

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 (הִפְכֶּם אִם־כֹּחֶמֶר הַיֹּצֵר יִחְשָׁב, hafkekhem im-kechomer hayotser yechasev)—their הִפָּךְ (hefekh, overturning, perversion) treats God like כֹּחֶמֶר (chomer, clay) to be molded. **For shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not?** (כִּי־יֹאמַר מַעֲשֵׂה לַעֲשֵׂהוּ לֹא אֶשְׁנִי, ki-yomar ma'aseh le'osehu lo asani). **Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?** (וַיֹּצֵר אָמַר לַיּוֹצֵר לֹא הָבִין, veyetser amar leyotsro lo hevin)—the יֹצֵר (yetser, thing formed) claims its יוֹצֵר (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

הָפִכְךָ מ	אֶם	כֹּחַ מָר	לִיצֹר ו			
Surely your turning of things upside down	H518	clay	as the potter's			
H2017		H2563	H3335			
יִחָשׁ ב	אָמַר ר	מַעֲשֵׂה ה	עָשָׂה נִי	ל א	עָשָׂה נִי	
shall be esteemed	H3588	say	for shall the work	it He made	H3808	it He made
H2803	H559	H4639	H6213		H6213	
וְלֹא צֹר	אָמַר ר	לִיצֹר ו	ל א			
me not or shall the thing framed	say	as the potter's	H3808			
H3336	H559	H3335				
הֵבִין:						
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.
