

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD’S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

**Introduction**

This passage of **SCRIPTURE** in *Romans 9* has probably raised more questions than answers for most of us. But we must realize that we are not alone in that. Even the **APOSTLE PETER**, when referring to inspired **SCRIPTURE** written by the **APOSTLE PAUL**, recognized that his weighty words were sometimes difficult to comprehend!

*2 Peter 3:15–16– “15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

Sometimes there are “*some things hard to be understood*” that are in the pages of **SCRIPTURE**! And the things in this Chapter are some of that! When **SCRIPTURE** talks about **GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY** on one hand and **MANKIND’S PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY** on the other hand, to us they don’t seem to mix, and yet they do in the eternal scheme of things!

This topic has caused **friendships to fracture**, **CHURCHES to split**, and has divided **BELIEVERS** into different doctrinal groups. Before we go on, let me give you my **simple understanding**. I know that this might not be satisfactory to everyone, but here goes:

**GOD IS SUPREME SOVEREIGN and WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR RESPONSE TO HIM!** The word “**SOVEREIGN**” means one who has **ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY** and **COMPLETE CONTROL!**

Charles Spurgeon was once asked how he reconciles **GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY** and **HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**: He replied by saying, “*I never try to reconcile friends.*”

Listen, we can find both of these friends in the **BIBLE**. In fact, *Romans 9* here emphasizes the **SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD** while *Romans 10* provides the framework for **HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**.

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD’S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

However, **PAUL** doesn’t seek to relieve the tension because they are friends. He doesn’t fully explain the working out of **ELECTION** and **RESPONSIBILITY** in this chapter because he’s more interested in addressing the haughty heart that dares to question the **CREATOR!**

**ELECTION** and **RESPONSIBILITY** are taught by **JESUS** in *John 6:37*: “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me [divine election]; and him that cometh to me [human response] I will in no wise cast out.*”

Here are just two verses from **PAUL’S** preaching in *Acts 13* where these two friends are found: *Acts 13:39–“And by him [JESUS CHRIST] all that believe [human response] are justified”* and then in *verse 48*: “*...and as many ordained to eternal life [divine election] believed.*”

It is true that the **LORD GOD is in CONTROL of WHAT HAPPENS, WHEN IT HAPPENS, HOW IT HAPPENS, WHY IT HAPPENS, and even WHAT HAPPENS AFTER IT HAPPENS!** That is true of all events in every place from the beginning of time. **HE** does this for our good and for **HIS** glory. **HE** is **NOT** the author of **SIN**, yet **EVIL** serves **HIS DIVINE PURPOSES**. **HE** does **NOT** violate mankind’s **FREE WILL**, yet **FREE WILL** serves **HIS DIVINE PURPOSES!**

Now we need to **UNDERSTAND** that we’re **NOT** supposed to **UNDERSTAND** all this. We’re simply to **BELIEVE** it! What the **LORD** calls on us to **UNDERSTAND** is that **HE IS IN CONTROL** and **WE MUST BELIEVE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST FOR ETERNAL LIFE!**

Having said all that, let’s read our passage in **Romans 9:19-24!**

The first thing I want you to notice here is that there are **seven different questions listed in verses 19-24**.

While **PAUL** doesn’t specifically answer each of these questions, there are at least three answers that are given.

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD'S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

**I. WE SEE THAT GOD DESIGNS WITH PURPOSE. (Vs 19-21)**

Let's look at what's behind **Romans 9:19**: The word "**then**" goes back to the question about **PHARAOH** in **verses 17-18**.

Many folks reading **verses 17-18** have the question of **verse 19** in their mind, *i.e.* "**Then why are we blamed for our behavior? If we are simply playing the roles GOD has for us in the outworking of His will, how can God judge us for resisting His will?**"

In **verse 20**, **PAUL** takes issue with the **ATTITUDE** behind the two questions in **verse 19**. The phrase "**repliest against**" means to "**talk back**" or "**to answer to one's face.**" **PAUL** was putting the person with **ATTITUDE** in his place!

Growing up, did you ever "**talk back**" to your parents? In this day and time there may be a lot of it and kids getting by with it. But if we ever did that in our day, it was an egregious mistake! And it was something that we never ever wanted to do again!

**PAUL** was putting such a questioner in his place. Notice that it's not the fact that a question is asked; it's the **ATTITUDE** behind the question that's inappropriate.

It's not wrong to ask questions of the **ALMIGHTY** but we cannot presume to correct **HIM**. Remember **JOB**?

**Job 38:1-3**– "**1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; For I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.**"

**JOB** is put in his place from that point all the way to **Job 40:2**...  
**Job 40:2**– "**Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.**"  
**JOB** was allowed to answer...but it only takes up two verses...

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD'S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

**Job 40:4-5**– "**4 Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. 5 Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: Yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.**"

And then the **LORD** lit into him again. Listen, when the **LORD GOD** declares **HIS WILL**, we should just be **STILL** and **LISTEN!** That's hard for us because many of us **want to have the LAST WORD** even with **GOD!**

**PAUL** shows that as **CREATOR, GOD** has the **ABSOLUTE RIGHTS OF OWNERSHIP** and **HE can do whatever HE WANTS** with what **HE** has **CREATED!**

**Read Vs 20-21**

**Isaiah 45:9**– "**Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?...**"

**Jeremiah 18:1-6** (Typically referring to **GOD** and **ISRAEL!**)

We are **CLAY!** And **CLAY** has **NO RIGHT TO COMPLAIN!** **CLAY** has no qualifications to "**talk back**" to the **CREATOR, GOD** can take and make **PRETTY POTTERY** and **HE** can also turn the **CLAY** into something **COMMON** and **ORDINARY**.

Again, the point is that the **CREATOR** can do whatever **HE** wants with that which **HE** has **CREATED!**

For us to **FULLY UNDERSTAND GOD**, we would have to be equal to **HIM**. That is a notion even more absurd than a **CLAY POT'S** being equal to the **POTTER** who molded it.

Keeping the larger context in mind here, **PAUL** is speaking about **ISRAEL** and her failure to accept **JESUS** as **MESSIAH**. The "**same lump**" represents **humanity as a whole**.

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD'S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

If the **CREATOR** wants to add a bunch of **GENTILE POTTERY**, isn't that **HIS RIGHT**?

*WE SEE THAT GOD DESIGNS WITH PURPOSE...*

**II. WE SEE THAT GOD DELAYS PUNISHMENT! (Vs. 22-23)**  
**In fact, GOD DELAYS PUNISHMENT TO SOME IN ORDER TO SHOW HIS MERCY TO OTHERS!**

**PAUL** introduces two categories of people here. We know that the **BIBLE** shows that there are two distinct groups of people:  
The **SAVED** and the **LOST!**  
The **CHILDREN OF GOD** and **CHILDREN OF SATAN!**  
**LIGHT** and **DARKNESS!**

Here he uses two quite descriptive categories:  
**"VESSELS OF WRATH"** and **"VESSELS OF MERCY."**

Let's look at these:

**A. Vessels Of Wrath. (Vs 22; Cf. Romans 1:18)**  
Most folks don't like to talk about the **WRATH OF GOD** but we must because the **BIBLE** does. Notice that **GOD** **"endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction."**

The **LORD** is **LONGSUFFERING** (i.e. **PATIENT**) and **HIS DIVINE DELAY** in **DELIVERING JUSTICE** is so that people might **REPENT** and **RECEIVE SALVATION**.  
**2 Peter 3:9**— *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

We **KNOW** that because of our **SIN** we **ALL DESERVE** the **WRATH OF GOD** but **HE** has made a way for us to avoid **HIS WRATH**—The **GOSPEL** of **JESUS CHRIST!**

**BOOK OF ROMANS**  
**GOD'S DESIGNS AND DELAYS**  
**ROMANS 9:19-23**

Now, I know this is a tough passage? So I don't want you to misunderstand what is being said here. The grammatical construction of that phrase, **"fitted for destruction"** is in what is known as the **"passive voice,"** which shows that **PEOPLE PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR DESTRUCTION** because of their continuing in **SIN**.

It's not that the **LORD** makes people **SINFUL**, but rather that they are born in **SIN** and **HE LEAVES THEM IN** their **SIN** unless they **REPENT** and **BELIEVE** the **GOSPEL**. If people **RESIST** and **REJECT GOD**, they end up **PREPARING THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION!**

If, during the time of **DIVINE DELAY**, an individual **REPENTS** and **BELIEVES THE GOSPEL**, he or she then becomes an object or **"vessel of mercy."**

*Ezekiel 18:32*— *"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."*

*Ezekiel 33:11*— *"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"*

*Vessels Of Wrath...*

**B. Vessels Of Mercy. (Vs 23)**  
Did you know that the **LORD** gets the **GLORY** either way? **HE** even uses **ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF** to **FURTHER HIS PURPOSES!**

Actually, the **LORD** uses **ALL CIRCUMSTANCES** to **PROMOTE HIS GLORY!** Now the grammatical construction here is different!

**BOOK OF ROMANS  
GOD'S DESIGNS AND DELAYS  
ROMANS 9:19-23**

It shows that we don't prepare ourselves for **GLORY**, but rather that we are *prepared in advance for glory* by **GOD**.

Each of us is either a "*vessel of wrath fitted for destruction*" or we are a "*a vessel of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory.*"

Not everyone is going to **HEAVEN**. If the **LORD** had left mankind to himself, all of mankind would have gone to hell! None of Adam's race deserves **HEAVEN**!

Those of us who are going to **HEAVEN** are going only because **GOD HIMSELF** had **MERCY** on us and sent **HIS SON** to pay the price for our admission.

**GOD'S MERCY** is **GOD NOT GIVING** man what he **DESERVES** !

**GOD'S LONGSUFFERING** is **GOD DELAYING HIS JUDGMENT** so that mankind can **REPENT** and **BELIEVE** the **GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST!** But **HE** doesn't delay forever!

**GOD'S GRACE** is **GOD GIVING** us what we don't **DESERVE**—All of the **RICHEs IN CHRIST JESUS**, including **HEAVEN!**

**Conclusion**

*GOD DESIGNS WITH PURPOSE  
GOD DELAYS HIS PUNISHMENT*