

The Potter and the Clay

Jeremiah 18

The Potter and the Clay

Introduction

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

Biologist to God: God, we don't need you anymore. We can now create life.

God to Biologist: "Oh, really? Okay"

Biologist to God: "Just watch. I can just take this dirt and ..."

God to Biologist: "Wait a minute. Get your own dirt."

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

- **Jeremiah 18** deals with the very basis of our very existence.
- Whose dirt is it anyway?
- Whose world is it?
- Whose nation is it?
- Whose life is it?

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

- God has created all that he has created with goals, plans, intentions and purposes in mind.
- This is true at every level.
- It was a lesson that Israel desperately needed to learn in the days of Jeremiah.

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

- By the time we are finished, we are going to see three levels of application in this chapter:
 - Theological
 - National
 - Individual

The Potter and the Clay

Introduction

- I. The Illustration 18:1-4
- II. The Application 18:5-11
- III. Reaction to God 18:12-17
- IV. Reaction to Jeremiah 18:18-23

I. The Illustration 18:1-4

I. The Illustration 18:1-4

Three basic points:

- As the potter was working with a particular lump of clay.
- The clay was not forming properly in his hands.
- He decided to make something else out of it.

I. The Illustration 18:1-4

- The potter is a picture of God.
- It is his clay. He makes what he wants even though sometimes the clay doesn't cooperate.
- God is free to do as he wills with what is ultimately his own.
- If we don't cooperate in one way, he can freely do something else with us.

II. The Application 18:5-11

II. The Application 18:5-11

- There is a huge mystery at work here.
- God is declaring his sovereignty – his rulership – his ability to do whatever he wants.
- He is also declaring that he allows his decisions to depend upon human responses.

II. The Application 18:5-11

Two errors are possible about the relationship between God's grace and our free will. We can deny either the sovereignty and sufficiency and primacy of grace, or the reality of free will ...

– Peter Kreeft, Boston College



II. The Application 18:5-11

This dilemma is not easy to solve, because we must reconcile rather than deny the two things that here seem to exclude each other. If God pulls my strings, I seem to be a mere puppet. If He does not, He seems no longer to be the universal First Cause.

– Peter Kreeft, Boston College



II. The Application 18:5-11

- This is the **theological application** – balancing God's absolute sovereignty or rulership over his world with our freely chosen responses.
- Any view that goes to far in one direction will become imbalanced.
 - Does God accomplish whatever he wants? Yes.
 - Can we actually do as we please? Yes.

II. The Application 18:5-11

- Nonetheless, God wants Israel to hear this principle as a promise.
- He will gladly do good to them if they will only respond properly to his will for them.

II. The Application 18:5-11



This promise means that no nation is inevitably condemned. There is always a way of salvation. For us individually, this means that as long as we live, God is always offering us the possibility of changing our attitude and so escaping the judgment that awaits those who turn away from the Lord to trust in idols.

– Issiaka Coulibaly, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, FATEAC, Ivory Coast

II. The Application 18:5-11



However, no nation is inevitably blessed either. Disobedience and idolatry can result in a nation losing all the blessings that the Lord has promised them.

– Issiaka Coulibaly, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, FATEAC, Ivory Coast

II. The Application 18:5-11

- This application combines God's will for nations and individuals.
- The big question is, How will the people of Israel respond?
- Will they submit to God, acknowledge their waywardness and receive his grace?

III. Reaction to God 18:12-17

III. Reaction to God 18:12-17

- What could be clearer?
- And what could be sadder?
- Israel has chosen a destruction of their own making rather than a blessed life lived in obedience to God.

III. Reaction to God 18:12-17



The egocentricity of human sin, grounded in the fallen human will, expresses itself in the fatal wish of fallen humanity to create God in its own image and likeness, rather than to respond obediently to the self-revelation of God.

*– Alister McGrath,
Professor of Science and Religion,
University of Oxford*

III. Reaction to God 18:12-17

- They have received fair warning.
- In the actual context, they had already received centuries of warnings.
- It's possible that God's very patience made them less eager to finally repent.

IV. Reaction to Jeremiah 18:18-23

IV. Reaction to Jeremiah 18:18-23

- Jeremiah was one unpopular prophet.
- He is now at his wit's end and pours out his complaint to God, in effect saying,
- “You said you would finally judge them God. Go ahead and do it. I don't care anymore.”

IV. Reaction to Jeremiah 18:18-23

- At present judgment was truly hanging over Jerusalem
- Still, there was time to repent.
- God's declarations of judgment are truly opportunities to change.

IV. Reaction to Jeremiah 18:18-23

- This is why God spared Nineveh in the days of Jonah.
- He would surely do the same for Jerusalem.
- He will do the same for us.

The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- Three levels of application can be seen in this chapter:
 - Theological
 - National
 - Individual

The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- Three levels of application can be seen in this chapter:
 - Theological: We need to balance God's sovereignty to carry out own will with our responsibility to listen.
 - National
 - Individual

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

It is ... foolish to fear the loss of our liberty and freedom and self-mastery when we surrender totally to God. For God is not a slave master but a creative author. Our surrender to Him is in fact the only way we can be totally free ...

– Peter Kreeft, Boston College



The Potter and the Clay Introduction

He is not our rival in the same universe, like Zeus; He is the Creator. Sometimes we need to get free from our imperfect fathers on earth, but never from our perfect Father in Heaven.

– Peter Kreeft, Boston College



The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- Three levels of application can be seen in this chapter:
 - Theological
 - National: God is sovereign over the nations. If he allowed his own people Israel to experience his disfavor, how much more should we feel the need to repent.
 - Individual

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

- Our nation is approximately as opposed to messages of judgment today as the people of Jerusalem were in the days of Jeremiah.
- I don't see any specific message from God that he is going to judge the United States of America.
- I also can't see any reasons why he would not.

The Potter and the Clay Introduction

Some years ago, my wife, Ruth, was reading the draft of a book I was writing. When she finished a section describing the terrible downward spiral of our nation's moral standards and the idolatry of worshiping false gods ... she startled me by exclaiming, "If God doesn't punish America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

– Billy Graham



The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- We should pray daily for our nation, its leaders, its people and its future.
- We may deserve judgment, but who knows?
- God may still see fit to pour out his wonderful grace.

The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- Three levels of application can be seen in this chapter:
 - Theological
 - National
 - Individual: We have personal choices to make in order to experience the fullness of God's blessing for us.

The Potter and the Clay Conclusions

- Will we submit to God or will we decide to be stubborn – like the people of Israel?
- Are there areas in our lives where we know that we are not submitted to God?
- Perhaps we have never received his forgiveness.