

**WHY DOES GOD PERMIT
CHRISTIANS TO SUFFER?**

HOW IS GOD'S LOVE FOR US EXPRESSED?

If God truly loves His spirit-begotten children, why does He sometimes permit suffering and pain? Perhaps we have failed to understand just how God expresses His divine love. See page 3.

YOU NEED TO KNOW WHY FIERY TRIALS ARE NECESSARY

Throughout history, God's people have experienced many persecutions and tribulations. God's children often experience severe trials and tests! Why? Do you know why a loving Creator has decreed that all of His children must go through their share of fiery trials? Read and understand this. Trials are a vital part in developing spiritual character. See page 6.

LESSONS FROM . . . THE MASTER POTTER

Life is full of trials, tests and temptations—all intended to be the means of building beautiful, God-like character in man. Isaiah, Elihu and Paul all used the analogy of the potter and the clay. Jeremiah was advised to go to the potter's house to learn how God works with men to mold them in His spiritual image. In this article these important principles are clearly explained. See page 10.

How Is GOD'S LOVE For Us Expressed?

If God truly loves His Spirit-begotten children, why does He sometimes permit suffering and pain? Perhaps we have failed to understand just HOW God expresses His divine love.

IF GOD is wiser than we, His judgment must differ from our own on many things. What seems right to us may be wrong to God and vice versa. We are told by Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. 55:8). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the manner in which God expresses His love is not always what we might expect.

A Grandfather—Or a Father? Humanly speaking, we tend to wish for a God who is a kindly *grandfather* rather than a father. We would like to believe that God is more of a "senile benevolence," as C. S. Lewis expressed it, who is concerned only that we all have a "good time" here below. We would like God to express His love for us by merely extending *kindness* (by which we really mean *indulgence*) as opposed to outgoing concern and involvement. Carnal man would like God to keep him out of painful situations and to bless him with "goodies" and spiritual bonbons. Human inclination tends to resist too much direct involvement on the part of God.

A plaque in a gift shop reads, "God is not dead—He just doesn't want to get involved." This is a shallow slogan reflecting a tragic misunderstanding of God's nature—typical of most of humanity. Yet when we look around at the world, how much of God's direct involvement do we actually recognize?

We do see endless suffering and pain. We see injustice of every type. But where is God in all of this?

Who Has Rejected Whom? The problem, of course, is not that God does not want to "get involved."

Rather, it is that man does *not want* God to be involved unless it is on man's terms.

Historically, when God thundered to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai, the people shrank back in fear. This was no kindly, senile grandfather! Rather, the powerful rock-shattering voice of the living God penetrated to the depth of their consciousness! Here was *power!* Too much power for puny men to cope with. "Let the *man* Moses speak on behalf of God," the people pleaded. They wanted to deal with someone who was vulnerable—flesh and blood like themselves. God's *direct* involvement was too much for them to handle.

Later, when the children of Israel asked the Prophet Samuel to arrange for them to have a human king like all the surrounding Gentile nations, God clearly framed the real problem. He said: "... they have not rejected thee [Samuel], *but they have rejected me*, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7).

And humanity has been rejecting God ever since. It is man who does not want to get involved with his Creator! Isaiah was inspired to write: "And *there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee . . .*" (Isa. 64:7).

God's Love. To extend His love toward His creation, it was necessary for God to make the first move. We are told by the Apostle John that Christ said: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . .*" (John 6:44).

It just isn't in us to automatically love our Creator. God must first express His love toward us before we are able to reciprocate. We are told in Scripture that "God is love"

(I John 4:8). He personifies it. He is the ultimate source of all love.

John further states, "Herein is love, *not that we loved God, but that he loved us . . .*" (I John 4:10). Man does not by nature love God. In fact, we are instructed that the carnal human mind is *animosity* and enmity toward God! (Rom. 8:7.) How then does a human being ever come to love God? John answers: "We love him, *because he first loved us*" (I John 4:19). But how is the love of God expressed? And how may it be reconciled with the suffering and pain we sometimes are allowed to endure?

God, in His revealed Word, makes several analogies which help throw light on this question.

The Artist and His Creation. Perhaps the least profound example which may be used to illustrate God's love for his human creation is the love of the artist for the artifact.

Jeremiah used an illustration from the arts in chapter 18, verse 6—"O house of Israel, 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 my hand, O house of Israel."

Have you ever seen a landscape or portrait artist lovingly labor over a painting? He plans it, draws it in with loving care, and applies the pigment with careful diligence. Each stroke is significant. All the elements are painstakingly weighed against each other. Color, value, hue, light and shade, intensity and chroma are all evaluated and considered. The artist exults in the rendering and rejoices if the result is what he set out to achieve.

A sculptor may set out to sculpt a magnificent marble piece. He goes to

great lengths to select the material with which to work. He may oversee the quarrying of a fine marble monolith. He examines it closely for quality and purity. He makes sure it is carefully protected as it is shipped to his studio. There he begins work by careful planning and measuring. Each stroke of the hammer is cautiously yet authoritatively executed as the chisel does its creative work. The more the piece comes to look like

what the sculptor envisioned, the more he delights in his work.

God is a great Artist who is lovingly involved in a great work of art. He is the Master Architect and Builder who is producing a great spiritual house. Peter used this analogy in I Peter 2:5. "Ye also, as lively [living] stones, are built up a spiritual house . . . acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Paul also used this analogy: "But Christ as a son over his own

house; *whose house are we* [Christians] . . ." (Heb. 3:6).

God is also a Master Potter who will not be satisfied with the clay until it has achieved a certain character. (See the following articles.)

Of course, any artist or artisan has to manipulate the materials with which he works. He does so with *loving* care and devotion. He pays attention to detail. He plans, he tests, he probes. He works with the *end product* in mind. So it is with the great Artist of the universe. He lovingly works with man and his environment to produce a glorious product that will give both Himself and the product immense satisfaction upon its completion. *Great art glorifies the artist who produced it!*

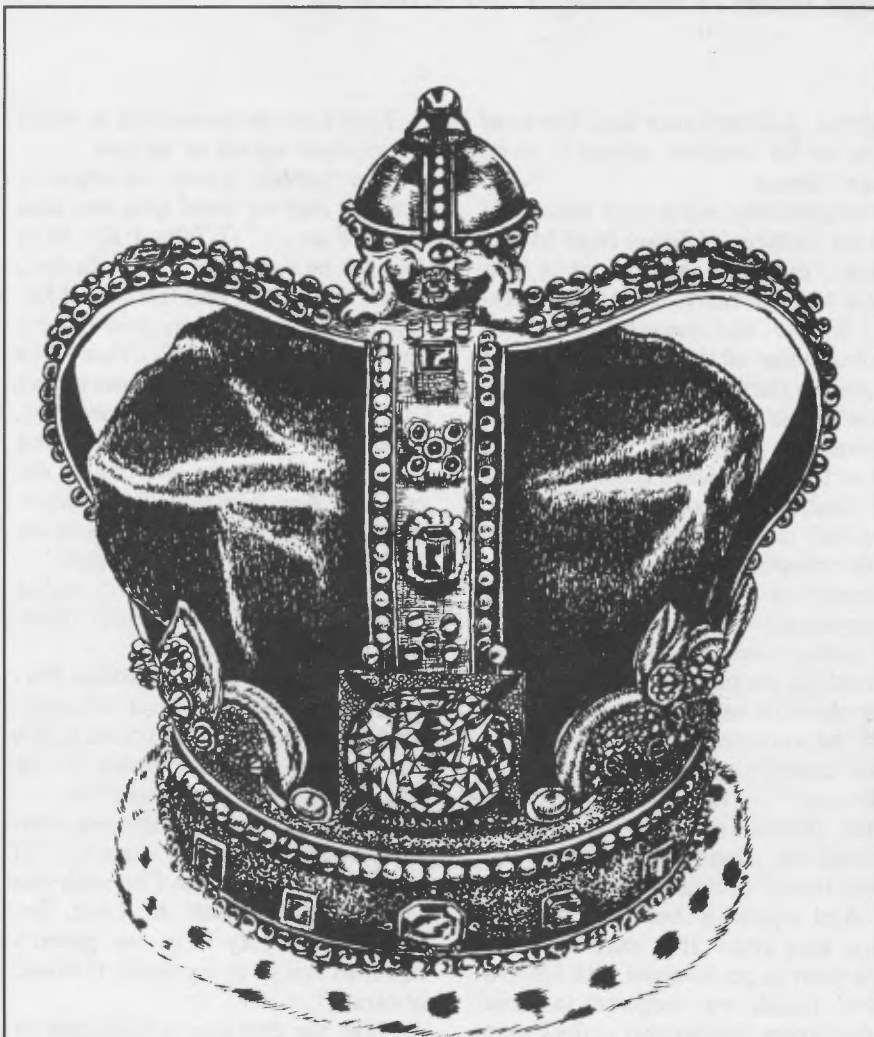
God intends that His children be brought to *glory*—a condition of spiritual perfection and maturity. This in turn will glorify the Creator Himself. And all of this expresses God's great love for His human creation.

The Shepherd and the Sheep. A second analogy of God and His people is that of the *shepherd and the sheep*. Asaph spoke of humanity as ". . . thy people and sheep of thy pasture . . ." (Ps. 79:13). This type is used throughout the Bible. Jesus is spoken of as the "good Shepherd."

This analogy is somewhat more sophisticated than the previous one. The relationship of a shepherd to his sheep—a man to his beast—illustrates some rather important points. Man is responsive and intelligent, yet decidedly *inferior* to God, as is the sheep to the shepherd. Yet even a human shepherd, far above the intellectual plane of his sheep, is deeply concerned with their welfare. He will fight off bears, wolves and other carnivores who attempt to rob him of his sheep. He will comfort them when they are frightened. He sees that they have adequate pasture and water. The good shepherd goes to great lengths to see that his sheep are well taken care of.

Think of a man and his dog. Why does a man train his dog? Primarily that he may love it, not that it may love him! But in addition, his training also makes the animal better able to serve him, not that *he* may serve *it*.

Man does not extend himself to the same degree to train a roach or a rat. The man takes pains with a



What is a kingdom?

Specifically, what is the Kingdom of God? Is it just an inspirational idea? A church? Or is it a literal kingdom? If it is literal, where is it ruling, what are its laws, and how may you enter it? Be sure to request your free copy of the vitally important booklet What Is the Kingdom of God? (See back page for address.)

dog—or a horse—because they are high on the intelligence scale of irrational creatures. A rat or a roach would hardly be worthy of such time and concern. A dog is more naturally lovable. And the man works at making it *fully lovable*—at least as much as is fitting between a human being and a brute beast.

No ridiculous anthropomorphic analogy should be made of this, of course. This is a limited analogy. But nevertheless God *does* make it. And we may learn from it.

God takes such pains to express His love to man because man alone is *worthy* of such concern. He is the apex of God's creation. God is naturally able to love man quite readily—and yet He strives to make man *fully lovable*!

Now ask yourself this question. Could a dog who was being house trained or corrected for some social indiscretion possibly conclude that its master was “good”? (I speak facetiously of course, since a dog is incapable of such rationality.) Even so we sometimes fail to see the goodness of our Master, His purpose and methods.

Husband/Wife. We may now proceed up the metaphorical ladder. God further explains His love to man by the analogy of *the marriage relationship*. This very expressive analogy is frequently used in the Bible to depict yet another aspect of God's divine love for humanity.

Physical Israel was depicted as an abandoned baby girl left to the mercy of the elements. God found her, cleaned her up, reared her and espoused her (Ezek. 16). But when she reached the full flower of her beauty she betrayed her divine husband.

This was spiritual adultery.

The same kind of spiritual marriage relationship was used to illustrate Christ's relationship to *spiritual* Israel—the Church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify”—set apart or separate—“and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Now think about this. When a man enters into a love relationship

with a woman, does he cease to care about her beauty, her appearance and cleanliness? Of course he doesn't! He becomes *more acutely* concerned with such things. Love is more sensitive than hatred to every blemish, every line or wrinkle in one's beloved. Love pays attention, but hatred ignores.

God, too, is highly concerned with every spiritual wrinkle or blemish a member of His Church may have. His concern and love may be expressed in a way that we do not recognize as love, however.

When God purges us of spiritual blemishes by whatever means He may choose to use, we all too often interpret His correction as undeserved suffering. Did Job take it kindly when God showed His love to him by allowing him to suffer so intensely? Not at all. Job writhed in self-pity. He claimed undeserved suffering. He argued with God and even accused Him! But finally he saw what God was doing and his reciprocal love to God grew even greater and deeper. His latter end was greater than the beginning.

Christ is a loving, concerned husband. He wants a wife who is spiritually healthy, morally clean and deeply affectionate toward Him. *He will have such a wife* by CLEANSING her in advance of His marriage (Rev. 19). While this cleansing may be painful—much like “grandma's lye soap”—now, it will be much appreciated later when Jesus comes in His Kingdom!

The Father/Son Analogy. Perhaps the greatest and most profound analogy used by God to illustrate His great love for mankind is the father/son analogy. This reflects the very relationship between God and Christ.

When this analogy was originally made and recorded as scripture, paternal authority stood on a much higher plane than it does today. Today the image of paternal authority is somewhat tarnished. But in biblical times it meant much more.

In this analogy—love between father and son—paternal love is essentially *authoritative* and the son's love is that of *obedience*.

A son is a reflection of the father. Naturally the father wishes that reflection to be favorable. He wishes the son to be honorable—to *glorify* rather than besmirch the family

name. The father uses his authority (if done correctly) to make the son into what the father in his superior wisdom realizes he should be.

God chastens and corrects His children in like manner, to strengthen their quality of character. This chastening is an expression of divine love. If God neglected to do this we could not consider ourselves His children. (Heb. 12:6-8.)

Of course we do not rejoice in correction at the time we are receiving it! It is not until *later* that we realize the good fruit of it. Then we are able to appreciate the love which was extended our way when the punishment was meted out (Heb. 12:11).

Why We Were Created. Was man created so that he could love God? Quite the contrary!

Man was primarily created so that God could take pleasure in and express love toward him. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and *for thy pleasure they are and were created*” (Rev. 4:11).

God does not exist for the sake of man. Nor does man exist exclusively for his own sake. He exists as an object of God's outgoing love!

As a great Master Artisan or Craftsman, God takes pains to ensure that His product is of the finest possible quality and beauty. God expresses His love to His sheep by protecting, feeding and caring for them as a concerned shepherd. As a loving husband strives to enhance his wife's beauty and comeliness, so God purges the Church of blemishes and moral uncleanness. And as a kind, concerned, yet firmly authoritative Father, God chastens and corrects His spiritual children.

Humanly we are limited. We see as if through a darkened glass. The whole of God's tremendous love is much greater than we can understand. But we can indeed be grateful God is not limited, and that neither is His boundless love and concern for His human creation—especially His spiritually begotten children. □

Be sure to request your free copies of:

**“Why Must Men Suffer?”
and
“Losing a Loved One”**

You Need To Know Why FIERY TRIALS Are Necessary

Throughout history, God's people have experienced many persecutions and tribulations. God's children often experience severe trials and tests! Why? Do you know why a loving Creator has decreed that all of His children must go through their share of fiery trials? Read and understand this. Trials are a vital part in developing spiritual character.

Many Christians fail to realize that trials and tribulations—unpleasant though they may be at the time—are really blessings in disguise. You need to understand why our loving Father has ordained that all His children must experience a number of temptations and trials.

God Almighty has deliberately designed the begetting and birth of a child in this life to be a type—an exact picture—of the spiritual begetting and birth which the child of God must experience before he can be born into His family.

We were born into this world under terrific pressure! In childbirth, both mother and baby usually experience much stress and strain, as well as a certain amount of physical pain.

This is an exact type of the spiritual birth.

Jesus Christ said to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

What are the very beginning steps toward salvation? 1) Repentance, 2) baptism, and 3) the receiving of God's precious Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). But—after our real conversion and baptism—we must continue to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18).

The apostle Peter revealed how this growing must take place: "As

newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Pet. 2:2).

After repentance, baptism and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit, we must continue the vitally important process of spiritual growth in the womb of the Church, so we can someday be born into God's family. We can only continue to grow spiritually if we steadfastly keep drinking in our daily supply of God's living waters—His Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; Isa. 55:1).

We continue to receive our daily portion of God's Holy Spirit if we continually feed on the Word of God. "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4).

The words of God Almighty as recorded in the Bible are life-giving and will nourish us—if we regularly receive them into our very innermost being! Christ said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

If we mix prayer and fasting with our daily study of God's Word, we receive a rich supply of spiritual food which will nourish us to full spiritual maturity. After safely completing a full term—usually much longer than the nine months required for physical birth—of growth in the womb of the Church, we will then finally be ready to be born into God's spiritual family.

Can you now see how the spiritual birth, like a human birth, is usually preceded by a most difficult period of stress and strain?

Stress and Strain Are Necessary. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, doesn't want us to be relaxed Christians! God does not want us to go to sleep on the job (Matt. 25:5). "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14).

Jesus Christ will reject any who remain lukewarm (Rev. 3:15-16).

We can only be born into the Kingdom of God under stress and strain—under pressure! You need to understand why this is necessary, and also why God permits us to be sorely tried at times!

King David, a man after God's own heart, will have a very high position of rulership in the Kingdom of God. He will be king over all Israel (Ezek. 37:24; Hosea 3:5; Jer. 30:9). In order to qualify for this high position of responsibility and service in God's Kingdom, David first had to suffer many trials, persecutions and afflictions. His life was, in fact, full of tribulations.

He understood that God's people must experience many trials and tests in this life: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19).

David made some very serious mistakes in his life and had to be af-

fllicted by God to learn his lesson—the lesson that sin never pays!

In a moment of weakness, David yielded to the terrible sin of lust. He gave in to his carnal urge and committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then, when she had conceived an illegitimate child by him, he sought to cover his sin by devious means. When this failed, he connived to bring about the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. He had him put in the hottest part of the battle where he would be certain to be killed by the Ammonites (II Sam. 11).

But is God a respecter of persons? Would He turn a blind eye to David's sin? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

God sent Nathan to point out David's terrible sin to him (II Sam. 12). David bitterly repented of this grievous sin (II Sam. 12; Ps. 51). Nevertheless, God Almighty showed that he must reap what he had sown.

What would his punishment be? He would have perpetual war from that day forward! God also afflicted David through sickness, and through taking the life of the very child which he had begotten in adultery! This was a very high price to pay for sin—but this was God's way of bringing David to his senses!

Did David know why God had afflicted him? Certainly! "Before I was afflicted I went astray [I sinned]: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). He then freely confessed that God was righteous in punishing him: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

Much Tribulation. The zealous apostle Paul also understood the absolute necessity of God's people going through tribulation in this world in order to purify them. He exhorted the disciples "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

He solemnly warned the evangelist Timothy: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12).

Paul will certainly have a very high position in the Kingdom of God. The many trials which he endured fully qualified him to receive a

position of great responsibility.

Have you ever carefully noticed just how much this dynamic apostle suffered and endured for Christ's sake?

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (II Cor. 11:23-28).

In addition to these trials, Paul revealed that he had certain physical infirmities which Jesus Christ had refused to heal—in order to keep Paul humble—so he would look to Christ and glory in God, rather than in what he had done (II Cor. 12:1-9). Paul concluded: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:10).

The Fiery Trial. Did the apostle Peter believe the lot of a Christian would be an easy one? No! He revealed that the faith of the Christian must sometimes be sorely tried: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:6-7).

This same apostle was also inspired to give the following warning: "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" (I Pet. 4:12-13).

Christ's exemplary life—especially during the three and one half years of His earthly ministry—was not a life of idleness and ease but a life filled with constant trials of every sort! He was continually opposed, persecuted, slandered, criticized, and was finally crucified by the very people whom He loved—loved so much that He was willing to die for them!

Yes, Christ knew what real tribulation was. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," said Jesus, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Many Bible prophecies reveal that the peoples of America, Britain and the British Commonwealth (modern Israel) have become terribly enmeshed in loathsome sins (Hosea 4:1-3; Jer. 30:11-15). God also shows that He will correct and chastise Israel because of her sins. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers" (Isa. 30:20).

Why will God so severely afflict Israel? Because He loves Israel and wants our people to turn from their mounting sins!

There are various ways in which God tries us. God tried and tested Abraham by commanding him to offer up his son Isaac. Abraham had to be willing to give up his only true, legitimate son in order to obey his Creator and receive God's incredible promises. Actually, God didn't want Abraham to slay his son. He only wanted to test Abraham to see if he loved Him, his Creator, more than anything else (Gen. 22).

How does God try and test us? How does He learn what is really in our heart?

We have already seen that God sometimes afflicts us in order to humble us or teach us an important lesson (Ps. 119:71; II Cor. 12:7-10).

God Chastens Us in Love. Yes, God Almighty has to chasten all of His sons and daughters—just as we have to correct our children: "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. 12:5-6).

The apostle Paul then goes on to show that if we "endure chastening," God will deal with us as with sons.

But if we will not receive this loving correction, then what does God call us? He bluntly calls us spiritual "bastards"! We are not really God's sons at all but are merely pretending to be His sons.

Does godly chastisement cause us to bear good fruit?

Notice why God chastens us. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (verse 11).

God has ordained that this life will not be an easy life—for a very good reason. He knows that if we have no severe trials and tests we become spiritually soft and flabby!

A comfortable man is a complacent man. A comfortable man doesn't want to change—doesn't want to alter the status quo! Why should he? He is quite happy to let things continue as they are. Why change when everything seems to be going along so very smoothly?

God Almighty knows that we need trials to stir us to action—to stir us up enough to overcome our spiritual lethargy!

God promises a special blessing on those who steadfastly resist and overcome temptations: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

How We Are Tried. What are some of the main ways in which we are afflicted? Ways by which we are caused to go to our knees to God in heartrending prayer? What are some of the trials which cause us to really cry out to God (as unto a merciful and loving Father) for help and strength to overcome our trials and tribulations?

Persecution is one of the main ways by which God's people are drawn closer to Him.

Physical necessities often cause God's people to have to go to Him in prayer. When we don't have the necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter), we are often brought to our knees before our heavenly Father.

Weaknesses, physical infirmities and sickness are often the means by which God brings us back into line. When we are told that we may remain an invalid for the rest of our life, or when we know that we may actually die of an incurable disease (unless God miraculously heals us!), then this sobers us, brings us to our senses. Such a shock often causes us to get down on our knees in heartfelt prayer, beseeching our compassionate God for mercy—for health and healing (II Kings 20:1-7).

Overpowering temptations are often the means by which we are brought to the realization of how weak and wretched our human nature is. Through strong and persistent temptations (fears and worries; lust and covetousness; hatred and malice; envy and jealousies), we are often sent to the throne of grace for additional strength to overcome our wretched nature (Rom. 7:14-25).

God has solemnly promised to deliver us from all of our temptations—if we will only rely upon Him. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

When we really repent of our sins and turn from them, accepting the blood of Christ as the means by which our transgressions are washed away, then we are assured by God that sin will no longer rule over us—will no longer dominate our lives.

God promises: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the [death penalty of the] law, but under grace [pardon]" (Rom. 6:14). Once we are forgiven our sins, God has solemnly promised that sin will no longer reign over us—will not control our lives!

A true Christian must continually suffer hardships and temptations of every sort. But God will not let them overcome or defeat us as long as we steadfastly look to Him for complete deliverance: "For he hath said, I will

never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

Is it God's will that His children be kept under a certain amount of pressure? He knows that we need to have continual trials, tribulations and persecutions in order to toughen us up spiritually—in order to show us how weak and helpless we are so that we will always look to Him and rely on Him for everything!

Pressure Is Essential. There are several analogies in the Bible—analogies which clearly show us why God permits us to have trials and tribulations.

The Christian is compared to precious metals—gold or silver—which have to be put into a fiery furnace in order to burn away the dross and impurities. Also, gold and silver must become molten before they can be poured into a mold. This is true with the Christian. We must at least be heated to red-hot in order to be malleable enough to be easily bent and shaped by the hands of our faithful Creator (see I Pet. 1:7; 4:12; I Cor. 3:12-15).

The Bible compares the saints to precious jewels or precious stones (Mal. 3:17). Again, it is interesting to note that diamonds, rubies and other precious jewels can only be made under terrific heat and pressure! So it is with us. We must be subjected to the tremendous heat of our fiery trials and to the constant pressure of temptation, persecution and tribulation in order to become a precious jewel in the sight of God!

God even compares His people to common clay in the hands of the Master Potter: "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).

Endure Hardness. The Word of God compares the true Christian to a spiritual soldier for Christ: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:3).

Before a raw recruit can really become a good soldier, he must first take an intensive course which will toughen him up for the battles ahead.

The best soldiers have always been

those who have been toughened and hardened by being subjected to hard work, exercise and discipline. So it is with the Christian. He must submit himself willingly to his Captain, Jesus Christ, and must voluntarily endure hardness—persecution, deprivation, tribulation and severe temptation—if he ever expects to become a good soldier for Jesus Christ.

And must not he put on all of the spiritual armor mentioned in the sixth chapter of Ephesians—the breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Word of God, and all the other pieces that make up the complete spiritual armor of a Christian?

We are commanded: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

God Almighty knows that we tend to get flabby, spiritually speaking, when things go too smoothly. We tend to let down in our prayer, Bible study and fasting when we have very few trials, problems or persecutions.

God would like to see us prosper and be in health (III John 2), but He will even deny us these blessings if He knows that we need to suffer deprivation, affliction or persecution in order to cause us to really look to Him as our Provider and our Deliverer from all our trials.

Jesus Christ will reject anyone who remains in a lukewarm condition (Rev. 3:15-16). He doesn't want to see us become spiritually drowsy—insensitive to our Creator's wishes. God doesn't want us to be spiritual drones.

Spiritual Exercise Is Vital. God Almighty knows that it is only through the spiritual exercise of problems, trials, tests, persecutions, temptations and tribulations that we develop real spiritual sinews and strength. If one doesn't actually tire himself with a certain amount of strenuous daily exercise, he can't develop his body to its optimum and remain in the best physical health.

So it is spiritually. If we don't daily exercise our spiritual faculties by overcoming and solving our spiritual problems, trials and hardships, then we will not remain in very good spiritual shape. We will then become spiritually weak and flabby. God doesn't want that to happen!

Whether we like it or not, this is the type of life our loving Father has ordained that we must lead. It is only those who constantly overcome who will make it into the Kingdom of God (Rev. 2, 3). Only those who exert themselves enough to hang on for dear life—to endure unto the very end—will be saved. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

We came into this world under terrific stress and strain—under pressure and anguish—and we will not be born into the Kingdom of God unless and until we have proven that we can withstand the pressures and strains of the everyday trials, tribulations, persecutions and temptations of this world.

"If Any Man Draw Back". But, regrettably, some prefer to give up and quit—to turn back! What does God think of these quitters?

If we willfully, deliberately sin against God, we will never receive forgiveness (Heb. 10:25-31). "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38).

Yes, some are not willing to really fight, to endure, to labor, struggle and strive in order to make it into the Kingdom of God. Christ showed that we must really strain if we wish to make it into His Kingdom. "Strive [struggle and strain] to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24).

Furthermore, Christ revealed that it is only those who are so fervent in their desire to make it into God's Kingdom that they are willing to be "violent" with themselves, who actually make it (Matt. 11:12).

Trouble Is Certain, But . . . The truth of the matter is that we are going to have trials and tribulations whether we obey God or not. Job declared: "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Yes, we will have troubles whether or not we obey God. But if we obey Him, He will give us the needed wisdom and strength to overcome all our trials and temptations (I Cor. 10:13).

Hardships, trials and persecutions are certain to befall all who live an upright, godly life. But these tribula-

tions are all designed by a loving Creator to teach us to go to Him daily—completely trusting in Him for our every need, including deliverance from all our sore trials.

God declares: "If thou faint in the day of adversity [hardship], thy strength is small" (Prov. 24:10).

An all-wise, loving Creator God has deliberately designed life in such a way as to include many trials and afflictions. The Almighty even goes out of His way to rebuke and chasten us—in love—to keep us on the straight and narrow path.

Knowing this, should we not earnestly desire God's correction? You need to learn to desire—and even pray daily for—chastisement from the hand of God!

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17).

Don't ever forget that God corrects us for our good—because He loves us and longs to share with us the eternal inheritance of co-ownership and co-rulership of the whole universe.

Can you now clearly see how trials, temptations, pressures and hardships have been put here as a blessing in disguise? These tribulations assist us in building the kind of perfect, godly character that we need to possess throughout all eternity.

Thank God for the blessing of these trials! It is through them that we develop godly character! □

A SPIRITUAL "POINT OF NO RETURN"?

Can a person ever reach a "point of no return" in his relationship with God? Is there an unpardonable sin? The booklet, *What Is The Unpardonable Sin?* explains the Biblical answers to these questions. For your free copy, write to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91123. Or, if you live outside the United States, see back page for the address nearest you.

Lessons from . . . the MASTER POTTER

Life is full of trials, tests and temptations—all intended to be the means of building beautiful, God-like character in man. Isaiah, Elihu and Paul all used the analogy of the potter and the clay. Jeremiah was advised to go to the potter's house to learn how God works with men to mold them in His spiritual image. In this article these important principles are clearly explained.

MANY OF YOU have experienced—or are experiencing—severe trials and tests. Unfortunately, some buckle under the pressure, instead of learning the vital lessons these trials are intended to teach us—lessons which are absolutely essential for a growing Son of God!

We all want to endure and conquer trials and temptations. But in order to do so, you must *understand why* your Creator designed your life to be “a seemingly unending multiplicity” of PROBLEMS.

God's Great Design. Sir Winston Churchill, speaking before the U.S. Senate in Washington on December 26th, 1941, said: “He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some GREAT PURPOSE AND DESIGN is being worked out here below of which we have the honour to be faithful servants.”

What is the “great purpose and design” which God Almighty is working out “here below” on this good earth?

Those in God's Church are the privileged few who really know precisely what that purpose is: GOD IS REPRODUCING HIMSELF! Man was *designed* to be born into the divine Family.

But man was *created* as a mere “CLAY MODEL”—a weak, transient, fallible creature who must be molded into the proper spiritual shape so that he can eventually become a member of God's Family.

The Potter and the Clay. The prophet Isaiah understood man was

merely a “clay model”—to be formed and fashioned by the hand of his Creator. “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). The Apostle Paul uses the same imagery or symbolism of *the potter and the clay* in Romans 9:21-23.

God compares Himself to the MASTER POTTER. And *all* mankind is likened to CLAY. “I also am formed out of the clay,” said Job's friend, Elihu (Job 33:6). Yes, man is made out of *clay*—we are just *the clay model* which God created for the specific purpose of molding into the image of His perfect character!

The Potter's Amazing Wheel. A few years ago I had the interesting experience of seeing a potter at work with a *potter's wheel* near Luxor, Egypt. It was truly fascinating to watch the skillful Egyptian potter at work.

He would take a lump of moist clay and put it upon his potter's wheel, which he kept turning with his foot. Within only a matter of seconds, the lump of clay would, as if by a miracle, quickly take the shape of a cup, a jug, an earthen pot, or a vessel of some sort. The old Egyptian potter kept some *water* within easy reach and would, from time to time, put a little more water on the lump of clay to make it more malleable.

Millenniums ago, the prophet Jeremiah was told to “go down to the potter's house” in order to learn a similar lesson (see Jer. 18:1, 2). “Then I went down,” says Jeremiah,

“to the *potter's house*, and, behold, he wrought a work on the *wheels*. 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. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, 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. 18:3-6).

It is interesting to note that a potter has to keep the lump of clay on *dead center* of his potter's wheel—otherwise the lump of clay will begin to *wobble*, and this will cause the vessel to have an uneven or irregular shape instead of being perfectly round.

So it is with the Master Potter and us. He has to keep us on *dead center* of His Way, or we will begin to “wobble” and develop “spiritual irregularities”—imperfect, marred *spiritual character*. God must continually nudge us—or shove us—back to *dead center* as we continually veer to the right or to the left!

Before we can really understand the marvellous lessons to be learned from the potter-and-the-clay illustration given by Isaiah, we need to examine briefly some of the important, interesting and valuable steps in making pottery. This will enable you to see just *how* the great Master Potter deals with *you*—His “clay models.”

Seven Vital Steps. There are *seven important steps* in pottery making. First, let us briefly examine these

seven steps. Then we shall draw the crucial *spiritual analogy*—how God actually develops *spiritual character* within the lives of the “clay models” with whom He is directly dealing.

(1) The master potter must first **SELECT** the type of clay which he wants to use in making a specific piece of pottery. There are many types and colors of clays—each with its own particular advantages.

(2) The potter then lets this clay age, weather, or ferment—*until it “STINKS”* and is therefore ready for use.

(3) Next, the potter **WEDGES**—kneads, beats, treads upon or pummels—the clay to remove *lumps*, air *bubbles*, etc., and to make it more pliable.

(4) The potter is then ready to begin actually *shaping* and *forming* the clay into whatever shape or design he has chosen. Throughout this process it is necessary to add **WATER** or **OIL** to keep the clay malleable.

(5) Once the potter has shaped the clay, he then puts it into a furnace (or kiln) where it is heated until it reaches its “maturing point.” This initial **BAKING**, or **FIRING** in the furnace, *permanently sets* or *hardens* the vessel in its desired form so that it can *never* be altered.

(6) After the first firing of the clay model, it is removed from the fire, let cool, **DECORATED** and finally *glazed* over. This newly-glazed pottery is then given a *second* firing to bake these decorations onto the clay model. (There are often several *decorations* and *firings* before the pottery vessel reaches its ultimate perfection of beauty. The **FINAL DECORATIVE WORK** may include fine *gold*, *silver* or other beautiful and precious metals arrayed in artistic patterns.)

(7) Finally the potter is ready to **JUDGE** his work. If the clay model hasn’t cracked, exploded or become marred in some way during these firings, it is at last ready to be used in whatever manner the designer and creator may decide.

The Crucial Analogy. Now let us understand the *spiritual application* of these seven vital steps in pottery making. We will thus acquire a much deeper comprehension of exactly *how* the Great Master Potter deals with us mortal “clay models.”

FIRST: God Must Choose Us. Choosing the clay.

Just as the potter chooses the type and color of clay which he will use, so God chooses the individuals which He will use.

Different kinds of clays obviously have different properties. Some are *more malleable* than others. Some are better for one type of work and some for another. Likewise with different human beings. The *potter* must decide which color and type of clay he will use—*before* he begins his work.

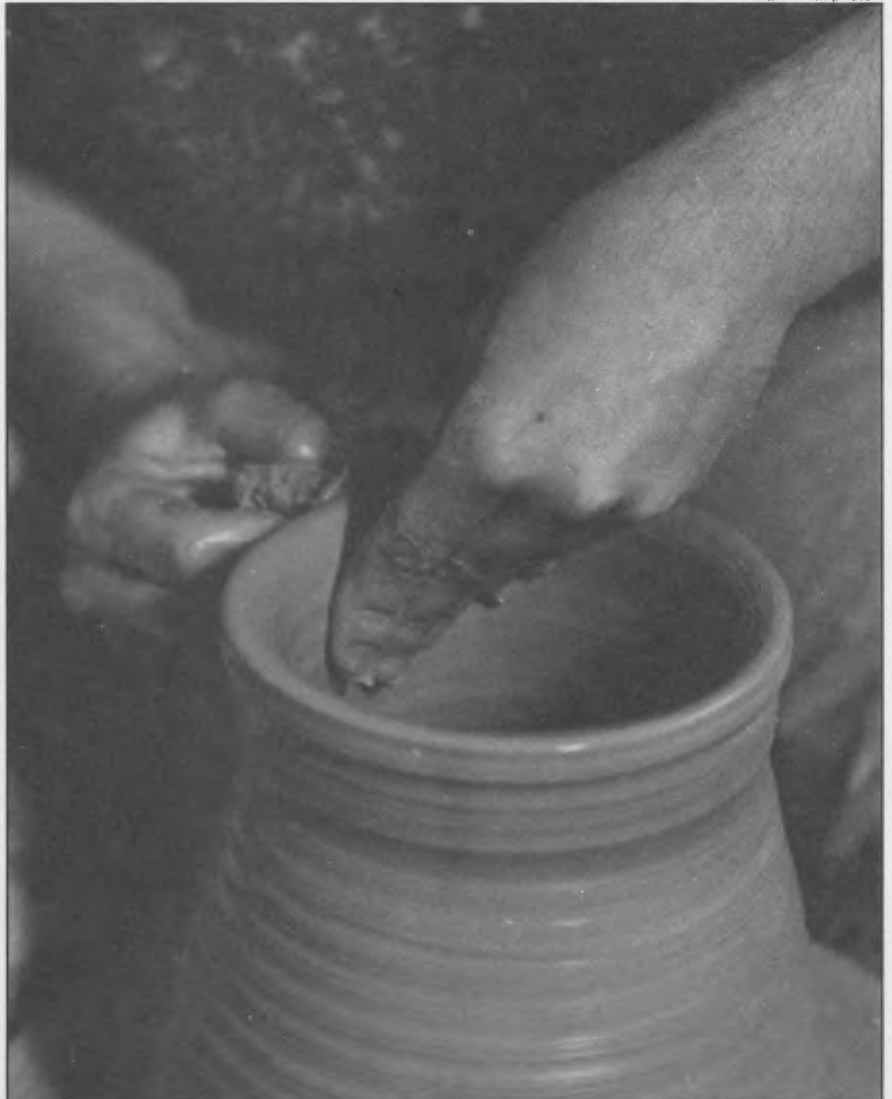
By looking at the illustration of the potter and the clay, we first learn (draw the parallel) that *God must always choose us. We never choose Him*—any more than the clay chooses the potter who will shape and mold it.

Christ said to his own disciples: “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you . . .*” (John 15:16). He also told the disciples, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*” (John 6:44, 65).

The Bible clearly shows that it is *God* who calls and chooses us—*not we* who choose Him. “The Lord is . . . not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to *repentance*” (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4). Certainly, no one can say that it is God’s will that all mankind must hear and receive the truth during *this age*. Many have never even heard the name of *Christ*, have never seen a *Bible*, and don’t have “a ghost of a chance” to be converted and receive true salvation during this life.

A potter’s hand carefully and skillfully manipulates the pliant clay.

Plain Truth photo



Notice how God predestined or proposed certain things even before Esau and Jacob were born. “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the *purpose of God* according to *election* might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her [Rebecca], The elder [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]” (Rom. 9:11, 12).

Paul then goes on to show that it is *God* who decides what He will do with *His* creatures—the “clay models” *He* has created! “So then it is not of *him that willeth*, nor of *him that runneth*, but of *God* that sheweth mercy” (verse 16). Finally Paul asks this question: “Hath not the **POTTER** [God] power over the *clay* [mankind], of the same lump to make one vessel unto *honour*, and another unto *dishonour*?” (Verse 21.)

All right—God has *chosen* you. But why? Many in God’s Church often ask this question: “Why has God chosen *me*? What have I done?” The answer is *not* what you *have* done, but what you *will* do; because you

have been chosen for a *specific* purpose. Our God does not choose at random. Our God does not play roulette! *You* have been called and chosen for a particular level of responsibility and some very specific jobs in God’s Work today, in God’s Government tomorrow, and in God’s Family for all eternity!!

SECOND: Our Stinking Sins. Weathering the clay.

After the potter selects the clay he wishes to use, he must then let the clay weather, age, ferment, *sour*—and it often literally “*stinks*.”

“Aging the clay—that is, keeping it moist in a container for several months—makes it better to work with. (Don’t worry if your clay begins to *smell bad*—that’s really a good sign.) Sometimes inoculating a fresh batch of clay with some of an old batch promotes the growth of *bacteria* and so helps *plasticity*” (*The Complete Book of Pottery Making*, John B. Kenny).

Also notice how Bernard Leach describes this same important aging process in *A Potter’s Book*: “Clay is

improved by long storage; it gains in plasticity, its decomposition continues, it changes colour, and may even begin to **STINK**. I have been told of old potters who speak of such matured, or *soured* clay with the quiet impressiveness of epicures discussing *vintage* wines.” The author then states: “The storage of plastic clay over long periods *increases its plasticity* by combining the *water* more intimately with the clay, and also by continuing the process of *decomposition* whereby the pure clay content is increased. Some clays alter their colour and *give off a bad smell*.”

It is commonly known among potters that clay which matures—which has literally come to “stink”—is more malleable than unmaturred clay.

What lesson are we to draw from this?

Simply this. God cannot really *begin* to deal with us—cannot begin to *convert* (change) us and bring us to the place of *true repentance*—until we have come to “stink” in our own eyes!

Many scriptures show that our sins are a continuous *stench* in the nostrils of God. “But we are all as an *unclean* thing, and all our righteousnesses are as *filthy rags* . . .” (Isa. 64:6-8).

But it is impossible for the carnal mind to see itself as it *really* is. Therefore God cannot begin to use *us* until *we* come to see ourselves as *we* really are—self-centered sinners, wholly antagonistic to God’s Law, deceitful above all things.

Until we come to see that we have sinned grievously against the Great God of Heaven, and acknowledge that we are *stinking* and *foul* in His sight—then we can’t possibly even *begin to repent* and approach God.

Christ summed it up: “For I am not come to call the [self-] righteous, but *sinners* to repentance” (Matt. 9:13).

A most difficult human being to bring to true repentance was Job—because *he* THOUGHT he was *pretty good* in God’s sight. Notice Job’s self-righteous attitude: “Thou [God] knowest that *I am not wicked*” (Job 10:7).

It was difficult for God to get Job to see that he *stank*—that he was entirely *wretched* in the eyes of his Creator. Why? Because “*Job . . . was*

The molded clay is placed in a kiln where it is “tried by fire.”

Plain Truth photo



righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1).

But eventually, God really did get through—Job was finally whittled down to size. Then Job repented: "Wherefore I *ABHOR* myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

Many profess to be true Christians, but are still *wallowing around in their own SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS*. God cannot really begin to shape and mold beautiful *spiritual character* in such individuals—not until they come to see that their whole being is *rotten and stinking* in their Creator's eyes.

THIRD: Why Beat Clay? Wedging the clay.

Before the clay is ready for use it must be *beaten* and *pummelled*—"bashed around a bit"—to help remove any AIR POCKETS and also to break up the HARD LUMPS in the clay. This makes the clay more plastic—and consequently more easily shaped.

What is the significance of this WEDGING of the clay?

God has to *rebuke* and *chasten* us—He has to subject us to some tough and unpleasant circumstances before we will really repent. This is precisely what God did with self-righteous Job. God allowed Satan to take away *all* of Job's physical *possessions*, and to destroy the lives of *all his children*. Then He let Satan afflict Job with *grievous boils* from head to foot—all to pummel Job, to bring him to his senses, to bring him to real repentance (Job 1, 2).

Job was finally beaten and buffeted about so much through his *trials* that all the *wind of vanity* ("air pockets") and *self-righteousness* ("hard lumps") were knocked out of him. Then he could wholeheartedly repent in sackcloth and ashes.

Just as a potter cannot properly work clay which hasn't been thoroughly *wedged* (beaten and pummelled—to break up the hard lumps and to expel the air bubbles) so God can't properly work with us until we repent of our *self-righteous hardness of heart* and our *wind of vanity*—both of which puff us up and prevent us from yielding to God (I Cor. 5:6-8).

Wedging the clay can be done by many different methods: *beating* or *pummelling*, *kneading*, *slamming*

the clay against a special table or bench top, repeatedly *cutting* it in half by using a taut wire, *treading* heavily on it with the feet ("as the potter treadeth clay," Isa. 41:25).

Similarly, God has many ways to chasten and correct us. But He never chooses the ones we want. He always seems to find our most sensitive nerve.

FOURTH: Molding the Pottery. Shaping the clay.

Once the potter has gotten the lumps and bubbles out, he is ready to start *molding* and *shaping* his clay into the form which he desires.

But there's still a problem: The clay is not supple—and consequently cannot be *properly* molded. The solution is basic: The potter must add the right amount of WATER (sometimes *oil* is used instead of water) to make the clay more plastic.

Once God has beaten our hardness of heart out of us, and knocked (some of) our vanity out of us, then we must receive the "living waters"—God's *Holy Spirit*—in order to be *properly* molded by God's Law.

No one can truly obey God—can truly *yield* to Him—unless and until he has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. But when *anybody* really thirsts for God's Spirit, He will give it to him (see Isa. 55:1).

Jesus said: "If any man *thirst*, let him come unto me, and *drink*. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly [or innermost being] shall flow *rivers of living WATER*. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given . . .)" (John 7:37-39).

Just as the potter must add sufficient *water* to the clay to make it completely pliable and malleable, so must the Master Potter add the gift of the "living waters"—the gift of His priceless Holy Spirit—before we can truly become pliable and YIELDED in His hands!

Without the addition of *water* to the clay, it will not be malleable enough to be continually molded in the hands of the potter. Likewise, without the addition of the spiritual water of God's Holy Spirit to our minds, we could never be *yielded* enough to be continually shaped in the hands of our Creator, the Master Potter.

The Apostle Paul told the Christians at Rome: "YIELD YOURSELVES UNTO GOD" (Rom. 6:13). We are to *yield ourselves completely* to God as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

FIFTH: Plunged into the Fire. Firing the clay.

After the potter has molded his vessel and has let it dry out thoroughly, he then puts his unbaked piece of pottery into a *fiery furnace* (or kiln) where it must be heated (very slowly at first so it won't explode) to a very high temperature before it will become sufficiently baked to attain its maximum *hardness*.

If it is fired at *too high* a temperature, it will warp. On the other hand, if it is fired at too low a temperature, the pottery will be "soft"—and will not attain its maximum "maturity," density and hardness. The master potter has ways of testing to find out the proper "firing range" (the proper temperature) at which a particular type of clay should be fired.

There is an amazingly close parallel here between the human potter and the Master Potter. When God *allows* us to be put through *trials* (remember, God tempts no man—Jas. 1:13), He has to know just how high the "heat" should be "turned on."

If God doesn't allow us to be subjected to enough trials and tests, we get *spiritually flabby* and never develop the hard, firm character which is absolutely required for Sonship in God's Family.

On the other hand, if He were to let us be tried by such a big *temptation* that we couldn't cope with it—then it would destroy us beyond redemption.

So God, as the all-wise Master Potter, knows *the precise degree* to which each true child of His can be subjected—and He watches over us very carefully to make sure that the trials and tests we receive are neither too light (Heb. 12:6-11) nor too severe (I Cor. 10:13).

Just as it is most *essential* that a clay vessel be put through the fiery test of a furnace, so it is equally necessary that a Christian have his share of *temptations, trials* and *tests*. Without these we would never develop much strength of character. But

THE WORD OF
GOD IS THE
FOUNDATION
OF KNOWLEDGE

GET
WISDOM
GET
UNDERSTANDING

Prov. 4:5



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God has solemnly promised not to let our trials and temptations overpower us—if we continue to really rely upon Him in faithful obedience.

Peter understood and wrote about the severe *temptations* and *trials* which would befall God's people: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the *trial of your faith*, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be *tried with fire*, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:6, 7).

But some actually get *mad at God* for "*forgetting*" His responsibilities and allowing a severe trial to besiege them. What these misguided people don't realize is that God, like a wise potter, has *deliberately* allowed His "clay models" to be put into the fire—for a very good purpose! "Beloved, *think it not strange concerning the FIERY TRIAL which is to try* [or test] *you*, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But *re-joice*, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (I Peter 4:12, 13).

James, the brother of Christ, writing to the "twelve tribes" of Israel, understood the need for Christians to be prepared to be plunged into the fiery kiln to become perfected—if God so willed. Notice his admonition: "My brethren, *count it all JOY when ye fall into divers TEMPTATIONS* [or trials]; knowing this, that the *trying of your faith* worketh patience" (James 1:2, 3). James explains that *temptations* are actually a blessing—because when they are resisted, eternal character is built: "Blessed is the man that *endureth temptation*: for when he is *tried*, he shall receive the CROWN OF LIFE, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (verse 12).

A wise master potter will not permit his furnace or kiln to become too hot when firing his pieces of pottery, for he knows this would ruin them beyond repair. He, therefore, carefully watches and *controls* the fire to make sure that just the right temperature is maintained at all times. He would not think of going away and

leaving his pottery in the fire.

So it is with God. He carefully watches over every believer, over every true Christian, to make certain that he isn't tempted beyond his capacity—making sure his "fiery trial" doesn't become too much for him to bear.

God has faithfully promised: "I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE, NOR FORSAKE THEE" (Heb. 13:5).

Notice how this is explained by Paul: "There hath no *temptation* taken you but such as is common to man: But GOD IS FAITHFUL, WHO WILL NOT SUFFER YOU TO BE TEMPTED ABOVE THAT YE ARE ABLE; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

SIXTH: Finishing Touches. Decorating the clay.

After the clay has been baked in a furnace to give it its permanent shape, strength and hardness, it is removed from the kiln and DECORATED—after which it is GLAZED OVER.

Then what happens?

Back into the fire—back into the furnace it goes so that the decorative work and glazing can be baked onto the surface of the vessel. This constitutes the *second* firing.

What should we learn from this DECORATING, GLAZING and SECOND FIRING?

God often puts *finishing touches* into our character—polishing different aspects of His perfect character within us through allowing *additional fiery trials* of various types. It is, remember, through *trials and temptations* that the most beautiful facets of our character are developed!

Now, even after a piece of pottery has been fired *twice*, it often has further stunning decorations applied—perhaps fine, pure *gold* or silver metals. Then after these exquisite finishing touches are added to the nearly finished vessel, it must go *back into the furnace!*

So, *back into the fire* this beautifully decorated piece of pottery goes—for the *third and* (in most instances) *final firing*.

So it is with God and His children. We sometimes think we have "had enough," that we've gone through enough fiery trials; but God, in His infinite wisdom, may feel otherwise.

He may realize that still more beautiful Godlike facets of character need to be added—if we are to have the exquisite, indescribably stunning character that is made in the image of the perfect, holy, and glorious God—our great Master Potter!

SEVENTH: At Last—A Work of Art. Judging the pottery.

The potter is now ready to judge his work. The piece of pottery has withstood *three* or more firings. The master potter can now survey his work. And he will judge it very critically.

Has it stood up to the test? Has it come through all of the firings a hard, strong, beautiful creation—something the potter can truly be proud of? Or, has it cracked, exploded, sagged, drooped, flaked or become warped somewhere along the line?

Likewise, at the end of our life, our Master Potter will judge us extremely critically to see how we have come through all our trials—and He will reward us accordingly.

Rejoice—Especially in Your Trials! So take courage!

If God has permitted you to be *sorely tried*—perhaps repeatedly—then that's *the surest sign* that your Creator knows you've got it in you to "endure unto the end." And that's

also the surest sign that the Ruler of the entire universe is working out some *higher purpose* in your life. Because it is *only* by means of severe tests and rigorous trials that God can develop His character in you, and will consequently give you a greater reward in His Kingdom—if you come through!

Christ has solemnly promised that those who hold steadfast till the very end—those who *endure* all their fiery trials—will definitely make it! "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

Think of that! When a potter finishes his work, he only has a beautiful piece of pottery. But when the Master Potter finishes His work with you, He will have a Son of God!

Only the "overcomers" will receive the fantastic blessings of great rewards—of rulership and service in the Kingdom of God (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

The great Master Potter has promised that those who *endure* their fiery trials will inherit EVERYTHING!

"He that overcometh [sin, trials, tests, temptations] SHALL INHERIT ALL THINGS; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7). What a fantastic future to look forward to! □

If You'd Like to Know More

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their local areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

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The Worldwide Church of God stations personal representatives (most are ordained ministers) in the United States and British Commonwealth and many other areas of the world. These local ministers will visit you, if invited, directly in your own home.

So if you have spiritual matters to discuss or questions to ask about biblical topics such as repentance, baptism, etc., please feel free to write us and request a private appointment. Worldwide mailing addresses and phone numbers are as follows:

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This Reprint Series has been reprinted from publications of the Worldwide Church of God.

Printed in U.S.A.

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