



I WILL HARDEN HIS HEART

EXODUS 4.18-23

CITY OF GOD CHURCH

10.31.10

The famous church reformer John Calvin once said this, “May there flourish, therefore, sufficient greatness of soul in the Church of God to prevent its godly teachers from being ashamed of the simple profession of true doctrine, however hated it may be.”

We are dealing with a topic and a question today that has led to a lot of controversy in the church throughout history. For those of you familiar with where we’re at in the book of Exodus this morning we are dealing with the problem of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart.

We’ve got a lot of work to do today so let’s go ahead and jump in.

Text: Exodus 4:18-23 (Read)

Two questions we want to answer this morning:

1. Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?
2. What, if anything, does the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart have to do with us?

First question: Why does God harden Pharaoh’s heart?

Within our text this morning there are three difficult to reconcile ideas...

1. God gave Moses the ability to perform signs to make others believe.
2. God would harden Pharaoh’s heart so he wouldn’t believe.
3. God would hold Pharaoh responsible for not believing (firstborn son).

God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that God would receive *more* glory

- What would have happened if Pharaoh would have simply released the people? Pharaoh would receive glory.
- By hardening Pharaoh’s heart, God was able to reveal himself to the people. The miracles, plagues, and destruction of the Egyptian army showed everyone who the true God was.
- Read Exodus 14:4

The question most people want to ask at this point is, “What about Pharaoh’s free will?”

- Did Pharaoh harden himself? (Ex. 7:22)
- Note the phrase “as the Lord said.” Connecting back to 4:21-23.

If God is the reason Pharaoh’s heart was hard, then can God hold him responsible?



- Exodus 9:27, 34/Pharaoh's rejection was sin.

Exodus consistently presents God as the one behind hardening the heart of Pharaoh, and yet the Bible still holds Pharaoh responsible for his sin.

Most people come to the Bible and want to answer the question, "How does God's control in the world square with free will?" This is a question that the Bible will *never* answer.

When most people talk about the concept of free will, they typically mean that all things being equal they could make any choice that they decide to make.

The Bible doesn't draw this line at sovereignty and free will. The Bible more clearly draws a line between God's sovereignty or control and accountability/responsibility.

To summarize it clearly, here's what we believe at City of God. The Bible teaches that God is completely sovereign over all things (the hardening of Pharaoh, the plagues, etc.), and that humans are 100% responsible for the choices that they make.

If you believe in a God that is involved in the world, you have to draw your mystery line on this issue somewhere, and this is where we draw the line.

God was the ultimate cause of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and yet the Bible holds Pharaoh accountable/responsible for his actions. At this point I have to say the Bible simply doesn't explain any more to me on this issue.

While it's fairly easy to wrap this issue up nicely the next question is the most pressing one for all of us in the room.

Second Question: What, if anything, does the hardening of Pharaoh's heart have to do with us?

This might seem like an odd question to ask at this point. Many of us might not feel like we're resisting God at this moment.

One of the things that is so helpful to do is to be constantly reading your Old Testament in light of your New Testament.

How did the guys who walked closest with Jesus interpret their Bible?

Paul is going to take the principle he sees here in Exodus with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and apply it to another situation.



Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Romans 9. Where Paul takes this principle is going to tie together nicely with what we talked about last week.

Last week we looked at how Moses was given power by God to accomplish the mission of delivering the Israelites from slavery.

- Similarly we said if God wants to deliver us from sin, it's going to take the power of God in our lives.
- We left last week faced with the reality that if any of us are going to love Jesus, it's going to take a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that stirs us to believing.

This should have led to a question in your mind (and it did for some of you). If my choosing to love Jesus is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit, then how does the Holy Spirit choose who to work in?

In Romans 9, here are the issues Paul is dealing with:

1. The Israelites (God's chosen people) have apparently rejected Jesus.
2. Does this mean that all of the promises made about Israel being the people of God failed?

Some people will argue that Romans 9 isn't talking about salvation issues (because they don't like the implications).

- Paul clearly frames Romans 9 in salvation language.
- "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers" (Rom. 9:3).
- Paul is wrestling with why more Israelites aren't trusting in Jesus and being saved.

What reasons would you expect him to give at this point?

- The gospel hasn't been presented clearly.
- Missionaries aren't trying hard enough.
- They simply don't want to accept Jesus.

Paul goes underneath all of the typical answers we might give to answer this question and roots the belief/unbelief of the Israelites in the plan of God.

Text: Rom. 9:6-13

Paul is looking back at these Old Testament stories, Jacob and Esau, and he's seeing connections to the way that God works in salvation.

What does Rom. 9:10-13 teach us about God choosing some for salvation?

1. God chose Jacob not based on anything good or bad in Jacob.



Paul is seeing in these stories truths about God's work of calling some to salvation.

2. You're saved by the calling of God, not by your works.

Most of us still believe that we are saved by what we do. Religious people are constantly tying their salvation to things that they've done. How do self-righteous people talk?

- "How can they not see that this is true?"
- "How can they live like that?"

In the midst of this, we've lost that if God had not done something in you, you wouldn't believe either!

How someone could believe in the doctrine of election, and ever fall into self-righteousness, is astounding. However, it happens all the time.

So what does this look like practically in your life?

- Underneath your believing in Jesus is God bringing you to a point of belief.
- Underneath your loving and serving others for Jesus is God doing a work in you.
- We should all be able to say with Spurgeon that at every point in our life "God was at the bottom of it all."

Paul helps sum up what he means here clearly in Romans 1:6, "including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

When you came to faith in Christ you didn't simply choose Jesus over a number of options that you could have picked just as easily. God called and chose you to believe. God gave you the faith to believe. God put in your heart a desire to repent.

How we aren't constantly worshiping God and broken before God because of what he's done to save us is unbelievable. The problem is that all of us think we're better than we really are and that we do deserve Jesus. There is nothing in you that would make God choose you. It is only by the grace of God that we're saved.

This isn't an easy concept to digest, and I know many of you might have objections to what I've just said. Let me try and deal with a couple of them because that's immediately what Paul does in Romans 9.

Objections:

Objection 1: Doesn't this make God unjust? (Rom. 9:14-18)



By addressing this objection, Paul is helping to clarify his argument.

- If he's addressing the question of injustice with God, it would appear that his audience understood the weight of what he was saying.

So what's Paul's response to this question?

- "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:15; cf. Ex. 33:19).
- "He has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom. 9:18).

Paul raises the objection that many of us would raise and then simply answers it by arguing that God is God and he can do what he wants.

Just as God hardens and softens the hearts of those within the book of Exodus, he does this in the hearts of people today. What is this based on? "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

It's easy to look at the doctrine of election and see a God that we think is unloving or unfair. Rather, Paul says that election actually is grounded in the mercy of God. We'll get back to this idea in just a minute.

Objection 2: How can God hold me responsible for what he makes happen?

Paul's readers asked the question this way, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" (Rom. 9:19).

Again, Paul's answer isn't what we want to hear, but he's very clear on how this can be. "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What is God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom. 9:20-23).

It's a logical question to ask. If God hardens and softens the hearts of people to the gospel, how can he still hold us responsible? Paul's answer is you're not God.

Again for Paul this is a glory issue. Because some people will be saved and others will be separated from God, we clearly see both the love and justice of God. In this way we see who God is *most* clearly. Just as the hardening of Pharaoh was for the sake of the glory of God so is this issue as it pertains to salvation.



There are probably a lot of different feelings in the room right now. Some of you are probably angry and have a lot of questions.

- Some of you love people who don't know Jesus and you can't stand the thought of a God that might not do a work in their life.
- Some of you have no clue what's just happened and you just need to ask some very basic questions.
- Some of you might be worshipping now as you see the depth of your sin, and the love that God had for you in calling you through the gospel.

With all of these different responses right now some of you may have a very honest and simple question. Why does this matter? If God is going to choose some, but we have no idea what God is going to do, then how does this change my day to day life? That's a great question and we'll end there.

We never want doctrine to be something cold and isolated from real life. The things you believe to be true about God should affect everyday life.

What are the practical affects of the doctrine of election?

1. It shines a spotlight on areas in my life where I allow the culture to shape my thinking as opposed to the Bible.

This might be a weird one to start with, but first I want to talk to those of you who are upset about this idea.

- Are you upset because you don't believe this is Biblical or because emotionally you don't like the implications of it?
- If you have a Biblical problem with this idea, I would love to talk more about it. I always want to let scripture be *the* authority in my life that's teaching me about God, and if I need to shape what I think to come in line with scripture, then I want to do that.

However, for most people, I don't think it's a Bible issue. I really think many push away from the doctrine of election because it goes against two things that are deeply imbedded in our culture.

- Everyone deserves an equal shot (it's unfair).
- Doesn't this mean that I have no real choices to make in this life if it's all determined by God?

What about the first question that the doctrine of election is unfair and makes God unjust?

Author Norman Geisler shares this story to show his problem with the doctrine of election.



“Suppose a farmer discovers three boys drowning in his pond where signs clearly forbid swimming. Further, noting their clear disobedience, he says to himself, ‘They have violated the warning and have brought these deserved consequences on themselves.’ Thus far we may be willing to agree. But if the farmer proceeds to say, ‘Therefore I will make no attempt to rescue them,’ we would immediately think something is lacking in his love. And suppose by some inexplicable whim he should declare ‘I have no obligation to save any of them, but out of the goodness of my heart I will save one of them and let the other two drown.’ In such a case we would surely consider his love partial.”

Election feels like it is cheapening the love of God. If God is love and his desire is for all people to be saved, then how can we possibly believe that he would choose some and not others?

While the story seems to find some fault in the way that election presents the love of God, there are some helpful qualifications that need to be made to this story:

- God is not a man and he is not cruel because he declines to show mercy to some. God is love, but he is also holy, pure, and righteous.
- This analogy trivializes sin. The question we should be asking is not why won't God save everyone, but rather why would God save anyone in light of how much we have sinned and rebelled against him.
- This story paints these boys as poor helpless victims crying out to a cruel God for help.
- How does the Bible paint the picture of these boys in the pond (and ultimately of our sin)?

“On the contrary, the biblical portrait would be of three boys who are thrilled to be where they are! They knowingly, willingly, and happily jumped in and would not have it any other way. They could not care less about God or his revealed moral will. In fact, they revel in their offense and the grief they bring to him by their transgression. Not only that, but they seek to entice and lure other passers-by to jump in with them (Rom. 1:28-32). Not content with their own sin, they refuse to be satisfied until they have been joined by all in a united front against God and his law.”

We feel as if God is unjust for saving all people, but we forget to realize that we have sinned against God. We're not neutral people that God is playing "duck, duck, damn" with.

The picture of God that some feel is painted by the doctrine of election is that of a very unloving God.

Dr. Sam Storms, a pastor in Oklahoma City, highlights the major problem and ultimate solution to this story this way.



“Divine, biblical love, on the other hand, entails that the farmer casts his own son into the pond, knowing full well that if his son makes an effort to save the boys he will die. The son swims to the three boys, notwithstanding their vehement and hostile cries that he get out of the water and leave them alone. As he reaches the three, he extends his arms in love to but one of them. Though that one boy is vile and reprehensible in every respect, the son of the farmer brings him back safely to shore, but in doing so he himself drowns. The two remaining boys laugh and mock that the farmer’s son has drowned. Their glee is beyond control. The one boy for whom the son gave his life to save is suddenly brought to tears as he senses the magnitude of the love that has been shown him, while he was yet hateful and full of blasphemy. The farmer lifts the boy up, dries him off, cleans the mud and filth from his body, and clothes him in the garments of his own dear son. They embrace in everlasting love. The young boy falls to his knees in gratitude, tears flowing. The two who remain in the water continue hurling their taunts at the farmer, declaring that even if they could start anew, they would dive defiantly into the middle of that pond without a moment’s hesitation.”

Election does not paint a picture of an unjust God. Rather we see the grace of a loving God who reaches down into our sin and rebellion and saves us in spite of ourselves. We don’t want God, and yet God lovingly and sacrificially rescues some.

This teaches that Jesus goes to the cross to suffer the punishment for our sin and rebellion. Jesus did this even as we continually rebel against him. The fact that Jesus dies in my place for my sin while I am an enemy of God shows the true heart of God.

2. The doctrine of election spurs me on toward mission.

This might seem backward for many of you. If God is the one who saves people, then why does it matter what I do? Why should I worry about sharing the gospel if God is simply going to choose some and not others?

Before answering that question it’s important to note how crucial it is to not read bits and pieces of the Bible in isolation from one another. The same guy who wrote this deep theological work on election also lived a radical life on mission.

Even though Paul believed this to be true about God and salvation, look at how he lived his life:

- He planted churches
- He wrote scripture
- He persuaded people to come to faith in Jesus

Just looking at Paul’s life you couldn’t believe that he believed election to be true. His life doesn’t seem to match up with the concept. Or maybe, it matches up better than we want to realize.



Hopefully none of you are going trick-or-treating tonight, but maybe some of you are. Think back to when you were little. Imagine your parents said to you, “Listen, tonight everyone in our neighborhood has buckets full of candy and all you have to do to get it is knock on their door. Now, don’t go looking for the candy.”

That would be absolutely crazy. As soon as I found out about this I had two pillowcases sprinting through the neighborhood looking for the stuff.

There were several reasons that we moved to Lafayette to start this church. However, there is one reason that compelled me almost more than any other.

In Acts 18 Paul is in Corinth and ministry is hard. The gospel had been rejected, and he wasn’t seeing anyone come to faith in Jesus. One night God came to him in a vision:

⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11).

Paul was discouraged about ministry and so God promised him “I have many in this city who are my people.” These were people who had not yet come to faith in Jesus.

So Paul hears God say that he has many people, and what is his response? Does he simply stop ministering because he knows God is going to do a work in their life?

No, he preaches. He spreads the gospel. He works night and day for a year and a half teaching the word of God among them because God had many people in this place.

And God has many people in Lafayette, West Lafayette, and on Purdue’s campus. People that God is about to do a radical work in their life and bring them to faith, and this should spur us on mission. God has promised that he will do a work through you.

There are days it’s difficult to do what we’re doing here. Will people show up? Will we have enough money to make it another month? Are people being changed? Is anything we’re doing making a difference?

But God comforts and challenges me with the truth that “I have many people in this place.” So City of God will work, serve, love, teach, and take the gospel to others because of a rock solid conviction that the love and mercy of God is going to save some in this city.

So what should your response be today?

1. Some of you need to repent of self-righteousness.



As much as I can preach on this and continually talk about it, it's amazing how wrapped up in my own righteousness I get. For some of you, you still believe that your relationship with God ultimately depends on you rather than God. You really believe that you save yourself.

Until you can repent of your own righteousness and be broken by what God has done for you, then you will never truly love Jesus.

2. Some of you need to respond in faith.

I believe that there might be some in here who have heard the gospel for the first time this morning. If God is stirring you toward faith in Jesus we want to encourage you to respond to that today.

- Even though we believe that God saves and chooses us we still believe we have to respond (as the Bible teaches). We'd love to talk with you more about that this morning.

Sam Storms finished his writing on election with this phrase. "It isn't 'Esau I hated' that disturbs me, but 'Jacob I loved' that absolutely astounds me."

The truth of election should absolutely wreck us. To see the love of God for people unwilling and undeserving should always bring us to worship and that's what we're going to do now.