

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

Romans 9: 1-3

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read Romans 9:1–18. Today, we will read verses 1-3.

Romans chapters 1–8 speak about personal salvation. The first five chapters describe how a sinner, by faith, receives judicial redemption—being condemned, then justified. Chapters 5–8 describe how a saint, through faith, experiences organic salvation, being sanctified day by day, and ultimately glorified. With precise language and meticulous logic, Paul systematically lays out God's foreknowledge and predestination, followed by man's calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification—thus giving a complete description of a saint's lifelong journey.

All men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; therefore, everyone needs salvation and must walk through the spiritual progression portrayed in Romans 1–8 in order to be conformed to the image of Christ, that at the Lord's coming, the glory of God's Son may be manifested in us.

The first eight chapters of Romans deal with the personal salvation of every saint. Yet each saint's salvation is not only for his own benefit but also for God's eternal will, purpose, and plan. What God desires to gain is not a number of individual spiritual giants, but a built-up Church that can serve as the Body of Christ and ultimately become Christ's Bride. Romans chapters 9–16 describe how the Body of Christ is built up. These eight chapters can be divided into two sections: chapters 9–11 reveal the wisdom of God's election, teaching us to submit to His arrangement in mercy; while chapters 12–16 speak about commitment in the Church, growing, being transformed, and becoming mature as God's testimony.

Personal salvation focuses on our individual relationship with God—receiving the Spirit's supply and leading—so that we may be conformed to the image of God's Son. However, if we focus only on personal salvation, it is easy to remain in theory.

Especially when we experience God's presence, enjoy the supply of the Spirit, and taste the unsearchable riches of Christ in fellowship with Him, we may feel exceedingly joyful, even as if we were already in heaven. But is this truly real? Or merely a self-perceived spirituality? Only when the attributes of Christ are wrought into us to produce the virtues of humanity, can sanctification be considered genuine.

Therefore, God has ordained that every believer cannot live apart from the Church. Only in the Church, as we learn to fellowship, coordinate, and serve together with other saints, can our true spiritual condition be manifested. God causes all things to work together for good by arranging all kinds of people in the Church—some to help, encourage, and comfort us, and others who may trouble us or make us uncomfortable. Yet all these are for our benefit, that we might grow. Hence, we must learn to recognize the wisdom of God's election, not viewing the saints around us from our own perspective, but from God's sovereignty.

Why has God placed these particular saints around you—especially those who trouble you most? Perhaps they are the very ones who can help you grow. Therefore, we must learn to submit to God's merciful arrangements in all things. A healthy Christian, after being saved, must know life and have proper spiritual nourishment. Our "eating" is in reading God's Word, and our "drinking" is in enjoying fellowship with the Holy Spirit—these are essential lessons in the organic salvation we must learn. Without proper eating and drinking, life cannot grow; yet if we only eat and drink but never exercise, our growth will not be healthy—we will become "spiritual fat men."

What then is our spiritual exercise? It is to know God's sovereignty and to submit to all His arrangements in our environment—especially those that do not conform to our will. In Paul's time, as the apostle to the Gentiles, his greatest difficulties came from the Jews. Thus, in Romans chapters 9–11, Paul especially views those troublesome Jews from the perspective of the wisdom of God's election.

Verse 1: "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit."

Paul was a man of sincerity. He spoke the truth in Christ and did not lie. In today's world, those who speak the truth are few. Those who seek personal advantage flatter with false words; those who wish to harm others spread lies and slander. Even news networks distort or selectively report events according to their political stance. Thus, it is rare to find anyone who speaks truthfully. But Paul was a genuine man—he spoke in Christ, with a conscience that bore witness in the Holy Spirit.

In the original Greek, the word “感動” is not present. The phrase literally means “my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit.” This expression is not easy to understand, so we must first define what “conscience” means. The Greek word *suneidesis* is composed of two parts: “sun” meaning “together with,” and *eido* meaning “to know” or “perceive subjectively,” with the suffix *-sis* denoting the result of a process. Thus, *suneidesis* refers to a result reached through a process that aligns with one's inner perception. Therefore, conscience is a subjective awareness, shaped by one's background, experience, and learning.

For example, drinking wine—for one who has suffered harm from alcoholism, his conscience is highly sensitive and forbids even a drop. But for the French, wine is part of daily life; as long as one is not drunk, the conscience feels at ease. An unbeliever's conscience is tied to his own moral sense of good and evil, which is influenced by his tradition, culture, and customs. Therefore, the conscience helps define what is socially acceptable, but whether one acts according to it depends on the soul—the mind weighs pros and cons, the emotion senses likes and dislikes, and the will finally decides. Hence, conscience in itself is merely a signpost; it lacks power to determine action. Yet Paul says that his conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit.

For every believer, the conscience is no longer the same as that of the unbeliever—it now has the Holy Spirit as its standard. What is this standard? Once a person is saved, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in his spirit. The Spirit can then operate from our spirit to influence our soul, and the conscience becomes the channel between the spirit and the soul. When we encounter a situation, the Holy Spirit first has a judgment—a judgment in line with God's will. The Spirit then transmits this divine

will through our spirit into our conscience. If our conscience is clean and open, God's will can pass through our conscience into our soul. Our soul must then undergo a process of understanding until it reaches full agreement with God's will, and the will of the soul acts accordingly. This is the process Paul refers to when he says, "my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit." Paul's words were truthful because his conscience testified together with the Holy Spirit.

Beloved brothers and sisters, in our daily life we say many words and do many things. If we learn, before speaking or acting, to go through this inner process—allowing the Holy Spirit to pass through our conscience to influence our soul before deciding what to say or do—we will greatly reduce mistakes in words and deeds and experience God's preserving grace in our daily living.

Verse 2: "That I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."

Paul's conscience testified that he had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart. Paul was a man who knew God's sovereignty. As the apostle to the Gentiles, wherever he went and to whom he preached, Paul followed God's sovereign leading. If everything was under divine sovereignty, why was Paul still sorrowful?

Because Paul not only submitted to God's sovereignty but also gradually understood God's will within that sovereignty—namely, that when salvation came to the Gentiles, the Israelites would be temporarily set aside. Seeing this, Paul was filled with sorrow. Though he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he himself was a Jew, and he deeply loved his own people. He believed that the gospel should first be preached to Israel and then to the Gentiles. Before ascending, the Lord Jesus had also charged His disciples, saying: "...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8b)

Indeed, the gospel spread according to the Lord's commission. Now it was being preached among the Gentiles with great fruit, while the Jews had become an obstacle to the Gentile churches. The Jews clung tightly to the ceremonial law of the Old Testament, and their hearts were closed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's

preaching among the Gentiles was under God's sovereignty, yet he also understood that, in that sovereignty, God's intention was to temporarily set Israel aside.

In every city he entered, Paul first went to the synagogue. But seeing the Jews' indifference to the gospel, he was filled with sorrow. This sorrow was linked to God's sovereignty. And his continual grief was linked to the virtue of his humanity. Though he knew God's sovereignty and that man cannot resist it, he still loved the Jews; thus his heart was continually pained.

Beloved brothers and sisters, Paul was truly one who knew God's sovereignty and was also full of human virtue. Many times, when we receive revelation and understand God's will—knowing that something cannot be done—we simply let go, leaving it at that. While that is submission to sovereignty, it often lacks human compassion. Paul knew that God had temporarily set Israel aside, yet he still had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart.

This is just like the Lord Jesus: He knew that Judas would betray Him, yet He continued to give Judas opportunities to repent, though He knew he would not. Knowing truth is one thing; walking according to truth with a heart of compassion is another.

In the Church, we often meet saints who fail repeatedly. Do we give up on them? When they say they repent again, do we refuse to believe them because of their past failures? To serve others is never easy; may God grant us the same virtue that Paul had—a heart that sorrows continually for others. Especially those who bear responsibility in the Church, when disciplining erring saints, should not do so coldly or without feeling, but with tears—for the Father's heart is grieved. Every saint has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and is precious in the Father's eyes. Paul knew this well; therefore he had great sorrow and continual grief.

Verse 3: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh."

Paul himself was a Jew. The unbelieving Jews were his brethren, his countrymen according to the flesh. For their salvation, he declared that he could wish himself to be accursed, separated from Christ, if only they might be saved. Here Paul expressed his deep emotion toward the Jews—he loved them to such an extent that he was willing, if it were possible, to bear a curse himself. Of course, this could never happen. Near the end of chapter 8, Paul had triumphantly proclaimed: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:35a) He was fully assured that no one could separate a redeemed believer from Christ.

Yet we must note carefully Paul’s wording. The word “accursed” here is the Greek *anathema*, which can mean “accursed,” but also “devoted permanently to God.” In Leviticus 27:28 it is written: “Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to the LORD of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to the LORD.” In the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), the term *anathema* is used for “devoted offering.” Because what is devoted to God cannot be redeemed, the one who offers it loses it forever. Paul’s meaning, therefore, is that he was willing to become such a “devoted offering”—completely given to God, belonging wholly to Him, even if consumed to ashes.

There is another Greek word for “curse,” *katara*, which is related to sin. In Galatians 3:13 it says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).” Here *katara* refers to the curse connected with sin—being rejected by God. But Paul’s *anathema* was not connected with sin; rather, it meant to be wholly devoted to God.

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul wrote: “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” Again, *anathema* is used. Such a person is not cursed unto damnation, but rather, Paul implies, set apart—completely handed over to God’s judgment. Therefore, the KJV retains the Greek word *anathema* rather than translating it as “curse.”

In this verse, we see that Paul was truly a man of deep feeling and noble character. Although the Jews constantly opposed his ministry, he sincerely loved them, even

to the point of being willing to suffer for their sake. May we learn from Paul's example in our service—to be willing to pay any cost for the sake of the saints we serve.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You for gathering the saints together as the Church. We know that every saint has been placed around us by the Father's arrangement for our growth. Help us to truly love the saints around us and to often pray for their spiritual condition. We are willing to give ourselves for their sake, that the Church may be filled with mutual support and edification, becoming a beautiful testimony. Let those who come among us say, "Truly, God is among you." Bless the Church and our church life. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.