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DOES GOD HARDEN OUR HEART? OR, DO WE HARDEN OUR OWN HEART?

Posted at 05:00h in Daily Devotions by Mark Driscoll

John 12:37-40 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart...

Jesus Christ says of some people, that God has “hardened their heart”.

How could this be? Isn't God good? Why would a good God harden someone's heart then punish them for having a hard heart?

Jesus' words echo an Old Testament story. In the book of Exodus, we discover that the Israelite people, numbering a few million, are enslaved to a cruel tyrant named Pharaoh who ruled as the most powerful man on earth and was worshiped as a god. God called Moses to proclaim to the pharaoh God's demand that his people be released to worship him freely.

Pharaoh responds to God's commands with a hard heart – something that is mentioned some nineteen times in the story.⁽¹⁾ Some of these verses say that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart, while others indicate that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Some theologians have said that the wording merely reflects the Hebrew understanding of the world, and that the issue is largely one of semantics because they would have seen every action as ultimately a work of God.

The question that has erupted from these verses is whether God could have overridden Pharaoh's will, hardened his heart, and then punished him for his sin. If God had done that, then God would have been unjust and morally responsible for making Pharaoh sin

yet still punishing Pharaoh for doing what he was forced to do. Likewise, any abusive father who throws his child across the dinner table and then spansks him for spilling his milk is unjust.

Moses (and Paul in Romans 9) is emphatic that God did in fact harden Pharaoh's heart. The question of how God hardened Pharaoh's heart is incredibly important if the justice of God is to be defended. The answer is that God hardened Pharaoh's heart with patience and grace. God did not need to send Moses to Pharaoh on multiple occasions to invite Pharaoh to repent of his sin and free the Israelites. God did not need to perform miracles in front of the Pharaoh to prove his power and sovereign rule over even the pharaoh. Furthermore, God knew that Pharaoh's heart was hard and that in asking him to repent and come under the leadership of the real God, Pharaoh would only grow all the more angry and hardhearted. Therefore, it was grace that hardened Pharaoh's heart, similar to heaping burning coals on the head of one's enemies, as Jesus said.

Subsequently, God remains gracious and is not unjust. The responsibility for the hard heart is ultimately the unrepentant, sinful pharaoh who repeatedly rejects God's offer of grace. Thus, the truism of the Puritans rings true that "the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay."

How is your heart toward God at this moment? Hard, or soft?

(1)Ex. 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 13:15; 14:4, 8, 17.

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