

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study through the Epistle to the Romans – Part 26

I. Exposition of Chapter Nine (Continued).

A. Verses 19-21 – More on the Divine Potter.

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

1. In Scripture, whenever there are Old Testament analogies used it’s important to look at the context of those analogies in the Old Testament.
2. When we look at what the potter and clay analogy means in the Old Testament, it actually is the opposite of what many (Calvinists) attribute to it here in **Romans 9**.
3. As mentioned last time, there are quotes here from **Isaiah 29:16** and **45:9** but the analogy is not really explained in those passages but it is in **Jeremiah 18:1-11**. (Remember we need the context of the whole of Scripture as well.)
 - a. We can see from Jeremiah the analogy is of a lump of clay which is **“marred”** (verse 4) which means; **“spoiled”**; **“ruined”**; **“perverted”** and **“corrupt”**. – **Word Study Dictionary**
 - b. The picture here is that God was attempting to fashion the clay into one kind of vessel but because of the flaws in the clay (**“marred”**), the potter had to be flexible and make a different kind of vessel.
 - c. The prophet Jeremiah, in applying this to Israel, is saying God has found you **“spoiled”**, **“ruined”**, **“perverted”** and **“corrupt”** so like the **“potter”** He has to work with you where you’re at. He basically says that because of the condition of the **“clay”**, I will **“...pluck up...pull down...and destroy”** which is describing judgment (verse 7). This would place them as **“vessels of dishonor”** (**Romans 9:21**) and **“vessels of wrath”** (**Romans 9:23**).
 - d. Reading **Jeremiah 18:8-10**, however, we discover that whether or not the Israelites are formed for judgment (**“vessels of wrath”**), is **UP TO THEM – NOT GOD!!** If they turn, God will turn, if they change their mind, God will change His mind. Their future was NOT determined by God – it was determined by them!!

B. Verses 22-24 – Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy.

1. **Verse 22 – “Vessels of Wrath”** – As we have seen, this is a description of all those who have rejected Christ and are, therefore, under the wrath or judgment of God. In comparing this to what was said about Pharaoh (verse 17) we see that God will use the rebellion of man to show forth His power in the judgment of that man in order so others may turn to Christ. (cf. **Joshua 2:9-11**).

- a. Note also that God has **“much longsuffering”** with the vessels of wrath. The word **“longsuffering”** means **“patience”**, **“forbearance”** and **“slowness to avenge wrongs.”**¹ We have seen how longsuffering God was with Pharaoh in that the plagues probably lasted for about a year giving Pharaoh opportunity after opportunity to repent and soften his heart.

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

II Peter 3:9

- b. **“...prepared for destruction.”** – The word **“prepared”** means **“to be fitted”** or **“arranged”**. This simply means that those who are under the wrath of God, due to lack of repentance and unbelief, are headed for ultimate destruction.

2. **Verses 23-24 – “Vessels of Mercy”** – Those who are under this category are obviously those who have repented and received Jesus Christ as Lord. (cf. **Ephesians 2:1-10**).

- a. **Verse 23 - “...prepared beforehand for glory.”** - By **“glory”** Paul means the glory that we will experience at our glorification. Our glorification is the third and final aspect of our salvation in which God will deliver us from the presence of sin forever. (cf. **Romans 8:17-18**).

¹Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

b. **Verse 24** – This verse expresses that God’s mercy is available to all people – Jew and Gentile when they meet the New Testament condition of faith!

C. **Verses 25-26** – Paul quotes from the prophet Hosea who declares God’s right to choose, calling those who previously were not called His people. (**Hosea 2:23 and 1:10**).

1. These passages from Hosea show how merciful God is. God told the prophet Hosea to name one of his children *Lo-Ammi*, meaning “**Not My People**.”

“To Paul this is a clear prophecy that the Gentiles, which were formerly not God’s people, would come to replace, in God’s favor, those who formerly were.” – Dr. Robert E. Picirilli²

2. This was prophesied about 720 years before Christ.

“...Hosea’s original prophecy had dual meaning. The near fulfilment lay in the restoring from captivity of the fallen Jews. The long-range fulfilment lay in the rejecting of national Israel from God’s favor, and the replacement of them by Gentiles not previously known as His people.” – Dr. Robert E. Picirilli³

D. **Verses 27-29** – Paul now quotes from Isaiah and declares God’s right to choose a remnant among Israel for salvation. (**Isaiah 10:22-23; Isaiah 1:9**).

1. **Verse 27** – “**The remnant will be saved.**” - The passage quoted from **Isaiah 10:22** speaks first to God’s work in saving a remnant from the coming Assyrian destruction. The suffering of God’s people at the hands of the Assyrians and others would make them feel as if they would certainly be destroyed. God assures them that this is not the case. He will always preserve His remnant.

2. **Verse 29** – “**...we would have become like Sodom...like Gomorrah.**” - Sodom and Gomorrah were *completely* destroyed in judgment. This quotation from **Isaiah 1:9** shows that as bad as Judah’s state was because of their sin, it could have been worse. It was only by the mercy of God that they survived at all. **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** were both totally destroyed, with not even a very small remnant to carry on. Even in the midst of judgment, God showed His mercy to Judah.

E. **Verses 30-33 – Reason and Summary of Chapter 9.**

1. What was the difference? Why did the unlikely Gentiles find righteousness, when the likely Jews did not? Because the Gentiles pursued the **righteousness of faith, and the Jews pursued the law of righteousness**. The Gentiles who were saved came to God through faith, receiving His righteousness. The Jews who seem to be cast off from God tried to justify themselves before God by performing works according to the law of righteousness.

2. Paul emphasizes the reason why Israel seems cast off from God’s goodness and righteousness.

Because they did not seek it by faith.

a. We might expect Paul to answer the question “**Why?**” again from God’s perspective, and simply throw the matter back on the sovereign choosing of God. Instead, he places the responsibility with Israel: “**Because *they* did not seek it by faith . . . *they* stumbled at that stumbling stone.**” (A quote from **Isaiah 8:14**) See also **I Peter 2:4-10**.

²Robert E. Picirilli, *Romans*. (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1975), 191.

³Ibid.