

## Response to the Critics Who Blame God for Negative Volition (vv. 19-24)

**VERSE 19** You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault (Ἐρεῖς μοι οὖν, Τί [οὖν] ἔτι μέμφεται; [fut.act.ind. 2s. eipon say + pro.dat.s. ego "me" + conj. oun then + interrog.adv. ti who? + conj. oun then + adv. eti still + pre.dep.ind.3s. memphomai find fault])?"

**For who resists His will** (τῷ γὰρ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ τίς ἀνθέστηκεν [conj. gar for + d.a.w/noun dat.nt.s. boulema will + pro.gen.m.s. autos "His" + interrog. tis who? + pf.act.ind.3s. anthistemi resist])?"

ANALYSIS: VERSE 19

1. Paul anticipates an inevitable objection to God's decision to harden some, and not others.
2. The objection arises from the statement in v. 18 (read).
3. The would-be critic is hostile to the exercise of sovereignty over mankind in the discrimination between the two groups.
4. He asserts that God is unfair since He made us this way, or that.
5. To the critic God cannot rightly find fault with unbelievers since He made them what they are.
6. The critic questions the prerogative to harden some, while showing mercy to others.
7. Since no one can resist the hardening process people are not to blame, the critic contends.
8. As in Rom. 3:5-8 the attempt to exonerate negative volition, and thus, to condemn God is naïve.
9. To be naïve is to exhibit a lack of informed judgment.
10. It is true that no one can successfully interfere with God's choice to show mercy toward some, and to harden others.
11. But to assert that God is arbitrary is to display gross ignorance of the function of the divine attributes with special emphasis on omniscience.
12. At the root of God's actions toward humans is His eternal foreknowledge (cf. Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20).
13. This explains how God could love Jacob and hate Esau while they were still in the womb, and had done neither good nor evil.
14. God's action toward each and every person is not based on His sovereignty, but arises from His omniscience.
15. If God's decision to bless some and curse others was based strictly on His sovereignty, this would render Him unjust and capricious.
16. To interpret chapter nine apart not taking into account divine omniscience (e.g. foreknowledge) is to misapply and interpret it in the broader context of Scripture.
17. This is the grave failure of Calvinism.
18. God honors positive volition even before a person becomes a living soul.
19. Again, review Romans 8 verses 29 & 30.
20. The critic has an underlying agenda to justify his rejection of God and His word.
21. The critic wants to blame God for negative volition, if what Paul asserts in v. 18 is true.
22. God carries out His resolutions and no person is able to override them.

23. Divine sovereignty functions in response to divine omniscience.  
 24. Hardening Pharaoh's heart is no problem as Pharaoh had a predisposition to be hostile to God and His plan.

Refuting the Critic (vv 20-21)

**VERSE 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God** (ὦ

ἄνθρωπε, μενοῦνγε σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ ἀνταποκρινόμενος τῷ θεῷ [*interj. O! + noun voc.m.s. anthropos + part. menoun on the contrary + pro.2s. su + interrog. tis "who?" + pres.act.ind.2s. eimi + d.a.w/pres.dep.part.nom.m.s. anapokrinomai answer back + d.a.w/noun dat.m.s. theos*]?)

**The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will**

**it** (μὴ ἐρεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι, Τί με ἐποίησας οὕτως [*neg me not + fut.act.ind.3s. eipon say + d.a.w/noun nom.nt.s. paloma thing molded + d.a.w/aor.act.part.dat.m.s. plasso form, mold + adv. tis "why?" + pro.acc.s. ego + aor.act.ind.2s. poieo do, make + adv. houto thus, in this way*]?)?"

**VERSE 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** (ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν ὁ κεραμεὺς τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ φυράματος ποιῆσαι ὃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν σκεῦος ὃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν [*conj. e or + neg ouk not + pres.act.ind.3s. echo have + noun acc.f.s. exousia authority + d.a.w/noun nom.m.s. kerameis potter + d.a.w/noun gen.m.s. pelos clay + prep ek + d.a.w/noun gen.m.s. phurama lump + pro.gen.nt.s "same" + aor.act.infin. poieo do, make + rel.pro.acc.nt.s. hos "one" + conj. me + prep eis + noun acc.f.s. time honor + noun acc.nt.s. skeuos vessel + pro.acc.nt.s. hos "another" + conj. de and + prep. eis for + noun acc.f.s. atimia dishonor; common*]?)?

**ANALYSIS: VERSES 20-21**

1. The critic is anyone who presumes to call God into account for creating humans and assigning them mercy or hardness of heart is here rebuked as arrogant and presumptuous ("who are you?").

2. In such an instance we have a finite human critic whose very existence, body and soul, depended on God in the first place.
3. The ill-informed critic asserts that the system is unfair.
4. To him God made people the way they are: negative or positive.
5. In these two verses Paul sets forth God's moral right to assign individuals a particular body-soul combination.
6. The hostile critic of God's decision to bring into existence those who would prove themselves negative is met here with a strong rebuke.
7. The fact is God does this every day and in every era.
8. Such types should focus on the essence of God, and withhold final conclusions, and wait for wisdom.
9. To engage in this futile attack on the integrity of God is to assume equality with God (cf. Isa. 29:16 ; 45:9).
10. To bring people into existence that God knows will be negative and will ultimately perish in the LOF is totally compatible with His +R and J.
11. Following the rebuke in v. 20a Paul presents two rhetorical questions in vv. 20b and 21 to demonstrate how stupid and presumptuous it is to call God into question.
12. He introduces an analogy of the sculptor and the item made by the sculptor.
13. This illustrates the different body types within the human race.
14. As a sculptor has the right to fashion from raw material anything he so chooses, so God has the right to mold the outer man as He pleases.
15. God has total freedom in this regard just as a "molder" (sculptor) has freedom to make an object of art as he sees fit (v. 20b).
16. Of course no object would object to its final form, as it is inanimate, so should the hostile critic keep his mouth shut recognizing who he is dealing with!
17. The first analogy is the art of sculpting (v. 20b), while the second analogy views humanity coming from a single lump of clay/mud (v. 21).
18. Pottery is in view in v. 21.
19. A potter may choose to make two vessels from a single lump of clay.
20. This illustrates the two broad classifications of humanity—the redeemed and the unredeemed.
21. All mankind derives existence from one genetic source (Adam and Eve).
22. God has the freedom to bring into existence vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor.
23. Vessels have a destiny that the potter assigns to them.
24. When the potter sits down at the potter's wheel he assigns one portion of the single lump to honor. and the other for dishonor.
25. Other verses where the Bible uses this figure for the human body (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thess. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 2:27).
26. As the potter may assign one portion of the lump for an ornamental vase (hold flowers), and another for a chamber pot who would question him for this?
27. God has the right to bring into existence two classes of humanity knowing that most will end up vessels of dishonor.
28. The point of the analogy is that God reserves this right based on the broader context of the WOG which recognizes volition, culpability, and divine foreknowledge.
29. Calvinism appeals to this very verse to justify the misapplication of the attribute of sovereignty, ignoring its logical precursor—omniscience.

30. To decree some to salvation, and the others to perdition is to blaspheme the fairness of God.
31. God does not play favorites.
32. The analogy of the potter is restricted to what God is free to do in response to what He already knows about each and every person.
33. Based on what He already knows from eternity past, God is free to make use of any vessel, and so cannot be rightly blamed if the vessel is assigned the status of dishonor.
34. God used the Pharaoh of the Exodus to bring glory to His name among the nations.
35. So God is free to harden the hearts of men in response to their unbelief.
36. God knew, in the case of Pharaoh, that further plague-miracles would only lead to a further hardening of heart, and Pharaoh would do exactly what was needed to exalt the God of the Hebrews before the nations.
37. This section is designed to answer the question: is God responsible for evil?
38. Evil is the product of free will operating at odds with God's perfect righteousness.
39. A person is not doomed to negative volition and eternal wrath as there are those who have of their own free will chosen to be vessels of honor.
40. God is free to create angels and men He knew would rebel against Him and perish.