

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

Romans 1: 5-9

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue reading Romans Chapter 1, verses 5 to 9.

Romans 1:1–17 is the introduction to the entire book of Romans. Paul first introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and separated to the gospel of God. Then Paul introduces the gospel itself—this gospel is concerning God's Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ. Regarding His humanity, Jesus Christ was born of the seed of David. But regarding His divinity, His humanity had to pass through death and resurrection, and He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. After this, Paul begins to unfold his burden and purpose for writing to the church in Rome.

Verse 5: “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.”

“We” refers to those who, together with Paul, were made apostles. “We have received grace and apostleship from Him” — “Him” clearly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul highly exalts Jesus Christ as his source; he received both grace and the apostleship from Christ. The Greek word for “grace” is *charis*, which is always translated in English as grace. This is one of Paul’s favorite words. In the Chinese Union Version, it’s sometimes translated as “grace” and other times as “favor”, but these two are interchangeable. Personally, I prefer using the word “grace”.

If we were to define grace, it could be said this way: “God freely extends Himself to people.” That is, God gives Himself to us freely. We often misunderstand and think that grace means getting good things from God, or receiving something we don’t deserve. For example, if a fellow believer gives you a packet of tea, or God grants

you a raise, a promotion, or heals your illness—these are certainly manifestations of grace, but they are not grace itself. Grace goes far deeper than the benefit you receive. God wants you, through these situations, to experience His faithfulness and His love. What you truly gain in those experiences is God Himself—freely given to you. That is grace. In other words, if God gives you a promotion, but it causes you to become so busy that you no longer have time to draw near to Him, and you cannot attend church gatherings anymore, then you have actually lost the opportunity to experience God. That promotion is not grace—it is, in fact, a loss of grace.

On the other hand, suppose God allows you to go through a difficult situation—one that you simply cannot overcome on your own. In your weakness, you turn to seek God's help. Though the situation remains, you experience God's supply and feel peace and joy—then you have received God's grace. Therefore, grace is connected to your experience and enjoyment of God. It has no direct correlation with outward material circumstances or possessions.

In this verse, Paul especially places grace together with his apostolic ministry, indicating that his apostleship was formed through experiencing much of God's grace. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15:9–10, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Here, Paul speaks about his apostolic ministry and mentions God's grace three times.

This reveals that the formation of a ministry comes entirely from grace. A saint, through the experience of grace: gains growth in life, receives equipping in truth through the supply of grace, overcomes environmental limitations by the upholding of grace, and obtains the power to function through the empowering of grace. Only then is a ministry formed within him. And the apostolic ministry that Paul received was for this purpose: to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations for the sake of Christ's name. So Paul's ministry was not based on natural ability or

religious credentials but was wholly constituted through many deep experiences of the grace of God.

When Abraham was first called by God to enter the good land, in Genesis 12:3, God promised that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Therefore, in Matthew chapter 1, when it speaks of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, it begins with Abraham. This shows that Jesus is the One through whom all nations would be blessed. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. So, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”

Paul received his apostleship as a direct response to Jesus' commission: to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations, for the sake of His name. As an apostle, Paul constantly exalted the name of Christ, declaring that the origin of his ministry was Christ, the power for his ministry came from Christ, and the fruit and result of his ministry should return to Christ. The phrase “to bring about the obedience of faith” is translated in the KJV as: “for obedience to the faith”. This translation is actually more faithful to the original Greek. The Chinese Union Version translates it in a way that can give the impression of persuading people with reason to accept doctrine. But in the Greek text, the word translated as “the faith” is πίστις (pistis), which means faith, not “the doctrine” or “truth.” It can be translated into Chinese as 信 (faith), 信心 (faith), or 信仰 (belief).

Faith is a gift from God. Paul’s ministry was to proclaim the name of Christ, and through that proclamation, God would sow the seed of faith into the hearts of people. According to the condition of each heart—just like in the parable of the sower—this seed of faith may take root and sprout. If the heart is like good soil, the result will be thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or even a hundredfold. This is a living, organic operation: through believing in Jesus, people are brought into obedience under His leadership, and eventually Christ is constituted into them.

The phrase “to bring about the obedience of faith” (as translated in the KJV) more accurately conveys the idea that it is not people taking the initiative to believe by their own power. While some newly saved believers may think they chose to believe

on their own, after some time—through deeper knowledge of the Bible and more subjective experiences of Christ—they come to realize that the KJV translation is more precise: God brings about obedience to the faith. Because the gospel is not merely a message or a doctrine—it is a Person, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of faith. The Lord Himself supplies faith into those who hear the gospel, and only then can people obey and believe the faith. So, the entire operation of salvation and obedience to the faith is initiated and sustained by Jesus Christ Himself.

Verse 6: “among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ”

The apostles were sent out to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ as the gospel. In many places, there were those who obeyed the faith of the gospel—and among them were you, the ones called to belong to Jesus Christ. “You” refers to the recipients of the book of Romans—the saints in Rome. These believers may not have been saved directly through Paul’s preaching, yet the work done by all the apostles was the same, and the fruit of that work was also consistent. Therefore, Paul could confidently say, “among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.”

Paul used a very unique way to describe them: those who are called to belong to Christ. Every person who believes in Christ and receives salvation has been called by God. We often associate God’s calling with particular ministries, such as being called to preach or to be a missionary. But Paul tells us that every believer’s faith and salvation are the result of God’s calling. And God’s calling is not first about going out to work for Him; it is first and foremost about becoming someone who belongs to Christ.

What does it mean to be someone who belongs to Christ? We recently studied the Song of Songs, so many saints should be familiar with this: in the fourth stage of the spiritual growth, only then can the believer declare with maturity—just as in Song of Songs 6:3: “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” This shows us that when we are called to be Christians, we are called to become people who entirely belong to Christ. This is a high calling. This calling speaks of: A change in our position (from

the world into Christ), a new beginning in life; a transformation in our inner content, so that Christ becomes our center; a shift in our goal, which becomes to gain more of Christ. Only through this process can we subjectively declare, “my beloved is mine.” This is not just a general calling—it is a high calling.

For Paul, this high calling was never an issue. From the moment he was called to be a Christian, his life underwent a complete 180-degree transformation. He went from being a persecutor of Christians to a man zealously preaching the gospel—even to the point that others sought to kill him. Most of us, I believe, are not Paul, nor can we be Paul. After we are called to be saints, we do experience a change in position, but as for the other aspects—the inner transformation, the functioning, the change in purpose, the constitution of Christ within us—we may have only barely begun. There is often little real transformation to speak of. Nevertheless, the call remains: we are called to belong to Christ, to grow in Him, and ultimately be fully constituted with Him.

Verse 7: “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul seems to understand the condition of most saints. So he continues by saying, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints...”. The phrase “called” here is from the same Greek word as the “called” in the previous verse—*kletos*—meaning “called” or “summoned.” In the previous verse, the calling is more general, but also very high—that after being called, one must belong wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Most saints, however, might feel unworthy of such a high calling. So in this verse, Paul brings the matter closer to our level by saying: we are called to be saints. A saint refers to someone who has believed in Jesus Christ, who has received Jesus Christ as the Savior for their whole life. Such a person has already experienced a change in position, has begun to experience God’s love, and has become a part of the church in Rome, bearing testimony for Christ in that city.

Paul reveals here a very practical path: Once a person has received grace and been saved, they must remain in the church life: to grow in the church, to serve in the

church, to experience God's love and the love among all the saints in the church. This is a specific calling for every saint after receiving grace. Some saints, after they are saved, like to drift from church to church—this is unhealthy. Every saint must first commit to a local church, to be connected with the saints in that church, to serve one another and to be perfected by one another. Only then can the building up of the church be brought forth.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. Grace and peace are the blessings Paul most often speaks over the believers when writing his epistles. Grace is the experience and enjoyment of Christ becoming everything to us. Peace is the result that follows from experiencing and enjoying Christ. This peace is not dependent on our external circumstances. Many saints, in the midst of afflictions and trials, are actually able to experience more of the grace supplied by Christ, and in those difficult environments, they express a peace and joy that is beyond human understanding. This kind of testimony—praising God and enjoying His grace in hardship—is even more moving and glorifying to God than simply giving thanks during easy times. Grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: God the Father is the source of grace. The Lord Jesus Christ is the channel or means through which grace is given.

Back in Romans 1:5, Paul mentions that he received grace and apostleship from Christ. As the apostles carried out their ministry, they supplied the grace of Christ to the saints in Rome. When the saints in Rome experienced this grace, they manifested peace and joy. Here we see the effectiveness of Paul's ministry: he ministered Christ to others so they could experience Christ directly as grace, which results in peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, grace and peace are the two most crucial guides in our Christian lives. If you accept and follow these two guides, you can live a life pleasing to God. How do they guide us? Please remember these two lines: “Stand in the realm of grace; walk on the path of peace.” Every time you pause or rest, ask yourself: Where am I standing? Are you standing in the lusts of the fallen flesh? Are you standing in the darkness of this world? Or are you standing in the realm of grace? You must be standing in the realm of grace. Every time you are

about to move forward, ask yourself: Is the path I'm about to take one that gives me peace in my heart? Peace must act as the arbiter in our hearts. Only the path that brings peace is God's leading. If there's even the slightest unrest in your heart, do not proceed further. This is how grace and peace become living guides to those who love and follow Christ.

Verse 8: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

When Paul wrote this letter, he had not yet been to Rome, but he was able to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ for all of you." Here we see Paul's broadness. Jesus Christ is the basis of his fellowship, because every saint is redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, and all have been saved through Christ's salvation. In Jesus Christ, we can have fellowship with every saved and graced saint. Having this basis for fellowship leads Paul to give thanks to God for the saints in Rome. Although Paul had not yet met many of the saints personally, this did not stop him from offering thanks to God on their behalf, because their faith had been spread throughout the world. The Greek word for faith here is *pistis*, which means faith, belief, or trust. The emphasis here is on the testimony that the Roman saints produced in their faith. "Spread throughout the world" refers to the places where the gospel had already been preached at that time.

When Paul wrote the book of Romans, it was near the end of his third missionary journey. Paul had already traveled throughout the regions along the Mediterranean Sea, which were considered the well-known world at that time. In other words, the Gentile churches that Paul had established had all heard the good testimony of the church in Rome, and so Paul thanked God for the saints in Rome.

Verse 9: "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

This verse continues the thought from the previous verse. Paul emphasizes that God can bear witness for him regarding how he constantly mentions the saints in Rome. Perhaps it is in his preaching, perhaps in his prayers, or perhaps in his fellowship. In any case, in Paul's ministry, he often brings up the saints in Rome. In this verse, Paul uses two very special terms to bear witness for him: "the gospel of the Son of God" and "serving God by the Spirit."

First, let us look at "the gospel of the Son of God." In the first verse, Paul said that he was called to be an apostle and had separated himself to God's gospel; then he told us that God's gospel is about the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, in this verse, he introduces another term called "the gospel of the Son of God." Why does Paul not simply say "God's gospel" but chooses to say "the gospel of the Son of God"? What is the difference between "God's gospel" and "the gospel of the Son of God"? Of course, we can broadly say that God's gospel is the gospel of God's Son—that is, the gospel of the Son of God. This is not wrong, but it misses an opportunity for deeper insight. When reading the Bible, we must learn to ask the right questions. Here, the question is: Why does Paul choose to use a new term, "the gospel of the Son of God"? Is there a special meaning contained within it?

If we carefully consider, from the moment Paul mentioned "God's gospel" to now introducing "the gospel of the Son of God," this reveals five levels of transition.

The first level is the shift from objective to subjective. "God's gospel" being "God's Son" is an objective statement. When we believe in God's Son, we accept the gospel; this gospel in us then becomes the gospel of the Son of God, bringing out our subjective knowledge of God's Son.

The second level is the transition from revelation to experience. God's gospel is a revelation—it is like unveiling a curtain so that we see God's Son. This revelation leads to belief, and after believing, we move on to experience God's Son; this experience then expresses the gospel of the Son of God.

The third level of change is from existence to daily life. When we accept God's gospel, we are born again. Being born again brings a new life; we now have a new

existence in us. Living in this new existence means we can enjoy the gospel of the Son of God in our daily life.

The fourth level of change is from labor to operation. Whenever we accept God's gospel, we are born again and have received grace; we are full of gratitude toward God and are willing to labor for Him. But such labor is often tied to external needs, and if done for a long time, it becomes tiring and can lead to complaints. However, if we truly know the gospel of the Son of God, this gospel empowers us inwardly, giving us motivation to operate. Our service is no longer laborious but becomes a motivated operation.

The fifth level of transition is from responsibility to life. Serving out of labor usually comes from a sense of responsibility, which is already good; however, God's higher will is for us to truly experience the gospel of the Son of God, so that our life can grow and produce service and operation flowing out of life itself.

The second special phrase is "serving God in the spirit" (translated as "in spirit" or "in the heart" in Chinese versions). The original Greek word is *pneuma*, usually translated as "spirit" in English, but more precisely means "spirit" or "inner spirit." We must understand that true service is not merely doing a ministry or external work, which is of limited value. True service is serving in the spirit, where the spirit is connected to our being, and the service is connected to our daily life. In other words, we are made alive in the spirit, able to receive supply from above in the spirit, and then connect that supply to our everyday service. This is how we produce service in the newness of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7:6 says, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." Paul served God in the spirit, and his service was to preach the gospel of the Son of God—this must be the example for our own service.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing before us a servant after Your own heart—Paul—who received the apostolic ministry in grace. When he served, he served in the newness of the spirit and brought people to the gospel of the Son of God. May the truths of the Bible become our subjective experience and be lived out

in our daily life. Help us also to become people who serve with our very lives. Bless the church and church life where I belong. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.