

REMNANT CHURCH SERMON NOTES – ROMANS 9: 19-21
PREACHED ON OCTOBER 4, 2026, BY REV. B.B. ANUM-HIGHER

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- You will remember that Paul responded to the question and objection about the justice and fairness of God in choosing some people for heaven and passing over others. How can God be just if he determines that one person will be his and will go to heaven, while another is passed over and remains under condemnation?" Paul answers the objection by directing us to the fundamental truth that salvation is not a matter of justice but a matter of mercy. If you think that salvation means receiving exactly what you deserve, then you have completely misunderstood the biblical teaching of salvation. Salvation is not something sinners can demand from God as their rightful due. It is mercy freely given to those who deserve judgment.
- In verse 19, Paul went on to respond to another question. Paul anticipates another objection from someone else on the fringes of the congregation in Rome, and he responds. He writes, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?'" If God has supreme control, then how can I be held responsible for my actions? Someone might say, I cannot resist anything by myself, and therefore, I am not responsible for what happens to me. How can we be responsible if God is sovereign?

➤ **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION.**

- This question brings us directly to the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. Ten times in the book of Exodus, we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, yet ten times we are also told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Here we see both truths standing side by side: God is sovereign, and man is responsible. I do not fully understand how these two truths operate together. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are like two parallel lines that run alongside one another, and we do not know where they meet. God alone knows how these truths are perfectly reconciled. We should not be surprised that creatures like us cannot comprehend everything that lies within the mind of our infinite God. There are truths we will never fully understand, even if we lived for hundreds of years and attained every academic qualification available to us.

- Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” What God has revealed belongs to us, and we are to believe and obey it. John Calvin seems to have captured this principle when he said, “When God makes an end of teaching, it behooves us to cease from wishing to be wise.” When God has finished revealing what He wants us to know, we should not insist on discovering what He has chosen to keep secret. So let us gladly affirm that there is a real relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, even though we do not know precisely how the two meet or are reconciled. There may be theories that attempt to explain it, but there can be no complete theology of that secret relationship because it belongs to God alone. It is one of those mysteries that God has not chosen to reveal to us.

➤ **PAUL’S RESPONSE TO THE OBJECTION IN VERSE 19.**

- 19 One of you will say to me, “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” Paul’s answer to the objector is found in verse 20: “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?” Paul is not going to give the objector the answer he demands. Instead, he tells him why the question itself is wrong. Paul does not attempt to defend God because God does not need to answer to anyone for His actions. We have no right to question the wisdom, justice, or actions of God simply because there are things we do not understand. What we do know is that everything God does is wise, good, righteous, and holy.
- God, in His infinite wisdom, has foreordained everything that takes place in this world. Nothing that happens in this world or in your life takes Him by surprise. God’s foreordination was behind the actions of Joseph’s brothers when they sold him into slavery in Egypt. Behind their sinful decision was the sovereign purpose of God, so that Joseph could eventually say to them, “It was not you who sent me here, but God.” God’s foreordination is comprehensive. It extends over the whole course of human history and over every event in His creation. Nothing falls outside the sovereign government of God.
- Yet we must equally affirm human responsibility in this event. Joseph said to his brothers, “You sold me into slavery.” Their actions were truly their own actions. God did not force them to commit that evil. Peter likewise told the men who, according to God’s predetermined plan, crucified His Son that they, with their wicked hands, had taken Him and put Him to death. Neither Peter nor Paul suggests that God’s sovereignty removes human guilt. God’s sovereignty stands, and human responsibility stands alongside it. All things are foreordained by God, and yet God still holds men accountable for their actions.
- There is God’s sovereignty, and there is human responsibility. Within that responsibility, there is also an element of freedom, because responsibility requires that man genuinely make choices for which he is accountable. If we are going to remain faithful to the whole teaching of Scripture, we must affirm both

truths. We affirm the foreordination and sovereignty of God, while also affirming the responsibility and freedom of man. You sometimes hear it said, "Calvinism affirms divine sovereignty, while Arminianism affirms human responsibility." That is a gross oversimplification. Every Christian is called to consider the whole Bible and seek to understand everything Scripture teaches, because all Scripture is inspired by God.

- Our politicians and our culture often encourage people to think of themselves primarily as victims. Certain groups in American society are told that they are prisoners of their background, their circumstances, their heredity, their DNA, their environment, or their education. They are told that they are victims and therefore not responsible for how they live or for the choices they make. But the Bible declares that our God reigns and that He does according to His will among the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Yes, God is sovereign! But that same Bible also teaches human responsibility. Man is accountable to God regardless of his background, DNA, circumstances, or environment. Man has genuine freedom in the choices he makes, the words he speaks, and the actions he performs, and therefore, he is answerable to God for them. In many ways, it is precisely because God is sovereign that man is responsible. The creature must answer to his Creator. Man, who lives and moves and has his being in God, must give an account to God.
- "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" Paul writes. How limited are the abilities of a mere human being! When it comes to understanding God and even understanding ourselves, we are like pygmies. Our knowledge is incredibly small compared with the infinite knowledge of God. God is our Creator. We stand before Him as creatures. Everything God does is right, while nothing we do is truly right unless it is energized by His Spirit and brought into conformity with His will. He possesses all knowledge, while our knowledge is limited. Yet we know this much: He loves His people, He knows what He is doing, and He will never wrong us in anything that happens to us. What Christ said to Peter in another context applies here. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, and Jesus told him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand" (John 13:7).
- The same principle applies to the sovereignty of God. The fact that our heavenly Father tells us that He has His reasons for doing something should be entirely sufficient for His children. If someone complains that God is finding fault with people for actions that He Himself has foreordained, that complaint only exposes the rebelliousness of the human heart. If God's Word tells us that He works all things according to the counsel of His own will, that should be enough for us. We do not need to know every detail of how His sovereignty and our responsibility fit together. We need to trust the God who knows everything and who has promised never to do anything unjust.
- The last thing in the world any sinner should desire is to stand before God demanding justice on the basis of his own righteousness. I wish I could

communicate to you the depth of gratitude I have toward God that I will never have to face the naked flame of divine justice in my own name. I cast myself entirely upon God's grace, His mercy, His pity, and His compassion. My relationship with God is through the cross of Christ. I come to God through the Mediator, never in my own name. My own name and righteousness are worthless before Him. I am saying that there is no unrighteousness with God. It is utterly unthinkable that there should be injustice and unfairness in God.

- When God pardons my sins, John tells me that He is faithful and just to forgive me my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness, because my pardon comes to me through the cross of Christ. Christ was judged justly in our place, and we are pardoned because our guilt was laid upon Him. He died in our place, and therefore we now live for Him and with Him. As we continue through this life, we will discover that every objection raised against God will ultimately prove empty. God assures us that He knows exactly what He is doing. Paul has already told us in verse 16 that salvation "does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Salvation is not ultimately of the "willer" or the "runner," but of the great "Pitier." So ask yourself: Would you rather have the desire for salvation resting in your own cold and sinful heart, or in the great and loving heart of the God who sent His Son to die for our sins?

➤ **THE POTTER HAS TOTAL RIGHT OVER THE CLAY.**

- 20. "But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?" Paul continues, "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21. "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?"
- Can you picture the cartoon? There is a lump of clay sitting on the potter's bench, and suddenly a mouth forms in the clay. The clay begins to complain to the potter: "Oh no! You are not going to make another three ducks out of me, are you? You are going to put me on somebody's living-room wall again! I want to be something different. I want to be a beautiful white swan!" But the clay has no life of its own, no independent authority, and no right to determine what the potter will make from it. The decision belongs entirely to the potter. That is the picture Paul gives us of the relationship between God and man. We are the clay, and God is the Potter.
- A potter can shape a piece of clay into whatever form he desires. He can assign it whatever purpose he chooses. He can use it for whatever end he intends. One piece of clay might become an ordinary chamber pot, while another might become a beautiful ballerina standing on her toes, arms extended, displaying extraordinary elegance and poise. One vessel may be made for an ordinary purpose, hidden away under a bed at night, while another may be placed in a glass cabinet, carefully preserved and admired for generations.

- And this is the relationship in which every man and woman stands before God. God has the sovereign right to give his creatures whatever form, purpose, and destiny he pleases. This is how the early Christians understood themselves. They possessed an incomparable treasure: Jesus Christ. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. They had the Son of God dwelling within them. God had caused his light to shine into their hearts so that they could know his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Yet what were they in themselves? They were merely jars of clay. Paul says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). They understood that they were earthen vessels. They knew that everything valuable in them came from God.
- Why did they see themselves in this way? First, because man is a creature. God created us, sustains us, and gives us every breath we take. We live and move and have our being in him. God, therefore, has absolute authority over everything he has made. And I ask you: Do we really have the right to question that? But there is something more. We are not merely creatures in the hands of our Creator; we are sinners in the hands of a holy God. We are not beings who deserve something from God. We are not even beings who deserve anything. We are sinners who deserve condemnation. We deserve to be exposed to the righteous judgment of a God who hates sin. We have no claims upon God as creatures, and we have even fewer claims upon him as sinners. This is the biblical background to Paul's teaching about election. Man has fallen. Man is a rebel. Man is naturally at enmity with God. Scripture tells us that the thoughts and intentions of the human heart are continually evil, that we are dead in trespasses and sins, that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked.
- And yet we live every moment at the discretion of the Almighty. Our entire existence is in his hands. He has unquestioned authority over his creation, even over those who have rebelled against him. God is the Potter, and we are the clay. He has been at work in our lives every moment of our existence. Think about it: every beat of your heart, every breath you breathe, every lesson you have learned, every ability you possess, every opportunity you receive, and every moment of your life is sustained by God. We are clay in the hands of the Potter.
- So what should my response be to being clay in the hands of God, my Creator and my Potter? That is the question we must ask ourselves. Do I realize that I understand God no more than a worm understands me? Do I understand that I am not merely a creature standing before God, but a sinful creature standing before a holy God? And therefore, am I willing to submit?
- Paul has no other answer to our resistance to God's supreme authority than the answer God gave to Job. Job had lost his possessions, his children, his health, and even the support of his wife. He had suffered terribly, and eventually, he began to struggle with what God was doing. His friends insisted that he must

have committed some terrible secret sin and needed to confess it. But God had to expose Job's pride and the foolishness of his resentment.

- The Lord asked Job in Job 40:1, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer God." He was humbled. He answered, "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4–5). Job became silent, but God continued to question him: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:8). God was bringing Job to understand what he had been doing. In questioning God, Job had been attempting to justify himself.
- Finally, Job gave his last answer to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know... My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:2–6). These words are Job's final recorded words. He does not argue with God again. He does not demand an explanation. He does not attempt to justify himself by condemning God. Instead, he is brought to where every Christian must ultimately be brought: standing before the glory and majesty of Almighty God, where every mouth is silenced, and no creature can condemn God in order to justify himself.
- I do not know why God loved me. I do not know why he chose me, or why he has shown mercy to many of you. He had no obligation to love us. He had no reason to choose us based on anything good in us. Why should we not have been passed by? We deserved nothing better. But I know this: the Lord is holy, wise in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. I do not understand the mysterious way in which divine sovereignty and human responsibility fit together. I do not know where those two truths meet or how God reconciles them in his infinite wisdom. But I do know that my God is righteous. And I know that God's glory shines most brightly in the anguish of Calvary, in the incarnate love displayed at the cross. There is nothing in God's election and nothing in his predestination that contradicts the love that gave his Son for the salvation of sinners.
- My eyes must be fixed upon the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. And the assurance I need is this: election is the election of God. Therefore, I will not stand before God accusing him of immorality or injustice. I will not protest that his sovereign election is arbitrary or wrong. I will remember that I am a man, and I am a sinner, while God is righteous and holy in all his ways. I must learn to trust what I cannot fully understand because I know the character of the One who has spoken.
- What would I have done if God had commanded Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering"? Where is the human logic in that command? Where is the morality we would expect? Yet

Abraham trusted the God who had spoken. I must learn the same lesson: I am a man, and I am a sinner; God is God, and he is righteous and holy in all his ways. The ultimate justification for God's sovereign election is that it is God's election. He is the Potter, and we are the clay. He is the Creator, and we are his creatures. He is the sovereign Lord, and we are called to trust, worship, and submit. And when I cannot understand why he chose me, I will not accuse him. I will bow before him and marvel that he loved me with an everlasting love.

- And one day, when I stand in his presence and see him in all his glory, I will understand more fully what I can only believe now: that all his ways are righteous, all his judgments are just, and all his purposes are good. Therefore, let every objection be silenced, let every proud thought be humbled, and let every redeemed sinner say: "To God alone be the glory."

➤ **SOME CLAY IS MADE FOR NOBLE PURPOSES, SAYS PAUL.**

- Paul uses the expression "noble purposes" in verse 21 to describe the work of God in choosing and shaping His elect. But what exactly are God's noble purposes for His people? The elect were created for the great purpose of glorifying God, fearing Him, and enjoying Him forever. Their purpose was not to make a name for themselves. It was not even primarily to become comfortable, successful, or constantly happy. Their highest calling was to glorify God in everything they did. So after every achievement, every new understanding, every victory, and every blessing, the question must always be: "To whom does the glory belong?"
- Did they perfectly keep the law of God? No. Were they completely sincere and blameless in everything they did? No. Did they somehow accomplish reconciliation with God by their own efforts? No. Who devised the plan of redemption? God. Who provided the Lamb? God. Who bore the entire cost of their salvation? The Lord. Who satisfied the wrath of a holy God against sin? The Lord. Who died for their sins? The Lord. Who rose again from the dead? The Lord.
- How little they deserve to boast in themselves when they consider what Christ has done for them! He took their sin upon Himself and bore it deep within His own heart. He carried their guilt in His own body upon the tree. He endured everything their sins deserved. He made peace through the blood of His cross. Therefore, when we look at our salvation, we must never turn the spotlight upon ourselves. We must look to Christ and say, "He did it all." Salvation is designed in such a way that all the glory belongs to God.
- And who sustains them throughout the Christian life? Surely, we might think, after God saves them, the transformation that follows must be their own achievement. Surely their changed lives, their growth in holiness, and their perseverance must somehow belong to them. But no. The same God who began the good work in them is the God who continues that work and will bring it to

completion on the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). The same God works all things together for their good because they have been called according to His purpose. The same God has promised that nothing can separate them from His love in Christ Jesus. He gives them the wonderful assurance that one day they will see Christ as He truly is and will be with Him forever. They are being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

- How can the apostle be so confident about these things? How can he assure believers that they have been grasped by a love that will never let them go? Because their salvation does not ultimately rest upon their decision, their consistency, or their strength. Their perseverance does not depend upon their ability to hold themselves securely to Christ. Jesus is their Shepherd and the Guardian of their souls. He lives to intercede for them, and He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him. Paul knows that he is the object of Christ's invincible determination to save. The One who endured the agony of Gethsemane, shed His precious blood, and tasted death for His people will certainly preserve everyone for whom He died.
- God will preserve these fragile jars of clay through every difficulty and trial. He will keep them as they pass through the fire and through deep waters. He will preserve them as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. He will protect them when they are attacked by spiritual powers, by the rulers of the darkness of this world, and by every enemy of their souls. He will keep them through the sorrows of things present and the uncertainties of things to come.
- Paul himself experienced terrible days. There were times when his outward man was wasting away. There were moments when he was crushed beneath burdens that seemed almost unbearable. He knew failure and opposition. He carried the weight of his own weakness and guilt. He endured the thorn in the flesh, demonic opposition, the hatred of the world, persecution, and the immense burden of caring for all the churches. How deeply these things troubled him! Yet none of them could ever tear him from the loving grip of his heavenly Father.
- He could say, in effect, "He will keep me fast because he loves me." God had laid hold of Paul, and no power could snatch him from God's hands. Therefore, even in the midst of suffering, there was still a song in his heart. Paul exhorted others to "rejoice in the Lord," and he practiced what he preached. Why could he rejoice? Because the love of God had broken into his life, and that love was not weak, temporary, or uncertain. It was a sovereign love determined to keep him to the very end. The God who chose him would preserve him. The Christ who died for him would intercede for him. The Spirit who began the work in him would complete it. And Paul knew that one day he would finally be where his Lord was.
- That is the confidence of the Christian: the God who begins salvation is the God who completes it. The God who calls his people is the God who keeps them. And the God who keeps them will bring them safely home.

➤ **CONCLUSION.**

- How can I know that God has made me for noble purposes? In other words, how can I know that I am one of God's elect, one of His chosen people? The answer is this: Do I have Christ? If I have Christ, then I can know that God has determined to make me one of His vessels, prepared for the most noble of purposes. Remember how powerfully, eloquently, poetically, and movingly the prophet Isaiah preached. His preaching was great. It was Spirit-anointed preaching. Isaiah proclaimed the coming Messiah as the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Yet to many who heard him, the Messiah appeared to be "a root out of dry ground." There was no beauty in Him that they desired. They did not want Him. They did not see anything attractive in Him. And Isaiah cried out, "Who has believed our message?" The people had rejected the Messiah whom Isaiah had proclaimed. They had rejected the promised Seed of the woman. They did not desire Him.
- But we must understand that the natural man cannot receive Christ by his own power. Left to himself, he cannot even desire Christ as he ought. A person may want to become a church member. He may even desire to become a minister. He may want to attend seminary, study theology, preach sermons, and become deeply involved in religious activities. But none of those things necessarily mean that he wants Jesus Christ as his Sovereign Lord and Savior. Christ, as He is revealed in Scripture, has no natural attractiveness to the fallen human heart. Therefore, I am saying that one of the great pieces of evidence that a person has been chosen by God is that he has a genuine desire for the Christ of the Bible and knows that he desperately needs Him. Do you want Christ? Do you need Christ? Do you desire Christ?
- That desire itself is evidence of God's gracious work in your heart. You may not possess a strong faith. You may not have a heroic faith. You may not have the kind of faith that seems capable of moving mountains. But if you have a faith that longs for Christ, a faith that yearns for Christ, a faith that knows it desperately needs Christ, then you have the kind of faith that brings a sinner to Christ and receives Him as Savior. The great evidence of our election is that we have Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is, deep within us, an elemental yearning, urgency, and longing to have Christ for our souls. We cannot be satisfied without Him. If losing Christ would leave us utterly desolate, if the thought of living without Him grieves us, if the thought that Christ is not who the Bible declares Him to be would devastate us, then these are powerful indications of God's gracious work within us. They are signs that God has made us vessels prepared for a wonderfully noble purpose.
- Is that longing in you today? AMEN.