

## Don't Harden Your Heart

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Jesus in Luke 4:4 said that man is to live "by every word of God." He taught that the wise will build his life on the foundation of obedience to the word of God (Matthew 7:24-25).

God's word judges us. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). "Discerner" is from the Greek *κριτικός*, an adjective that means able to judge or discern (*Greek-English Lexicon*, Bauer, Arndt and Gringrich). The English word "critic" is derived from the Greek word used here. *Κριτικός* is a cognate of *κριτής* (*kritēs*), a judge, and *κρίνω* (*krinō*), a verb meaning to judge or distinguish or decide. God's word judges us, and in a sense is our critic. It penetrates beyond the surface to our innermost being. In the final analysis, everyone will be judged by God's word (John 12:48).

As we look into God's word, it can show us what we are, like looking into a mirror. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1:22-24). It is given to provide wisdom, instruction, reproof and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). The question is, will we believe it? Will we receive it? Will we be corrected by it? Since we are free moral agents with the power of choice, the answer to those questions is ours to decide. We must choose if we will receive it, believe it, be corrected by it (Psalm 95:6-8; Acts 19:8-9).

We are warned in Scripture, as we will see, do not harden your heart. Do not stubbornly resist, to your hurt, the will of God, as did many of the people of Israel of old (Ezekiel 3:7; Luke 7:30), and as has been typical of mankind as a whole, for that matter.

If we are receptive to God's word and genuinely believe it, it will work effectively in us to change our lives and accomplish God's purpose (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Have you ever thought about why the world is deceived? Is it God who has deceived mankind? Some seem to think that it is. God has indeed allowed the world to be deceived. But who was it who lied to Adam and Eve? Who was it who chose not to believe God and chose to believe Satan instead? Mankind has been blinded by Satan's deceptions, because Adam and Eve chose to reject the truth and mankind has been following that pattern ever since then (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

As a result, all (nearly all) humans have been shut up together in unbelief. "For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all" (Romans 11:32). The word "committed" (or KJV "concluded") is *συγκλείω* (*sugkleiō*), which means to shut together (like a net, Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Darby's reads, "God hath shut up together all in unbelief...." Robertson points out, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew." In other words, the world is shut up or trapped in a net of unbelief, because of their unbelief. The word "unbelief" here is *ἀπειθεια* (*apeitheia*), which means both unbelief and disobedience. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* defines it in part as, "obstinacy, obstinate opposition to the divine will." It's from a

cognate word, *ἀπειθής* (*apeithēs*), which means unpersuadable.

Note that all, hyperbole, virtually or nearly all, are shut up in a net of unbelief, so that he may eventually have mercy upon all. Ultimately God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Allowing the world to stumble along blindly in unbelief and ignorance for the time being is merciful on God's part. The end result will be mercy for all.

For now, however, God has mercy upon whom he will (Romans 9:15, quoting from Exodus 33:19). Is this completely arbitrary? How does God decide on whom he will have mercy? It begins with God's purpose. God chose Jacob over Esau from the womb, because it suited his purpose, which is eventually to show mercy to all [Romans 9:10-13; "hated," is loved less by comparison (see Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*), he preferred Jacob over Esau, cf. Hebrews 11:20; John 12:32; Romans 5:18-19]. The wisdom of God's choice was borne out by the behavior and choices of the two men as they lived their lives (cf. Hebrews 11:21; 12:16). Some have been given in this life a greater opportunity for a knowledge of God than others. For example, the true gospel has been preached far more widely in the United States in modern times than in many other parts of the world. But with that opportunity comes greater responsibility.

Despite the fact that some have greater opportunity to hear the gospel, salvation is open to any who hear if they respond in belief and faith (Romans 10:13-21). As we see here, though many hear, many who hear do not obey, Israel being an example, which we will discuss in more detail shortly.

First, however, there are other examples of those who do hear and respond in a positive way, such as the Bereans (Acts 17:11-12). Note they received the word with all readiness, searched the Scriptures to find out if what they were told was the truth, and as a result they believed. We are to receive with meekness the word (James 1:21). Note at the preaching of Peter, some received the word, were convicted, and acted on it by repenting (Acts 2:37-39, 41). Those who repent at the rebuke, reproof, or correction of God can receive God's Spirit (Proverbs 1:23). God's Spirit is given upon repentance to those who obey God (Acts 5:32).

Others who hear the same words refuse to believe, and harden themselves (Proverbs 1:20-33). Israel was a people called, even a people chosen, but note the consequences of hardening their hearts against God's word and rejecting the calling they were given (Jeremiah 7:13, 22-28; Isaiah 65:12; 66:4; Jeremiah 6:10, 17-19; 2 Kings 17:13-15).

Refusing to hear and be instructed, refusing to take God's word seriously, choosing to sin, hardens and eventually deceives us, if we allow it (Hebrews 3:13). Note how rejecting God leads to being deceived and to greater and greater sin (Romans 1:18-28).

God has mercy on those who hear and obey his word (Isaiah 66:2; Exodus 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:9-13). Those who harden themselves will be hardened. Pharaoh seven times hardened his own heart, and often the trigger was God's mercy (Exodus 8:15; 9:34). Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and God, at least in part, further hardened Pharaoh's heart by calling on him to do the right thing and showing him mercy. Pharaoh refused to humble himself

before God (Exodus 10:3).

God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13-18). However, if we persist in refusing God's word and choose unrighteousness, God will allow us to be blinded by agents of deception (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

In the end, those who will be in God's Kingdom are not just the called, and not just the chosen, but those who are called, chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:14). Such is our calling that not many mighty or noble or powerful are chosen (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). [The words "are called" is not in verse 26 in the Greek original, and many modern translations leave out these words; the meaning is not that such are not called, for many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). For more on this subject, see our article, "Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called in This Age?"]. Of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews at the time of Jesus, all had heard Jesus' message and were commanded to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15; John 8:40), but only a couple of them—if that many—followed Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38), identified as "a council member" (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50), believed by some to have been a member of the Sanhedrin (e.g., *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* on Matthew 27:57), and Nicodemus (John 3:1; 7:50; 19:39; see Clarke on John 3:1). If we are to remain among the chosen we must continue faithfully in God's word.

We must make sure our hearts and minds are receptive to the truth, and that we don't harden ourselves against God's word, for any reason (Proverbs 28:13-14; 29:1; 2 Chronicles 36:11-16; Hebrews 4:1-2, 7, 11).

There's always the danger that we could become hardened in heart through neglect and the deceitfulness of sin. But if we are diligent in seeking God, and strive earnestly to abide in his word, that will not happen. We've been forewarned. Let's not let our hearts be hardened.

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