

Isaiah 29:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Analysis

Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay הַפְּכָמָם אַמְ-קְחָמָר הַיְצָר (yitsbar)—their חַפְּךָ (hefekh, overturning, perversion) treats God like חָמָר (chomer, clay) to be molded. **For shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not?** (פִּי-יָמָר מְשֻׁשָּׁה לְעַשְׂהוֹ לֹא עָשָׂנִי) (ki-yomar ma'aseh le'osehu lo asani). **Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?** (וַיְצַר אָמָר לְיֹצְרָוּ לֹא בִּין) (veyetser amar leyotsro lo hevin)—the יֹצְרָה (yetser, thing formed) claims its יֹצֵר (yotser, potter/former) lacks בִּינָה (binah, understanding).

Paul develops this pottery metaphor extensively in Romans 9:19-21. The absurdity: clay criticizing the potter, creatures second-guessing Creator, finite man correcting the infinite God. Those who hide counsel from God have inverted the Creator-creature relationship. They act as if they formed God rather than vice versa, as if human wisdom exceeds divine understanding. This is cosmological rebellion, ontological presumption.

Historical Context

The pottery metaphor runs throughout Scripture (Jeremiah 18:1-10, Romans 9:21, 2 Timothy 2:20). Ancient Near Eastern potters possessed complete authority over clay. Isaiah's audience, familiar with pottery-making, would recognize the absurdity immediately. Yet they lived it: making political calculations as if they, not God, controlled history; devising strategies as if divine counsel were deficient.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. In what ways do we implicitly treat God as if He lacks understanding of our circumstances?
2. How does anxiety reveal that we've inverted the Creator-creature relationship?
3. What does it mean to embrace your status as 'clay' under the Potter's hands?

Interlinear Text

לְזִיכָּר וְ	כַּחֲמָר אֶם	סְפִּיכָּה מִ	סְפִּיכָּה מִ	לְזִיכָּר וְ	כַּחֲמָר אֶם	לְזִיכָּר וְ	כַּחֲמָר אֶם
Surely your turning of things upside down	H518	clay	as the potter's	סְפִּיכָּה מִ	H2563	לְזִיכָּר וְ	H3335
H2017				סְפִּיכָּה מִ		כַּחֲמָר אֶם	
שׁוֹלֵךְ בָּאָמָר יְמִינָה הַמְּצָמָע בְּרִאָה יְמִינָה בְּרִאָה	H3588	say	for shall the work	it He made	H3808	שׁוֹלֵךְ בָּאָמָר יְמִינָה הַמְּצָמָע בְּרִאָה יְמִינָה בְּרִאָה	H6213
shall be esteemed	H2803			it He made	H6213	it He made	H6213
מִתְּמַמֵּן בְּרִאָה יְמִינָה הַמְּצָמָע בְּרִאָה	H559						
me not or shall the thing framed	H3336	say	as the potter's	H3808			
		H559	H3335				
בְּבִין:							
it He had no understanding	H995						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 64:8 (Parallel theme): But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

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