

THE POTTER'S HAND

GBC EQUIPPING HOUR | OCTOBER 4, 2020



Uncontested Predestination - Romans 9:19-24

PURPOSE: To be malleable to how God is masterfully shaping our faith even as we “work it out” (Philippians 2:12-13).

I. Uncontested Predestination: Man Can't Talk Back to God

You will say to me then, “**Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?**”²⁰ **But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?** Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

-Romans 9:19-24

A. A Clear Opportunity for Arminian Theology to Weigh In

1. *The Conventional Logic of Arminian Theology.* It's simple. It's easy. God gives man a choice to obey or disobey. If man chooses to obey, God rewards his obedience with blessing. If man chooses to disobey, God judges his disobedience with cursing. This line of logic isn't at all foreign to Scripture. Both in the Old Testament Law and in the New Testament gospel, man is shown to be at the crossroads of belief or unbelief. And the divine consequences are repeatedly shown to follow **after** man's actions...at least, *at face value*. (See Part II of p. 3 ahead for **three instances** of just the opposite –God choosing **before** man).

2. *A Problem for Arminian Theology.* Paul could have answered the question posed in verse 19 with a very simple Free Will reply: “God finds fault in man **because** man resists God’s will.” After all, Paul recognizes the consequences for man’s action over in verse 32, but not here in verse 19. Why not? The Free Will reply certainly would have solved all his problems: “Paul, the reason why your fellow Jews are being *excluded* from the Kingdom and these new Gentile believers are being *included* is because the Jews *rejected* God’s terms and the Gentiles are *receiving* God’s promises and terms.”

This is not the first time Paul avoids the Free Will answer to his problem. Look back at Romans 9:14 “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part?” Back then it was the same thing. Paul avoids the Free Will response and makes a case purely based on God’s sovereign *mercy* –no talk there of God putting man’s actions on the balance scale.

B. Why the Arminian Response is Barred from Discussion

1. *Because Man’s Role is Too Small.* Back at the beginning of Romans 9, Paul’s issue was the huge shift from God reaching out to the Jews to God now reaching out to the Gentiles. It was as if the entire Jewish covenant system was turned upside-down. Clearly God is in the driver’s seat here. Clay is the *passive* object and God -the Potter- is the *active* agent. No overlap.
2. *Because Man’s Sin Pit is Too Deep.* Like in the previous section, this portion of Romans 9:19-24 emphasizes “mercy;” the word occurs **seven** times in the larger scope of Romans chapters 9 through 11. Those in dire need of God’s intervention are not in any place to tell the mercy-giver to explain himself.

II. Paul's Use of Old Testament Verses to Compound his Case

A. God's Sovereignty over the Time of the Patriarchs

When God said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," in Romans 9:12 (Malachi 1:2-3) it was **both** before and after they were born, and **both** to two individuals and to their respective family lines. This is too far reaching to pin down to a single man's free will. See Obadiah 1:6-11.

B. God's Sovereignty over the Time of the Exodus

When God demonstrated that "he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" in Romans 9:18 it was **both** before and after the Exodus, and **both** to an individual (Pharaoh, hardened) and to a whole people group (the people of Israel receiving a merciful deliverance from Pharaoh's clutches). Again, this is too far reaching to pin down to a single man's experience of free will. For the before and after details, see Exodus 9:16 (Romans 9:17) and Genesis 15:13-14.

C. God's Sovereignty over the Time of the O.T. Prophets

1. *Before the Exile.* Israel's *pride* led them to being chastened from above...in Isaiah 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?"¹⁶ 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"?

2. *After the Exile.* Israel's *contrition*...in Isaiah 64:8-9a (compare with "Cyrus" in Isaiah 45:1-13).

But now, O LORD, **you are our Father**; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever...

III. **The Ordinary Convention vs. Paul's A Fortiori Argument**

A. The Ordinary Convention: Man's Deeds Weighed

1. This convention stems from the suzerain-vassal model reinforced in Moses' writings. Here the king speaks to his subject and his subject answers either for his willingness to comply or for his actions. This is the essence of "culpability."
2. It goes back to childhood. When your parent says to do something, you do it. You don't say, "Why?"
3. When Arminian Theology makes an argument using "free will" observations from Scripture, those observations are not meritless. God's unfolding redemptive plan repeatedly places man at a crossroad with him having to make a decision. Calvinists shouldn't dodge this.

B. Paul's A Fortiori Argument: Something More Weighty..

1. "Ay-For-She-**OR**-I" (Webster's Dictionary): with greater reason or more convincing force —used in drawing a conclusion that is inferred to be even more certain than another.
2. Paul argues, a fortiori, God's will over man's will.

The Potter's Hand Course Outline (tentative):

- September 6 - Introduction & Romans 9:1-5
- September 13 - God Establishing True Israel / Rom. 9:6-8
- September 20 - Literal Predestination / Rom. 9:9-13
- September 27 - Unaided Predestination / Rom. 9:14-18
- October 4 - Uncontested Predestination / Rom. 9:19-24
- October 11 - God Can Turn the Tables / Rom. 9:25-29
- October 18 - A God-Saturated Faith / Rom. 9:30-33
- October 25 - Conclusion