

A Further Consideration of Romans 9:14-24

Introduction:

Two weeks ago, we considered that God had a purpose in having mercy upon those whom he has mercy and in hardening those whom He will harden.

That leads us to another question. If God's purpose is fulfilled in those whom He hardens, "Why then does God still find fault with them as being sinful?"

Key Verses: Romans 9:18 (ESV) So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Romans 9:19 (ESV) You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

Romans 9:19 (NASB95) You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

Theme: There are some key issues that we need to wrestle with in understanding God's hardening the hearts of individuals and His still finding fault with them.

- I. Issue # 1 What are we to understand by Pharaoh's hardened heart?
 - A. There are 18 references in the book of Exodus of Pharaoh's heart being hardened.
 - B. There are 3 different Hebrew words translated into English as the word hardened. (See Addendum)
 1. The first word is used 12 times in Exodus referring to Pharaoh's heart.

The word means to be resolute. It also means to shore up or strengthen. It is quite similar to our word for the hardening of cement.

Thus Pharaoh's heart became like cement. Nothing permeated it or moved it. It could no longer be worked with.

2. The second Hebrew word that is translated "hardened" is used 5 times in reference to Pharaoh's heart. It means to make heavy. It is a word that is used elsewhere in connection with eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear.
3. The third Hebrew word that is translated "hardened" is used once in reference to Pharaoh's heart. The word means to be obstinate.

C. Observations concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

1. The Scripture repeatedly refers to Pharaoh hardening his own heart.

Exodus 8:15 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Exodus 8:32 (ESV) But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

Exodus 9:34 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

2. Pharaoh sinned and was accountable for his hardened heart.

Exodus 9:34 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

Thus, God is indeed finding fault with Pharaoh for what Pharaoh does.

3. Pharaoh's hardened heart was in keeping with the plan of God.

Exodus 7:13 (ESV) Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Exodus 7:22 (ESV) But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Exodus 8:15 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Exodus 8:19 (ESV) Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

God was not taken by surprise by Pharaoh's heart being hardened.

4. In eleven separate verses it is stated that God would or did harden the heart of Pharaoh.
 - a. These verses are meant to teach us that God's statement that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened was more than a mere prediction.
 - (1) God would harden the heart of Pharaoh.
 - (2) God would withhold that which would be necessary to "soften" Pharaoh's heart.
 - (3) Pharaoh had set his heart on a course that God would not change.
 - b. These eleven verses teach us that God is not ashamed of hardening Pharaoh's heart. Rather He wants all the world to understand He did it.

Further, Pharaoh's heart being hardened was in keeping with God's plan or purpose.

5. Here we learn great truths about God's grace.
 - a. First, it is not the circumstances of life that change men's hearts. Rather it is the grace of God at work in the hearts of people in the midst of circumstances.
 - (1) No circumstance of life that a person will encounter will bring them to God apart from God's grace. Even the plagues in Egypt in and of themselves were not going to change the hearts of those that experienced them.

(2) No circumstance of life can overthrow a person's trust in God if God is administering grace to that person. All the Injustices that Joseph encountered did not dissuade him from a faithful allegiance to God.

(3) Thus it is not the circumstances of life that determine our spiritual condition but rather the grace of God.

b. Secondly, God's judgment is the withholding of His grace.

D. The scripture also gives us insight as to "how" or the means that God used in hardening Pharaoh's heart.

1. God hardens men's hearts by allowing the works of the evil one to prosper.

Exodus 7:22 (ESV) But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

In this instance it was the turning the Nile river into blood.

2. God causes men's hearts to be hardened by allowing them to experience a measure of peace in the midst of their sinfulness.

Exodus 8:15 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Exodus 9:34 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

How often it is when people are in trouble they turn to God. However, when the crises passes so does their commitment to God. People quickly revert to their former sinful practices.

3. God causes men's hearts to be hardened by withholding the grace to understand the benefits experienced by God's people.

Exodus 9:7 (ESV) And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

The key word here is “behold.”

4. God allows men's hearts to be hardened through the company that they keep.

Exodus 9:34 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

- a. David was very concerned about the kinds of servants that surrounded him.

Psalm 101:6 (ESV) I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me.

- b. It was God's grace in leading David to have Nathan the prophet in his employ. What a blessing Nathan turned out to be in addressing David's sinful, hardened heart.

5. Thus, the Scripture warns us against hardening our own hearts.

Psalm 95:8 (ESV) do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

- a. We harden our hearts by the company that we keep.
- b. We harden our hearts by the failure to recognize God's activity in our lives.
- c. We harden our hearts by the resistance to God's instruction and rebuke.
- d. We harden our hearts by reverting to our sinfulness when we experience a respite from the consequences of our sinfulness.

- II. Issue # 2 God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart is illustrative of how God normally works and is not to be understood as an exception to the rule.

Romans 9:18 (ESV) So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

A. God hardened the hearts of the nations round about Israel.

Joshua 11:18 (ESV) Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

Joshua 11:19 (ESV) There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle.

Joshua 11:20 (ESV) For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

B. God hardened the hearts of the Jews that did not believe.

Romans 11:7 (ESV) What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

Romans 11:8 (ESV) as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

C. A person falls into one of two categories. Either they are one upon whom the Lord shows mercy or they are one whom he hardens.

Romans 9:18 (ESV) So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

III. Issue # 3 God's sovereign purposes are accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals

If God's purposes are done in those whom He hardens, "Why then does God still find fault with them?"

Romans 9:19 (ESV) You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

Rom 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

A. The demonstration that God's purposes are accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals.

1. God's sovereign purposes are accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals illustrated in Pharaoh

Romans 9:17 (ESV) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

2. God's sovereign purposes are accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals illustrated in Joseph's brothers.

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) As for you, you meant evil against me, **but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**

- B. The demonstration that God is responsible for His purposes being accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals.

1. God is responsible for His purposes being accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals illustrated in Pharaoh.

Romans 9:17 (ESV) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

2. God is responsible for His purposes being accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals illustrated in the life of Joseph

Genesis 45:7 (ESV) And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.
Genesis 45:8 (ESV) So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

3. God is responsible for His purposes being accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals illustrated in the crucifixion of Christ.

Acts 2:23 (ESV) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Isaiah 53:10 (ESV) Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

4. It is because God's purposes are accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals that we can say with confidence that all things work together for good to those who love God.

Romans 8:28 (ESV) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- C. The demonstration that God is responsible for His purpose being accomplished in the sinful acts of individuals **but God is not responsible for the sinfulness that motivated their actions.**

1. Those evil motives come from their own heart.

- a. The evil motives come from their own heart illustrated in Pharaoh

Exodus 5:1 (ESV) Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.' "

Exodus 5:2 (ESV) But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."

- b. The evil motives come from their own heart illustrated in the brothers of Joseph

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

- c. The evil motives come from their own heart illustrated in those who participated in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Acts 2:23 (ESV) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

- d. The evil motives are in fact evil and produce sinful actions.

Exodus 9:34 (ESV) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

IV. Conclusion:

- A. God finds fault with a sinful mankind that is hardened because their actions are truly sinful and their hearts are truly corrupt.
- B. Though their actions ultimately serve the sovereign plan of God their intention is just the opposite. They do what they do out of the worst of motives. They are seeking to oppose God and their intent is evil in doing what they do.

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,** to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

- C. God does not take a good heart and make it sinful and corrupt.
- D. However, sinful mankind cannot thwart the plan of a sovereign God. Even their rebelliousness is overcome, and will ultimately serve to advance the cause of Christ.

Romans 8:28 (ESV) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

