

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

Romans 9: 4-5

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 9. We will read verses 4-5 today.

Paul was a sincere man who spoke the truth in Christ, and his conscience bore witness together with the Holy Spirit. Paul was so cautious and earnest, fearing that his readers might misunderstand his words, for what he was about to say could be very different from what they expected. Throughout his missionary journeys, the Jews continually opposed Paul, even stirring up riots and persecuting him. In the Gentile churches he had established, the Jews repeatedly caused disturbances. The believers who received his letters might have thought that Paul must hate the Jews. Therefore, Paul carefully expressed his attitude and let his conscience and the Holy Spirit testify on his behalf. He was constantly sorrowful for the Jews, for he saw that it was God's will to set them aside temporarily, and this brought continual grief to his heart. Paul was truly a man full of human virtue, able to feel sorrow for those who persecuted him, because the Jews were his brethren according to the flesh—his own kinsmen.

Paul was called and sent by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He held his ministry in deep respect and labored diligently among the Gentiles in service. At the same time, he also honored God's work, knowing that God could work through his hands as well as through the hands of others. God is infinite, and His work is eternal. The commission God gave to Paul was only a part of God's overall work, and Paul both understood and respected the work that God accomplished through others.

Take the Jews as an example: they were God's chosen people in the Old Testament, and God's work was carried out among them. But now, in the New Testament, they seem unable to keep up. Because of their narrowness, they determined to persecute Paul and tried to hinder the work that God was doing through him. Yet

Paul remained exceedingly broad and inclusive. When he saw that God was setting the Jews aside, he was not glad, thinking that God had answered his prayer by removing those who persecuted him. Instead, he was grieved and sorrowful in heart for the Jews.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must learn from Paul's broadness of heart, to recognize God's infinity and to understand that His work carries eternal value. If you have such understanding, you will surely respect God's work, especially in those churches whose theological structures and organizational visions differ, resulting in different practices. We must learn to appreciate and be tolerant, not to criticize recklessly. God desires to gain people from all the earth, and naturally He will raise up various kinds of churches so that the Gospel may be brought to every corner of the world.

The unity among churches is not achieved through theological debate, nor by comparing the size of congregations, and even less by using various means to suppress those who differ. The basis of the church's unity is found in Ephesians 4:13—"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." I personally believe that this unity will be fully manifested when Christ returns, when the overcomers from all the churches are raptured, revealing the oneness of the universal church. Until then, we must learn from Paul's broadness and inclusiveness, respecting God's work throughout the whole earth while also honoring the commission God has given to us personally.

When Jesus Christ fulfilled His ministry on earth, He never focused on the crowds but cared for each individual who sincerely sought the Lord—like the woman with the flow of blood who pressed through the crowd, or Zacchaeus who climbed up the sycamore tree to see Jesus while the multitude thronged around Him. In the same way, today God will not bring about the unity of the church through mass movements, but through individual overcoming saints who, like Paul, possess the same broadness and inclusiveness, able to respect the work that God accomplishes through the hands of various churches.

Just like the prophet Elijah, who complained to God that the Israelites had killed His prophets, torn down His altars, and were seeking his life, yet God answered Elijah that He had reserved for Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Our difficulty often lies in being too self-assured, thinking that what we are doing is the entirety of God's work—but that is far from the truth. God had reserved for Himself seven thousand who were like Elijah; the number seven signifies perfection in time, and one thousand is God's number, so seven thousand speaks of God's perfect operation within time, while we are only a small part of it. Of course, we must never despise the work in our own hands, for if this link were missing, God's work would not be complete. At the same time, we must learn to respect the work that God is doing among other groups. Paul deeply respected the work of God's hand that had once been among the Jews, and next Paul bore testimony for Israel.

Verse 4: “who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of *God*, and the promises;”

They are Israelites—this is Paul's declaration. Paul did not call them Jews, for that title developed after the Israelites were taken captive; in the days of their return to the land of Israel, most of those who came back were remnants from the tribe of Judah, and from there the term “Jew” gradually became the common designation. By the time of Paul, that was the usual name used, yet Paul chose not to call them Jews but Israelites. In doing so, he traced their identity back to their ancestor Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, and whose twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. They later became God's chosen people in the Old Testament, those who bore witness for God under the Old Covenant.

Then Paul listed six special privileges that God had given to the Israelites: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service, and the promises. These six privileges seem to be divided into three groups, and we can look at them one by one. The first group is the adoption and the glory. The adoption refers to the manifestation of glory. When the saints of the New Testament have

completed their lifelong journey of sanctification, at the time of Christ's return they will receive the adoption, and God's glory will be revealed in them. Therefore, Paul mentioned the adoption and the glory together.

In Exodus 4:22 it says, "Israel is My son, My firstborn." Israel is not only God's son but also His firstborn. However, when the Israelites did not obey God's commands and acted arbitrarily, they could lose the privilege of the firstborn. The book of Genesis records four instances of the transfer of the firstborn's privilege. The first was from Esau to Jacob, recorded in Genesis 25:22-34; the second was from Zerah to Perez, recorded in Genesis 38:27-30; the third was from Reuben to Joseph, recorded in Genesis 49:3-4; and the fourth was from Manasseh to Ephraim, recorded in Genesis 48:12-20. These four instances recorded in Genesis show that receiving the firstborn's privilege is not determined merely by birth but also according to the circumstances at the time.

In the New Testament, Romans 8:29 tells us, "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." The saints of the New Testament are to receive the adoption, so that Christ may be the firstborn among many brothers. Thus, in the New Testament, Christ is the firstborn, and we are all His brethren, speaking in terms of individual spiritual growth.

But in terms of the salvation of the corporate body, Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body; therefore, the church becomes God's firstborn, and the privilege of the firstborn is transferred from the Israelites of the Old Testament to the church in the New Testament. This is why in Hebrews 12:23 the church is called "the general assembly of the firstborn." Paul certainly knew this, yet he still respected God's work in the Old Testament, for God's work is eternal. The Israelites will ultimately receive the adoption, and the manifestation of that adoption is glory.

Next, let us look at the second group: the covenants and the law. God is a God of covenant, and when He makes a covenant with man, it is a profound display of His mercy toward humanity. God is the sovereign Creator of the universe, and all

creation ought naturally to obey His word without question, yet He willingly limits Himself to establish a covenant with people.

In the Old Testament, God made three covenants with the Israelites. The first is the covenant with Abraham, recorded in Genesis 17:4-8, where God said to Abram, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” We see that this covenant is exceedingly rich, including descendants, a kingdom, and the possession of land. This covenant reveals God’s intention for the Israelites: that they would multiply, establish a kingdom, enjoy the land God gave them, and bear witness for God.

The second covenant is the Mosaic covenant, and after establishing this covenant, God also gave the law. When Moses led the 2 million Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel through Moses, recorded in Exodus 19:4-6, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Mosaic covenant follows the covenant with Abraham and represents God’s continued assurance of His promises to Israel.

God not only made a covenant with Moses but also gave the law through him. The covenant revealed God’s intention, while the law practically defined the content of that intention. God first gave the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20:2-17, and afterward gave many statutes and ordinances in succession. These laws, statutes, and ordinances became the guidelines for the life of the Israelites. The Mosaic law regulated the life of the Israelites, with the purpose that through their

lives they would bear witness to God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. The Israelites lived under the Mosaic law, which expressed the essence of God's intention. It was not until the time of David, when the kingdom of Israel was established, that God made a covenant with David.

Now let us look at the third covenant, the Davidic covenant, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, where God said to David, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." In its immediate fulfillment at that time, King Solomon was raised up, built the temple, and succeeded to David's throne as king over Israel; however, Solomon's reign did not last forever.

Therefore, the "seed of David" points to Jesus Christ, who in Matthew 12:42 reveals Himself as greater than Solomon. Thus, the full fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is in Christ. Christ, with His body as the temple—that is, the church—is to become God's holy temple. When the building of the church is complete and Christ returns as King, His kingdom will endure forever. Therefore, the covenant with Abraham shows us God's intention, the Mosaic covenant and the law testify to the content of God's intention, and the Davidic covenant is the actual manifestation of that content, bringing Christ's reign on earth.

Now let us look at the third group: the service and the promises. The service refers to the system of worship and ministry of the priests in the Old Testament. For Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, it was necessary first to establish the priestly system of service, so that the Israelites could properly offer sacrifices and worship to God. On one hand, this system helped the Israelites remove defilement; on the other hand, it guided them in offering worship and praise to God. This system of worship and service was the practical means by which God's promises to the people of Israel could be realized, which is why Paul mentions service and promises together.

In fact, the New Testament church is the same. God has given the church various promises, but they must be realized through the establishment of a system of

service within the church. For example, at the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the bread and the cup and instructed His disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Him. Today, the church must have the ministry of the bread and the cup so that the saints participating in the Sunday worship can partake of the Lord's table, sharing in the promises that Christ has given to the church.

Verse 5: “of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.”

In addition to the six privileges God gave to the Israelites listed in the previous section, Paul also specifically mentions their forefathers. The forefathers refer to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the ancestors through whom God worked powerfully throughout the generations. Although by Paul's time most of the Jews did not believe in Jesus, this does not erase the fact that their forefathers had once borne glorious testimony to God. They are people who have forefathers.

Dear brothers and sisters, we should also frequently remember our spiritual forefathers—those who have helped us and guided us in spiritual matters. Paul reminded Timothy in the same way in 2 Timothy 3:14, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.” Paul was not boasting about himself, but instructing Timothy to learn to respect the transmission of teaching. Likewise, we must respect the heritage, remembering those spiritual elders who have helped us; they are our forefathers. A person who has forefathers is one who will not forget their roots.

According to the flesh, Christ also came from the Israelites. Jesus was born of Mary through the Holy Spirit, and Mary's genealogy is recorded in detail in Luke 3:23-38. This genealogy proves that Jesus came from the Israelites, from the tribe of Judah, and is a descendant of Nathan, the son of King David. Therefore, according to the flesh, Jesus is also of Israel. Whenever Paul mentions Jesus Christ, he particularly adds his praise for Him: “He is over all, God blessed forever. Amen!” On one hand, Paul lists the rich inheritance God gave to the Israelites, and on the other, he brings in Jesus Christ. However, as soon as Paul mentions Christ, his tone immediately

changes. Although Christ came from Israel, He is over all, He is the glorious God, and He is forever blessed. May we, whenever we mention the name of Jesus Christ, also be stirred as Paul was, expressing our praise and adoration for Him.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, help us to learn Paul's broadness and inclusiveness. Even though he was subjected to countless persecutions and obstacles from the Jews during his ministry, Paul still spoke of the Jews with such respect. Paul truly understood God's infinity and the eternality of His work. Although it may seem that God has temporarily set the Jews aside, they indeed represented God's work and His testimony in the Old Testament.

Today, as we learn to serve and worship in our own church, on one hand it helps us to see our vision and the commission God has given us. We dare not take lightly the commission God has entrusted to us, yet at the same time it teaches us to respect the work God is accomplishing through other groups. What we see is always partial and limited within time; may God broaden our vision so that we may truly see His heart. In this way, we can have Paul's broadness and inclusiveness. Bless the church I am part of, that it may be a church pleasing to You. I offer this prayer, request, and thanksgiving in the holy name of my Lord Jesus Christ.