

# 15

## The Third Purpose of Chastening

Before I present the third and most significant purpose of chastening, I want to point to a difficult verse in Hebrews. The answer is intricate because the problem in the verse is very strong. Here's the problem verse:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation *perfect* through sufferings (Heb 2:10).

Referring to the cross, this verse says that through His sufferings Jesus was made *perfect*. (The same idea is reiterated in Hebrews 5:9 and 7:28.) What did Hebrews mean when it said the cross made Jesus perfect? Was He imperfect before the cross?

The Greek word for perfect, *teleios*, has three primary meanings: to be made perfect, complete, or mature.

Applying those meanings of *teleios*, does Hebrews 2:10 mean, therefore, that Jesus was *imperfect* in character before the cross? Or does it mean that He was *incomplete*, but that the cross made Him a complete person? Or does it mean that He was *immature* beforehand, but the cross completed His maturity process?

To all three questions we answer an unequivocal, *No!* Prior to the cross, Jesus was eternally perfect, complete, and mature.

What, then, does Hebrews 2:10 mean? How did the cross make Jesus, the captain of our salvation, “perfect through sufferings”?

To answer that question, let’s look again at the Greek word, *teleios*. Its primary meanings are perfect, complete, and mature. But there is a secondary, subtler meaning to *teleios*, and it’s this secondary meaning that answers our enigma.

*Teleios* also carries the meaning of *qualified*. This meaning is widely supported by noted authorities. For example, Matthew Poole says the Greek word signifies “the consecrating or accomplishing of a person for office by sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry writes, “He perfected the work of our redemption by shedding his blood, and was thereby perfectly *qualified* to be a Mediator between God and man.”<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes puts it, “To render him wholly *qualified* for his work.”<sup>3</sup> To interpret *teleios* as *qualified* is consistent with how Christ Himself used the word when He said, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be *perfected*’” (Luke 13:32).

We conclude, therefore, that Hebrews 2:10 means this: Through the sufferings of the cross, Jesus *qualified* to become the “High Priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1). The suffering of death gave Him the necessary experience to become the Captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10).

*There are some ranks and stations in the kingdom of God for which one must qualify.* This principle is true in the natural order as well. For example, for a pilot to

1 Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Bible*, McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, Vol. III, p. 816.

2 Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, Vol. VI, p. 897.

3 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983, Vol. XII, p.64.

become a flight instructor, he would have to have certain course work completed and so many hours of logged flying time in order to qualify for the rank of instructor. In another example, in order for a student to qualify for a PhD or diploma, he must satisfy a rigorous regimen of academic study and related work. In yet another example, a Private would have many years of strenuous labor and dutiful faithfulness in front of her before she could qualify as a Sergeant Major of the Army. This principle of qualification runs through all of life. Some ranks can't be reached until a candidate has properly qualified for the higher position.

The same is true of Christ as Captain of our salvation. Although He was eternally perfect and complete, He could not serve as our High Priest until He had come to earth as a Man, died on the cross, and resurrected.

Now, because of the sufferings of death, He is qualified as the Captain of our salvation to lead every believing saint through the valley of our own death into the resurrection life He purchased for us.

Was the cross a chastening, then? *Yes!* Not in the sense of punishment or purification, but in the sense of *qualification*. Through the chastening of the cross, Jesus qualified to become our Apostle and High Priest.

Revelation 5 confirms that the cross qualified Jesus as our Redeemer.

Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is *worthy* to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was *able* to open the scroll, or to look at it (Rev 5:2-3).

According to this passage, Jesus was both *worthy* and *able* to take and open the scroll in the Father's hand. What qualified Him to be worthy and able to open it? The cross. Prior to the cross, Jesus was neither worthy

nor able to open that scroll; He had to endure the cross in order to qualify to open it.

Before Jesus became a Man, He was fully God and limitless in power. Nevertheless, in His pre-human state, He was not *able* to open this scroll. Why not? Because He lacked strength? No. He lacked the necessary life experience. The cross was a qualifier. By enduring it, Jesus gained the authority to open the scroll of the Father's blueprint for the earth and the human race in the age to come. Jesus alone is qualified to lead us into our eternal destiny in God.

### Connecting the Cross with Chastening

I would like to take you to three significant verses that corroborate the assertion that the cross was a chastening of God.

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will *strike* the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matt 26:31).

The fact that God said He would "strike" His Son carries a clear association with chastening.

Here's a second verse.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and *scourges* every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:5-6).

*Scourges* is the same word that is used for the scourging of Jesus at His crucifixion. Not only did the Father scourge Jesus at the hands of the Romans, He scourges "every son whom He receives." The link between the cross and chastening is clear. Christ was chastened by the Father upon the cross.

Thirdly, Isaiah strengthens the connection between the cross and chastening.

Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men (Isa 52:14).

When Isaiah says, "Just as many were astonished at you," he is speaking of the Babylonian captivity. When the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, they suffered such humiliation and abuse at the hands of the Babylonians that people in other nations were astonished at how severely Israel was chastened in the captivity. Isaiah's point is that, just as other nations were astonished at how God had chastened Israel, in the same way men will look at how God chastens Jesus upon the cross and be astonished at the extremity of Christ's suffering. Thus, Isaiah draws an undeniable connection between the chastening of the Babylonian captivity and the cross of Jesus. The captivity prefigured Christ's death. Just as the Father used the Babylonians to chasten Israel, He used the Romans to chasten Jesus on the cross.

The Scriptures substantiate our conclusion, therefore, that the cross was an instance of the Father chastening His Son. But again, He wasn't *punished* or *purified*; rather, He was *qualified* to serve as our Redeemer.

### **Our Chastening Is Qualifying**

Just as Jesus' chastening qualified Him as our Captain, our chastening can also be qualifying. This truth infuses our times of distress with great hope and significance.

Until you see the significance of qualification in the chastening process, the entire subject remains unclear and perplexing. For example, if your only template for chastening is punishment and purification, then Job's story is bewildering. Some have supposed that God

was punishing Job for fear in his life because of what he said in Job 3:25, "For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me." If God was punishing or purifying Job because of a stronghold of fear that had developed in his heart, we could understand Job going through a difficult season. But when you look at the intensity of his crucible, it seems like overkill. Why would a stronghold of fear incur such extreme, intense suffering? The punishment seems grossly excessive. The whole story remains inexplicable. What sin was so great that he needed to be purified with such extreme measures? If all we see in chastening is punishment and purification, therefore, we simply can't make sense of Job's story.

But what if Job was qualifying for a higher office in the kingdom? With that possibility, suddenly the book of Job becomes a sparkling, life-giving jewel. His trial qualified him to write the first book of the Bible, to become a mentor and spiritual father to every generation, to prefigure the cross of Christ, and to behold the glory of God with his physical eyes. The trial made him a General in God's army!

Just as God chastened Job to qualify him for a higher office, God chastened Jesus to qualify Him as the Captain of our salvation. It's the same operation at work in both Job and Jesus. While some see no connection between Job and Jesus, I find the connection between their lives absolutely stunning.

Here is the great hope within chastening. If He loves you, He will chasten you—that you might qualify for greater servant leadership. The higher rank comes with the grace to lose your life even more for the sake of others.

God's discipline doesn't mean He's angry with you,

even if He was “a little angry” (Zech 1:15). It means He delights in you! He is so pleased with your consecration and fervency He invites you to a journey that leads to greater intimacy and greater effectiveness in the harvest.

### The Hope of Qualification

Think of it! God is chastening you—just as He did Jesus—so that you might have the authority to accomplish greater exploits in the kingdom and produce greater fruit.

This is why your trial is so intense. It may seem even doubly intense in its extremity, but God is using it to qualify you for the scroll of your own destiny in God. Once again, let me quote Isaiah 40:2.

“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.”

If your chastening is doubly intense, then pay attention. God may be qualifying you to behold His glory.

Job’s trial was not the only one in the Bible that seemed doubly intense. Consider the stories of Jacob, Joseph, Naomi, David, Jesus, and others. All their stories suddenly make sense when we realize they were qualifying for a higher entrustment in the kingdom.

One reason Jesus’ sufferings were so intense was because He was qualifying for an *eternal* office. When God is qualifying us for something eternal, we might find the process doubly intense.

“The LORD is a God of justice” (Isa 30:18). If you suffer double for your sins, God’s justice considers that you now qualify for twice the promotion. It would not satisfy His justice to take you through a double trial and then abandon His purpose in your life.

Equity, justice, judgment—these are very important to God. It's important to God that due price be paid for things. That's why the fuss over weights and measures in the Old Testament (see Deut 25:13-16); God's justice demands that full price be paid for what is purchased. This sense of justice affects how He trains His sons. When the price has been paid, the rank must be given.

Does your suffering seem unfair? It just may be. But here's the thing: God is Master of the payback for unjust suffering. His great sense of justice demands that the unjust suffering of His chosen ones be answered. Double suffering can qualify you for the double honor of a higher rank.

### **Resurrection Qualifies Us**

Again, the cross and resurrection qualified Jesus to serve as the Captain of our salvation. Had He endured the cross only, but not been resurrected, He wouldn't have qualified as our High Priest. Paul attested to this:

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Cor 15:17).

The implications of this statement are astounding. Paul said that if Christ had died on the cross but not resurrected, nothing that He accomplished on the cross would be ours. We would still be dead in our sins.

I will say it again for emphasis. If Jesus had been mocked, beaten, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, impaled to the cross, had writhed in torments for six hours, died, and descended to hell—but not been resurrected—nothing that He labored to purchase on Calvary would be ours. To qualify as our Redeemer, He *had* to be resurrected.

The same is true for you. In order for your chastening to qualify you for your next assignment, you must

be raised up. Resurrection is not simply desirable, it's *essential*.

When God heals and raises you up, everything you labored for in your years of chastening will become available to the body of Christ, and you will qualify for an even greater abandonment in servanthood.

### **The DNA of Your New Assignment**

Inherent to the nature of your trial is the DNA of your greater assignment. Let me explain.

When you are being chastened by the Lord, consider carefully the nature of your trial. Is it related to finances? Then your next assignment will likely involve helping others overcome in their financial challenges. Is it related to physical infirmity? Then when you are healed, you will likely help others gain their healing in God. Is it related to mental health? When you overcome, you will help others with mental distresses come into peace and wholeness. Is your crisis related to your children? Your trial will give you the authority and understanding to help other parents with their children. Is your trial related to your marriage? Then God will likely equip you to help other marriages in due time.

The challenge before you is like a qualifying mete. Once you accomplish this exploit or feat, it will qualify you with greater authority and understanding to lay your life down in greater servanthood for others facing similar challenges.

### **The Example of Zacharias**

God chastened Zacharias so that he might qualify to serve as an effective father to John the Baptist. I want to talk about his story because I believe it will fill your heart with hope.

When Gabriel appeared to Zacharias to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth, was going to have a son, Zacharias couldn't believe it. Not only was his wife barren, but she was also elderly. A double negative. Gabriel's message seemed surreal to him. So Gabriel said, "But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time" (Luke 1:20).

God lamed Zacharias in his voice for ten months by making him mute. It was a chastening.

Some people might look at Zacharias's muteness as punishment, as though God were saying, "You didn't believe Me, Zacharias, so I'm slapping you with a fine. Your punishment will be the frustration of not being able to talk until your son is born. I'm going to teach you how displeasing your unbelief is to Me."

While there may have been an element of punishment in his muteness, I really don't think that was the main substance of the trial. Rather, I think it had to do with qualifying Zacharias for spiritual fatherhood. Let me explain.

As a faithful priest of God, Zacharias was godly, blameless, and devout. He was not living in compromise but was humbly serving God to his best ability. His problem was not rebellion, but unbelief. How did he fall into that unbelief? Through deep disappointment and heartsickness. For decades, Zacharias cried out to God for a son, but his prayer had gone unanswered. As the years turned, his soul calcified and his heart became like an old, hardened wineskin. When the mighty angel Gabriel came with great news, Zacharias' heart was so hardened by disappointment that he simply couldn't respond in faith. He couldn't make the leap to God's ways. Too many had been the years of dashed dreams

and unfulfilled hopes. Life had been too hard. After fifty-some years of deferred hope, this heartsick man was incapable of responding in faith to Gabriel's fabulous announcement.

I can imagine God thinking something like, "Zacharias, we've got to do some fast work here. John the Baptist needs a prophetic father, and we've only got around ten months to make you into that man. Your old wineskin needs serious renewal. I'm going to have to put you into My accelerated program. I'm going to put you into a prison of infirmity. In the same way that Joseph's dungeon accelerated his growth curve, this affliction will force you to find a new walk with Me. The intensity of the trial will cause you to press into Me like never before. In my mercy, I am granting you an opportunity to be changed. So buckle up. You're going to endure a very trying ordeal. I'm making you deaf<sup>4</sup> and mute."

The chastening was effective in Zacharias's life. Around ten months later, after John was born, Zacharias wrote those famous words, "His name is John," and his tongue was immediately loosed. Rather than doubt and unbelief coming out of his mouth, a fiery stream of prophetic declarations erupted from this man. Zacharias burst into a prophecy that rang with clear insight and courageous faith.

Zacharias! Who are you? You're nothing like the man of ten months ago. What happened to you?

In one word, chastening. God used a prison of muteness to effect powerful changes in his heart. The old wineskin of his crusty heart was totally renewed, and he emerged from the trial with prophetic understanding into God's redemptive purposes. If you have time for it, marvel at the glory of his prophecy after his chastening:

4 Luke 1:62 indicates that Zacharias was not only mute, but also deaf, for they made signs to communicate with him.

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:67-79).

God chastened Zacharias to purify and change him, but even more than that, to qualify him. Through his faithfulness in the trial, he was made *able* to serve as a spiritual father to John the Baptist.

What an encouraging story! God is qualifying us for something greater in the kingdom.