

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life from the week ending 05/31/09
God has authority over all of the clay.

In our study of Rom 9 we are now on verse 19.

In verses 19-29 Paul, after presenting the evidence to the unbelieving Jews, continues to use his debater's technique to not only answer their questions, but ask the question that they would have asked. In answer to these questions he presents the very essence of God that they themselves knew to be irrefutable and undeniable.

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" [these are stupid questions if you understand the essence of God.] **On the contrary, who are you, O man** [the created one], **who answers back to God?** [when it comes to whatever God says, how can the created respond or question the Creator?] **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? (Rom 9:19-21)**

- Paul is taking us all to a place of humility that he himself learned the hard way. God is it, and He has cart blanch over every part of each of us. Paul here is not getting into an argument over who believed and who didn't, he already did that.

- **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 in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (Rom 9:22-24)**

Verse 19 begins with two debater's questions that Paul anticipates would be asked by those who are antagonistic towards his teaching. "Why does He still find fault?" Paul has already answered the question of why one receives mercy, and another receives judgment or hardening. He's already used the examples of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh. It's not the believing Jews who would be antagonistic to what has been taught in Rom 9, in fact they would rejoice over this teaching. It is the unbelieving Jews that are now up in arms about the concept that **"not all Israel is Israel"** since they depended upon their racial heritage. Paul has shown them that their birth is of no importance when their free will to choose for Christ as Saviour is of utmost importance.

In these two questions Paul uses a debater's technique that anticipates their reaction, and therefore anticipates their questions, so that he can ask them and answer them before they do. This is an effective technique that takes the antagonist out of the argument, (you might try this in your marriage or other relationships). It shows them that Paul understands their erroneous thinking, and forces them to sit back and listen reasonably to demonstrate the fallacy of that type of thinking. Paul is quoting their thinking and they know it. If any humility exists, they have an opportunity to recognise this man's genius. Whenever you are under pressure, as Paul was, you must be able to think and know the thoughts of your opposition.

The first debater's question is: **You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault?"** In other words, after the presentation of these things (Rom 9:1-18), there is still opposition, but now it's opposition to the essence of God, **"why does He still find fault?"** But, why is there still any opposition? Opposition at this point is almost ludicrous. The tremendous logic and ability of the presentation of Paul in Rom 9 begs the question as to why anyone would say no to these things. How can anyone be so blind as to not see the perfect character of God through the Cross and through the doctrines of the Bible? How can anyone reasonably resist the Gospel and depend rather on themselves?

The answer is because each doctrine is resisted individually, and as scar tissue is built up, there is blindness as to the next thought, and arrogance is increased. Now they are totally implacable so that they are thinking exactly the content of this debater's question. **"Why does He still find fault?"** It is obvious that this question anticipates objection to the doctrine of divine integrity, the doctrine of divine decrees, as well as other doctrines – election, adoption, and pre-destination. All of these doctrines depend on the free will of the creature. But, the objection is obviously irrelevant because it is blasphemous to assume that God doesn't know what He's doing and that, furthermore, God is unfair in what He's doing. Paul anticipates the antagonism of the racial Jew against the true spiritual heritage of Israel. The racial Jew emphasises physical birth and natural descent from Abraham while the spiritual Jew emphasises the new birth and spiritual descent from Abraham. This becomes a conflict of the natural and the spiritual seed of Abraham. Furthermore, it proves the principle that irrelevance becomes irreverence by blasphemously maligning the character of God. Negative volition results in arrogance and scar tissue of the soul, which always finds fault with God and becomes critical of divine policy. In fact, scar tissue of the soul, or hardness of the heart, moves and enters where we should fear to be.

It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. (Isa 8:13)

Holy is the word for God's integrity, His Righteousness and Justice. To not regard Him as always right and always fair and just is, and should be, a place of dread. The self-righteousness and legalism of the Jews results in distortion of doctrine. This is tantamount to denial of the spiritual heritage of Israel. This first debater's question anticipates a distortion of doctrine – distortion on the part of Jewish reversionists who follow the same pattern as Pharaoh did. They see the power and glory of God and they reject it. It is inevitable that the perfect character of God will find fault with imperfect and sinful mankind. However, the issue here is man's volition at the point of Gospel hearing.

God's work in eternity past, which is the function of His omniscience in His divine decrees, pre-destination, adoption of the elected ones, does not hinder or contradict the function of His Justice when He either condemns or judges. Nothing God did in eternity past coerced man's free will. God does not tamper with free will and neither does man tamper with God's judgments. On the basis of the imputation of divine righteousness to those who believe in Christ, the justice of God has the right to condemn those who do not believe in Christ. Just as the free will of man has freedom to reject Christ so God is free to judge those who reject Christ. On the basis of the potential of the imputation of blessing in time to the target of imputed righteousness God also has the right to administer punishment and discipline to those believers who do not attain maturity, those who reject doctrine, those who are distracted from doctrine, and those who resist doctrine.

On the basis of the perfect character of God the integrity of God has the right to find fault with sin, human good, and evil, and to punish with strict justice all three categories in the old sin nature's modus operandi. The reality of judgement always elicits the reaction of "unfair" – "how can God be fair and do this thing or that?" As soon as people are in a situation where they know they are being disciplined or being judged then the old sin nature instinctively screams out "Unfair!" Therefore the profit from the administration of discipline and punishment is lost to that individual.

The reality and connection of divine judgement and/or divine blessing is not subject to critical scrutiny on the part of mankind. Mankind who possesses neither the facts nor the doctrine to be critical. The Jews found fault with Paul. They had a habit of finding fault because they had resisted truth. The less you know of the truth, the more critical you are of the truth. They had resisted, just like Pharaoh, and they had all of this scar tissue in their souls. Therefore, the more scar tissue you have, the greater the arrogance. Critical people, when they are ignorant of the facts, are always arrogant.

The second debater's question is: **"For who resists His will?"** God's will is His purpose or intention. This includes what was written in verse 18, His mercy or His severity. Paul anticipates from these two debater's questions the blasphemous attitude of the racial Jew. Their attitude: They picked up on the fact that if God had hardened Pharaoh's heart how can God blame Pharaoh or condemn Pharaoh for what Pharaoh has done? Paul actually anticipates this view of supralapsarianism, a system of theology for blaming God for Pharaoh's decision, for Adam's decision, and indeed for everyone's decision. Supralapsarianism makes God the author of Adam's sin and would also make God the author of Pharaoh's erroneous decisions. All of this ignores the fact of Pharaoh's free will. Pharaoh had the right of self-determination and was a free agent responsible for his own decisions. God merely used Pharaoh's negative volition to evangelise Egypt and the entire world, as well as begin the first client nation Israel. Had the matter been left to the will of Pharaoh Amenhotep II, the Jews would still be slaves in the Egyptian empire. But in grace the sovereign will of God vetoes the power of Pharaoh by freeing the Jews from slavery. It was accomplished through the negative volition of Pharaoh. The point is: Whether you say yes or no to God you are not going to stop the plan of God.

The greater the opposition the greater the manifest power from God. The greatest example of this, of course, is the Cross. Throughout human history the co-existence of the free will of man and the sovereignty of God is necessary to resolve the angelic conflict. God did not tamper with Pharaoh's free will, but He had the genius to utilise the opposition as well as positive volition to fulfil His perfect plan in human history. God used the maximum positive volition of Moses in one way, and the maximum negative volition of Pharaoh in another, but the free will of both men accomplished the will of God. This is a reminder that Jesus Christ controls history. This is also a reminder that the justice of God can bless or curse, depending on positive volition at salvation through faith in Christ, and after salvation positive or negative volition toward Bible doctrine. This is also a reminder again that God uses the wrath of man to praise Him (Psa 76:10).

No matter which way things go, history is inevitably going to glorify God. No disaster in history ever slows the momentum of the divine plan. Human failure and human success does not hinder or frustrate the plan of God. Human failure and opposition to God does not change the faithfulness of God, nor does it hinder the advance of the plan of God. Furthermore, human failure and opposition to the plan of God does not destroy free will and self-determination in the human race. Mankind continues to function as a free agent under the principle of self-determination.

The two debater's questions combine to form two answers directed toward the opposition. The first answer is found in verses 20-21, the second in verses 22-23. Inevitably the key to all answers is found in the perfect essence of God. If you understand the divine attributes you have the key to the answer for everything in life. Every divine attribute is perfect, incorruptible, not subject to sin or human good or evil, not contaminated by arrogance or jealousy or pettiness, not subject to human power and human authority. The integrity of God is perfect and makes no bad or unfair decisions in dealing with mankind. The perfect righteousness of God is imputed to mankind at salvation through faith in Christ, and that imputation, even though it resides in each one of us, it is still incorruptible. The possession of divine righteousness makes it possible for God to deal in grace with the believer and eventually to bless him.

The justice of God can impute blessing without compromising divine essence where the righteousness of God is imputed. The only way for the believer to miss blessing is to try to reinvent the wheel through self-righteousness and legalism. The wheel is God's plan which operates on the perfect axle of divine

righteousness imputed, and when the believer attempts to use his own self-righteousness as the axle he reinvents the wheel by substituting his own plan for God's plan, hence failing to exploit the imputation of divine righteousness. The first half of the book of Romans tells us how righteousness is imputed. The last half of the book of Romans tells us how to exploit the imputation of divine righteousness. The parenthesis or the transition becomes the motivation, the encouragement, the understanding, getting back to reality by facing the facts of doctrine.

The first answer to these questions: **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? (Rom 9:20-21)**

Paul is bringing out the fact that these people are stupid when they become contradictory to God. In arrogance people do not know what they are, and therefore they do not know what God is, they do not know who and what they are, and therefore they answer God back. They contradict, they are impudent, and therefore blasphemous. What member of the human race, believer or unbeliever, has the right to answer back to God, or to contradict, or to bring up accusations against Him? This blasphemy stems from ignorance. Ignorance leads to fear and fear leads to accusations. Even the greatest believers can fall into this.

Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. But the anger of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram burned; against Job his anger burned, because he justified himself before God. (Job 32:1-2)

Surely you have spoken in my hearing, And I have heard the sound of your words: "I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent and there is no guilt in me. Behold, He invents pretexts against me; He counts me as His enemy. He puts my feet in the stocks; He watches all my paths. Behold, let me tell you, you are not right in this, For God is greater than man." (Job 33:8-12)

"Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to do wrong. For He pays a man according to his work, And makes him find it according to his way. Surely, God will not act wickedly, And the Almighty will not pervert justice. Who gave Him authority over the earth? And who has laid *on Him* the whole world? If He should determine to do so, If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust. (Job 34:10-15)

"Listen to this, O Job, Stand and consider the wonders of God. Do you know how God establishes them, And makes the lightning of His cloud to shine? Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds, The wonders of one perfect in knowledge, You whose garments are hot, When the land is still because of the south wind? Can you, with Him, spread out the skies, Strong as a molten mirror? Teach us what we shall say to Him; We cannot arrange *our case* because of darkness. Shall it be told Him that I would speak? Or should a man say that he would be swallowed up? (Job 37:14-20)

The unbelieving Jew in our passage is both arrogant and legalistic. He overestimates himself while at the same time underestimates God.