

Church of God, The Eternal

P.O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440

We Are the Clay

April 1991

Dear Brethren:

The elements of nature which are reawakening in this Spring, 1991, seem to shout louder than ever, "We are the work of Your hands." Among all the creation, man has been the creature who, from time immemorial, has been the least cooperative with his Creator. Since the creation of the first human being until the present, man has been rebellious to his Creator, and God has had to intervene through all kinds of circumstances in order to prevent man from violating the span of time which God has determined for the realization of His plan which was conceived even before the creation of man.

For instance, when Adam sinned, God had to intervene and drive him and his wife out of the garden of Eden; and God placed cherubim with a flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life. God in His mercy did not want man in his carnal state to reach immortality.

Then, when human beings began to multiply on the face of the earth, God saw that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence as a result of man's behavior. God had to intervene again; He destroyed humankind through the flood, except for Noah and his family.

As soon as the earth became repopulated, men once more wanted to show their capabilities, their intelligence, and all their strength, in order to prove to their Creator that they could live according to their own philosophy. Men joined together to build a huge tower. God intervened. He confounded their language and scattered them upon the face of all the earth. And so it went. God had and still has to intervene time and time again in the lives of human beings, families, peoples, nations, and kings. Daniel was inspired to write:

. . . Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him (Dan. 2:20–22).

In chapter 4, verse 32, we see what God did with Nebuchadnezzar. Although king, he was compelled to live like an ox until he knew that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and

gives it to whomsoever He will. It is a lesson which all humankind will be compelled to learn someday.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "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" (Isa. 64:8). We, human beings, are likened to a piece of clay which has to be kneaded and shaped by the hand of its Creator, for the human creation is destined to become a member of God's family. The Apostle Paul uses the same image to show the sovereignty of God:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom. 9:20–21).

God is likened to the Master Potter and human beings to vessels of clay. Whatever our station in life or whatever responsibility we carry out, we can all say, "Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was formed from a piece of clay" (Job 33:6, *RSV*). So we are born and we are likened to pieces of clay, vessels unto dishonor. We are unfinished vessels, each having its qualities and its defects, some being a more malleable lump than others, but whatever the quality of the clay, a large task must be undertaken by the Master Potter, because, as we are told by the prophet Isaiah, ". . . we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6). That is the kind of clay which we are before our call.

But when we are called to live God's way, we become a lump of clay which God shapes after the image of His perfect character. He wants to make us vessels unto honor. This is what the prophet Jeremiah explains to us, "O house of Israel [people of God], 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" (Jer. 18:6). So we must let ourselves be fashioned, shaped in the hands of God. And when we resist, when we are unfaithful, when we compromise with God's Way of life, then we can be compared to a vessel which is not malleable, but is misshapen and has to be kneaded and molded again. Jeremiah expressed that image when he went down to the potter's house; he said, "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18:4). As a potter kneads his clay to reshape it into another vessel, so God tries us in order for us to become aware of our wretchedness and come to repent and say to Him, "Not as I will, but as You will." It is then that the vessel unto honor begins to take shape.

But what kind of clay are we throughout that process? A clay which is pliable, malleable, pleasant to work? Or are we a lump full of hard chunks still, because of our conceptions or stubbornness? Then the Master Potter uses more radical means to eliminate the impurities—the trust in the self. God says to us:

Behold, ye are of no value, and your making is of naught: man hath chosen an abomination by them [an abomination is he that trusts the self]. . . . [He] shall come upon princes as upon clay, and as the potter treadeth mire under the foot" (Isa. 41:24–25, *Geneva Bible*).

Our hardness of heart toward God's Way of life must be vanquished, and the natural mind must give way to the Spirit of God. It is then that the vessel takes on a marvelous shape, spiritually speaking.

But at this stage the process is not over. As a potter puts his vessel into an oven which he has carefully heated, so that the vessel may become usable, so God puts us through the furnace of trial; and He knows exactly which temperature each of His vessels can bear. As we read, ". . . God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able . . ." (1 Cor. 10:13). If God did not subject us to the heat of trial from time to time, we would be limp vessels, we would never develop the firm, solid, and confident character which God wants to see. On the other hand, if God tried us at a too high temperature, we could become cracked and unusable vessels. Therefore, as the potter monitors the heat of his oven very carefully, so God observes and watches each of us so that the furnace of trial may make us solid and useful vessels.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Heb. 12:4–6).

When we are in trial, the human tendency is to get angry with God. That is a very dangerous attitude, which is pictured by the vessel which loses its shape under the effect of heat; and if it cracks, then it will become unusable. Spiritually speaking, that is a tragic situation for one called of God. James addresses the following exhortation to us: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [when you meet various trials, *RSV*]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (Jas. 1:2–3). So God watches closely so that the heat of trial may be neither too low nor too high for each of His clay models.

Let us remember, brethren, that God wants to make us vessels unto honor. A vessel unto honor at the potter's is a vessel which is richly decorated; and for that decoration to withstand use, the vessel undergoes a second firing. In our lives, that decoration represents the fruits of God's Holy Spirit which become more and more manifest if we remain confident in the hands of the Master Potter. God undertakes the finishing of our character; He adds increasingly beautiful facets of His perfect character to His clay models, and it is in the heat of trial that such decoration ultimately becomes an indelible part of our lives.

Brethren, these Spring Holy Days remind us that God wants to make us superb vessels, vessels made in the image of the perfect and glorious Master Potter. But how many additional

trials will be necessary for us to become the finished product? It will all depend on how we allow God to work in our lives, and how we trust Him when we go through the heat of the furnace.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy (1 Pet. 4:12–13).

As a clay vessel must be put into the oven and be heated to a certain temperature before becoming a usable utensil, so the called of God cannot become a vessel unto honor without going through his share of trials. If we continue day after day to have implicit confidence in our Master Potter by obeying Him faithfully and wanting to be the workmanship of His hands, then we can have the assurance that the finished work will be marvelous and solid. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it [will bring it to completion, *RSV*] until the day of Jesus Christ" (Ph'p. 1:6). Christ, who is our example, is the most beautiful vessel unto honor, for He was tempted and tried more severely than any other man and yet committed no sin. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). God promises solemnly that those who will endure unto the end will be rewarded. When He has completed His work with you, you will be vessels unto honor, that is, immortal beings in God's family.

However, let us not forget, brethren, that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread remind us that we are vessels still in the making. Let us make sure that no bitterness, no slander, and no wickedness harden us and make us like vessels which crack under the effect of heat and which therefore, having become useless, eventually will be broken.

By the sacrifice of Christ, God "hath chosen us . . . before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him" (Eph. 1:4). For almost six thousand years God occasionally has intervened in the affairs of men, so that we may be born in the flesh at the time chosen by Him and become, under His mighty hand, vessels unto honor filled with the rich and marvelous blessings of God. It is a priceless privilege; so, let us be willing to undergo these successive stages with the proper spirit and attitude.

Thank you, brethren, for all your efforts. I greet you all warmly.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Aviolat', written in dark ink.

Jean Aviolat