

“Why Doth He Still Find Fault?”

“Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will?” (Rom. 9:19). Paul anticipated these questions based upon conclusions he had reached about Moses and Pharaoh. He wrote, *“So then he hath mercy on whom he will (Moses) and whom he will, he hardeneth (Pharaoh)”* (9:18). This sounds as if man has no will at all, but in our last article we showed such is not the case.

Paul’s response to his anticipated question was, *“Nay, but O man, who art thou that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why didst thou make me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay that for the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”* (Rom. 9:21). Again we might conclude that man is wholly a vassal in God’s hands with no power to exercise a will of his own.

Nevertheless, as admittedly difficult as the passage appears to be, Paul’s next words prove such a conclusion was not what he meant! *“What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction ...”* (Rom. 9:22). Had God allowed no man to execs his own will but rather move solely under the will of God, how could it rationally be said of God that he endured, with much longsuffering, vessels of wrath? Such a vessel would have been and acted exactly as God had made it! To conclude such would be equal to saying that a man deliberately stepped on a board with a spike in it; left his foot there and grimaced at the inflicted pain, when he had stepped on the spike in the first place and could have removed his foot, erasing the pain, whenever he wished. Does such describe our loving God? It does not. The resolving of the difficulty of these passages lies in the fact that God is the final voice in determining what constitutes right or wrong. In these verses Paul has contrasted *“vessels of honor”* with *“vessels of dishonor”* and *“vessels of mercy”* with *“vessels of wrath”* (9:21, 23). Our God has the sovereign right to determine what is right (vessel of honor) and what is wrong (vessel of dishonor). He is the Potter. He, as Creator of our world, has the undisputed right to determine what is right, acceptable to him. Upon *“vessels of honor”* God shows mercy and *“vessels of honor”* become *“vessels of mercy.”* Upon *“vessels of dishonor”* God shows his wrath, thus *“vessels of dishonor”* become *“vessels of wrath.”* Critical questions: *“Can ‘vessels of dishonor’ become ‘vessels of honor’; can ‘vessels of mercy’ become ‘vessels of wrath’?”* A plate cannot become a pitcher; a pitcher cannot become a plate. But plates and pitchers have no will at all. But man does have a will. A *“vessel of dishonor”* may become a *“vessel of honor.”* Paul said as much in his letter to Timothy. *“Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and sil-*

ver, but also of wood and earth; and some unto honor and some unto dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master's use ..." (2 Tim. 2:20f). "Right" and "Wrong" does not change. God has decreed what constitutes both. The doctrine of "situation ethics" is false. But man can choose to do right and become a "vessel of honor" and he can choose to do wrong and becomes a "vessel of dishonor." Right is right and wrong is wrong. A plate cannot become a pitcher nor a pitcher a plate but man both can and often does cease to do wrong and begins to do right. This was God directions to Israel long ago. "Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:16f). We do not have a God so given to capricious behavior that He would demand man to do something when He had made man such that he could not help but do the opposite!

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