

Stumbling Over Trust in God

Thomas Robinson, *God's Amazing Paths 2*, September 25, 2016

Romans 9:19-33

¹⁹ You'll say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will?"

²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, human being, to answer back to God? Will the **molded image** say to its molder, "**Why have you made me like this?**" [Isa 29:16; 45:9]

²¹ Doesn't **the potter** have authority over **the clay**, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? [Jer 18:1-12] ²² What if God, desiring to show wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction [Isa 10:6; Jer 19:1-13], ²³ in order to **make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy**, which he has prepared beforehand for **glory** – ²⁴ even us whom he has **called**, not from the **Jews** only but also from the **nations/Gentiles**? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

"I will call those who are not my people, 'my people,' [Hos 2:23]

and her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" [cf Hos 11:1; 14:5]

²⁶ *"And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of a living God.'"* [Hos 1:10]

²⁷ But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

*"Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, [Hos 1:10 / Isa 10:22 / Gen 22:17] only **a remnant** of them will be **delivered/saved**,*

*²⁸ for the Lord will perform his **word** fully and without delay upon the earth."* [Isa 10:22-23]

²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

*"If the Lord of hosts had not left us **a seed**,*

we would have become as Sodom and been made like Gomorrah." [Isa 1:9]

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That **nations/Gentiles** that did not pursue a **righteous standing** with God (*dikaio syne*) have taken hold of such a righteousness, a righteous standing that flows from **trusting God's faithfulness** (*pistis*). ³¹ But Israel by pursuing a **law** to define righteous standing did not reach such a law. ³² Why? Because it did not flow from **faith** (*pistis*), but as if it from works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;

and whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame." [Isa 8:14; 28:16]

Isaiah 29:16 Isaiah speaks of God's judgment on Israel

¹⁶ Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

Jeremiah 18:3-6 Jeremiah enacts a Sign of Israel as Clay in God's Hands

³ So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴ And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. ⁵ Then the word of THE LORD (*Yahweh*) came to me: ⁶ "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares THE LORD (*Yahweh*). Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

Isaiah 8:13-14; 28:16 The Stone of Stumbling and the Foundation Stone

¹³ But THE LORD (*Yahweh*) of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. ... ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel

28:¹⁶ Thus says THE LORD (*Yahweh*), "Behold, I laid as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes/trusts (in the stone) will not be in shame.'

Galatians 3:27-29

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Messiah, clothed yourself with Messiah. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.

Reading Scripture to Understand God's Ways

In Rm 9-11 Paul moves from grief to perception and hope to praise through scripture. He develops key points of Rm 1-8: "Righteousness": both God's righteousness in faithfully being true to his promises and the way he draws humans into a righteous standing with him through Jesus. "Faith": both God's faithfulness embodied in Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection and our faith/trust in what Jesus has done.

But Paul is painfully aware that many of his fellow Jews do not trust that God was at work in Jesus. Rather Torah/Law is God's final revelation defining an ethnic people marked by circumcision, purity laws, temple, and Torah. The Messiah must fit and confirm these.

Paul had agreed but was confronted by Jesus. He looks back across scripture observing how God repeatedly chose a path for his faithfulness that surprised people: Isaac, Jacob, Israel in slavery, rebellious Israel after the golden calf. These show God's surprising ways as he interacts with people who are beloved but also rebellious. But they point to the great destruction and remaking of the people through exile, the crucifixion of Israel's Messiah by the Romans, and the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to include all the World.

The Potter Who Smashes and Remakes the Clay

Paul meditates on God's ways seen in Hosea and Isaiah, in the time of the destruction of northern Israel and in Jeremiah anticipating Babylonian exile. Crimes and faithlessness of Israel and Judah made them vessels of wrath that God judges but longs to remake and save. Israel's leaders simply want God to be a force on their side without change.

God intends radical change. Isaiah in the opening words of his prophecy expresses how radical the judgment is – only a seed is left – even as God longs for healing. But the seed is enough for God's recreating power. Jeremiah enacts the signs of the reshaped clay and the broken pot. Judgment will be like a smashed pot, but God is able to reshape the clay.

Note that Paul is not talking about personal predestination, as these verses are sometimes taken. God, in radically choosing the path of his mercy, remakes the nature of his people.

"Not My People" Become "God's Children"

Hosea's shows how being God's people has always depended not on physical descent but on God's calling. God's ways are always challenging to humans who seek power and control.

But God's intentions are to transform those who are "not my people" into God's children.

That meant faithless Israel through restoration. But ultimately it points to the vast world of "not my people" across all nations. God performs his "word" of promise.

The Faithful and Transforming God

Paul mingles Isa 8:14 and 28:16. The precious cornerstone that God sets is also a stone of stumbling for many. The crucified Messiah, God among us, God's embodied love, is God's radical reshaping of the clay. But many saw it as foolish and weak. They wanted righteous standing with God but based on controllable criteria of law. Many could not trust such a radical sign of love and grace, a righteous standing based on trusting God's faithfulness.

God calls us to trust his unexpected paths of grace and be his inclusive people of promise.