

ROMANS Part 85

Chapter 9:17-24

The Potter and the clay.



17 For the scripture is saying to Pharaoh that “For this selfsame thing I rouse you up, so that I should be displaying in you My power, and so that My name should be published in the entire earth.”18 Consequently, then, to whom He will, He is merciful, yet whom He will, He

is hardening. 19 You will be protesting to me, then, “Why, then, is He still blaming? for who has withstood His intention?” 20 O man! who are you, to be sure, who are answering again to God? That which is molded will not protest to the molder, “Why do you make me thus?” 21 Or has not the potter the right over the clay, out of the same kneading to make one vessel, indeed, for honor, yet one for dishonor? 22 Now if God, wanting to display His indignation and to make His powerful doings known, carries, with much patience, the vessels of indignation, adapted for destruction, 23 it is that He should also be making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He makes ready before for glory—24 us, whom He calls also, not only out of the Jews, but out of the nations also.

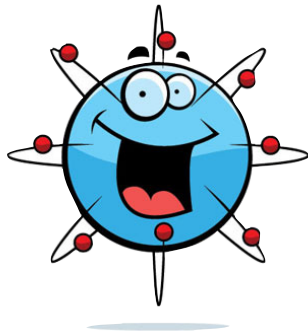
SPIRIT

It is important for us to properly grasp God’s relationship to His creatures because, after all, we are His creatures. What a great help it is to travel through this life knowing why we are living, how we are moving, what we’re doing, and where we’re headed. Most of God’s creatures live oblivious of Who created them.

Spirit is the animating force of the universe. Nuclear power is a parable of it. Like God, nuclear power is an invisible force; it rattles the globe without being seen. Atoms underlie everything, undetected, and God does the same. Just as everything consists of atoms, everything coheres by the power of God. Apart from Him, the universe flies apart, for “all has its cohesion in Him” (Colossians 1:17). The wind is also analogous to spirit, being an invisible power that moves things and whistles and groans while going around trees, walls, and through cracks, but which itself is neither seen nor heard. Both “spirit” and “wind” come from the same Greek root word, *pneuma*. Certainly, atomic blasts are known to produce great winds. It escaped humanity for the longest

time that such power could reside in such tiny particles. These atoms are apparently the building blocks of creation and yet, unless disturbed, they toil noiselessly and invisibly as they organize and bind all things by the keeping power (that is, the cohering power) of God.

As to construction, atoms are a compact core of neutrons and protons surrounded by whirring electrons. God spent little time designing this. I don't believe the design to be elegant. To God, it is ordinary and foolish, something He thought of off the top of His head; a first draft. It is the way of Deity to make important things look ridiculous.



Protons and neutrons and the surrounding blur of electrons must, to the celestial creation, look like seals juggling beach balls look to us. Remember, “the stupidity of God is wiser than humans, and the weakness of God

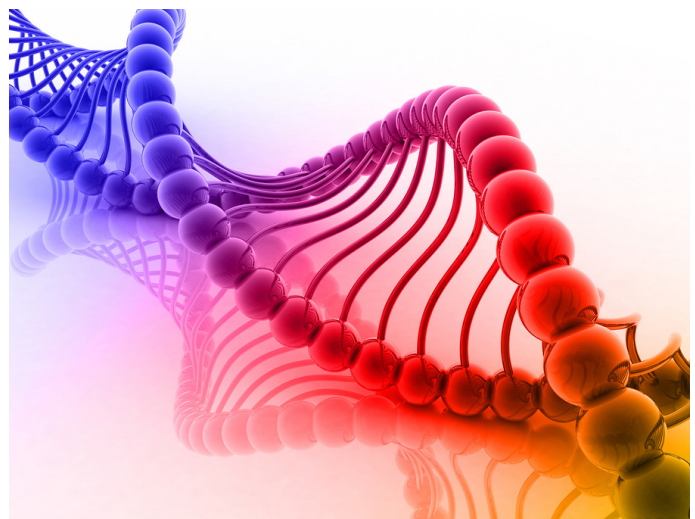
is stronger than humans” (1 Corinthians 1:25). God could have made the atom much slicker in appearance than it is, but He doesn't want slick right now. He loves confounding humanity's wisdom with His special brand of creative and operational stupidity.

THE DOUBLE HELIX

Strands of DNA look like a double helix. You do realize, I hope, that God is playing another game here. Yes, it's another “top of the head” creation from God's great celestial laboratory. It's the same joke that He pulled with the atom, only now the madcap design belongs to the blueprint of what we are and, probably, what we do. From hair follicles to toenails, from breakfast to dinner, we live and move and have our being according to the particular DNA blueprint written specifically for us by God. The double helix is a list of instructions done up pictorially.

Wiser beings of higher worlds look at the double helix and laugh for the same reason that the atom amused them: the design is absurd. I am only mentioning this because of how easy all of this creation and maintenance business is to God. This stuff just flies off His fingers like paint flicked off a brush. The things that God does in His spare time—create and sustain life—we have not accomplished in 6,000 years of math, science, philosophy, and picking our noses. The double helix resembles

a twisted ladder with connecting avenues and colorful balls hanging off the whole of it that could pass for the plastic globes at a McDonald's Playplace. I never tire of reminding you of the stupidity and the ease by which God creates and carries things. I like to show how easy and offhanded it is for Him because the free will people fail to grasp how God can keep track of everything, or how the innumerable details of life don't somehow overwhelm Him. (The free will people think that God is a lot like them; this is their essential flaw.) The free will people looking up at God are like planarian worms looking up at the space shuttle. Since the free will people can't figure out how God could animate or move them without their conscious consent, they figure that He doesn't. “Out of sight, out of mind” is another of their fatal misapprehensions.



The difference between free will believers and planarian worms is that planarian worms seek the light.

It is all fun and games for God in the creation and cohesion department because, as I've been saying, He designs everything off the top of His head without ever stopping to second-guess Himself. He has no “control-z” button on his keyboard.

Here is a Zender Theory about how God created the universe: I think He merely breathed, and then stuff came out. (I hope I am not getting too technical.) *One exhalation:* stars. *Another exhalation:* planets. *Another exhalation:* the three-toed sloth. (The only breather God got during the six days of creation was when He inhaled.) Scientists gaze into their microscopes, telescopes and sigmoidoscopes at all of these things created by the Deity (sloths may be observed by the naked eye as they hang from sapodilla trees in humid, Central-American countries) yet most of the scientists, in spite of this, detect not a single whiff of

God's majesty, or even His existence. (In this, they are not far from the free will people.) God has hardened their noses as well as their hearts. The scientists do create some magnificent scopes, however, for which I credit them. God has given this to them.

HIGHWAY OF THE SPIRIT

God could have made humans out of anything, but chose elements native to the soil. He then mixed the soil with water to make a mud-like substance with hair follicles and toenails that we call flesh. Water and soil cohere to make flesh; the double helix spins and bangs to define our physical traits and possibly our habits; meanwhile, the atom is the sub-flooring of everything—but what animates that sub-flooring? Spirit, of course.

I love spirit. I even fly Spirit Airlines. I drink whiskey and rum, which are spirits. I like the wind, too. I like things that are moving. I even like atomic power; I like that it doesn't make much noise unless it explodes. I like my breath, and I like yours, too. I hate it when things die because that means that the spirit of God has left the building and only the organic matter remains. Organic matter without animating spirit depresses me. I could just



cry over it, and I do. Proverbs 20:27, however, returns me to the land of the living. This verse paints a nice figure of God breathing into humanity the spirit of life and then investigating every corner *of* that humanity by means of that spirit transversing the body via the breath. If you think I'm kidding, here's the verse—

The lamp of Yahweh is the lifebreath of humanity,
Searching all the chambers of the inner being.

This “lifebreath” of humanity is spirit. As we have already discussed, breath is wind, and spirit is called wind. We can see neither breath nor wind, yet both things move from here to there. Spirit does the same thing. We know that blood carries oxygen throughout our bodies. If it carries oxygen, then it carries spirit as well, for the lamp of Yahweh (I believe this to be a figure of speech for spirit) is the lifebreath of humanity. Oxygen, then, travels throughout every bodily chamber by means of blood transversing a detailed and ridiculously broad arterial, venous, and capillary network. Laid end to end, the blood vessels (arteries, capillaries, and veins) in the human body would measure about 100,000 km (60,000 miles), or approximately 2.5 times the circumference of the earth. Capillaries alone account for about 80,000 km (50,000 miles) of vasculature in an adult. This wall-to-wall superhighway is the physical means by which the invisible God moves inside of us, touching every corner of who we are.

On the other hand—the darkened hand—consider the words of the famous Christian Dr. James Dobson who, running three quarts low on the very spirit we've been discussing, contends that God is a gentleman and “will not force Himself upon anyone.” The implication is that, after God creates us, He leaves town. This is the essence of free will, that God leaves us on our own to either choose or reject right paths.

The spirit of God not only does not leave us on our own, it touches us constantly, inside and out. Not

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only that, but it searches. Proverbs says that it “searches all the chambers of the inner being.” What does this mean? It means that there is no corner of us unknown, unsustained, or uninvaded by God. (So much for the gentleman god who supposedly never forces himself upon anyone.) The spirit doesn't just *go* everywhere, it *searches* everywhere. This means that it must be looking for something. Oh, it is. Metaphorically speaking, the spirit searches anything that could possibly be untouched



by the lifebreath. This spirit has eyes, ears, feelers. The searching is literal but the eyes, ears and feelers are not. I created these metaphors to impress upon you the literalness of the searching. No chamber within—not the brain, not the heart, not the liver, not the narrowest thread of capillary—gets left untouched, unchecked, unsearched. (This is God, loving you; bathing you.) Think of computer-scanning software searching thousands of files for viruses. Sometimes you can see the files whizzing by at breakneck speeds. Hundreds of files pass in a blink. Yet this pace is pedestrian compared to “the lamp of Yahweh” searching the chambers of the innermost being of everything that *is* a being.

Why the figure of a lamp for the spirit? A lamp is light, and God is also light. This speaks of illumination. What can hide from the illumination of God? Things try, but they all fail. Everything fails. Even stubborn people have been illuminated by God to remain in darkness. The sun touches wax and it melts; the same sun touches soil and hardens it. The very fact that some resist such obvious truth speaks of a visitation—in fact, the constant visitation—of God.

THE INNER BEING

What is suggested by the term “inner being”? You could take this literally, but you could also take it figuratively to speak of the soulish aspects of humanity: our hopes, dreams, feelings. God continually saturates these; some are wax, some soil. God hardens and softens as He will. Both hardening and softening require His presence. To use a common English idiom, God is “on it.” He’s everywhere. It is the exact opposite of leaving town. If we

could see a graphic depiction of how God moves—a depiction similar to that which allows computer users to monitor virus scanners—the spirit would be proceeding in a holy blur; no, it would be so speedy running through us so as to be rendered invisible. Think of an airplane propeller. The propeller moves so fast that you can see right through it. Gods actions and movements are undetectable; we see but the results of them. It is not that they are invisible because they are not there, but rather because they are moving so fast. This befuddles free will people like James Dobson and millions of others who assume that, because they don’t see or feel the activity of God, it isn’t there or does not exist.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

This returns me to my main text, “**Or has not the potter the right over the clay, out of the same kneading to make one vessel, indeed, for honor, yet one for dishonor?**”

I could return you to the origin of this passage, Jeremiah chapter 18, where God tells the prophet to go down to the potter’s house where he will witness a simple demonstration of the manner by which God ultimately shapes Israel. Israel is like a pot in a potter’s hand. God can do with it what He wills. God said to Jeremiah, “Go down to the potter’s house,” and Jeremiah went. One of the highlights there was witnessing a vessel marred in the hands of the potter—it may even have been smashed flat. To what purpose? To discard the original material? No, but to remake it. In Romans chapter 9, Paul takes this analogy and extrapolates, applying it to all humanity. He adapts this well-known analogy to his higher truth. Having been given larger pictures and grander truths than

Jeremiah thought possible, Paul is “Mr. Universal.” None of this “one small dusty nation in the Middle East” stuff for Paul. God gave Paul new revelations concerning all humanity and all creation, then generously handed over to the ex-Pharisee old examples to which he could tie and apply his new revelations—thus Jeremiah and the potter’s house come to Romans chapter 9. Few Christians of my acquaintance (none, actually) believe the limited Israel application, let alone Paul’s broader stroke. God inspired Jeremiah’s “Potter Report” in order to place before Israel a bigger, more absolute picture of His control. Yet God Himself hardened and blinded Israel to the very revelation He exhorted them to see. What the simple picture of potter and clay will eventually do is stand as a witness and a testimony against Israel, being another necessary crack on the head that delivers them of the eonian nuisance of self-righteousness.

UNINSPIRED ANALOGIES

Speaking of proud and stubborn people, those who claim to believe in Christ are always inventing new analogies to explain the extent of God’s control (or non-control) over human beings. They say that the so-called control “is like a fly in a jar,” in that the fly is free within the jar to do whatever it wants, but can’t escape the confines of the jar. Or, they say, “God’s control over us is like a dog on a leash,” and they apply the same fly idiocy above only they make the fly a dog and turn the side of the jar into a leash. People claiming to believe in Jesus are quite proud of these analogies. Another sad invention along this line is the “horse in the bridle” analogy, but again, it’s the same tired formula except now they have hired a horse.

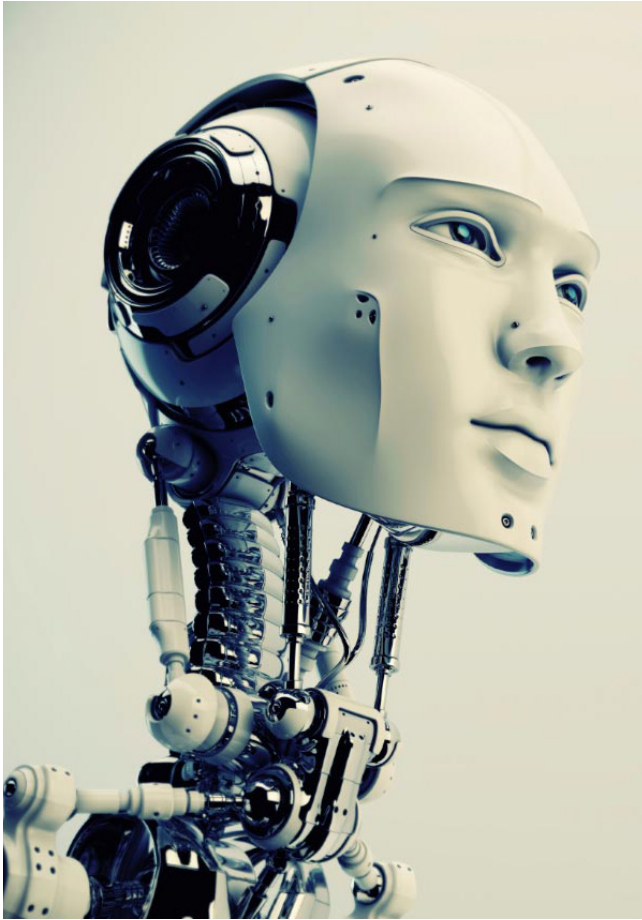
The troubling thing is how the wanna-be believers work so hard developing an analogy that God has already forwarded in His inspired Word: potter and clay. The degree of God’s control over humanity is the same as that of a potter over a lump of clay. How simple can you get? You don’t need a horse, a dog, a fly, a jar, a bridle, or a leash. All you need is a guy spinning a slab of mud on a wheel. Simply watch the potter, as Jeremiah did, and realize (because you’re enlightened, not hardened) that potters shape clay, and not vice-versa. No lump of clay ever decided what it would become. To my knowledge, no lump of clay ever protested to a potter, “Why have you made me thus?” Christians hate God’s inspired analogy, however, because it embarrasses them. Humility is not their cup of tea. They don’t want to be clay, they want to be

their own potters. This is why they are always coming up with other analogies. They would rather be flies, horses and dogs than clay.

CLAY DAY

I teach the sovereignty of God, therefore I dis-teach the free will of humanity. I oppose it. As soon as I do this, many oppose *me* by saying, “We are not robots!” My hackles go haywire at this point and I respond, “I never said that we are robots.” I purposely say this in an apologetic tone, causing my detractors to believe that I am about to back down on my hardline sovereignty-of-God-stance. Little do they know me, the poor things. In





fact, my stance is about to enjoy a good dose of doubling down. “I didn’t *say* that we were robots,” I repeat. “You’ve got me completely wrong. You’re misquoting me. You must have gotten some bad information. Robots flash, blink, whirl and hum, and can operate at a distance from their owners with the latest wireless technology. No, my enemies (why call them “my friends” when they’re clearly not?), we are not robots at all. Look at yourselves! You give yourselves too much credit. We are not robots, we are clay. Yes, clay. This is God’s inspired illustration of what we are. Why don’t you like God’s illustration? Why does it ruin your day? Why do you scramble to invent other illustrations? We are more inert, more boring, and far less flashy than what you apprehend robots to be. We are smooched daily and even by the minute into shapes determined beforehand by the Potter.” As soon as my detractors start crying about this (it doesn’t take long, and some of them actually sob), I whip out the “lamp of Yahweh” verse and flash the intricacies of how the inert clay comes alive by the animating power of God, that is, spirit. I then show them how God constantly searches every chamber of every being until He makes happen what He needs to happen. Then I add Acts 17:28 for good measure, “For in Him, we live and move and are,” and

top off my little concerto with Acts 17:25, “For God gives to all, life and breath and all.” By this time I’ve exhausted my antagonists—leaving them in a puddle of tears—while at the same time refreshing myself.

FUTURE USE, NOBLE DISPLAY

God makes happen what He needs to happen. Far from the deaf, dumb and blind concept of a god who merely sets creation in motion and leaves it, we worship a Being Who searches and scours us via every breath drawn. None of us are on autopilot. Remember, “By Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). Then Proverbs 20:27 exposes the wiring and plumbing of this, to our happy gaze. God creates the building blocks of body and constitution, then provides the sustaining power and never lets go. God fashions the raw material into laughable shapes to bamboozle scientists even while delighting children who remark at how bright and cheerful the ridiculous revelation is. God then infuses the raw material on a continual basis by investigating every chamber of it—not only the literal chambers of the body, but the chambers of thought, hope and dream. The children laugh.

And still, many hold tenaciously—in spite of everything—to human free will. Only the same spirit under discussion could work such a miracle of stubbornness, coursing through the bodies of unbelievers, congealing and clogging where necessary. Such are the most unique vessels of God’s great wheel, disbelieving in the face of so great a light. Yet hardened vessels are essential to God’s great drama. Without opposition, good lies inert. The time does come, however, to smash and re-fashion these dishonorable containers into something more closely resembling a Ming vase. In the meantime, *we* ought to enjoy our stature as enlightened ornaments (granted us only by God’s grace), luxuriating in the prospect of future use and noble display, never again to fall, crack or cry. —MZ

This work cannot continue ...

...without your help. Thanks to all of you who have become fellow-laborers with me to spread good news such as you have read here in the *ZWTF* and watched on *The Revelation Series*, the *Crack O’ Dawn Report*, and elsewhere. To those who have been thinking about contributing, now is a good time. This effort is supported, not by a cold institution, but by members of the body of Christ. THANK YOU! Even though it may take awhile, I personally respond to everyone who writes to me. I love you all and could not do what I do without you. —Martin

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