

GOD'S CHILD IS BUT A VESSEL OF MERCY

“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,” Rom. 9:22-23.

Del Wray Pastor

A lesson on Self-Examination, a lesson that must be learned before anyone can be saved. And the first thing we observe here is that, as vessels of mercy it is distinctly said that they are made of the same lump as the vessels of wrath. The same piece of clay from which the vessel of wrath is fashioned may be used by God to also make a vessel of mercy. Oh, dear Brothers and Sisters! You, who have hope of Heaven hereafter and a foretaste of it even now, look back to the hole of the pit from where you were dug, to the miry clay from where you were drawn! There was nothing in you by nature better than that which is found in any other man! You did lie in the impure mass of fallen creature ship, and if God has made you a vessel of mercy, it was not because there was anything in you that could merit esteem! There was no fitness, no natural adaptation in you to become what you are. You are a miracle of His love and of His distinguishing Grace! Had He left you to yourself, you had been as base and vile as others in your life; you had been as despairing, and as Christ less as others in your death; you would have been as surely damned in eternity as the man who has descended into the pit of Hell, red with the blood of many a murdered one! Remember, you were in the loins of Adam, in the loins which begat a Judas! You are a son of the same mother Eve, who conceived and brought into the world, Cain the murderer, and of Demas who forsook the Lord, and of Judas who sold Him for 30 pieces of silver. You know, too, in your own experience, that your temper is as evil, your disposition as vile, and your tendency as hellish as that of any man who has perished upon the gallows! If there is a difference in you, the difference is of God's Grace, and not of nature. This very morning you have had in your own soul a proof that you are taken from the old block, and are but a shred from the leprous rag of fallen humanity!

My dear Reader, have you learned this Truth of God in your souls? I know there are some who will not believe that you are depraved. You cannot be brought to think that you are as fallen as the worst of men; you set yourselves up with pride, pretending to believe that there is something in you better than is to be found in the criminal or the profligate. I give you but little hope that you are a child of God if you have never learned this Truth of God! I find that God's elect, here, are of the same lump as the chief of sinners, and if you are of a different lump, it argues that you are not one of the chosen people of God. All God's people must learn, as surely as ever Grace teaches them, that they are vile. Christians may differ in a thousand doctrines, but they never differ in this one point. We all believe, and we

are all compelled to confess, that our nature is vile from its original, evil, only evil and that continually! If there is any good in any of us, we all acknowledge it is the work of Divine Grace, and not the fruit of creature strength, or an emanation from our depraved hearts. I pray God that you may learn this lesson, and if you have learned it, let it not discourage you, but rather give you hope! As you look upon yourselves and say, "I see that I am of the old stock," lift up your eyes to the God of All Grace, and cry, "O Great Potter! Though I am of the old clay, yet fashion me by Your Grace, and make me a vessel of mercy prepared for glory."

Further, it appears both from the text and the context that these vessels of mercy were as much as any other portion of the clay, entirely in the Potter's hands. Had the Potter willed to leave that mass of clay alone, and let it revolve upon the wheel untouched by His gracious hands, or surrendered to the tools of Satan and his craft, if, I say, the Great Potter had left you or me, who are vessels of mercy to ourselves we should have been vessels of wrath most surely! Jehovah might have done this if He had willed to do so and there would have been no power in us to fit ourselves for Heaven. Hell's thistles grow self-sown, but God's wheat needs a Husbandman. Vessels of mercy fit themselves for destruction, but God's Grace, alone can prepare a soul for glory. There is no reason in the world why any man should be saved apart from the Sovereign and distinguishing Grace of God. If the Lord had permitted the whole human race to perish, He would have been infinitely just, and throughout eternity the angels would have hymned Him in songs of adoration. If He had chosen to spare a few of mankind, the sparing of but a few would have been an act of surprising mercy and mercy and judgment would have constituted the two elements of the eternal song! Inasmuch however, as He has taken so much of the clay, and has been pleased to make innumerable vessels of mercy as the stars of Heaven, unto His name be all the Glory forever and ever! Take heed that when you think of the number of the redeemed, you do not mar the idea that God is still a Sovereign. Had He saved but one, you would have said it was an instance of absolute Sovereignty, though He has saved tens of thousands, the Sovereignty is just as absolute as it was before. Had the Lord left you to become all that your evil nature and Satan could have made you, you could not have murmured. If He had permitted you to go on in your drunkenness without sending the Gospel to you; if He had allowed you to reject that Gospel as you would have done unless He had compelled you to receive it, you could not have impugned His Justice, even though you might have murmured at it. You have been made what you are, not as the result of any compulsion of merit demanding a debt from the Lord, nor by any effort of your own, you are what you are as the effect of the Sovereign discriminating love of God the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Now let me ask my reader again, have you learned this Truth of God? Have you learned how entirely you lie in God's hands? Have you ever been brought, my Reader, to believe that if saved, it must be His will that saves you, though if lost it is your will that damns you? Have you ever been stripped so naked, so thoroughly naked, that you have said, "I have no claim upon God. If He saves me, it must be mercy, pure mercy, unmingled mercy"? Oh, if you have never been brought here,

I tremble for you! I pray the Lord to bring you to this spot, for it is the very threshold of the door of Divine Grace. And when a man is brought here, he is not far from the Kingdom of God! Be it so with each of us, that we may acknowledge the Sovereignty and then admire Grace in the Sovereignty.

My text speaks of God's chosen ones as being "vessels." Now as we all know, a vessel is nothing but a receiver. A vessel is not a fountain it is not a creator of the water but a container and holder of that which is poured into it. Such are the redeemed of God. They are not fountains by nature, out of whom there springs up anything that is good. They are simply receivers and receivers only! At one time they are full of themselves, but God's Grace empties them and then as empty vessels they are set in the way of God's goodness, God fills them to the brim with His loving kindness, and so are they proved to be the vessels of His mercy. Sinner! Remember all that God asks of you in order to your salvation is that you would be a receiver and this He gives you even the power to receive! You may receive from Him who gives all; He asks you not to do anything but to hold out your empty hand and take all you need. He does not ask you to come with your mouth full as one that is fat and filled with bread but to open wide your empty mouth and He will fill it with His salvation. He does not bid you store your granaries and become rich, He bids you simply confess your poverty, and open the doors of your empty chambers, that He may pour you out a blessing such as you shall scarcely find room to receive! The chosen of God, to repeat my text, are vessels and vessels, only! They may, as vessels, afterwards give out to others, but they can only give out what God has put in them. They may work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, but they cannot work it out unless God works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure! They may run over with gratitude, but it is only because God has filled them with Grace, they may stream forth with holiness, it is only because the Lord keeps the supply overflowing. They are receivers and only receivers!

And now let me ask, have you ever learned this Truth, my Reader? Have you come to live as a receiver at the hands of God? Have you stood at Mercy's gate as a ragged beggar crying for His bread? Have you ever been compelled to say,

"Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Your Cross I cling"? In God's name I assure you, if you have never become a vessel of mercy, if you have never yet been willing to take from God instead of giving of your own doings to Him, if you are not willing to be a recipient of His gratuitous goodness, you are a total stranger to everything like the Gospel of Christ! The Romanist who brings his prayers, the formalist who brings his ceremonies, the hypocrite who brings his profession, all these men have mistaken the Gospel! The Gospel is a scheme not of giving to God, but of taking from God. It is not of bringing something to the Eternal Jehovah, but it is taking from His fullness, drinking from His well, receiving from His storehouse. You have not yet begun to spell out salvation unless you have learned, first of all, that you can do nothing and be nothing, except God makes you something and enables you to do something in His cause.

But furthermore and lastly upon this first head, the children of God are called vessels, but they have this added by way of distinction, they are "vessels of mercy." In order that they may be vessels of mercy, it is certainly necessary that they should be sinful, and that they should be miserable. Pity may be given to the miserable, but mercy must be bestowed upon the sinful! For a judge to talk of mercy to those who never had offended, would be to insult them; and for the philanthropist to offer pity to the man who knows no sorrow, would be but to mock him! The only qualifications that a man can have for being a vessel of mercy are the qualifications of being sinful and of being sorrowful, two qualifications which I doubt not, many of you now possess, although because you have them, you think that you never can be a child of God. O rejoice in this thought, that in order to be filled with Grace, the qualification is emptiness! In order to be clothed with righteousness, the indispensable qualification is nakedness! In order to be washed in Jesus' blood, all that is needed of you is that you should feel your need of that washing! The redeemed of God are not vessels of merit, but vessels of mercy! They are sinful men and women who have felt their sin, and have mourned over their iniquity, and have hence become sorrowful and miserable. Then it is that God shows to them that they are vessels of mercy. If I could wander through your homes here and read each heart, I should find some, I doubt not, who have come here saying, "I am the chief of sinners; I feel that if all the world were saved, there is no room for me, for there is not one good trait in my character. My sin is so aggravated; I have heard the Gospel so often and yet I have rejected it! Conscience has attired me so many times, and yet I would not listen to its admonitions. I am sure, I am certain that I am in the most hopeless plight, and I am fearfully miserable upon this account. Oh, that there were mercy to be had in Heaven, and that God would have pity upon such a one as I am!" Soul, there is comfort for you in this text! Have I not told you, and do you not believe it, that the vessel must be empty before it can be filled and you are empty! There is hope, then, that God will save you! The vessel must be black with sin before it can be washed with mercy. And you are black. There is hope, then, that you shall be cleansed. A vessel must be filled with misery before it can be filled with mercy you are filled with misery and full of sorrow. Oh, be of good cheer! Bring this vessel of yours, full of misery though it is, and empty it all at the foot of the Cross, and I tell you, Sinner, my words are true, He will fill your vessel with the richest mercy that ever He gave to the brightest of His saints, or to the boldest of His Apostles!

What a glad and joyous hour it is, when God, for the first time, fills the vessel with His mercy! My soul cannot help going back to the hour in my own experience, when the first flood of mercy brimmed this poor empty vessel. Filled to bursting with wormwood and gall had that vessel been for many and many a day. Often had it seemed as if the vessel must be shattered with the workings of inward sorrow? At last the hour had come, Jehovah said, "Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." These eyes, by God's Grace, looked! This heart believed, and in a moment that vessel emptied of self. And emptied of misery, I was plunged into the sea of mercy and fully submerged! I thought I should have a little hope at first, and then a stronger confidence, but no, my sun

arose in the fullness of His strength! The stream came not by slow degrees, but in an instant was the vessel covered, swallowed up and lost in joy and love! The gladness of that hour, I can remember, but I cannot tell. Then I knew my sins forgiven! I could dance for mirth! Then I knew my name was inscribed in the Lamb's fair Book of Life, and nothing that earth could have afforded could give a drop of joy that was comparable to the bliss of that hour! Oh, may it be so with some of you this morning! Men, Brothers and Sisters, Fathers, Mothers and Children may it be so with you! Turn, I beseech you, your tearful eyes to Jesus hanging on the Cross, and it shall be so NOW! Come bring your empty vessels, for the fountain flows! Break not your pitcher with despair, but come and fill it with the hands of faith. There is room for you here at the marriage feast, you shivering beggar clothed with the rags of sin! Come, the voice of Mercy bids you. The arms of Jesus are outstretched to woo you! You are not rejected; Mercy's door is not shut, come and welcome! It is the 11th hour, the 12th hour, though it has struck on earth, has not struck in Heaven, there is time! Your noon-time of mercy is not passed! The hour of Divine Grace still lasts, and even now you may read your name as a vessel of mercy fully prepared unto eternal glory!

II. We have cast our eye upon the vessels, let us now pause a little while and see THE POTTER AT HIS WORK.

When a potter is about to make a vessel, you must not imagine that he takes up the mere clay and puts it on the wheel, and then leaves it to chance as to what shall be made of it. No, he has his plan. Before he sits down to the labor, he knows what kind of vessel he is about to make. So it is with our Divine Potter who is in Heaven. He takes the poor sinner as a mass of clay, He puts him on the wheel, and as that wheel revolves, the Potter looks and sees in that clay a future something which does not appear to the vessel, but which only appears to the Great Workman's eyes. We may truly say of each of us who know the Lord, that, "it does not yet appear what we shall be." And what we shall be will never appear until we shall see Christ as He is, and be like He! The Potter, however, knows what we are to be. Our Father who is in Heaven will not be deceived at last as to what He will make of His people. He has a plan and that plan, I think, I may say to you in these few words, "He will present us without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." Sweet and blessed consideration! God intends to make of every sinner who believes on Him, a spotless, perfect vessel, and full of glory! He does not intend to leave a single sin unpardoned, or to let a single evil principle remain in your soul. He means to tear up your iniquity by the roots, and make you totally free from the very being and indwelling of sin! He means to wash you so completely in the blood of Christ, that both the power and the guilt of sin shall all be taken away! And He means, as the completion of all, to make you in the image of Christ Jesus as fair and lovely as that spotless and perfect Lamb of God! Oh, Christian, does not this rejoice your heart? You shall yet be like Christ! Oh, do you say, "I am as much like the devil, sometimes, as I can be, and I often have to mourn that there is so much of the old Adam in me"?

Yes, but rejoice. It does not yet appear what you shall be! Every mark of Satan shall yet be put away from you. Every tinge of the old depravity shall yet be cleansed. And when you shall be taken into Heaven as a vessel thoroughly finished, you will be a theme of wonder to all the angels and the glorified spirits who shall gather round about you to see the matchless skill and Grace of God as it is manifested in your character and in your nature! The Lord grant that we may always have an eye to the great plan of the Potter, so that when sharp afflictions make us whirl upon the wheel, we may rejoice that the plan is being accomplished, and that we shall come forth perfect from the hands of the Maker.

And now while we are stopping here to notice the Potter at His work, having glanced at the plan, let us observe that like every potter, He first of all makes the outlines in the clay. You may have seen the man at work executing designs in glass. Perhaps at the very first moment, you may form a rough guess of what the whole thing is to be, though the ornament and elaboration which constitute the main part of the beauty you cannot yet discover. Certain it is, that the moment a man begins to be prepared for Heaven by the Grace of God in his soul you may see the outlines of what he is to be, although it is but the bare outline. Shall I tell you what those outlines are? There is first of all in him, faith in Christ. It is a simple childlike trust in Him who hung upon the tree. There is next in him another mark of the Potter's hands that is love to Christ, a love that is strong as death, though sometimes it seems to be feeble as a worm! There is also in him a hope that makes him not ashamed; and a joy which makes glad his countenance. It is but the bare outline, as I have said, for the glory which excels is not there. The vase is only in its embryo, but yet sufficiently developed to give a prophecy of its finished form; but as for the pictures that shall be inlaid, as for all the different colors that shall be spent upon it, you cannot guess as yet nor could you unless you could climb to the Potter's seat and see the plan upon which He looks as the clay revolves upon the wheel.

Dear Saints, have you anything in you as yet of the great outlines? Can you say in truth, "I do believe on the Lord Jesus"? Fear not then, my Reader, you are a vessel of mercy! Not a finished vessel, but one that shall be finished. Can you say, "O yes, I do love Jesus, Because He first loved me"? If that is true, you are not yet what you shall be, but you are a vessel of mercy for all that! And does your hope sometimes tell you that through Jesus you shall stand among the glorified? Then be glad; The Potter has begun with you, and He will never leave you! He mars no vessel on the wheel, or if it is marred, He will remake it. He casts not away the clay which He has once taken in His hands; He will complete what He has begun; He knows no failures and no disappointments. You shall yet be all that He would have you be and, filled with glory, you shall glitter in Heaven at last! But to proceed as the Potter goes on with His work, you may perceive the gradual completion of the article which He manufactures. And so, dear friends, if you are a vessels of mercy, there will not always be in you the bare outline, but as time goes on there will be some of the beautiful lines and firings He puts there! It is always a joy to me that such a large proportion of gray-headed Christians always attend here, and it is a theme of wonder, also, as well as of joy, because I can

scarcely understand what they can learn from me. The Lord must have taught them so much more in these many years. He must have been engraving them, and using the tools of discernment upon them so long that they must be getting ready, they must be getting nearer to that glorious readiness which prepares the people of God for entrance into eternal life! I am not among those who think that a Christian is a thing that stands still. He is a vessel, but is a vessel on the wheel. He is clay, but he is clay in the Potter's hands gradually being formed. I should question whether there is any of the life of God in a man if that life does not germinate and grow, for life is a thing that will grow, and you cannot prevent it, you may seek to bind up the branch of a tree or to restrain it, but if it cannot grow in one direction, it will in another. If it cannot swell in one place where you have bandaged it, although it will often burst the tightest bond you can put around it, if it cannot swell there, it will surely grow somewhere else! So is it with the life of God in the Christian, it will grow! The Christian will be getting more and more like his Master.

You sometimes seem to think you are going backward, yet if you are the children of God, there is a constant going forward, after all. There may be occasional backslidings, but the tenor of your life will be progress. You may slip, yes, and fall but still, "Onward," will be the true motto of your course. You will be progressing in the Divine Life, but I do not think, friend, that you are a vessel of mercy, if after 20 or 30 years of union with Christ's there has been no growth in you. If you do not know more of your Lord's faithfulness; if you do not feel more of your own weakness and depravity; if your faith has not become more unstaggering, and more confident in Him who is faithful and true; if you have not more longings after Him, and more will to be spent in His cause, I should begin to question whether you are a vessel on the Master's wheel. I do not think He would lose twenty-five years over you, that He would let you be spinning round on the wheel of Providence all that while, and yet never have touched you and never have made you more meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light! In fact, it is just this growth of God's Grace that is one of the evidences of life, and though you may not be able at all times to discover it, yet it is there! If you are a vessel of mercy, you are getting nearer towards completion nearer to the day when with everlasting songs you shall be presented before the Father's face.

Oh, Believers, if we can only see here on earth, vessels getting ready for perfection, and if those vessels have so much beauty in them as the children of God really have, what must they be when at last they shall be finished? Jehovah, how glorious shall be Your workmanship in this, Your Second Creation! If this world is fair, how much fairer shall the new world be, if in this, Your old Creation, You have made such beauties that the admiring angels may come down to view them, and the morning stars may find in them subjects for song what shall Your new Creation be? If that rough work, which You did but speak from Your mouth, is so marvelously beautiful, what must be that work to accomplish which You have sat down to the potter's wheel? That work to perform which You have shed Your own blood, and to perfect which You have not spared the treasures of Heaven, but emptied them out that You might complete those vessels which shall

be for Your glory? Oh, the songs! Oh, the hallelujahs that shall greet Jehovah's workmanship, when all shall be completed, when all the vessels shall be brought Home, when Heaven's tables shall be loaded with the richest of all ware, when souls shall be filled with the red wine of bliss and all the glorified shall rejoice in God! What songs, I say, what hallelujahs shall make the courts of Heaven echo and re-echo throughout eternity forever and ever!

THE POTTER'S MARK UPON HIS VESSELS: In all manufacturing of costly wares, there is always some trademark peculiar to the firm that has manufactured the article, a mark which is not to be imitated and without which no vessel is the genuine production of the professed maker. Dear believer, you may know today whether you are a vessel of mercy! You may know by the Master's mark upon you! That mark, the Apostle tells you, is calling. Have you been called? If you are called, you are elected. Has Divine Grace called you out of darkness into the marvelous Light of God? If so, it is not a matter of question as to whether you are ordained to eternal life. You may rest assured that, without a doubt, your name was in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the foundations of the world, if you have in time been called from sin unto righteousness! Mark, then, the distinguishing mark of the Great Potter upon His vessels of mercy is effectual calling. And I would here remark that that is a mark which no man can put upon you! It is one which God alone can impress. We can call you, but we cannot call you effectually. The earnest minister may cry aloud, and spare not, and bid sinners come to the marriage supper of the Lamb but it is in vain calling to deaf ears and such are the ears of all men by nature! The Lord alone can so speak that the deaf, no, the dead, will hear! Have you ever, then, felt a calling which is not of man, neither by man? Has the voice of Mercy ever spoken to your soul and said, "Come to Jesus"? And has it so spoken that your heart has said, "Your face, Lord, will I seek"?

Oh, my dear Readers, you have been called time enough by me, so many times that if you perish, your blood must lie at your own door! God is witness that over the most of you, these eyes have wept many and many a time. The Lord knows how earnestly I have called to you, how I have pleaded with you as though it were my own soul that was at hazard and as though I pleaded for my own life! If you have rejected these callings, be prepared to answer for it at the Last Great Day. But alas, these callings you may have, and they may only sink you lower than the lowest Hell! Have you ever received the Irresistible calling of the Holy Spirit? Has He said to you, "Mary," and have you said, "Rabboni"? Has He cried to you, "Zaccheus make haste and come down?" And have you come down and received Him into your house? None but a call from Christ's own lips shall ever compel such stubborn hearts as ours to follow Him! Have you had that call? If so, you have the mark of the Potter upon you! You are not a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction, but a vessel of mercy prepared unto glory! I would further say, that as this is a mark which no man can put upon you, so blessed be God, it is one which no man can take away from you! If God has called you, that calling is without repentance, God will not repent and take back the gift which He has given you. If He has called you by His Grace to repentance, He will call you to

faith, and then from faith to love, from love to patience, and to hope and onwards till at last He whispers, "Come up here," and He calls you unto glory! I do not believe in that Gospel which teaches that a man may be effectually called, and yet may perish; that a heart may be thoroughly renewed, and yet may go back to its old state, that, in fact, God's work may melt away like "the baseless fabric of a vision." I do not believe that His new Creation is but froth and foam, that it only lives by the will of a creature, and it dies if that creature has a will that it should do so!

No, my dear children of God, if the Lord has put Heaven's light in you, once, it is there forever and not death nor Hell can quench it but in your soul it must and will burn! "Ah, but," says one, "if I indulge in sin." Yes, but you shall not indulge in sin, the Lord will preserve and keep you so that the Wicked One touches you not. "But if I go back and sin as I used to do." Yes, but you cannot do it. That Grace of God which has changed your nature will hold you to the end, you shall walk in the Light of God till you come to walk in Heaven! "Your path shall be as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day," and if you go back, we will say of you, "He went out from us because he was not of us, for if he had been of us, he doubtless would have continued with us." "The dog has returned to his vomit, because he was a dog, and the sow that was washed has returned to her wallowing in the mire, because she was a sow" but had the natures been changed, they would never have returned to their old propensities! Had they been made new creatures in Christ Jesus, that new Creation could never have been undone! God's tapestry could not have been unraveled; His work could not have been consumed; it is eternal and must abide; it must last even to the perfection in Heaven. Be of good cheer then, if the Lord has put His mark upon you, the devil cannot wash it out!

And then, to conclude, let me remark, if you have had the seal of calling put upon you, that seal is sure and certain. There never was a man yet called out of darkness into the Light of God by mistake! There never was a man who repented, and then found he was not an elect one; never a man went to Christ, and then found he had not a right to come, and must go back. "Whoever comes unto Me I will in nowise cast out." God has never made mistakes in the callings of His Grace! The right man is called at the right time, and the right place; he goes to Christ and finds that what is a fact in time was a purpose in all eternity! Between calling and election there is an indissoluble union. If you have the link of calling in your hand, depend upon it that it is fastened, though you cannot see it, unto the other golden link of Divine Decree!

You could not have come to Christ unless the Father had drawn you, and the Father would not have drawn you unless He had intended to draw you, and that intention is Election's decree. Be, then, quite certain that if you come, it was intended that you should come; and you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world! But am I certain that I am regenerate? I cannot allow a dispute about whether I am elected or not. Am I sure that, "My faith is fixed on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness?"

Oh Lord, revive Your work, we pray! We are feeble and weak; we can do nothing. But come Yourself and achieve triumphs, and let victories be won. Come and break the hard heart, and subdue the stubborn will. Lord, save the unsaved! O God, awaken those reading here present who are dead in sin, and let the vessels of mercy whom in Your Sovereign good pleasure You have chosen out of the mass of mankind be filled with mercy till they overflow with gratitude and joy! Oh Lord, hear us and let the feeble effort of these words be crowned with richer success than we can ask or even think, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.