

Message Five

**God as Our Sovereign Potter
Making Us His Vessels, His Containers, to Contain Him**

Scripture Reading: Jer. 18:1-10; Isa. 64:8;
Rom. 9:15-16, 19-23; Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:6-7

I. God as our sovereign Potter has absolute right over us as His pottery; it is crucial that we see a vision of God's sovereignty—Jer. 18:1-10; Isa. 64:8; Dan. 4:3, 34-35; Rom. 9:19-23:

- A. Sovereignty refers to God's unlimited authority, power, and position—Rev. 4:11; 5:13:
1. As the sovereign One, God is above everything, behind everything, and in everything—1 Kings 22:19.
 2. God has the full capacity to carry out what He wants according to the desire of His heart and according to His eternal economy—Dan. 4:34-35; Eph. 1:4-5, 9-11.
- B. Romans 9:19-23 refers to God's sovereignty:
1. "Who withstands His will? But rather, O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?"—vv. 19b-20:
 - a. We need to realize who we are; we are God's creatures, and He is our Creator—Isa. 42:5.
 - b. As His creatures, we should not resist His purpose or answer back to Him, the Creator—Rom. 9:20.
 2. "Does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?"—v. 21:
 - a. God is our Potter, and we are the clay in His hand; God, our Potter, is sovereign—Jer. 18:1-6; Isa. 64:8.
 - b. As our Potter, God has the absolute right over us; regarding us, He has the right to do whatever He desires; if God wills, He can make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor—Jer. 18:6; Isa. 29:16; 64:8; Rom. 9:21.
- C. God's sovereignty is the basis of His selection; His selection depends on His sovereignty—vv. 11, 18; 11:5, 28.

II. God as our Potter has sovereignly created us to be His vessels, His containers, to contain Himself according to His predestination—2 Cor. 4:6-7; Eph. 4:6; 3:19b; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:20-21; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; Eph. 1:5, 11:

- A. God's purpose in creating man was to make man His vessel, His earthenware container, to contain and be filled with Christ as

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life for the building up of the Body of Christ as God's great corporate vessel for His expression—Gen. 2:7; Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:21, 23; 2 Cor. 4:7.

- B. The basic teaching of the whole Scripture is simply this: God is the very content, and we are the containers made to receive the content; we must contain God and be filled with God so that we can be vessels unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work—2 Tim. 2:20-21.
- C. If we do not contain God and know God as our content, we are a senseless contradiction—Eccl. 1:2-3, 14.
- D. All of Paul's fourteen Epistles can be summed up in two words—*open vessel*:
 1. The degree to which God can dispense Himself into us depends on the degree of our openness; God wants us only to love Him and to keep ourselves open to Him—2 Kings 4:1-7; Matt. 5:3; John 1:16; Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2.
 2. Decadence starts from self-complacency; progress starts from hunger and thirst—Deut. 4:25; Luke 1:53; Phil. 1:25; Rev. 3:16-18.

III. In His sovereignty God as our Potter has the authority to make the ones whom He has selected and called to be vessels of mercy unto honor and glory—Rom. 9:11, 18, 21-24:

- A. We were chosen by God according to His sovereign mercy; God's mercy is the most far-reaching of God's attributes, saving us out of our wretched position into a condition that is suitable for His grace and love—Eph. 2:1-4; Heb. 4:16; Matt. 5:7; 7:1; 9:13:
 1. According to our natural condition, we were far removed from God, totally unworthy of His grace; we were eligible only to receive His mercy—Eph. 2:4.
 2. Man's disobedience affords God's mercy an opportunity, and God's mercy brings man to salvation—Rom. 11:32.
 3. We were created to be vessels of mercy to contain Christ as the God of mercy—9:11-13, 16, 20-21, 23; Lam. 3:21-24; Luke 1:78-79.
 4. Because of God's mercy, we responded to the gospel when others did not respond, we received a word about Christ as life when others refused to receive it, and we took the way of the Lord's recovery when others drew back from taking this way—*Hymns*, #296, stanza 3.

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- B. “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy’...So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”—Rom. 9:15a, 16:
1. Our concept is that the one who wills gains what he wills to obtain and that the one who runs gains what he runs after—v. 16:
 - a. If this were the case, God’s selection would be according to our effort and labor.
 - b. On the contrary, God’s selection is of God who shows mercy; we do not need to will or to run, for God has mercy on us.
 - c. If we know God’s mercy, we will neither trust in our effort nor be disappointed by our failures; the hope for our wretched condition is in God’s mercy—Eph. 2:4.
 2. If we would serve God in His New Testament economy, we need to know that it is wholly a matter of God’s sovereign mercy—Rom. 9:15-16; Heb. 4:16:
 - a. If we know God’s sovereignty, we will thank Him for His mercy, realizing that we are under His sovereign mercy—Rom. 9:15.
 - b. The expression *sovereign mercy* means that God’s mercy is absolutely a matter of God’s sovereignty; being a vessel of mercy is not the result of our choice; it originates with God’s sovereignty—v. 18.
 - c. The only thing we can say to explain God’s mercy to us is that in His sovereignty He has chosen to be merciful to us—vv. 15-16, 23.
 3. In God’s sovereign mercy our hearts are inclined toward Him; because of His mercy to us, we seek Him day by day—Jer. 29:12-13; Deut. 4:29; Isa. 55:6; Psa. 27:8; 105:4; 119:2; Heb. 11:6.
 4. The more we see that everything related to us is a matter of God’s mercy, the more we will bear our responsibility before the Lord; however, even our willingness to bear responsibility is of God’s mercy.
 5. Regarding His recovery, God has mercy on whom He will have mercy.
- C. Romans 9 reveals the principle that everything depends on God’s mercy—vv. 15-16:

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1. The apostle Paul applies this principle to the Israelites, showing us that everything that happened to them was of God's mercy—vv. 16, 23.
 2. There must be at least one time when we see God's mercy and definitely touch His mercy—Eph. 2:4; Matt. 9:13:
 - a. Concerning this matter, our eyes need to be opened at least once; there must be at least one time when we see that everything depends on God's mercy.
 - b. Whether we see this all at once or we realize it through a process, the minute we touch this matter, we touch not a feeling but a fact; this fact is that everything depends on God's mercy.
- D. "Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help"—Heb. 4:16, cf. v. 15; Luke 15:20-24.
- E. In His sovereignty God the Father has had mercy on us; therefore, we must praise and worship Him for His sovereign mercy:
1. "Father, we enjoy Thy mercy, / Ever fresh and ever new; / Every morning shed upon us, / It refreshes as the dew. / How we taste it! How we taste it! / Giving Thee the praises due"—*Hymns*, #26, stanza 5.
 2. "Father, Thy mercy with Thy love and grace / Did we obtain; / And in Thy mercy, with Thee face to face, / We'll e'er remain; / And for Thy mercy we would worship Thee / Through all our days and through eternity"—*Hymns*, #25, stanza 3.
- F. We were created to be vessels of mercy unto honor to contain Christ as the God of honor (2 Tim. 2:20-21; Rom. 9:21) so that we may honor God and men (Judg. 9:9):
1. Being vessels unto honor is not the result of our choice; it originates with God's sovereignty—Rom. 9:21.
 2. The believers are vessels unto honor with Christ as their treasure through regeneration—2 Cor. 4:6-7.
 3. The believers are vessels unto honor through their cleansing of themselves from the vessels unto dishonor—2 Tim. 2:20-21.
 4. Vessels unto honor are those who honor God by living and walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25) and those who honor men by ministering the Spirit to them (2 Cor. 3:6, 8).
- G. We were created to be vessels of mercy unto glory to contain Christ as the God of glory:

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1. Glory is God Himself expressed and manifested—Jer. 2:11; Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Pet. 4:14; Col. 2:9; Psa. 24:7-10.
2. The Lord was able to tell the Father, “I have glorified You on earth, finishing the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4); this means that while the Lord was living on earth, He manifested and expressed the Father.
3. The release of the glory of Christ’s divinity (Luke 12:49-50) was His being glorified by the Father with the divine glory (John 12:23-24) in His resurrection (Acts 3:13) through His death; in Christ’s glorification He, as the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit for His divine dispensing (John 7:39; Luke 24:26, 46; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6).
4. As vessels of mercy unto honor and glory, we have been prepared by God unto glory through glorification—the last step of God’s full salvation—Rom. 8:21, 23, 29-30; Phil. 3:21.
5. According to His sovereign authority, God created, formed, and even made us for His glory—Isa. 43:7; Rom. 9:23:
 - a. We were predestinated by His sovereignty to be His containers for His glorious expression and manifestation.
 - b. This is the climax of our usefulness to God—the goal of God’s selection according to His sovereignty—vv. 11, 18.
 - c. The glorification of God is the purpose of our service—7:6; 11:36.
 - d. The highest service that we can render to God is to express Him for His glory—1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31; Rom. 6:4.
 - e. God’s glory is wrought into the church, and He is expressed in the church; hence, to God is the glory in the church; that is, God is glorified in the church—Eph. 3:16, 20-21.
6. We have this treasure, Christ as the God of glory, dwelling within us, the earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7); “this treasure” (v. 7) indwelling us is “the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6), the presence of Christ, “the person of Christ” (2:10).
7. When we turn our heart to the Lord, we are beholding the Lord Spirit as the presence of Christ in our spirit, and we are “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit”—3:16-18; cf. 2 Tim. 4:22.
8. To behold the glory of the Lord is to see the Lord ourselves; to reflect the glory of the Lord is to enable others to see Him through us—Isa. 60:1, 5.