

Sunday, July 30, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (49)

Disciples of Jesus (6)

Clay in the Potter's Hand

As we continue our study of the disciple of Jesus, we have been addressing various descriptions of what the life of a Christian is like. We have discussed how a Christian is to be like an athlete (committed) and a soldier (waging war against Satan). These are qualities that address one's relationship with himself. Today, we want to address the disciple's relationship with his Lord. Obviously, we have addressed how we must fully understand that He is the Master, and we are His students. We are to be loyal to Him. But in this lesson I want to focus on a specific aspect of that relationship. To do so, we want to discuss what the Bible has to say about the potter and clay.

I. The Bible and Pottery

- a. Throughout the Roman empire, as in most of man's history, pottery was very prevalent. It was used for many purposes. If you look up pottery that has been unearthed or preserved from that time period you find common pieces that would have been used daily by everyone, and more elaborate pieces that would have been in the houses of the wealthy. The point is, any analogy to pottery, clay and a potter would have been easily relatable to the first century Christian.
- b. **Jeremiah 18:1-11.** Jeremiah writes as Judah is facing Babylonian captivity. Continually he warns them that disaster is coming at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. They were not going to escape because they were being punished by YHWH for their incessant immorality and idolatry. BUT, as with most of the prophets, in the midst of these warnings of doom, you would find promises of restoration if they would but repent. One such occasion is our text.
 - i. Jeremiah is told to go to a potter's house and observe him making a clay vessel. (1-3)
 - ii. But the object was marred as the potter worked. So he took that clay and made another vessel out of it. (4)
 - iii. 5-10 – YHWH declares that He can do just as that potter did. IF a nation (Judah) turns from its evil, He will relent from the disaster. BUT, if a good nation does evil, He will relent and bring disaster.
 - iv. 11 – the declaration, YHWH was fashioning disaster, so they are called to repent.
- c. **Isaiah 29:15-16.** Isaiah, writing earlier than Jeremiah (ca. ~725-690 BC), wrote of and witnessed the fall of Israel to Assyria. He condemned their idolatry and tried to warn them just as Jeremiah did later. But the people rejected YHWH's warnings. Isaiah challenges their rejection by saying, *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"?*
- d. **Romans 9:20-21,** is likely referencing Isaiah 29 as Paul warns Jews not to question God's judgments. It is in a context where Paul is explaining how God chose to make salvation available to everyone, including the Gentiles. We learn from this that we ought to be careful before questioning Him.
- e. Let's consider these and some other passages and see how we are "clay in the potter's hand".

II. "You are the Potter"

- a. **Isaiah 64:8,** *But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.*
- b. **God created us** – "formed us" – Genesis 2:7 notes that *"the LORD formed man of the dust of the ground."* 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul notes, *"we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."* The "earthen vessels" is a reference to our bodies, the "treasure" is God's word working in us.

- c. **He is sovereign** – a word meaning He has ultimate authority. He answers to no one. He can determine what is right and wrong. This is related to His omnipotence – which means He is “all-powerful”. Proverbs 19:21, *There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel— that will stand.* The point of His sovereignty is that God is ABLE to do whatever He wills to do. (NOTE: Being able does NOT mean he has to do each of these things). God can do whatever He chooses to mold us, BUT based on scripture we must understand He does NOT remove our free will. We will address that in a few moments.
- d. **What do we know about Him** –
 - i. He knows us - Psalm 139:1-4, Hebrews 4:13.
 - ii. He cares about us - Luke 12:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7.
 - iii. He knows what is best for us – Deuteronomy 10:12-13 – “for your good”, Matthew 6:32-33,
 - iv. He has a plan for us –
 - 1. Romans 8:28 – all things work together for good according to His purpose. NOTE: This is not something mysterious, or God micromanaging our lives, but a desire that we be what He wants us to be. The point of that text is God is going to accomplish HIS purpose.
 - 2. Ephesians 1:4 notes *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.* This IS HIS desire and it leads to the next point.
 - 3. 2 Timothy 2:20-21 – Paul speaks of various vessels (some pottery), some honorable and others dishonorable. God wants us to be “*a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*”
 - 4. Ephesians 2:10, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

III. “I am the clay”

- a. **I need to acknowledge that He is the potter.** I need to trust Him. Isaiah 55:8-9 notes, His thoughts and ways are higher than ours. He knows what is best. Cf. Hebrews 12:5-11 which addresses the chastening of God and relates it to a father chastening his children.
- b. **BUT, I also need to acknowledge that God created me with free will.** The idea of free will is that while God is in control, I can CHOOSE how to live. I can CHOOSE whether to submit to Him or not.
 - i. Every passage of scripture that calls for us to choose or obey (cf. Joshua 24:15) implies this.
 - ii. John 7:17 - *If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*
 - iii. If I am the clay, I need to WILLINGLY YIELD to His desire.
- c. **I need to let Him shape me** –
 - i. If God is the potter, I am the clay. I need to let Him determine what I need to be – Romans 12:1-2 – be transformed (more in a moment). Clay is pliable and moldable until it becomes hardened. That describes us.
 - ii. Some of the qualities I need to make this happen include:
 - 1. **Faith** – I need to believe God – all that we have discussed about Him. Hebrews 11:6. As noted last week, our “shield” is our faith (Ephesians 6:16). I need to TRUST Him – Proverbs 3:5-6, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*
 - 2. **Humility** – 1 Peter 5:6, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. (Cf. James 4:10, Romans 12:3, etc.)
 - 3. **Meekness** – Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek...”; James 1:21 – we are called to “*receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.*” Meekness is now cowardice or timidity, but rather it is a willingness to yield, even in

trying circumstances. If we want God to “mold and shape us”, we need to be willing to submit to Him, even when the circumstances are challenging.

4. **Obedience** – if God is to shape us, it is going to be by our willingness to OBEY Him in everything. 1 Peter 1:13-15 – we rest our hope upon His grace, “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to former lusts, but striving to be holy even as he is holy.

d. **How are we molded?**

- i. As already noted, this is not by God “taking over” and removing our free will. It is about letting Him direct how we live our lives.
- ii. Recall Romans 12:1-2 which gives us the process.
 1. **Present your bodies a living sacrifice** – it starts with surrender. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 notes that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and “you are not your own...” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.* In addressing being a disciple, Jesus emphasized that – “deny self, take up cross, follow Me” – Luke 9:23
 2. **Do not be conformed** – to conform is to assimilate into, or to be MOLDED into something. To be like everyone else. Here Paul notes it is important that we NOT be conformed to the wrong worldview. As already noted, a disciple knows that His master is first. 2 Timothy 2:4 – like the recruit enlisting in the army, he seeks to please his Master first. 1 Peter 1:14 is the only other usage of this Greek term – “*as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance...*”
 3. **Be transformed** – this is the change we are seeking.
 - a. A Greek word from which we get our English word, “metamorphosis”. Think of the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly.
 - b. We need to let God change us!
 4. How does He transform us?
 - a. **By the renewing of our minds** – it starts with making up our minds that we are going to follow Him.
 - i. This is the commitment we referenced in Luke 14:27, 33 (counting the cost). It starts with your mindset! You must determine you want God to change you according to His desire.
 - ii. The idea of renewal is to make something new or refreshed, FOR the better. It is taking on a new mind, thinking differently. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 speaks of bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.
 - iii. Colossians 3:9-10 - *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.*
 - iv. Ephesians 4:23 calls for us to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind.”
 - b. **By His teachings** – “*that you may prove that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” Be letting His word dwell within us and change us into what He wants us to be. Jesus noted, “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” (John 8:31-32). James 1:21-25 calls for us to be doers of His word

and not hearers only. Psalm 119:9, *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul commended them for receiving His word as, *“the word of God which also effectively works in you who believe.”*

c. We have to live by His word if we are to let Him mold us.

e. ***It is a process –***

- i. As the potter is creating his work, he is working with a potter’s wheel and clay that is pliable. It is still soft and moldable. That is why, as the illustration in Jeremiah pointed out, he was able to start over and create something new in place of that which was flawed. BUT, it takes time and patience to mold whatever is being created. And it often involves steps in a specific order.
- ii. This is equally true with the disciple of Jesus. Real and lasting change does not happen instantly. It takes times. If we are letting God mold us according to His will, we realize this. And there is a sense in which, as long as we live, we are not done. We are not fully molded until this life is over.
- iii. BUT, we have to with patience keep letting Him change us day by day. 1 Peter 2:2 speaks of new born babes receiving the pure milk of the word “that you may grow thereby.” Galatians 6:9 encourages us to no grow weary. Philippians 3:12-14 reminds us that we are not there yet, so we keep “pressing on”.

And thus we can see how we are like, “Clay in the potter’s hand”. God is the potter and we are clay. Will we let Him mold us into something useful? Recall 2 Timothy 2:20-21 which noted there are different types of vessels in a house. We need to desire to be molded into a *“vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”* What about you? Are you letting God shape you into what He wants you to be? Think about it!