

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

Romans 9: 21-24

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 21-24 today.

The sovereignty of God is not an easy subject to deal with. God is the Lord who created all things in the universe, and naturally, He can do all things according to His own will. If we return to Genesis chapter 1, in the record of God's creation, only on the second day, when He divided the waters above from the waters below and created the firmament, did He not say that it was good; for according to Ephesians 2:2, the air is the dwelling place of Satan, and Satan is the ruler of the power of the air. On every other day, God saw that it was good—especially on the sixth day, after God created man in His own image, according to His likeness, God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Therefore, in God's original creation, everything was good.

All evil in the universe comes from God's adversary, Satan. Satan tempted man, and through one man sin entered the world, and Satan became the ruler of this world. Of course, God also foresaw that man would fall, and before the foundation of the world, He had already established a complete plan of redemption to save mankind, with the purpose of bringing forth a new creation out of the old. For God, the new creation is much more difficult than the old creation. The old creation was accomplished through God's speaking and His breath, but for the new creation, God had to sacrifice His only begotten Son in order to bring it forth. The ultimate completion of the new creation requires that every saint who has received grace and salvation and has become a child of God must manifest the glory of the Son of God—only then will the great work be fully accomplished.

The most difficult part is that throughout the entire process, God greatly respects man's free will. Although God has accomplished salvation, He does not force anyone to accept it. God desires all men to be saved and not one to perish;

however, man still needs to actively respond to this salvation, and after being saved, to willingly follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and walk on the path of sanctification. Therefore, God's sovereign guidance comes first, and man's cooperation and response in free will follow—only then can God's will, purpose, and plan be fulfilled.

I personally believe that separating God's sovereignty and man's free will into two opposing theological arguments is unwise; this is not the perspective that Paul intended to convey in Romans chapter 9. Some teachers who emphasize God's absolute sovereignty tend to diminish the responsibility that man bears in his free will, resulting in a portrayal of God as a dictatorial tyrant, which I believe is unbalanced. In Paul's discourse, he actually distinguishes between God's will and the way God carries out His plan. Therefore, we should not only look at the final outcome, but also at how God executes His plan throughout the process.

In Romans 9:19, the phrase "who has resisted His will?" refers to boulemata, which denotes the decision of the Triune God—a resolution made after full deliberation among the three Persons of the Godhead. This will cannot be resisted and will inevitably be fulfilled as the final outcome. In Romans 9:11, the phrase "that the purpose of God according to election might stand," where the Chinese Union Version translates "purpose" as "will," comes from the Greek word prothesis. Translating it as "will" is actually inaccurate. The original meaning of prothesis is "a setting forth in advance," that is, according to God's will, God has established a plan, and in carrying out this plan, there are specific goals at each stage. Therefore, within God's prothesis, Paul gives three examples, one of which is Abraham, who according to God's promise, begot Isaac. In this process, we see that Abraham made many mistakes, yet God led him step by step, and in the end, through grace, the promised son Isaac was born.

Among the examples is God's sovereign choice of Jacob. Although Jacob's natural character was corrupt, he valued the birthright and the blessing, and this gave God the opportunity to work in him. Jacob's life was not easy; he went through much suffering, and through those trials his character was transformed by God—he became a prince who no longer grasped for things but instead stretched out his

hand to bless others. He was chosen under God's sovereignty, whereas his brother Esau despised his birthright, valuing earthly enjoyment and blessing instead. As a result, he lost the spiritual blessing contained in the birthright. He obtained the earthly blessing he desired, but he was not chosen by God, because God's election is spiritual.

Among them are also Moses and Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses once acted according to his own will and pursued his own way, but after killing a man and being rejected by his own people, he fled to Midian and shepherded flocks for forty years. Eventually, he learned to rely solely on God's mercy, and only then was he able to bear the commission God entrusted to him—to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. In contrast, Pharaoh was proud and arrogant, despising God; yet God, through the hand of Moses, brought upon Egypt the ten plagues that grew increasingly severe. God did not immediately send the tenth plague all at once—this was an expression of His mercy, giving Pharaoh an opportunity to repent.

Of course, God also knew that Pharaoh would only become increasingly hardened, so God allowed him to continue in his hardness of heart. It is just like Judas beside Jesus; Jesus clearly knew that Judas loved money and would betray Him for it, yet He still entrusted him with the money bag, giving him the opportunity—through managing the money—to perhaps be awakened by his conscience and repent. Of course, Jesus also knew he would not repent. We can see that even in God's foreknowledge, He continually gave the hardened Pharaoh opportunities to repent. Since we do not have God's foreknowledge, should we not all the more treat those whom we consider beyond help with hearts of mercy?

Dear brothers and sisters, I have said so much, and the purpose is to remind us not to understand God's sovereignty in a one-sided way, nor to interpret it solely by looking at the outcome; rather, we must view God's sovereignty in the light of His omniscience. God foreknows the end of every person, yet He still willingly provides various opportunities for people throughout the process. God's love, grace, and mercy are thus revealed to us. God is not a dictatorial tyrant; even in situations beyond recovery, He still respects human free will and remains a God full of love.

Verse 21: “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

We already read this verse yesterday. In God’s established will, He has the authority to take one lump of clay and make it into a vessel of honor, and from the same lump, take another and make it a vessel of dishonor. Man was created as a vessel to hold something; if it holds something precious, it becomes a vessel of honor, but conversely, if it holds something worthless, it becomes a vessel of dishonor. Just as when Adam was created, God placed him in the Garden of Eden. As Genesis 2:9 records, God told Adam that in the garden there were two special trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God’s intention was for man to eat from the tree of life, and He specifically warned Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for the day he ate from it, he would surely die. Had Adam eaten from the tree of life, he would have held God’s life and become a vessel of honor. Unfortunately, Adam disobeyed God’s command and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, becoming a vessel of dishonor.

God is the omniscient Potter, and in His foreknowledge, He made both vessels of dishonor and vessels of honor. The Greek word for “honor” is time, which means value. Interestingly, the pronunciation of this word is exactly the same as the English word “time.” Perhaps it is a coincidence, but undeniably, the most valuable thing in a person’s life is time; everything we possess is obtained by exchanging our time. For example, when we work, we exchange time for money; in entertainment, we exchange time for comfort and enjoyment; in spiritual pursuits, we exchange time for future glory in eternity. As vessels, we hold all the things we have obtained through the use of our time.

If a person’s vessel is filled with the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is the supreme treasure, and he becomes a vessel of honor; if a person’s vessel is filled with money, power, or fame—things that may have some value on earth but cannot be carried into eternity—he becomes a vessel of dishonor.

Verse 23: “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,”

A vessel of dishonor has no use in God’s hand and becomes one prepared for wrath, a vessel ready for destruction. Since it is described as “prepared for destruction,” this does not mean immediate destruction, but rather destruction at the time God has determined. Each of us is allotted a certain number of years to live, and when the time comes, we will die—neither earlier nor later. Yet only God knows this time; we do not. When the appointed time arrives, God will reveal His wrath through this vessel of dishonor and display His omnipotence. Before that, however, God shows great patience and forbearance.

The term “patience and forbearance” in the KJV is translated as “endured with much long-suffering,” meaning to show forbearance amid great suffering. Although the vessel of dishonor will inevitably be destroyed, God repeatedly exercises forbearance, and this forbearance occurs in the midst of immense suffering. God’s righteousness does not allow impurity and dishonorable things, which gives rise to His wrath. Yet God’s forbearance restrains His wrath, and in doing so, He endures long suffering Himself—this is God’s enduring patience.

God’s wrath originates from His justice, and God’s forbearance comes from His love. In His love, He would rather suffer Himself than cease to repeatedly show forbearance toward the vessels prepared for destruction. How long does this forbearance last? It continues until God’s wrath and God’s forbearance reach a critical point—perhaps twenty years, perhaps thirty, or more likely the span of a person’s entire life. Then God will reveal His wrath and display His omnipotence, and the vessel prepared for destruction will face its unavoidable end and be consumed.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that from Paul’s description, we can truly understand God’s sovereignty. In His omniscience, God knows that this vessel of dishonor is destined to meet destruction, yet He does not immediately shatter it. Instead, He restrains His wrath that arises from justice and, with His omnipotence,

patiently endures, showing forbearance toward human selfishness and audacious wrongdoing. Only when a person's evil is full and God can no longer forbear does the day of destruction arrive. Truly, God desires all men to be saved and that none should perish.

Verse 23: “and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,”

Those vessels of honor are the ones who have received God's mercy and are predestined by Him to obtain glory. In His foreknowledge, God gives the promise; in His plan, He elects; and in His execution, He shows mercy. This vessel is able to gradually accumulate God's glory, little by little, until it can fully manifest the abundance of God's glory.

Dear brothers and sisters, each of us who are saints saved by grace is a vessel of honor. We are foreknown by God and therefore predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. In time, God sends messengers of the Gospel to call us. After we are called, God declares us righteous. Once we are justified, we begin the path of sanctification. As God's nature is formed within us, our vessel begins to accumulate His glory, continuing until we complete our journey in this life; when Christ returns, we will fully manifest the glory of God.

Verse 24: “even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

Paul once again emphasizes that we who are called by God are vessels of honor, and at the coming of Christ, we will all manifest the glory of God. These vessels of honor are not only called from among the Jews but also from the Gentiles—what is impossible in this? In Acts 1:8, at the time of Jesus' ascension, He already established the order for the spread of the Gospel: from Jerusalem to all Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

And historically, the progress of the Gospel indeed followed the order established by Jesus. On the first Pentecost after Jesus' ascension, Peter and the eleven disciples stood up to preach and bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, resulting in the formation of the first church—the church in Jerusalem. This church was largely composed of Jewish saints, all of whom were vessels of honor. In Acts chapter 10, Peter opened the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles in Cornelius' household, and afterward, God raised up the church in Antioch, the first church of the Gentiles. Both Barnabas and Paul ministered in this church, and it was from the Antioch church that the disciples were first called Christians. Paul, called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, was sent out by the Antioch church to preach the Gospel and establish churches among the Gentiles, resulting in many Gentiles receiving grace and salvation, all of whom also became vessels of honor. What is impossible about this?

Beginning with this verse, Paul moves into his true burden, which is to speak about God's sovereignty, especially the wisdom of God's election. The Gospel started with the Jews and then spread to the Gentiles. When the Gospel among the Gentiles flourished, it seemed that the Jews were left behind, as if set aside by God. Yet God's election does not change; when the number among the Gentiles is fulfilled, Israel will still be saved as a whole. Paul's burden unfolds gradually in the following chapters, and through his description, we are able to truly understand God's sovereignty.

Let us pray together: Dear Heavenly Father, regarding Your foreknowledge and predestination, we can say nothing but offer our gratitude, worship, and praise. For we were originally vessels prepared for destruction, yet by Your great mercy, You have granted us the wisdom to be saved, enabling us to respond positively to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After receiving grace and salvation, it is only through a positive response to the leading of the Holy Spirit that we can walk step by step on the path of sanctification. Throughout this process, everything is arranged under Your sovereignty, and even at times, when our free will makes choices that offend Your sovereignty, You still repeatedly endure and show forbearance, giving us opportunities to repent, because Your calling does not change. We ask You, Lord,

to shorten the time of our trials, that we may truly know and love Your will. Enable us to choose, in our free will, to obey Your sovereignty, and may our vessels increasingly reflect Your glory. Bless our daily lives, and we pray all this in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.