

Clay in the Hands of God in a Dark World

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I remember when I was in high school, part of art class dealt with pottery. It was fun because you got to work with what I always called mud (clay). You got your hands dirty in trying to make some form of object out of clay. I remember making a clay cup and it didn't look too good. It was put in a pottery oven and I thought maybe it would look better after it cooked for a while – I was wrong. We then had to put some glaze over it and heated it again and again I thought maybe the looks of the cup would improve – I was wrong again. Now, I did have a chance in improving the cup before it would go into the oven? Of course, and that would have required me to squeeze the cup into a mass of mud again. I didn't do that since that would have required more school work. So, I made an ugly cup and kept it an ugly cup. This is why I'm not a potter who makes things out of clay. I don't have the ambition to make a perfect clay object. That's a shame because clay is easy to shape because it allows itself to be formed in the hands of the potter as long as it's good clay.

A good father is like a potter. As their son or daughter grows up, a father will try to guide and shape their children into a person who'll be ready to tackle the world when they become an adult. As children, we have a lot of imperfections. I remember seeing a movie one time where a father caught his sons smoking behind the shed. So, instead of yelling at them, he took them inside the house and showed them how to smoke a good cigar. He gave each a cigar and lit the cigars for them and told them to take a deep inhale so they could enjoy the smoke. He kept telling them this until the smoke made them so sick, each son had to make their way to the bathroom with a stomach ache. The father was trying to weed out an imperfection that was developing in his sons. This is one example of how a father tries to shape their children. We have to remember that our Heavenly Father does the same thing with us. We are the clay, and He is the potter. This should give us encouragement in a dark world that hates the

followers of Jesus. God wants to be our potter of clay. Let's take a closer look into this.

Let's turn to Jeremiah 18: 1 – 11 as we continue to see how light did shine even in the darkness of the Old Testament. This is what the Lord said through Jeremiah, "The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, 'Go down to the shop where clay pots and jars are made. I will speak to you while you are there.' So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so the potter squashed the jar into a lump of clay and started again. Then the Lord gave me this message: 'O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. And if I announce that I will build up and plant a certain nation or kingdom, making it strong and great, but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless that nation as I had said I would. Therefore, Jeremiah, go and warn all Judah and Jerusalem. Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: I am planning disaster against you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and do what is right. (NLT, 1144)'"

During the Old Testament days, God would have His prophets do a lot of showy things to get the people's attention. Just like companies do today in advertising where ads are created to get your attention. The History Channel has been having shows on Sundays about the birth of the Disney Empire that was started by Walt Disney and his brother Roy. A big part of their success was advertising like making lunch boxes for school kids that had Disney characters on them or produce toys that would come out when a new Disney movie came out. These things were to get people's attention. God wanted His people to get the picture, so He has Jeremiah go down to a potter's house to watch the potter form a jar out of clay. If we can use our imagination for a moment, maybe we can picture an old man start mixing some dry powder and start mixing it with the right amount of water. With his hands, he would begin the tedious process of kneading the mixture until it was ready to be molded. He would then place it on

the potter's wheel and turn it at the desired speed he felt comfortable with – no electric during those days. Working with his hands, he would form it into a cone. Then he would press gently in the center with his thumbs and start pressing until a cup or bowl was shaped. However, as Jeremiah was watching, the infant jar became marred in the potter's hands. In Hebrew, the term "marred" means to be corrupt, be ruined (Strong's Concordance, 7752). The object was not forming into what the potter wanted it to be. So, because he was the one forming this object, he had the right to make it back into a lump of clay and start all over again in reshaping it. The potter would continue to do this until the object became perfect as possible. He had a healthy pride of the object he had created with his own hands. After Jeremiah saw this, God tells Jeremiah in verse 6, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" In other words, God is telling Israel that they are the clay and He is the potter. In fact, God would tell them that He has the right to build up and tear down any nation or kingdom that obeys or doesn't obey Him. Israel had become a proud nation. A nation that had become selfish and thought they could handle their own problems without getting God involved. They had rejected God and the covenant God had made with their ancestors. So, they were being punished for their disobedience or sin against God. God has the right to punish them. He is their Creator. He is the potter and Israel is just mere clay. That clay can't do nothing unless it's formed by the potter and God is reminding Israel of this because they keep forgetting it. I think America is just as bad as Israel was. We take it personal when God allows things to happen in our lives that are sent to wake us up. We think we have the right to live our own lives the way we want to. We retire when we want to. We move to different locations or to bigger or smaller houses because we want to. We buy and sale things because we want to. We do things within the Church the way we want to because we think we have the right. However, we have to realize, we really are just a piece of mere clay. Genesis 2: 7 states this when God created the world, "And the Lord God formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person (NLT, 8)" We are byproducts of the first man. God took dust from the ground and made and shaped man from His own hands and HE breathed life into that man and he became a living person with a soul and spirit. This is what made man different

from animal. Now, we are shaped and molded while in a human mother's (a female only) womb by the hands of God. The Lord has every right to shape and mold us. The Lord has every right to discipline when needed and to forgive. He is the one who formed us and allowed us to be born.

God has not just formed us, but He also has given us the ability to make choices on our own. This is a great gift, but can be a curse if used for the wrong purpose. The wrong purpose is rejecting the Lord. When this happens, then God, out of love, will discipline us like He does with Israel. It is for their own good. The good thing here is God is giving them a warning before He totally makes that clay object into just a pile of clay that will require total reassembly. He tells Israel this in verse 8, "and if that nation I warned "repents" ("turn" in KJV) of its evil, then I will "relent" ("repent" in KJV) and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. (NIV)" God also states this in verse 11, "So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and do what is right. (NLT)" The Lord is telling Israel they have been disobedient, but He has given them a short chance to "repent" or "turn" from their evil ways. The Hebrew term used here is "naham" which mean both of the English terms. It can also mean to change one's mind and to express sympathy. In other words, not only is Israel to change their mind about God, but there should be some remorse or expressed sympathy for their disobedience. When we sin against the Lord, there needs to be sympathy for what we have done to the Lord so those sins can be forgiven. Just like the story Jesus gives in Luke 18 where the Pharisees prays in an arrogant manner while the sinful tax collector beats his chest in sorrow, we too should show sorrow for our sin. This is one of the reasons we should allow the Lord to shape and mold us is because He will find the sins that causes separation between us and God and He exposes them so we can see them. The problem is most people reject the Lord's molding and shaping. I had received a call last Sunday afternoon for very loud music at a pavilion in the park. It was so bad; the neighbors nearby could hear every word to the songs being sung. I found out that a Ranger had already stopped by and had told them to turn down the music. They did, but turned it back up when the Ranger left. So, I had the Seasonal Ranger stop by, since he was close, and give them a final warning to turn the music down. I told him to let them know that they had signed a contract for

the pavilion and it is listed on the agreement that there is to be no loud music or DJ. The Ranger told them and left. I drove by about ½ hour later and I can hear the music from the road before I came to the entrance to park. So, I walked down to the part of the park where the circuit breaker box is and turn all electric off to the pavilion. The music stopped quickly. When I walked up, the lady who reserved the pavilion was all upset about what I had done. How often do we do this when the Lord warns us of our sin. So, we keep pushing God away. The problem with this is it keeps us from being molded and shaped by the Lord. If we don't want to be shaped by the Lord, He won't shape and mold us. A lot of Christians today want to be called Christians, but don't want the Lord to shape and mold them or they just want a little shaping and molding. We don't want the Lord to change us too much. However, if the Lord is the One who formed us to begin with, wouldn't it make sense to allow Him to complete the work. All we do is make it worse like I did with the piece of clay at school. I couldn't make it any better because I had no skill for it, but the Lord has all the power and love to shape and mold us into beautiful Christians if we would only allow Him to. The Lord only wants the best for us. This is light in a dark world. If our human fathers wanted the best for us and they tried to shape us the best they could, just think about what the Lord could do in our life if we would only give Him full control to shape and mold us. I'll end with this message from God to Israel in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me. I will be found by you," says the Lord (NLT, 1157). Are we good clay in the hands of the Lord?

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.