

WOULD GOD HARDEN YOUR HEART?

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We talked last week about “Harden Not Your Heart”. That topic is fairly common in the scriptures.

People today mostly think of a hard-heart as being someone who is uncaring or unfeeling of others.

But Biblically ... a hard-heart tends to apply to someone who is insensitive to spiritual things. Dull. Slow to pick up on things that are of spiritual importance. Callous.

And a hard-heart can be found amongst believers.

Mark 8:14-21

14 Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.

15 Then He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.”

17 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? **Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?**”

18 **Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?** And do you not remember?”

19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?”

They said to Him, “Twelve.”

20 “Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?”

And they said, “Seven.”

21 So He said to them, “How is it you do not understand?”

The disciples sometimes had a hard-heart. They were slow to pick up on spiritual truth. Because they didn’t remain focused and open to what Jesus was saying and doing.

Mark 16:9-14

9 **Now when He rose, early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene,** out of whom He had cast seven demons.

10 **She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.**

11 **And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.** *(Even though there were prophecies about it and Jesus had spoken about it)*

12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.

13 **And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.**

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; **and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.**

Jesus rebuked their hardness of heart. They were at fault because it was their choice.

Jesus can rebuke them or us ... because having a hard-heart is a matter of attitude. It's a choice they and we make.

We can choose to be tender-hearted — quick to pick up on spiritual things — or we can choose to be hard-hearted.

If it was some attribute over which we had no control ... Jesus would not be able to rebuke. He can't rebuke people who are literally blind and cannot see!

Jesus was angry and grieved at the religious leaders in the synagogue... because of their hard-hearts. You can't be angry at something people can't change and have no control over.

But: A HARD-HEART IS A CHOICE. All of us have free will ("free moral agency"). God has given us the power to choose ... whether good or bad. We are absolutely free to choose. YOU CHOOSE!

We can even choose to go to hell!

God doesn't overrule our ability to make free choices. Though He will seek to influence us.

Having a hard-heart is A MATTER OF CHOICE.

Hebrews 3:7-15

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,

In the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,

And saw My works forty years.

10 Therefore I was angry with that generation,

And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,

And they have not known My ways.’

11 So I swore in My wrath,

‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ”

12 **Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;**

13 **but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

15 while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS!

An instruction. A command. So it must be possible not to have a hard-heart (or carelessly allow one to develop).

So ... if it's a fundamental truth that we are all free moral agents ... we all get to choose — and hardness-of-heart is a choice — for which we can be justly rebuked.

That being the case — what about the following?

Exodus 14:1-8

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

2 “Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea.

3 For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.’

4 **Then I will harden Pharaoh’s heart**, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

5 Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”

6 So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him.

7 Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them.

8 **And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt**, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness.

God said twice that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Did God overrule his free will? So there was no way the Pharaoh could avoid destruction? So ... can He hold Pharaoh accountable? That’s definitely very odd. What happened to free moral agency?

Exodus 4:21-23

21 **And the LORD said to Moses**, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But **I will harden his heart**, so that he will not let the people go.

22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn.

23 So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” ’ ’ ”

The Lord hardened his heart.

So ... Pharaoh had no choice? God forced him to have a stubborn heart? God had set him up to fail? No way to avoid the death of the firstborn? Did He really do that?

This troubles many people. It makes God look unfair ... unjust ... denying Pharaoh his human right to choose?

Let's have a closer look. Especially at the gift of choice.

It is important to fully understand that God has given us all free choice.

It's absolute — starting from Adam and Eve. They had the freedom to choose. From the Garden of Eden right down to today — that is how God has worked.

Deuteronomy 30:14-20

14 **But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.**

15 **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,**
16 **in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.**

17 But **if your heart turns away** so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them,

18 **I announce to you today that you shall surely perish;** you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

19 **I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life,** that both you and your descendants may live; (***“choose” — YOU — CHOOSE!***)

20 that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Blessing or cursing is man's choice. **God very much wants to bless ... but it's not His choice.**

God's eternal nature is to do good and to bless. He is reluctant to punish.

God gives mankind the choice. He warns of the consequences over and over again ... yet will not overrule man's ability to choose. He will seek endlessly to help us to choose what is right.

We'd lose count trying to add up how often God tried to get Israel and Judah to choose rightly. For centuries!

2 Kings 17:7-18

7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods,
8 and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

9 Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city.

10 They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree.

11 There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger,

12 for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets."

14 Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. (*"Stiffened their necks" — hardened their heart*)

15 And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them.

16 So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

17 And **they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.**

18 **Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight;** there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

God testified by all His prophets and seers. For century after century.

THEY stiffened their necks — it was their choice!

Going into captivity wasn't God's preference.

Jeremiah 7:22-27

22 For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.

23 **But this is what I commanded them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.**

24 **Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.**

25 **Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.**

26 **Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.**

27 "Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you.

God was "up early" to send all of His prophets — daily!

But — THEY CHOSE to stiffen their necks.

Jeremiah 26:2-6

2 "Thus says the LORD: **'Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word.**

3 **Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way**, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.'

4 **And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you,**

5 to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded),

6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." ' ' "

Perhaps they'll listen? God Himself sent many prophets. But — the choice was theirs.

Jeremiah 44:2-6

2 **"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'You have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them, (It's happened now. It's over.)**

3 because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods whom they did not know, they nor you nor your fathers.

4 However I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!"

5 But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods.

6 So My fury and My anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.'

God sent numerous prophets. He did all that He could.

What we see is that God always wants to bless. He wants repentance. He wants humility. It wasn't a lot to ask for in a sense.

He'll try to influence good choices ... but won't overrule our right to choose.

And endlessly the people hardened their hearts. No amount of warnings seemed to do any good.

Something we need to watch out for. Our response to anything from God or His Word should be a quick “Yes Sir!” Not ... “Let me get back to you on that”.

Jesus summarised it well:

Matthew 13:13-15

13 **Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**

14 **And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:**

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15 **For the hearts of this people have grown dull.**

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.'

THEIR HEARTS HAD GROWN COLD!! THEIR EYES — THEY HAVE CLOSED!

Matthew 13:15 (NIV)

15 **For this people's heart has become calloused;**

Matthew 13:15 (NLT)

15 **For the hearts of these people are hardened,**

Eventually God will directly intervene — because He has to. He is a righteous judge and must do what is right ... but tries over and over again to seek repentance and change ... first.

His judgment is reluctant.

Lamentations 3:31-33

31 **For the Lord will not cast off forever.**

32 **Though He causes grief,**

Yet He will show compassion

According to the multitude of His mercies.

33 **For He does not afflict willingly,
Nor grieve the children of men.**

God does not afflict willingly! Sometimes it's the only way God can get a response.

Not limited to Israel. There is the remarkable illustration of Nineveh in the days of Jonah.

Jonah 3:4-5, 10

4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "**Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**"

5 **So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.**

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; **and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.**

God sent a warning to them ... and — the people of Nineveh believed God — and repented.

Jonah 4:1-2

1 **But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.**

2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "**Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?** Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; **for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.**

Jonah knew what God is like. Loving and kind!

The people of Nineveh made a good choice! They didn't harden their hearts.

Wherever we look in the Bible ... we see that the choice to believe God and respond ... or harden our hearts and resist — is entirely ours. God never interferes with our freedom to choose.

Yet:

Exodus 9:8-12

8 So the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, **“Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh.**

9 **And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.”**

10 Then they took ashes from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses scattered them toward heaven. And they caused boils that break out in sores on man and beast.

11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians.

12 **But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.**

The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. How does that fit in with the rest of the Bible? Doesn’t this go contrary to the rest of the Bible? God overruling a man’s heart and freedom to choose?

Is God partial? One rule for some people and a different rule for others?

If God hardened Pharaoh’s heart — he couldn’t really be blamed could he? Not his fault!

What’s going on here? Wait until new week. 😊