

Romans 9:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Analysis

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?—menoun...antapokrinomenos (μενοῦν...ἀνταποκρινόμενος): 'on the contrary...answering back.' Paul rebukes the objector. O anthrōpe (ὦ ἄνθρωπε) recalls Job 38:1-3 where God confronts Job: 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?' The creature has no standing to interrogate the Creator's justice. Isaiah 45:9: 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!'

Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?—to plasma tō plasanti (τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι). The potter/clay imagery from Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, Jeremiah 18:1-6 establishes Creator's absolute rights over creation. The creature's proper posture is submission, not accusation. God's sovereignty isn't subject to human moral judgment; rather, he defines what is just. Our revolt against his decrees merely proves our moral corruption.

Historical Context

Job 38-41 demonstrates this principle: God doesn't answer Job's questions about suffering; he overwhelms him with questions about creation, establishing divine prerogative. Paul similarly silences objections by asserting Creator rights—the basis of all theology.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why is questioning God's justice itself evidence of the fall's corruption of our moral sensibilities?
2. How does the Creator/creature distinction answer objections to divine sovereignty?
3. What is the difference between humbly asking 'How can this be?' (seeking understanding) vs. 'Why hast thou made me thus?' (accusing God)?

Interlinear Text

μενοῦνγε	ὦ	ἄνθρωπε	σὺ	Τί	εἶ	ὁ		
Nay but	O	man	thou	it Why	art	G3588		
G3304	G5599	G444	G4771	G5101	G1488			
ἀνταποκρινόμενος	τῷ	θεῷ	μὴ	ἐρεῖ	τὸ	πλάσμα	τῷ	
that repliest against	G3588	God	G3361	Shall	G3588	the thing formed	G3588	
G470		G2316		G2046		G4110		
πλάσαντι	Τί	με	ἐποίησας	οὕτως				
to him that formed	it Why	me	hast thou made	thus				
G4111	G5101	G3165	G4160	G3779				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 29:16 (Creation): 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?

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.

Job 33:13 (Parallel theme): Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.

Job 40:2 (References God): Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.

Job 16:3 (Parallel theme): Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?

Matthew 20:15 (Parallel theme): Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

Job 40:8 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?

Job 36:23 (Parallel theme): Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?

1 Corinthians 1:20 (Creation): Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

1 Timothy 6:5 (References God): Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.