

THE TWO TYPES OF VESSELS

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"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:20-23).

Very few preachers living today will ever dare to read these verses in their churches, much less give an honest exposition of them to their people. If their members inquire about these verses most preachers will try to explain away their plain sense. We live in a time when Arminianism has gained the upperhand of the theological world. Very few preachers can be found who really and truly believe in sovereign grace and will preach it to their people. Even most so-called sovereign gracers are in truth Calvinians.

Those who fear God and take the words of the Bible seriously can see that these verses teach election and reprobation according to Gods sovereignty. Here is seen the greatness of the Creator and the nothingness of the creature. Gods will is supreme and right in eternity and time. In an unusual manner, Paul clears God from any charge of cruelty and unmercifulness by observing His conduct in time toward both the elect and the reprobate.

VESSELS OF WRATH

In the first two verses God is represented as the Potter, and men as clay in His hands (Isa. 64:8; Jer. 18:1-6). As the potter has power over the clay to shape it in what form he pleases, so God has unlimited power over His creatures to make from the same lump of human clay vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. No truly saved person challenges that right of God. Rather, he most reverently bows to it as the Scripture of truth. What would the ability to fashion be worth, if God were under the dictation of that which is to be fashioned?

I understand by "*vessels of wrath*" vessels which are destined to be objects of wrath, or vessels to be filled up with Gods wrath (Isa. 51:20). In I Thessalonians 5:9 Paul said: "*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*" These words suggest that God did appoint some to wrath who are called in my text "*vessels of wrath.*"

Here is seen the doctrine of reprobation or rejection. Although this doctrine is sparingly mentioned in the Bible, it most assuredly is taught in my text and in other places. If God chose some to salvation (II Thess. 2:13), then common sense teaches us that others were unchosen. In Romans 11:7 Paul said: ". . .*the election hath obtained it, and the rest were*

blinded." In John 13:18 Christ said: *"I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen,"* implying some were not chosen. According to John 17:6 the Father gave Christ a people *"out of the world."* Then there must be a world not given to Christ (II Peter 2:5; I John 5:19), and for which He will not pray (John 17:9). There can be no election without reprobation, for reprobation is the negative side of election.

The Divine decree of the rejection of some men is twofold: preterition and predamnation. Preterition is a mere leaving of the creature out of the bounds of Gods election. Predamnation is Gods appointment of the non-elect to everlasting wrath. Preterition is negative; predamnation is positive. Preterition is God withholding His grace to which no man has a claim. Predamnation is God considering man as a guilty sinner who deserved condemnation and wrath.

The words, *"the same lump,"* speaks of man as lying in the mere mass of creatorship, pictured by unformed clay before being put into shape. While in this state some were rejected. God left them as He found them in the pure mass before they had done either good or evil (Rom. 9:11). This was an act of Gods sovereign will and pleasure. That is why Paul starts out by saying: *"What if God, willing to shew his wrath. . ."* God had a greater right to do this than any earthly potter.

Predamnation is Gods appointment of men Who He passed over to punishment for their sins (Jude 4). God gave some *"over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient"* (Rom. 1:28). In Psalm 81:12 God said He *"gave them up unto their own hearts lusts."* The reprobate God left in their natural condition of enmity against God. He denied these the grace that could have cured their depraved hearts (Ezek. 36:26-27; Matt. 11:25-26). These are given up to believe a lie and be damned (II Thess. 2:10-12). Such wicked persons are *"reserved to the day of destruction"* and *"shall be brought forth to the day of wrath"* (Job 21:30). Job 20:29 says: *"This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God."*

FITTED TO DESTRUCTION

Some make the words, *"fitted to destruction,"* to be a verbal adjective, or to mean fit for destruction. This leaves undetermined the agency by which this fitness is effected. This allows man to fit himself for destruction. It also permits one to escape supralapsarianism.

It cannot be denied that there is a sense in which men fit themselves for destruction. Hosea 13:9 says: *"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself. . ."* Proverbs 6:32 reads: *"But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul."* In Romans 2:5 we are told: *"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (cf. Hos. 14:1; I Thess. 2:16). There is also a sense in which Satan fits men for destruction (Luke 8:12; II Cor. 4:3-4). But I do not believe that Romans 9:22 points to the sinner or Satan.

The best interpretation is to allow the full participial force which makes the vessels of wrath prepared by God for destruction. The word "fitted" in the Greek is *katartizo*, and it means "to fit, to frame, to prepare." This sense is demanded by the context. God is compared to a potter who makes one vessel to honor and another to dishonor. The vessels do not make themselves. So it is God who prepares some for wrath and some for mercy. As I have already shown, the object of predestination is man as lying in the mere mass of creatorship, signified by unformed clay before being put into shape. There is probably an allusion to the creation of Adam out of the dust of the ground. The word "Adam" means "red earth" or clay.

The words, "*the same lump*," points to men not created, much less viewed as fallen creatures. If men were viewed here as fallen creatures, they could not be said to be made out of the same lump both to honor and dishonor. Rather, it would have been said that all were dishonorable and some were left in dishonor and some were made honorable. But this is not what the passage says. Paul tells us God made out of "*the same lump*" some to honor and others to dishonor.

We must not suppose that God created man without a purpose. This is contrary to His attribute of wisdom. God first fixed the end for man's creation and then determined the means to create him. No wise potter would first make his pots and then decide for what use he made them. The truth in my text is that God made some of His creatures to honor and some to dishonor out of "*the same lump*" of human kind for His own glory. This glory He determined to bring about by different means. With respect to the vessels of honor, He determined to create them, to permit them to fall in Adam, to recover them by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and to bring them to glory. This glorified His mercy and grace in a way consistent with His own glory. With respect to the vessels of wrath, He determined to create them, to suffer them to fall in Adam, to leave them in their sins, to condemn them in their sins, and to punish them with wrath. This was designed to glorify His justice and longsuffering without the least blemish on His mercy and goodness.

No right-thinking person denies that an earthly potter of the same lump of clay can make one vessel to ornament the house and another for some base use. Originally the two were the same thing--clay. The potter determined their destination. If an earthly potter has the power to make out of the same clay the kind of vessels he pleases, much more God has this power, out of the same lump of creatorship, to appoint creatures He determined to make for His own glory, to be vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy.

In what sense did God fit the wicked to destruction? He did not by positive action infuse sin into the vessels of wrath. This would be contrary to His holiness and purity. This would make Him the author of sin. God certainly did not infuse hardness and rebellion into the hearts of the vessels of wrath. God may be said to have fitted men to destruction in a twofold sense only. First, by leaving them outside of the bounds of His election. Second, by appointing before hand to punish them for their sins. If there is no injustice in God punishing sins, it cannot be unjust for Him to determine to do this before hand.

God did not appoint any unto destruction but for sin. Nevertheless, though sin is the cause of damnation and death, the thing decreed, it is not the cause of the decree itself. It is the cause of the thing willed, but not the moving cause of Gods will. Nothing outside of God can move His will. Therefore, His decree of reprobation is traceable to His good pleasure. If sin were the cause of the decree, then all would have been rejected because all fell in Adam!

"Destruction" does not mean cessation of being as false prophets teach. It is the end of all hopes and enjoyment. It means eternal imprisonment in Hell and being shut up to everlasting darkness. It means to be the companions of the Devil and demons for eternity. It points to an eternal visitation of Divine anger in flaming fire from the presence of the Lord Himself (II Thess. 1:7-9). It involves a final withdrawal of all long suffering as well as everlasting punishment upon the bodies of the damned!

THE PURPOSE OF THIS

Two reasons are given as to why God shows His wrath upon some. First, it was because God is willing to show His wrath. The punishment upon these vessels of wrath will be made an occasion of Gods exhibition of His holy anger against sin. His hatred of sin is absolute, and the vessels of wrath will be made to experience it to the fullest extent. The entrance of sin into the world was necessary to manifest Gods wrath and hatred for sin. He tolerates sin in the world for the very purpose of glorifying Himself in its punishment.

Second, it was to *"make his power known."* This truth is illustrated in the case of Pharoah (Rom. 9:17). The power of God is what punishes men for their sins. Their destruction proceeds from *"the glory of his power"* (II Thess. 1:9). The eternal damnation of some sinners will demonstrate to the universe the power of God. Sin in its nature is a dishonor to God, but He overrules it so as to turn the destruction of the wicked to His glory. This is a most wonderful display of Divine power to men and angels.

LONGSUFFERING WITH THE NON-ELECT

The words, *"endured with much longsuffering,"* reveal the patience of God with the reprobate. He suffers these ungrateful rebels to live while they deserve to die. He prolongs their lives and gives them space to repent though they are fitted to destruction. Short-sighted mortals believe God should cut off the wicked in childhoods. But God in His longsuffering endures them to old age until they are ripe for ruin. In their condemnation and punishment God will be glorified.

The Scripture says in Proverbs 16:4: *"The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. . . .Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"* (Rom. 9:15,18).

VESSELS OF MERCY

Verse 23 of Romans 9 mentions "*vessels of mercy.*" This means men toward whom God's mercy was to be displayed. These vessels would receive mercy when in a miserable state of sin and wickedness. They were destined to be objects of God's mercy, not because they deserved mercy more than others, but because God had purposed to fill them with His mercy. This mercy is an act of God's sovereignty because He says: "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. . . . So then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*" (Rom. 9:15-16). The vessels of wrath "*shall have judgment without mercy*" (Jas. 2:13), but the vessels of mercy have "*obtained mercy of the Lord*" (I Cor. 7:25; cf. I Tim. 1:16; II Tim. 1:18; I Pet. 2:10). These vessels of mercy are not saved by their good works, but they are saved "*according to his mercy*" (Tit. 3:5). They can approach the throne of grace and "*obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16). Their hope of everlasting happiness is the hope that they "*may find mercy of the Lord in that day*" (II Tim. 1:18).

BEFORE PREPARED TO GLORY

God Himself has prepared them to glory, or predestined them to glory (Rom. 8:29-30). None of the elect will enter glory until they are prepared for it by God in a way consistent with His holiness and justice. God, as the Master Potter, fashions the vessels of mercy unto glory. They were given by the Father to Christ, and Christ will bring "*many sons to glory*" (Heb. 2:10). This is why the elect "*obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*" (II Tim. 2:10). Even their afflictions suffered in this world work for them "*an eternal weight of glory*" (II Cor. 4:17). It is in this hope of glory that they now rejoice (Rom. 5:2).

Mark carefully the word "*afore*" or "before." In time God creates them in Christ Jesus; He renews their hearts; He sanctifies their souls by His mercy, making them fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He prepares men for Heaven before they reach Heaven. In all of this God is free of blame and censure.

THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY

To the vessels of wrath God makes "*his power known,*" but to the vessels of mercy He makes "*known the riches of his glory.*" To them He reveals the glorious riches of the perfections of His nature and in His arranging for their salvation in Christ. With much longsuffering God restrains His wrath against the wicked that He might make known by calling and justification the riches of His glory on the elect which He has prepared to eternal glory. The awful ruin of the reprobate is necessary for the full display of the riches of Divine mercy in saving the elect.

CONCLUSION

1. In the context there are two examples of vessels of mercy: Jacob (Rom. 9:11-13) and Moses (Rom. 9:15). There are two examples of vessels of wrath: Esau (Rom. 9:13) and Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17).

2. Men are not passed over by God because of their sins, for if this be true all would have been passed over. Both election and reprobation are owing to Gods good pleasure. *"(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"* (Rom. 9:11-13).

3. The reprobates have no right to complain because they were not chosen to salvation but appointed to wrath. God is under no obligation to exercise mercy toward any person. He could have justly left the elect as well as the non-elect to perish in their sins. Had He been pleased to do so, He would have still been the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The wicked are treated as they deserve to be treated. All are ill-deserving and undeserving. None have any claim on God, for His will is the only rule for His mercy. God in His sovereignty has power to dispose of His creature according to His good pleasure, either to choose or refuse, according to the counsel of His own will. Job 33:13 says: *". . .for he giveth not account of any of his matters."*

4. The only reason that any are saved from the destruction of sin and Hell and brought to glory is the mercy of God. It is not due to education or the power of religious example. It is not by some acts of righteousness such as baptism or the Lords Supper. It is because the Lord delights in mercy, not because any deserve it. The elect do not fit themselves for glory. They are not only before prepared unto glory, but it is God who prepares them!

5. All the heathen religions in the world and all forms of Arminian Christianity teach that man is his own savior and that he is the determiner of his own destiny. The Bible teaches that God determines mans destiny and that salvation is owing to the mercy and will of God so that no flesh can glory in the Lords presence. Man can only throw himself upon Gods mercy. He can only say: *"God be merciful to me a sinner"* (Luke 18:13). I believe that I heard some person say, *"I hate such a doctrine. It is damnable heresy. It deprives man of any glory in his own salvation."* To such an objector I would ask as did the Apostle Paul: *"Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"*