

Title: Vessels of Honor and Dishonor

Scripture: Romans 9:20-24

Series: God's Saving Grace

1. Introduction:

- a. In our previous sermon on the Epistle to the Romans, we concluded with a rhetorical question from **Romans 9:19** You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”
 - i. In this verse, Paul foresaw that those who reject God's absolute sovereignty over salvation would question the biblical doctrines of Election and Double Predestination. His response sharply rebukes the questioner for their irreverent pride and foolishness.
 - ii. Such a person forgets that, just as clay can't question the potter, humans should not and can not question their Creator.
- b. This brings us to the point of our sermon, emphasizing that the Sovereign God holds absolute authority over all humanity. After all, mankind is a sinful lump of clay. God has the power to shape vessels for honor or dishonor as He wills. He has the potter's freedom to do so. He can choose to elect some for salvation and condemn others as reprobates.
- c. I pray, that at the end of this sermon, we will humbly submit to these revealed truths!

2. Verses 20-21 - All of Humanity is Naturally Ruined Clay:
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?

- a. God’s plan for salvation was set before the world began, even before Adam and Eve. Scripture teaches that God’s decree of election was made in view of the fall. When God shapes vessels fit for destruction from one batch of clay and vessels fit for honor from another, it does not imply that He predestined some people to be evil and others to be redeemable from eternity. Instead, God applies His redeeming grace to a humanity that is already dead in sin and trespasses. We must remember that Adam and Eve were created perfect and the corruption now endemic in each human being was a result of their willful disobedience, the fall.
 - i. Once again, we must not believe that God creates people wicked and then punishes them for their wickedness; this is not what Paul is teaching in Romans 9.
- b. At this point, a question does arise: Did God ordain the fall?
 - i. There are two reasons why we believe that God did ordain the fall.
 1. The first is the Biblical teaching of God's sovereignty. God is sovereign over nature and human history, ruling everything by his power and authority. He is sovereign over the disposition of his grace. The Bible teaches that nothing can happen apart from God's sovereign action.

2. Secondly, we know that God has the authority and power to prevent anything from happening that does happen.
 - a. God can exercise his authority, power, and sovereignty by stopping something from happening or by not stopping it. Those are God's options always in every way.
 - i. Since the fall happened, we must conclude that God could have prevented it, but He chose not to. Even more precisely, the Fall was decreed, and the outcome of grace was God's plan, yet the evil of man's disobedience and sin was solely man's responsibility. God's purpose in not stopping the fall was not to provide himself with a wicked batch of clay to exercise his sovereign decree of reprobation. Scripture tells us that somehow, the fall, which produced a batch of fallen humanity and fragile, corrupt clay, was for his glory and the salvation of a specific people.
 - ii. Beloved, we know from Scripture that God had determined to be a God of grace to the elect long before the world was created and before the fall.
 1. **Jeremiah 31:3** the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

2. **Ephesians 1:4A** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him...
- c. Paul's main point is this: Just as a potter can shape one vessel for honor and another for dishonor from the same batch of clay, God has the sovereign right to choose some for eternal life while allowing others to remain in their sinful state, all from the same fallen clay (humanity).
- i. **2 Timothy 2:20** Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.
 1. Paul's point is that in a great house, there are beautiful and honorable vessels, like flower vases, decorative plates, and ornate cups. But in the same house, there are also vessels for dishonorable use, such as those for washing feet, bathroom use, and trash. These ordinary and unattractive vessels served a purpose but had no glory bestowed upon them. The same potter that designates clay to glory by forming vessels for honor also designates clay for reprobation by forming vessels for dishonorable and vile usage. We have no right to complain!
 - ii. **Isaiah 45:9** "Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?"

d. The conclusion of this verse is clear. God elects, and God condemns. That is His prerogative. Salvation strictly belongs to God, and man cannot object.

3. Verse 22 and 23 - God Makes His Wrath Known On The Dishonorable Vessels to Pour Grace to the Vessels of Honor:

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—

a. **What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power** - Beloved, we must ask: Is there anything wrong with a just and holy God displaying His power and wrath? We might wrestle with this because we live in a culture that rejects the notion of a just and wrathful God, but Paul consistently teaches that God is both grace and wrath. Because God is holy, He must hate sin.

i. As we read in **Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

1. This is what makes Him a just judge!

ii. We must remember that when God was going to visit his wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked in **Genesis 18:23-24** Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (24) Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep

away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?

1. Even Abraham, the father of the faithful, fell into a grave error by suggesting that God might punish innocent people (the redeemed). Later, Abraham came to his senses and said to God in **Genesis 18:25** Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

a. And yet, Abraham didn't realize how impossible it is for God to punish the innocent along with the guilty or the righteous with the wicked. Such a thing is unthinkable.

b. When Paul talks about God showing His power and wrath towards vessels of destruction, we shouldn't think that God punishes innocent people or finds fault with the faultless. **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?**

i. Today's church, which lacks vital doctrine, does not accept the idea of God pouring out His wrath on unrepentant sinners. However, the Bible teaches that it is right for the Judge of the earth to show His wrath. Though we might struggle with this idea, it only takes a moment to see that a holy God's anger against sin is just. For instance, when Jesus made a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple, His anger was justified. We see the embodiment of the wrath of God being displayed!

- ii. Every time the New Testament mentions the last judgment, it shows everyone standing before God's judgment seat with their mouths shut. The whole world is found guilty before him.
 - 1. **Romans 3:19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.
- c. But our verse also teaches us about the long-suffering nature of God with the sinner.
 - i. When it seems we escape the consequences of our sins, our sinful and hardened hearts wrongly assume that God is powerless. This is a foolish and most dangerous assumption. Beloved, we know that throughout history, God has, at times, suspended His patience to remind us that He is a just God who does indeed punish the wicked.
 - ii. Several passages emphasize God's patience and reluctance to punish sinners, including:
 - 1. **Romans 2:4** Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?
- d. We must not confuse God's patience with weakness or reluctance. The Bible teaches that God's patience will eventually give way to His wrath, and all unrepentant sinners will face eternal torment for their hardened hearts. Beloved, God's long-suffering with the reprobate is actually for His glory and the benefit of the elect. When God shows patience to the reprobate, He does so

in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory

- i. For example, God's patience with Pharaoh and the Egyptians allowed His glory to be revealed to Israel. If Pharaoh had been destroyed immediately, no one would have seen God's mercy toward Israel. Instead, as the ten plagues unfolded, God's mercy and grace in election became more evident, not just only to Israel but to the World.
 1. God's eventual destruction of Egypt caused the pagan nations in the promised land to fear Him. We read in **Joshua 2:9-10** and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. (10) For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.
- ii. Therefore, God's glory is compared to endless riches to the elect. This rich grace is the core of the doctrine of election. We should view predestination as part of God's amazing grace, reflecting the abundant riches of His glory to His people.
- iii. More than any other, this doctrine reveals that God's grace is a gift to the elect. God formed vessels of honor from ruined clay:

As the famous hymn **Amazing Grace** states:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

- a. Beloved, the hymn makes it clear we were not looking for God, but God found us with His mercy and grace. We were lost but are now found. We were blind, but now we see. Praise God for the doctrine of Election!
- e. God chose to make vessels of glory from a corrupt mass of clay. If you are in Christ Jesus, God has done this for you. He has made you a vessel of mercy that he prepared before the foundation of the world for glory.
- f. Our verses also teach us that we are united to God by His plan for eternal glory. This plan included a family composed of Jews and Gentiles. We read **even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles** (v. 24).
 - i. Again, Paul shows us that God **will have mercy on whom he will have mercy** by calling the nations who were not part of His people. Beloved, Paul is talking about us. We who were not His people and could never attain such an incredible adoption are now His people by grace.
 1. We are **the wild olive branch grafted into the root of the tree**. We bring nothing to the table. Nothing in us could move God to include us in his kingdom. Our only hope is the riches of his glory and mercy. That is what election is all about.
 - a. Consider the hymn **Rock of Ages**:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

- g. It is essential to know that in our last verse, Romans 9:24, Paul quotes from the book of Hosea. At God's command, Hosea married a woman named Gomer, who was an unfaithful prostitute. By marrying her, Hosea gave her his name, rescued her from prostitution, and gave her honor. However, Gomer was unfaithful in her marriage vows. She had three children: Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi. The last two names symbolize Israel's condition: Lo-ruhamah means "No pity," and Lo-ammi means "Not my people." These were children of sexual immorality. After her unfaithfulness, Gomer became a prostitute again, shaming the prophet and scorning his grace.
- i. Instead of rejecting his unfaithful wife, at God's command, Hosea goes to her, redeems her, and restores her to her former honor so that the children of unfaithfulness are restored alongside her. The child "No pity" becomes "My loved one," and the child "Not my people" becomes "My people."
1. Through election, God has done this for you and me: From a sinful and degenerate clay lump, God formed the elect to be vessels of honor.

4. Benediction:

- a. **2 Corinthians 4:7** But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Pastoral Blessing: **Numbers 6:24-26** The LORD bless you and keep you; (25) the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; (26) the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Public Reading of Scripture

Hosea 1