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Class Notes

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Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9:19-24

Romans 9:19-24 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? ²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction? ²³ 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-- ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Context:

Romans 1-8: the display of the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation

Key problem: the Jewish people... Why is it that the overwhelming majority of Jewish people are rejecting Jesus Christ and as a result will be damned (if they continue)

Paul's deep sorrow over the issue: Romans 9:1-3

Paul's statement of the focus – the Jewish people and their advantages: Romans 9:3-5

Paul's immediate concern: GOD'S WORD HAS NOT FAILED!! (Rom. 9:6)

The Doctrine of Sovereign Election: Not all Israel is Israel

A group within the group; the elect... and the non-elect

The principle proved with Abraham's children – Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau

God's purpose in election: "Not by works but by him who calls..." God wants salvation to be ultimately HIS work for HIS glory; not human works for human glory

Proof: before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad... their election or non-election was not based on their works

Objection: IS GOD UNJUST??

Not a matter of justice but of mercy; God's self-revelation to Moses was nothing God would ever owe to anyone

The full display of God's glory is in HEAVEN... ultimately, Moses was saying "Take me to heaven where I can see your full glory forever and ever."

So, salvation can never ultimately be by human works or human will or human anything... but only by God's mercy; undeserved and free

Romans 9:16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

On the other hand, Pharaoh is a paradigm example of a non-elect person (just as Esau was)

And God says WHY Pharaoh existed and was positioned as he was:

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

This begins to address today's question... WHY does God create people, whether Jews or non-Jews, who will ultimately end up in hell? Answer: to DISPLAY his attributes... power, in the first

case, but more attributes to come. Also, that he might make a GREAT NAME for himself, that people all over the world can call on to be saved:

Romans 10:12-13 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Summary: Two types of people receive two different patterns of treatment from God

Romans 9:18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Literally: "Therefore on whomever he wills, he has mercy; and whomever he wills, he hardens."

It ultimately comes down to God's will, not man's.

The burning question in front of us now is, how shall we understand the justice and goodness of God in the damnation of the reprobate... the Esaus and the Pharaohs whom God hardens? And how shall we understand God's purpose in creating them AT ALL?!!

Like Judas Iscariot:

Mark 14:21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.

So... why was he born? Why did God knit him together in his mother's womb?

I. The Next Objection Raised: Why Does God Send Anyone to Hell?

Romans 9:19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

A. What Is the Objection?

1. Basically: If God is so all-powerful over human will and human hearts, why doesn't He simply save everyone?
2. Why does anyone go to hell? God can do anything He wants with human hearts!!

B. Two Underlying Assumptions of the Objection

1. Paul's doctrine teaches the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation
2. God's absolute sovereignty nullifies human responsibility

II. God's Rebuke of Human Arrogance

A. God Puts Humanity in its Place... A Regular Pattern!

Romans 9:20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?

1. What is the rebuke: WHO ARE YOU O MAN!

Romans 9:20 "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

We are merely creatures... God is the Creator

2. Arrogantly arguing with God is Satan-like
3. Right attitude in this study is absolutely VITAL

B. Is "God on Trial"? May it Never Be!!

Daniel 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

C. Talking Back to God : What is rebuked is not asking questions, but contentiousness

III. God's Role

A. God is the Potter, We Are the Clay

1. God is shaper, molder, craftsman, POTTER

Romans 9:20 "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

- a. Greek: word is “**plasma**”: relates to something that can be molded, something soft and plastic
 - b. Humans are molded, shaped, fashioned... points to our CHANGEABILITY
 - c. Things we read, conversations we have, experiences we undergo, people we observe or interact with... all these things MOLD US like plastic
 - d. Contrast: God never changes... in fact, He is the one who does the molding, the shaping, the crafting
2. God fashions the elect after His image by His own internal vision

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

B. The Potter and the Clay

Romans 9:20-21 "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

C. Key Distinction: Not God as Creator but God as Molder

1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: This section [Romans 9] is NOT speaking of God as Creator but of God as shaper and molder of what is here
2. God does not create anyone evil... rather He created Adam perfectly good, in His image and likeness, with a completely free will to choose at the tree of knowledge of good and evil
3. BUT when Adam sinned, the whole human race sinned with him... all of us became cursed and corrupted... this is the doctrine of original sin

4. The whole human race is the massive lump of sinful clay... not shaped or made sinful by God, for God cannot make anyone evil

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

5. Lloyd-Jones quote:

"It is as though God found this disgusting pile of rejected, stinking clay of no value...wrecked and defiled by evil... and chose to do something with some of it. He chose to take some of that lump, that defiled and evil pile of useless clay, and fashion it into the perfect image of His Son. But He did more than that... He chose to give the rest over to the desires of their evil hearts, to harden them and to confirm them in their rebellion. He gave them over to be what they wanted to be... He could have saved them all, He could have exerted His sovereign power in an awesome way, and transformed them, but He chose not to!"

- D. Key Insight: God Does Not Craft Everyone for Glory; some are vessels of dishonor, created for destruction

IV. God's Rights

Romans 9:21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

- A. God's Rights of Ownership... The Sovereign King

- B. "The Same Lump of Clay"

1. The "same lump of clay" is SINFUL HUMANITY, not merely humanity
2. God can do whatever He wants with the putrid pile of sinful human clay
3. He can reject it all... He can transform some of it into fine China, while leaving the rest vile and rejected; or He can transform ALL of it into fine China... it is totally within His right as sovereign owner of the Earth

4. "Same lump of clay" highlights the UNCONDITIONAL aspect of election
 - a. God does not look at the clay and say, now here is something I can work with; here is something that's not quite so bad as the rest
 - b. It is the SAME LUMP OF CLAY... all of it rejected and wicked and defiled and "worthless"

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

- c. He chose to do something astounding with part of it

C. Pottery for Noble Purposes

1. Literally: "vessels of honor"
2. God has the right to take stinking wicked clay and transform it into a vessel in which He will put something of immense worth and value and honor
3. What is that? His own eternal glory!

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

D. Pottery for Common Use

1. He also has the right to take the same stinking wicked clay and fire it in a kiln of hardening to make it a vessel of dishonor... a vessel with no radiance of God's glory
2. This is absolutely in keeping with the clay's own nature and bent

3. The clay yearns for it and begs for it out of sinfulness and stony ignorance
4. God has the right to do it

V. God's Reason: The Display of His Various Glories

Romans 9:22-23 *What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make known his power, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make known the riches of his glory to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory...*

A. God's Grace in Explaining

1. Amazing! After the rebuke comes the reason!
2. God could have chosen to cut off all discussion, all explanation
3. However, God is zealous to help us understand

B. God's Reason for Everything: A Display of His Glory

C. God's Glory Put on Display in Creation and in History

D. God's Glory Put on Display Maximally in Redemption IN CHRIST

E. God's Glory is Put on Display in Both Types of Vessels

1. Two types of "vessels"
 - a. "vessel" = kitchen container (like a pitcher, bowl, platter) or implement or tool... something fashioned for a purpose to accomplish a certain task
 - b. Vs. 21: "vessel of honor" vs. "vessel of dishonor"
 - c. Vs. 22-23: "vessels of wrath" vs. "vessels of mercy"

Romans 9:22-23 *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*

KEY CONCEPT: God does all this to DISPLAY HIS GLORY!!!

2. One type of glory shown in the vessel of honor... the vessel of mercy
3. Another type of glory shown in the vessel of dishonor... the vessel of wrath

VI. How God is Glorified in the Vessels of Wrath

A. Paul's Fragmented Question: "What if God..."

1. Paul begins a question that he never completes
2. Insight from Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: in short, Lincoln asked a rhetorical question about slavery... "If God allowed slavery, then punished both North and South for it..."

"... shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?"

3. Similarly: What if God, for His own glory, created people out of that sinful lump, knit them together in their mothers' wombs, gave them many good gifts of His grace, bore their rebellion patiently, and then justly condemned them to hell, "shall we discern therein any departure from [God's goodness, wisdom, or holiness]?"

B. What God Displays in Vessels of Wrath

Romans 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction?

Other things not mentioned here. Example: God's love for his enemies

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

C. How God Deals with Vessels of Wrath

1. He specifically creates them with an amazing body and mind

2. He lavishes goodness on them
3. When they sin, he withholds his just punishment from them FOR A SEASON
4. He records every careless word they have spoken... every single deed, thought, motive
5. He hardens them
6. He limits the damage they do and controls the effects of their evil
7. He uses their deeds—both good and evil—to further his purposes in the world
8. He justly takes their lives from them... the death penalty for sin
9. He judges them with perfect justice on Judgment Day
10. He destroys them eternally in hell
11. BUT He does not regenerate them by His sovereign grace

God withholds His effectual call, withholds the power of the Holy Spirit, does not grant them the new birth or repentance; God does not take out their heart of stone and He does not give them a heart of flesh

D. How Vessels of Wrath Are “Prepared for Destruction”

Romans 9:22 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,

1. “Prepared” = in every other case it has a positive meaning
 - a. Like when the disciples were mending their nets... arranging them for use
 - b. Like what God did in creating and arranging the world in perfect order
 - c. Fitting, preparing, arranging, perfecting, accomplishing of an end purpose

- d. This use here is very unusual, and very powerful... these vessels are perfected, arranged, trained, prepared, worked on for DESTRUCTION

Ephesians 2:3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Like a lightning rod, scientifically designed to “attract” the strike

2. Key Question #1: What are they prepared for?
 - a. Vs. 22: “destruction”
 - b. Word clearly refers to the outpouring of God’s wrath in hell

Matthew 7:13 Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

3. Key Question #2: Who prepares them for destruction
 - a. All agree: the devil prepares them for hell
 - b. All agree: they prepare themselves for hell
 - c. Some: God prepares them for hell
 - i) HOWEVER note the INDIRECT nature of the preparation

Romans 9:22-23 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

The Greek grammar in verse 22 is passive... “

On the one hand, God is actively preparing the vessels of mercy for glory by the direct means at His disposal... the means fitted to the ends – the preaching of the gospel is meant to bring us to repentance and faith and in the elect it does, and all the other working of the Holy Spirit preparing us for eternity in heaven

But the subject of the verb is left out for the vessels of wrath
 “prepared for destruction”

The language implies God acts more INDIRECTLY in the preparation
 of vessels of wrath

James 1:13-15 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

It's more like God “gets out of the way” and allows the wicked person to pursue his evil desires. God does not actively lure the person at any moment to do evil.

4. Key Question #3: How are they prepared for destruction?

a. God: by hardening them

- i) By not regenerating them, to some degree “God causes all things to work together for destruction”
- ii) The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay
- iii) The wickedness of the unregenerate heart is such that anything God does will perversely harden them and tend toward their destruction
- iv) The same blessings that cause thanksgiving in the elect cause idolatry and excess and sensual indulgence in the non-elect
- v) God gives the non-elect wealth... they become covetous and greedy and selfish and are destroyed thereby
- vi) God gives the non-elect poverty... they become bitter and angry and hate-filled and envious and criminal and are destroyed thereby
- vii) God gives the non-elect human praise and encouragement... they become prideful and arrogant

- viii) God withholds from the non-elect human praise and encouragement... they become bitter or ambitious or angry or despondent
- ix) Basically, anything God does to the unregenerate heart will **INDIRECTLY** prepare it for destruction

Key insight: indirectly, because this is not their natural purpose... the good gifts of God are meant to lead us to repentance, faith, thanksgiving, godliness

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

But without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, every good and perfect gift actually only tends to prepare the Esau's for hell

- b. The devil: by tempting them... the devil blinds their eyes from Christ, and actively and directly induces them to sin, thus preparing them for hell
- c. They themselves: by hardening their own hearts and by committing actual sins... every sin they commit, every time they hear God's word and harden their heart, every time they indulge the flesh or act pridefully, they are preparing themselves for destruction

VII. How God is Glorified in the Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9:22-23 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. By Being the Glad Audience for this Display of Wrath, Power, Riches, Glory, Mercy

- 1. vs. 22-23 "In order to"... vessels of wrath exist in part to accomplish something in the vessels of mercy

2. It seems that God wills that there be some vessels of wrath at least in part so that the elect would KNOW and DEEPLY FEEL what we have been saved from
3. If there were no hell, no unrepentant sinners... If the "smoke of their torment did not rise forever and ever", our gratitude to Christ for His grace would be diminished
4. When we stand on Judgment Day, when the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, when the goats, the unbelievers, get the just punishment for their sins and are cast into the Lake of Fire, when the sheep get to come into the Kingdom which we did not deserve and we realize that we truly deserved hell but because of Christ, we are getting heaven, how sweet is our sense of grace

B. By The Way the Vessels are Being Prepared in Advance for Glory

C. By Experiencing the Riches of His Glory Forever and Ever

VIII. An Eternal Display of God's Glory Through the Vessels of Wrath

A. Question: Why did God create the vessels of wrath?

B. Answer: To display his glory in and through them

C. Implied: An audience... watching, seeing, learning [God already knows how glorious he is]...

The audience must be the elect angels and redeemed sinners

D. WHEN? When does this display and education occur?

1. Partially now, it is true

When God strikes a sinner dead in the midst of his blasphemy, onlookers learn God's justice and wrath, as well as God's mercy to others

Acts 12:21-23 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

2. But there are problems... the prosperity of the wicked, and the fact that many of them “escape justice” in this world

Job brought up this issue:

Job 21:7-13 Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? ⁸ They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. ⁹ Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. ¹⁰ Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. ¹¹ They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. ¹² They sing to the music of tambourine and harp; they make merry to the sound of the flute. ¹³ They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace.

Nazi war criminals; CNN headline in 2018: “Most Nazis Escaped Justice. Now Germany is Racing to Convict Those Who Got Away.”

The phrase “escaped justice” and the “race against time” implies justice can only happen in this world.

The Bible says differently. Most of the education of the saints in the topic of God’s glory will

E. Hell an Eternal Display of the Glory of God

My book on heaven, *The Glory Now Revealed*

“Memories of the Damned” chapter; Question: Will the redeemed in heaven know of the damned in hell?

Answer: Yes, but with no pain or regret... *Revelation 21:4 “There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.”*

Question: Why will the redeemed in heaven know the specifics of the damned in hell?

Answer: For the praise of God’s glory... both in how he treated the damned and how he saved them from the same fate.

1. God's justice, power, wrath, best displayed not in providence but in eternity
2. The completed stories of unbelievers eternally unfolded, how God "bore with great patience" their sins, how many times God appealed to them to repent, how many messengers of the gospel he sent their way, how many times God showed them kindness in the midst of their sinfulness... the FULL STORY of their lives can never be understood IN THIS WORLD...
3. Therefore, the redeemed in heaven will have a full knowledge of the damned—their sins, God's righteous punishment of them

Luke 16:22-25 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵ "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

Revelation 14:10-11 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

Isaiah 66:24 And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

F. "Vengeance is Mine," Says the Lord

Romans 12:19-20 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

1. When we are persecuted in this world, we are told to love our enemies and pray for them to be converted
2. However, the overwhelming majority of persecutors are never converted
3. That leaves a debt of justice still to be paid
4. When?? It must be in hell
5. AND the redeemed want to know about it

Revelation 6:9-11 *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.*

The inhabitants of heaven 1) know that they were martyred, so they remember their own sufferings; 2) know that their persecutors have not yet been judged, so they are aware of events on earth; 3) cry out for vengeance, showing that such a desire is in no way ungodly; 4) are told to wait for justice... implying, it's COMING!

6. It is what Jesus said they cried out for and what God will give them

Luke 18:7-8 *And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*

G. How to Apply this Knowledge

1. Urgency in evangelism
2. Thankfulness for salvation