

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

Romans 8: 29-30

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 to read Romans Chapter 8, and today we will read verses 29 to 30.

God's creation of the universe and all things is so great and so transcendent; we are all His creation. Toward our Creator, we can only worship and praise Him. Yet according to the record in Genesis chapter one, God completed the great work of creation simply by speaking. Only when He created man did God expend a little more effort: in His own image and according to His likeness, He formed a man from the dust of the ground, and then breathed into his nostrils, and Adam became a living being. According to the original text, he became a "living soul." This was the creation of man, which took just a little more effort than all other created things.

As for the creation of woman, it was carried out with even greater delicacy, because woman was to become man's helper. Therefore, God first needed to design the blueprint of woman based on man's need. Then God performed the first surgery in the universe: He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took something from Adam's side, and with that material, according to the blueprint He had already made, built a woman. This may perhaps be considered the first record of "3D printing" in the universe—using Adam's genes as the material, and according to God's blueprint, constructing a woman with three-dimensional formation—Eve.

When Adam awoke from his deep sleep and saw Eve, he was exceedingly glad and said: "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." God also gave His blessing and established the principle of marriage: a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. In this way, the universe and all that we know was completed.

After man's fall, Satan entered the world through one man and usurped the creation that God had made, becoming the ruler of this world. The entire universe thus

became the old creation. Yet man's fall was no surprise to God, for God is all-knowing and all-powerful; He knew beforehand that man would fall. Therefore, even before creation, God had already prepared the plan of redemption—that out of fallen mankind He would bring forth the new creation.

In contrast to the old creation, which was brought into being simply through God's speaking, the bringing forth of the new creation is far more difficult. God Himself must personally be involved to resolve the problem of sin. Not only must He participate, but He must also sacrifice His only begotten Son, the second of the Divine Trinity, the Son of God. Anyone with a little common sense might ask, "Is it worth it?" For example, in developing a new product today, we often go through many failed prototypes before reaching the final product. Who would still treasure the failed ones? According to human reasoning, it would seem easier just to start over and create another humanity.

But—we are not God. Though Adam's race fell into sin, God did not destroy everything and start over again, though for Him this would have been the simplest path. With just a word, God could have started anew. Yet He did not. Instead, God was willing to give up His only begotten Son for this fallen humanity. According to God's plan, Jesus Christ came into the world, became a man, and lived a perfect human life. Ultimately, He was crucified for the sins of mankind, accomplishing redemption. Then He rose from the dead, becoming the firstfruits of the new creation.

After Christ's resurrection and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, to indwell every believer who is saved. The spirit of the saints was made alive, and they received the spiritual life. Within this life are all the riches of Christ, including the Spirit of sonship. Thus, the Holy Spirit became in the believers the firstfruits. When the saints gather together, they become the church—the assembly of the called ones.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says that the church is God's masterpiece, the fruit of the Triune God's full cooperation. And within the church, the overcomers are the firstfruits among all the saints. When Christ returns, all the saints will be raptured,

and their bodies will be redeemed. Then the saints will become the firstfruits among all created things. At that time, all creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and will enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

In God's plan of redemption, He intends to restore the universe through us. God does not need us to do anything for Him; rather, He needs us to offer ourselves so that the Holy Spirit may work within us. From the regeneration of the spirit to the sanctification of the soul, and ultimately to the glorification of the body, the glory of God's Son will be manifested in us. For this ultimate goal, all creation today is groaning, asking, "Why have the sons of God not yet been revealed?" We also groan, asking, "Why, after being saved for so long, can we still not be freed from this corrupt flesh and this body of death?"

These two groanings both carry a sense of helplessness. But the Holy Spirit, with groanings which cannot be uttered, intercedes for us—and this intercession is always according to the will of God. When God hears the Spirit's prayer, He causes all things to work together, so that through various environments we pass through, we gain benefit from those experiences, and ultimately, we gain God Himself.

At this point, Paul has completed his speaking on the organic aspect of salvation. Then, with wisdom, Paul uses verses 29 and 30 as a summary, and from verses 31 to 39 he leads into worship and praise toward God. Because what God has accomplished for us is so complete, our assurance of salvation is fully secured. Today, we will read verses 29 and 30.

On the surface, these two verses seem simple, but theologically they have stirred much debate. Different theological frameworks emphasize different aspects and bring out different points: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, sanctification, glorification, and so on. Saints who are interested in theological systems may spend additional time to pursue and compare the similarities and differences among these perspectives.

As for me, I do not enjoy spending time on philosophical discussions. I prefer to explain Scripture from the angle of practical experiences. This may not be

comprehensive, and it may have some bias, but the benefit is that I am not rigid. I trust that at the proper time God Himself will adjust me. As long as I maintain a humble heart before God, acknowledging that I am still in the process of learning, God will give me the explanation that best matches the measure of life I have today. Therefore, I will only explain the verses directly, without delving into theological backgrounds. Of course, such an explanation can only represent my present understanding of these verses.

Verse 29: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.” God is all-knowing, and naturally, He can foreknow every person and every matter. To us, this may seem inconceivable, but God is eternal; He is not within time but transcends time. God can choose to enter into time at any moment to observe, or He can govern everything that takes place. Therefore, God’s knowledge is complete; He not only knows the outward appearance of things but also the inward condition of man’s heart.

The Greek word for foreknow is *proginosko*, made up of two words: *pro* meaning “before,” and *ginosko* meaning “know.” Together, they mean “knowledge beforehand” or “foreknow,” which is an objective knowing. In other words, God observes first without interfering, and within His foreknowledge arises His predestination.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. So, within God’s foreknowledge, He knew who would be in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus He chose us. I believe human free will plays a role here. God has already prepared salvation and has sent His disciples to preach the gospel. For those who hear the gospel, they have the free will either to accept or to reject. God respects human free will and never forces anyone to believe; yet, everyone who believes is one whom God has chosen.

So then, is it that man first believes, or that God first chooses? This is a theological debate, and I do not wish to enter into it. But from my personal experience, I am certain that it was God's word that first entered my heart. Along with God's word came the Holy Spirit, who began to change my heart—from being like the wayside soil, to becoming stony shallow ground, then thorny ground. By then, God's word had already taken root within me. And my heart turned from thorny ground into good soil only after I received grace and salvation, when I began walking on the path of sanctification. From then on, my heart was gradually changed, until it could bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

Thus, we see that between foreknowledge and predestination, there is choosing. And whoever God has chosen, He certainly also predestined. Predestined for what? To be conformed to the image of His Son. Let us look more closely at the word predestine. The Greek word is *proorizo*, also made of two words: *pro* meaning "before," and *horizo* meaning "mark out." Together, it means "predetermined" or "predestinated," that is, to mark out beforehand, to set boundaries in advance. God foreknew us, then chose us, and then marked us out—predestined us—to be conformed to the image of His Son. I would like the saints to temporarily set aside existing theological backgrounds, especially the debates about God's sovereignty and man's free will, and instead try to follow Paul's line of thought.

For this reason, I will temporarily set aside the term predestine and return to the original Greek sense: to mark out beforehand that we are to be conformed to the image of His Son. The Greek word for conform is *summorphos*, which is also made of two words: *sum* meaning "together with," and *morphos* meaning "form." If you look it up in a dictionary, you will find that this Greek word carries a very meaningful definition: sharing the same form from embodying the same inner reality. That is, because of the inner reality, the same outward form is manifested. This is why English versions translate it as conformed. Moreover, in the original text, it is in the passive form. Therefore, translating it as "to imitate" or "to conform" gives us too much of an active role. A better translation would be: to be molded into the image of His Son.

The word likeness is often translated into English as image, and in many other places it is translated as likeness. So I feel that likeness is a better rendering here. When God created man in the beginning, He did so according to His image and after His likeness. Image refers to the inward aspect, while likeness refers to the outward aspect. What Paul emphasizes here is that we are being conformed to the image of Christ within us—not that we outwardly imitate or copy the works Christ once did, but that inwardly we are molded into the character of Christ.

Therefore, the full translation of this verse is: those whom God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, or to the character of Christ, inwardly. The purpose of this is that His Son, Christ, might be the firstborn among many brethren. When we possess Christ's character within us, then at Christ's return we will fully obtain the sonship, and Christ will be our Brother. When Christ gains many brothers, He will no longer be the only begotten Son, but the firstborn among many brethren.

This fully agrees with what Hebrews 2:10–11 says, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” God's heart's desire is to gain many sons and to make Christ the Firstborn. Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers. He wants to be our Elder Brother, our Forerunner, the Captain of our salvation, and He will lead us into glory.

The Lord Jesus Himself first passed through death and resurrection, and was glorified. Paul says this in Romans 1:4 (NKJV), “and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The word declared here in Greek is *horizo*, which means marked out. From eternity past, Christ was God's only begotten Son, full of divinity. But when Christ entered into time and put on humanity, His divinity was hidden within His humanity. It was only after His death and resurrection that His humanity was marked out with power as the Son of God. So in His humanity, to be declared the Son of God, He had to pass through death and resurrection; and after passing through, He became God's

Firstborn Son. Likewise, we who are saved saints, predestined by God—that is, previously marked out—are to be conformed to the image of Christ.

In Paul's thought, predestination is not a cold theological term, but something full of life and vital operation. Just as Christ passed through death and resurrection to be marked out as the Son of God, we also, in the process of sanctification, are gradually being conformed to the image of Christ, having been beforehand marked out to become Christ's brothers and God's sons. Why "beforehand"? Because the ultimate fulfillment of this matter will only be completed at the time of Christ's return.

Beloved brothers and sisters, in the church we address one another as brother or sister. We must recognize and value this title, because only with Christ as our common Elder Brother can we truly call one another brothers and sisters. Humanly speaking, we share no blood relation. But according to God's foreknowledge and predestination, we all share God's life, and one day we will grow into full sonship and become Christ's brothers. What a glorious and honorable identity and position this is! If we truly see this real value, we will consider brother and sister to be the most glorious titles.

In the church, some may like to be called pastor, or elder, or deacon, but those are titles concerning human relationships, which are of little value. To be called brother or sister, however, is tied to the relationship of eternal life. Not only so, but Christ Himself is to be our Elder Brother, and together with Him we will enter into glory. What a glorious matter this is! This is entirely according to the will and plan of the Father—that Christ might be the Firstborn among many brethren.

Verse 30: "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Paul, with his consistent meticulous logic and precise choice of words, in just one verse describes the entire experience of every saint's life. Paul begins with God's predestination. According to the discussion in the previous verse, we know that

predestination includes foreknowledge and election. Every person who becomes a Christian is one who has been predestined by God. Once again, I would like to ask the saints to set aside for a moment the concept of sovereignty often spoken of in discussions of predestination. This predestination is based on God's foreknowledge and election, and in this process, man's free will must also actively cooperate with the work the Holy Spirit does within our hearts. Those whom He predestined, He also called; those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified.

In this brief discourse, Paul only speaks of the results, not of the process. He presents three stages of result: those whom He foreknew, He also called; those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified. Let us look at them one by one. First, those who were predestined were also called. God's predestination requires a process for us to become the called. In this process, God sends many messengers of the gospel to preach the good news to us. At the same time, the Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts, and in our environment all things work together for good, so that our heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh. Then we begin to respond to the gospel, we answer God's calling, and we decide to receive Christ as the Savior of our life.

No one becomes a Christian by accident or at random; each one is called by God. Since it is a calling, it must have a specific purpose, intention, and plan. Therefore, every saint must seek early and come to know God's purpose, intention, and plan concerning themselves. In this way, when the Lord returns, we will be able to give an account to Him.

Next, those whom He called, He also justified. This phrase includes the entire section of Romans 1:18–5:11, the discourse concerning judicial redemption. For us, we neither need to do anything, nor can we do anything; we only need to acknowledge that we are sinners and be willing to accept the free grace, and we will be justified by God. But behind this matter, Jesus Christ had to pass through an entire process: He became flesh, lived a perfect human life, walked the way of the cross, accomplished redemption, and then rose from the dead, being declared with power to be the Son of God.

Those whom He justified, He also glorified. This one phrase encompasses Romans 5:12–8:30, the entire section concerning the salvation of life. The saints, those who have been justified, must actively and positively participate in this salvation of life. For God has predestined that every one of His children must pass through the process of sanctification. In this process, the most crucial matter is to set the mind on the spirit, so that the Spirit of God may make His home in us. We must also experience the Spirit of Christ working within us to make us wholly of Christ. Furthermore, we need to experience the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead, giving life to our mortal bodies, so that in all things we may be led by the Spirit of God. In this way, we grow into the sons of God. Then, at the coming of Christ, we will fully receive the sonship, our bodies will be redeemed, and we will manifest the glory of God. This is the course of each of our lives.

For this glorious and hope-filled life, let us together offer a prayer to God: Dear Father God, how we thank You that You sent people to preach the gospel to us and granted us the wisdom unto salvation. We know that before the foundation of the world, You had already predestined us, and in time You gave us wisdom to become those who are called. You not only gave us the authority to become Your children, but once we were called, You also justified us. Not because we ourselves are better than others, but because Jesus Christ has already accomplished the judicial redemption for us. We need only to believe wholeheartedly, repent, and confess our sins, and then our sins are forgiven.

On the basis of the precious blood of Christ, You have justified us. And everyone whom You justify, You also determine to glorify. Of course, this is the process of sanctification throughout our whole life, for it is Your good pleasure that Christ would be our elder brother and lead us together into glory.

At the manifestation of Christ, we will receive the sonship, our bodies will be redeemed, and we will display the glory of God. Dear Father God, for Your wonderful will we give You thanks, and for Your plan upon us we thank You even more, that You cause all things to work together for good. In this process we are gradually being wrought, until ultimately we may manifest the glory of the sons of

God. We offer You our thanks, worship, and praise. Bless my whole life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!