

# Romans

## Bible Study

### Vessels

#### Romans 9:19—24

Previous lessons on chapter 9 have focused on how God has changed His dispensational dealings with national Israel. Paul is specifically looking at Israel in the past, before the Body of Christ was formed. Israel had been the only nation through whom God revealed Himself, and anyone who wanted to come to God needed to do so through the nation of Israel. Ruth is an example of a Gentile coming to God through Israel. She traveled with her mother-in-law to Israel and said that she was going to make Naomi's God her God (Ruth 1:16).

This lesson will move away from our main focus and instead will examine how Paul uses the term *vessel* in his writings. If you were to look up the word *vessel*, the first and most common definition is *container*. This is also the most common usage in Scripture, and can refer to pots, jars, and even people. It's interesting that the Apostle Paul generally does not refer to a pot, jar or other container as a vessel, other than to compare it to something else. When He speaks of vessel, he always does it in reference to an individual, nation or group.

#### **Vessel as a nation or group**

Paul uses the potter and clay analogy in Romans 9 to show how God is sovereign over the nation of Israel. Just as a potter has full control over the clay, God has full control over all of creation. He uses people and nations as He pleases, and in this case, Paul is showing Israel that God can use them as needed, or, as Paul is teaching, not use them to accomplish His purposes.

In context, Paul is talking to Israel (Romans 9:1—4). They were God's chosen people who were elect to reveal God to the world. It was through Israel that God gave Scripture and His Son, Jesus Christ. Now that the Body of Christ has been formed, with the raising up of Paul, Israel was no longer needed in the position she had enjoyed for approximately 1,500 years previous to this. The nation of Israel is no longer God's people (Romans 9:25). Instead of God revealing Himself through Israel, He has chosen the Church, the Body of Christ for this task. Instead of a nation of priests with the message of the Kingdom (Exodus 19:6), God is using a congregation of Ambassadors with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20). Although most churches don't recognize that there are any differences in the New Testament, other than the expansion of ministry to the Gentiles, it is very important to see that Israel and the Church are treated very differently with different programs.

Notice how God was dealing with the Gentiles in verse 22. He was enduring, with much long-suffering, these vessels of wrath that are fitted for destruction (Acts 14:16). The Gentiles were far from God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). However, to make His power known to the world, while holding back His wrath, He changed His dealings with mankind, and raised up Paul to begin working with the Gentiles, forming the Body of Christ. The world was to experience the wrath of God at the stoning of Stephen, shown by Jesus standing to execute judgment (Psalm 110:1—2), but instead of wrath, the world saw God's mercy. This is why members of the Body of Christ are called vessels of mercy. It is upon these vessels of mercy that God is pouring out His blessings in abundance (Romans 2:4; Ephesians 3:16). He prepared these vessels of mercy for His glory, before the foundation of the world, so that they would experience the riches of His glory (Ephesians 1:4). God did not elect certain people to become vessels of mercy, but decreed that those who would be saved were to become vessels of mercy, chosen to be given God's abundant blessings because they chose to be saved. He prepared beforehand what would happen to those who believed, but did not prepare beforehand who would be saved.

## **Vessel within the Body of Christ**

Believers in the Church, the Body of Christ, have a very special position that we need to fill. We were shown God's mercy and grace when He turned from Israel as His primary means of revealing Himself to the world and turned to the Gentiles. Believers are ambassadors who have been committed with proclaiming the Gospel, the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17—18). The Gospel is powerful because it reveals Christ and the power of the resurrection to the world. It has the power of God contained in it because it is the word of God. It abolishes death while bringing life and immortality to the world (2 Timothy 1:10). It is the only way that mankind can be translated from the powers of darkness into the glorious illuminating power of God (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 1:10). This is the Gospel that was entrusted to Paul, and the Gospel that we are commissioned to preach to the world (1 Timothy 1:11). This is why Paul likened himself as being an ordinary clay vessel which held the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:7).

We, too, are vessels that should radiate the light of God to the world (Philippians 2:15), and therefore we need to have a proper walk. Before we were saved, we walked according to our own desires. Now, as believers, we are of God's light and therefore we need to walk in a manner that reflects our position in Christ as children of light (2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8).

Our purpose on this earth is to walk in a manner pleasing to God and to bear fruit for Him (Colossians 1:10). We are able to do this when we are walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16; 25). This means that believers are bearing fruit anytime they are walking in the Spirit, which is the normal Christian walk. I believe we are very aware when we are walking in the flesh, pleasing self and displeasing the Lord. When we are not walking in the flesh, we are walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). This is why I will be bearing fruit as I live out my normal, every day life going to work, doing the ironing, shopping, etc. when I am walking in the Spirit.

When we are walking in the Spirit, we are sanctifying (separating) ourselves to be useful to God. There are two aspects of sanctification; positional and progressive. We are sanctified, or set apart, fully at the point of salvation because of our position in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30). Once we have been set apart for God's service through Jesus Christ at the point of our salvation, we are now to set ourselves apart from the world (Ephesians 4:22—24). As Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 4:4, we are to possess our own vessel (body) in sanctification. We need to take action to live a life consistent with our position in Christ.

In order to live a life pleasing to God, we need to do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Most people try to please God in their own power. If they fall, they tell themselves that they will try harder. The Bible teaches that we need to renew our mind in spiritual things in order to live righteously (Romans 12:2). The old nature, the one we were born with, is to be considered dead while we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us (Romans 6:11). When we take in the word of God, the Holy Spirit uses that to change us from the inside out. We walk a sanctified life when we are walking in the Spirit. We are then called a vessel of honor because we will be useful by God (2 Timothy 2:21). That is how we bear fruit for Him. As a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, we are created to do good works, which God had already prepared for the Body of Christ to perform (Ephesians 2:10). When we study Scripture, rightly divided, we become equipped to perform these good works (2 Timothy 3:16—17).

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit [www.MidActsTruths.com](http://www.MidActsTruths.com)