

“The Potter’s Freedom”
Romans 9:14; 19-24
(Preached at Trinity, November 1, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. I was first introduced to the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace a little over 22 years ago. I still remember I made two statements in opposition, two oppositions that are quite common to someone influenced by today’s theology of Arminianism.
First, God choosing one man over another seems unfair.
Second, doesn’t God’s sovereignty infringe upon our free will?
 2. It’s amazing how strongly we defend the freedom of our will while caring little for the freedom of God’s will.
 3. In this chapter Paul has been describing vividly God’s sovereignty in the lives of men – the freedom of God’s will. He has given us a clear view of unconditional election. And Paul is quite aware of these objections. Not only does Paul describe clearly God’s sovereignty and His electing grace and mercy, he also answers the objections.
 4. He deals with the objections in several verses. He begins with **Verse 14**
Romans 9:14 – “What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God?”
 - A. The word for “unrighteousness” can also be translated “injustice”
God is being charged with unfairness or unjustness.
 - B. God is being accused of being unjust. If God has ordained all things and has chosen who will go to heaven and who will go to hell how is it fair that He hold us accountable for our actions. If God has willed it who can resist Him.
Romans 9:19 – “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?”
 - C. We looked at this last week as I set before you the two Biblical truths of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.
 5. Then beginning with **Verse 21** Paul defends God’s sovereign rights.
Romans 9:21 – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”
 6. This morning I want to address this issue of the rightness of God’s sovereign election. It is indeed right, just, and fair. We hear a lot about the free will of man. This morning I want to look at the freedom of God’s will.
We’ll look at it under two headings.
 - I. God’s free will as it applies to fallen humanity
 - II. God’s free will as it applies to His sovereign rights
- I. God’s free will as it applies to fallen humanity.
 - A. Human beings have a natural sense of entitlement
 1. In our modern culture it has reached high levels – our social structure insists on absolute equality. Anything less is unfair.
 2. We are taught this from childhood.

- a. The cake must be cut into equal portions or else it is unfair. If one sibling gets to stay up late while the others are sent to bed it is unfair. We learn to expect equal treatment.
 - b. For some it is taken to extremes. Many today think children should never be allowed to lose. It might affect their self-esteem. And so everyone is a winner. After all, this is the only way it can be fair to all.
3. We've come to believe this sense of absolute equality and entitlement. "Equal rights" seems only right. There should be no discrimination. Everyone should have a right to healthcare, to own a home, to drive a car
 4. What is the basis for these beliefs? What is the basis for this claim to absolute equality in all things?
The ultimate reason we feel we have the right to everything that everyone else has is because we feel we deserve it; we are entitled to it.
If he has a nice house I deserve to have one.
If he has a nice car I deserve to have one.
- B. What do people mean when they accuse God of being unfair?
1. They are assuming that God is not giving people what they deserve. God owe us life, health, wealth, good looks, intelligence, joy, etc.
 2. It seems only fair that if God saves one single person all are entitled to their fair share. That God would show preference seems unthinkable.
 3. Our great error is presuming we deserve *anything* good from God
 4. Even as Christians we have to guard against feelings of entitlement. Are you ever envious of others? Why do you feel you deserve what they have? Do you feel you deserve more respect, more honor, more wealth, more power? Why is this? We must come to the place of understanding we deserve nothing.
- C. In Chapters 1-3 Paul established the universal guilt of humanity. All are hopelessly corrupted by sin.
1. All are guilty. All are under God's condemnation.
Romans 3:9-10 – "What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:"
 2. Even as believers, although we are no longer in bondage to sin it is still active in every part of our being. **Romans 7** describes our continued struggle against sin. In other words we still fall far short of God's glory.
 3. The point is God owes us nothing good. He only owes us His wrath and judgment – all of us.
Romans 6:23 – "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
Romans 2:5-6 – "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁶ Who will render to every man according to his deeds:"
- D. All of God's dealings with humanity presuppose their sin and guilt
1. Any good thing, any blessing is based upon grace – undeserved.

2. God gives good gifts to different individuals but since all have sinned none of them are deserved and if God doesn't give equally to all no one can charge Him with unfairness – only rich mercy and grace.
Absolute fairness demands punishment upon all.
It is not unfair for God to show mercy upon one and not the other.
Why is God under obligation to be merciful to any rebellious sinner?
 3. All of God's blessings upon humanity are by grace – this means they are a gift.
 - a. Who among fallen man is worthy of God's gift?
 - b. In fairness no one deserves any goodness from God.
 4. If God looked down from heaven upon the mass of righteous men and arbitrarily determined to send some to hell and some to heaven that would be unfair. But for God to choose some wicked men to be recipients of His grace while leaving others is not unfair.
Since God owes grace to nobody it isn't unfair that He doesn't give it to everybody.
- E. God does show equality to all men in offering the Gospel to all.
1. God calls upon all men equally to repent
God told the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill:
Acts 17:30 – “*God* now commandeth all men every where to repent:”
 2. All who turn from their sin and turn to Christ shall be saved.

II. God's free will as it applies to His sovereign rights

Romans 9:21 – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

- A. God is the owner of all things – does He not have the right to do with that which belongs to Him as He is pleased?
1. We certainly have to agree that things are not equal among human beings on this earth.
An earthquake hits and there is terrible damage and death.
A wildfire destroys several hundred homes
A tornado wipes out an entire town
A child is born with a terrible birth defect and his parents are told he won't survive to his first birthday.
One man succeeds in a venture and becomes a multimillionaire. Another doing the same thing falls into bankruptcy.
 2. Because things are not equal we accuse God of being unfair
- B. If God doesn't love all men equally or treat all men equally is He being unfair?
1. Was it fair for God to choose Israel and then give them a land that belonged to others? Was it fair that God told Israel to go in and kill the owners?
 - a. The question should be, did the inhabitants of Canaan deserve the land? Were they entitled to it?

- b. The fact is God showed great mercy unto them in restraining His judgment for 400 years. God foretold Abraham that his people would go into captivity for 400 years. Why 400 years. God was giving the Amorites time.
Genesis 15:16 – “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full.”
 - c. But why did God choose Israel? He chose them because it was His sovereign prerogative to do so.
2. This goes back to the question in **Verse 14** – “*Is there* unrighteousness with God?”
- a. The answer God gives us in **Verse 15** is basically, “This isn’t your business. It is My business.”
“I will show mercy to whom I show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”
 - b. In other words, God doesn’t owe us an answer.
Isaiah 45:9-10 – “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? ¹⁰ Woe unto him that saith unto *his* father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?”
3. The perfect illustration of God’s sovereign right to do what He pleases with that which is His own is found in the parable of the vineyard.
Matthew 20:1-15
Matthew 20:15 – “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”
- C. Our problem lies in the fact that we look at God as a man looks upon a man
- 1. Most people feel they have a right to complain to God if He fails to give what they are entitled to.
 - 2. We feel we are justified in complaining to God
 - a. If God tells us our duty to Him we have a right to tell Him His duty to us – or else it is unfair.
 - b. Just as God judges us for failure of our duty to Him, we feel we are just in judging God for failure to meet our expectations.
 - 3. The problem is looking at God as a man and seeking to hold Him to our standards.
Paul corrects such vain thoughts
Romans 9:20 – “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?”
 - a. Because God is God He has the right to create one man in weakness and the other in strength
 - b. Because God is God He has the right to create one man in poverty and the other in wealth
 - c. Because God is God He has the right to place one man in sickness and the other in health

4. These things are God's sovereign right – this is Paul's teaching here
Romans 9:15 – “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”
Romans 9:21 – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

- D. Do you understand how wicked it is to complain against God?
1. People cry loudly about God's sovereignty
 2. So many people despise election as being unfair. How can it be unfair? What do we deserve from God?
 - a. Does God not have the right to show mercy upon whom He will?
 - b. Why is our freedom of will of greater importance than God's freedom?
 3. Does God not have the right to exercise His purpose as He is pleased?
Daniel 4:35 – “And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
 4. James R. White in *The Potter's Freedom* – “God is the free and sovereign Creator and acts freely in that realm that is His: we are mere creatures, never sovereign, never autonomous, but responsible within the realm of our createdness. The Reformed position plainly asserts that God “does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth and He does so solely on the basis of His own desire and decree, never on the basis of anything outside Himself.”
 5. God has the right to all things because He owns all things

III. God is free to raise up vessels of honor from among the mass of vile and corrupted vessels that are fitted for destruction

Romans 9:21 – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

- A. Returning to our situation as fallen humanity – We are all vessels of wrath
1. Is God not merciful to remake many, to recreate them and make them glorious vessels that will glorify Him?
 2. Salvation begins while we are horribly deformed by sin – He remakes us
 3. God is continuing to conform us to the divine nature
 4. The words of Isaiah describe this marvelous work
Isaiah 64:6-8 – “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. ⁷ And *there is* none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. ⁸ But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.”
- B. That God does this for any is a testimony to His rich grace
1. None are deserving
 2. May God hush our lips from ever impugning His perfect work

Conclusion: What are the implications of the sovereign work of God?

1. It should humble us and give us a heart of submission. In a world where all men have sought to usurp the throne of God and raise themselves up as gods we humbly submit.
2. It should fill us with joy that God is doing His will. This must be our prayer. “Oh God, Thy will be done.”
 - a. This was our Lord’s prayer, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42)
 - b. Jesus taught us to pray this in the Lord’s Prayer:
“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.”
3. It should fill us with great gratitude. If God has done something for us that we never could have done for ourselves. If God has done something for us that we absolutely do not deserve. How should we not be filled with great gratitude?
4. It should fill us with great comfort. If God in His sovereignty chose us will He not protect us and keep us? Will He not do good for us?
Romans 8:32 – “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”