

Romans 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Analysis

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory—the purpose clause: God's ultimate aim is to display to ploutos tēs doxēs autou (τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, 'the riches of his glory'). Skeuē eleous (σκεύη ἐλέους, 'vessels of mercy') contrasts with 'vessels of wrath' (v. 22). These God proētoimasen (προητοίμασεν, 'prepared beforehand')—clearly divine initiative in election.

The contrast is telling: wrath-vessels are 'fitted' (ambiguous agency); mercy-vessels are 'prepared beforehand' by God. This asymmetry reflects Reformed theology's insight: God actively elects to salvation; he passes over to just condemnation. Election is unconditional grace; reprobation is just judgment on sin. Both display God's glory: mercy magnifies grace; wrath magnifies holiness and justice. The ultimate purpose of all history—election and reprobation alike—is the manifestation of God's manifold glory.

Historical Context

Ephesians 1:4-6 teaches God chose us 'before the foundation of the world...to the praise of the glory of his grace.' All of redemptive history—creation, fall, election, redemption, consummation—aims at displaying God's glory in the highest degree possible. Both mercy and justice contribute to that display.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between 'fitted' (v. 22) and 'prepared beforehand' (v. 23) illuminate God's different relationships to wrath and mercy?
2. What are 'the riches of his glory' that God displays through mercy-vessels?
3. How does understanding that your salvation displays God's glory (not your merit) transform worship and humility?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἵνα	γνωρίσῃ	τὸν	πλοῦτον	τῆς	δόξαν	αὐτοῦ
And	that	he might make known	G3588	the riches	G3588	glory	G846
G2532	G2443	G1107		G4149		G1391	

ἐπὶ	σκεύη	ἐλέους	ἃ	προητοίμασεν	εἰς	δόξαν
on	the vessels	of mercy	which	he had afore prepared	unto	glory
G1909	G4632	G1656	G3739	G4282	G1519	G1391

Additional Cross-References

Romans 2:4 (Parallel theme): Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Ephesians 2:10 (Parallel theme): For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 3:16 (Glory): That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

