

# THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

## The Disciple's Transformation

“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!’” (Jer. 18:6)

The prophet Jeremiah was sent to the house of a potter to learn a lesson (Jer. 18:1-6). Jeremiah saw the potter working the clay on a wheel, correcting a vessel that had been disfigured and shaping it once again into a good vessel according to his liking. God then told Jeremiah that He was the Potter and Israel was the clay.

Although not used by the Lord, the figure of the potter and the clay is a good illustration of at least two demands of discipleship: the need to deny self and follow the teachings of Christ. Let’s consider some lessons we need to learn at the potter’s house.

### God Is The Potter

As our creator, God is in control of this molding process (Jer. 18:6). He has power over the clay. We must remember God’s place (Rom. 9:20-21). God has a design in mind for all of His creation – including us. We have no right to reply in protest against His divine will and purpose.

What do we know about this Potter? We know that He knows us (Ps. 139:1-3), He cares about us (Luke 12:6-7), He knows what is best for us (Deut. 6:24), and He has a plan for every vessel that He creates (Ps. 139:13-16).

### Disciples Are The Clay

We have no power over the Potter, or any right to criticize His plan. We must remember our place.

In order for this illustration to work in our lives, we must make ourselves clay. The clay cannot be worked and formed unless it is soft and malleable. In order for us to be clay in God’s hand, we must have:

...the figure of the **potter and the clay** is a good illustration of at least two demands of discipleship: the need to **deny self** and **follow** the teachings of Christ.

We are not **molded** to be an **ornament**, but to be useful and **prepared** for every **good work**.

**Faith** – we must believe that God’s way is right and trust that His way is best for us.

**Humility** – we must accept our place under the potter’s authority.

**Meekness** – we must show a willingness to yield to God’s will, accepting it as what is best for us (James 1:21).

**Obedience** – this illustration works for us only inasmuch as we are willing to participate. Calvinism uses this illustration to teach that man is incapable of resisting God’s sovereign control, but this is not true. God respects man’s free will. God fashions us after His will if we are willing to allow Him to do so.

### **We Are Molded By The Lord’s Teachings**

In the illustration, the clay is molded by the potter’s hand. Disciples are molded by the teachings of Christ.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This passage explains how this molding process works.

1. We are not to be conformed to this world. To be conformed is to be fashioned like something else, to be pressed into a common mold. Disciples are not to be like everyone else in the world.

2. We are to be transformed. The word “transformed” is translated from the Greek word **metamorphous**, which is the word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.” This word indicates that we are to change into another form. This is not merely a spiritual change, but a change that is expressed outwardly in our character and conduct. The form that disciples are to change into is the form of Christ (Gal. 4:19).

3. This transformation is accomplished by a renewing of the mind. To renew is to renovate or to make a complete change for the better. The mind is not renewed instantly or miraculously. It is renewed as we study and learn the teachings of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). The transformation of life is made as we apply these teachings to ourselves. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:9-10).

This transformation is not done without our cooperation. We must allow God’s word to teach us new values and priorities, a new view of our role and purpose, a new way of thinking,

acting, and reacting to different situations. Only then will our lives be an expression of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

This is where the real work takes place in this illustration. Just as the clay must respond to the potter's hands in order to be shaped and molded, so we must respond to the teachings of Christ in order to be true disciples. We cannot say that we are clay in the Potter's hands unless we are yielding to the teachings of Christ.

### **This Molding Is A Process**

The renewing of the mind and transforming of life takes time. It takes time for the clay to be worked, turned, and molded into a vessel. In a sense, no one is there yet. God is still working on all of us (Phil. 3:12-16). The clay turns on the wheel as it is being molded. It doesn't seem to "get anywhere," but it is being turned into something great.

This illustration reminds us of our need for God. No one achieves their full potential without God. Just as a lump of clay cannot become anything without the potter putting it on the wheel, we cannot become what God would have us be unless we submit ourselves to His will.

The illustration also reminds us of God's patience and personal interest in our lives. The potter that Jeremiah saw took a vessel that was marred and ruined and, instead of throwing it away, he continued to work on it until it became a good vessel. God does the same thing for us. We may sin and fail to be what God would have us be, but as long as we seek forgiveness and yield to Him, God can make us right again.

Let us remember that the life of a Christian is a process. God is making something of us and no one is there yet. In the end, we are better than anything we could have ever been by ourselves.

### **This Molding Has A Purpose**

What is the final purpose intended by this molding process? God desires that we be honorable and useful vessels in His service. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

We are not molded to be an ornament, but to be useful and prepared for every good work. If we have cleansed our lives of sin, and have taken on the mind of Christ, then God will find us ready and useful vessels. However, if we have sin in our lives, or have failed to renew our minds, God will find us unprepared, uncooperative, and unfit for use in His service. If we serve God in holiness, readiness, and obedience, then we have fulfilled the purpose for which we have been molded.

## Conclusion

There is much that can be learned about discipleship at the potter's house. As our Creator, God is the Potter and we are the clay. In order to be molded into the image of Christ, we must obey the teachings of Christ. The renewing of the mind is a process, not a one-time event. God has a purpose for our lives. We must be ready to serve Him.

## Questions

1. What message does God reveal to Jeremiah at the potter's house (Jer. 18:6)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Why doesn't the clay criticize the Potter's work (Rom. 9:20-21)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What does God have in mind when He gives us commands to obey (Deut. 6:24)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. What form should disciples desire to take (Gal. 4:19)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are we willing participants in God's molding process? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Before clay can be shaped and molded, what form must take? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What role does humility and meekness play in this molding process? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. What is supposed to happen to our minds (Rom. 12:2)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. How does Paul describe this transformation/molding process (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10)?  
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10. What purpose does God have in mind with this molding process (2 Tim. 2:20-21; Eph. 2:10)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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11. What does the illustration of the potter and the clay say about our need for God? \_\_\_\_\_  
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12. What does the illustration of the potter and the clay say about God's patience with us (Jer. 18:4)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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13. What interest does God have in our lives and our potential (Ps. 139:13-16)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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