

Romans
Divine Election (Part 7)
Romans 9:6-29
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I thought about taking a step away from the book of Romans today just because I know many of you are still sort of in that Thanksgiving sugar coma thing, and Romans 9 is not a good place for that; but I decided to go to Romans 9 anyway. So, I invite you to turn there with me this morning Romans 9, as we continue our journey through Paul's magnificent explanation of the doctrine of election, Romans 9.

Working with clay, making pottery, this is one of the world's oldest skills. In fact, archaeologists have discovered pottery that goes back to the very beginnings of civilization; and frankly, very little has changed with this skill for thousands of years. In fact, if you take the 1500 years during which the Bible was written, beginning 1445 years before Christ with Moses and then running all the way to 100 years after Christ and the apostle John, if you take those 1500 years during which the Bible was written, potters were an essential part of everyday life. In every single home, there would've been cups and plates and bowls and jugs and bottles and cooking pots that were made by the village potter or perhaps a number of potters in that community. They made water bottles that were uniquely designed to keep the water cool; Getty's nothing new. They made clay into coverings for roofs, to build kilns, and they even used clay to make the wheel heads on which the ancient potter turned his clay.

Obviously, the essential ingredient in pottery is clay. Chemically, clay is a hydrated silicate aluminum that includes various impurities; and if that leaves you somewhat lacking, let me give you the concise definition of the American Ceramic Society: "Clay is a fine-grained rock which, when suitably crushed and pulverized, becomes plastic when wet (Not plastic as in polymers, but plastic as in pliable.) and able to be shaped and formed, leather hard when dried; and, on firing, is converted to a permanent rocklike mass," pottery! Now, you may be under the mistaken impression that the closest you've ever come to a potter is Mr. Potter on "It's a Wonderful Life."

The fact is our homes are filled with the modern version of pottery. It's called ceramics. Ceramic simply means, "that which is made of clay and then hardened by heat." In fact, the word "ceramics", the English word is derived from the Greek word, "keramikos", which simply means 'earth or earthen.'

Now most of us, it is true, have never seen the things that we have in our homes made; in fact, most of them were made through some sort of an industrial process as opposed to a village

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potter. We've seen potters' work, perhaps you have as I have, more as a sort of special sort of display, not as an ordinary part of everyday life as it was in the first century when Paul wrote Romans 9. But you can still connect with Paul's lesson this morning; because this morning in Romans 9, Paul is going to use the picture of a potter and two clay pots made for entirely different purposes to illustrate one of the Bible's most profound and frankly most difficult truths.

We're studying Romans 9 - 11. The central issue of these chapters is introduced in the first 5 verses of chapter 9; it's the question of why so few of God's chosen people, Israel, have believed in their Messiah and His gospel. You can almost hear someone asking in the first century, "Paul, if your gospel is so wonderful, if this is what the Old Testament was leading to, then why have so few Jewish people, your brothers and sisters according to the flesh, believed that message?"

We're studying Paul's first answer to that question; he has three answers. We're studying his first answer to that question, and it's, "The Reality of Divine Election." This answer begins in 9:6 and runs through 29. Now just to remind you, this paragraph unfolds in several ways. First of all, in verses 6 - 13, "Divine Election is Explained and Illustrated;" then in verses 14 - 23, "Divine Election is Defended." Paul anticipates the reaction, the objections, that his readers will have to the doctrine of divine election, and he provides answers to those objections.

Now, we've already completely considered objection number one. In verses 14 - 18, Paul considers the objection, "God's will isn't fair." The objection is essentially this, "If God chose people and saved them unconditionally, (that is unconditioned on anything in them as you seem to be teaching, Paul) then that would violate a basic principle of what is just and fair; it's just not fair." Paul's answer to this objection, as we observe, came in two parts. In verses 15 and 16, he shows us that Scripture teaches that God justly selects some to whom He shows mercy, and the chief example that he uses is Moses.

Secondly, he shows us that Scripture teaches that God justly passes by others to whom He shows His justice; this is verses 17 and 18, and the chief example there is the antagonist of Moses, Pharaoh.

Paul's main point, what he drives to in answering this objection, comes in verse 18; look at it with me. He says, "So then [God] has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." He says, "Listen, it is just and fair for God to do so, and I have demonstrated it to you," he says, "from the Old Testament Scripture." But as soon as he says what he says in verse 18, it invites objection number two, and that's that man's will then isn't free, and this is the objection

he deals with in verses 19 - 23. Let's read it together just to remind ourselves of the flow of Paul's thought. Romans 9, beginning in verse 19:

You will say to me then, [In light of what I have just said in verse 18] "He has mercy on whom He desires; and He hardens whom He desires." You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory.

Here Paul answers a second objection to unconditional election, and it's an objection that has to do with God's free will. Now we looked at the objection itself; it's in verse 19, "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'" This objection is: if divine election is true (if unconditional divine election is true), then man's will must not be free. In essence, it's saying, "Look, God has no right to hold me responsible for sin if He's the One who chooses who's in and who's out." The argument goes like this in verse 19.

First of all, the argument says, "Listen, Paul, you teach, just as you just said in verse 18, that God decides who gets mercy, and God decides whom He hardens."

So secondly, if that's true then, it's God's will that determines our destiny, verse 19, "Who resists His will?"

Thirdly, the argument goes, that means God has no right to blame or judge us. Again verse 19, "Why does He still find fault?" Now this objection is, as I noted for you, a gross perversion of what Paul taught. In fact, he's going to explain that and defend that here shortly in the passage as we come to it. This is not what he taught. Paul never taught that God created people to sin so

that He could display His wrath, and he's saying, "It's not like that; you are still to blame for your sin."

But this second objection is really about man's free will; and so, Paul goes on to provide us with an answer then in verses 20 - 23 regarding man's free will. Now, before we looked at the text itself, we dealt with a couple things.

First of all, I said it's important for us to have an understanding of the question. A lot of people think they have the answer when they don't even really know the question. What is the question here about free will? Well, the question is, "To what extent is man's will affected by original sin, by his inherited sin? Does man have a free will?" And then we said we've got to define the terms. By "will" we mean that faculty of the soul that makes choices; and by "free," we looked at a couple of options, but we said when Scripture describes man's will as "free," it means the freedom of self-determination. We have free wills in that we have the freedom to choose according to the disposition of our own wills. Every human being has a free will in this sense; his mind is able to choose what he wants. You did that all week whether it was having that extra piece of dessert or not; it was a decision that you made according to your own disposition, what you wanted.

But that's not the whole story, and so we look, secondly, at a biblical perspective on man's free will because you have to temper that reality with these two biblical points. And we looked at them in detail; let me just remind you of them.

First of all, man's will is free to make real choices in keeping with his own desires. You're free and I'm free in that sense. But secondly, man's will is not free from his own depravity. It goes like this, "I make real decisions; I'm not a robot. I choose based on what I want." The problem is my "wanter" is depraved; my desires are warped because of my fallenness; and, therefore, left to myself, I will never choose God; I will never choose salvation; I will never choose to humble myself before God. Our only hope is for God to exercise His free will and choose to save us. And that brings us to verses 20 - 23 where we ended last time.

Because in these verses, in answer to an objection about man's free will, we have a biblical apologetic for God's free will, a biblical apologetic for God's free will. That is the message of verses 20 - 23, because Paul's answer here to the question about man's free will isn't the answer I just gave you, although he does give that answer in other places. But here, Paul's answer to the question of man's free will isn't about us at all; it's about God. The point of this whole section is

God's free will; it's about the freedom of God's will to decide who gets His justice and who gets His grace. That's especially the point of verses 20 - 23.

Now before we look at these verses in detail, let me step back and just summarize their message for you. If I could summarize these verses, it would be like this. Since all men are equally deserving of God's justice, God has a right to decide who gets the justice they have earned, and who gets the mercy they've not earned; that's the message of these verses. Just like the governor of our state can pardon a death row inmate and leave others to suffer the justice they've earned, God has that same right.

But let's examine Paul's response here more carefully. It's really aimed at two different groups. Verses 20 - 23 target two different groups. He begins with his answer to those who sinfully question God's right to election. In verses 20 and 21, this is the focus; he's responding now not to honest questions about how election works; he's responding to those who sinfully question God's right to choose. In fact, the key word in verses 20 and 21 is in verse 21. You see that word "right". We're going to get there, but it means a "state of control over something, freedom of choice or right." So, with that in mind, let's look at how Paul responds to those who sinfully question God's right to choose in election.

Verse 20, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" Now the main point of these two verses is this, you have no right to question the right of God to make that decision. You have no right to question God's right to make that decision.

Now, that's an interesting response because Paul could have responded by explaining that man's will is free in the sense we're not robots; we make real decisions that reflect our real desires; but at the same time, our wills are bound by sin, and we never choose God. In that sense, our wills are not free; he could have explained that, but that's not what he does.

Instead of explanation, we find confrontation. That's because the way the question, the objection is phrased in verse 19, shows it's not an honest question; it's not an honest objection. It's intentionally antagonistic, and so Paul confronts the pride of the man who would ask his question in this way. The objection in verse 19 is really an attack on God's justice. This reminds us that

we can ask honest questions of God, but we have no right to call God's right to act as God or God's character into question.

But as soon as he says what he says in verse 18, it invites objection number two, and that's that man's will then isn't free, and this is the objection he deals with in verses 19 - 23. Let's read it together just to remind ourselves of the flow of Paul's thought. Romans 9, beginning in verse 19:

Now, notice again how he responds. Look at the objection again in verse 19, "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'" Verse 20, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" Now that "O man" is intentionally there to contrast the smallness, the weakness, the creaturely-ness of the one questioning God with the majesty and greatness and god-ness of God, the ocean that exists between man, the creature, and God, the Creator. It's interesting in the Greek text. The emphasis is on the word "you". It's like saying, "Who do YOU think YOU are?" Specifically, he says, "Who do you think you are to answer back to God?"

Now that Greek word "answer back" has a specific connotation of an argument. You know when I was growing up, it was legitimate in my household to ask honest questions of my parents and decisions that they had made, and we could do that if we did in the right spirit, the right tone. We may get an answer, we may not, but we wouldn't get in trouble. But that was much different than if we answered back! It was not going to be a good day in my household if we answered back. That's the connotation of this word. Who do you think you are to answer back to God, to take a debating, accusing, attacking approach with God?

Now this reminds us that God is always open to our honest questions as long as our questions grow out of a genuine desire to understand God and His ways, and we have a willingness to accept whatever answer He gives. In fact, if you're here this morning and you're a student, listen, you have questions; the Bible has answers; the Bible will stand up to the hardest questions you have, and it's okay to ask those questions. But what God will not tolerate is if instead of coming with an honest question, humbly before God, seeking to understand His mind and His ways is if you come to God thinking you're His equal and demanding answers of God. God's response to that is, "Who do you think you are?" To those who were driven by an arrogant

desire to correct God, to judge the decisions of their Creator, to sit in judgment on God himself, Paul's response is, "Who do you think you are to answer back to God?"

Now Paul continues this confrontation of those who sinfully question God's right to act in election. In verse 20, he says, "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this?' will it?" You see for a man to question God, Paul says, is something like if something that's been shaped and fashioned and molded could talk back to the one who molded it and say, "What are you doing? Why did you make me like this?" Paul is putting us in our place. He's saying, "Listen, you are a created being just like that thing that's been molded, and you have no right to question your Creator, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

Now don't forget the context. The context here is not why do I have the nose I have, or why am I the shape I am? The context is election. You see what Paul is saying is this is what happens when someone comes across the biblical teaching about election and in response to God, either says or thinks, "What right does God have to do that? How can God condemn anybody to hell? Is it really God's right to choose who gets saved? That violates my free will!" Paul says it is just as ridiculous as a pot saying to the potter, "Why did you make me like this? You had no right."

Now notice Paul puts it in the form of a rhetorical question that calls for a negative answer. He says in verse 20, "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this?' will it?" He expects the answer, "Of course not!" That would never happen! A pot would never say to the potter, "What are you doing?" He's saying it's far more ridiculous for us to say to God when it comes to salvation, "What are you doing?" Again, this is intended to put us in our place. The relationship between God and man is the same kind of distance and relationship between that of a potter and a lump of clay. Ouch! That's you, that's me!

Now, Paul didn't originate this imagery. In fact, what we discover here in verses 20 and 21 is actually built on a familiar Old Testament image. The first half of verse 20 matches exactly the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, in Isaiah 29:16. Turn back to Isaiah. Look at Isaiah 29, and I'll begin in verse 13:

Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*." [In other words, these aren't true believers; they're just going through the motions.] Verse 14,

“Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.”

Woe to those [God pronounces a curse to those] who deeply hide their plans from the Lord, And whose deeds are *done* in a dark place. [Here are people thinking they can hide what they’re doing from God.] ...they say, “Who sees us?” or “Who knows us?” [And now notice verse 16.] You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, “He did not make me”; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?

Again, the Septuagint translation of that verse is exactly the same as the beginning of verse 20 that we’re looking at in Romans 9.

Now the second half of verse 20, we can’t be absolutely certain in its case, but it looks like it comes from Isaiah 45. Turn over to Isaiah 45 and notice verse 9. “Woe to *the one* who quarrels (There’s that context again, who quarrels) with his Maker- [Literally with his Fashioner] An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making *say*, ‘He has no hands?’” [He’s no good at this; he’s not able to do this.]

Now there are other Old Testament references that use this same image of a potter as well. Go over to Isaiah 64, 64:8. “But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay ... You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.”

Or, turn over to Jeremiah, Jeremiah 18; Jeremiah uses this image extensively here, Jeremiah 18, beginning in verse 1:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will announce My words to you.” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel.

By the way, this is the only time in the Scripture where the potter’s wheel is referred to. Usually it was two discs made out of clay or stone, one above another, and the potter would turn the

lower desk with his foot and cause the upper disc to turn with it, and then he would fashion pottery on it. Verse 4:

But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?” declares the LORD. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.”

And he goes on to apply that very specifically. So, understand, then, this image of God as the potter and His people as the clay is a familiar Old Testament image. That’s what Paul borrows back in Romans 9.

Go back to Romans 9. Here Paul uses this to question those who have questioned God. He responds to the sinful question of God’s right to choose who gets grace and who gets justice. And Paul says, “Listen, you have no greater right to question God than a clay pot has the right to question how the potter shaped it.” Verse 21, “Or does not the potter have a right over the clay?” The Greek word “right” is the word “authority”. He’s saying, “The potter has the lawful power or authority over that lump of clay; it’s his.” He can do with it what he wants. Verse 21, “Or does not the potter have a right over the clay,” [and here specifically how his authority exercises itself] “to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?”

Now what’s Paul talking about? Well remember in the larger context, he’s talking about why individuals have not believed the gospel. He’s dealing with the eternal destiny of individuals; that’s continued as his emphasis here. So, he’s talking about one vessel who is chosen and saved, and one vessel who receives God’s justice; that’s the stress.

But first, just consider the illustration itself. Paul describes a potter in his pottery shop; and that potter, sitting there at his pottery wheel next to him, has this large lump of clay. And Paul says the potter, sitting there in his shop, has the complete right or authority to make from that same lump of clay, a pot that will be used for an honorable use, is how he puts it. We’re talking about things like maybe a family heirloom that will sit on the mantle and adorn the house or perhaps a

pot that's used for cooking or for storing family valuables. The potter has a right to make out of that lump of clay that kind of pot.

But the potter has a right as well, out of that same lump of clay, to make another clay pot that will be used for literally a dishonorable use. Now, there were a number of those in a first century household; but of course, the chief dishonorable use would have been as a chamber pot or a privy pot to keep you from having to go out and find the outhouse at night. The potter has a right. He can make, out of that clay, a wonderful family heirloom, or he can choose to make, out of that clay, a privy pot; that's his choice. The actual illustration is easy to understand; it's dealing with a potter's right to decide how the clay will be used, either for a chamber pot for excrement or a pot for cooking, it's his choice.

The problem comes in applying this illustration, and here's where we have to be very careful so that we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. Don't miss this because this is where a lot of people go astray. Paul is not talking in these verses about why God created anyone. Instead, he is merely defending what he said back in verse 18, "So then God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." So, the point of the potter's freedom or the potter's authority is not that God has a right to create some people in order to show them mercy and to create other people in order to destroy them. That's not what Paul is arguing! In fact, nowhere, nowhere, does the Bible say that God creates sinners to destroy them any more than a potter makes a pot to smash it!

In fact, the Scripture teaches exactly the opposite. The Scripture teaches that God made man the high point of His creation in His own image. Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our own image." This morning, the choir sang that beautiful anthem taken from Psalm 8 where the psalmist describes that God is majestic in His glory, but that He made man in a role of honor and dignity, a little lower than God in terms of the rest of the creation. Of course, the gulf between us and God is great; but in terms of the rest of creation, we are close to God.

You know, we live in a world where evolutionary theory is the prevailing theory, and that teaches us, as the founder of PETA said, "That a boy is a rat, is a pig, is a dog. They're all the same. There's no difference, we're all just animals on exactly the same level."

The Bible says, "No!" God made animals, and then He made man "in His image, and He breathed into his breath life itself." And so, understand then, that when God finished with His creation, man along with everything else that God made, "was very good." Genesis 1:31, "God

saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” God created man in His own image; God didn’t create man or anything else for dishonor. God has never deliberately created people in order to send them to hell; that is an absolute lie. Here in Romans 9, the potter illustration shows us this because the potter isn’t creating the clay. He’s simply shaping and forming pre-existing material for his own purposes. The same thing is true with God in this pottery illustration. As Charles Hodge, the great Roman’s commentator, puts it, “We are dealing here with God as moral governor, not as creator.”

So, what’s the lump of clay? The lump of clay is not mankind unfallen where God creates mankind unfallen and then chooses from unfallen mankind those whom He will love and save and those whom He will destroy. No, the lump of clay is fallen humanity; already having sinned in Adam, having taken that precious gift of the image of God and marred it beyond description by our sin. And God looks at that lump of clay, fallen humanity as it already exists, and Paul discusses what God decides to do with that lump here in Romans 9.

By the way, this is exactly what Paul has been showing us since verse 6 of Romans 9. You remember he started with Abraham and all the idolaters in Ur around him, and then he talked about Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and Esau. They were all from the same lump of clay, but God chose Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and He passed by the rest. So, this passage isn’t dealing with creation at all.

So, what does this potter illustration show us? Let me give you a couple of lessons from the potter illustration. First of all, the potter illustration teaches us that God didn’t create people evil, nor did He make them evil. The potter here doesn’t make the clay. He doesn’t alter its nature. He simply shapes and molds what’s there to his own purpose. The second lesson in the potter illustration is that God treats no one unfairly when He chooses some and not others. The clay isn’t treated unjustly if the potter decides to form, from that clay, a family heirloom or if he decides to fashion, from that clay, a privy pot. The clay deserves nothing. Its rights aren’t violated.

But above all, this would be the chief lesson of the potter illustration. It proves one basic point. God has the right to decide who gets His wrath and who gets His mercy in the same way that a potter has the right to make pots for different uses from the same undeserving lump of clay.

God's decision about what kind of pot to make isn't because of some inherent difference in the clay. Notice that expression, "the same lump," which deserves absolutely nothing.

In fact, think about it this way, it would be in the potter's right to take that same lump of clay, and from that lump of clay, to make all family heirlooms. That would be the potter's right. Or, the potter could hear that there's a run on privy pots and decide to take that lump of clay, and from that one lump of clay, to make all privy pots. Or, the potter could decide to take that same lump of clay and make some privy pots and some family heirlooms which is exactly what God did. Think about it, God could have chosen to save everyone. God could've chosen to condemn everyone and show them justice. Or, God could have done what God did decide to do and that is to allow some to endure the justice that they've earned and to rescue others to display His mercy. It was the potter's right.

In other words, this illustration proves that God is not under obligation to extend grace to everybody or to anybody. We are all sinners, and we have all forfeited every claim to God's mercy. We are all of the same lump. As a result of the sin of Adam, we all deserve eternal death.

Go back to Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death, [in all of its shapes, physical death as well as eternal death, spiritual death, came] through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-." How? In Adam! His guilt was credited to us, and we received the blame for his sin, but it doesn't stop there.

We also deserve eternal death as a result of our own deliberate choice to sin; that's Romans 3, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." We have chosen our path, so the point is nobody deserves God's mercy. That's the lump of clay we all belong to, and God has a right to do what He decides with the clay. He has the right to punish everyone without exception. And folks, if God decided to do that, not one of us would ever have a right to complain.

God also has a right to decide to punish some as an expression of His justice and to pardon others as an expression of His mercy, and that decision is solely at His own discretion. We all deserve hell; and if God chooses to show grace to some, why shouldn't He have the right to do so?

Listen, if the governor of the state of Texas can decide to pardon a death row inmate and leave the others to the justice they have earned, then why can't God have the same authority? But as

soon as you start talking about God doing that, people begin to backpedal and particularly find this teaching hated. The hatred of mankind is directed against the sovereignty of God in salvation.

In fact, Spurgeon, commenting on God's sovereignty on salvation said this, "No doctrine is more hated by sinners, no truth of which they have made such a football as the great stupendous but yet most certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah." And then he says this, here's why, I love the statement, "Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne." That's the mindset of humanity. They're happy to have God around, kind of like a genie in a bottle, let me rub the bottle and out pops God and gives me all my wishes. I'm happy for God to be around in that kind of way, but don't let God be God.

In Romans 9 Paul demands that we acknowledge that God is on His throne and that it is His right to be there. But what Paul says here in Romans 9 raises two other questions that I think are far more difficult questions than the ones we've had to deal with so far. The first question that this raises in my mind and all of our minds I think is: why? Why does God choose one person and not another? Why does He choose to make one person a vessel of honor and another person a vessel of dishonor? Why does he choose to make one person a vessel of mercy and another person a vessel of wrath? Have you ever wondered that? Well, here's the answer, "I don't know, and neither does anyone else." God hasn't told us in His Word, and so the answer is Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things [that are] revealed belong to us and to our [children] forever." We only get what God told us, and He doesn't tell us the answer to that question.

So, what do you do with this? If you're a Christian here this morning? If you're in Christ, how do you respond to this illustration of the potter? Let me tell you what it should produce in you and me. It should produce humility. You realize what Paul says here? You were part of the very same lump of clay as the person who will experience God's justice forever. There was no difference between you and that person; it was the Potter's freedom to decide to show you mercy.

I remember when the truth of all of this came crashing down on my heart; I'm sure I've told you before. My first trip to India in the mid-90s, I flew into Calcutta on the last day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the streets were filled with people, and we drove to the Baptist guesthouse there in Calcutta, and the room had open wires on the walls; it had holes for windows but no windows. And as I was lying there that night on a World War II Army cot, it struck me in

a way that it never had that I was in a country of a billion people, most of whom had never even heard the name of Jesus Christ. And I was struck with a question, and I was reduced to tears.

“Why me?” That’s where the potter illustration should take us, “Why me?”

You see, the greatest question in election isn’t why does God choose whom He chooses, but why did He choose me? Why did He choose me?

It should produce not only humility, but gratitude. God, for nothing in you, for no reason in you at all, God took that same lump of clay and from that fallen humanity (that lump of clay) He chose to fashion you into a vessel on whom He would shower His mercy and His grace. Not only should it humble you, but it should fill your heart with joy and gratitude to God for His amazing grace!

What if you’re not a Christian? What if you’re here this morning and you’re not a follower of Christ? How should you respond to the truths we’ve examined about the potter this morning? Well, first of all, let me say don’t do what Paul is saying not to do in this passage. Don’t you dare accuse God of injustice, because God’s response to you would be, “Who do you think you are? You’re just a clay pot. You have no right to speak back to God, to answer back to God.” But secondly, I would say to you if you’re here and not a Christian this morning, “Don’t use election as an excuse for not believing in Jesus Christ.” In fact, I told you Paul is going to give several answers as to why people don’t believe; this is his first answer.

His second answer is human responsibility. Look over at chapter 10; Romans 10:9, Paul says at the end of verse 8, here’s the message of faith that we’re preaching, here’s Paul’s gospel message, verse 9:

... if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* [your] Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be ... [spiritually rescued]; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, [That is imputed righteousness, the righteousness of Christ becomes yours.] and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in [rescue and] salvation. For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ... there is no distinction ... *Jew* ... [or] Greek; the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call

on Him; for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

Listen, that’s your invitation; so, don’t you dare use election as an excuse for why you’re not trusting in Christ. God says, “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

So, Paul’s comments here on election raise the difficult question, “Why does God choose one person and not another?”

But it raises a second question and that is, “Why didn’t God decide to save everyone?” This is the real question isn’t it? Why didn’t the Potter decide to make all family heirlooms? Why did He decide to make some vessels of mercy and some vessels of wrath? Again, not creating them for that purpose, but out of their fallen humanity, choosing to show justice to some and mercy to others. Why? Why doesn’t God show mercy to everyone?

Well, the closest biblical answer that we have is in Romans 9:22 and 23, and this answer comes not to those who sinfully question God’s rights in election, but to those who humbly question God’s reasons for election; that’s verses 22 and 23. Here is really Paul’s application of the potter illustration. Look at those verses.

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?
And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy,
which He prepared beforehand for glory.

What’s the main point of those two verses? God’s reasons for election, that is for choosing to save some and for reprobation, that is, passing by others and leaving them to His justice. God’s reasons have to do with putting His character on display, and Lord willing, we will examine those reasons together in detail next week.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are humbled by the passage we’ve studied together this morning. We’re reminded that You are God and we are not; that we are clay pots, You are the Potter. Father, forgive us for ever, in an antagonistic sinful way, questioning Your right to choose who gets

justice and who gets mercy when all of us deserve justice. Father, help us to bow before Your throne and to let You be God.

Father, I pray for those of us who are in Christ, that You would use this great truth to humble us, to remind us there was nothing in us; we were just part of the same lump; and out of that lump, You have fashioned a vessel of mercy, one on whom You have decided to show mercy. Father, give us true gratitude. Help us to love You in response to follow Your Son, to live in a way that honors You. Father, grip our hearts with these truths.

And, Father, for those who may be here this morning who are not in Christ, I pray that You would keep them from using election as an excuse for not believing when You have given them an honest and open invitation, "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." May they turn from their sins and confess Jesus as Lord, calling on You even today?

We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.