

## **Softened Hearts**

For quite a while now my prayers have included a petition to our Lord to soften the hearts of my family and all those whose lives I touch. I pray that this blessing could be received by every one on earth, but I realize that in these end times, this is no longer possible, if it ever was. Human hearts grow harder and harder as they increasingly reject God, and unknowingly prepare the way for the Antichrist, as well as for their eternal damnation.

What is a softened heart? In Ezekiel 11:19 God speaks of replacing the stony heart with a heart of flesh. This is certainly a very figurative descriptive of something that's hard being replaced with something soft. In the context of this verse, it is speaking of the time Israel will be restored to the land and converted to faith in Jesus, just prior to the millennium. In Jeremiah 31:33 God speaks of writing the law on the hearts, again relating to the end times. Of course, this is simply another way God has chosen to describe hardness of heart vs. softness of heart, for there is nothing literally "stony" in the human body that could be the "heart" nor is there a new piece of "flesh" that would replace it.

These are simply expressions for depicting the characteristics of the human soul and its manner of relationship to God and to other people. A hard-hearted person may be characterized as one having any or all of the following. They may be considered as unyielding, ungrateful, prideful, mean-spirited, unforgiving, selfish, lacking in compassion, rejecting God's truth, etc. In a softened heart these unfortunate characteristics are diminished, but not necessarily eliminated. Thus it would seem that there is no physical substance that can be called "the heart" in this spiritual context. That being said however, the actual workings of the "heart" are very evident as expressed by emotions such as sorrow, joy, humility, pride, guilt, fear, gratitude, love, hate, and many other related "feelings." Perhaps then, we can define the "heart" as that portion of the mind that deals with spiritual matters.

In order to seek a better understanding of the subject, it seems best to first discuss the hardened heart, because Scripture speaks considerably on that subject. Perhaps the most memorable of these is the episode when Moses petitions Pharaoh to let his people go. Repeatedly we read of the Pharaoh's heart being hardened by God. Reading this in the narrow context of that event, it may seem that God has deliberately hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to create the condition by which He can justify inflicting the punishment that follows. However, we should know that it is not God's way to cause sin or to set up conditions that must result in sin. When we recall the omniscience of God and His foreknowledge of all things, we must realize that God knew that Pharaoh already had a very hard heart, an angry, unbelieving, proud, arrogant, unrepentant heart. God merely amplified the evidence of that deadly characteristic in order to facilitate the process, and to demonstrate for us His power, as well as the means by which He would free His people and punish their enslavers.

This punishment had a two-fold purpose. First, the cruelty and genocide against His people was justification enough. Second, their total commitment to idol worship and the influence it had on God's nation Israel was also offensive to Him, and a just cause for severe punishment of those who caused this. We might note in passing here that most of those plagues, the bloody Nile, the frogs, the death of cattle, etc. each represented one of the gods that they worshiped. God effectually ridiculed these major gods and caused the Egyptians to "choke" on them as He rammed them down their throats, turning each into offensive terrifying plagues instead of items of worship. The tenth plague, the death of all first born, can be seen as God's response to the genocide killing of all male babies born to the Israelite slaves. Thus I hope we can see that God didn't initiate Pharaoh's hardened heart. It already existed as evidenced by his treatment of his captives, and in his extreme pride and arrogance in the leadership of his people in unconscionable idol worship. It is of interest to note that the Pharaoh of 80 years earlier had a soft heart toward his daughter and her desires. Otherwise these would not been a Moses.

We find many examples of God's condemnation of those with hardened hearts in which He knows repentance will not happen. We find it expressed in Revelation where we are

given a vision of the Tribulation, and even in the subsequent millennial period, when Jesus' rules physically here on earth from David's throne. However, what is most disturbing is what God tells us through Paul in Romans chapter one. This applies not only to past periods but also most specifically to these current end times in which we live! Three times we are given lists of God's grievances against mankind.

These grievances for which eternal punishment is decreed could all be forgivable for individuals through repentance, but repentance will not occur for the large majority, because their hearts are hardened beyond the possibility of being softened. The hardened heart is not mentioned as such, but, its characteristics are unmistakable. Verses 21 and 22 speak as follows: *"21 because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened, 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."* Later follows that horrible wherefore, *"24 wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts..."*

This is followed by a list of sinful behaviors and abominations. Verse 26 begins with *"For this cause God gave them up...."* This relates to yet another list of abominations. In verse 28 we read again that *"...God gave them over..."* This is yet another list of deep-rooted sinful behaviors. Later in chapter 2 verse 5, God continues to lay it on to them and explains His response to these things. He says, *"but, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."* God gave them up, gave them over, all due to their hardened and impenitent hearts! End of story! They're done, finished, headed for "hell in a hand basket" as they used to say. (Why a hand basket, I never understood.) I pray that you will read Romans. The list of human faults that God so hates. I would have included them here, but some, through Satan's involvement have already become so sacred to the world that laws have been created to punish those who think and speak against them. I'd like to defer going to jail a little longer for my biblical beliefs so that I might continue my efforts to be fruitful in the faith. If God delays His return, the day will

soon come, that even in this country, ownership of the Holy Bible will again be punished most severely, as will be teaching and preaching of its sacred Word.

As you read these claims that God has against the impenitently hardened hearts, perhaps you will recognize that these are growing ever more common each day. They are most graphically depicted in Hollywood, in Washington, in much of medicine, in the music world, in education, and in the media, as well as in the world of sports and the higher levels of business often called Wall Street. In other words, it is large persuasive and powerful in most portions of the world in which we now live! We should realize that it includes that all powerful and controlling cadre of human agents that direct the “up front” puppet rulers, such as presidents, kings and other centers of visible powers of the world. Very sadly, I believe that it is also found in a growing number of “Christian” churches! The ultimate sources of power that direct these human subordinates of Satan are the supernatural “principalities and powers” of which Scripture speaks. Does this sound absurd? If it does, then it is time to reexamine Scripture and take seriously what it says, accept its truth and relevance while looking around, being conscious of what is happening. By doing this, much of the nonsense we see around us will become understandable.

Can a hardened heart be saved? Sure it can, or else no one would have been, or ever could have been redeemed, because all hearts are naturally hard in their deceitful wickedness. The innate consciences of some let in a little softening light, but unless the Holy Spirit and Jesus are directly involved, that softening never reaches the level needed to affect salvation. However, doesn't it seem evident that somehow the softening of the heart is a first step in the process God uses to lead one toward salvation? Am I off base to believe that a jump from having a hardened heart to receiving a new heart is not likely until some pre-softening of the old heart has occurred?

On that basis let us muse a little about the idea of softening of hearts. I began praying for this softening without having attempted much depth of thought. I began when I saw and experienced what hardened hearts can do to each other, and others around them. I

believe that we can safely conclude they are the fountainheads of the major sources of pain and suffering that has flooded the entire world. It seems to me therefore that any softening of hearts has to be beneficial to souls, both in this world and in eternity whether or not it leads to salvation. Remember, even those destined for hell will be judged and assigned their specific location in the place of eternal punishment based on their conduct here. If we let the hardened heart represent the sinfulness of man, than certainly any softening must be beneficial even to the lost, in terms of their place assignments in the eternal place of torment.

How can the true Christian be effectual in softening a hardened heart? The answer is very simple to state, although quite difficult to do. It cannot be effective without a great deal of Spirit-led time, love, patience and prayer. However attempting to “force feed” Jesus into hardened hearts will be a futile effort that will usually cause even greater hardening. The most effective thing one can do beyond praying for them is to live through Jesus and continue to express the evidence of it to the hardened. Sadly this may involve suffering abuse, anger, the casting of dispersions, insults, mocking and any variety of hurtful things as responses from the hardened hearts. The Christian must take the abuse in the manner of Jesus’ ever exuding love, patience, gentleness and perseverance, until the hardened heart sees that these Christian qualities are not merely a veneer, but have real depth and substance. Once that is established, some amount of softening should occur unless that person has been “given over” as Romans chapter one describes.

I won’t dwell on this here, but demon possession is also a reality where no softening can be realized. We never seem to consider this possibility, yet Jesus dealt a great deal with demon possession. Demons are real evil spirits that don’t die. They seek to, and do dwell in humans, and don’t necessarily manifest as the openly destructive monsters as the ones Jesus dealt with. They exist today as they did then, and there is no reason to not believe that many incorrigible hardened hearts are simply demon possessed. Their powers and intelligence, as they control their hosts, can be as great as their subtleness. We should not dismiss the possibility that there are many among us. Also might we not be seeing

evidences of this in those in power and prominence in Hollywood, in the government, and in other areas previously mentioned? If we look carefully we can see that they lead the way to the end times world-wide horrors that Scripture describes, and that we can now see are on our immediate horizon. These hearts cannot be softened while the demons control them. We should all pray for the exorcism of those to be so influenced

Is there any real hope of salvation for the hardened heart that is not demon-possessed? There certainly is unless by God's foreknowledge He has determined otherwise. As noted above, all such hardened hearts can be softened. How else could anyone be saved, because all hearts are hardened to sin right from birth? Their hearts may be sin hardened for many years. However, by His sovereign will, God draws all who will repent and seek salvation. To them He grants eternal life. Consider King Manasseh the king of Judah. For nearly 50 years he was the most hard-hearted sinful and cruel king of Israel. Or consider the prideful, lustful slave trader John Newton as but two of many such hardened hearts. Something got to them that began a softening which led to salvation.

Does the redeemed Christian (there is no other kind) have any influence in such matters? Indeed he does! The power of prayer emanating from a sincere, loving, single-minded redeemed heart is a powerful weapon when used in accordance with God's will. Dr. Missler calls such prayers the "heavy artillery in our arsenal of weapons against evil." To many of us, it seems difficult that such lowly miniscule beings such as us can have any influence on our incredible Omni-everything God. Yet this is absolutely true, because Scripture says it is! Prayer is held high everywhere in Scripture as a means of influencing God. Jesus' life and teachings are the epitome of this doctrine, and we, as His disciples have been given the right to have our prayers heard and answered in accordance with God's will.

Here's a question to consider. Is the hardened heart naturally hard, or is it naturally soft, and becomes hardened by reason of some circumstance? The world believes that man is intrinsically good and growing better with time. This of course is demonstrably false, being both contrary to even casual observations as well as to Scripture. What first comes

to mind regarding this matter is Jeremiah 17:9, where God reveals to us how the heart, all hearts are deceitful and wicked. That being the case, then it seems evident that being hard-hearted is the natural state of man. David confirms this by pointing out in Psalm 58:3, that we are born sinful.

Adding this to Jeremiah 17:9, it seems evident, that we all have sinful hearts from birth. These initially sinful hearts grow desperately wicked quite quickly. However, the sin-hardened heart can have most of the external characteristics of a soft heart. The majority of mankind frequently exhibits this external softness, even though it is absent of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and as is therefore of no spiritual value where salvation is concerned. It is sad but true, that this can often be seen expressed more strongly and sincerely in the unsaved than in many of the redeemed. The internal hardness is most often found externally expressed against believers than toward anyone else. This is evidenced in most of the world, especially in Arab controlled countries, and as a growing cancer in this country as well. That should not be a surprise to anyone who knows what Jesus said in this regard.

Based on our initial examination of the hardened heart depicted as in the Exodus and Romans examples, the hardened heart has no place to exist in the realm of the redeemed souls. A genuinely softened heart is the only heart potentially compatible with salvation. The hard heart is the old heart that is replaced by the new heart making all who are born-again possessors of only softened hearts.

But are all people whom we observe as having soft hearts genuinely saved souls? As noted above, obviously they are not! Can the saved soul occasionally show the characteristics of a hardened heart? Yes, and it very often does. That is because the evil nature of man exists long after the softened heart has taken its place. It is what takes over at times, and causes moments, or even longer periods of hardness and backsliding from spiritual growth. However, because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, each saved soul has been given power over sin, and as the process of sanctification continues, that evil nature will give way an ever-diminishing sinfulness and hardness of heart. If you're unruly

May 27, 2010  
April 21, 2016

March 2009  
June 26, 2014

nature troubles you, pray and continue praying in faith and in sincere single-mindedness, and He will prove this truth to you.