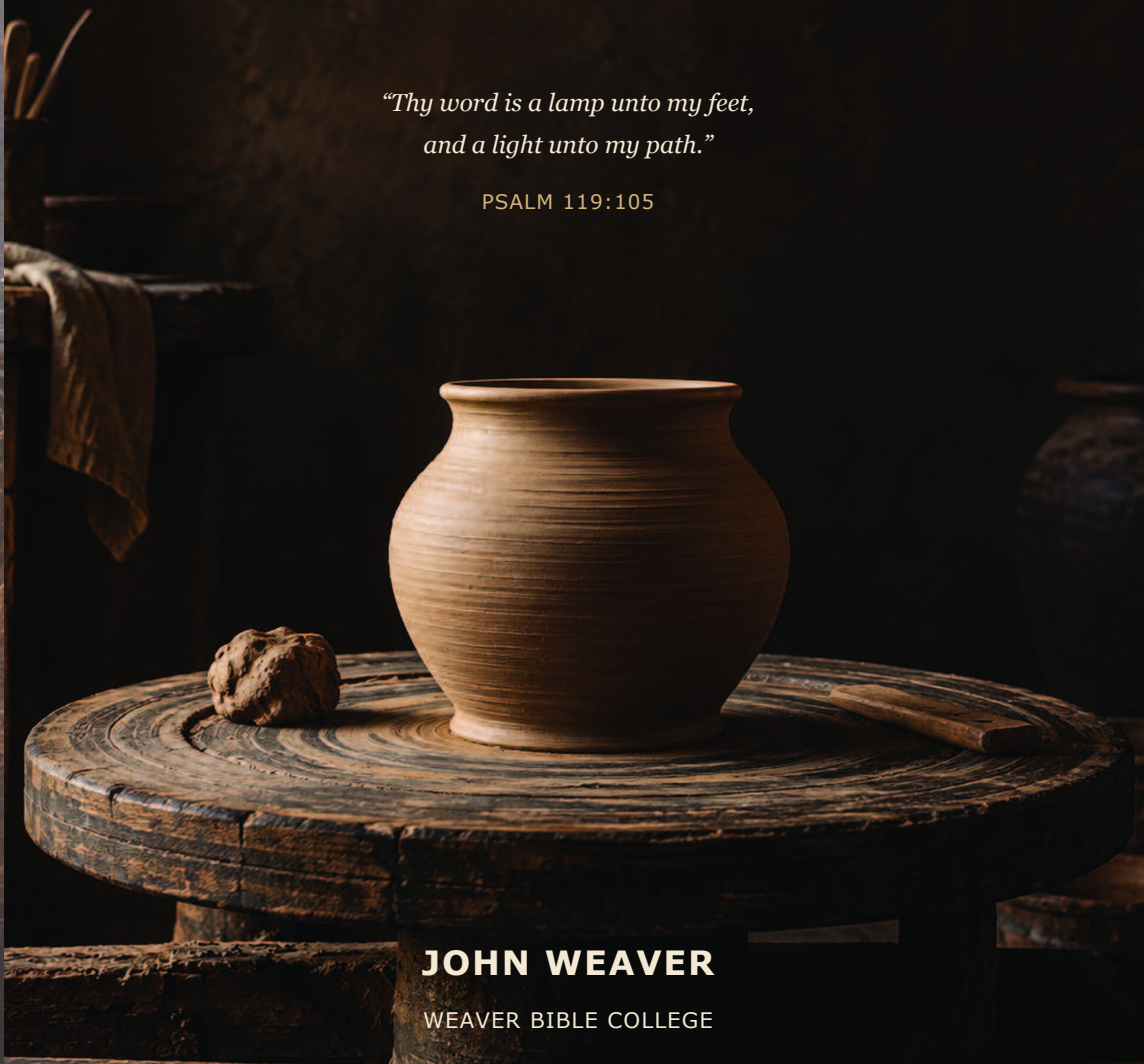
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BIBLICAL STUDIES

The Potter and the Clay

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



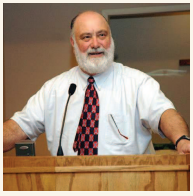
O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter.

ISAIAH 64:8, EXCERPT

The potter and the clay provide a biblical picture of authority, dependence, and purpose. John Weaver examines the image through Scripture and considers its implications for the believer's response to God. These messages connect humility with the responsibility to receive instruction and pursue obedience.

"The problem was never with the Potter; the problem is always with the clay."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

The Potter and the Clay

Part One

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 18:1-12 (KJV)

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house. And there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again another vessel that seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck it up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil

> in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.
>
> Now therefore go to speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.

Introduction to the Passage

> This passage is absolutely stunning. It demonstrates the grace, mercy, and patience of God, while at the same time it also demonstrates the corruption, the depravity, and the rebellion of man. Judah and Jerusalem were on the verge of being destroyed by the righteous judgment of God. And Jeremiah was commanded by God to appeal to these people one last time. You know, I thought about that. Do you realize that for each individual,

For each nation, each country, and each kingdom, there is always going to be one last time, or one last opportunity, to hear and heed the Word of God. The problem is that most will never know when that last opportunity has come. We do not even know the last time we will see God's sunshine or breathe God's air. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:1, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

What is true of individuals is also true of kingdoms, nations, and countries. Many who plan to repent at twelve o'clock die at eleven-thirty. I can assure you of this: the unconverted, and the nations destroyed for not repenting, will always remember that one last time or opportunity when they should have heard and heeded the Word of God, but did not.

So God graciously sends Jeremiah one last time to plead with these people. In verse 11, God says, "Now therefore go to speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device

against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

God said they must turn then. He had devised something evil against them because of their rebellion. Verse 12 says, "And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."

The evidence of a lack of, and a failure to, repent is continuing in one's own ways, desires, and devices. Repentance is a change of heart and a change of mind that leads to a change in conduct and behavior.

The Potter's Precepts

If someone tells me that they have repented and yet have never changed, continuing to do exactly the same things they have always done, then obviously there is no repentance. God will not and does not forgive where there is no repentance. Since there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness; therefore, the only thing left is judgment.

God now prepares Jeremiah to send him one last time to these rebellious people. We will be looking at a number of things, but here we consider only the first two verses, which present one point: the potter's precepts. This entire passage deals with the divine Potter. Listen carefully: this is a truth that will be repeated a number of times before the message is finished. This is what Jeremiah was to learn and what he was to communicate.

The Potter's Precepts: God's Sovereign Right

In verses 1 and 2 we read: “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.” Jeremiah might have attended to God speaking to him at his own house. Yet he was commanded by God to go to the potter's house—not for Jeremiah's sake, because Jeremiah was willing to listen and willing to be taught, but so that God might teach the people by adding a confirmation to His doctrine. God was teaching Jeremiah so that he might relay this

truth to the people. There was something Jeremiah needed to learn, and therefore God sent him to the potter's house.

Here is what Jeremiah was to learn and communicate to the people: God, as the only sole and absolute sovereign, has an absolute right to deal with nations according to their conduct towards Him. This truth is illustrated in tangible form by the potter molding vessels from the clay.

Nations, countries, and kingdoms are made up of individuals. Therefore, that which is true nationally, and true in reference to a country and a kingdom, is equally true in reference to individuals. God is sovereign and, as the sole sovereign, has an absolute right to do as He wills. This chapter expresses the sovereign power of God over His creatures and His usual methods of dealing with them. Just as the clay is in the potter's hands, likewise men and nations are in the hands of the divine Potter, and He may do with them as He pleases.

There is a concept in these first two verses that deserves special attention. God told Jeremiah, “Go to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.” God directed Jeremiah specifically to go to the potter’s house. What if Jeremiah had gone to the brick mason’s house, the plumber’s house, or the gardener’s house? Would he have heard from God? The answer is no.

Hearing God in the Appointed Place

Here is the point: if you want to hear from God, you must be in the place appointed by God to hear God speak. You are not going to hear God speak at a football game, a hockey game, or a basketball game. Do not look to hear from God at a county fair, at the fortune teller’s booth, at the spiritual advisor’s house, or from the daily horoscope. Do not expect to hear God speak from a church that denies the virgin birth, the blood atonement, the inspiration and authority of the Bible, or any of the major doctrines of the Bible. Do not expect to hear God there, because God is not there, and He is not going to speak there.

The only place where we can hear God speak is the place He has appointed. What kind of places has He appointed? First of all, the

place of the living Word. Jesus Christ is called the divine Logos, and the Greek word Logos simply means Word. The Bible says in John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

We must remember that Jesus Christ is the living Word, while the Bible is the written Word of God. It is divinely inspired, inerrant, and infallible, and it is to be the only guide for our lives. God has given us His written Word that we may know and discern His will for our lives.

He said in 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, “All Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” The word inspired is the Greek word theopneustos, and it literally means God-breathed. God breathed out the Scriptures. So you have Jesus Christ, the living Word, and you have the Bible, the written Word.

That is why he said in Deuteronomy 29, verse 29, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God has revealed His will and His word for us.

God commanded Jeremiah to hear His words. He specifically told Jeremiah, “You go down to the potter’s house, for it’s there I’m going to speak to you.” God directs us to the living Word, His only begotten Son, and to the written Word, the one which He has inspired.

In light of this truth, how will one know whether he is really hearing the Word of God? How does one know that he really has heard the Word of God? Obviously, if you are reading from the Scripture, in one sense of the word, you are hearing the Word of God. If you are listening to me expound the Scripture, in another sense of the word, you are also hearing the Word of God.

External vs. Internal Hearing

But there is an external hearing of the Word of God, and there is an internal hearing of the Word of God. You may hear the Word externally and never really benefit by it. In order to benefit from the Word of God, you must hear it spiritually and internally. I can, if you have the ability to hear, cause you to hear the Word of God externally. But only the Holy Spirit can cause you to hear it internally.

Our Lord said in Matthew 11:15, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” If you have the physical ability to hear, if God has given you ears, then you have a responsibility to hear. While men, or at least most men, have the ability to hear externally, most of them do not and will not. By nature, none of us have the ability to hear internally. In other words, it is a work of grace and mercy that causes us to hear internally.

One of my favorite quotes is by Augustine, one of the early church fathers. He said, “I heard the gospel all of my life. And then one day I heard it.” That is the truth. We can hear something all of our lives and never, ever really hear it. Although we have an external hearing capacity, that does not mean that we have an internal hearing capacity by nature.

Hold Jeremiah 18, but go back to Jeremiah chapter 6, and look at verse 10. Jeremiah asks, “To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.” What does Jeremiah say? Their ear is uncircumcised; therefore, they cannot hear. They have the ability to hear externally, but they cannot hear internally and spiritually. Another reason they will not hear internally and spiritually is that they have no delight in the Word of God. It is a reproach to them. Hold in Jeremiah 18, but look in John chapter 8 and verse 43 at what our Lord asked the Pharisees.

Biblical Evidence of Spiritual Deafness

In John 8:43, our Lord is showing that although we may have the ability to hear externally, none have the ability to hear internally and

spiritually apart from grace. He asked the Pharisees, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word." Did they have the ability to hear? Physically, yes. Externally, yes. Spiritually and internally, no.

First Corinthians 2:14 tells us about the natural man, or the unsaved man: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." What does a natural man think about the Word of God? It is pure foolishness. That is why this room is not filled today and overflowing. Some men would rather cut their lawns, go fishing, or do anything other than hear the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. To them, it is foolishness.

Then the Scripture says, "neither can"—that is, he does not have the ability to know them. Why? Because God's words are spiritually discerned. You must have spiritual discernment to truly hear the Word of God.

You say, "But Brother Weaver, I'm a Christian." That does not matter. Do you remember those two on the Emmaus road who were walking with Christ? Beginning at Moses and the prophets, He opened the Scripture and expounded all things unto them, and they still did not know who He was. Now, we are talking about believers. Luke 24:45 says, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." Even believers have to have their minds illuminated in order to understand the Scriptures. Certainly, it is true of the unsaved.

In Acts 16:14, concerning Lydia, a certain woman who was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira and worshipped God, the Bible says, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened." With the result that, or so that, she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. Why did she really hear? Why did she really listen? Because God opened her heart. God opened her mind. God opened her understanding.

I want you to turn back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 15. While you are turning there, mark Luke 6, because we will come

back there momentarily. I am trying to show you why God told Jeremiah to go to the potter's house to hear His words. There is indeed an external hearing and an internal hearing. Many hear the Word of God externally, but very few hear the Word of God internally and spiritually.

God sent King Saul on a mission, and Saul disobeyed. He spared the best of the sheep, the best of the oxen, and Agag, the king. When Samuel reproached Saul and said, "You've disobeyed God," Saul tried to blame it on the people: "Look, the people spared all these animals so they could sacrifice them to God."

Obedience as the Proof of True Hearing

Look at 1 Samuel 15:22–23: "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

Return to verse 22. Saul said the people spared the sheep and oxen so that they might sacrifice them. Samuel poses this question: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Then he answers it himself: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

God had rather have our obedience than any and all the sacrifice that we could give Him. "To obey is better than sacrifice." Now consider the latter part: "And to hearken than the fat of rams." Do you realize that the fat of the ram was the best part of the sacrifice, and it was always given to God?

Understand this: obedience and hearkening in this passage are synonymous. No one ever really hears the Word of God until he heeds the Word of God. No one ever really hears the Word of God until he obeys the Word of God.

You may hear externally, but that does not mean you are hearing internally and spiritually. When you begin to obey and apply the Word, that means you have really heard. If you do not obey and apply it, then, although you have heard, you really have not heard.

Our Lord explains this in Luke chapter 6. Beginning in verse 46, He asks, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” The word Lord is kurios in the Greek. It literally means boss, owner, master, or sovereign. Why are you calling Me Sovereign, Sovereign, and do not the things which I say unto you? Why are you calling Me Master, Master, and do not the things which I say unto you?

Then, in verses 47 through 49, He says: “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”

Notice what our Lord says. You can hear and obey; that is really hearing. But if you hear and disobey, then in reality you have not heard. So how can you tell whether you have really heard the Word of God, whether you are hearing it internally and spiritually? The answer is that it will be evidenced by the results and effects of the Word in your life. If you really hear God's Word spiritually and internally, there will be results, fruits, and a manifestation or evidence that you have genuinely heard. What are some of the manifestations that show whether we are really hearing the Word of God? Let me begin at the beginning.

Six Evidences of Genuine Hearing

First, there will be condemnation. If you are genuinely hearing the Word of God in your life, there will be condemnation to those who are in sin and rebellion against God. Unless one is in Jesus Christ, unless one is a real, genuine, true Christian, he is under condemnation. Condemnation arises not only because of original sin, but also because of our personal sins.

Condemnation is a fact. I have heard people say, “Well, Brother Weaver, when I do such and such, I do not feel condemned.” Let me tell you why you do not feel condemned: condemnation is not a

feeling or an emotion. Condemnation is a judicial proclamation. One is either justified or condemned; it is just that simple. One may sense the results of a legal pronunciation, but he does not feel the legal pronunciation.

If I happen to be in a court of law and am on trial for murder, and the judge says, “Guilty, you will die on the 23rd of this month, by electrocution,” I have not felt his decision. That was a judicial fact. I may sense the result of that judicial fact in my life, and I may dread being executed on the 23rd, but I have not felt the condemnation. The condemnation was simply a fact.

Listen to Proverbs 17:15: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.” How do you justify the wicked? It is a legal pronunciation. You are saying that he did nothing wrong and is right according to the law. Or how do you condemn the just? You say he is wicked according to the law, when in reality he is not; you say he has violated the law, when in reality he has not.

Both justification and condemnation are judicial facts, proclamations from a court of law. John 3:18–19 says, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Men are basically already condemned. Romans 5:18 tells us that we were condemned even in Adam, who was our representative.

And when he sinned, we sinned. So mark this down: man in a state of nature is condemned already. He is under the judgment and wrath of God. He may sense the results of that condemnation when he hears the Word of God, but you do not feel the condemnation.

Let me give you an illustration. Years ago, I had an unsaved friend who is now saved by the grace of God. I asked him why he did not attend church more often than once or twice a year. His answer was straightforward: "Because I know that you're right. And I sense my condemnation when I hear the truth. And right now, I love my sins too much, and your preaching just makes me very uncomfortable."

At least he was telling the truth. The truth of condemnation is found in each life, even as Christians. In one sense, we are condemned—not by being under the wrath and judgment of God, for we have been delivered from that, nor in the sense that we are fearful of punishment, for we are delivered from that. But when we do something wrong, something unbiblical or ungodly, our consciences convict us, and we are not able to pray as we ought because we are under a sense of condemnation.

Everyone in this room will say, "Uh-huh, I've experienced this." If you tell me you have not experienced it, you are either not saved or you are lying. Consider 1 John chapter 3, verses 20 and 21.

He is talking to believers in this passage. In 1 John 3:20–21 he says, “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” What does he mean by “if our heart condemn us”? The word condemn in both verses literally means to find fault, to be blameworthy, to deserve censure, or to be rightfully accused or condemned.

If you are a Christian and know that you have done something contrary to the Word of God, when you go to pray, it is in your mind: “I have done this; I should not have done that. I have violated God’s Word. I deserve censure and blame.” It is as David said in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” It is also like Proverbs 28:9: “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”

If we as Christians want to be free from condemnation in our lives, we must be free from disobedience to God, because when we are disobedient, our conscience condemns us. If you can live without being condemned, you are not listening or hearing the Word of God. Inevitably, something in this Book will condemn us, even as Christians, because none of us are perfect. If you are really hearing, there will be some condemnation in your life.

Secondly, if you are really hearing, there will be conviction. Conviction necessarily follows condemnation for a Christian, but that is not necessarily so for the unconverted. Not every condemned sinner is convicted; some never experience genuine conviction of sin.

Conviction is based upon the Word of God. When Christians are condemned by their attitudes and actions, we are convicted in the sense that we know we have violated God's law and Word. We are convinced that we are not right with God. By the way, do you realize it is the duty of pastors to convict and condemn?

In Titus chapter 1, beginning at verse 7, Paul describes what a pastor must do: "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;" He continues: "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."

The pastor is to be able to convince. In other words, I should be able to take the Word of God and show you what is wrong in your life. It is true that the Holy Spirit must apply it to you, but I am supposed to be able to take the Scripture and say, "This is where you are wrong. This is where you need to change. This is where you need to repent."

You would do well to remember that conviction will do one of two things: it will either draw you closer to Christ or drive you away. You will either get right with God and repent, or you will flee from the convicting power of the Word of God. Do you remember that passage in John chapter 8? I want to preach on that again. I did it years ago, but I want to preach on it again in the near future.

Here is this woman taken in adultery, in the very act, and the Pharisees say, "The law of Moses says she's to be stoned. What sayest thou?" They were tempting Him and trying to set Him up. After Jesus knelt down and wrote on the ground, the Bible says, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

Notice the words, "Being convicted by their own conscience." They went out convicted, but they never repented. Their conviction

drove them away. In the Bible, there is the doctrine of clean hands. If I am going to accuse Jim of something, I must be clean and pure from whatever I am accusing him of. Otherwise, when I condemn him, I condemn myself.

These Pharisees were guilty of the very thing they accused this woman of, and consequently their conviction drove them away rather than drawing them to Christ. There will be conviction. If you are a child of God, there will be conviction. If you are unsaved, there may be external conviction, in the sense that you realize, "Hey, I'm wrong." But only the Holy Ghost can make it internal and spiritual.

Thirdly, there will also be correction. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." If you read, study, listen to, and hear the Word of God, yet can do so without being corrected doctrinally, you are deceiving yourself. You are not really hearing. God's Word is designed to correct our misunderstandings, our humanistic education, and our man-centered theology. If you are really hearing the Word of God, it will correct you.

And that is true, saved or unsaved. Let me give you an example. The Scottish archaeologist Sir William Ramsay was born in 1851 and died in 1939. He was an atheist; his parents were atheists, and he despised the Word of God. Ramsay was wealthy and had an earned doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University. He set out to disprove the Bible, centering on the Book of Acts because it contains so many locations, names, and peoples. He figured Acts would be the most vulnerable book: if he could expose it as a myth, the rest of the Bible would be proven a myth as well.

With all his wealth and education, Ramsay began extensive archaeological excavations in the places where Paul, Peter, and others were supposed to travel. For twenty-five years he continued writing books, and each one came closer and closer to the truth until he reached the last. Ramsay confessed that the Book of Acts was true and divinely inspired. He himself came to trust the Lord Jesus Christ and became a Christian. Here was a man who set out to disprove the Bible, yet he was corrected by the Bible. If you and I understand its

intent, and if we truly hear spiritually and internally, we will be corrected.

Fourthly, if we are really hearing the Word of God, there will be cleansing. If you are truly hearing the Word of God, you will be cleansed in your daily life and walk. If you are not living a holy, godly, obedient life, listen to me: it is because you are not really hearing the Word of God. Our Lord said in John 15, verse 3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." Psalm 19:9 says, "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." David asked in Psalm 119:9-11, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" How do you live a clean life? "By taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Confirmation in Christ

"With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." If you are really listening to the Word of God, it is going to clean you up. Like the leper in Mark chapter 1, verses 40 and 41, who came running to our Lord, knelt before Him, and besought Him, saying, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Our Lord reached out His hand, touched him, and said, "I will; be thou clean." If you really hear the Word of the Lord, you are going to be clean. You will have a clean, godly life.

I like the words Dwight L. Moody wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible: "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." That is true. But if you are really hearing the Word of God, it is going to clean you up.

Fifthly, if you are really hearing the Word of God, there is going to be confirmation. Many desire confirmation and yet never find it for their faith. In all probability, the reason most never find confirmation for their faith is that they are looking in the wrong place. They are looking for their experiences, their emotions, or something other than the Word of God.

In Romans 15 and verse 8, we read, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” Jesus Christ actually confirmed all the promises made unto the fathers, and in doing so, He confirmed our faith. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 8, “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Confirmation is not a ceremony or a ritual that you go through, like they have in the Lutheran Church. Confirmation is not an experience that you have. Confirmation is found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our salvation, first and foremost, is an objective fact. It is outside of us. It is an accomplished fact, something that Jesus Christ did. That is why He said, “It is finished.” And if you understand,

If you are really listening to the Word of God, you are going to be confirmed in your faith: yes, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is the Savior, He is the Lord, and He is the Master.

Sixth, if you are really hearing the Word of God, there will be comfort. So many are in turmoil, trouble, and sorrow, yet in the Word of God we have comfort. In Isaiah 40 and verse 1, the Scripture says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Do you want comfort?

You may have lost a loved one. You may have had financial reverses or ill health. Do you want comfort? The Bible says in Romans 15 and verse 4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." You are not going to get comfort out of a bottle, a liquor bottle or a pill bottle. You get comfort from the Word of God. In fact, the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 1 and verse 3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." If you will have comfort, it is from the Scriptures and the God of the Scriptures. That is why in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 17, the Bible says, "Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

The thing I like about the Scripture is that it is so applicable. You say, "But you do not understand. We are being persecuted, tormented, and tyrannized." I understand that. But Paul said in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 7, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How did He start that? "And to you who are troubled rest with us." Do you want a little comfort concerning what is going on in the world today? He tells you how to get that comfort: look at how Jesus Christ is going to take care of it when He returns. He will wipe them out. That is comforting. You are only going to find comfort and rest in the Word of God.

Applications of Hearing the Word of God

Applications and Exhortations

It is really and truly simple enough to discover whether or not an individual is genuinely listening to and hearing the Word of God. All you have to do is look for the effects of the Word of God in your life. If these effects, fruits, evidences, or manifestations are not in your life to some degree, you are not listening. You are not hearing.

I still get convicted over sins that I committed twenty years ago, sins I remember repenting over. I wish I had not done them, and I still think about them. There are many professing Christians who go to counseling sessions, psychologists, psychiatrists, and sometimes supposedly Christian counselors. Do you know why most people need counseling? The reason most people need counseling is because they do not listen to the Word of God on a daily basis. If you really, genuinely heard the Word of God and obeyed the Word of God, it would take care of 99.9 percent of your problems.

I do not understand why people will not listen to the Word of God, yet they will listen to a humanistic psychologist or psychiatrist who tells them everything contrary to God. I understand that many people are ignorant of the Word of God, and some do not know how to listen. But the truth is this: if you really learn to listen, hear, heed,

and obey, it will take care of most of the consternation and confusion in your life.

If you do not read the Scripture on a daily basis, if you do not try to hear, understand, and learn on a daily basis, you are asking for trouble in your life. I have preached for nearly forty-nine years, but I have to read the Scripture every day. I may know the Scripture better than you, but that does not mean a thing. I still need the Word of God, and I need to hear it daily. And so do you.

The second thing is this: Are you in the proper place to hear the Word of God? If not, you should be. God told Jeremiah, "Go down to the potter's house. It's there I will cause you to hear my word." You need to make sure that you are under the preaching and teaching, the exposition, of the Word of God. Many people move for job improvement, a raise in pay, or to be near family and friends. Very few ever move so they can hear the Word of God and be fed the truth of God.

Hearing the Word of God should be the highest priority in your life. Nothing should come before hearing the Word of God. What good is it if we gain the whole world and lose our own souls? What good is it to have the greatest job in the world and end up losing your own family? What good is it to have the best health in the world and die an unbeliever?

Hearing the Word of God must be both external and internal, spiritually. Getting to the place where we hear it externally and seek the Holy Spirit to apply it internally is vastly important. So God said to Jeremiah, “Go down to the potter's house; it’s there I’m going to cause you to hear my words.” If you’re not in the right place at the right time, you’re not going to hear the Word of God.

When you hear externally, seek Christ and the Holy Spirit to apply and teach it internally and spiritually, so it becomes part of you. Did you really hear today? I pray so.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace, mercy, goodness, kindness, and love, Lord, that you would teach us to hear Thy Word, apply it, and conform our lives to it. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

The Potter and the Clay

Part Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 18:1-12 (KJV)

Jeremiah 18, verses 1 through 12:

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 'Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.' Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?' saith the Lord. 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.'

"'At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation,

> and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.'
>
> "'Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.' And they said, 'There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.'"

Introduction and Review

> If you'll remember, last week when I began this message, I pointed out the fact that God commanded Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house, and there He would cause him to hear His word. Jeremiah did not go to the plumber's house or the brick mason's house; he went to the potter's house as he was instructed, because that was where God was going to speak to him and give him a message to deliver to the people. That message was that God is the absolute and sole sovereign. Consequently, He has an absolute right to deal with nations according to their conduct toward Him.

This was illustrated by the potter working with a vessel on the wheel. Since nations are made up of individuals, whatever is true of the nation is true of the individual as well. I pointed out that he was to hear the potter's words, or the divine Potter; God was going to speak to him.

So I ask this question: How does one know whether or not he is really, genuinely hearing the Word of God? You have to remember the distinction in the Bible between external hearing and internal hearing. Anyone who has ears to hear has a responsibility to hear. That is why our Lord said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." But just because you are hearing externally, just because you are hearing sounds, does not mean that you are really, genuinely hearing. There is indeed a spiritual hearing, and no one ever really hears the Word of God until he heeds the Word of God, until he actually obeys the Word of God.

So the question has to come back: How do we know that we are really, genuinely hearing the Word of God? The answer is by the fruits of that Word in our lives, by the evidences and manifestations of that Word in our lives. If you are really, genuinely hearing the Word of God, then you are going to have some of these things in your life in some degree.

The Potter's Precepts (Review)

When I say in some degree, remember our Lord said that even the good hearer, the good seed, brought forth some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. In other words, if you are really, genuinely hearing the Word of God, to some degree these things are going to be in your life.

The very first thing I pointed out was condemnation, because you and I cannot hear the Word of God without being condemned because of our sins. Even as Christians, in 1 John chapter 3, "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and God knoweth all things." When we sin, when we violate God's law, we are condemned in our own hearts. That is for sure. But the second thing I pointed out was conviction. We as Christians will always be convicted over our sins. We will know that we have fouled up, gone astray, violated, and transgressed the Word of God. So there will be conviction in some degree.

The Potter's Plan

Thirdly, there will be correction. The Bible is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction. If you're really hearing the Word of God, if you're really listening, you're not going to be holding on to humanistic thoughts and values or humanistic theology. The Word of God is designed to correct us. So if we're really listening, we're going to be corrected.

Fourthly, there will be cleansing in our lives. The Bible says, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Jesus Christ said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." And David asked, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy

commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Dwight L. Moody had written in the flyleaf of his Bible, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Lastly, there will be confirmation in your life. That is, the Holy Spirit of God is going to bear witness with your spirit that you are indeed a child of God.

The Potter's Plan

Last week we looked at the potter's precepts. He said to Jeremiah, "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words." Today we begin with verse 3 and look at the second point, the potter's plan. "Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels."

A potter does not simply go to the wheels without a plan. He does not simply throw some mud at the wheel and decide he'll wait and see what turns out. No. When the potter goes to the wheel, he has already determined beforehand what he's going to produce.

It may be a vase. It may be a cup, a pot, a plate, or a bowl. But he already knows what he is going to produce. Some folks pronounce vase, “vase.” Do you know the difference between a vase and a vase? About 600 bucks. It depends. If you want to buy a vase, you can buy one at Wal-Mart for 20 bucks. But if you go to an antique store or some other high-volume store and buy a vase, you are going to pay an extra 700 bucks for basically the same thing. The potter knows exactly what he is going to make when he goes to the wheel.

So God, the divine Potter, also had a plan for Israel. In Exodus 19, beginning with verse 3, we read: “Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, ‘Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.’

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, now watch, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a

kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."

God revealed to Moses His plan for the nation of Israel, and then Moses communicated that plan to the people. Likewise, God communicates His plan for our lives in His Word.

Let me give you several things that should be very obvious. First of all, it is God's will that His people be saved from their sins. Stop and think about that. It's God's will that His people be saved from their sins. This should be very obvious because the Bible says this is the reason why He sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. The Bible says in Matthew 1:21, "And thou shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." So God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that we might be saved from our sins.

But that's not all. He not only sent the Lord Jesus, He also sent the Holy Spirit into the world. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Note that God has not only chosen us to salvation, but He chose us to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Obviously, not only did the Lord Jesus Christ come and die for His people, but at the same time God sent the Holy Spirit of God to draw us unto Himself. That's why the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

So let's mark it down. We can say it like this: It is God's plan, the divine Potter's plan for His people, that we be saved. Secondly, it is His divine plan that we be sanctified.

This is an obvious fact. In First Thessalonians chapter four, beginning with verse one, the apostle says: "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments

we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit."

Notice what he says: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." We can spell it out. First, it is God's plan that His people be saved. Second, it is God's plan that His people be sanctified. Third, it is God's plan that His people be separated.

The apostle Paul said it this way in Romans 1:1: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." If you are separated unto God—and, really and truly, that is what the word sanctified means—you are set apart for a special purpose. It is God's plan for you and me to be saved as His people, to be sanctified, and to be separated unto Him, unto His Word, and unto His truth.

The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 1:4, speaking of Jesus Christ, "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." It is God's will that we be delivered from this present evil world. That means we are to be separated unto Him and unto His Gospel. It is the Sovereign's plan that we be saved, that we be sanctified, and that we be separated.

And I'm going to give you one more thing before I go to the next point. I want you to understand this. It's also the Sovereign's plan that we be sure of that salvation. I want you to understand this. Salvation is an objective fact. I said this last week. Salvation is an objective fact. Salvation is not based upon our experiences. It's not based upon our feelings. It's not based upon our emotions. Salvation is based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Do you remember in John 19:30, Christ was hanging on the cross and he

said this, "It is finished." That is, it's over, it's done with, it is an accomplished fact.

Now, there are a lot of people who are basically not sure that they're saved. Some of them probably really are not saved, that's why they're not sure. But others who may be saved are trying to base their assurance upon some feeling or some experience. Listen, not everyone has the same experience. Not everybody is made up the same. Not everyone has the same emotions that other people have. No. You cannot trust emotions or experiences. The only thing that you can trust is the completed, full, and final work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me show you this. I want you to turn in your Bible, hold Jeremiah 18, but turn in your Bibles to 1 John chapter 5. I want you to see this in light of what I've just said. Look in 1 John chapter 5. 1 and 2 Peter, and then 1 John, and go, if you would, to chapter 5 and let's begin reading there with verse 10. 1 John 5 and verse 10.

So now we're talking about assurance of salvation. We're talking about being sure that we're saved. But you look what he says. 1 John chapter 5 and let's begin reading there with verse 10. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." That is, we have the Holy Spirit. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." So God gave his Son a record, and God said, if we do not believe this record, then we're making him a liar. Well, what is the record? Look in verse 11. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Now watch the next verse. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

If you are in Jesus Christ, if you have Jesus Christ, you have life. If you do not have Jesus Christ, you do not have life. First John 5:13 says, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” How can I know? Not based upon my experience, feelings, or emotions, but upon the objective person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ completed everything. He fulfilled the law. He earned and worked out a perfect righteousness. He died as our substitute, as our surety,

and as our sacrifice. God has given this record: he that hath the Son hath life. Therefore, we may know that if we are in Christ, we have life. If we are not in Christ, we do not have life, and we do not know.

It is God's plan that we be saved, sanctified, separated, and sure. Here is a good question: If that is God's plan for us, why are we in such a mess? Why are our lives, our churches, our families, and our country in such a mess? What happened to the plan? What happened to the nation Israel? In Exodus chapter 19, God said that they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. What happened to that nation? How then did they end up being chastised, deported, and cursed?

That question, along with several others, leads to the next point. Go back to Jeremiah 18 and look at verse 4. Notice what he said in verse 3: "Then I went down to the potter's house and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels." Here is the potter's plan. Now, in verse 4, we have the potter's problem.

The Potter's Problem

"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." Pottery is one of the oldest arts in the world, and it remains virtually unchanged to this present time. The potter would take a lump of clay, twist it, knead it, and pound it until, hopefully, all the bubbles and impurities were out of it and it was soft and pliable. Then he would place that clay on the wheel. The wheel was usually operated by a treadle. The potter would put the clay right in the middle of that wheel, and the wheel would spin. Then the potter would take his fingers and hands and caress that clay and work it. If the clay was of the right consistency and free from impurities and foreign matter, then that lump of clay, which was nothing in and of itself, would turn out to be a very beautiful and useful vessel.

But the Bible says in verse 4, "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." The problem was not with the potter. The problem was with the clay. Usually there are two possible problems that will disrupt the work of the potter. First, the clay could contain hidden impurities or some foreign matter. Secondly, the clay could be stiff, inflexible, and unyielding. In other words, if

the clay is not pliable enough, it is basically impossible to work with. So the difficulty is not with God. The difficulty is in man.

Now, I ask you this question: What happened to Israel? If God planned for them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, we know they were neither. What happened? Israel had both problems. They had impurities or foreign materials—that is, idolatry—as well as a rebellious heart that was as an adamant stone. Without turning there, let me quote 2 Kings 17:12: "For they served idols."

Whereof the Lord had said unto them, "Ye shall not do this thing." What did they do? They forsook God. They went after foreign gods, foreign material, all these pebbles there. And how about Zechariah 7:12? The Bible says, "Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts." What did they do? They made their hearts as an adamant stone. They made their hearts inflexible, stiff, and hard.

All you have to do is read the book of Judges. See how often they forsook God and went into idolatry, and God judged them. Read the book of Hosea. Read the book of Amos. You will find that Israel had both of these problems. They were full of impurities and foreign matter, and they were stiff and inflexible.

What about the problems in our lives? Do you realize we basically have the same exact problems?

Isaiah 59 tells us that what God said then is just as true today. You want to know what the problem in our lives, our churches, our families, and our country really is? Here it is:

“Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” There is no problem with the potter. There is no problem with God. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.”

Is that not exactly where we are today? Is that not what is wrong with most people, most families, most churches, and our entire country? Of course it is. The problem is not with God. God's hand is not short that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. But it is our sins, our rebellion, the pebbles, and the stones in our lives.

I have dealt with animals all my life, and it is interesting. You can feed those animals and let one grain of corn get in your shoe. In just a few seconds, you are limping. You have to stop and get that grain of corn out. Any little pebble will do the same thing. That is what God says: it is our sins and our iniquities.

Human Responsibility

Now look at 2 Timothy 2, verses 20–22. Mark this passage, because we will be coming back here shortly to see another point. Look at verse 20. Look what he says.

"But in a great house"—that is, in a good house, a big house, a large house, a magnificent house—"there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. Now watch. If a man therefore purge himself from these," that is, the dishonorable things, "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Whose responsibility is it to get that grain of corn out of my shoe? It is mine. It does not matter how it got in there, whether I dropped it purposely, dropped it accidentally, or someone threw it at me. If it is in my shoe, it is my responsibility to get it out. Whose responsibility is it to remove the pebbles from our lives? It is our responsibility.

Do you understand that repentance is the gift of God? But God is not going to repent for you. Faith is the gift of God, but God is not going to believe for you. We have been commanded to repent, and we have been commanded to believe. Repentance and faith are not simply one-time acts. If we have been saved by the grace of God, repentance is an attitude and disposition of life. We are to be

continually and constantly turning from anything and everything contrary to God and His Word.

I have done far more repenting after I got saved than when I got saved. When God convicted me initially, He convicted me over a number of things, and I repented of those things. But when I started studying the Scripture, I found out I had a whole lot more problems than just those few. Our lives are to be lives of continual repentance. Moreover, it is our responsibility to make sure that we are yielding to God. Romans 12:1 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Romans 6:16 likewise addresses this responsibility.

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Do you realize you can be soft and pliable either toward God or soft and pliable toward sin? It is your responsibility to say, "Lord, make me soft and pliable to you. I want to yield to you." Do you realize the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20?

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." You have a responsibility to make sure the pebbles are out of your life and that you are soft, pliable, and easily worked with.

The Potter’s Prerogative

It is absolute foolishness on our part to think that we can sin, rebel, and be disobedient and still be used for God, for His honor and His glory. I have known pastors who were in wonderful positions to reach many people, and they developed the attitude, “Well, I can sin and do this because I am doing such a good work, and God is going to overlook this.” It is not going to happen. God is not going to overlook our sin. Someone says, “What you need to do is make yourself indispensable to God.”

I have news for you: no one is indispensable to God. We are all dispensable. When we become so proud, arrogant, haughty, and

inflated with our own pride that we think we are indispensable, right there is a huge stone and an unyielding spot in the clay. Many saints have learned the lesson the hard way: God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble. Therefore, it is our responsibility to humble ourselves.

The Potter's Prerogative

Go back to verse four of Jeremiah, chapter 18. We have looked so far at the potter's precepts, the potter's plan, and the potter's problem because of the pebbles and the inconsistency in the clay. But in verse four we find another truth, and that is the potter's prerogative. "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." Here is his prerogative: "So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."

We need to learn that God has an incontestable sovereignty over us, and He is not a debtor to us. We must learn that God may dispose of us as He thinks fit, and He is not accountable to us at all. For you and I to think that God is accountable to us, or that God must give a reason for what He does in our lives, is essentially to say that the clay has a right to quarrel with the potter. No.

You know what the Bible says in Job 33:13? "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." God does not owe us an explanation. God does not owe us a reason. God is sovereign. God is God.

In 2 Timothy 2, verse 20, Paul gives us a very important verse: "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." He continues in verse 21: "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

What did he say? There are vessels of honour and vessels of dishonour in every house. My wife has a beautiful bowl—I guess you would call it a bowl—that Jane gave her before she died. That bowl is on our mantelpiece for everyone to see. It is a very beautiful, attractive bowl. It is displayed because it is beautiful and suitable for that place.

But our slop jar is not on the mantel. Our honeypot is not on the mantel. Whatever you call it—chamber pots—it is not on the mantel. Those vessels have a different purpose and a different place. Now listen to Jeremiah 18:4: “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.” Listen now: “So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.”

So the potter can just as easily make you into a vessel of dishonour as a vessel of honour. If the clay is full of pebbles, if it is unusable, stiff, and unyielding, what happens? Instead of making a vase, he will make us a slop jar. Romans 9:21 says, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” That is God's prerogative. The potter has power over the clay and may make from the same lump one vessel for honour and another for dishonour.

Examples of Vessels of Dishonor

Let me give you an example of a vessel of dishonour. The first example is a young man by the name of Demas. In Colossians 4:14 we read, “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.” Demas traveled with Paul and Luke the physician. Look at this example carefully.

In Philemon, verse 24, we read, “Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.” Demas is here called a fellow laborer with the Apostle Paul and with Luke. Now turn to Second Timothy, chapter 4, and look at what is said concerning Demas. Paul writes, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.”

Demas not only traveled with the Apostle Paul and Luke; he was also counted as a fellow laborer. He was viewed as one who loved the Lord and served Him. But the question has to be asked: What happened to Demas? With all of his advantages, all of his training, all of his fellowship, and all the opportunities that Demas had, what happened to him?

How is Demas best remembered? He is no longer remembered as a fellow laborer with the Apostle Paul or as someone who traveled

with Luke. Demas is now remembered as someone who forsook the ministry and forsook the Lord. He is remembered as someone who loved this present evil world. He loved the glitter and glamour of this world more than the Lord Jesus Christ.

He did not want to be a martyr. He did not want to suffer. He wanted to retreat to a place of safety. He loved the world that now is, with all of its cares, troubles, and confusion. He loved this world, not the next world, and would rather have his life now than later. Luke is remembered as the beloved physician. Paul is remembered as the greatest apostle. Demas is remembered as one who is unworthy to be remembered. He is a vessel of dishonor.

Look in First Timothy, chapter 1, verses 18 through 20. Paul tells Timothy, “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is

Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Wow! When was the last time you thought of Hymenaeus and Alexander? Now, evidently, Hymenaeus and Alexander were in the church. They had indeed made professions of faith, and yet they remained in error. If you would turn right over, hold 1 Timothy chapter 1, but turn right over to 2 Timothy chapter 2, we'll come back there in just a moment, but look in verse 17. We'll come back and read a little bit more later. "And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus." Now, Hymenaeus is mentioned again. How do we know that Hymenaeus and Alexander were in the church? Well, because the Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 20 that he delivered them unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. Now, delivering them unto Satan is through excommunication or church discipline, which is read, which we read this same phrase in 1 Corinthians 5, which we will get there a little bit later.

But I want you to note that both of these men evidently held unsound doctrine. Go back to 2 Timothy, chapter 2, and let's now read 17 and 18. He said, "And their word will eat as doth a canker: of

whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." Wow. How are Hymenaeus and Alexander remembered? They're remembered as individuals who made shipwreck of their faith, and shipwrecked other people's faith as well.

They are known as vessels of dishonor. In fact, Paul had to say, at one point, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil." So he turned against the Apostle Paul. A vessel of dishonor. Let me show you another one. I want you to look in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. I wish I had time to really deal with this passage. I don't, but I want you to look at it very quickly. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Because this is where the Apostle Paul had to deliver someone else over to Satan.

Which again is church discipline. I want you to look at it. You're talking about a heinous sin. Here it is, 1 Corinthians 5, verse 1. Paul writes, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife." So he said even the unsaved don't condone this. He said, "And what about you folks? Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."

"For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

This was a very heinous and grievous sin, done in blatant opposition to Scripture, even while his father was alive. Most commentators say that this was his stepmother, not his real fleshly mother. Here was a man committing fornication with his stepmother while his father was still alive.

Paul was still talking about this in 2 Corinthians 7:12: "Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong," the son, "nor for his cause that suffered wrong," the father,

"but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you." Here was a man committing fornication with his stepmother, which is absolutely contrary to Scripture.

Leviticus 18:8 says, "The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness." Leviticus 20:11 says, "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." Deuteronomy 22:30 says, "A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt."

Yet, if you look in 2 Corinthians 2, the amazing thing is that this man was restored. He evidently repented. He is unnamed, and I can tell you why he is unnamed: I would not want my name listed either. But Paul says, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."

"Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ."

Was he forgiven? Yes. Was he restored? Yes. How is he remembered?

As someone who committed an awful, heinous, grievous sin, one not even condoned by the heathen, he will always be remembered as a dishonorable vessel.

Here is the whole point. Go back to Jeremiah 18 and look at verse 4. The potter's prerogative is this: "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

So, guess what? We may sin. We may be disobedient. We may transgress. We may rebel. We may fail to surrender and yield and do that which is right. But that does not upset or destroy the work of the Potter. He just makes it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Conclusion and Application

Instead of making us a beautiful vase to display, He will make us a slop jar, a spittoon bucket. We are in His hands. The divine Potter is not hampered in the least. The problem was never with the Potter; the problem is always with the clay. Psalm 76:10 says, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

God is in control, even of sin and rebellion. God will allow just enough sin and just enough rebellion to be that which will ultimately praise His justice, and the remainder He will restrain. Daniel 4:35 says, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” God does according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and no one can stop Him.

He has the absolute right to make us into any vessel that He chooses. He is the Potter; we are the clay. We can be a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor. God will work with what we give Him, and He will make it whatever pleases Himself.

All clay, no matter its consistency or content, is in the hand of the divine Potter. There is no one who can thwart, hinder, stop, or overthrow Him. God has said in Isaiah 46:10, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” In Ephesians 1:5, we read about the good pleasure of His will. In Ephesians 1:9, He speaks according to the good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself. Ephesians 1:11 sums it up: “according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

The truth is that we are in God’s hands, and God can either make us a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor. When you die, you will be remembered by your family and friends, perhaps not for long and perhaps not by many. The question is, how do you want to be remembered—as a vessel of honor or as a vessel of dishonor? There have been people who died of whom I have heard people say, and sometimes I have said it myself, “Thank God he’s gone.” There are others of whom we say, “Oh, God.”

CHAPTER 3

The Potter and the Clay

Part Three

Introduction and Review

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, “Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words.” Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?” saith the Lord. “Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.”

“At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey

not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

"Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." And they said, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart."

God commanded Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house to hear his words. God could have spoken to Jeremiah anywhere, but there was a specific lesson that God wanted Jeremiah to communicate to the people. This was one last time that God was going to appeal to the people and warn them, and yet they still refused to listen.

The lesson Jeremiah learned as he watched the potter was this: God, as the sole sovereign, has an absolute right to deal with nations according to their conduct toward him. This was illustrated in a tangible form by the potter molding the vessels from clay. Since nations are made up of individuals, what is true of nations is also true individually.

We have considered the potter's precepts found in verses 1 and 2: how do we know whether we are genuinely hearing God's Word? Five results will be evident in our lives if we are truly hearing it.

We have also considered the potter's problem and prerogative. The problem appears in verse 4: "the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter." Several things may cause the vessel to be marred, including pebbles or inconsistency in the clay. Yet the potter has the prerogative: "so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."

The potter may begin with a design for a beautiful vase, but if there are pebbles or inconsistency, he may have to say, "Well, I'll make it a slop jar, or I'll make it a spittoon." In other words, it is totally in His hands. That is His prerogative. God is absolutely sovereign and in control at all times. We may rebel against Him or

disobey Him, yet this does not affect Him at all. He still works everything out for His honor and glory.

Therefore Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." God allows just enough evil to honor and glorify His justice; what will not do so, He restrains. Daniel 4:35 says, "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Thus, when we speak of the potter's prerogative, we understand that God may make us a vessel of dishonor or a vessel of honor.

The Bible shows individuals whom God made into vessels of dishonor. If God makes us into a slop jar because of our own rebellion and wickedness, and we realize what God has done to us because of our sin, we need to repent and be the best slop jar we can possibly be for God's honor and glory. I will be honest with you: I would still rather be God's slop jar than a vessel of destruction.

The sixth point is the potter's procedure. In verse 6, God says, "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." God is telling these people, "I can do with you exactly as this potter does."

The Potter's Procedure: The Kiln Experience

The potter may finish a work on the wheel, but that does not mean the work is complete. Once the potter finishes a work on the wheel, there is a drying process and a firing process whereby the pottery is placed into the kiln. It is only the kiln that truly matures and finishes the potter's work. Without this process, the vessel simply would not last long.

In Isaiah 48:10, God says, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Egypt was considered to be the iron furnace, or the furnace of iron. So God sent Israel into the furnace for 400 years. Deuteronomy 4:20 says, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day."

God told Israel, "I brought you out of the iron furnace." In 1 Kings 8:51, while Solomon was praying and dedicating the temple to the Lord, he said, "For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron." God had chosen them in the furnace of affliction.

Let me challenge you to do something. I want you to study history, but especially Christian history. Read the Christian history in the Bible. Read Fox's Book of Martyrs. And you're going to discover a very important truth, and that is this: Usually, the individuals that God uses the most are the same individuals that suffer the most.

Zechariah 13:9 says, “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.” Note, if you would, that when they call the Lord their God, when they call upon Him, He has tried them with fire. He has brought them into the furnace.

Peter picks up on this very same truth in 1 Peter 1:7: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Note that he calls it the trial of faith, and then talks about it being tried with fire. Remember, God said, “I've chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”

Shrinkage: Humility Through Affliction

Let me ask you a question. Do you know what happens to a vessel when the potter takes it off the wheel, lets it air dry for a moment or two or a little while, and then puts it in the kiln? Do you know what happens to that vessel when it is placed into the furnace? Let me give you just three things very quickly. First and foremost, the most obvious change in the vessel is shrinkage. Once the potter makes the vessel on the wheel, it starts to air dry, and when he puts it in the kiln, it gets drier and shrinks anywhere from 5 to 15 percent. There will be some shrinkage just from air drying, but the most shrinkage occurs when it is in the kiln. It has to take place very slowly, or else the formation of steam within the body of the vessel will cause it to

burst. So when God places us in His divine kiln, we can expect shrinkage—shrinkage like that of John the Baptist.

You say, "What are you talking about?" Well, do you remember that passage? After John had baptized Jesus, they finally came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." In other words, "John, you're losing it. You're losing listeners and hearers. Everybody's going to hear Christ. They're not coming to hear you." And John gave the classic response in John 3 and verse 30 when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

I want you to understand something. When God places us in the kiln, when God places us in the furnace, it will change our attitude. There will be shrinkage. We will lose our pride and our arrogance and our haughtiness, and it will humble us. And as difficult as the furnace may be, it is absolutely necessary. Do you understand it should not be any wonder to you as to why we go through hardships and trials and tests and temptations and tribulations? The Lord places us in the furnace to bring us to an end of ourselves.

We have to realize literally how foolish and vain and helpless we really truly are. I want you to listen to this principle, and I'm going to show it to you from Scripture. There's a principle. That principle is this: before one can be honored, he must first be humbled. I want you to look in your Bibles, hold in Jeremiah 18, but turn first to Proverbs chapter 15 and look at verse 33. Proverbs chapter 15 and verse 33. Proverbs 15 and verse 33.

Look what the Bible says. Proverbs 15 verse 33: "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility." Before honour is humility. Look in your Bibles to Proverbs 18 and verse 12. Proverbs 18 verse 12. The Bible says, "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility." And then if you look in Proverbs 29 and verse 23, Proverbs 29 verse 23, again God says it like this: "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." Do you realize when God places us in his divine kiln, when God puts us in the furnace of affliction, He knows exactly what we need. He knows exactly what it will take to bring us to the end of ourselves.

You know, so many times we tend to think, "Behold, I am wise." And when God places us in the furnace, all of a sudden we realize we're not so wise. We begin to think many times, "Behold, I can do all things." But the truth of the matter is when God places us in the furnace, we realize we can do nothing. Help me out, I know you remember this: what did our Lord say in John 15?

“Without me, you can do how much?” Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Hannah was praying in 1 Samuel 2 and verse 7, and she said this: “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.” God is able to bring us down, and God is able to lift us up. The Bible speaks in Isaiah 2 and verse 17: “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

What is the purpose of placing us in the furnace of affliction? What is the purpose of putting us in the divine kiln? It is so that we would be brought to the end of ourselves, brought to our own helplessness and hopelessness, and realize that our only help and our only hope is in the Lord himself. Do you know what David said?

I love this passage in Psalm 116:6: “The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.” If we want to be helped and strengthened by God, we must realize, “I can’t. I am nothing. I must depend totally and completely upon the Lord.” Twice in the New Testament we read that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

The very first thing that happens when you get in the kiln is shrinkage. You begin to realize that you are not so wise, not so smart, and not full of ability. You realize you can do nothing. The first result of being placed in the divine kiln is shrinkage.

Burn-off: Weaning from Worldly Attachments

The second benefit of being placed in the divine kiln is burn-off. Burn-off indicates the burning off of organic and inorganic materials such as carbon and sulfates. Only in the furnace does the vessel lose many extraneous things that it does not need and that would hinder it from being a perfect vessel.

When we get in the furnace of affliction, we realize there are many things we can live without. We are so accustomed to having multitudes of things that we think we need them. Do you realize that if the electric grid went down totally across this nation today and stayed off for two weeks, how many people would die? A hundred years ago, it would have affected hardly anyone. Now we think we cannot live without electricity.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:31, “And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.” God tells us to learn to use this world without abusing it. Scripture tells us in 1 Timothy 6:17 that God hath given us richly all things to enjoy. The problem is not with the things God has given us to enjoy, but with our abuse of them. We hoard and hold on to them, place our confidence and comfort in them, and look at the gifts instead of the giver.

We often forget the truth of 1 John 2 verses 15 through 17: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

It is only in the furnace that we learn what is important, what is absolutely necessary, and what we can live without. In the furnace, we are weaned from the things of the world. One of my favorite stories concerns a multi-millionaire who died. As he was being buried, one pallbearer asked another, "How much did he leave?" The second responded, "He left it all." That is the truth.

I will guarantee you this: one hundred years from now, it will not matter what you had or did not have, what you possessed or did not possess, or what you enjoyed or did not enjoy. It simply will not matter to you then. What do we learn in the furnace of affliction? We learn the truth of the little couplet: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." In the furnace, you have shrinkage.

Vitrification: Maturing and Strengthening

In the furnace, you have burn-off. Thirdly, you have what is called vitrification: the hardening and tightening of that clay, or the partial glassification of the clay. We can also think of it as maturation or maturing. All that Abraham went through is reflected in Romans 4 and verse 20: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." How could he be strong? Because he was matured in the furnace.

That is why the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 16, in verse 13, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." Paul, speaking of Epaphras in Colossians 4 verse 12, said: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." What is vitrification?

It's when you and I mature. It's when we become strong, when we learn to stand strong, and when we're strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. Read the Bible. Moses endured how? By seeing Him who is invisible. Daniel was able to face the lions unafraid. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were able to endure the fiery furnace. Job suffered greatly. I don't suppose anyone has ever suffered like Job, but yet Job said this in Job 23 and verse 10: "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

When hath he tried me? When I'm in the furnace, I shall come forth as gold. Ask yourself this question: How did the martyrs face their torture and death? I know the answers: by His grace and by His Spirit, but you have to remember this. They had already been purified and made perfect in Christ. They had already been tried in the furnace of affliction. They had already matured and strengthened and hardened themselves in Christ so that they were able to face their torture and their death. It's the furnace that will prepare us for glory. It is also the furnace that will enable us to learn what is important and what is not important and how we're to fulfill our responsibilities.

So here's the potter's procedure. Once he's through that vessel, he takes it off the wheel, air dries it, then sticks it in the kiln and turns

up the heat. And I've got news for you folks: He knows exactly how high to turn the heat. He knows what it will take to bring us to the end of ourselves. You know, the best thing that could ever happen to each one of us is when we get on our face before God, weeping, so broken, so helpless, and just say, honestly, "Lord, I can't. If I ever do anything, if I keep going, if I succeed, if I do anything, it's got to be by your grace and by your mercy. I need you. Please help me."

The Potter's Patience

And that's what we learn in the furnace. I want you to go back to Jeremiah, chapter 18, because I want you to see seventhly, the potter's patience. Beginning there in verse 7, the potter's patience. God says, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

“Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”

Interestingly enough, when I am talking about the potter’s patience, Romans 15:5 calls God the God of all patience. Patience is actually a divine title. Arthur W. Pink wrote an article on the patience of God and asked some very pertinent questions. Listen to what he says: “How wondrous is God’s patience with the world today.”

I stop and think about that. Lord, have mercy. I do not even know how we have existed as long as we have. If Arthur W. Pink were alive today, I do not know what he would think. But he asks, “How wondrous is God’s patience with the world today? On every side, people are sinning with a high hand. The divine law is trampled underfoot and God himself openly despised.

"It is truly amazing that he does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy him. Why does he not suddenly cut off the haughty infidel and the blatant blasphemer as he did Ananias and Sapphira? Why does he not cause the earth to open its mouth and devour the persecutors of his people so that like Dathan and Abiram they shall go down alive into the pit? And what of apostate Christendom?

"Where every possible form of sin is now tolerated and practiced under cover of the holy name of Christ. Why does not the righteous wrath of heaven make an end to such abominations? Only one answer is possible: that God bears with much long-suffering the vessels fitted to destruction."

That is the patience of God. The only reason this world has not been destroyed is because of the long-suffering and patience of God. Stephen Charnock, one of the old Puritans, has a wonderful book—probably three inches thick—on the existence and attributes of God. In that book, he defines patience, especially in reference to God, and here is what he says: "Patience."

It is part of the divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness. Mildness is always the companion of true goodness; and the greater the goodness, the greater the mildness. Who is so holy as Christ? And who is so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch of His mercy: "The Lord is full of compassion and slow to anger."

It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the subject. Mercy respects the creature as miserable; patience respects the creature as criminal. Mercy pities him in his misery. Patience bears with the sin which engendered the misery and gives birth to more. Personally, we would define divine patience as that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them. In Nahum 1:3 we read, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power." Men in this world are quick in passion and are not so ready to forgive an injury or bear with an offender as one of meaner rank.

It is a want of lack of power over that man's self that makes him do such unbecoming things upon a provocation. A prince who can

bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger because great is His power. He has no less power over Himself than over His creatures. The divine patience not only allows God to bear long with sinners; it also restrains God from instantly and immediately striking us dead.

The most patient and glorious sovereign of heaven and earth endured the wickedness of the antediluvians an additional 120 years. In Genesis 6:5 we read, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Yet in Genesis 6:3, God said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” God was telling Noah that He would destroy the earth, yet He gave these wicked people 120 years more. First Peter 3:20 tells us, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” God waited 120 years during Noah's building of the ark and allowed those wicked people to continue in their sin.

He did not smite them instantly; He allowed them to live. Do you realize that God patiently bore with the Amorites for an additional four hundred years? In Genesis chapter 15, God told Abraham that his descendants would go to a strange country for four hundred years. He explained why Israel had to go into Egypt:

“And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

Do you realize how wicked the Amorites were? Yet God allowed them to live an additional four hundred years.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He put a sword in their hand and said, “Kill every one of them.” But He waited 400 years. Think about the patience of God with Israel. The Exodus, when

Israel left Egypt, was approximately 1446 B.C. The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in 586 B.C. Subtracting 586 from 1446, we find that God suffered the provocations of the Israelites for 860 years. It was not only in the wilderness that they provoked Him; they provoked Him when they were in the land as well.

The Limit of God's Patience

Psalm 78:5 says, “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgat his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.”

Read all of Psalm 78, and you will see everything that God did for the Israelites, and how every time they forgot Him and turned from God. Peruse the book of Judges and see how they forsook God and followed Baal. Read the prophets and see how they pleaded, begged, admonished, and warned them to turn from their idolatry and back to God. Yet they would not. Eight hundred and sixty years. Finally, God said, “That’s enough.” Understand this truth: God is patient.

The Potter's Punishment

But there is a limit to his patience. Sooner or later, the long-suffering of God will come to an end. If you really want to understand God's patience and long-suffering, ask yourself this question: Why has God allowed me to live as long as I have lived? Let's be honest. Each of us has enough sins that we should have been killed, struck dead under the judging hand of God many years ago. Do you realize it is just mercy that God did not kill you before you even came to Christ? And

even after you have been saved, you have still sinned. So you have to ask yourself: Why has God allowed me to live?

Do you remember Lamentations 3:22-23? "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." God has been merciful. God has been patient. God has given us compassion day after day and allowed us to live. But we must understand this: there will be a time when His patience will come to an end.

Now go back to Jeremiah chapter 18. We have seen the potter's precepts, the potter's plan, the potter's problems, the potter's prerogatives, the potter's procedure, and the potter's patience. Now consider the potter's punishment. Look first at verse 12. When God sent Jeremiah one last time, what did they say?

The Potter's Punishment

They said, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." Now look at Jeremiah 19:10-11 and see what God told Jeremiah to tell them. "Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, and shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again." "And they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury."

What does the potter do with a worthless and useless vessel? He does not save it. He does not need it. It is good for nothing, so he simply destroys it. A work on wheels, while it is wet and pliable to some extent, may be fashioned into another vessel. But once that vessel is taken off the wheel, dried, put in the kiln, and hardened, it cannot be reworked. If the vessel is cracked or defective, it is useless. The potters would then take the useless, worthless vessels, cast them down, and break them.

They would deposit the broken pieces of clay in Tophet, a garbage dump. God told Jeremiah to break the vessel before them and let them know, “That’s exactly what I’m going to do to them. And I will bury them in Tophet, in the garbage dump.”

Isaiah 30:14 says, “And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit.” God says that when He breaks the vessel, there will not be a sherd left of it; it will be destroyed.

The devastation God speaks about, I believe, was not simply the Babylonian captivity, because that captivity lasted only seventy years. After seventy years, they came back into the land. I believe this destruction speaks of the destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70. God said, “I’m going to destroy the nation in such a way there’s not going to be a sherd of it left, not a sherd.”

There is a movement today known as Zionism. Zionism tries to do that which God says cannot be done. God says the nation will never be made whole again, and they are trying to say, “Yes, it can be.” Man cannot piece together that which God has broken.

God said in Jeremiah 19 that He would bury them in Tophet. Tophet was also known as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. In that valley was their image to Moloch, where they sacrificed their little babies. The name Tophet comes from the Hebrew word “toph,” which means to roll as a drum. This brazen image had a fire kindled in its bottom, causing its arms to turn glowing red. They would place a baby in its hands, and the baby would roll down the arms into its belly and into the fire pit to be consumed. Thus Tophet was known not only as a garbage dump, but as a valley of slaughter. God said, “Just like you’ve used Tophet as a valley of slaughter to murder babies, so you shall be slaughtered and buried in Tophet.”

Your dead carcasses will lie there. Look in Jeremiah chapter 19, beginning with verse 11: “And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury. Thus will I do unto this place, saith the Lord, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet: and the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured

out drink offerings unto other gods. Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the Lord had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the Lord's house, and said to all the people, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words."

I hope you have gathered from these Scriptures that it does not pay to fight against God. It is not for your good to fight against your Maker. God has placed a curse upon all who fight against Him. Isaiah 45:9 says, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" God says, "Woe to that man. Cursed be the man that strives with his Maker." God is sovereign.

Look in Romans chapter 9. Paul is arguing and giving us the same truth that Isaiah gave and that Jeremiah gave. Let us begin with verse 19; in fact, let us go back to verse 18.

The Scripture says, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 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? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory."

The potter's patience will finally come to an end. When it does, you see the potter's punishment. God said, "I'll take this vessel and break it. There will not be a sherd left. Nothing to use. It will be gone." Let us make some applications. First of all, God will not lose any of his glory by the destruction of such unholy and worthless vessels.

Applications and Conclusion

Do you realize the Bible says in Proverbs 16 and verse 4, "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Those whom he destroys will praise and honor his justice, his righteousness. Those whom He saves will praise and honor His grace and mercy. Unbelievers, non-believers, are just as much in the hands of God as are believers. Whether they realize it or not, they are being fitted for God's divine purpose.

Go back to Jeremiah 18. This is not just simply individuals. It is true individually, but it is also true nationally. Look what he said in verse 7: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." In other words, the reshaping, reforming, and remaking of any man, even an entire nation of men, is accomplished by God. God is sovereign, and He is in sovereign control over human history.

The potter has an absolute right over the clay. This is true not only individually but nationally. As solid as the foundation was for the formation of this country, what did God say? If it turns, I will repent of the good that I said I would do and do it. Look at evil, Russia as we call it. God says if it repents, He will spare them. God is in control of nations and individuals.

The third application is this: when God appears in judgment against any person, people, or nation, you may rest assured it is because of our sins. Isaiah 29:16 says, “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?” And Isaiah 64:8 says, “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.”

God said, "Jeremiah, I want you to go to the potter's house, because there's a lesson that you need to learn, and this people need to learn: that I'm sovereign, that I'm in control, that I can do good or I can do evil, in the sense of judgment and wrath upon sin and wickedness. You need to bow to the one true and living God, and not to a dumb idol." God says, "Tell them this one more time."

And what do they say? "Nah. We'll do according to our own devices, and according to the imagination of our own hearts."

If God has saved you by His grace, you sure better learn to be thankful and grateful. If God has given you truth and mercy and life and health and strength, you better learn to be thankful and grateful.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions, they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I pray that you would help us, Lord, to learn the principles and the truths of Jeremiah 18. Help us to understand that thou art the potter, we're the clay. We're in your hands. May, Father, we get all the pebbles out of our lives. May we yield to thee and be of the consistency so that thou mayest be able to make us into vessels of honor for Your glory and Your praise. Help us to live for Thee, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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