

THE POTTER'S HAND

GBC EQUIPPING HOUR | OCTOBER 18, 2020



A God-Saturated Faith - Romans 9:30-33

PURPOSE: To be malleable to how God is masterfully shaping our faith even as we “work it out” (Philippians 2:12-13).

I. Harmonizing the End of Romans 9 with the Whole Chapter

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? **Because they did not pursue it by faith**, but as if it were based on 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 believes in him** will not be put to shame.”

-Romans 9:30-33

A. A Common Strawman Argument from the “Free Will” Side

Point of Agreement. It’s honest to say that Paul here is continuing his search for answers as to why so many of his fellow Jews could be excluded from salvation (recap previous 9:1-5 discussion). Here, like before, Paul answers his own question: his fellow kinsman failed because they “did not pursue it by faith.” Their claim to righteousness was based on their own works rather than the work of God through his Son.

Point of Disagreement. It’s altogether misleading to say Paul’s reference to “faith” is a stand-alone “faith” which operates *above* or *in front of* or *outside of* God’s elective powers. This is where the Arminian strawman argument

against Sovereignty surfaces (something like): “Paul’s final closing argument at the end of Romans chapter 9 is essentially the **bedrock confession** that ‘justification comes by faith’ –putting to rest all the worries Paul had previously about how God might elect one person over another person. When all is said and done, man’s choice, *by his faith*, has the final say on his destiny. Thus, if man chooses Christ, his reward is Heaven; if man winds up in Hell (because of unbelief)...well, he’s made that choice for himself...”

The above is a classic strawman argument; all it does is leapfrog over Paul’s previous axiomatic statements on God’s sovereignty which are:

...though they were not yet born **and had done nothing either good or bad**—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works **but because of him who calls**—¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Romans 9:11-13)

So then it depends **not on human will** or exertion, but on God, who has **mercy**. (Romans 9:16)

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”²¹ Has the **potter** no right over the clay, **to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?** (Romans 9:20-21).

Paul did not intend for his stronger “a fortiori” argument of God’s choosing ahead of man to suddenly play second fiddle to man’s choice. That’s not where Paul is going. Where Paul is going from the end of Romans 9 into the start of Romans 10 is a concentrated focus on the carryout of God’s sovereignty in the course of man’s response to special revelation. Yes, there is more ‘boots on the ground’ emphasis on man’s actions in verses 30 through 33, but not at all excluding God.

B. Objective Faith vs. Subjective Faith

The towering distinction: *objective faith* emphasizes the object of one's faith –the One a saved person looks to in advancing forward in trust/faith/reliance; conversely, *subjective faith* looks inwardly with emphasis on the “I” in “I have faith.” In visual terms, the first looks up from a hole and the second gazes into a mirror.

Going from chapter 9 into chapter 10, Paul's attention isn't on subjective, but rather *objective* faith. He camps out on this “stumbling block” (9:33) causing many Jews to fall all over themselves. Reading more of Paul's writings we find out **who** this “stumbling block” is:

For **Christ is the end of the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

..but we preach **Christ** crucified, a **stumbling block to Jews** and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God** and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

God isn't being a practical jokester in setting up this stumbling block. On Earth Jesus seamlessly met all the expectations of the Law and the Prophets. But to someone all too self-confident in their own independent claim to righteousness, the humble Christ was effectively a barrier rather than a bridge –a bitter irony, and a *divine* one at that, in view of the whole testimony of Romans 9.

II. **The Whole Idea: Election Over Faith...and Faith Over Works**

Note: herein, the word “Over” doesn't mean “in the place of”; “Over” means the “primary qualifier of _____.”

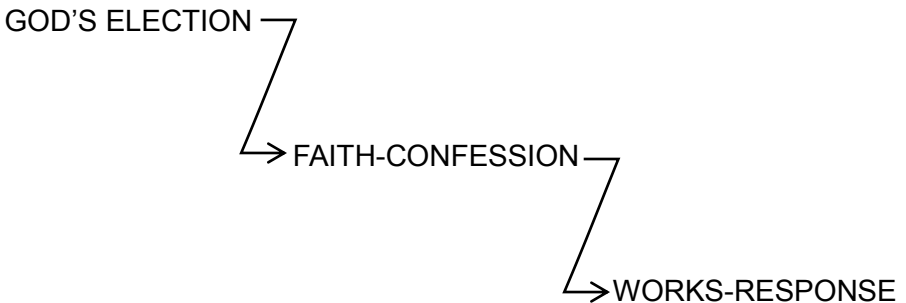
A. Election Over Faith

Rather than making faith overshadow election why not follow the natural order of Paul's words and make election overshadow faith? Elsewhere in Ephesians 2:8

“faith” is under the heavenly qualifiers of God’s “grace” and “gift.” In Romans 2:4, “repentance” is the result of (not the cause of) God’s “kindness.”

B. Faith Over Works

This one can be confusing because we are used to seeing Paul consistently exhort his readers to uphold “faith” in the place of “works.” But this is only true in the cause-effect discussion. Elsewhere Paul approves of “works” so long as it is a God-saturated, Christ-centered activity brought on by the work of the Holy Spirit. The second half of most of Paul’s church letters puts heavy emphasis on Christian action. This is only after Paul explains in the first half of his letters, the extent of God’s sovereign mercy and love for his beloved elect ones.



The Potter’s Hand Course Outline (tentative):

- September 6 - Introduction & Romans 9:1-5
- September 13 - God Establishing True Israel / Rom. 9:6-8
- September 20 - Literal Predestination / Rom. 9:9-13
- September 27 - Unaided Predestination / Rom. 9:14-18
- October 4 - Uncontested Predestination / Rom. 9:19-24
- October 11 - God Can Turn the Tables / Rom. 9:25-29
- October 18 - A God-Saturated Faith / Rom. 9:30-33
- October 25 - Conclusion