

## Night of Weeping

*Why GOD's Children Suffer*

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### CHAPTER 9

#### THE PURIFYING

CHASTISEMENT supposes sin. Suffering does not, for JESUS suffered, nay, "**learned obedience by the things which he suffered.**" But chastisement does.

Some have, indeed, applied the word chastisement to JESUS also, for He was "**made perfect through suffering,**" and in the sense of passing through discipline that He might know by experience our condition here and be seen as the doer of the Father's will, the Man that "**pleased not himself**" - in this sense His sorrows might be called by that name. Yet in no other. For although tempted in all points like as we are, He was without sin. But in our case it is altogether different. It is sin in us that draws down the infliction, just as the rod attracts the lightning from the clouds.

Yet it is all forgiven sin. In looking to the cross we found forgiveness. As believers in JESUS, we "**have no more conscience of sin.**"

Still the flesh remains. The old man is ever at work within us. "Iniquities prevail against us"; and though we know that they are purged away, still they cleave to us. Our nature is still defiled though our conscience has been cleansed. It is against sin still existing within us, though forgiven, that chastisement is directed.

The casting of gold or silver into the furnace implies that there is dross upon them that requires to be purged out with fire. Were there no dross, there would be no need for furnace or fire or refiner's labor. These are but means of getting rid of the dross.

The fire which the Lord is to kindle in the earth, when He comes again, proves that sin is found upon it. Were there no curse lying on the earth, no purifying fire would be needed. But the blight must be burned out, the trail of the serpent must be swept clean away; and therefore the earth must be cast into the furnace that out of it may come a new and more glorious creation, fit for GOD to look upon, and for holy men to dwell in, and from which, therefore, every trace of corruption must be totally erased.

So with chastisement. It has reference to sin. Were it not for sin chastisement would be unknown. In Heaven there is no chastisement, for there is no sin. Angels know nothing of it, for they know no sin. They see it afar off. They hear the sad story of earth. They witness the tribulations of the Church, but that is all. For it is only where there is sin that there is chastisement. Its existence here is just GOD's voice, saying, "I have found iniquity upon the

earth." Its infliction on an individual is GOD saying, "I have seen sin on thee."

I do not take up the question as to particular trials being the result of particular sins in individuals. In many cases we know that this is the case. In others it is more doubtful. And hence, though it is well in affliction to ask what special sin or sins GOD is pointing at, it is wrong in us to fix exclusively upon one or two instead of turning our attention to the whole body of sin and directing our efforts against that.

But chastisement supposes also a determination on the part of GOD to get rid of sin. It is the expression of His hatred of it, and of His settled purpose to deliver from it. To purify us is what He seeks; and this He is resolved to accomplish at whatever cost. It must be done, for He cannot look upon iniquity. And what is pain if it expel sin? What is sorrow, if it help to purge away the evil of our nature - a lifetime of accumulated dross?

There are several figures which GOD employs for pointing out His designs in chastising us.

Let us enumerate these:

1. *It is a refining.* The saints are "**chosen in the furnace of affliction,**" (Isaiah 48:10) and "**when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold**" (Job 23:10).

The heat of the furnace burns out the dross and leaves the pure metal behind. It is in the furnace that the flesh is destroyed and the old man gets his deathstroke. It is in the furnace that self-confidence is upturned, unbelief is broken, and faith is strengthened and purified. Were it not for the furnace, what would become of our dross and alloy? And then when the silver is in the crucible, the Refiner himself comes near. Hear how the Lord hath spoken concerning this:

**"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will melt them and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?"** (Jeremiah 9:7) **"I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin"** (Isaiah 1:25). **"When the Lord . . . shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning"** (Isaiah 4:4).

2. *It is a sifting.* **"Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve"** (Amos 9:9).

We are GOD's corn, grown in His fields and gathered in by His hand. Yet we are coarse and rough grain. Many a sifting process we must pass through in order to separate the coarser particles that nothing but the finest may remain. Affliction sifts us. Persecution sifts us.

GOD has many a sieve, some finer and some coarser, and He makes us to pass through them according as we require.

- He sifts the professing church, and many fall off.
- He applies a finer sieve, and many more fall off.
- He takes each church by itself, each congregation by itself, and sifts them, and many false brethren are discovered.

- He takes each believer and sifts him individually and his coarser particles pass off.

This process is repeated. He is winnowed and sifted again and again till the grain is purified.

3. *It is a pruning.* "**Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit**" (John 15:2).

We are the branches of the vine. CHRIST is the Father's vine: the stem and root of all spiritual life. Over this precious vine the Father watches. His desire is that "**the branch of the Lord should be beautiful and glorious,**" that this vine should yield its fruit in its season. Hence, He not only waters it, but keeps it night and day. And He prunes it with the skill and care of a husbandman. He wishes to make each branch fruitful as well as comely, and He spares no pains, for "**herein is he glorified if we bear much fruit.**"

How much we owe to this heavenly pruning! What rank, luxuriant branches does it cut away! What earthliness, what foolishness, what waywardness, what hastiness, what fleshly lusts, what selfish narrowness are all, one by one, skillfully pruned away by the vine-dresser's careful knife!

4. *It is a polishing.* We are "**living stones,**" placed one by one, upon the great foundation stone laid in Zion for the heavenly temple. These stones must first be quarried out of the mass. This the HOLY SPIRIT does at conversion.

Then, when cut out, the hewing and squaring begin. And GOD uses affliction as His hammer and chisel for accomplishing this. Many a stroke is needed; and after being thus hewn into shape, the polishing goes on. All roughness must be smoothed away. The stone must be turned around and around on every side that no part of it may be left unpolished.

The temple indeed is above, and we are below. But this is GOD's design. As the stones of Solomon's temple were all to be prepared at a distance and then brought to Jerusalem, there to be builded together, so the living stones of the heavenly temple are all made ready here to be fitted in without the noise of an axe or hammer into the glorious building not made with hands.

Everyone then must be polished here; and while there are many ways of doing this, the most effectual is suffering. And this is GOD's design in chastisement. This is what the HOLY SPIRIT effects: as like a workman He stands over each stone, touching and retouching it, turning it on every side, marking its blemishes and roughness, and then applying His tools to effect the desired shape and polish.

Some parts of the stone are so rugged and hard that nothing save heavy and repeated strokes and touches will smooth them down. They resist every milder treatment. And yet, in patient love, this heavenly Workman carries on the Father's purpose concerning us. Keeping beside Him, if one may thus speak after the manner of men, the perfect Model according to which the stone is to be fashioned - even JESUS, the Father's chosen One - He labors till every part is shaped according to His likeness, line after line.

No pains are spared, no watchfulness relaxed, till we are made entirely like Him, being changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.

Thus affliction molds and purifies. Thus it effaces the resemblance of the first Adam and traces in us each lineament of the second that **"as we have borne the image of the earthly, we may also bear the image of the heavenly."**

"Oh," said a saint of other days, "what I owe to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord JESUS!"

Come, then, let us question ourselves and endeavor to ascertain what affliction has been doing for us and what progress we are making in putting off the old man and in putting on the new.

- Am I losing my worldliness of spirit and becoming heavenly minded?

- Am I getting rid of my pride, my passion, my stubbornness, and becoming humble, mild, and teachable?

- Are all my idols displaced and broken, and my creature comforts do I use as though I used them not?

- Am I caring less for the honors of time, for man's love, man's smile, man's applause?

- Am I crucified to the world and is the world crucified to me by the cross of CHRIST; or am I still ashamed of His reproach, and am I half-reluctant to follow Him through bad report and through good, through honor and through shame?

- Do I count it my glory and my joy to walk where He has led the way, to suffer wherein He suffered, to drink of the cup of which He drank, and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith He was baptized? Or, while professing to seek the kingdom hereafter, do I refuse to undergo that tribulation through which I must enter; while willing to secure the crown of glory, do I shrink back from the crown of thorns?

- Am I every day becoming more and more unlike the children of earth, more and more fashioned after the likeness, and bearing the special lineaments, of my Elder Brother, of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named?

Do I realize this earth as neither my portion nor my rest, and, knowing that one chain may bind me as fast to the world as a thousand, am I careful to shake off every fetter that may bind me to the vanities of a world like this?

- Is chastisement really purifying me?

- Am I conscious of its blessed effects upon my soul?

- Can I look back upon such and such scenes of trial and say, "There and then I learned most precious lessons; there and then I got rid of some of the body of this death; there and then I got up to a higher level from which I am striving to ascend to one higher still?"

- Have I learned much of the sympathy of JESUS and known the blessedness of having such an One as He to weep along with me in my day of sorrow?

- Have I wiped off my rebellious tears and been taught to shed only those of love and submissive fondness, tears of brotherhood and sympathy, tears of longing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord?

To make us "**partakers of his holiness**" is GOD's great design as stated by the apostle. And there is something very remarkable about the expression. It corresponds to a similar one in the Second Epistle of Peter, "**partakers of the divine nature.**"

It implies something very exalted and very blessed; much more so than if it had merely been told us that GOD's aim was to "**make us holy.**"

Partakers of His own very holiness - His very nature! This is more than angels can glory in. It is something peculiar to "**the redeemed from among men**" - the members of the Body of CHRIST. And it is in this way that JESUS speaks to us.

It is not merely "**peace**" that He promises to us, but His own peace - "**my peace.**"

It is not merely joy He bestows, but His own joy - "**my joy.**"

So here it is not merely holiness He is conferring upon us, but His own holiness. His wish is to make us partakers of that. And oh, how much does that imply!

A goodly prize this - one for the obtaining of which we may well count all things but loss!

It is well for us when we come to see it in all its value and excellency and to set our hearts upon it. Until we do so there will be strife between us and GOD, for this is the blessing which above all others He desires for us and which He is bent on conferring upon us. When, however, we come to be perfectly at one with Him as to this, then the struggle ceases. He gets His own way, and this is best for us.

How blessed when His desire to deliver us from sin, and ours to be delivered from it, meet together; when His purpose to make us holy is cordially responded to by our fervent longings to be so! Then it is that the divine fullness flows into the soul without a check, and, notwithstanding the bitterness of the outward process by which this is effected, joy unspeakable and full of glory, possesses the consecrated soul.

**"Wherefore, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."** And there is nothing like affliction for teaching us this. It acts like the wind upon the trees, making them take deeper root. It is the growing of the grass that it may shoot up thicker and greener. It is the shaking of the torch that it may blaze the brighter.

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