

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

Romans 9: 6-9

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 are going to read Romans Chapter 9 and today we will read verses 6 to 9.

Paul knew God and deeply respected God's work. God had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and he established many churches among them. Although the Jews repeatedly persecuted him and continually disturbed the churches he had established, Paul still respected the work that God had once carried out among the Israelites. He declared that they are Israelites, and that the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises all belong to them; the fathers are theirs as well, and even Christ Himself came from them according to the flesh.

God truly granted the Israelites exceedingly rich inheritance. Especially when Paul mentioned that Jesus also came from them, he could not help but burst into a doxology concerning Christ: "He who is over all, the eternally blessed God." Paul made it very clear that Christ is the eternal God Himself; obviously, this refers to Christ's divinity. From this verse onward, throughout chapter nine, Paul no longer mentions the name of Christ or Jesus but directly uses the title "God," because Paul begins to emphasize God's sovereign authority.

The sovereignty of God is a difficult topic to discuss, yet one that cannot be avoided. We must grasp Paul's line of thought and carefully consider what he expressed. Only by understanding the examples Paul cited and how those events unfolded in the Old Testament can we rightly and balancedly comprehend what Paul meant by God's sovereignty.

Throughout church history, the tension between God's sovereign authority and human free will has been debated for centuries. The Calvinist school advocates God's absolute sovereignty, whereas the Arminian school emphasizes human free

will. These two theological systems once caused intense controversy in the Dutch church. In 1609, the Dutch government convened the Synod of Dort. With some political influence involved, the outcome was that the Arminian view was condemned as heresy. Clergy who held Arminian beliefs were removed from their positions, while the Calvinists achieved a complete victory and became the mainstream of European Christianity.

However, the Church of England, due to its overemphasis on God's absolute sovereignty, lost its spiritual vitality, leading to decline and corruption. Around 150 years after the Synod of Dort, God raised up John Wesley to launch the Holiness Movement. To a certain extent, this movement restored the Arminian emphasis on human free will, especially regarding a believer's pursuit of sanctification after salvation, where the free will of man plays a crucial role.

I give this example to illustrate that any theological school or system must go through the test of time and undergo necessary corrections. We all must acknowledge that God is the sovereign Ruler of human history, especially the history of the Church. God will not allow His Church to decline, nor will He allow His house to become desolate. In different ages, the Church has different needs, and God raises up His servants to meet those needs. Whether one emphasizes God's sovereignty or human free will, God Himself is not concerned with such distinctions. His ultimate purpose is to manifest the glory of His Son in His children.

Therefore, when speaking of God's sovereignty, I do not refer to the views of the Calvinist school or the Wesleyan school, but rather go directly to the Scriptures and try to enter into Paul's line of thought to share fellowship with the saints. In essence, I believe in God's omniscience, and within His omniscience, He foreknew; within His foreknowledge, He predestines; and within His predestination, we are brought into glory. Human free will plays a part in every step of this process. The extent of that role varies according to each person's nature and experience. What is most important is that if we maintain a heart that is turned toward God—setting our mind on the spirit—God will surely give us the most fitting guidance.

In Romans chapter 9, Paul leads us to know the sovereignty of God, and furthermore, to know this sovereign God Himself. If we only know God's sovereignty but do not truly know God, we will live in fear and trembling, and even be filled with complaints, because we regard God as a tyrant, fearing that we might offend Him at any moment.

Of course, God is a loving God, not a tyrant. On the other hand, if we claim to know God but do not recognize His sovereignty, then we have not truly known Him, and His sovereignty cannot be manifested in us; eventually, we will deviate from God's way. With this understanding, we can now begin to look at the sovereignty of God—this is indeed a profound and challenging subject.

Verse 6: “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”

At the very beginning, Paul says that this does not mean that the word of God has failed. The Greek word translated as “word” in the Chinese Union Version is actually *logos*. According to the translation pattern of the Union Version, *logos* should normally be rendered as “the Word.” Generally speaking, the Greek word *rhema* is what the Union Version translates as “word.” *Logos*—or “the Word”—refers to the word that is connected with God's will, whereas *rhema* refers to the application of God's word upon us.

First, Paul asks here: Has God's purpose concerning Israel failed? God gave the Israelites such a rich inheritance and so many words of promise—has God's word failed? Of course not. God is a sovereign God. Isaiah 55:11 says, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please.” God cannot deny Himself. Since God's word must be fulfilled, why then did Israel stumble?

Because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. The problem does not lie with God's word, but with the Israelites themselves, for not all who are born of Israel are truly Israel. This statement echoes Romans 2:28—“For he is not a Jew who

is one outwardly.” However, in chapter 2, Paul adds a qualifying term, “true Jew,” indicating that what he emphasizes is the inward reality of being a Jew—that is what makes one a true Jew.

In this verse, Paul is correcting a common misconception: “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” In other words, being called an Israelite is not merely based on bloodline. By blood, one can be a Jew, but being an Israelite is something different—it cannot be attained by natural descent alone. Why is that? To understand this, we must return to the book of Genesis.

Israel’s original name was Jacob. Jacob was a man who loved to grasp and seize; he used schemes and deceit to obtain what he desired. By nature, he was not an admirable or pleasant person. Yet, he valued what God valued. For example, he treasured the birthright—the very thing God esteemed—and he pursued it with all his strength. Because of this inward desire for what God desired, Jacob could be used by God.

Under God’s sovereign hand, Jacob endured much suffering throughout his life. Though he suffered, he was always under God’s protection. Eventually, through those dealings, Jacob learned to let go—to stop grasping—and became a man who could extend his hands to bless others. At that point, God changed his name to Israel, meaning “a prince of God.” All who were born of Jacob were his sons, but not all who were born of Israel were truly Israelites. This statement from Paul helps us understand Genesis 49:2, “Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father.” These were Jacob’s final words of blessing to his twelve sons before his death.

At that time, Jacob’s life had reached great maturity and spiritual depth. The words he spoke became prophetic, foretelling the future of the twelve tribes of Israel. His twelve sons were all Jacob’s sons—so he said, “you sons of Jacob.” But he also said, “listen to Israel your father,” showing that it is those who listen to Israel’s words—those who heed the voice of the transformed man under God’s rule—who can truly be called Israelites. In the Old Testament, Israel typifies God’s testimony on earth. Therefore, only those who listen to the word of God’s testimony can become true

Israelites. And lest we miss this crucial point, Paul adds yet another example to help us understand more deeply.

Verse 7: “nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’”

Abraham was Jacob’s grandfather, and it was not until Jacob’s time that the twelve tribes of Israel were brought forth. Paul therefore takes us back to Abraham himself—to show that not all of Abraham’s descendants are counted as his children. Abraham’s wife Sarah was barren, yet God had promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. In an attempt to “help” God fulfill His promise, Abraham took Hagar, his maidservant, and through her had a son, Ishmael. This was a child born according to the flesh, not according to God’s promise—and God did not count him as the heir. Because Abraham acted out of the flesh, God withdrew His visible presence from him for about thirteen years. This shows how seriously God regarded Abraham’s lapse into fleshly self-effort.

When God appeared to Abraham again, He established the covenant of circumcision—commanding Abraham to cut off the flesh. After dealing with the flesh, God promised that Sarah herself would bear a son, and that he should be called Isaac. A year later, at the appointed time of life, Sarah gave birth to Isaac—the son born of promise by grace. When Isaac was weaned, Ishmael mocked him. Sarah, seeing this, told Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son, saying that Ishmael could not share in the inheritance with Isaac. God confirmed this in Genesis 21:12, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.”

Paul quotes this verse to show that only those who are born through Isaac—that is, born according to promise and grace—are truly counted as Abraham’s seed and heirs of his inheritance. Ishmael, born of the flesh, could not be counted among the heirs and had to be sent away. Likewise, Genesis 25:1–6 records that after Sarah died, Abraham married another wife, Keturah, who bore him six more sons. Yet even these sons were sent away to the east, for they too could not share in the inheritance. Only Isaac—the one born according to the promise and by grace—was

recognized by God as Abraham's true heir. This shows that it is not by fleshly effort or natural birth, but by God's promise and grace, that one becomes part of the true seed of Abraham.

Verse 8: "That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

Abraham, in his flesh, fathered eight sons. Yet only Isaac—born according to the promise—was counted as his heir. Before Isaac's birth, Abraham had already fathered Ishmael, but that was a child born of the flesh, not of the promise, and thus could not be counted as his heir. After Isaac, Abraham had six more sons, which shows that even in his old age, his flesh and natural strength were still capable of producing offspring. However, Abraham knew that these sons could not be heirs of the promise, so while he was still alive, he sent them away. From beginning to end, only those born according to the promise were counted as true descendants. From this, Paul concluded that the children born of the flesh are not the children of God.

In John chapter 3, it is recorded that Nicodemus, an elderly and highly respected Pharisee, came to see Jesus by night. Seeing that Jesus was young yet spoke and acted with great authority, Nicodemus hoped to learn deeper knowledge and truth from Him. But Jesus said to him, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus could not understand this and asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Then in John 3:6, Jesus told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The flesh can only produce flesh—it cannot bring forth the children of God. Only those who are born of the Spirit can become children of God. To be born again means to be born of the Spirit.

At that time, Nicodemus might not have understood, but the disciples who followed Jesus later did. Before His crucifixion, Jesus repeatedly promised His disciples that although He would leave them, He would send the Helper—the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16–17, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth." And in John 15:26, "But

when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” Jesus gave this promise to His disciples before His death. Then, after His resurrection, on the evening of the resurrection day, Jesus appeared to His disciples and spoke with them. In John 20:22–23, it is written: “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Through Jesus’ breath, the disciples received the promised Holy Spirit and became children of God. Empowered by the Spirit, they went out to preach the gospel and bring salvation to others. Whoever received the gospel had their sins forgiven and received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—thus becoming children of God.

In the same way, just as Abraham’s children born of the flesh were not counted as his heirs, so today no one becomes a child of God through bloodline, tradition, religion, or culture. Only those who receive the promised Holy Spirit and are born again can truly become children of God.

Verse 9: “For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

This event is recorded in Genesis 18, where God, as a friend of Abraham, visited him and received his hospitality. In the midst of their friendly conversation, God gave Abraham a promise. In Genesis 18:14, the Lord said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” The phrase “according to the time of life” means “at the time of life.” In other words, at the appointed time—when life had matured—Sarah would bear a son. This birth was entirely based on God’s promise; it was not the result of human effort, but of divine life working at the right time. Sarah represents grace, and Isaac represents Christ. In the same way, every believer who is saved by grace comes into being through God’s promise—when the time of life arrives, Christ is formed within us.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you look back over your life—the roads you’ve traveled, the hardships you’ve endured—surely you will realize that without God’s promise and His supply of life, you could not have endured. It is because we know all things are under God’s sovereign hand that we can follow Him with peace in our hearts. Through the continual supply of divine life, we are being gradually conformed to the image of Christ. God’s purpose is to manifest the glory of His Son through us. Thanks be to the Lord! If it were up to our own strength, we could never persevere. But because we depend on this sovereign God, we can follow Him faithfully all the way to the end.

Let us pray together: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for revealing Yourself as the God of perfect sovereignty. In Your sovereignty, You have measured out every circumstance of our lives and prepared every spiritual supply we need to pass through them until the journey’s end. If we were to rely on ourselves, we would surely fail and stumble. But as we submit to Your sovereign authority, we can walk in peace and reach the goal. Lord, Your sovereignty is our assurance and our refuge. Thank You for Your faithful guidance in every aspect of our lives. Teach us to be obedient children, that at the time of life, Christ may be fully formed within us. Bless our daily living and make every step a reflection of Your will. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!