

# The Potter and The Clay

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As a little kid of six or seven, I watched my mother make ceramic pottery. She would make figurines of gorgeous women in lace gowns. They were made out of clay, and she would paint the faces and shape the fingers on each hand and add the lace to make the dresses and all. I would watch her do that and I was just amazed. She was quite skilled. One day I remember that she let me make something. We got some clay and formed it into a plate-like shape and then fluted the edge. She had me do that like you would a pie crust. She let me press my small hand in the middle of the plate, then she wrote the date in there. Then she let me paint it with some green paint. So I had a chance to experience that.

Pottery and pottery making go back to the time of Genesis. Our son, Britt, collects Biblical antiquities. He bought a piece of pottery from an antiquities expert in Israel. He was showing it to me and said, "Do you notice something about this piece of pottery?" Right near the handle there was a thumb print in the clay. You just marvel at that. I said, "How old is this?" He said, "I've had it dated by an expert and it's dated to the generation before Noah, 4,300 years ago. This man put his thumb print in a soft piece of clay and it's there today. You just look at that and you have chills up and down your spine and think, "Man! Look at this!"

What I'm leading to is that God draws many analogies to many different things in the Bible. We all know that. He does so because, through analogies, He wants to teach us lessons that are difficult to understand.

Einstein did the same thing. Let me quote from the book, Einstein's Cosmos. It was written in 2004; this is on page 13. It was written by Michio Kaku. You can see him on PBS in science shows. He is a Japanese fellow and a very bright man. Here is what he says about Einstein:

Einstein would often comment that if a new theory was not based on a physical image simple enough for a child to understand, it was probably worthless.

Einstein would often use these thought experiments and explain very difficult concepts in a way that a child could understand. He said that if you cannot do that, it's probably a worthless theory.

What we want to do today is look at a very important physical image, an analogy that God provides in the Bible using pottery. Let's go to Isaiah 64:8. This is the overall scripture that covers everything that we're going to say today. God draws an analogy between Him and us and pottery.

**Isaiah 64:8.** *But now, O LORD, you are our father; (Here's the analogy) we are the clay, and you our Potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. (KJV)*

So the analogy says that God is the potter, we are the clay, and God works to shape us according to His will.

We have to ask: When God uses an analogy like that, what is He trying to teach us? Why did He pick this analogy rather than some other analogy? What lessons does He want us to learn through this analogy?

Hopefully we can answer some of those questions today. The title of the sermon is:

### The Potter and the Clay

In the first part of the sermon, we're going to talk about pottery making in Ancient Israel and the process that went on so we can better understand the analogies as we go through them.

The in the second part of the sermon, we're going to talk about four lessons we can learn from this analogy that applies to us today.

So first we will talk about pottery making in Ancient Israel.

I'll read a passage from the book, Palestinian Pottery in Bible Times, written by Kelso and Thorley. Pay very close attention to what they have to say.

Clay was the first synthetic to be discovered by mankind.

I had never thought about that before.

An artificial stone produced by firing clay shapes to a temperature sufficiently high to change the physical and chemical properties of the original clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone.

So it says that clay is the first synthetic discovered by mankind and that it produces an artificial stone by being heated to a temperature that changes the physical characteristics and chemical properties of the clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone. You go from soft clay, which really is like dirt, to almost a stone-like substance through the process of making pottery.

Let's look at that process of making clay in Ancient Israel. The first thing you needed was a source of clay. That was usually found in a field or along the bank of a stream. The following refers to a potter's field. That's a field that a potter bought because it had the right kind of clay he could use in making pottery.

**Matthew 27:7.** *And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. (KJV)*

The Holman Bible Dictionary says on pages 13-14:

The potter prepared dry clay by sifting and removing foreign matter and letting it stand in water to achieve uniform granules. Having achieved the desired texture, the potter mixed it by treading on it (with his feet) or hand kneading it. Then the potter was ready to shape the vessel.

Isaiah 41:25 refers to treading clay by foot. We know the Ancient Israelite's did that in Egypt when they were making brick. They were in the slime pits. First you needed a source of clay, and then the potter needed a workshop to make the pottery. Usually it was attached to his house or in his house. Jeremiah 18:2.

**Jeremiah 18:2.** *Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. (KJV)*

In his workshop he had a work bench and various tools. The most important tool was a potter's wheel. This was a rotating disc that was powered by his feet. He would move his feet and the disc would rotate, generally in a counter clock-wise manner. Maybe if we're old enough, we can remember back in the days when women would sew with a foot-powered machine. My mother and grandmother had a foot-powered Singer sewing machine. The faster you would move the peddle, the faster the needle would go up and down.

Well, the potter did the same thing. He would take a glob of clay and throw it onto the wheel. It's called a "throw." Then he would begin to shape the clay.

I'll read from the Zondervan Bible Dictionary, page 674.

By thrusting his forearm into the mass of wet clay, he hollowed out the interior. The centrifugal force imparted to the spinning lump enabled the potter, in a matter of minutes, to form a vessel with only light pressure from his fingers.

He would get his hand down in there and begin to work the clay as it was spinning toward the outside, hollowing the inside, and then he could make it into whatever shape he wanted this vessel to be. Then after letting it dry for a period of time, hardening a little bit, the potter could add a base if he chose, or a handle if it was a pitcher or something like that. He could form a spout by bending the clay in the shape of a spout or he could add various decorations on the outside.

The last step was to coat the pot with a liquid called "slip." I remember my mom doing this. I saw her mix it and put it on. Slip is a clay that is thinned to the consistency of cream or milk. You either poured it on or rubbed it on or painted it on the surface because it filled all the pores on the pot. You could add color to the slip to change the

color of the pot. After that process, if you desired, you could paint decorations on the pot. Then it was ready for the final and most important process. That is called “firing.”

I’ll read from the Vincent Handbook of Bible Knowledge, page 258. The potter needed an oven to heat the clay. It’s called a “kiln.”

During the time of Solomon, a new technique called “burnishing” was developed, which gave the pottery a subtler, softer appearance. Before the clay was dry, it was rubbed with a stone or a piece of bone and baked in an oven called a kiln. When the vessel cooled, it looked glossy which enhanced the color of the original clay.

The oven had to be fired and heated somewhere between 1,300 and 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. That is very, very hot. We read earlier in the book Palestinian Pottery, it changed the physical and chemical properties of the original clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone. That was done by heat. This firing is the most difficult part of the entire process. A master potter knew how to do this. He knew what temperature and how long to fire the pottery. It was a skill that was carefully guarded in the family, and it was passed down secretly from father to son. It was very detailed and complex, so this information was very highly guarded.

My mom had a kiln. It was about the size of a small garbage can. It was made out of fire-proof brick. It had an electric heater on the bottom. Dad had to wire it up to 220 volts to get it up to the appropriate temperature. I can remember watching her do that. The kiln had a heavy lid. She would put this gorgeous figurine made of clay into the middle and then another piece right in front of the port hole. It was about the size of a nickel and it had a plug in it. She would put this little device in front of it so you could see it. She would put the top back on and plug it in. It would get hotter and hotter, and occasionally she would let me pull out the little plug and peer inside. She told me to watch that little device. When it got up to the proper temperature, this stick would droop over and begin to melt. Then you knew that the temperature was hot enough. Then you would unplug the whole thing and let it cool overnight.

After cooling overnight, we were kind of excited, and she would take the lid off. This figurine went in as clay. And as clay, you could tap it and it had a dull thud, or you could use your fingernail and scrape across and it would leave a crease. When you brought it out, this figurine now was like glass. You could tap it and it would ring like a wine glass.

So this firing, you see, changed the clay into something that was hard as glass.

There are many Bible references to pottery making.

***Nehemiah 3:11.*** *Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. (KJV)*

At that time, pottery makers got together in a common tower and put furnaces around with a common chimney. One of the east gates of Jerusalem is called, the Potsherd Gate. A potsherd is a fragment of broken pottery. Occasionally something didn't work out right, perhaps the temperature wasn't right or someone dropped a piece of pottery and it would break into fragments. So they would dump this useless pottery outside the gate, and eventually, it came to be called the Potsherd Gate, because there was a nearby factory. You can read that in Jeremiah 19:2.

**Jeremiah 19:2.** *and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. (RSV)*

There was a pottery factory right near that gate.

We remember that Job used a potsherd to scrape his sores.

**Job 2:8.** *And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. (KJV)*

So as I said before, pottery making began during the first few chapters of Genesis.

Not too long ago, an entire pottery making operation was found inside a cave at Lakish which is approximately thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. In that cave was a potter's wheel, a kiln and everything needed for a complete pottery making operation. It was dated to 1500 B.C. So pottery making in the time of the Old Testament and early New Testament was a very common trade. There was a pottery maker in almost every village, certainly in every city. Master potters were famous and highly regarded because of their skill.

So we've seen a little bit about making pottery in the times the Bible was written. What we want to do now is investigate the question: What is God trying to teach us with this analogy of the potter and the clay? We will talk about four points.

### **1. God is the potter who made us and we are the clay.**

We read Isaiah 64:8 in the beginning. We're the clay and God is our potter. We are the work of His hands. What this tells us is that we did not make ourselves. The Master Potter did. We did not. We are made from dirt and we will return to dirt. We're made from the same stuff that vessels of pottery were made of for millennia. The fact is, lest we think we're something, we need to understand that clay is only of value when it is shaped into something useful. It's just dirt. Dirt is worthless, but if the dirt is molded and shaped and fired properly, it becomes a beautiful vessel. But prior to that, it is nothing. The material is very common. It's just dirt.

The same is true with us. I know you're familiar with the following scripture, but let's read it from the perspective of our being clay, and clay that God is going to use to shape into something useful and beautiful.

**1 Corinthians 1:26.** *For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:  
27) But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (KJV)*

How much more base can you get than dirt? There's nothing more common or base than dirt. That's us. We are the base things of the world, the things which are despised. You think about what happens to dirt. I won't elaborate, but it doesn't take a wild leap of imagination to figure that out. God has chosen the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are. Why did He do that? So that no flesh should glory in His presence. So you see, apart from God, all of us are worthless. We are weak. We have no power in and of ourselves. We have no mighty intelligence and we are just as common as dirt, yet God is doing something with that.

In Galatians 6:3, Paul admonishes us and he says:

**Galatians 6:3.** *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (KJV)*

One reason God uses the analogy of the potter and the clay is to teach us the fact that He created us. We didn't create ourselves, and we are as common as dirt. Apart from God, we are about as worthless as dirt. The fact is that this worthless clay can be shaped into something beautiful. God called nobodies to become spiritual vessels in His family (as we're going to see in a moment), to be shaped and molded by Him into something beautiful and valuable.

Ancient Israel was likened to the work of a potter. Let's go Jeremiah 18:6. God draws this analogy of Ancient Israel and Himself and He is telling them that they are the work of a potter. He's talking to Israel.

**Jeremiah 18:6.** *O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. (KJV)*

What He is saying is, "If you will let Me, I will shape you into something beautiful and valuable and something special." Despite this fact, guess what Israel did. They argued with the Master Potter. They argued with their maker. Let's go to Isaiah 29. God is talking to Israel. This is from the New King James. Israel is arguing with God, the very one who made them, the Master Potter. God is speaking here.

**Isaiah 29:16.** *Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, "He did not make me" or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?* (NKJ)

Israel did exactly that. Now let's go to chapter 45 and look at verse 9 out of the New Living Translation. It has a very important principle starting right off in the beginning of verse nine. Notice this first sentence.

**Isaiah 45:9.** *“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator ... (NLT)*

That's exactly what Israel did. That's exactly what mankind does today.

*9b) ... Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’ Does the pot exclaim, ‘How clumsy can you be?’ (NLT)*

In essence that's what Israel was doing, and we'll talk on the side for a minute; that's what all mankind does today. That is epitomized by the theory of evolution. The theory of evolution tries to explain how this pot came into existence without a master potter. It just evolved. This pot just all came together by itself, and nobody really created it. It created itself. Man tries to explain how this all came to existence without a master potter. The end result is, if you believe that, you believe that man is at the top of the evolutionary pyramid. We have the one-celled animals, the bacteria and all of that at the bottom. You have man at the top, and guess what; the mind of man is the epitome of evolution. The mind of man is it. Nothing has been created greater than the mind of man. We're at the top of this evolutionary ladder, in an effort to explain how the pot came into existence without the Master Potter, without intelligence.

Solomon said it best, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” So mankind, as Ancient Israel, tries to explain how they came into existence apart from God and then they argue with God as mankind argues with God today, mostly by saying that God doesn't exist.

So as a result of their sins, Ancient Israel was eventually broken as a potter's vessel as it is described. Let's go to Jeremiah 19:11. God again uses the analogy of pottery, trying to illustrate what's going to happen to Ancient Israel. “You're going to be broken in so many pieces like a pot that is smashed.”

**Jeremiah 19:11.** *and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet till there is no place to bury. (NKJV)*

He says, “This people in this city, I'm going to break into so many pieces.” It's like Humpty-Dumpty; you can't put it back together again. It's too destroyed. So He uses another graphic analogy involving pottery.

Tophet is located just south of Jerusalem, just outside the wall in the valley of Hinnom. In the valley of Hinnom is where worshippers, those from Jerusalem, sacrificed children. They sacrificed their own children to Molech and to Baal by burning them alive. God

said, "Enough is enough. I'm going to smash this people and this city like I would smash a pot."

I believe God had to do the same thing to the Worldwide Church of God. It had gotten so perverted, so polluted, so many ungodly things were going on, it could not be resurrected, it could not be remodeled, it could not be refurbished. It had to be completely destroyed.

Today the fact is, as unlike the Old Testament times, we are spiritual Israel. We talked about that recently in a sermon. Let's go back to one scripture as a reminder – Galatians 6:15. Once Christ came, once the New Testament Church began, and once the holy spirit was available through the sacrifice of our savior, God now is not creating a physical nation. God is creating a spiritual people. This was a very difficult concept for the disciples and the early converts to understand.

***Galatians 6:15.*** *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything ... (NKJV)*

It doesn't make any difference, and they had a hard time grasping that.

*15b) ... but a new creation. (NKJV)*

That's what avails.

*16) And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (NKJV)*

Spiritual Israel ... we are that new spiritual creation. Paul was trying to get across to the church at Galatia that He's not building a nation anymore. He's building a people that are a spiritual creation, the Israel of God, the body of Christ. Therefore, if we understand that we're a new spiritual creation, the church, then God, the Master Potter, is making spiritual vessels of us. We are spiritual vessels, and He uses pottery to teach us this lesson. You see, this was just a new concept that the disciples could not understand. They had a difficult time understanding this, and God is using the analogy of pottery and clay and a Master Potter. Let's turn to Romans 9:20. Paul continues this analogy of a master potter, clay, and creating a vessel, but he applies it to spiritual Israel. He applies it spiritually.

***Romans 9:20.*** *No but, O man, who are you that reply against God? ... (KJV)*

Just like Israel did, they argued with God.

*20b) ... Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? [What are you doing?]*

*21) Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*



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

Who are these vessels of mercy? Who are these vessels of honor?

*24) Even us, whom He [God] has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (KJV)*

So this tells us that those God has called during the New Testament dispensation; God is making spiritual vessels of us to be glorified.

Now we have to ask the question: How can God, the Master Potter, create spiritual vessels? How is that done?

That leads to the next point. We go back to making pottery.

## **2. Something else is necessary to shape the clay, and that is water.**

You have this dirt in a field, and you can't shape the dirt. It just sifts through your hands. But when you add water, everything changes. Water makes the clay the right consistency to be molded and shaped, worked to the desired shape to be something beautiful. As with clay, the human heart has to be reshaped. When God calls us, our carnal nature, our human heart needs to be reshaped.

Let's go to Romans 2:5. Let's understand. Paul is writing a letter to converted brethren. This is not a letter to everybody, it's to converted brethren. Notice, he's describing the human heart.

***Romans 2:5.*** *But after your hardness and impenitent [Greek means unrepentant] heart treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; (KJV)*

What he is saying to them is that the human heart is very hard, and it's something that cannot be easily shaped. It would be like a potter trying to make a pot out of a rock. It just can't happen.

So this is a warning to all of us. We dare not let our heart become hard or stay hard. But, you see, God in His wisdom and His power has created a way to change the hardness of the human heart. He hinted at that in the Old Testament. Let's go to Ezekiel 36 and begin in verse 26. It's also repeated in Ezekiel 11:19, if you want a reference. This is looking into the future, a time that has yet to arrive.

***Ezekiel 36:26.*** *A new heart also will I give you, [How's this going to happen?] and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony [hard] heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. (KJV)*

If you've ever seen a heart transplant on T.V., the heart is very soft. What we're being told is that human nature has a hard heart, but God says, "I'm going to give you a soft heart, a heart of flesh."

*27) And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. (KJV)*

God is saying that, through His spirit, He will take our hard heart that we had before we were called, and over time, through the power of the spirit, He will create a soft heart in each one of us. And that which changes the heart from hard to soft is His spirit, the new spirit, the holy spirit.

In this context, God uses another analogy to help us understand. It is the analogy of water and the holy spirit. God, in the Bible, ties the two together, the holy spirit being like water, so we can understand the context and the concept. The Old Testament hinted at this concept. Let's go to Isaiah 44 and begin in verse 2. God hinted to the Ancient Israelites and hinted during the Old Testament times that there is a tie-in between God's spirit and water.

*Isaiah 44:2. Thus says the LORD that made you [the Master Potter], and formed you from the womb, which will help you; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and you, Jesurun [Israel], whom I have chosen. (KJV)*

Now looking into the future.

*3) For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: ... (KJV)*

What is He talking about?

*3b) ... I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring: (KJV)*

He is talking about a time down the road where God's spirit will be available and He says it's like pouring water.

Now Christ, in the New Testament states this directly. Let's go to John 4 and begin in verse 6. Christ ushered in the availability of the holy spirit through His sacrifice. He made it possible and He draws an analogy between the coming of that spirit and water. This is about Jacob's well.

*John 4:6. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. (KJV)*

They had a stone well, and the lip of the well would keep people from falling in.

7) *There came a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus said unto her, Give me to drink.*

8) *(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy food.)*

9) *Then said the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

10) *Jesus answered and said unto her, If you knew [He's getting to the subject] the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water.*

Obviously she does not understand what He is getting at.

11) *The woman said unto him, Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then have you that living water?*

12) *Art you greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

13) *Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again:*

14) *But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (KJV)*

This is obviously a reference to the holy spirit.

Now let's turn to John 7 and start in verse 37. It stated directly.

**John 7:37.** *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst [the same analogy here], let him come unto me, and drink.*

38) *He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (KJV)*

There it is again. Now John explains.

39) *(But this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the holy spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (KJV)*

This ties together water and the holy spirit. One reason Christ came to this earth was to make possible the gift of the holy spirit.

As mentioned before, we are the clay. God is the Master Potter and the water that allows the clay to be shaped is the holy spirit. It couldn't be more clear. Water softens the clay and allows it to be molded into a new shape, and the holy spirit does the same for us. It softens our heart. It softens our human nature and allows God to shape us into (What?) a new creature, a new person.

That leads us to another important concept.

### 3. After firing, the clay becomes a new substance.

Remember we read earlier, Palestinian Pottery in Bible Times by Kelso and Thorley. I'll read it again.

The clay was an artificial stone produced by firing clay shapes to a temperature sufficiently high to change the physical and chemical properties of the original clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone.

Now what is this new creation shaped by fire? What is this new spiritual creation to look like? The Bible is very clear on that. Let's go to Romans 12:2. Clay, water and the Master Potter; us being transformed by God and Christ through the power of the holy spirit.

**Romans 12:2.** *And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*

The Greek word for "transformed" is Strong's 3339, and it's the Greek word "metamorphoo." It's where we get the English word metamorphosis. So when a little slug changes into a butterfly, we say it metamorphosed into a butterfly. So metamorphoo is translated as the word "transformed." But you are transformed. You are changed by the renewing of your mind ...

*2b) ... that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)*

What is that new mind? Philippians 2:5 tells us that it is the mind of Christ. It's very clear.

**Philippians 2:5.** *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (KJV)*

Now let's go back to Romans 8 and read verse 29. Again, we're talking about this new shape ... this new spiritual shape that the Master Potter is creating through the power of the holy spirit.

**Romans 8:29.** *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [what?] to be conformed to the image of his Son ... (KJV)*

It's very clear. The Greek word for "conformed" is Strong's 4832, and it means *fashioned like unto*. So this tells us that we are fashioned by the Master Potter like unto the image of Jesus Christ.

Then in Ephesians 4:13, a third scripture talks about what this new creation is? What is this new creation going to become? God will shape us and work with us over decades, over years until this happens.

***Ephesians 4:13.*** *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [mature] man, unto the measure of [what?] the stature of the fullness of Christ: (KJV)*

Meaning Christ's stature, His magnificence, and His character. Not only that. Not partly, but fullness, meaning that God is shaping us if we will let Him, to be like Jesus Christ in every conceivable way ... what we think, what we say and what we do.

How is this done spiritually? We know how it's done physically with the analogy of the potter and the clay and the water, but how is it done spiritually?

When I first came into the church, I read this scripture and I didn't understand it. I understood the first part, but I didn't understand the latter part of it. Let's go to Matthew 3:11. John the Baptist is talking. The first part I understood, but it took a while for the latter part to be understood with this thick head of mine.

***Matthew 3:11.*** *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the holy spirit ... (KJV)*

That we understand. We receive the holy spirit after immersion and after repentance. But notice, he said he's going to baptize you ...

*11b) ... and with fire: (KJV)*

What on earth is God talking about here? It's one of those scriptures that you kind of read over and put it on the shelf because you don't really understand it. The point is that just because we have received the holy spirit by the laying on of hands, it doesn't mean that we're going to exercise it. It doesn't mean that you're going to put it to use.

I can't tell you the number of people that I've counseled with over the years that were baptized. They had the holy spirit as a grain of a mustard seed, and then five, ten, twenty years later, they had the same conduct, the same problems, and the same hang-ups as they did the day they were baptized. Just because we receive the holy spirit does not mean that we will exercise it, that we will put it to use.

So remember, after firing, the clay takes on the hardness of stone. So do trials by fire firm us and strengthen our character so that we will not be soft and wishy-washy, but will be made strong and hard, not easily bent, not easily broken through fiery trials.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 3:13. Paul says this. He's trying to get the fact across that clay, when it is heated, becomes very strong. You can take the clay and run your finger across, as I said earlier, and it leaves a crease. However, once it comes out of the kiln, that's not going to happen. In fact, people have been killed by being hit over the head with a pot.

**1 Corinthians 3:13.** *Every man's work shall be made manifest [apparent]: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed [what?] by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

*14) If any man's work abides which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. (KJV)*

The clay goes into the kiln and then after the firing, it cools down and comes back out. That clay stays, it remains, only it's better, it's harder and stronger.

*15) If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (KJV)*

You see, painful, fiery trials serve the purpose of getting our attention. There's nothing like a 2 x 4 between the eyes. We have pain when we go through a time of suffering. If we have God's spirit and we try to learn through the trial, it causes us to get back to basics. It causes us to simplify our lives, put first things first, focus on God, focus on His will, focus on what He wants us to do. We eliminate all the other distractions. We simplify our lives when fiery trials come along.

Notice 1 Peter 1:7. Peter is talking about a trial of faith and yet tried by fire.

**1 Peter 1:7.** *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes ... (KJV)*

Trials are valuable because of the end result. He says that our trial of faith is going to be with fire.

*7b) ... though it be tried with fire, might be found [at the end of the day] unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (KJV)*

It means that God allows fiery trials to come our way. He even causes fiery trials to come our way so that through the heat of the trial (just as the heat of the kiln makes the pottery a new substance, hard and strong) we will come through the trial hard and strong as a new person. Not with a stony heart as before, but with the very character of God and Jesus Christ ... a new person. The fiery trial motivates us to exercise the holy spirit that sometimes we ignore or allow to become dormant, or we don't use properly. The trial wakes us up, gets us in shape to exercise God's holy spirit and it hardens and strengthens our character. The fire provides that as it does with the pottery and the kiln. The last point is a question. We get down to the nitty-gritty here.

#### 4. What is our duty and responsibility in being the clay?

The clay doesn't have any say in the matter. The potter goes to the potter's field and takes a shovel and digs some clay up, puts it in a bucket and takes it back and shapes it into whatever he wants. The clay has no say in it. Clay has nothing to do about it. But you see, as the clay yields to the water and it yields to the potter's hands, it yields to the fire. Here is what we need to be doing as the clay.

Let's begin in Romans 6:12. We have an obligation. We have a responsibility once God chooses us to be the clay. He is going to use and shape us into a new creation. Paul says to the converted brethren in Rome:

**Roman 6:12.** *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. (KJV)*

If you look at the world today, sin is available at the touch of a button on a computer. It's available at the touch of a remote control of a television. It is available anytime and anywhere a human being wants. This has never happened in the history of the world where sin is so available. So this applies even more to us today. *Don't let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

*13) Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin ... (KJV)*

Don't yield to the temptation. Don't press the button. Don't go there!

*13b) ... but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead ... (KJV)*

We were dead. We had no hope or future until God called us.

*13 continued) ... but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (KJV)*

Not as instruments of sin, but instruments of righteousness.

So we need to yield in the same way as the clay yields to the potter's hands, and the clay allows the potter to shape it into whatever the potter wants. We need to do the same thing.

*16) Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (KJV)*

He is drawing the connection between yielding and obedience.

*17) But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin ... (KJV)*

We all used to be the servants of sin before God called us.

*17b) ... but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (KJV)*

Again, yielding and obeying.

*18) Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness.*

How? Because we were willing to yield to the Master Potter. We were willing to submit ourselves and say, "God, you do with me whatever You want to do with me. Give me more of your holy spirit." Like the clay would say, "Pour a little more water on me so I can be shaped easier and better. Give me more of your spirit, so you can do with me as you wish."

Summing up this fourth point, our duty and responsibility is to yield and surrender to the process that God is doing in us, making a new spiritual creation, changing our heart from hard to soft, changing our character from Satan to Christ. Our duty and responsibility is to yield and surrender, to allow, through the power of His spirit, to shape us as the Master Potter in whatever form He wishes.

So, let's conclude. God is using the analogy of the potter and the clay to show us that He is shaping us into a new person, a spiritual creation, a new person shaped into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let's go to 2 Timothy 2:20 for a final scripture. I'll read this from the New King James. It starts out talking about a great house; we would say today, a mansion.

**2 Timothy 2:20.** *But in a great house [mansion] there are not only vessels of gold and silver ... (NKJV)*

In other words, in a mansion you find gold and silver plates and cups and eating utensils.

*20b) ... but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. (NKJV)*

Back in the days before running water and before indoor plumbing, a common vessel for dishonor, you could say, was a chamber pot. If you don't know what that is, ask someone who is older than 50 for 60 years. So what we're being told here is that, in a great house, there are vessels that have great honor and there are vessels that don't have so much honor.



**2 Timothy 2:21.** *Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [the dishonor], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified [holy] and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. (NKJV)*

The Master Potter wants to shape us into a vessel of honor if we allow Him to do so. God is shaping us into vessels of honor for the purpose of doing His bidding and His will.

So the point is we need to learn from the analogy that God gives us about the potter and the clay and the water. We have to realize that right here and right now. God is shaping us, as our Master Potter, to be a shining child of His, eternally shaped into the image of His Son.

So let's be willing to yield to God's loving hands so we can be formed and shaped into the image of His Son.