

Biblical Notes – Romans 9:22-24

22 – 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? (22. εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὄργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατὸν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκεύη ὄργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν)

It is clear from the previous verses that this is most likely a reference back to Pharaoh (vs.17) who was shown to be a vessel of wrath. The patience he showed this vessel of wrath was his repeated appeal to him to let his people Israel go.

“Hereby God manifests His great displeasure against sin, and His power to take vengeance on sinners; He exercises great patience towards them, seeing they are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction by their own wickedness, to which God shuts them up in His judgment. On the other hand, what can be said against it, if He proceed in mercy with others, thereby manifesting the riches of His glory, or His glorious grace, since they are vessels of mercy, whom, by His sovereign election from eternity, and the sanctification of His Spirit in time, He had afore prepared unto glory? The sum of the Apostle’s answer here is, that the grand object of God, both in the election and the reprobation of men, is that which is paramount to all things else in the creation of the universe, namely, His own glory. With the assertion of this doctrine, however offensive to the natural man, which must always appear to him foolishness, Paul winds up, in the last verse of the eleventh chapter, the whole of his previous discussion in this Epistle. Vessels of wrath, —vessels ‘full of the fury of the Lord,’ Isaiah 51:20. Here Paul calls the wicked vessels, in allusion to the figure which he had just before used. Fitted to destruction. — They are vessels, indeed, but they are vessels of wrath, and by their sins they are fitted for destruction; and it is in the counsel of Jehovah that this shall be so.”

— Haldane’s Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans, Commentary on Romans 9:22.

“22 [What] if God, willing to shew [his] wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the y vessels of wrath fitted to 23destruction: (22) The second answer is this, that God, moreover and besides that he justly decrees whatever he decrees, uses that moderation in executing his decrees, as is declared his singular mercifulness even in the reprobate, in that he endures them a long time, and permits them to enjoy many and singular benefits, until at length he justly condemns them: and that to good end and purpose, that is, to show himself to be an enemy and avenger of wickedness, that it may appear what power he has by these severe judgments, and finally by comparison of contraries to set forth indeed, how great his mercy is towards the elect. (y) By vessels, the Hebrews understand all types of instruments. (23) Therefore again, we may say with Paul, that some men are made by God the creator for destruction.”

— Geneva Study Bible, Commentary on Romans 9:22-23.

“22. And what, etc. A second answer, by which he briefly shows, that though the counsel of God is in fact incomprehensible, yet his unblamable justice shines forth no less in the perdition of the reprobate than in the salvation of the elect. He does not indeed give a reason for divine election, so as to assign a cause why this man is chosen and that man rejected; for it was not meet that the things contained in the secret counsel of God should be subjected to the judgment of men; and, besides, this mystery is inexplicable. He therefore keeps us from curiously examining those things which exceed human comprehension. He yet shows, that as far as God’s predestination manifests itself, it appears perfectly just.

The particles, εἰ δὲ, used by Paul, I take to mean, And what if? so that the whole sentence is a question; and thus the sense will be more evident: and there is here an ellipsis, when we are to consider this as being understood, — “Who then can charge him with unrighteousness, or arraign him?” for here appears nothing but the most perfect course of justice. (307)

But if we wish fully to understand Paul, almost every word must be examined. He then argues thus, — There are vessels prepared for destruction, that is, given up and appointed to destruction: they are also vessels of wrath, that is, made and formed for this end, that they may be examples of God’s vengeance and displeasure. If the Lord bears patiently for a time with these, not destroying them at the first moment, but deferring the judgment prepared for them, and this in order to set forth the decisions of his severity, that others may be terrified by so dreadful examples, and also to make known his power, to exhibit which he makes them in various ways to serve; and, further, that the amplitude of his mercy towards the elect may hence be more fully known and more brightly shine forth; — what is there worthy of being reprehended in this dispensation? But that he is silent as to the reason, why they are vessels appointed to destruction, is no matter of wonder. He indeed takes it as granted, according to what has been already said, that the reason is hid in the secret and inexplorable counsel of God; whose justice it behoves us rather to adore than to scrutinize.

And he has mentioned vessels, as commonly signifying instruments; for whatever is done by all creatures, is, as it were, the ministration of divine power. For the best reason then are we, the faithful, called the vessels of mercy, whom the Lord

uses as instruments for the manifestation of his mercy; and the reprobate are the vessels of wrath, because they serve to show forth the judgments of God.

22.“Since then God willed (or, it was God’s will) to show His wrath and to make known his power, he endured with much forbearance the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction;

23.So he willed to make known the riches of his glory towards the vessels of mercy, whom he has fore-prepared for glory,

24.Even us, whom he has called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.”

The verb ἔστι, or ἵν, is often understood after participles, especially in Hebrew; and καὶ has the meaning of ‘so’ in some instances, Matthew 6:10; Acts 7:51; Galatians 1:9; and in some cases, as [Schleusner] says, without being preceded by any particle of comparison, such as Matthew 12:26, and 1 John 2:27; but εἰ; here stands somewhat in that character.”

— Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible, Commentary on Romans 9:22-24.

We know from the prior passage that it is God who fits the vessel to destruction:

Romans 9:20-21 NASB

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? [21] 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?

It is the potter who chooses what purpose the clay will serve, and in the case of Pharaoh he was made a vessel of wrath for destruction to display the power of God.

This is exactly what Proverbs 16:4 teaches us.

Proverbs 16:4 NASB

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

It is clear here that God predestines some to damnation (as vessels of wrath) as this fits the whole theme. The vessels are crafted by the Lord before they are born.

Isaiah 45:7,9,12 NASB

The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. [9] “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker- An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’ [12] “It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host.

23 – And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (23. ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλούτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκεύη ἐλέους ἢ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν)

Here we see the fact that the two are interlinked (prepared beforehand). The vessels of mercy are prepared beforehand for glory (predestined for salvation) which the vessels of wrath are prepared beforehand for destruction.

24 – even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. (24. Οὓς καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ιουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἔθνῶν)

This demonstrates the context stems beyond the Jews but also from among the Gentiles.