

Romans 9... 10... 11

The sovereignty of God. You've heard the term; but what, exactly, does it mean?

According to Norman Geisler,

Technically, sovereignty is not an attribute of God, but rather an activity of God in relation to His universe. Sovereignty is God's control over His creation, dealing with His governance over it: Sovereignty is God's rule over all reality.

As you read the Bible you must conclude God is sovereign. The Scriptures reveal the following about Him:

- God is prior to all things.
- God produced all things.
- God sustains all things.
- God knows all things.
- God rules over all things.
- God owns all things.
- God can do all things.
- God is in control of all things.

- being changed to bring change -

When you look at everything the Bible says about God interfacing with His creation you must conclude He is sovereign.

God's sovereign rule over all reality leads to an objection:

Romans 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

In other words, since God is in control, how can man be held responsible for his decisions? How can God "find fault" when He is in ultimate control? Since His will be done, who can really resist it?

This obviously is a huge theological question. I would point out that we only know God is sovereign because He has revealed Himself to be so in the Bible. In the same Bible - sometimes in the same verse - He reveals that man is free and responsible.

So how are we to reconcile these things? We just saw, in the previous verses, an example. God hardened Pharaoh's heart; sovereignty. Pharaoh hardened his own heart; free will and responsibility.

But a Jew might argue, "Who cares about Pharaoh!" How can God harden the hearts of His chosen people, Israel, and still hold them responsible for their free will choice to reject Jesus? Can the Jews be held responsible for rejecting Christ if it was God's will all along to harden them?

To answer, Paul takes us back to Jeremiah eighteen and nineteen to look at the potter and the clay. Here we get some insight into God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

Romans 9:20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, "Why have you made me like this?"
Romans 9:21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

It is very important we understand these verses as referring to a specific reference in the Old Testament. In Jeremiah Israel was the clay and God was the potter. The clay is said to be marred, so the potter could not mold it as He desired. Instead He made it into another vessel, one more consistent with the material in His hands.

Then God makes this application:

Jeremiah 18:6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* you in My hand, O house of Israel!

Jeremiah 18:7 "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*,

Jeremiah 18:8 "if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

Jeremiah 18:9 "And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*,

Jeremiah 18:10 "if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

Jeremiah 18:11 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.'" "

God says that His dealings with Israel, and other nations, **depends upon their obedience to Him**. He holds them responsible and then judges them accordingly.

This is God's own application of the illustration of the potter working with the clay. The hardening came from the clay, *not* from the potter. Finding the clay hardened, God would shape it according to its nature. Yet He looked for repentance.

In Jeremiah nineteen the vessel on the potter's wheel was finished. Jeremiah took it out to the field and broke it in pieces. It remained marred in the potter's hands, and was only fit for destruction. It was a picture of the destruction that would come upon Israel if their hearts remained hardened against God.

First century Israel was a "lump" of "dishonor," having rejected Jesus Christ, and God was shaping them accordingly. At the same time, He began working with another "lump," those who receive Jesus by grace through faith.

Verses twenty-two through twenty-four in Romans nine summarize the age in which we live, the Church Age.

Romans 9:22 *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

Romans 9:23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

Romans 9:24 *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

The "lump" of "dishonor" - Israel - is headed for a time of God revealing His wrath against them. They have become "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction." It would begin with the destruction of their Temple in 70AD and continue through the Great Tribulation.

In the meantime, God is longsuffering, enduring with apostate Israel, preserving them, while He forms His Church, the "vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory."

God is making known the riches of His glory on anyone of natural birth who receives Jesus and is born again.

The picture of God as a potter making (creating) some people from eternity past as vessels only fit for eternal destruction is not a biblical teaching. It assumes this illustration has no context or commentary to explain it.

God is sovereign. Mankind is free and responsible. With that as your basic understanding you can see how a sovereign God is nevertheless justified in holding the nation of Israel responsible for their free choice to reject Jesus as His Son and their Savior.

You might still struggle with the concept that both these things can be simultaneously true. **I do** - until I remember that I only know about God and man and our relationship by what He has revealed in the Word. I therefore see them both and trust that there is no contradiction or inconsistency.

You and I are free and responsible. God is sovereign and in control. Israel rejected Jesus. God pushed 'stop' on the prophetic clock. He is calling out a people, the Church, comprised of Jews and Gentiles. One day He will push 'start' and all Israel will be saved at the Second Coming.