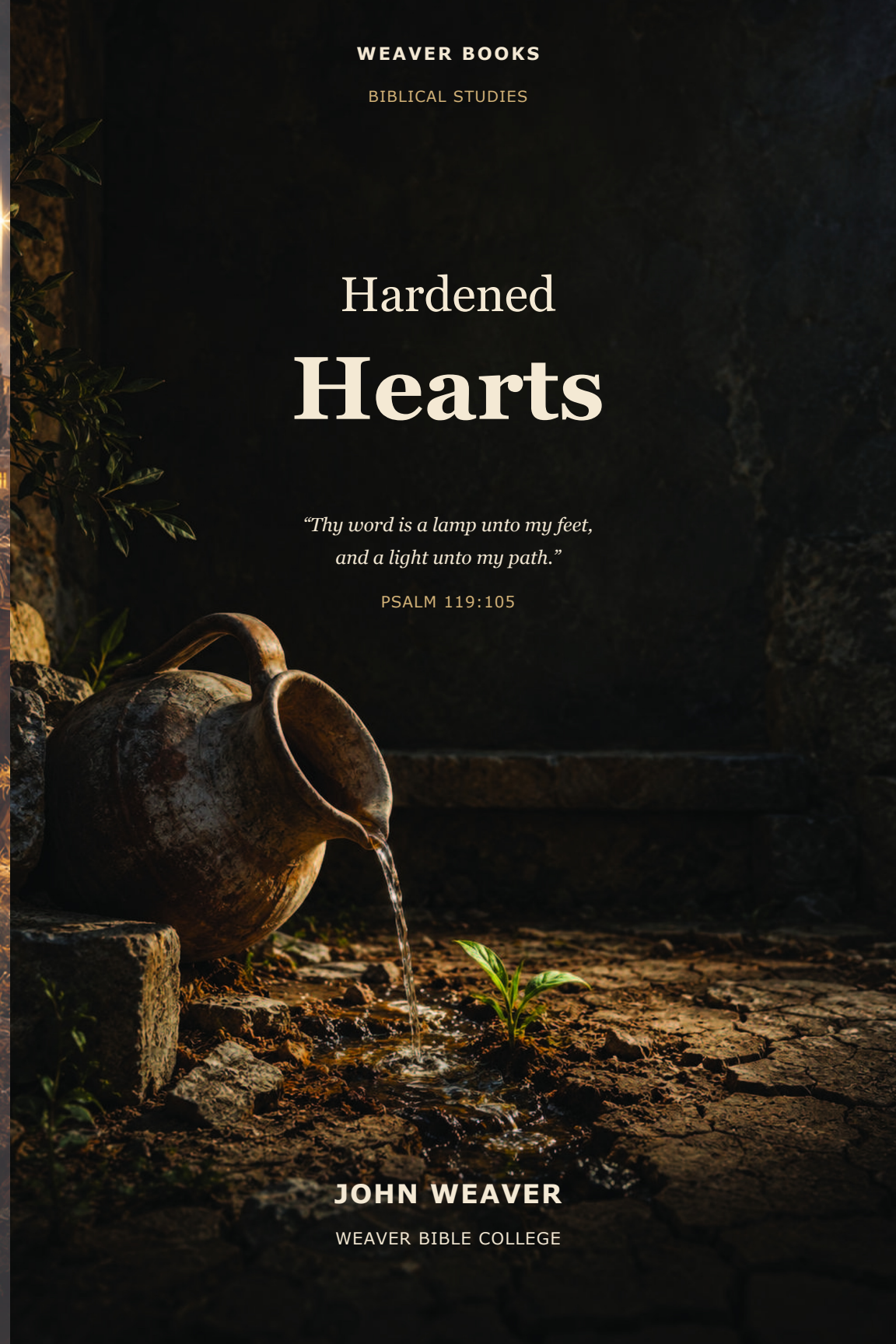
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Hardened Hearts

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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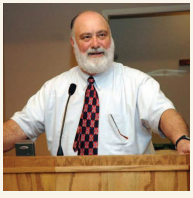
To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

HEBREWS 3:7-8, EXCERPT

A hardened heart is not only a problem outside the church. John Weaver examines how believers can become inattentive to Christ, resistant to correction, and slow to learn from Scripture. These messages call for renewed consideration of God's works, faithful self-examination, and the obedient response that protects against spiritual dullness.

“If everything that you are doing is for God's honor and glory, you are going to have a very difficult time letting your heart become hardened.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

Hardened Hearts

Part Three

Introduction and Review

Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1.

I want to finish that brief series on hardened hearts. This is actually the third message, and I will take a few minutes to review, especially since the last one has been several weeks past. The Bible says, “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

This is the third message in this brief series, and I want to encourage you not only in keeping your hearts, but to make sure that your hearts do not become hardened. Astoundingly, we discovered in Mark chapter 6 and Mark chapter 8 that it was not just unbelievers who can have hardened hearts, but Christians can have hardened hearts as well. Undoubtedly, most of us have never really considered the implications of hardened hearts.

Our Lord said in Mark chapter 6 and verse 52, “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.” He was talking there about His disciples. Then in Mark 8 and verse 17, “When Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not, neither do ye understand. Have ye your heart yet hardened?”

Remember, I told you that the word “hardened” is from the Greek word poroō, which is from the word pōros, a kind of stone. It is also translated “blind” twice in our Bibles. The word means to cover with a callous, or to cover with a thick skin. It means to make the heart grow dull, to grow hard, to become dull, and to lose the power of understanding. The word refers to an obtuseness of mental discernment, a dull perception, a lack of consideration, and a lack of understanding.

In the first message, I pointed out that there were three things that led to a hardened heart. The first was imperfect consideration, the second was improper reasoning, and the third was incomplete perception.

In the second message, I dealt with 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 13 through 16, where Paul told Timothy that he was to meditate upon reading, exhortation, and doctrine. These were the things he was to give his attention to. The word “meditate” means to care for, to carefully attend to, to be diligent in, to practice, and to apply. Timothy was to give himself to those things.

To prevent hardened hearts, we must consider the Word of God predominantly. In other words, the Word of God is to be foremost in our thinking. It is to be foremost in our lives.

Considering the Son of God

While we are not able to give absolutely perfect consideration of things, at least we can give a persistent, practical, and perpetual consideration of things. You remember that passage in 2 Peter, chapter 1, where the Bible tells us that according to His divine power, He had given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. So God then has given us in His Word everything that we need to live a holy life and a godly life.

I took the illustration of sickness and showed you the sources of sickness based upon the Word of God. I ended by showing that Christians should always be willing to submit to their Heavenly Father. We may not be able to witness our Lord's miracles the way the apostles and the early disciples did, since obviously we were not there, and they were. But we certainly can read about them in His Word, and we consider the implications of them. So, we must consider the Word of God predominantly.

Consider the Word of God Predominantly

The second thing is, we must consider the Son of God preeminently.

Consider the Son of God Preeminently

That is why we look at Hebrews 3 and verse 1: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

The word “consider” is an imperative, which means it is a command. It means to consider, to behold, to perceive, to discover, and to understand. We are to fix our hearts and our minds upon Him, and we are attentively to focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me show you the implication of this word “consider.” In Matthew 7 and verse 3, our Lord says, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” The mote is something extremely small, and of course the beam is something extremely large. Why are you beholding, focusing upon the mote, the little tiny splinter that is in your brother's eye, but you are not even considering, not even thinking about, and not even paying attention to the beam that is in your own eye?

In Luke chapter 12, verse 24, here is the word again: “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them.” How much more are ye better than the fowls?

So He tells us, “Consider the ravens.” Pay attention to them. Look how God supplies their needs and takes care of them. Then, in verse 27, He says it again: “Consider the lilies how they grow, they toil not,

they spin not, yet I say unto you that Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these." When you read these passages, you can understand the implication of the word consider. We may truly consider our own thoughts and our own sins. We may consider the ravens and the lilies. But according to Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 1, we are to consider the Lord Jesus Christ preeminently. He is to be first and foremost in our thinking as well.

The Apostle Paul said basically the same thing in Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 and 2: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is on the right hand of God. For your life is hid with Christ in God, and ye are dead." Christ is our life. If we are dead, we are to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Hebrews 3:1 says, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." This command is to consider the offices of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as His person, because Jesus Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King. As we consider these offices, we must remember that He is the one and only Mediator between God and men. First Timothy chapter 2, verses 5 and 6, says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due times."

When you consider the Lord Jesus Christ, His office of Prophet, Priest, and King, and who He is, He is the perfect and absolute mediator. A mediator is a go-between. If, for instance, Francis and David were having a big argument, I would come to mediate. I would be a go-between, keep them away from each other's throat, divide them, and represent Francis to David and David to Francis. That is the mediator.

Jesus Christ is the perfect mediator because He is the God-man. He is God in the flesh. On the one hand, He can certainly represent His Father, who is God, holy, just, and righteous. On the other hand, since He is perfect man, He can also represent us.

In fact, our Lord was even classed with us, so to speak. Hebrews 2:16 says, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." "Wherefore in all things it

behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

In light of our Lord's person, His position, His power, and His offices as Prophet, Priest, and King, we are commanded to consider Him. The book of Hebrews further exalts our Lord and demonstrates His uniqueness, capacity, and qualifications to fulfill His offices. Hebrews 4:14 says, "Seeing that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "Let us therefore come boldly into the throne of grace, that we may attain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."

Jesus Christ has suffered in every way that we have suffered, yet without sin. He hungered and thirsted; He was betrayed, forsaken, ridiculed, and mocked. Therefore, Hebrews 3:1 tells us to consider Him preeminently—not just as our great high priest, but because, as that great high priest, He understands everything about us and is the one that undertakes for us.

Moreover, consider Jesus Christ when we think about sin, especially when we are tempted to sin, for each one of us is tempted in various ways. One of my favorite stories revolves around the Scripture, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." A father told his little boy not to go swimming in the canal. The father came home early and caught him coming out of the canal with his swimming trunks on. He confronted him: "Son, I thought I told you not to go swimming." The boy answered, "Yes, Dad, you did, but I was tempted." His father asked, "Well, son, why did you bring your swimming trunks?" He replied, "In case I got tempted."

SCRIPTURE READING - Hebrews 12:1-4 (KJV)

> We are not to make any provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof. Yet when we are tempted to violate His law, transgress His commandments, and act disobediently, the one thing that would really stop and hinder us is if we truly considered His sufferings.

I have heard people say, “Well, I tried to resist, but I just grew so tired of resisting. I just figured I might as well give in and get it over with.” None of us have ever endured, and none of us have ever suffered, the way our Lord has suffered. Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 1, says:

“Wherefore, seeing we are also compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

When our Lord was praying in the garden, He sweat great drops of blood. And He prayed, “Not my will but thine be done.” The word “resisted” here means to resist, to stand against, to dispose troops and set them in battle array. The word “striving” is very unique. It is antagōnizomai. The Greek word agōnizomai is where we get our English word “agonize.” He said, “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” You have not yet agonized against sin until you have bled, or until you have bled out. So the author of Hebrews 12 is saying, Do not go complaining or offering the excuse that your temptation was so great, because you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

You have not really, genuinely fought against it. He is telling us that we cannot quit, give in, give up, or yield to temptation, because we have not resisted unto blood. If we wish to be victorious over sin and to be overcomers, then, according to Hebrews, we must consider the Son of God preeminently. We must consider not only His person, power, position, and offices, but also His service and suffering.

Consider the Work of God Providentially

We must consider the Word of God predominantly, the Son of God preeminently, and, thirdly, to prevent our hearts from becoming hardened, the work of God providentially. Everyone can quote Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” But do you really, truly, genuinely, sincerely know? Do you know that God works everything out for our good and His glory?

The word “know” is the Greek word oida, which means to see: to perceive with the eyes and the senses, to observe and attend as an absolute and certain fact or reality. So, do you really know? Once you understand that there is no such thing as luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God, you understand that it is God in His sovereign providence who allows things to come to pass in our lives. Absolutely nothing can happen apart from God.

It is true that God uses means. Why did God allow Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be thrown into the fiery furnace? He did so for His own honor and glory, to demonstrate His mighty power and that He can preserve His people. That is a good answer.

Why did God allow Samson to lose his power, be afflicted by his adversaries, and finally die with them? It would be inaccurate to answer only, “For God's own honor and glory,” though that is true. God also allows us to reap what we sow. Samson was reaping the consequences of his sins of fornication and rebellion against his parents.

We have trials, temptations, and troubles of our own making. Moreover, we have trials brought upon us by God's absolute sovereignty. Job, for instance, did not make his specific trial.

God just sovereignly brought it upon him for His own honor and His own glory. Many times we find ourselves under chastisement; many times we find ourselves under judgment. Do we take the position Eli took in 1 Samuel 3:18, when little Samuel told Eli what God was going to do to him and to his house? Eli responded, “It is the Lord. Let him do to him what seemeth him good.” Let him do what seemeth him good. Just let Him do it. He is God. I submit. I surrender.

So do we rebel against God, or do we submit to God? I will tell you this: the easiest and quickest way out of a trial is submission to God, because the more we fight and rebel, the worse it gets.

Andrew Murray had been dead for a long time. He was going through a specific trial, being persecuted, and had been viciously attacked by another preacher after he preached. He retired to his room and spent the night praying, intending to remain there and rest the next morning. Before he could get any rest, there was a knock at his door. His hostess handed him a note from another individual who was going through a great trial. Instead of speaking, he handed her a piece of paper through the door and said, "Please give her this. It's what I have just come to in the realization of my own trial."

Andrew Murray wrote: "First, He brought me here. It is by His will that I am in this great place, and in that fact I will rest. Next, He will keep me here in His love and give me grace to behave as His child. Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last, in His good time He will bring me out again, how and when He knows. Let me say that I am here by God's appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time."

Isn't that amazing? And that is certainly true. That which is true of us individually is also true of us nationally. I don't care where you go in this country, Christians are concerned over the state of our nation, and rightly so.

For instance, if you harm the egg of an eagle, you may be subjected to a $250,000 fine and face two years in prison.

It is legal in this country for a woman to have an abortion and murder her own child, basically, for any reason she so chooses, and that abortion is now subsidized by tax dollars. We see sin and wickedness made legal by a perverted, ungodly, tyrannical government, according to Psalm 94, verses 20 and 21. We have brought this judgment upon ourselves by our own disobedience to God and His law. We have sown the wind, and we are reaping the whirlwind.

Robert L. Dabney was aide-de-camp to Stonewall Jackson. He was also a Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author. Here is what he wrote in 1897:

"The history of human rights is that their intelligent ancestors usually learn the true grounds of them in the furnace of affliction, that the posterity who inherit these rights hold them for a while in pride and an ignorant prescription that after a while, when the true logic of the rights have been forgotten, and when some plausible temptation presses them to do so, the next generation discards the precious rights bodily and goes back to the practice of the old tyranny. You may deem it a strange prophecy, but I will predict that the time will come in this once free America when the battle for religious liberty will have to be fought over again and will probably be lost, because the people are already ignorant of its true basis and conditions."

There cannot be any civil liberty without spiritual liberty. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 17, "Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

What is happening in this country is what is happening in individual lives. Our politicians, our leaders, and our people in general are seeking morality, liberty, and freedom apart from God and apart from God's law. They think that somehow, in their humanistic mindset, they will attain some perfect state. It is absolutely impossible. Humanism cannot produce morality. Humanism cannot produce freedom.

We must consider not only the Word of God predominantly and the Son of God preeminently; we must consider the work of God in providence as well, because God is the One who brings everything together and brings everything to pass.

Consider the Worship of God Perpetually

Fourthly, we must consider the worship of God perpetually. The unhappy truth in Christendom is this: most Christians only think about worshiping our Lord on Sunday. There are a few people who worship Him on Saturday. That is public worship, and there is a difference between private worship and public worship. But the

truth of the matter is, our Lord should be worshiped perpetually, both privately and publicly, when it is needed and necessary and deemed that we should.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 31, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If I am eating my dinner or drinking a glass of water, it is to be to God's honor and glory. It is to be a worshipful act. Even the wife washing dishes is performing a worshipful act, as long as she washes those dishes for God's honor and glory. Plowing a field, as long as you plow in faith, is indeed for God's honor and glory and is an act of worship.

The Apostle Paul said it as well in Colossians 3, verses 23 and 24: "...and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of your inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. It does not matter whether you are eating, drinking, or doing anything else; it is to be worship. The glory of God and the worship of God are to be perpetual in our lives.

One of the best-known catechetical questions is from the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Do you realize that you cannot worship God without glorifying Him, and you cannot glorify Him without worshiping Him? Moreover, whenever you praise the Lord, you are glorifying Him and worshiping Him. The Bible says in Psalm 50 verse 23, "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me."

Whenever we praise the Lord for life and health, sleep and rest, and all of His multitudinous benefits; when we thank Him and give Him the honor and glory, we are actually worshipping Him. It may not be in a formal setting, but we are still worshipping Him.

Stonewall Jackson was one of the godliest saints, and he made it a habit to pray, praise, and worship God in everything that he did. He said, "I have so fixed the habit in my own mind that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without a moment's asking of God's blessing. I never seal a letter without putting a word of prayer under

the seal. I never take a letter from the post without a brief sending of my thoughts heavenward." He taught at VMI. He says, "I never change classes in the section room without a minute's petition on the cadets who go out and those who come in." So everything he did, he bathed in prayer. His great refuge lay in prayer.

The Worthlessness of Self Practically

He habitually prayed. You have to remember that it was through death he lost his first wife and a child. In fact, he lost practically everyone that he loved. But he came to adore the Lord with the intensity of a child, and he understood that the love of God could never be taken from him.

One of the men who knew Stonewall Jackson, a member of his own congregation, said, "It would be difficult to find in the entire Presbyterian Church any other member who disciplined himself so strictly, obeyed what he believed to be the will of God so absolutely, prayed so fervently, and found so much happiness in his religion."

Why? The answer is because he worshipped God perpetually. Everything that he did was an act of worship: whether you eat, whether you drink, do all to the honor and glory of God. If everything that you are doing is for God's honor and glory, you are going to have a very difficult time letting your heart become hardened.

Consider the Worthlessness of Self Practically

We must consider the worthlessness of self practically. I want to point out another problem that we have today in Christendom: we are anthropocentric instead of theocentric. Anthrōpos is the Greek word for man. Anthropocentric simply means man-centered. Theocentric means God-centered, since theos is the Greek word for God. One of the problems we have is that we are man-centered instead of God-centered.

While there is indeed value to the human soul, there is very little value to self, which includes pride, ambition, arrogance, and self-will. Look what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12 and verse 3: "For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is

among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Note what he said: we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but we are to think soberly. One of the greatest problems we have is that most people tend to think more highly of themselves than they should. Do you realize that one of the sins that God hates, and He hates intensely, is pride?

Proverbs 6:16–19 says, “These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination to him. A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among the brethren.” What is it? Each one of these things basically involves self and selfishness. Whether you are talking about a false witness or feet that be swift in running to mischief, it is all self, selfishness, and pride. These are the things that God hates.

The truth of the matter is, there is a curse placed by God upon those who trust in the flesh and lean upon the flesh. Jeremiah 17:5–8 says, “Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabit it. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh. But her leaves shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

Here is a picture of two different individuals: one who trusts in man and the arm of the flesh, and the other who trusts in God. The one who trusts in the arm of the flesh ultimately ends up perishing. The one who trusts in the Lord will be fruitful regardless of the season. We are talking about considering self practically.

Our Lord said in John 15:5, concerning all our abilities and power, “Without me ye can do what?” Nothing. You can do absolutely

nothing. If I am going to properly assess myself, I must realize that I am nothing and can do nothing in and of myself. Therefore, I must depend upon the Lord.

Do you know what the middle verse of the Bible is? The middle verse is Psalm 118:8.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. So he is telling you: you do not trust in yourself, and you do not trust in government. You trust in the Lord Himself.

If we are not going to have our hearts hardened, then the truth of the matter is that we have to consider the Word of God predominantly; we have to consider the Son of God preeminently; we have to consider the work of God providentially; we have to consider the worship of God perpetually; and we have to consider the worthlessness of self practically.

Conclusion and Call to Consider

If we want to escape a hardened heart, we must follow the counsel that Paul gave to Timothy. What did he tell him? In 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 7, he said, “Consider what I say unto thee, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” So God must give us understanding, but He is only going to do it as we consider these things that He has given us.

We are not only to keep our hearts; we are to keep our hearts from becoming hardened. The only way we can do that is by proper consideration of the things that He has laid out for us in His Word.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace, Your mercy, and Your help. We pray that You would teach us, that You would build us up in the most holy faith, and, Lord, that You would indeed enable us to keep our hearts and keep them from being hardened. May we trust in Thee and look to Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Hardened Hearts

Part One of Three

Introduction: Hardened Hearts Among Believers

Mark 6:52 says, “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.” If you look at Mark chapter 8, you will find the story again. He left them, and entering into the ship again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.

He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the Herodians,” or Herod. They reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.” When Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, “Why reason you because you have no bread? Perceive you not yet, neither understand? Have you your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see you not, and having ears, hear you not?”

He continued, “And do you not remember? When I break the five loaves among the 5,000, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up?” They said unto Him, “Twelve.” “And with the seven among

4,000, how many baskets full of fragments took you up?" They said, "Seven." And He said unto them, "How is it that you do not understand?"

When we think of hardened hearts, we normally think of the unsaved, the belligerent, and the rebellious. We think of men that will not be taught, warned, pleaded with, or exhorted under any circumstances. We think of those who have what we would call blunted feelings and moral insensibilities, or whose moral sensibilities are certainly lacking.

In fact, when we think of hardened hearts, our mind usually goes to Proverbs 29:1: "He that being often reproved and hardened at his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 14:9 says, "Fools make a mock at sin." When we think of an individual who refuses instruction and refuses wisdom, and someone who makes fun of and mocks at sin, we automatically think that individual possesses a hardened heart. While that is probably true and undoubtedly true, in our text it is not the fool, the mocker, the unsaved, or the pagan that contains the hardened heart.

It is believers. Moreover, it is our Lord's own disciples. If we are to argue from the greater to the lesser, stop and think that here were men who spent three years of their lives with our Lord. They watched Him, saw Him, heard Him, and were with Him. They saw Him perform miracle after miracle. If these individuals, who had regular, daily conversations with our Lord, could have hardened hearts, how much easier is it for you and me to have our hearts hardened when we are not with our Lord as they certainly were?

The Biblical Definition of the Heart

The general usage of the heart in Scripture refers to the mind, the understanding, and the reasoning faculties. The very first time the word heart is used in the Bible is Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5, where the Bible tells us that God saw the thoughts of their heart. Whatever the heart is, it can think, because God saw the thoughts of the heart. In Genesis 8, verse 21, the Bible tells us that the imaginations of the heart in man are only evil continually. Whatever

the heart is, it can obviously imagine as well. In Genesis 27, verse 41, the Bible tells us that Esau said in his heart, so the heart can speak. And in Matthew 5, verses 27 and 28, our Lord tells us that the heart is intimately connected with the eyes.

For in that passage He said, you have heard it said of them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery. But verily I say unto you, that whosoever looketh upon a woman and lusts after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. So there is a connection between the eyes and the heart.

Nebuchadnezzar's Changed Heart

We are going to look at a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a proud, arrogant, haughty monarch, and God had decreed to take him down to size. In Daniel 4:16, God says concerning Nebuchadnezzar, “Let his heart be changed from a man's, let a beast's heart be given unto him, and let seven times pass over him.” That which was to be changed in him was his heart; he was to be given a beast's heart. “Let seven times pass over him” is simply the Chaldean way of saying seven years. Literally, for seven years Nebuchadnezzar was going to be driven insane. He was going to live like an animal. If you read the rest of Daniel 4, you will find that he was driven from men and ate grass like an oxen. His hair grew like bird's feathers, his fingernails like bird's claws, and he was literally insane for seven years.

Then God restored him. Look at what he said in verse 34. Before reading it, look back at verse 16 one last time: “Let his heart be changed from a man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him.” Now go to verse 34: “At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me. And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.”

Verse 36 says the same thing in a different way: “At the same time my reason returned unto me.” When God changed his heart, He changed his understanding and his reasoning ability. He could no longer think and act like a man; he began to think and act like an animal. Thus, when the Lord speaks of a hardened heart in Mark 6

and Mark 8, He is talking about a hardened mind, a hardened understanding, or a hardened reasoning faculty—one that does not function properly.

The Meaning of 'Hardened'

With that in mind, look back to Mark 8:17. The wording is exactly the same in Mark 8 and Mark 6: “And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened?” Then in Mark 6:52 there is the point-blank statement: “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.”

The Greek word for hardened is poro, which is actually from the word porous, which is a kind of stone. Incidentally, the word is translated blind twice in our Bibles. Actually, the word means to cover with a thick callous or a thick skin, or become hardened with a callous. So it means to make the heart dull, to grow hard, to become callous, to become dull, to lose the power of understanding.

Anyone who has ever done manual labor with an axe, hammer, shovel, or whatever has noticed that, without gloves, calluses soon develop. Obviously, those calluses are helpful. Those individuals who happen to shoot Glocks quite frequently have a little thing called Glock finger. It is the middle finger that goes under the trigger guard, where it constantly rubs against the metal. Pretty soon, a callus develops there. Calluses come through constant rubbing, and they are on the heart as well.

Literally, this word refers to what we would call an obtuseness of mental discernment, a dull perception, a lack of consideration, and a lack of understanding. Let me give you an illustration of a hardened mind or heart. Hold Mark 6, but turn back to Job 39. In this passage, God is questioning Job, demonstrating that He is God, and certainly Job is not.

Illustrations of Hardened Hearts

Beginning with verse 13, God asks, “Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? Are wings and feathers unto the ostrich?” The

ostrich “leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them.”

“She is hardened against her young ones as though they were not hers. Her labour is in vain without fear.” Why would she do that? Verse 17 gives the answer: “Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding.” The ostrich lays her eggs in the dust or dirt, covers them with dirt, and leaves the dirt to hatch them. She never goes back.

A predator could find the ostrich's young and eat them. Someone could step on them and crush them. But that is because she has a hardened heart toward her young; she simply does not even think of them anymore.

Jeremiah applies this very illustration in Lamentations 4. Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah concerning the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. He is rightly referred to as the weeping prophet because he watched his nation and people literally destroyed. The siege of Jerusalem was absolutely horrible. At least a million people were killed, some by starvation and some by the sword.

Jeremiah writes that her Nazarites “were purer than snow,” “whiter than milk,” and “more ruddy in body than rubies”; their polishing was of sapphire. But then he says, “Their visage is blacker than a coal. And they are not known in the streets. Their skin cleaveth to their bones. It is withered. It has become like a stick.” They were starving to death inside Jerusalem because they were surrounded by the Romans. If they went out, they died.

Jeremiah continues, “They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with the hunger. For these”—those who starve—“pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the fields.” If you were killed with a sword, at least you died very quickly. If you starved to death, it was long and painful.

Then he says, “The hands of the pitiful women have soddened their own children. They were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.” These women actually killed, cooked, and ate their own children during the siege. Their hearts were so

hardened that, instead of protecting their children and sacrificing for them, they killed and ate them.

Jeremiah says, “Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.” Just as the ostrich was hardened toward her own young, these women during the siege of Jerusalem were hardened toward their own young as well.

You may say, “I can certainly understand that. That was during a time of warfare and siege, and people were doing whatever they had to do. That was then. Something like that is not happening today.” Well, within the last week or two, I read about a young woman in Clovis, California, who was a college student. She gave birth to a baby girl, promptly pitched the baby into a garbage bin, and went back to class. Nothing had happened.

Just this past week, I also read of a teenage girl who had a baby. She took a knife and stabbed her baby seven times, wrapped it in a blanket, and threw it in the shed. What about abortion? What about infanticide? We have the same thing today. Today, it is simply more culturally accepted. Or we could say our hearts have become more hardened to the reality.

So Jeremiah is using this as an illustration. The interesting thing about the word hardened is that it indicates a process, what you and I would know as petrification. Petrification occurs when some type of organic matter is exposed to minerals and becomes harder and harder and harder until eventually it is turned literally into stone. This process of hardening our hearts not only repeats itself, but it also builds upon itself. I want to show you from the Bible about hardened hearts, where we are, and how these hardened hearts are acquired.

The Process of Hardening: Imperfect Consideration

In Mark 6 and verse 52, we have a very pointed statement by our Lord concerning His disciples. The Bible says, “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.” Let me ask you a question: Why did they not consider the miracle of the loaves? The answer is because their heart was hardened. Here is the

first thing that will lead to a hardened heart: imperfect consideration.

When we fail to consider, reflect, and meditate upon that which our Lord has done and still continues to do for us, the process of hardening continues. It literally feeds upon itself. You do not consider because your heart is hardened, and when you refuse to consider, your heart becomes more hardened. You do not do it because you have a hardened heart, and when you do not do it, your heart becomes even harder. It builds upon itself. They refused to consider.

In this context, as we will see not only in Mark 6 and Mark 8 but also in Matthew 16, the disciples were in a boat. Our Lord had sent them away. They were rowing, and there was a storm. He walked to them on the water, and of course they were frightened. The reason for their fear and unbelief during the storm, even while seeing our Lord walking upon the water, is directly related to their having hardened hearts because they failed to consider the miracle of the loaves.

These disciples had not only seen the miracle; they participated in it. When our Lord broke the bread and the fishes, He delivered them to His disciples, who then delivered them to the people seated there. They may have failed to consider it, but they did not necessarily fail to remember or recollect it. They may have had an intellectual acknowledgment that the miracle happened, but they had not looked at its implications and made applications to their own lives.

When he says, “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves,” the word considered is the Greek word suniemi, which literally means to set or bring together, to join together in the mind, to perceive clearly, to comprehend thoroughly, and to understand. They did not join these things together in their minds. They may have remembered the miracle, but they did not really consider it. If our Lord took five loaves and two fishes and fed five thousand men, not counting the women and children, He was not only a miracle worker; He was God, God in the flesh. If our Lord could walk calmly upon the sea during a storm, He had to be the God who controlled all the elements. Obviously, there was more to these miracles than simply multiplying the loaves and the fish. They failed to consider it.

The prophet Samuel admonished the Israelites in 1 Samuel 12:24: “Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.” We do not really consider what God has done for us. We may say, “Thank you, Lord, for doing this,” and acknowledge that He has done it, but we do not break it down, consider it, note its implications and applications, and then live according to our understanding of it. We simply accept what He has given us and what He has done for us.

Let me show you a New Testament example. In Acts 12, Peter had been arrested by Herod, who had already killed James with the sword. Peter was next and was supposed to be executed, but the Lord sovereignly, powerfully, and miraculously delivered him. The Bible says in verse 5, “Peter therefore was kept in prison.”

But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. When Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison. Now, to me, that would seemingly be uncomfortable anyhow. You are sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison. And he smote Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell from off his hands.

How many of you, if you knew that you were going to be executed tomorrow, would sleep so soundly tonight that someone would have to smite you to wake you up? It seems that Peter was not really concerned. He was sleeping, and the angel had to come and smite him.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by an angel, but thought he saw a vision, or thought he was dreaming.

When they were past the first and second ward, they came into the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord. And they went out and passed on through the one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter

was come to himself, when he finally woke up and realized, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

How did he come to the conclusion, Now I know of a surety that the Lord had sent his angel and had delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews? Because he considered the thing. Iron gates do not open by themselves. Chains do not fall off by themselves.

And he said, God has done this. Whatever God does for us, or does to us, there should be proper consideration, because God does not make any mistakes. There are no accidents in a world that is ruled by God. These disciples of our Lord possessed a hardened heart because of imperfect consideration.

Improper Reasoning and Incomplete Perception

An imperfect consideration will always lead, secondly, to an improper reasoning. In Mark 8:15, our Lord charged them, saying, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the Herodians.” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.” When Jesus knew it, He said unto them, “Why reason you because you have no bread? Perceive you not yet? Neither understand? Have you your hearts yet hardened?”

Whenever there is a lack of consideration, there is always going to be an improper reasoning or rationalization. Our Lord warned very clearly, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod.” Then they reasoned, “It is because we have no bread.” How can you even come to a conclusion like that?

The word reasoned here is the Greek word dialogizomai. It means to reason, to dispute, to cast about in the mind, to muse, to think, and to consider. It is actually made up of two Greek words, which means to bring together different reasons, or to bring together and reckon up reasons, revolve them in your mind, and deliberate upon

them. So they are reasoning among themselves, but they are saying it is only because they have no bread.

Here is one obvious truth: whenever there is imperfect consideration, inevitably there is going to be improper reasoning. The book of Job is replete with improper reasoning. Consider everything that Job's three friends said to him. While they said many things that were good, accurate, and true, they simply did not apply to Job. They did not really consider Job, or the sovereignty of God, or what was actually happening in Job's life.

They ended up accusing him of being a hypocrite and a huge, rebellious, wicked sinner. So their reasoning was fallacious. It was faulty. In the end, of course, God condemned them and said, "My servant Job, he needs to pray for you, and if he doesn't pray for you, you're in big trouble." Their reasoning was not based upon a proper consideration.

Anytime you have an improper or imperfect consideration, you're going to have improper reasoning. In Mark chapter 2, verse 1, we read: "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days. It was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, not so much as about the door. And he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And while they could not come nigh unto Him for the press, they uncovered the roof where He was, and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed where the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

"But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he saith unto them, Why reason ye such things in your hearts? Whether it is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk, but that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." He said to the sick of the palsy, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." Immediately he rose up, took up his

bed, and went forth before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw it on this fashion.” Our Lord saw this sick man being lowered down in a bed and said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

The scribes reasoned, “This man is blaspheming,” because only God can forgive sins. How would they reason like that? Because of imperfect consideration. They did not consider any miracles that He had done. They did not consider any claims that He made. They did not consider that He was God in the flesh. If He was merely a man attempting to say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” they would call it blasphemy. Anytime you have an improper or imperfect consideration, it will always lead to what you and I would call improper reasoning. They did not reason correctly because their consideration was imperfect.

So you have an imperfect consideration, which will lead to a hardened heart, which will also lead to improper reasoning, and that always leads to what you and I would call an incomplete perception. In Mark chapter 8, verse 17, Jesus said unto them, “Why reason ye? Because you have no bread. Perceive ye not yet? Neither understand. Have ye your heart yet hardened?”

The word perceived is an interesting word. The Greek word is noieo, and it means to perceive with the mind, to understand, to have understanding, to think upon, to ponder, and consider. Imperfect consideration always leads to improper reasoning. Improper reasoning always leads to incomplete perception. You do not really see things as they truly and actually are. You cannot.

In Mark 8:14-21, the disciples had forgotten to take bread, having no more than one loaf in the ship. He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” They reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.”

They forgot to take bread into the ship, and our Lord warned them of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the Herodians. Instead of perceiving and pondering what He had said, they reasoned inaccurately and concluded that it was because they had only one loaf of bread. Do you really think that our Lord would be

concerned as to whether there was one loaf, twenty loaves, or a hundred loaves?

Jesus' Righteous Exasperation

Why did they not perceive? Because they did not consider. Because they did not consider, they reasoned wrongly, and consequently had absolutely no idea what our Lord was talking about.

I believe truly that our Lord was exasperated at this point with His disciples. Their conclusion was, “It is because we have no bread.” When Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, “Why reason you, because you have no bread? Perceive you not yet? Neither understand? Have you your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see you not, and having ears, hear you not, and do you not remember?”

He reminded them of the five loaves among the five thousand and asked how many baskets full of fragments they took up. They answered, “Twelve.” He reminded them of the seven among four thousand and asked how many baskets full of fragments they took up. They answered, “Seven.” And He said to them, “How is it that you do not understand?”

Do you know what our Lord had just done? He had given nine questions rapid fire. He had nailed them. When He said, “How is it that you do not understand?” I think if our Lord had been born in South Georgia, He would probably have said something like this: “How stupid could you be? How ignorant can you be? What’s wrong with you? Wake up, dummy! Smell the coffee!”

Nine questions come without stopping. Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have you your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not, having ears, hear ye not? And do you not remember when I brake the five loaves among five thousand? How many baskets full did you take up? And with the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full did you take up? How is it that you do not understand? Nine questions without even slowing down.

Then He culminates it in verse 18: “Having eyes, see ye not, and having ears, hear ye not, and do you not remember?” Wait a minute. He was asking, Did you not see what I did? Were you not involved?

Do you not remember? Remembering was not merely holding in their minds what actually happened. When He fed the five thousand—that was five thousand men, not counting the women and children; it may have been fifteen thousand or twenty thousand—He took five loaves and two fish and fed them all. Then He asked, How many baskets full of fragments did you take up? Not merely how many baskets, but how many baskets full. They said, Twelve. Then He asked about the four thousand: How many baskets full of fragments did you take up? Seven. He had fed fifteen or twenty thousand people with five loaves and two fish, and four thousand with seven loaves.

Could they think His warning concerned having only one loaf of bread in the ship? Could He not take one loaf of bread and feed them forever if He wanted to? Do you follow what He was saying? It was their hardened heart, the dullness of their mental faculties, that kept them from understanding.

Things in Scripture are often so plain and evident, though not everything is. One cannot help but ask why other Christians do not see these things. Now we know the answer: hardened hearts. Hardened hearts are fed by imperfect consideration, which leads to improper reasoning, which leads to incomplete perception. When that happens, the heart becomes harder still. It feeds upon itself.

If you'll go back to Matthew 16, when they finally understood, note if you would, we'll come back to this passage again momentarily. But look in Matthew 16 at verses 11 and 12. Our Lord is still asking them. How is it that you do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, but that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So our Lord was warning them of the doctrine of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians.

adorned on them after He rebuked them severely with these nine rapid-fire questions. Wow. So, we have to ask ourselves this question. Why is it that we do not see more, understand more, comprehend more? And the answer would be because of a hardened heart. And when we refuse to consider and refuse to reason and

refuse to perceive, the heart gets harder and harder. It feeds upon itself.

Now, let me make a couple of applications, and I want you to look. Turn back in your Bibles. Hold Matthew 16. We'll come back there. But turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 8. I want you to watch this. Here's the first application. And by the way, I want you to understand there is such a thing as a righteous anger. There is such a thing as a righteous exasperation. When you look in Mark 8 at verses 11 and 12, our Lord was exasperated with the Pharisees. Now they were unbelievers, that is true, but look at it. Mark 8 verse 11, And the Pharisees came forth and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. Watch.

And he sighed deeply in his spirit. Oh, my soul, I can hear it. And he said, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say to you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation. He said, what's wrong with you people? All you want is a sign. So he's thoroughly exasperated with the Pharisees. And then when you get from verses 13-21, now he's exasperated with the obtuseness of his disciples.

That's why He gives them those nine rapid-fire questions, one right after the other. There is a righteous anger. Do you remember that passage in Mark chapter 3 when our Lord was teaching? There was a man there with a withered hand, and they watched Him to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath day. The Bible says that He looked around about them, being grieved for the hardness of their heart. He looked around with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart. He told the man, “Stretch forth thy hand.” And he did, and it was restored whole as the other. But there was a righteous anger. That's why the Bible says, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” I confess and acknowledge that most of the time our anger is sinful. It's not used for the reason God has designed it. But our Lord's anger was a righteous anger. His exasperation was a righteous exasperation.

Do you think that our imperfect consideration, improper reasoning, and incomplete perception exasperate our Lord as much today as they did back then? Do you think that oftentimes He might just look down and say, “I don't know about those people. I don't

understand. It's so plain. But they just will not think. They will not listen. They will not consider"? I do believe that there is indeed a righteous exasperation.

Hardness of Heart Evidences Small Faith

Hardness of heart will always evidence and manifest itself in a smallness of faith. In Matthew 16, the same episode is recorded: "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reason among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, He said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand? neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it to you not concerning the bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?" Then understood they that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

But notice: He said, "O ye of little faith." A hardened heart cannot produce a great faith; a hardened heart can only have a small faith. If you and I do not really consider, reason accurately, and perceive the things that God does for us, to us, and through us, the result will be a hardened heart.

Application: Learning from God's Works in Others

Abortion does not upset most Christians today. Socialism does not upset most Christians today. Theft and adultery do not upset most Christians today. You know why? We have become hardened to those things.

I want to show you one last passage. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 21, verse 32. Lord willing, I will build upon this next week. But put this down somewhere in your mind: The Lord requires us and holds us responsible not only to learn from what He does to us, for us, and through us, but also to learn from what He does to, through, and in the lives of others that we know.

Our Lord said, “For John, that is John the Baptist, came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not. You would not listen to him. But the publicans and the harlots believed him. And you, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe.”

You would not listen to John the Baptist. You would not repent when he demanded repentance, but the publicans and the harlots did. You saw the change in their lives. You knew what happened, and you knew the grace, power, and mercy given to them. Yet when you had seen it, you repented not afterward, that you might believe.

So God holds us accountable and responsible not only for what He does in our lives, but for what He does in the lives of others that we know. We need to give those things a perfect consideration, if possible, so that we can have proper reasoning and a complete perception of the situation.

Until we do, we will continue with hardened hearts. How do we get out of a hardened heart? My answer is that you will need to be here the next two Sundays to find out. Obviously, if the disciples of our Lord had hardened hearts, it should be very easy for you and me to have hardened hearts.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and Your mercy in our lives. We pray that You would teach us, build us up in the most holy faith. And Father, we do have to confess and acknowledge we do have and have had hardened hearts. Oftentimes, Father, we do indeed fail to even consider what You have done in our lives. We fail to reason. We fail to perceive. And we fail to make applications. Consequently, our hearts are hardened. We ask for Your divine forgiveness and mercy, and that You would teach us, lead us, and build us up in the most holy faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Hardened Hearts

Part Two of Three

Review of Hardened Hearts

In 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 13 through 16, the Apostle tells Timothy, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

When we think of the phrase “hardened hearts,” we normally think of the unsaved who are deeply sunk in rebellion and sin. However, it was not just Christians who possessed hardened hearts. There were even our Lord’s own disciples. Arguing from the greater to the lesser, if those disciples who were with Jesus Christ daily had their hearts hardened, how much easier it is for you and me, who are not around Him daily, to have our hearts hardened as well.

Mark 6:52 says, “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.” Jesus asked them in Mark 8:17, “Have ye your heart yet hardened?” When we talk about a hardened heart, we are talking about our minds, our understanding, and our reasoning ability.

When the Bible commands us in Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life,” it is telling us to keep our minds and our understanding. In the New Testament, our Lord says, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications.” In other words, you cannot commit anything without first thinking about it. All evil thoughts and everything else proceed from the heart, or from the mind.

The word "hardened" is from the Greek word "poroo," which literally comes from the word "porous," which is a kind of rock. The word is translated "blind" twice in our Bibles. It refers to a callous, something covered with hard skin. A hardened heart, then, speaks of a mind that is dull, a mind that cannot perceive, a mind that is not quick. It refers to obtuseness of mental discernment, dull perception, and a lack of consideration and understanding. As I pointed out in the application last week, a hardened heart will evidence itself in smallness of faith, because in Matthew chapter 16, verses 6 through 12, our Lord said to His disciples, "O ye of little faith," and it is in the same context and the same story.

Mark 16 and verse 14 puts together unbelief and hardness of heart, or slowness to believe and hardness of heart. Again, our Lord is reprimanding His disciples. The Scripture says: "Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." Notice, then, unbelief and hardness of heart. The one is a slowness to believe, and the other is hardness of heart.

Three things lead to a hardened heart: imperfect consideration, improper reasoning, and incomplete perception. These things build on each other and feed each other as well. The disciples failed to consider properly, to reason properly, and to perceive completely what the Lord had already shown them.

Had the disciples really considered the miracle of the loaves, they would not have been frightened when they saw Him walking on the water during the storm. Had they understood how He took five loaves and two fishes and fed about 15,000 to 20,000 people, and how He took seven loaves and fed 4,000, they would have understood that He indeed was the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. Everything was under His control. Everything is under His authority. He can walk on water if He pleases.

In fact, that is what He said in Matthew 28, verse 18: "All authority in heaven and earth is given unto Me." So many people say, "Let me see it and I'll believe." No, you believe and then you see. The problem the disciples had was not necessarily intellectual; it was spiritual. If you believe, then you are going to understand. If you do not believe, you are not going to perceive, see, or understand, regardless of the proof and evidence. Faith comes first.

We talked last week about imperfect consideration. When you understand that our consideration is always imperfect simply because we are sinners, it should not discourage us from proper consideration. While we could never be perfect in this life, we can be persistent, practical, and perpetual in consideration. We may not achieve perfection, but we will certainly reach a higher goal than we would without trying and considering. Certainly, we want to be obedient to Scripture.

In our text in 1 Timothy chapter 4, the Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 22, told Pastor Timothy to flee youthful lust. Timothy was probably in his 40s when Paul told him this, perhaps in his 50s. In Bible times, a man was not even counted a man until he was 30. That is why our Lord did not enter into the ministry until He was 30 years of age. Yet God, through the Apostle Paul, told Timothy to flee youthful lust. To get away from youthful lust, the answer is always to flee. No matter how old you are, there are always temptations to youthful lusts. The answer is to flee, to get out of trouble and harm's way, like Joseph, who left his coat and fled from Potiphar's wife. In 1 Timothy chapter 4, Paul is not only telling Timothy how to be a good pastor; he is also telling him how to be a good Christian witness.

In 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 12, Paul says, “Let no man despise thy youth.” We might smile at that when we think Timothy was probably in his forties or fifties, but Paul continues: “But be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Paul says, “I want you to be an example. I want you to be a type. I want you to be an emblem of believers.” In verses 13 through 16, he tells Timothy how to be that example: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”

Then he says, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

The Command to Give Attendance

Paul commands Timothy, “Give attendance.” The word “give attendance” is “prosecho” in the Greek, and it literally means to apply oneself to, to attach oneself to, and to turn something over in the mind. It literally means to become addicted to. So what he is saying is, “Till I come, become addicted to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” In 1 Corinthians 16:15, when commending the house of Stephanas, Paul said, “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.)” They had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. Thus Timothy was to addict himself to reading, exhortation, and doctrine. “Doctrine” is the Greek word “didaskalia,” from “didaskalos,” meaning teaching or instruction. This is what he had to be addicted to till Paul came: reading, exhortation—that is not only giving exhortation, but receiving

And then, of course, he says, “to doctrine.” In verse 14 he says, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” Pastor Timothy was set aside, and hands were laid upon him. A gift was bestowed upon him through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Usually, when an individual is set aside for the ministry, the elders of

the church come together, lay their hands upon his head, pray over him, and set him apart to the ministry.

I have often said that today it is not like it was in Bible times, because usually it is empty hands on empty heads. But it was not that way in Bible times, because these men were certainly godly men. The Apostle Paul is talking about the gift that was given unto Timothy. In 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 6, Paul said it like this: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.” Whatever Timothy had, it was the gift of God, and it came through the Apostle laying his hands upon Timothy.

All the Bible is telling us in verse 14 is that his gift and his ministry were sanctioned by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. The call of God was thus recognized by the church through the approbation of the elders, and all this was expressed in setting him apart to the ministry. Whatever gift and benefit he received at this particular point was called the gift of God, and he was not to neglect it.

Meditation and Wholehearted Devotion

Now, after telling him this, look in verse 15. He says, “Meditate upon these things.” Ask yourself, “What are these things?” Then you have to go back. These things upon which he is to meditate are that he is to be an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. He is to meditate upon giving attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine, and upon the ministry placed upon him. The word is “Meletao,” which literally means to care for, attend carefully, be diligent in, and practice and apply.

"Give thyself wholly to them." That is, completely: "That thy profiting may appear unto all." Timothy was to give himself completely and totally to meditating and applying all of these things that the Apostle had laid out for him. In doing so, Paul tells him in verse 15 that his profiting, or progress, in the Christian faith would appear unto all.

Now note verse 16. Here is not only a word of admonition and warning, but also a word of command: "Take heed to thyself and to

thy doctrine." The word "take heed" is epecho, and it literally means to give heed to, to observe, to hold upon, to give attention to, and to hold forth.

Take Heed to Yourself and Doctrine

By the way, it is a present active imperative. The present means it should be something continuing. The active means that Timothy himself is doing it. And it is an imperative, which means it is a command. So when Paul tells him to take heed unto thyself and to thy doctrine, he is commanding him to do this constantly and continually. It is to be done perpetually. Timothy must take heed to himself and to his doctrine.

This is one of the greatest failures in the ministry today. Most pastors and preachers do not take heed to themselves, and they do not take heed to their doctrine. That is why their families and churches are usually in total disarray and complete, abysmal confusion. When you think about doctrine, very few Christians can explain justification, sanctification, adoption, effectual calling, or election. Very few, because pastors do not give attention to doctrine, do not take heed to it, and do not give it to their people. Their people are absolutely ignorant concerning this doctrine.

But here is a command: "Take heed unto thyself and to thy doctrine."

In verse 16, here is a second command, and it is the same present active imperative. The first is, “Take heed unto thyself and to thy doctrine.” The second is, “Continue in them.” Timothy is commanded not only to take heed, but to continue taking heed to himself and to his doctrine. “For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”

In other words, Timothy, if you want to be an example to believers and reach people, you must take heed to yourself and to your doctrine. The Apostle Paul is telling Timothy the tools he needs for a successful ministry. Those tools are only two: godly living and biblical doctrine. If you want to succeed biblically in the ministry, Paul says, “Timothy, you need godly living and you need Bible doctrine.”

When you look around today, you will find people who claim to be successful in the ministry. They have big works, big buildings, lots of money, and private planes. You can build a huge ministry through entertainment, programs, music, plays, drama, and many other things. But Paul tells Timothy that the only way to do this biblically is through godly living and doctrine.

In 1 Timothy chapter 4, particularly verses 12 through 16, Paul exhorted and commanded Timothy to give himself wholly and completely to Bible doctrine and to watch himself, making sure that he lived a godly, holy, obedient life as he preached the Word of God. In doing so, he would be able to save himself and others as well.

How do we apply this to ourselves, and how does this relate to a hardened heart? Where do we begin? How do we make application of the things that happen to us in life so that our hearts will not become hardened? We are not walking and talking with Jesus Christ the way the disciples did. We are not sitting down, watching Him physically, eating with Him physically, or walking with Him physically. Yet they saw all those miracles and participated in them, and their hearts were hardened.

So how do we today prevent a hardened heart? The answer is that we do so in a number of ways, and I am only going to cover one of them today. It is based upon what the Apostle Paul told Timothy. Here it is: I am going to summarize it.

The Word of God Must Predominate

We must consider the Word of God predominantly. Whatever happens, whatever transpires in our lives, we must consider the Word of God predominantly. Why? The Bible is the full, final, and finished revelation of God. He has given us everything that we need for life and godliness.

So many people are interested in secretive things. It is kind of like in the Apostle John in the book of Revelation, when the seven thunders uttered their voices, the angel said, "Seal up those voices and write it not." And yet I read about one preacher who preached seven messages on what the seven thunders said. How do you know what the seven thunders said? It was not written. But the Bible says

in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." I do not know the secret things of God until they come to pass in time and history. But the things which God has revealed belong to us and our children that we may obey them.

Our Lord has given us everything that we need in the Bible. The Bible says, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." So God has given us everything that we need in the Bible that pertains to life and to godliness. He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. We cannot get all things that pertain to life and godliness except through knowledge of Him.

Now watch verse 4: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.” Where are these promises? They are in Him, but they are in the Word of God, “that by these,” that is, by these promises, “ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” So what God is telling us is this: He has given us in His Word everything that we need for life and godliness. He has given us everything we need to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

When a Christian refuses to read and study his Bible, he is not only sinning against God and in rebellion to God; he is actually seeking to thwart the work of Jesus Christ. You say, “How can you say that?” I’ll show you how.

God has given us everything we need that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him, and it is by these exceeding great and precious promises that we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Now watch, Galatians 1, verse 3: “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

So it is His will that we be delivered from this present evil world. Our Lord gave Himself for that. How are we going to escape all the corruption that is in this world? The answer is through His promises, which are given to us in His Word, which is everything we need for life and godliness. So here is the question: Does the Word of God permeate, predominate, and pervade your mind?

Do you continually have thoughts of deliverance from sin? Thoughts of living holily and obediently and godly? Have you reached the point in your Christian life when you have come to the conclusion that the Word of God has all the answers? Have you reached the point in your Christian life that you come to the Bible whenever you have a problem, whenever you have a difficulty, and you seek to find the answer from the Word of God? Here is another question. I want you to listen to it. Do you understand that the Word of God

Your experiences are never to interpret the Bible. One of the biggest failures in Christianity today is that everyone wants to put experience first and foremost and make it paramount. I have heard people say, “But I know what happened to me. I know what I went through. I experienced something different.” Let me tell you something: your experience is not determinative; the Bible is. Whatever experience you have, you must allow the Bible to interpret it.

Some people want only an experience. You remember the one man in the Bible to whom Jesus Christ would not even speak? He would not acknowledge him. It was King Herod, because Herod had wanted to see Him for a long time; he wanted to see some miracle done by Him. Our Lord would not even speak to him. Why? Because all he wanted was an experience. If you want an experience, your flesh will give you an experience. The devil will give you an experience.

If you do not believe that, before you go to bed, eat a peanut butter, mayonnaise, pumpkin, and pickle sandwich with a few onions, and your stomach will give you an experience before morning. You can have an experience. The Bible is determinative, not what we experience. The Bible must always interpret our experiences, and not our experiences interpret the Bible.

Let me give one illustration, dealing with sickness. Each of us has been sick, and each of us, by the grace of God, has recovered. When you were sick, did you ever ask yourself why you were sick? Did you ever ask, "What am I to learn from this experience? Is God trying to teach me something, trying to show me something?" Have you ever considered the sources of sickness? The Bible must predominate our minds. We must consider the Word of God predominantly.

Illustration: Sickness and Its Sources

First, we all understand that sin is the general cause of sickness and death. If sin had not entered into the world, there would not be any sickness and there would not be any death. Romans 5:12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Sin brought sickness and death into the world. We understand that.

Yet there are some sins that bring special sicknesses and other problems upon our body. I am going to show you two very quickly that everybody can identify with. You will understand where I am going, and then I am going to turn it around on you. Talk about the sin of drunkenness. If you look in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 23—and by the way, drunkenness is a sin. It is not a disease.

Sickness from Sin

In Proverbs 23, beginning with verse 29, here is the question: "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?" Then he says, "They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." That is, they want it more potent, more powerful. God says, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." That is another story. Then he says, "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

What will happen when you are drunk? "Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou

say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

Here are all kinds of problems, not just cirrhosis of the liver and a whole host of other things that usually drunks have. You do not have to be a drunkard to have cirrhosis of the liver, I understand that, but it is one of the predominant diseases that they possess.

Notice that he said, "Thine eyes shall behold strange women." One of my pastor friends used to be a drunk. He was a great big man, probably weighing 250 pounds; his wife was a little thing, maybe 110 soaking wet. He came home one night drunk as a skunk, so drunk that he passed out on the sidewalk in front of their house. His wife went outside. I think it was raining even. Somehow she picked up that heavy man, got him on her shoulder, and walked him to the door. He looked at her drunk and said, "If my wife knew I was going home with you, she'd kill me." He did not even know it was his wife. I said to myself, and told Joy, "I would have dropped him right there."

I would have left him on the sidewalk in the rain, just as sure as this world. But this is what he is talking about in Proverbs chapter 23. Obviously, there are all kinds of physical problems that drunkenness brings on itself, not counting the mental, moral, familial, and economic problems. All these problems basically could be avoided if you would not be a drunkard.

The same thing is true with immorality. Sexually transmitted diseases could not happen if the sin were avoided, and if abstinence and morality prevailed. So you can see that many sicknesses and things like that are brought on by specific sins. While I'm sure we do not have any drunkards or whoremongers in this assembly, sin is not limited to the grosser sins of the flesh. In fact, the truth of the matter is that spiritual sins are even worse than fleshly sins.

When you stop and think, our Lord reserved His highest condemnation for the Pharisees, and the Pharisees were basically moral because they were self-righteous: "I don't drink, and I don't smoke, and I don't chew, and I don't go with the girls that do." That was their philosophy. They condemned the prostitutes, the

drunkards, and the publicans, having nothing to do with them because they were self-righteous.

So you have to understand that there are indeed spiritual sins as well. When Rebecca, Isaac's wife, was pregnant with Jacob and Esau, the Bible says in Genesis 25 and verse 22 that the children struggled within her womb. Rebecca said, "Why am I thus?" and inquired of the Lord. Her attitude was, "What's happening to me? What's going on in my womb? Why are these babies struggling? Why are they fighting?" The wise thing to do when there is any sickness is to inquire of the Lord, Why am I thus?

Sin does bring sickness, and it is not just physical sins. There are a whole host of spiritual sins, such as pride, idolatry, covetousness, and many more. Let me show you one particular example. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we are talking about Christians, not the unsaved—people who abused the Lord's Supper. Beginning with verse 27, he says, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Then he says, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Now watch: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

The Bible speaks in verse 29 of partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Then, in verse 30, Paul says, "For this cause," because these Christians committed this sin, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"—that is, they died. Here, then, sicknesses, infirmities, weaknesses, and even death are attributed to a wrong partaking of the Lord's Supper.

The Apostle John, in 1 John 5:16 and 17, tells us that there is a sin unto death and a sin not unto death. He says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto

death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." Then he says, "All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."

Christians can sin and get sick and weak. Christians can sin and die because sin is a violation of God's law. You must remember that Hebrews chapter 12 tells us that God chastens all those that are His. One means God uses in chastening is sickness. God says, if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged by Him. But if we are judged by Him, He whips us; He chastens us that we might not be condemned with the world.

When we become sick, one of the questions we must first ask ourselves, making the Word of God predominantly, is whether God is chastening us.

Is there any sin, any particular sin that I have committed that I've not repented of? See, that is how we keep our hearts from being hardened. It's not just that I'm sick. “Lord, is this sickness brought upon me because of a particular sin? Have I done something? Have I done something unawares, unknowingly?” You have to remember the heart's deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And only God knows the heart. And only God can open your eyes and let you see what is really and truly in your heart and what is in your life.

Sickness from Satan

One of the first sources of sickness is sin. The second source of sickness in the Bible is Satan. There is satanic affliction. Satan certainly attacked Job. There's no two ways about that. We may not deem ourselves a worthy target of Satan, but you have to remember this: He has plenty of minions to help him to willingly do his work. He does not have to turn himself loose upon us. He's got plenty of helpers that would be delighted to attack us.

There are obvious illustrations in the Bible of satanic affliction. In Luke chapter 13, beginning with verse 10, our Lord Himself deals with one of them: “And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.”

In South Georgia, we would say she's crooked back. She's bent over; she can't straighten up. Verse 12 says, “And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

“And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Then the Lord answered him and said, “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for

All the glorious things that were done by Him. But our Lord specifically says that Satan had bound her lo these eighteen years. You also have to remember that in Mark chapter 5 there was the man who was possessed of the demons. When our Lord asked their name, their name was Legion, for they said, “We are many.” Of course, He cast them out.

But I want you to turn, if you would, to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, because I want you to see that the Apostle Paul even ascribed his affliction to a messenger of Satan. Notice, if you would please, at verse 7: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” So Paul identifies his problem as a thorn in the flesh and as a messenger of Satan.

Now, I will be absolutely honest. I do not know what his thorn in the flesh was with absolute certainty. I think I have an idea; could be wrong. But I do tend to think, along with some others, that it was probably some type of ophthalmic disease which not only affected his eyes but his body as well. For instance, in Galatians chapter 4 and verse 15, he asked these Galatians, “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been

possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." So evidently he had some type of eye problem, or at least the Apostle is saying, "You loved me this much at one time that you would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me." When you get to Galatians 6 and verse 11, the Apostle Paul says, "Ye see how large"

The Greek word there for "large," "pelikos," denotes a geometrical magnitude and not an arithmetical magnitude. In other words, the book of Galatians is not a long book; it is only six chapters. When Paul says, "Ye see how large a letter I have written with mine own hands," he is talking about the size of the letters that he used to write. Paul usually had an amanuensis, that is, a secretary. He dictated his letters to them and then signed his name. But in the book of Galatians, evidently he wrote that one himself, saying, "You see how large a letter I've written with my own hands."

This eye disease would have made Paul unappealing and weak. It would have been an infirmity that he had to bear. His critics in 2 Corinthians 10:10 exploited that, saying, "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." They did not think much of the Apostle Paul.

Whether or not his thorn in the flesh, his messenger of Satan, was an ophthalmic eye disease, I do not know with absolute certainty. But I do know that whatever affliction he had, he ascribed it to a messenger of Satan. In 2 Corinthians 12, verses 7 through 10, he said that, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure. For this thing he besought the Lord three times, that it might depart from him. And the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Most gladly, therefore, Paul said, he would rather glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. He took pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake, because when he was weak, then he was strong. He would take the messenger as long as God's grace was sufficient, and he would have the power of God in his life. Whatever

Paul's thorn in the flesh was, whatever messenger of Satan afflicted him, he had to bear it all of his life.

When you consider the Word of God predominantly, and take sickness as an illustration, you have to consider, first, that sickness can come from sin; secondly, that sickness can come from the afflictions of Satan; and thirdly, that sickness can also come from self. By self, I am simply referring

Sickness from Self and Sovereignty

We must give consideration to the fact and the reality of our creaturehood. We are mutable, frail, weak, and dying creatures. That is all there is to it. You do not have to be a great and exceeding sinner, nor do you have to be afflicted by Satan, to become sick. There are many viruses, bacteria, spores, fungi, and a host of other communicable diseases ready to attack your weak body. You do not have to be a sinner or afflicted by Satan to have a cold, catch the flu, have bronchitis, get the mumps or measles, or fall and break your arm. You do not have to be a great and horrible sinner to catch a communicable disease. That is part and parcel of being a creature. We are not God. Yes, we are sinners, and yes, there is a Satan, but we are creatures as well. Our sickness could simply be something that happens by virtue of the fact that we are creatures.

We cannot undo our creaturehood. Norman Vincent Peale wrote a book, The Power of Positive Thinking. I like what one fellow said: "I find Peale appalling and the Apostle Paul appealing." We should keep our minds predominating upon the Word of God. We can keep positive thoughts there, but positive thoughts will not negate the fact that we are creatures and human.

There is a fourth consideration. If the Word of God is going to predominate our minds, and I am using sickness as the illustration, we have to consider this: our sickness could come from sin, from Satan, or from self. But the fourth possibility is that our sickness could come from the sovereignty of God. God is absolutely sovereign, and He will allow things in our lives that we do not understand. He will allow them for His honor and for His glory. A good illustration is found in John chapter 9.

In John chapter 9, our Lord healed a man born blind. Never before had a man born blind been healed. The standard thinking in those days was that if you had some type of infirmity or affliction, either you or your parents had sinned. The disciples thought so as well. John 9 says, "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Read all of this wonderful chapter.

Our Lord healed the blind man, but the Pharisees kept asking, "How did he heal you?" He answered, "I told you once. If I tell you again, will ye also be his disciples?" They replied, "Thou art his disciple; we are Moses' disciples," and cast him out of the synagogue. Our Lord sovereignly and powerfully healed this man who had been born blind.

The same could be said of Job. Job had not necessarily sinned particularly against God. In fact, the Bible calls Job perfect—that is, mature, complete, and upright—one that feared God and eschewed evil. He spit it out; he couldn't swallow it. Yet God, in His sovereignty, allowed Satan to attack Job. In the end, Job was vindicated and amply rewarded.

James says it correctly and concisely in James 5:11: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Of course, He is that.

Whenever I think and speak of God's sovereignty, I think of some of the choicest saints who have had horrible afflictions. Fanny Crosby was blind. I have told you how the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" came to be written, when a Christian brother lost his children when the ship sank. So many saints have suffered immensely. I remember one particularly.

She had cancer of the bone—a simple woman who never made it, I do not think, past the third grade. The world would call her ignorant, but she had more knowledge and more understanding than probably a lot of people today and a lot of preachers today. She was dying with cancer of the bone, which is absolutely horrible. You could go into

the hospital, as I did many times to see her, and hear her screaming, moaning, and groaning with pain fifty yards before you got to her room. You would walk in: "Well, Mrs. Kitchens, how are you today?"

"Oh, I'm fine, by the grace of God. I'm so thankful." She never complained, never bellyached, but simply endured.

Think of all these afflictions that people have gone through. Consider children born with organic diseases related to the brain. Alice and I have friends whose daughter was born with Down syndrome. She is probably in her forties, fifty maybe even. When I visited, she was happy to sit on the couch and color—twenty and thirty years old, just sitting there coloring.

If she could help her mother, she would. She would always kiss her daddy and mother and say, "I love my daddy. I love my mother." At home, she would come up, hug my neck, and kiss me. She would say, "I love John Weaver." So simple, yet I could not help but think how God in His grace and mercy would somehow let this young woman and others like her redound to His honor and glory. He is going to do it.

I saw that she did not have much ability, but what little bit she had, she wanted to use to help her mother and daddy. I often thought, I would much rather have a child like her than a child considered normal who hated Jesus Christ and the Word of God and was full of rebellion, wickedness, and sin.

I'd much prefer someone like that. Yet what about these people? God is sovereign, and He allowed it for reasons we don't understand. We don't know, but He's in control, and I'm content to wait until the day that He reveals all of His goodness and mercy in these people.

In Exodus, chapter 4, God calls Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. Moses offers many excuses because he does not want to go. In verse 10 he says, “And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” He says, “I don't talk well.” He must have been from South Alabama or South Georgia. I don't know.

But God answers: “And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or

the blind? have not I the Lord?" God said, "I made them. They're mine." You must remember that all things were created for God's honor and God's glory.

We have to stop and think. It doesn't matter what type of sickness it is. It could be from my sin, a satanic affliction, or self. It could be just for God's sovereign glory, grace, and mercy. It could be. If our hearts are not hardened, we'll consider all these things in light of His Word, and His Word will predominate in our lives.

Application: Submit to God's Word

We should always be willing to submit to Him and bow to Him because He's too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. He does not make mistakes. If we do not want hardened hearts, we must learn to consider everything in light of the Word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word, truth, grace, and mercy. Help us, Lord, to have the Word of God predominate in our lives, to learn to consider everything in light of Thy Word, to search Your Word, and to have understanding. Keep our hearts from being hardened. May we give Thee the honor and glory. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

Chapter 1: Hardened Hearts - Part 3
JW00427 | SermonAudio

Chapter 2: Hardened Hearts - Part 1 of 3
JW01498 | YouTube

Chapter 3: Hardened Hearts - Part 2 of 3
JW01499 | YouTube

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