

(This was to be an extra appendix for the Modernized Edition of Pink's Sovereignty of God. I decided not to include it so as not to detract from the overall purpose of the book.—John Formsma)

Mr. Pink is to be commended for his unyielding tenacity to Scripture, always making it the standard, regardless of what man might think. I have always appreciated this fearlessness in his writings. However, in this book, Pink was perhaps too close to the distortion of double predestination. That is, implying that God actively wills the damnation of the non-elect in the same way He actively wills the salvation of the elect, and that He shapes them both like clay to their predestined ends. This appendix has two objectives. First, to point the reader to a more correct Biblical understanding of the verses from Romans 9 that Pink used to explain the ramifications of God's eternal choices. Second, to point out that a proper understanding of Romans 9 is a glorious promise FOR faith, even to those who appear to be forever lost.

In his attempt to explain God's sovereign choice of those who are to be saved or damned, Pink's basic logic is good, at least as much as finite humans are able to comprehend it. God, in eternity past, purposed to create a certain way according to His eternal purposes. After creation, now things cannot be altered from those purposes. Therefore, those God chose to save will be saved; those God passed by will be damned. From God's perspective, those things are immutable. This reasoning can be seen by the following quotations.

“God had a definite reason why He created men, a specific purpose why He created this individual and that individual, and in view of the eternal destination of His creatures, He purposed either that this one should spend eternity in Heaven, or that this one should spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. If then He foresaw that in creating a certain person that that person would despise and reject the Savior, yet knowing this beforehand He, nevertheless, brought that person into existence, then it is clear He designed and ordained that that person should be eternally lost. Again, faith is God's gift, and the purpose to give it only to some, involves the purpose not to give it to others. Without faith there is no salvation—‘He who does not believe will be condemned.’ Hence, if there were some of Adam's descendants to whom He purposed not to give faith, it must be because He ordained that they should be damned.”

In Chapter 5, Pink said:

“Now all will acknowledge that before the foundation of the world God certainly foreknew and foresaw who would and who would not receive Christ as their Savior; therefore in giving being and birth to those He knew would reject Christ, He necessarily created them unto damnation. All that can be said in reply to this is, No, while God did foreknow these would reject Christ, yet He did not decree that they should. But this is a begging of the real question at issue. God had a definite reason why He created men, a specific purpose why He created this individual and that individual, and in view of the eternal destination of His creatures, He purposed either that this one should spend eternity in Heaven, or that this one should spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. If then He foresaw that in creating a certain person that that person would despise and reject the Savior, yet knowing this beforehand He, nevertheless, brought that person into existence, then it is clear He designed and ordained that that person should be eternally lost. Again, faith is God’s gift, and the purpose to give it only to some, involves the purpose not to give it to others. Without faith there is no salvation—‘He who does not believe will be condemned.’ Hence, if there were some of Adam’s descendants to whom He purposed not to give faith, it must be because He ordained that they should be damned.”

The above two quotes are certainly true, inasmuch as our small finite human minds can comprehend it. God’s creating set in motion everything that comes to pass in time, and everything is now happening according to that eternal purpose.

It might have been better had Pink stopped with those more general statements. However, Pink erred in the application of the potter and clay metaphor. He said, “These verses represent *fallen mankind* as inert and as impotent as a lump of lifeless clay.” In the same paragraph he wrote, “Let man contend with his Maker as he will; the fact remains that he is nothing more than clay in the Heavenly Potter’s hands, and while we know that God will deal justly with His creatures, that the Judge of all the earth will do right; nevertheless, He shapes His vessels for His own purpose and according to His own pleasure.”

It is true that fallen man must have divine assistance, and it is also true that God makes vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor. What is not true is that Romans 9 refers to all men *in general*, and that the Potter shaping the

clay refers *in general* to God's predestining of men to their eternal destruction. Rather than Romans 9 being a proof of God's sovereignty in reprobation, we should understand it in its context of Paul's plea FOR faith to *avoid* eternal destruction.

Some groundwork is required before we look at how Pink misunderstood the clay/potter metaphor. Each of the following points could be written about at length. However, all I will do in this appendix is mention them briefly so we can then examine how Pink misinterpreted the metaphor.

Romans is more than the explication of the doctrine of justification by faith. We love that doctrine, of course, but there is much more that just that in the letter to the Romans. For instance, there is a long, multi-chapter section explaining a dilemma that was quickly approaching that generation then alive. Namely, if God's intention was that the "kingdom of God will be taken from [the Jews] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt 21:43), what would that say about God's yet-unfulfilled promises to Abraham? Could they continue if natural Israel were destroyed? Would God not have broken His covenant with Abraham? How could the Gentile nations be blessed and transformed if God ends His covenant with Israel? Paul digs deep into the mine of Old Testament prophecy to show that God's purpose had always been to finally put away a "disobedient and contrary people" (Rom 10:21).

Also apparent in Paul's mind was the massive struggle between two groups, both claiming to be children of Abraham, and the true sons of Yahweh. One group was fleshly or carnal, and the other group was spiritual. Those of the flesh were led by the Judaizers, the natural-born descendants of Abraham. Over decades they had perverted the covenants into an actual system of works-righteousness. They had twisted the gracious covenants into a system of legal righteousness (see Rom 10:3), and they were fierce enemies of the true children of Abraham: those "of the Spirit," or those "in Christ," the True Israel. One of Paul's purposes in Romans was to show which of these two groups were the true descendants of Abraham and, therefore, the true sons of Yahweh. Each group made their claims, and in the forty years after Christ's resurrection, there was a vicious battle between them—who would be proved right in the end? Jesus had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in AD70, and while no man knew the day or the hour, Paul knew that it was looming and would happen within that generation still alive (Matt 24:34). One of the things Paul anticipates is how

to think through all the world-changing promises made to Abraham centuries before. Once Jerusalem and the temple system was destroyed, it would appear that God had broken His covenant since He destroyed those who claimed to be children of Abraham, along with their temple. These and other questions Paul wants to answer in advance because he knew the Spirit would soon gain the victory over the flesh.

Romans 9 is in that long section, and by using the examples of Jacob and Esau, it is as if Paul is dissecting the covenants, using a microscope to examine one of the tissues of God's covenantal purposes. He begins to wrap up his chapters-long argument that natural generation and circumcision were never enough—that God had always dealt *spiritually* with the elect and non-elect *descendants of Abraham*, both before and after the Law given through Moses. Because the contextual contrast is between believing Jews and unbelieving Jews, it forces the conclusion that the two types of vessels made from one lump of clay are *Jewish* vessels, and not all mankind in general. Paul uses the example of Jacob and Esau to make this point. Jacob and Esau were from the same metaphorical lump of clay. They not only came from the same parents, but were twins together in the same womb. Though their parents and gestation were the same, their covenantal destinies were different because God had chosen to be in covenant with Jacob but not Esau. Paul argues this way to show that unbelieving Jews could not trust in their lineage or their circumcision. They needed to be more than fleshly children like Esau—they needed to become spiritual children like Jacob.

With the above in view, it should be clear that the “same lump” refers to Jacob and Esau, and by extension, believing and unbelieving Jews, and does not refer to a lump of humanity in general. This directly relates to the next section.

I want to look now at what is *intended* in the example of the potter and the clay. As we will see from the quotes below, Pink asserts that God, as the Potter, actively shapes the destinies of men, and that this shaping is according to His eternal purpose. Pink makes it sound as if man has absolutely no choice in the matter of his reprobation. At first glance, and especially for a Calvinist, this appears to make logical sense. For if God has eternal purposes, won't that manifest itself in the destinies of men? Won't men, at least in some sense, be unable to prevent themselves from being a vessel unto dishonor? But Paul did not intend this at all. In fact, the way

Paul used this metaphor is far more wonderful, encouraging, and glorious. It is filled with so much hope for the believing sinner! Now, it might make some Arminians glad and some Calvinists mad. Nevertheless, as Mr. Pink himself so often said, we MUST conform our thoughts and ways to God's thoughts and ways.

Now let us look at the quotes. The notable phrases are italicized.

Pink says about Romans 9:21-23,

*“These verses represent fallen mankind as inert and as impotent as a lump of lifeless clay. This scripture evidences that there is ‘no difference,’ in themselves, between the elect and the non-elect; they are clay of ‘the same lump,’ which agrees with Ephesians 2:3, where we are told that all are by nature ‘children of wrath.’ It teaches us that the ultimate destiny of every individual is decided by the will of God, and blessed it is that such be the case! If it were left to our wills, the ultimate destination of all of us would be the Lake of Fire. It declares that God Himself does make a difference in the respective destinations to which He assigns His creatures, for one vessel is made ‘for honor and another for dishonor’; some are ‘vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,’ while others are ‘vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory.’ ... Let man contend with his Maker as he will; the fact remains that he is nothing more than clay in the Heavenly Potter’s hands, and while we know that God will deal justly with His creatures, that the Judge of all the earth will do right; nevertheless, He shapes His vessels for His own purpose and according to His own pleasure. God claims the indisputable right to do as He wills with His own. Not only has God the right to do as He wills with the creatures of His own hands, but He exercises this right, and nowhere is that seen more plainly than in His predestinating grace.”*

Now, I wholeheartedly love the last sentence of this long paragraph! Yes, God has the right to do as He wills—regardless of what man thinks of it. Pink used the Potter shaping the clay into vessels of honor and dishonor to attempt to prove both predestination and reprobation. But, was this Paul's (and God's) intention in the example of the potter? Certainly not, as is clear from the context and also from the Old Testament potter to which he alludes. Instead of teaching inevitable reprobation, Paul was teaching that they *could* come to God through Christ *to avoid* becoming a vessel of dishonor to perish eternally.

The context of Romans 9-11 militantly argues against the idea that a man cannot prevent or change his becoming a vessel of dishonor. Paul wanted to shock unbelieving Jews into real and active faith in Christ. He was grieved over his own people, but himself said it was his earnest desire and prayer that Israel may be saved, and that he was using any and all means to provoke to jealousy his kinsmen *in order to save* some of them (Rom 10:1; 11:14)! If it were actually impossible to prevent some of them from becoming vessels of dishonor, why write three chapters on it if their reprobation were inevitable? If it were impossible to prevent it, how could he have *any* hope whatsoever that any of them could be saved?

Now, let's look at the Old Testament passages from which Paul takes this metaphor. In Romans 9:20, Paul alludes first to Isaiah 26:19; then, in v.21, he shifts focus to Jeremiah 18. This is the key to properly understanding his argument in Romans 9. This proper understanding leads to an exuberant evangelical joy rather than any sort of constraining "Calvinistic" fatalism. Isaiah 26:19 essentially says what Paul says in Romans 9:20, that the potter has the right to do with the clay as he sees fit. But this should not be taken to mean that God actively forces people into a mold for which He has eternally predestined them, with no possibility of escape. It's the exact opposite, as we will see from Jeremiah 18.

Jeremiah 18:1-12 can be summarized as follows. God commanded Jeremiah to go to the potter and wait for God's message. As Jeremiah observed the potter, the vessel he was shaping from the wet clay became ruined, so he used that same clay, reshaping it into another vessel. The message God gave was this: Israel was like the clay in the potter's hand. But God was shaping them according to their response to Him! God tells them that if He threatens to bring disaster against a rebellious nation, it will happen... *unless* that nation turns from their evil. If a nation under God's blessing does evil, then He will stop the good to that nation. V.11 is the end of the matter: "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.'" God was telling them that with their repentance, He would shape them into a good vessel. With their continued evil, He would shape them into a bad vessel. Their response in v.12 is abysmal, and it was the same abysmal response given by so many of Paul's kinsmen according to the flesh. Those natural-born Jews

of his day ignored all of Jesus' warnings while He was on earth, and many of them ignored the warnings from heaven as Jesus spoke through the apostles. God was so incredibly kind in the forty years after the resurrection, continually offering true sonship to any of the rebellious Jews who repented and received their Messiah.

In Romans 9, the potter and the clay is not a metaphor proving the eternal and immutable rigidity of God's purposes; rather, it was evidence of God's desire to show mercy. Pink missed the intent of that passage, and applied it wrongly. If it were meant to prove reprobation, wouldn't it make more sense to use an example of a clay vessel *already fired and hardened*? But this isn't the example, and very thankfully so! It is wet, *moldable* clay, and the hearers and readers were to understand that their response could determine whether they would be a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor.

We must not forget the tenth chapter of Romans that follows this metaphor. Rather than Paul preaching to hardened clay vessels who cannot repent because God has not chosen them, he appeals to them in every possible manner because *it was still possible for them to repent*. And these were apostate, Christ-rejecting Jews! If the promise of the gospel was truly and sincerely offered to these apostates, can it not still be truly and sincerely offered and received by anyone today? Paul had personally experienced this mercy. As Saul of Tarsus, he was breathing out threats of murder toward Christians, but God had mercy on him, and seized him for Himself. If a Saul can be saved, certainly we must believe that the same grace is still available for the worst sinner today. Paul refers to his experience to encourage faith in others (1 Tim 1:12-17).

I find the metaphor of the potter and the clay so exhilarating. Rather than it being a hindrance to real and living faith, it encourages it. Let no one ever say, "I doubt that God could love such a one as I." Not so! As Calvinists, we need not hang our heads in shame over any of the Scripture. Yes, God has predestined the elect. From God's perspective, those things are immutable. But God has not shared His immutable secret purposes with man. Man must trust in God's revelation and must never think he is irredeemable. God has predestined the elect. But yes—gloriously, yes!—God also welcomes and eternally embraces all who repent and receive Christ as Lord and Savior. God still responds to man's repentance today, just as He would have in Jeremiah's day. We must direct sinners to their Lord, trusting that He will work in them as He sees fit. His gospel is a glorious gospel (2 Tim

1:11), and God is willing to receive any and all who turn to Him as revealed in the new covenant. Sinners have a Lord already, and He is abundantly willing to also be their Savior. This sovereign Lord has done everything required for them to turn, love, and serve Him. Therefore, we direct them to His work on their behalf, encouraging them to a living faith and a covenantal obedience of life on their part.

Though Pink misapplied parts of Romans 9, his overall work and legacy is still quite good. For instance, he did a fine job of calling sinners to faith and repentance, and we will end on this positive note to honor a truly Godly saint and faithful teacher. This is a quote from Chapter 8.

“In like manner, the sinner—every sinner—is responsible to call upon the Lord. Of himself he can neither repent nor believe. He can neither come to Christ nor turn from his sins. God tells him so; and his first duty is to certify ‘that God is true.’ His second duty is to cry unto God for His enabling power—to ask God in mercy to overcome his enmity, and ‘draw’ him to Christ; to give to him the gifts of repentance and faith. If he will do so, sincerely from the heart, then most surely God will respond to his appeal, for it is written, ‘For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Rom 10:13).”