

# The Potter and the Clay

Rick Railston

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When I was a little kid I watched my mom make ceramic pottery. She had a gift; she would make these gorgeous figurines. They were usually of women in lacy dresses and I can remember forming the fingers of the hand—one finger of the hand—and etching the fingernail in with a little scribe. I have one at home and it looks so realistic. They are all handprinted; she painted the faces and colored the dresses. I remember one time she even let me make something. She got a gob of clay and had me put my hand in it—I was probably 4 or 5 years old. I still have that today, my handprint on this piece of pottery.

Pottery and pottery making go back to the time of Genesis. Our son Britt is a collector of biblical antiquities—it's a hobby of his. He has a couple of big display cases of ancient artifacts. I've mentioned it before but he has a clay pot—it's a small one with a handle. He showed it to me when we went visiting years ago and he handed it to me—you handle it very delicately—and he said, look right here. It was on the handle where you grab it and put your thumb and there was a thumbprint on this clay pot. That pot has been dated to before the time of Noah; 4300 years ago and you're looking at a thumb print of a human being 4300 years ago. Who would have thought.

With that in mind—our Father draws analogies to many things to teach us lessons about things that are difficult for humans to understand. Einstein knowingly or unknowingly copied that, in that regard, because he would do the same thing. In the book Einstein's Cosmos, written in 2004 by Michio Kaku—you see him on PBS from time to time. On page 13, Michio Kaku says:

*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.*

True—very, very true. He didn't realize when he said that, our Father uses images that are very simple and easy to understand so we can grasp deeper concepts about Him and His plan of life and His Word.

We want to look today at a very important physical image and analogy that our Father draws for us using pottery. Let's go to Isaiah 64:8, just one verse. Isaiah makes a fundamental statement here.

**Isaiah 64:8** *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. (KJV)*

He's drawing an analogy of the Father making something out of clay to help us understand what He is doing in our lives, day by day. He's attempting to teach us, through this analogy, what He is doing in our lives. So, what lessons does He want us to

learn through this analogy of pottery and the life of a Christian. Hopefully we can answer some of those questions today.

The title of the sermon is:

### The Potter and the Clay

In the first part we are going to talk about pottery making in ancient Israel so we can get the context of the verses that we read in the Old and New Testament. Then, in the second part, we're going to examine four lessons we can learn from this analogy of making pottery and forming and shaping us in our lives.

Let's first discuss pottery making in ancient Israel. From the book, Palestinian Pottery in Bible Times, written by two men Kelso and Thorley, they say this:

*Pottery was the first synthetic [I didn't realize that until you do research on it] to be discovered by mankind. An artificial stone produced by firing clay shapes to a temperature sufficiently high [this is important] to change the physical and chemical properties of the original clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone.*

Let's look at the steps required to the making of pottery in ancient Israel. First you need a source of clay. It's usually found in an area near a stream. We won't turn there but in Matthew 27:7 there is a reference to a potter's field and in that field, was where the potters got the clay to make their pottery. It's usually found next to a stream where the flooding from time to time washes the clay up from the bottom of the stream. The Holman Bible Dictionary on page 1314 says this:

*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 or by hand kneading it. Then the potter was ready to shape the vessel.*

We won't turn there but Isaiah 41:25 refers to treading clay by foot.

After the clay was kneaded and mixed with water, then what the potter had to have needed was a workshop—a place to make the pottery. It was usually in the house or attached to the house. Jeremiah 18:2 talks about going to the potter maker's house, where had his business in his home. Of course, you needed a work bench and various tools, but the most important tool was the potter's wheel. If you have ever seen one in operation it's a rotating disk powered by your feet. You just move your feet back and forth and it rotates this disk. It's like the old, early Singer sewing machines. You could power the sewing machine by pumping it with your feet. Then what they would do next—they used the term "throw"—they would throw a lump of clay on the wheel, get it spinning and then the potter would begin to shape it.

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary on page 674 says:

*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.*

If you've seen TV documentaries on it, you see how that's done. You can make a pot like that in just a few minutes—a skilled potter can. After letting it dry and harden somewhat, the potter could then add a base or a handle or form a spout if it was pouring vessel or add various decorations according to his artistic talent and taste. Then the last step, the pot had to be coated with a substance, a liquid, called slip. I remember my mom talking about it and I used to watch her do that. You get clay and thin it and thin it to the point where it's about the consistency of cream. You brush it on and smooth it on, because what it does is fill the pores of the clay and gives you a nice, smooth surface. If the potter so desired you could color the slip to make whatever plate or pot any color you wanted. Then after that, you could paint decorations or artistic touches they could be added. Then the last part of producing an item from pottery is called "firing". It's the most important part of the whole process. The potter needed an oven called a kiln. Let me read from the Vincent Handbook of Bible Knowledge on page 258:

*During the time of Solomon, a new technique called burnishing was developed which gave the pottery a more subtle, 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 original color of the clay.*

A kiln was often fired between 1300 Fahrenheit and 1900 Fahrenheit—pretty hot. Remember we read earlier that by applying heat it changed the physical and chemical properties of the clay into a new substance with many of the characteristics of stone. The firing process is what does that. It's the most difficult process and the skill in doing so was carefully guarded among pottery makers. It was passed down from father to son, it was not disseminated to competitive pottery makers. Each one had their own way of doing that. My mom had a kiln and it was the size of a large garbage can. It was brick; heat was done by 220-volt electricity. I remember she would have me, as a little kid, watch it for her. There was a hole in the side of the kiln with a plug. Every so often if you were firing a piece of clay, you would pull the plug out and look and see the object and make sure it was okay. There was a way to judge the temperature—I'll mention that in a second. The figurine went in as clay. I remember mom putting the figurine in and it was clay and if you tapped it you got this dull "thunk" sound. If you hit it too hard you would make an indentation. It made a dull sound. But when you put the clay piece into the kiln, it would come out very different. The way you learned the temperature, there was a little base with what looked like a piece of pottery sticking out about as big as your finger. You could buy them for different temperatures, but when it began to bend over, due to the heat you knew you were at the right temperature. She would have me go in every 10-15 minutes and look through the hole. I thought it was really exciting to

do that. The inside of the kiln was just red hot. When it drooped, I got all excited and ran and got my mom.

After cooling—she would have to unplug it and it took 5-7 hours for it to cool. Then she could take the figurine out. When you tapped it after it came out it had a ring like glass because of the change in chemical composition of the clay. So you changed something from very soft to something that was as hard as glass. There are many Bible references to pottery making, we won't turn there but I'll read them for reference. Nehemiah 3:11 talks about the tower of furnaces where pottery makers got together and built a tower where they had several furnaces. One of the gates of Jerusalem is called the potsherd gate. A potsherd is a fragment of baked clay; some broken vessel. Remember Job used one to scrape his sores in Job 2:8. He did so because where Job lived there was a nearby factory—a "pottery making" factory so to speak, in their terms not factory, as we know them today. That's in the first two verses of Jeremiah 19, especially if you read it out of the Revised Standard Version.

Pottery making began, we read, in the first two chapters of Genesis. Not long ago an entire pottery making operation was found in a cave near Lakish which is approximately 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem. That goes back to 1500 B.C. Pottery making during the time of the Old and New Testament was a common trade and a master potter was a famous person in the town, or in the whole area. He was highly regarded for his skill and his ability to make these vessels out of clay. That's a brief synopsis of what pottery making was like during the time of the New Testament and the Old Testament. What we want to do is spend the rest of our time in asking the question,

"What is our Father attempting to teach us with this analogy of the potter and the clay?"

It occurs over and over in God's Word and there's a reason for it. We'll address it through four points.

### **1. God Almighty, who is the Master potter, is shaping us into spiritual vessels.**

Not physical vessels, spiritual vessels. As we read earlier in Isaiah 64:8, our Father is the Potter and we are the clay. The fact is, we didn't make ourselves. Mankind seems to be on a mission to figure out a way to conclude that man somehow made himself or that man is at the top of the evolutionary chain. But the fact is, the Creator made us and we did not make ourselves. We are made from dirt; we are the clay. God Almighty is the Potter. When we die, we return to dirt. Adam was made from dirt and we need to remember that.

Clay only has any value—the clay you can just dig out of the ground—when it's shaped into something useful. Otherwise, it's just dirt on the ground. It's worth almost nothing. In and of itself, clay is worthless, it is just a form of dirt. Of course, the same is true for us. Apart from the spiritual aspect of our lives, we have no value because we will all go back to dirt at some point. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 1:26; this is a very familiar scripture.

Let's read it from the perspective of our being the clay of the Master Potter. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church and by extension, us today:

**1 Corinthians 1:26** *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: (KJV)*

People are amazed when they realize, not everybody is being called today. It's not our Father's business to call everybody in the world today. So, Paul is saying, the rich, the famous, the talented, the intelligentsia—not many of those are called.

*27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (KJV)*

In other words, He has chosen the weak and the not as bright, so that He can show man, who thinks he's something when he's nothing, that he is just "dirt" after all.

*28) And base things of the world [there's nothing baser than dirt], and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*

*29) That no flesh should glory in his presence. (KJV)*

Man can't take credit for anything God does through him or her. We can't take credit for that. Apart from our Father, all of us are like the clay; we are just worthless. We don't have value apart from our Father. Look at Galatians 6:3, Paul is reminding us here. It's the political season coming up and you see these candidates strutting across the stage—"Look at me, look at me"—and trashing their opponents and elevating the self.

**Galatians 6:3** *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing [that's dirt], he deceiveth himself. (KJV)*

As worthless clay can be shaped into something beautiful, God called the "nobodies"—the weak of the world—to become beautiful, spiritual vessels in his sight. There is a transformation that occurs between the physical and spiritual. Those He has called He shapes and molds as the Master Potter, into something that is very beautiful, that is far from the dirt He started with and is something gorgeous.

Ancient Israel was likened to the work of a potter. Let's go to Jeremiah 18:6. The Old Testament hints at this process. We'll cover a few verses where it was hinted at what would happen under the New Covenant.

**Jeremiah 18:6** *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. (KJV)*

He is the Master Potter and we are the clay. But despite this fact—that they were told this—Israel argued with their Master Potter, their Maker. Let's see that in Isaiah 29, we'll read the first part of verse 16. Yehovah is talking to Ancient Israel, I'll read this out of the New King James.

**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"?* (NKJV)

He doesn't know what he's doing. He didn't really do this. Some other process or some other event did this and that is exactly what Israel did to God Almighty. Look at chapter 45:9, I'll read this out of the New Living Translation.

**Isaiah 45:9** *"What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. [Can you imagine arguing with the Creator?] 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)

That's exactly what humanity has been doing with God Almighty since day one. The theory of evolution tries to explain how the pot was created without a Master Potter. How that man is at the top of the evolutionary ladder, not a Spirit Being who far surpasses anything of humanity. As Solomon said, it's all vanity of vanities in the human mind. As a result of their sins, Ancient Israel was eventually broken as a potter's vessel. A beautiful pot just thrown against a stone and went to pieces. Let's go to Jeremiah 19:11 and see this. Because they argued with God, they didn't accept Him as their Creator, the Supreme Being, as Yehovah, they had to suffer for that.

**Jeremiah 19:11** *And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again [it's like Humpty Dumpty falling off the wall, you can't put it back together again]: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury.* (KJV)

This is another graphic analogy because Tophet is located just south of Jerusalem and guess where it is? It's in the valley of Hinnom; very appropriate analogy. As we know, that is exactly what happened in a similar manner what God Almighty did to the Worldwide Church of God—just obliterated it, because it had turned away from Him. Ceased putting Him first and ceased trying to understand Who God Almighty is and Who His Son is.

Today, under the New Covenant, we have become spiritual Israel. Physical Israel was broken like a pot but we are spiritual Israel. Let's go to Galatians 6:15-16 and we'll see that.

**Galatians 6:15** *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing [it's not important at the end of the day], nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16) And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (KJV)*

Those called, those converted, those trying to follow the commandments of God Almighty are now a new spiritual creation, the Israel of God—a spiritual nation. Therefore, our Father, who is the Master Potter is making spiritual vessels of the human beings that He has called at this time. This was a new concept to the disciples. When they were following Christ around, they at first didn't get this; they didn't understand that yes, He is the Messiah and we're following Him and He's going to save Israel—that was their original understanding—but they didn't understand that through the power of the Holy Spirit, each one of them would be transformed into a new person, a new spiritual vessel. This was lost on them. With that in mind let's go to Romans 9:20-21 and then verses 23-24.

**Romans 9:20** *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? [You going to argue with God? Debate with God?] Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21) Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? (KJV)*

*Continuing in Verse 23) ...*

*23) And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24) Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (KJV)*

We see very clearly that our Father called us to be shaped into vessels of glory. That's a process initially the disciples did not understand. When we were called, we didn't understand it either. You have to then ask the question, how can Yehovah—our Master Potter—create spiritual vessels? What is the process? How does that work? That goes to the second point of the lessons we can learn.

## **2. Something else is necessary to shape the clay.**

An outside substance was necessary to shape the clay—the dirt out of the ground—and that was water. Water was necessary to shape the clay. We have the Potter, we have the clay, but what water does is make the clay the right consistency. It softens the clay, binds it together so it can be molded and shaped. It can be worked into a desired image. It can be made into something beautiful and the water is the binder that binds it all together. As with clay, the human heart needs to be shaped. The human heart is a stony thing; not easily molded and shaped. It is not easily softened. Let's go to Romans 2:5. We have to remember that Paul is writing to converted brethren—those with the Holy Spirit. I'll read this out of the New International Version.

**Romans 2:5** *But because of your stubbornness [talking to converted people here] and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (NIV)*

What Paul is telling the brethren in Rome is that apart from God Almighty, apart from His Holy Spirit you have a stony heart; you have an unrepentant heart that needs to be changed. It's hard and your heart apart from God Almighty and apart from His Holy Spirit is not easily shaped. There's a lesson for us that we can never allow hard heartedness to take over our character and our nature—to be hardhearted. We have to be soft-hearted. Our Father has created a way to change all of that hardness. Let's go back to Ezekiel 36 and we'll see a prophecy, looking into the future. Ezekiel 36:26-27, it's also repeated in chapter 11. This is a prophecy looking to our time, after Christ walked the earth.

**Ezekiel 36:26** *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. [Meaning soft, pliable, moldable]  
27) And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (KJV)*

It's very clear that the Holy Spirit opens our minds and gives us the power to be able to keep the commandments of God Almighty. To want to keep the commandments of God Almighty. This verse looks forward to the coming of the New Covenant when our Father would create a soft heart from a hard heart in each one of us. That which changes the heart from hard to soft, as we see right here, is this new spirit. It's His Spirit. We don't have the spirit of Satan, we don't have the spirit of the world or human nature, we have a new spirit that is the very Spirit of God Almighty. In this context, Yehovah uses another analogy to help us understand and that is the fact that water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. That was hinted at in the Old Testament. Let's go back to Isaiah 44:2-3, I'll read this out of the New King James.

**Isaiah 44:2** *Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.  
3) For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring; (NKJV)*

Looking forward to a time when the Holy Spirit would be available to those that He called after Christ walked this earth. The New Testament states this analogy directly. Let's go to John 4:6-14. This is the account where Christ is at the well. You'll see where the woman at the well did not have a clue what He was talking about in the beginning.

**John 4:6** *Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*



- 7) *A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."*
- 8) *For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.*
- 9) *Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*
- 10) *Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" [What's He getting at?]*
- 11) *The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?"*
- 12) *Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"*
- 13) *Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water [the water in the well] will thirst again,*
- 14) *but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (NKJV)*

This is an obvious reference to the Holy Spirit and using the analogy of water to help us understand the Holy Spirit. Let's move forward to John 7:37-39.

**John 7:37** *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. (KJV)*

Drawing on what He said to the woman in John 4.

- 38) *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*
- 39) *(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (KJV)*

We know that one reason Jesus came to the earth was to give the gift of the Holy Spirit—to open up that door to those our Father would call. He is using the analogy of water to make that point. Putting it all together, we are the clay, the Father is the Master Potter, but the Holy Spirit is what allows the clay to be shaped. The Holy Spirit allows us—the "dirt"—so to speak, to be shaped into a beautiful vessel. Without the water, it wouldn't happen. Dirt is just dirt; it would just fall to the ground. With the water, it allows clay to be molded into a new shape, the same way the Holy Spirit allows a human being with a human mind with the Holy Spirit in us to be made a new creation, as we read in many parts of the Bible.

How does the Holy Spirit allow our Father to shape us into a new person? How does that happen? That leads us to another important concept, point 3.

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

It's not the same thing as it was before—after firing, after heat. Remember we read earlier, pottery was an artificial stone produced by firing clay shapes at 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. What is this new creation shaped by fire? What is this? What is this new spiritual creation? The Bible is very clear about that. Let's go to Romans 12:2. Paul is admonishing these folks in Rome. We read earlier that he called them hardhearted, stubborn and now he is saying in Romans 12:2, admonishing them.

**Romans 12:2** *And be not conformed to this world: (KJV)*

Ancient Rome was just like a combination of New York City and Las Vegas today.

*2 continued) ... but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)*

What does He mean by *transformed*? Let's look at that Greek word, it's Strong's #3339, the Greek word *metamorphoo*, we get our English word metamorphosis from that. Strong's says: "to change, to transfigure". In other words, to have a new mind. What did Paul say in Philippians 2:5, *let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus*. So that is the transformation from the human carnal mind to the mind of His very Son. We see that back in Romans 8:29.

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

In Chapter 12 we focused on the word *transformed*, now let's look into the word *conformed*—*into the image of His Son*. It's Strong's #4832 and it's *summorphos* and this is where we get the English word, he "morphed" into this. It's "being conformed into the image of something else". Strong's says *it is fashioned like unto the image of His Son*. So, we are conformed, we are fashioned over time with the water of the Holy Spirit to be not in the image of a human being—a carnal, selfish human being—but into the image of His Son. Then Paul really states our goal as Christian in Ephesians 4:13. This is what we all strive for and it is a change of who we are—from the old individual to a new individual.

**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 man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (KJV)*

That is our goal. Like the water takes dirt and makes it into something that can be fashioned into a beautiful piece of pottery, the Holy Spirit can take a human being and fashion that human being into the image of the very Son of God. So how is this done? When I first came into the church, I read this scripture that we are going to turn to and I

didn't understand it—it didn't make any sense to me when I first came into the church. Let's go to Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist is speaking here and I couldn't understand what was meant by this. I understand now, but not back then.

**Matthew 3:11** *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he [referring to Jesus] that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire: (KJV)*

I read that and scratched my head and counseling for baptism I understood going into the water and coming out of the water and all of that. That's baptism by water but what on earth is this baptism thing by *fire*? Just because we have been given the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean that we will always exercise that spirit. That spirit can lay dormant in individuals by not exercising, not calling on it, not using it. If we don't exercise it, then something additional is necessary for us to exercise it. After firing, we've learned that clay—this soft clay—takes on the hardness of stone. In a similar way, trials by fire that come upon us as human beings, firm up and strengthen our character. Just as that clay going into the kiln—my mom's kiln, I could tap on it and it was just a "thunk", a dead "thunk"—a few hours later it would come out and you could tap on it and would ring just like glass. It was transformed, it was made hard. Trials firm up and strengthen our character. A soft or wishy-washy character is made strong by the endurance of fiery trials. After the character is made strong, then it's not easily bent or twisted. It's not easily changed into something else. Satan tries, but the trials also help mold and shape us. With that in mind let's go to 1 Corinthians 3:13. He's talking about trials by fire.

**1 Corinthians 3:13** *Every man's work shall be made manifest: [made apparent; at the end of the day it's going to be an open book] for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work to see of what sort it is. (KJV)*

Our Father allows trials to come upon us, causes trials to come upon us as a test to see where our character stands. Are we soft and wishy-washy and just fold up? Or are we strong and hard and we resist the trials that come our way?

*14) If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*

*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)*

Painful trials get our attention. If, in our lives as Christians—everything was perfectly blessed, we never got sick, never lost a job or had any problems at all—why we would want our Father's Kingdom to come? We would just want to live like a human being for an eternity. But that's not the way it works. Our trials—God allows or causes trials to come our way, to get our attention. They will motivate us to exercise the Holy Spirit that is in us. To get back to the basics, to eliminate the unessential, the frivolous and with laser like focus concentrate on what is important to being in the Kingdom of God.

Peter addresses the same subject in 1 Peter 1:7, a trial by fire. The apostles were very familiar with this. We know the history of the apostles and their end and they ended their lives all except John, in fiery trials.

**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: (KJV)*

So, the trial by fire shapes us and helps mold us and strengthens our character just like the fire of the kiln turns soft clay into something that is hard; almost like stone. As the fire of the kiln turns clay into a stone-like substance, the fire of trials changes us into a new person. Into the image of the very Son of God and the trials motivate us to exercise the Holy Spirit. Firming and strengthening our character.

One more point to make. This is the big question for all of us.

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

We are not the Master Potter; we don't shape the clay. We are not the water that binds the clay together, we are the dirt—we are the clay. What is our duty and responsibility? The clay yields to the water. The clay yields to the potter's hand. The clay yields to the fire. If you want to humanize it, the clay allows the water to bind it together and allows the Potter's hand to shape it and then goes into the kiln willingly to be changed into something new. Back to Romans 6—we're told Paul had a lot to say about this, about what we need to be doing. Romans 6:12-13 then skip to 16 and 17.

**Romans 6:12** *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body [there were apparently people there that were allowing that to happen], that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

*13) Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: [what does the clay yield to?] but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (KJV)*

Our responsibility as the clay is to yield to our Father. To allow Him to shape us and mold us through the power of the Holy Spirit, just like the clay mixed with water yields to the potter's hands.

*16) Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey [like the clay yielding to either Satan or God Almighty], his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (KJV)*

So the question is, do we yield to our Father or do we yield to Satan and this world.

17) *But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart [through the Holy Spirit in us] that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*

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

How did that happen? Because they were willing to yield to the Master Potter, they were willing to yield to the Holy Spirit. They were allowing the water to bind them together. Our duty and responsibility are to totally yield, totally surrender to our Master Potter and to allow Him to shape us. Allowing the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit to shape us into the very image of His Son.

Let's conclude now and wrap up. Our Father is using the analogy of the potter and the clay to show us that He is the process of shaping each one of us into a new person. That new person is the in the image of His Son. Let's go to 2 Timothy 2:20-22. Paul is instructing young Timothy and I'll read this out of the New King James Version.

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

The Greek word for vessel here is *skeuos* and is Strong's #4632. The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates says: *This word means particularly of a hollow vessel for containing things*. So Paul is saying that in mansions there are a great many vessels that are hollow that contain various things; liquids, solids, whatever it might be. A hollow vessel for containing things is analogous of the human body containing the Holy Spirit.

*20 continued) ... but also [in this great house there are also vessels] of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.* (NKJV)

What does that mean? Before the coming of indoor plumbing, you could say a chamber pot. So, a clay chamber pot is not the most honorable of uses for a piece of pottery but it was necessary.

21) *Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [meaning a vessel of dishonor], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified [that word means to be made holy] and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.* (NKJV)

Our Father is shaping us to become vessels of honor. To do His bidding, thereby being useful vessels to Him, to do His will on this earth. So, we all need to learn the analogy that God gives us about the potter and the clay. A lot of lessons to be learned by this analogy. We need to deeply realize that, right here and right now, our Father as the Master Potter is shaping all of us to be His children, eternally in the image of His Son, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that each one of us has. Going forward, we need to willingly yield to His loving hands—the Master Potter's loving hands—so we can be daily formed and daily shaped into the image of His Son.