, on the other hand, is highly efficient because power is concentrated. But once the system goes down the wrong path, there's no way to correct it, and it ultimately leads to national ruin.

Whether it is democracy or absolutism, as long as human beings are involved, sin will be present. Even the best system will be corrupted through human participation and will lead to injustice. We believe that human history is in God's hands and will, according to His timeline, ultimately lead to the millennial kingdom when Christ reigns on the earth.

And today's church is the prototype of the coming millennial kingdom. Therefore, the church is a very special community, because the church is the house of God. When the saints come together to become the church, we are to learn within the

church to let Christ be the Lawgiver, Christ be the Judge, and Christ be the King who governs. In this way, we can, even now within the church, foretaste the beautiful life under Christ's reign in the millennial kingdom to come.

After understanding the nature and purpose of the Law, let us now look at the content of the Law. The content of the Law falls into two major categories: ceremonial laws and moral laws. Ceremonial laws are directed toward God—they are intended for people to be separated unto God, to worship Him, and to serve Him. Moral laws are directed toward human relationships; in the Ten Commandments, the fifth to the tenth commandments lay out the fundamental principles of human interactions. Even Gentiles who did not have the Law, if they followed their conscience, could still align with these fundamental moral principles. God not only gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, but He also expanded upon these principles into numerous statutes and ordinances, which became civil laws that governed Jewish daily life. These detailed laws later became the foundation for the legal systems in many Western nations.

In the New Testament, when Jesus Christ came, He abolished the ceremonial laws, because all ceremonial laws pointed to Christ—they were types and shadows of Christ. Once Christ came, the shadows were no longer necessary. On the one hand, Christ abolished the ceremonial law; on the other hand, He strengthened the moral law. The moral law in the Old Testament regulated external behavior, but Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), gave the constitution of the kingdom, which governs the inner heart. For example, the Old Testament law says, “You shall not murder,” but in the kingdom constitution given by Jesus, it becomes: “You shall not hate.”

When Jesus returns to establish the millennial kingdom, it will be the most perfect system in human history. This is beautifully described in Micah 4:1–4: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days. That the mountain of the Lord's house. Shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the

word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”

I believe this is the kind of peaceful scene we all long for—when everyone turns their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, when no one learns war anymore, but instead sits under their fig tree and vine, enjoying all the abundance God has prepared for us. How beautiful, how peaceful, how joyful that will be! But such peace and joy will only come when Christ returns.

Yet, if we are willing, we can also have a foretaste of this even today in the church. Now that we’ve looked at the nature, purpose, and content of the Law, let us return to today’s passage. The words of the Law are spoken to those under the Law. If to the Jews, it refers to the written Law they held in their hands; if to the Gentiles, it refers to the function of the Law written on their hearts. All who are under the Law are required to keep the Law. As Galatians 3:10 says: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’”

Those under the Law, if they fail to keep all the Law, fall under the curse; they will be condemned. Therefore, Paul says that the Law came to shut every mouth—because no one can keep the entire Law. In this way, all people in the world must bow before the judgment of God.

Verse 20: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

This is the conclusion Paul reaches in his discourse on condemnation: every person of flesh has failed to fully keep the Law; therefore, no one can be justified before God by works of the Law. Justification is a legal term—it refers to a person going through the process of judgment and being found to meet the standard that God

has established. But when God uses the Law as the standard for judgment, no one in the flesh has the ability to fulfill the whole Law.

Here we must emphasize again: God's standard is absolute. To break even one commandment is to break them all. In our human, relative perspective, a person who breaks fewer rules is considered a "good" person. But in God's absolute view, only Christ is good. Unless a person can live a life just like Christ, he cannot be justified by keeping the Law. Otherwise, there is not a single person who can be justified by the Law.

In this final part of Paul's discourse on condemnation, he first reveals the universality of sin, then he shows the total depravity of man, and finally, he brings in the Law to silence every mouth, because no one can be justified by the works of the Law before God.

This leads to Paul's most important declaration: "By the law is the knowledge of sin." God originally gave the Law knowing that man had no ability to keep it, because man's nature is incapable of fulfilling God's law. If the nature is wrong, the ability will be lacking. Just as a dog's nature cannot produce a human lifestyle, in the same way, a human nature cannot live a life that meets God's standard.

Even though God commanded Moses to teach the Israelites to obey the Law, His true intent was that, through trying to keep the Law, they would come to realize their total corruption—that they were utterly unable to obey. In other words, God wanted the Israelites to know their sin, to realize they could not save themselves, and instead seek God's grace. Just like Ephesians 2:8–9 says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Dear brothers and sisters, Paul's conclusion on condemnation ends here: No one can be justified by the works of the Law. And the purpose of the Law is to make people aware of their sin. Since man cannot be justified by the Law, then how can man be saved? This naturally brings us to the next section: the doctrine of justification by faith. Justification by faith is a very important truth. In the 15th and 16th centuries, many of our spiritual forebears gave their lives to restore this truth.

Until 1517, when Martin Luther launched the Reformation, the truth of justification by faith was finally recovered and has since become a commonly held belief among Christians today. This is a most precious truth. May God grant us grace to truly see how great the grace we have received is.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for letting us realize that under heaven, there is no one who can be justified by works of the Law. The Law reflects Your very nature and bears testimony of You—but human nature simply cannot live a life that aligns with the Law. Through Paul’s discourse, You help us see that Your original intent in giving the Law was to reveal sin, to help us realize our total depravity, and see that we cannot save ourselves—so that we would seek Your mercy and grace. Thank You, Lord—we truly are a blessed people. You have enabled us to believe in Jesus and receive salvation. With such a simple act of faith, we are justified by You—what a tremendous grace that is! Through our daily time in Your Word, help us to see the truth, and give us the determination to live a life aligned with the truth. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!