

The Potter and the Clay **Romans 9:19-24**

April 28, 2021

Question: At times is it hard for you to embrace the doctrine of God's sovereignty in election? Explain.

Review and Context

Theme of Romans: The gospel of God (1:16-17)

Chs 9-11 The gospel and Israel

- In 9:1-5, the apostle in a very personal way introduced the problem (from the human standpoint) of Israel's unbelief (rejection of the Messiah)
- *Thesis:* 9:6a "But it is not as though the word of God has failed."
 - The OT's numerous promises to the nation of Israel, of spiritual salvation through the Messiah
 - Examples include Deut 30:6; Eze 36:24-28; Jer 31:31-36; Zech 12:10-13:1
- The apostle proves that the word of God has not failed, using several arguments. The first argument centers on God's sovereign election of some individuals and not others (9:6b-29)

Why does God find fault with those He hardens? (19)

verse 19

The apostle anticipates that some will object in this way to what he has said (especially verse 18)

The objection asks why God finds fault with (condemns) those whom He hardens, when no one can resist God's sovereign will.

The objector is saying God would be wrong to do so

The potter is sovereign over the clay (20-21)

verses 20-21

Question: What is the point of the potter analogy in verses 20-21?

20a “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”

1. NIV “to talk back to God”
2. God was quoted in verses 15, 17
3. We are mere men, mere created beings

20b “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’”

1. For created beings to accuse God of wrong for hardening some, is like this.
2. **Is. 29:15–16** Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, “Who sees us? Who knows us?”
You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,
that the thing made should say of its maker,
“He did not make me”;
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,
“He has no understanding”?
3. We have no right to do this

verse 21

1. *Question:* What does the “vessel for honorable use” represent in the following verses?
2. *Question:* What does the vessel for “dishonorable use” represent in the following verses?
3. *John Murray:* “It must be borne in mind, however, that Paul is not now dealing with God’s sovereign rights over men as men but over men as sinners.”¹
4. The clay is fallen, sinful men
5. God has the right to do with sinners as He pleases, just as the potter has the right to do with his clay as he pleases

God’s sovereign purpose (22-24)

verse 22

“to make known his power”

1. Relates to the display of God’s “power” in judgment upon Pharaoh in verse 17
2. The power God shows in carrying out His wrath

¹ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, p. 32.

God has “endured with much patience vessels of wrath”

1. Those who have not been predestined to receive mercy. Those whom God hardens.
2. God has endured with them, rather than judging them immediately.
3. *Douglas Moo*: “We must remember at this point that God, in strict justice, could have executed his sentence of condemnation on the entire human race immediately after the Fall. It is only because of God’s great patience that he has waited to bring down his wrath on a rebellious world so that he can finish his wise and loving plan.”²

God desires “to show his wrath and to make known his power”

1. God’s fierce opposition to evil, and His power to do what He wills about it, is part of His self-revelation
2. It is God’s right and His desire to manifest the full range of His character in the things He does
3. To think that God should not give open display to His wrath is to think that it is not glorious, that God is not as He should be³

By enduring “with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,” God’s wrath and power can be demonstrated even more vividly than if God were to bring down final judgment on vessels of wrath at the very outset of their disobedience.⁴

verse 23

God’s patient endurance with vessels of wrath, and His subsequent display of His wrath, serve this purpose.

1. Mercy can only be seen in its fullness against the backdrop of the wrath we deserve
2. Further, God endures vessels of wrath, in order to unfold His plan of redemption

God has purposed to make known the riches of his glory for “vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory”

- Those whom He predestined to receive His mercy and salvation

God has purposed to make know to them “the riches of his glory”

- God has purposed to magnify His great glory for the eternal enjoyment of His chosen people

verse 24

² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 606.

³ John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 2nd ed., 188.

⁴ Piper, 187.