

ROMANS

9:19-21



PART II

A close-up photograph of a person's hands shaping a piece of clay on a pottery wheel. The hands are positioned to guide the clay as it rotates. The wheel is dark and has some concentric circles visible. The clay is a light brown color. The background is a solid purple color.

***Thou Art the  
Potter; We  
All Are Like  
Clay***

# ROMANS

## 9:19-21



<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is resisting?”

<sup>20</sup>But rather, O man, who are you giving a hostile answer to God? “Will not the thing formed say to the [One] having formed [it], ‘Why have you made me like this?’” <sup>21</sup>Or has not [the] potter the authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one indeed unto [a] honor vessel, one however unto common use?



# ROMANS

9:19-20a



*No Talking  
Back!*

**<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is resisting?” <sup>20</sup>But rather, O man, who are you giving a hostile answer to God?**

As you may recall from v.14, Paul asked a rhetorical question: *“What then will we say?”* Now Paul heightened the conversation by engaging in direct address. And we know that it is direct by the use of a singular second person future verb (ἑρεῖς) ***“You will say....”*** So who is Paul addressing?

In context and utilizing Holy Scripture (Acts 15:5 and 11:2-3), we can safely deduce that Paul is addressing his major opponents...the Pharisees (and Pharisaical Jews), whom Paul has already addressed in 2:17-27!

# ROMANS

9:19-20a



*No Talking  
Back!*

**19**You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is resisting?” **20**But rather, O man, who are you giving a hostile answer to God?

The claim that God improperly finds fault rest upon this assumption. However, Paul is clear that no one can oppose God's intentions! So then, what's the answer to his second question? The facts of history very vividly illustrate for us that, ever since the Fall, men have continually and consistently resisted God's intentions (cf. Ps. 14:2-3). God, in His mercy and forbearance, has temporarily allowed man to oppose His intention, plan, and will in hope that His patience would lead them to repentance (2:4-5). We discussed this last week concerning the Pharaoh of the Exodus.



# ROMANS

9:19-20a



*No Talking  
Back!*

**<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is resisting?” <sup>20</sup>But rather, O man, who are you giving a hostile answer to God?**

Thus, in Paul's day, many in Israel had been resistant (e.g., 3:3; 10:1, 16-21; 11:20); however, such resistance will not prevail against God's coming judgment (cf. 2:8-9, 12, 16; 3:19-20). Prior to the great Day of Judgment, Paul contends that there is no unrighteousness with God in showing mercy based upon who He is and not based upon our willing or striving (v.16). Indeed, all too often, our willing and striving are contrary to His divine will and resistant to His mercy!

# ROMANS

9:19-20a



*No Talking  
Back!*

<sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is resisting?” <sup>20</sup>But rather, O man, who are you giving a hostile answer to God?

Paul’s retort isn’t accusatory, since his language (ὦ ἄνθρωπε) “*O man*” or more politely, “*O dear sir*” isn’t derogatory. Prior he uses a word that points to this phrase in 20a as being corrective: μενοῦνγε (men-oon’-geh) - “*on the contrary*” or “*But rather...*”



# ROMANS

9:19-20a



*No Talking  
Back!*

**19**You will say to me then, “Why then still does He find fault? For the purpose of Him, who is **resisting?**” **20**But rather, O man, who are you **giving a hostile answer to God?**

Paul begins to sharpen the contrast between Creator and created! Talking back or “...*giving a hostile answer to God...*” presumes that God has already spoken, which He has (2:17-27), and Paul will now begin to bring his whole exposition from 9:6 to culmination in v.24 (which we will discuss at length next week!).

# ROMANS

## 9:20b-21



**Vessels of God's  
Use: Honorable  
and Ordinary**

**20b “Will not the thing formed say to the [One] having formed [it], ‘Why have you made me like this?’” 21Or has not [the] potter the authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one indeed unto honor vessel, one however unto common use?**

**To quote from Franzmann:**

***“...various applications are made of the potter-vessel relationship; it can depict man’s accountability to his Maker (Is. 29:16), or the impiety of man in questioning the ways of God (Is. 45:9), or the humility of an appeal made by sinful people to the mercy of the God who created them (Is. 64:8), or God’s freedom to visit wrath or mercy on a nation according to His will, even if the nation is His chosen people (Jer. 18:6).”<sup>1</sup>***

**<sup>1</sup>Franzmann, Romans, 179.**



# ROMANS

## 9:20b-21

*Same Clay;  
Different  
Use*

**<sup>21</sup>Or has not [the] potter the authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one indeed unto honor vessel, one however unto common use?**

The clays question in v.20b now leads Paul to ask a follow-up question...v.21. His question expresses the reasons *why* the potter forms vessels in different ways. And this is Paul's major point: God (the potter) has the authority to make clay vessels for varying purposes...and all from the same lump! His production results in “...**some vessels for noble or honorable uses and others for common or menial use!**” Paul uses the same analogy with the same terminology in 2 Tim 2:20.



# ROMANS

9:20b-21



**Same Clay;  
Different  
Use**

**21Or has not [the] potter the authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one indeed unto honor vessel, one however unto common use?**

Again, all the vessels are made to be used, and all are made for a beneficial purpose, though the dignity of their intended use varies. Here's a comparable distinct: a fine Meissen dinner plate vs. Oneida table ware.

So, therefore, in this context, Paul's reference to the *"same lump"* (αὐτοῦ φύράματος – literally, of the same mass) asserts that Moses and Pharaoh, Jacob and Esau, even obdurate Jews and believing Christians, were (are) of the same lump. Though some are privileged to have a more honored role than others, the Scriptures demonstrate that all have a role. More importantly, none are predetermined for rejection or wrath.



# ROMANS

9:20b-21



## Conclusion

**<sup>21</sup>Or has not [the] potter the authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one indeed unto honor vessel, one however unto common use?**

**As we have been doing, let's hear from an ancient Church father who sums up this section of Romans very aptly:**

***"There is no difference in the clay which the potter molds with his hands. He can make whatever kind of vessel he wants to, and the vessel cannot answer back and say how it would prefer to be made."**<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup>(Pseudo-)Constantius, *Romans*, (Bray, *Romans*, ACCS NT 6:251).

ROMANS

9:22-24

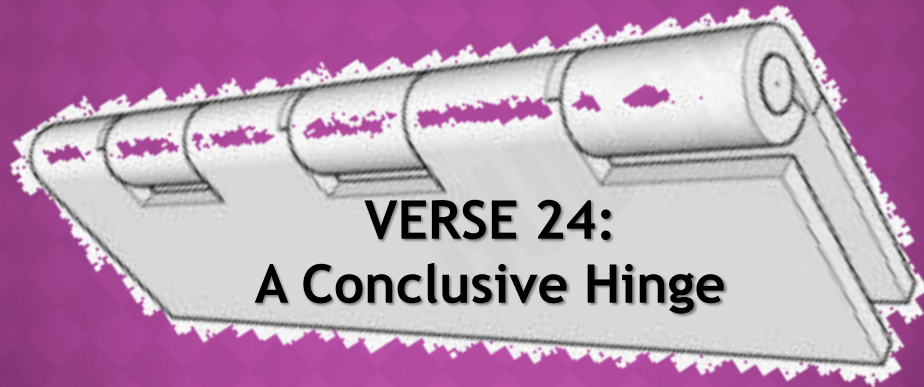
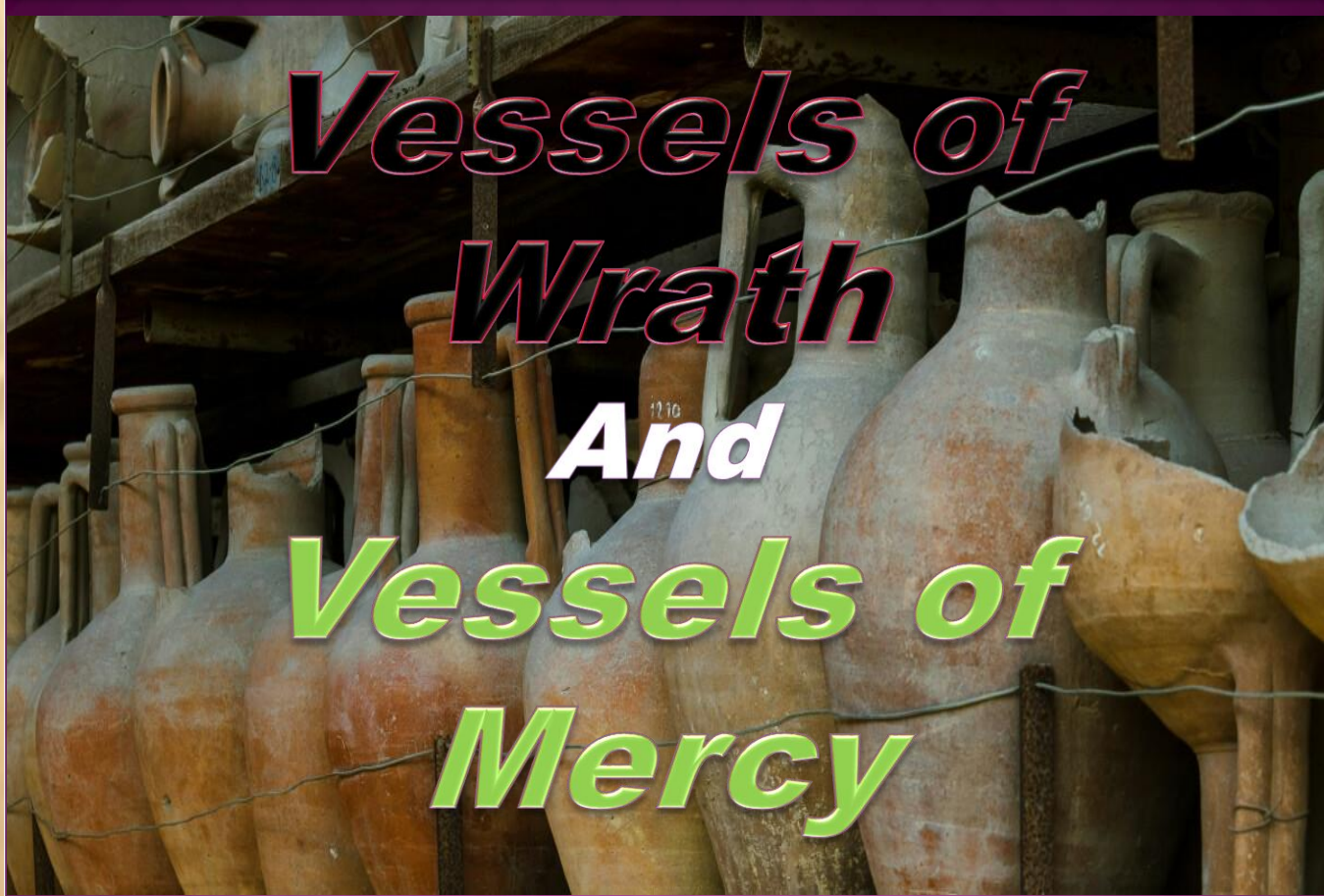


PART III

*Vessels of  
Wrath*

*And*

*Vessels of  
Mercy*



VERSE 24:  
A Conclusive Hinge