

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

Romans 9:14-18

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 14-18 today.

In Romans 8:29, God foreknew certain people and predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son. In this verse, Paul tells us that foreknowledge precedes predestination, and this foreknowledge is an objective knowledge; that is, God does not intervene but knows the circumstances that people will develop under their free will. In Romans 9, Paul begins to discuss God's sovereignty. This discourse on God's sovereignty complements Romans 8:29, explaining the process from foreknowledge to predestination. On one hand, this process is entirely based on God's sovereignty; on the other hand, after God's sovereignty is revealed, human free will also plays a responsive role.

Paul does not adopt a theological argumentative approach but instead uses Old Testament examples familiar to all to reveal the process from God's foreknowledge to His predestination. First, he uses the example of Abraham begetting Isaac to reveal God's promise in His sovereignty and that God's promise can only be realized through grace. Isaac was born of the promise and became Abraham's heir; Abraham's other seven sons could not become his heirs.

Second, he uses the example of Rebekah bearing twins to reveal God's election in His sovereignty, which is to fulfill God's eternal will and purpose. Before the twins were born or had done anything good or evil, God chose Jacob and prophesied to Rebekah that the older would serve the younger. By the time of Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, he observed the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites, and the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, and through the history of these two nations in the Old Testament, he concluded that God loved Jacob and hated Esau.

Third, he uses the example of Moses and Pharaoh to reveal God's mercy in His sovereignty. This is also the scripture we will read today: Moses received God's mercy and was predestined by God, while Pharaoh, not receiving God's mercy, became increasingly hardened.

Verse 14: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!"

What shall we say then? This is immediately following God's election in His sovereignty. In Rebekah's twins, before they were born, and before they had done good or evil, God chose Jacob and prophesied that in the future, the older would serve the younger. Paul knew that, according to human logic, questions would certainly be raised, so he first raises the question people would ask, and he raises it in the form of a rhetorical question. Is there unrighteousness with God? Then Paul himself answers: Certainly not.

Yesterday, we already discussed that God chose Jacob because Jacob valued what God valued; he could, according to God's will, fulfill the commission God gave him. For those who are chosen, they are only filled with gratitude, feeling they are unworthy, yet received God's election—how could they complain that God is unrighteous? So, those who raise questions should be those who are not chosen. Here, Paul is fundamentally unwilling to explain further because they do not even have the standing to ask this question. Paul answers decisively: Certainly not. Then, Paul introduces the next example to respond to this question. This brings out God's mercy in His sovereignty.

Verse 15: "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.'"

Moses is, according to God's promise, chosen by God and received God's mercy. God said to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have

compassion on whomever I will have compassion. This verse is quoted from Exodus 33:19; the background of this event is recorded in verses 18–22, where Moses requested to see God's glory; this was originally an impossible thing. People are defiled and sinful; God is holy and glorious; if a person sees God's face, they cannot survive. However, God has compassion on whomever He will have compassion, and has mercy on whomever He will have mercy. Therefore, God put Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered Moses with His hand; after passing by Moses, He let Moses see His back.

Universally, apart from Jesus Christ, who is originally God's Son and has seen the Father's glory, only Moses alone saw God. But he saw God's back, and it was when he was placed by God in the cleft of the rock. Christ is that cleft rock; only by standing on the foundation of Christ's redemption can people see God, and it is seeing God's back; this is completely God's mercy.

In Exodus 33:19, the order in English is that God first has grace, then has mercy. When Paul quotes this verse of scripture, he slightly modified it; the Chinese Union Version's translation is not faithful, but the KJV and NIV both very accurately translate it, first as have mercy, then as have compassions; have mercy is mercy, and have compassion is better translated as compassion. Mercy emphasizes outward action, and compassion emphasizes inward feeling. Here, we will look at three terms: grace, mercy, and compassion. These three terms are frequently used in the Bible; although they are similar, they still exist with different meanings.

We read God's word and must strive for accuracy, so it is best to have a clear definition for each term. Grace is something people do not deserve, yet God freely gives to people; this is grace. For example, Christ's redemption is the free grace God gives to people. Mercy is when people have fallen to a point, even to the extent that they have lost the standing to receive grace. In this situation, God still comes to people's position, gives people the help they need, and lifts people up, making people have the standing to be able to receive free grace. Compassion is when God shows mercy; in God, there is sympathy for people, able to sorrow with people together, and in sorrow, give people comfort, give people encouragement.

We originally were all dead in trespasses and sins; actually, we did not even have the standing to receive grace; it is God in His great love who first moved with compassion, then showed mercy; we, under God's sympathy and condescension, were delivered; we could then have the standing to receive Jesus Christ's salvation. In 2 Corinthians 1:3, Paul calls Father God the Father who shows mercy, the God who grants comfort. The term mercy is actually mercy; every one of our salvations is Father God first initiating, is in Father God's compassion and mercy; He first adjusts our circumstances, we could then stand in a suitable position, hear the gospel, and be able to accept Christ's salvation.

Looking again at Moses, Moses killed a person, fled to the wilderness of Midian, and in the wilderness herded sheep for forty years. When he reached nearly eighty years old, he completely lost his past ambitions, thinking his life was just like that. At this time, God moved with compassion, showed mercy, and personally came to the wilderness where he herded sheep, in the burning bush speaking to Moses; Moses could then rise to answer God's call and, according to God's will, follow God's leading. Moses walked higher and higher, and finally could see God's back. God truly was full of compassion and mercy toward Moses.

Verse 16: "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

So then, looking at it, this is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, only of the God who shows mercy. Moses, before forty years old, grew up in Egypt's palace, learned all of Egypt's literature and martial arts, and was greatly powerful. When he saw his own people reduced to slaves, he was willing to help the Israelites; he rose up on his own, he also ran on his own, and as a result, he killed an Egyptian and was threatened by his own people, who wanted to report him.

Moses had no choice but to flee in panic, went to Midian, and there herded sheep for forty years; he saw his own willing was ineffective, his own running was also ineffective. However, forty years later, in God's mercy, he was raised up by God. Indeed, under God's leading, he could come to Pharaoh's presence, display God's

great power, leading two million Israelite congregation, leaving Egypt, entering the wilderness, worshipping God.

Not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. The word “of” in the KJV translation means pointing to the source. So it can also be translated as, not from people’s willing, not from people’s running, only from the God who shows mercy. Here, Paul points out the source is very important. Paul is not saying not to will, not to run, but willing and running cannot come from oneself; they must come from the God who shows mercy. Once God initiates, we must will to follow, and must run, strive to follow.

Paul himself was like this; Paul in Romans 1:10 says he, in prayers, constantly pleads with God to, according to God’s will, go visit the church in Rome. By Romans 1:13, Paul says he repeatedly intended to go to Rome. Paul is first seeking God’s will, and then he intended. Paul in Philippians 3:8 saw the preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; in Philippians 3:13–14, he could forget what was behind, strive forward, run straight toward the goal. Paul, seeing the Lord’s preciousness, was willing to rise up and run. Therefore, if it is God who initiates, we must will, we must run, we must strive to follow God.

Verse 17: “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’”

Moses receiving God’s mercy is a positive example; next, Paul focuses on a negative example, which is Egypt’s Pharaoh. God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites to escape Pharaoh’s slavery and dominion. Moses, the first time going to see Pharaoh, requested Pharaoh to allow the Israelite people to go to the wilderness to hold a feast to God. In Exodus 5:2, “Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.’” Here we see Pharaoh’s proud mindset, exalting himself above God, even despising God, saying, “Who is the Lord?”

Because Pharaoh put himself above God, God allowed Pharaoh's heart to harden. God, through Moses' hand, sent ten plagues. The plagues were increasingly severe, and Pharaoh's heart was also increasingly hardened. The first four plagues: water turning to blood, frog plague, lice plague, and fly plague, only caused inconvenience in people's lives. By the fifth plague, it caused livestock to get pestilence; the sixth plague began to attack people, causing boils to grow on people. After the sixth plague, in Exodus 9:15–17, "Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go."

Paul quotes Exodus 9:16, telling us God raised up Pharaoh, made Pharaoh rule Egypt, and made Egypt the most powerful nation at that time, for God's purpose, to display God's omnipotence through Pharaoh. Pharaoh is the most powerful person on earth, and if Pharaoh does not listen to God's words through Moses, God sends down various plagues, from light to heavy, totaling ten plagues. The last plague is striking all the firstborn in Egypt; even Pharaoh's firstborn son was struck; at this time, Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. God did not send the most severe plague from the beginning; this shows God has a merciful heart, giving Pharaoh opportunities to repent, and also gave ten opportunities, yet Pharaoh's heart was increasingly hardened.

God's mercy, for those who are chosen, is a great help, causing people to be grateful to God. But God's mercy, for those who are not chosen, not only cannot help but makes them more hardened. Because he takes a position of opposition with God, he wants to, through God's hands, resist with all his strength. People wanting to contend with God, how is it possible? Pharaoh fell into this fallen mindset, and the result was exactly through Pharaoh, God's omnipotence was displayed. By the tenth plague, Pharaoh's firstborn son died; Pharaoh then hurriedly summoned Moses to the palace, asking him to take the Israelite congregation, quickly leave Egypt. Moses led two million Israelite congregation, leaving Egypt, entered the wilderness.

Unexpectedly, after Moses left, Pharaoh regretted again, sent out Egypt's most elite chariots and horsemen, pursued the Israelites, and at the Red Sea's edge, caught up with Moses. Moses used the staff to part the Red Sea; the Israelite congregation passed through on dry ground in the sea; Egypt's chariots and horsemen also entered the Red Sea's dry ground. Moses again stretched the staff toward the sea; the Red Sea closed up, drowning Egypt's chariots and pursuers. This great miracle spread throughout the nations at that time, causing God's name to be declared throughout the earth.

Moses also specially made a song, in which several verses praise God's name, stirring the nations. In Exodus 15:11–15, "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation. The people will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away."

Verse 18: "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

Paul used the examples of Moses and Egypt's Pharaoh, confirmed that God has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. God in His sovereignty promises, in His sovereignty elects, and in His sovereignty shows mercy. Thus, people foreknown by God receive the promise, are elected by God, and receive mercy, are predestined by God to be conformed to the image of God's Son, receive the adoption as sons. We can only be filled with gratitude, praise God's sovereignty. Not our being and doing, nor our willing and running, completely God's foreknowledge, promise, election, and mercy in His sovereignty, we could be predestined, receive the adoption as God's sons; what a glorious grace. Conversely, if, like Pharaoh, the mindset is proud, deliberately not knowing God, in God's

sovereignty, mercy becomes his stumbling block, makes him more hardened. God also allows him to harden; the end is destruction.

Let us pray together: Dear Abba Father, we are so grateful. You in foreknowledge knew us, You granted the promise. You elected us, You again showed mercy on us, we could have a suitable position, hear the gospel, and believe Your Son Jesus Christ, be our lifelong Savior. We know all this is arranged in Your sovereignty.

Our nature is corrupt, our actions are also full of trespasses and sins, we are fundamentally unworthy. Yet You in foreknowledge, predestined us, and arranged all things to work together, enabling us to gradually be conformed to Christ's image, when Christ comes again, able to receive the adoption as sons. Dear Father God, we are so thankful to You, You truly loved us, also helped us be people who know love, willing to obey You, follow You throughout life. Bless my daily life, prayer in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.