

The Fairness of God

Romans 9:19 - 33

¹⁹One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" ²⁰But 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?' " ²¹Does 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? ²²What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath - prepared for destruction? ²³What 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 - ²⁴even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," ²⁶and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" ²⁷Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. ²⁸For the Lord will carry out this sentence on earth with speed and finality." ²⁹It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah." ³⁰What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. ³²Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." ³³As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

We must understand that it is impossible for us to know everything about God. He is infinite. We are finite. He is everlasting. We are created. We will never completely know and understand the person and purposes of God. In today's Bible lesson, Paul wrestled with the inscrutable or unfathomable purposes of God. Some would accuse God of being unfair and uneven in His dealings with man. But such charges are baseless. Man is in no position to charge God with anything. As Paul wrote in verse 20, "but who are you, O man, to talk back to God?"

While we may not always understand or discern how God works, we can trust His character and His promises. God is infinitely good and loving. He will always work among His people in ways that are true to those values. We can also trust how God has promised to work in our lives. For example, review Romans 8:28, 37. It may sound like a cliché, but it is true...we may not always see God's hand at work but we can certainly trust His heart.

In today's Bible lesson, Paul reached back to some of the Old Testament's images and metaphors to help us understand God's work

among us. God is like a potter who can mold and shape clay as He pleases (verse 21). Clay does not edit or correct the potter. We are in the safest possible place when we are in the shaping and molding hands of God. Those hands do not always shape each one of us in the same way. God works uniquely among us according to His purposes and how He has gifted and blessed us.

Verse 23 teaches us that God faithfully works to bring glory to Himself and to reveal His glory and riches to His people. That revelation has the capacity to draw people to God through the mercy and riches of Christ.

One of the greatest mysteries to many in Paul's day, especially those with a Jewish background, was God's call and extension of grace to Gentiles. Many devout Jews would have dismissed such thinking. Many Christians who came from Jewish backgrounds would still have believed that Jesus was a Jewish Messiah for Jews alone - the Gentiles be damned. Such thinking would have been prevalent among some of Jesus' own disciples. Consider Peter's change in theology and thinking thanks to a vision the Lord supplied (see Acts 10 - 11).

We often fall prey to the same kind of thinking. We draw lines or limitations around what God can do. We often discriminate against certain kinds or categories of people by saying, "God can't do anything with them." We write off as hopeless certain categories or places when God could not be working. It is nothing short of heresy to imply that any person or people are God-forsaken... the implication is they are beyond the reach of God's grace and hand. In writing about God's saving work among the Gentiles, David Jeremiah drew a conclusion that could apply to God's saving work today among people and in places where, humanly speaking, we would think such a thing is impossible. *"Yet when the gospel was preached, many thousands of Gentiles believed. So though they were not looking for righteousness, they found it because God placed it before them."* God is faithfully watching and working in places where we are not.

Applications . . .

1. Are there people or places where you personally think God cannot or is not at work? Repent now of such thinking. Ask God to give you greater clarity and faith in His power.
2. Do you currently struggle with things you believe God has done un- fairly? Repent now of such feelings. Ask God to give you greater trust in His work and character.

- 3. Ask God to be a potter in your life in places where you need molding and shaping.**
- 4. Give thanks for what God has already done in your life.**
- 5. Pray today for a friend. Let that friend know that you have prayed for him or her.**