

Objects of Wrath

“Have you ever read Romans 9 and felt shocked—almost scandalized—by what it says about God? It’s one of those passages that challenges everything we think we know about fairness, justice, and even grace. Listen to these words:

‘Though her sons had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to election might stand—not from works but from the one who calls—she was told, The older will serve the younger. As it is written: I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.’

And then Paul, anticipating our objections, writes, ‘What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! For he tells Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’

Does that shake you? It should. Paul doesn’t stop there. He presses further, asking, ‘Who are you to question God?’ And then he drives the point home with these words: ‘Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? What if God, although choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath—prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory?’

It’s shocking, isn’t it? God is sovereign, completely free to do as He pleases with His creation. He chooses whom He will have mercy on and whom He will harden. He creates vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor—all for His purposes and His glory. And our first instinct is to object. ‘That’s not fair!’ we say. But Paul cuts us off: ‘Who are you, a mere human being, to talk back to God?’

This is where we have to stop and wrestle with the reality of who God is. He is the Creator. We are the creation. He is holy, perfect, and sovereign. And we are sinful, fallen, and finite. We don’t have the right to question Him, and we certainly don’t have the capacity to fully understand His ways.

But here's where I want to take you deeper. The shock of Romans 9 isn't just about God's sovereignty—it's about His justice. If we're struggling with the idea of God creating vessels of wrath, it's because we've forgotten Genesis. We've forgotten that all humanity—every single one of us—deserves wrath. And the fact that God shows mercy to any at all is the real mystery of this story.

In Genesis 2:16-17, God gave Adam a command: 'You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.' But Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, believed the lie that they could be like God. They thought they could determine good and evil for themselves, that they could be autonomous beings, sovereign over their own lives. But God had warned them: 'You don't have that ability. You were made to live under My authority. If you reject that, you will surely die.'

The Fall was not just a mistake; it was humanity's declaration of independence from God. It was a rejection of His sovereignty and a grasping for autonomy. And in that moment, Adam and Eve plunged the entire human race into sin. As Paul says in Romans 5:12, 'Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.'

This is where Romans 9 begins to make sense. When Paul speaks of vessels of wrath, he's not talking about innocent people who were arbitrarily chosen for destruction. He's talking about sinners who are justly condemned by a holy God. We are not born neutral; we are born as enemies of God, dead in our trespasses and sins. And the fact that God doesn't destroy all of us outright is a demonstration of His patience.

But here's the real scandal: God doesn't just create vessels of wrath. He also creates vessels of mercy. And He does this, not because we deserve it, but because of His grace. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' Jesus Christ—fully God, fully man—took the wrath we deserved. On the cross, He bore the punishment that was meant for us. Isaiah 53:10 says, 'Yet the Lord was pleased to crush Him severely.' Why? So that we, the vessels of wrath, could become vessels of mercy.

This is the heart of the gospel. None of us deserve God's mercy. None of us are worthy of His grace. But God, in His sovereignty, chose to redeem a people for Himself. Grace, by definition, is unmerited favor. The moment we think we deserve it, it ceases to be grace. As Romans 11:6 reminds us, 'Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace.'

So let's come back to that shocking question: Why would God create vessels of wrath? The answer is that God is sovereign, and His purposes are higher than ours. He demonstrates His justice through His wrath and His mercy through His grace, and both point to His glory. But the real question is this: Why would God save any of us at all? And the answer is simple: because it's all about God. His justice, His mercy, His sovereignty—all of it points back to Him. This isn't just a story about humanity's sin or even about God's grace. It's a story about the glory of God, who is sovereign over all things and who works all things for His purposes.

Reflect on these truths. Let them shape your understanding of who God is. His justice, His mercy, His sovereignty—they all point us to the glory of His grace. And may this understanding lead you to worship the One who has redeemed us from wrath and made us His own."