

The Potter's Masterpiece

Scripture Text: Romans 9:19-29

Introduction

If you painted a picture, how would you make it? What image would you choose to create? What canvas would you use? What paint would you use? What brush or utensils would you use? The answer to all of these questions would depend on what you desired at that moment to create. And in the midst of your creation, you might even choose to do things a bit differently or completely start over. Would you say that if you did all of those things, choosing every detail of the process and bringing forth an image that originated solely within your own mind, that the end result would be your creation? Assuming that the end result was what you intended, would your painting probably please you? I am not very creative and would most likely produce a horrible painting or drawing, but if I worked hard to create something that in the end was the very masterpiece I envisioned, I think I would be very happy. The same is true for God.

As we have gone through chapter nine of Romans, we have tackled some serious and somewhat troubling issues. Paul has raised several objections to the character of God. Paul asked if God had failed to keep His promises? The answer, of course, was “no.” God is very trustworthy. Paul asked if God was unjust by choosing some and rejecting others. Again, the answer was “no.” God is just in all that He does. Today, we see another question about the character of God and the answer might offend us. Why does God find fault with some? Why does God blame those who might be just doing what He created them to do? Some might expect Paul to appeal to our will, or our ability to choose our destiny, or our moral responsibility to do right. Paul does not say that here. Instead, he basically asked, “Who are you to question God?” Who are you to tell God what He must do? The main thing I see in this passage is that God does what He desires in order to bring glory to Himself which in turn benefits His chosen people.

God's Will is Supreme

Last week, we read a passage that essentially questioned whether God was a just God. Paul answered that question very strongly saying that God was indeed just. We see in the opening verses of this passage a series of rhetorical questions Paul asked and a statement answering those objections.

Romans 9:19–21 ¹⁹ 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?

At the heart of these questions is the realization of Who is God and who is not. Our Father in Heaven is God. We are not. That sounds simple, right? R. C. Sproul once wrote, “Most Christians salute the sovereignty of God but believe in the sovereignty of

man.” What I think that means is that most Christians give lip service to God’s sovereignty, but at the end of the day, they really believe they are in control. What I think they believe is that God is sovereign and can do whatever He wants except violate my freedom. God is sovereign until it comes to my ability to choose what I want. He cannot violate that. If that is true, is God really sovereign? Basically, Paul was arguing that God is in control. We are not. In fact, we really have no right to question what God does.

In this passage, Paul referred to the potter and the clay. The “molder” and that which is molded. God is the Potter. He made everything, including mankind. We are the clay. We are the people God created out of the dust of the earth. Like a human potter who shapes a lump of wet clay into a masterpiece, so is God Who takes fallen humanity and shapes us into a beautiful creation who will be in the image of His Son. Just like a human potter who makes different types of pieces for different purposes, so does God take us, the human clay, and makes each of us into something for His purposes. God is the Potter. We are the clay. God is the Creator and has every right to do with His creation as He pleases. Who are we to question Him? Who are we to say that we know better than He does? Who are we to tell God what He can and must do with us?

This line of questioning is like saying we, those created in God’s image, are on the same level as He is. We are not. That which is painted cannot say to the painter, “I know better than you.” That which is sculpted cannot say to the sculptor, “Why did you make me this way?” When we come to God, Who has the power over life and death, our mouths ought to be stopped and we simply fall down and worship our awesome Creator with complete reverence. However, we oftentimes forget our place. We assume a position that is not ours to have. We not only fashion idols to worship, like money, work, family, or friends, we make ourselves into gods, masters of our own destinies. We point our finger at God and dare Him to act contrary to our vaunted will. Does God owe you salvation? Does He owe you His mercy and love? No! God does not owe anyone anything, but He freely gives out of the good pleasure of His will.

God’s Will is for His Glory

When it comes to explaining salvation, where do you usually begin? If you were to tell someone about the Gospel, how do you begin? Would you begin with mankind being made in the image of God? Would you begin with man’s sinful nature and need for a Savior? Would you begin with God’s love for us and how He sent His only begotten Son for us? All of these are excellent things to mention that capture part of the Gospel. They also have one thing in common: *it is about us!* We oftentimes think about things in ways that affect us. We are naturally self absorbed and think about how things relate to ourselves. Why not start with the awesome Creator God Who is worthy of our praise? Why not start with the very purpose we were created: to bring glory to God Almighty? Paul wrote asked a question in this passage to that effect.

Romans 9:22–24 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?

Why does God do what He does? What did God say about Pharaoh? God put Pharaoh in place in order to show His own power and to make His own name great in all the earth. (Exodus 9:16) It was about God and making Himself known. I had a very long meeting this past week with the Tar River Baptist Association, where we discussed some important things happening in Baptist churches of our area. In that meeting, each person mentioned why he served on this leadership committee of the Tar River. One pastor said that he was happy to serve the Tar River because he wanted to make the name of Jesus Christ famous. Do you think in that way? Do you want the world to know Christ better than they know the President, the Governor, or any Hollywood celebrity? God does! He wants to make His name famous and the name of His Son famous throughout the whole world. God is passionate about His glory. Are you?

God's Glory Benefits Us

If God does what He does for His glory, what does that mean for us? I mean, it sounds like it is all about God. Where do we fit in this? Some might think that God doing what He does for His glory would exclude any benefit to us. For instance, if I sought my own glory, you might say I am being selfish, and you would be right. If any of us were to seek only that which brought us fame or recognition, we would be narcissists. But again, we are not God. God seeking His own glory is of great benefit to us. To prove this point, Paul quote a prophet from the Old Testament.

Romans 9:25-26 ²⁵ *As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' "* ²⁶ *"And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.' "*

Our Advent reading today was from this passage that Paul quoted from the prophet Hosea. Do you remember Hosea? He was the prophet God told to marry a "wife of whoredom," whose unfaithfulness to her husband was an example of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Paul used Hosea's marriage to compare it to God bestowing His mercy on an undeserving adulterous people. In Hosea's prophecy, God mentioned a day where He would take a people who were not His people and call them His children. He would take a people who were separated from Him, and make them His very own people. Who do you think those people are? You and me! Anyone who comes to Jesus Christ. We are all the adulterous people upon whom God has lavished His love.

The benefit of salvation was not just for the Jews, either. Again, Paul reminded us that the bloodline of Abraham was not enough to save someone from God's wrath. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Paul mentioned that only a remnant of the Jewish people would be saved by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. There would be some Israelites who received God's mercy but not all of them. If God had not been merciful to the remnant, the whole nation of Israel would have been destroyed, just as Sodom and Gomorrah

were destroyed. Just as with the Jewish people, all of us are guilty of sin and deserve God's wrath. We all come to God, not on the basis of our reputations or our good deeds or anything else about us, but only by His grace and through our faith in Jesus Christ. God desiring glory for Himself results in mercy and grace for those who believe.

Just because God sovereignly calls people to Himself does not absolve us of our guilt of sin or our responsibility to repent and turn to Christ. There is still a requirement of faith. We must pursue something, either Christ by faith or judgement through the Law. Why do people not come to Jesus Christ? The rest of this chapter and the next one reveal a responsibility for people to believe, to confess, and to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I'll point out just a couple of other passages concerning our responsibility to turn to God. When Paul preached in Athens on Mars Hill, he said the following:

Acts 17:30 ³⁰ *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent...*

God commands all people everywhere to repent. In a letter to the Thessalonians, Paul mentioned about those who were perishing and why they were perishing.

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 ⁹ *The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

Paul affirmed that humans are guilty of sin. He mentioned the necessity of all of us to turn from sin and to turn to Christ. However, Paul offered no explanation as to how all of that fits with God's sovereignty. I think the best answer to this weighty issue is to say, "I do not know, but God does." Like John McArthur once said, I believe God can work out things that I cannot understand. He is God. We are not.

Conclusion

Oswald Chambers once said, "Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time." You may not understand His ways. In fact, you may have a hard time reconciling who you think God is and what Scripture seems to say about Him. That is OK. The good news of the Gospel is that we are not required to have it all figured out. We are not required to understand all of the intricacies of salvation. We may not understand all things about God or our faith. We may not understand how God's sovereignty and man's will and responsibility are linked. What we can know from Scripture, is that God is sovereign, He does love the world, He has sent His Son to demonstrate that love for us, and He does call people to turn from sin and turn to Him. He has chosen the canvas and all the elements and He is making a masterpiece. Are you that masterpiece? Do you trust Him? Is He God or are you trying to be god of your life? There can only be One. Choose wisely!