

# The Relevant Warning in Pharaoh's Obduracy

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God created man in His own image and endowed him with a sinless soul. His intention was that man should be an associate of His holiness. Through the Fall, man forfeited his innocence; he became alienated from the life that is of God. He is by nature spiritually dead. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Dead persons cannot see. Accordingly, spiritual death implies spiritual blindness. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). Man, who from the Law written in his heart may know something about God's omnipotence and justice, cannot from this source learn who the true God is. And as man's intellect is darkened, so is his will perverted. Man resists God with all faculties of his soul. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). This, then, is man's natural condition, a condition which in Pharaoh's case led to the hardening of his heart.

In einer verhärtung des Herzens befindet sich schon von Natur der Mensch; sein Herz ist von Natur hart. Es ist von Natur unempfanglich für die Wirkungen des göttlichen Wortes. Auf diese natürliche Hartigkeit beziehen sich Stellen wie: Hes. 36, 26; Matth. 19,8; Mark 10, 5; 16,14. In diesen Stellen sind doch nicht Leute vorausgesetzt, die actualiter sich gegen die Wirkungen des göttlichen Wortes verschliessen. Man kann daher wohl mit Meisner den Unterschied von einer induratio organialis, welche in den genannten Stellen vorliegt, und einer induratio actualis machen.<sup>1\*</sup>

This last condition which is mentioned by Hoenecke is the obduracy which we are concerned with in this paper. It is the actual hardening of the heart by the individual himself, a heart which is later and forever hardened by God.

Thus, Pharaoh is given in Scripture as an example of obduracy, an example which should be a relevant warning for us today. For what is the greatest sin? Is it murder, the wanton taking of human life? Is it the worship of idols, of false gods? Is it blasphemy against the holy name of God? Is it the violation of the code of moral decency? True, all these are sins of crimson dye, sins that call down the vengeance of God. And yet none of these crimes, repulsive as they are; qualifies as the greatest sin. Black as they are, they can all be forgiven through a repentant faith. God has promised it; the examples of Holy Scripture prove it.

There is one offense, however, that makes all other sins pale in comparison, an offense which, if continued, removes a man from the realm of God's grace. That is the sin of willful, stubborn rejection of the preaching of the Law or the Gospel.

Unter Verstockung verstehen wir denjenigen Zustand eines Sunders, da weder die Predigt des Gesetzes, noch des Evangeliums einen Eindruck auf sein Herz macht.<sup>2\*\*</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909). Vol. II, pp. 443-444.

\* Trans. No. 1 cf. end notes.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

\*\* Trans. No. 2 cf. end notes.

In considering this sin of obduracy; which removes a man from the realm of God's grace, let us first of all take a look at the history of Pharaoh's hardening of the heart so that we can see how he fell into this sin. We begin this history with Moses and Aaron who went before Pharaoh and demanded what the Lord had told them. "Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land" (Ex. 7:2). The miracle which they were to show him, that would testify that they were God's messengers, was the miracle of the rod which would become a serpent. However, Pharaoh had some of his magicians do the same with their rods, and even though the serpent into which Aaron's rod had been changed swallowed up the serpent of the magicians, he refused to accept it as a testimony to God's power and glory as the Lord of all. Thus, he refused to believe in Jehovah, the God of salvation, who would deliver His people from bondage. Therefore, God began to plague Pharaoh to demonstrate that He was God of gods, and Lord of all; and beside Him there is no god, no power, no deliverance, and no salvation without Him.

The first plague was that of blood. Moses lifted up the rod and smote the river, and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The river began to stink, because the fish that were in the river were killed and the river became polluted from the dead fish. Egypt could not have been touched in a more sensitive spot. The Nile was the pride and idol of Egypt. But now her god was loathsome, an object of disgust and death. It goes without saying, that Pharaoh's faith must have been shaken and weakened in the god of the Nile. But because the magicians did on a small scale what seemed to be as much of a miracle as that which followed on the word of Moses, Pharaoh would not relent; he would not believe in God as God and would not accept His Word.

So, after a week, a plague of frogs was sent. They literally covered the land of Egypt. The country has always abounded with these creatures, but now they swarmed in thousands everywhere, in the bed-chamber of Pharaoh, and in the very ovens and kneading-troughs in which the bread of the people was prepared. It must be remembered that the frog was a sacred animal to the Egyptians; to kill it was sacrilegious; and yet to live in the midst of its swarming multitudes was hideous. The heart of Pharaoh now relented a little, and the frogs died, and in putrid heaps polluted the land.

But as the plague departed, Pharaoh's heart grew hard again; and a third plague came, the plague of lice. The bodies of men and of all living animals were invaded. No one was exempt, neither the Pharaoh nor his subjects. These tiny bugs clung to everyone and made their lives almost unbearable. Even though the magicians at this point were not able to imitate the production of these insects, Pharaoh was now more stubborn than before.

Therefore, God sent a fourth plague. Flies came in countless swarms. They were everywhere and the air was filled with them. The conjecture is that they were stinging insects, a species of gnat; whose bite brought much pain to the Egyptians and possibly made their days miserable and their nights sleepless. Nonetheless, if they were not species of gnat and were nothing more than the common house fly, the distress would be no less inconceivable. For they certainly made their lives hectic by crawling all over their bodies and food before it was eaten. With this plague Pharaoh relented insofar as he permitted them to offer sacrifice to God. However, they were not to go into the desert, but they were to keep the feast in Egypt.

But such a compliance was not sufficient. A fifth plague quickly followed in the form of an affliction of the cattle—murrain. It seized all the domesticated animals in which the wealth of the nation consisted. And so impoverishment and want followed. As for the Pharaoh, his heart was not yet converted. There upon followed, in this history of Pharaoh's chastisement, the sixth plague. The ashes of the furnace were thrown by Moses and Aaron into the air, and it became a boil with blains. In other words, painful swellings and sores broke out all over the body, breaking out both upon man and beast. All living creatures in Egypt suffered from its effects. Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, there was no sickness.

Pharaoh, however, was still not converted, and a seventh plague followed. Rain is almost unknown in Egypt. The prophet Zechariah speaks of "the family of Egypt...that have no rain" (Zec. 14:17). Yet there descended upon the land of Egypt a storm of hail with a terrific and destructive violence, accompanied with an electric phenomena to increase their suffering. Egypt had never seen anything like it. The consequence can be readily conceived, in that the country was more than likely marred, ruined and transformed by such a hailstorm.

Pharaoh bowed before this dreadful plague and asked the prayers of God's messengers. So, "the hail ceased and the rain was not poured upon the earth" (Ex. 9:33).

Quickly, however, his heart was hardened and he was again the same God-defying Pharaoh. Then God sent the eighth plague of locusts. What vegetation remained after the hailstorm was thereupon eaten up by the locusts until nothing remained but a naked desert. Pharaoh's heart quivered under this affliction, and again he asked the intercession of Moses and Aaron.

At their entreaty the storm ceased only to find Pharaoh as hard and stubborn as ever. God thereupon sent the ninth plague of darkness. Egypt, with its almost cloudless sky, experienced the sun's rays of light everyday. Now all of a sudden the light was withheld. A darkness that could be "felt" enveloped the whole country, so that the people could not see one another, and so it says "Neither rose any from his place for three days" (Ex. 10:23). All normal activities of their daily lives were made impossible to do by this plague of darkness.

However, one more plague remained. Pharaoh, after the ninth plague of darkness, cowered before the afflicting hand of Jehovah and conceded all that God's servants asked, namely, to let them go into the wilderness to worship, only requiring that the flocks and herds of Israel in the green pastures of Goshen, untouched by hail and locusts, should stay behind as guarantee that they would return. When this qualified consent was not accepted by Moses, he became so infuriated at the demand that he said to Moses: "Get thee from me! Take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die" (Ex. 10:28). And it was as he requested—Moses saw his face no more. But now the last and severest of all the plagues came upon the Egyptians and afflicted every family except those of the Hebrews, who were instructed concerning its passover how to protect themselves from its path of death. It was a fearful judgment; no language can portray it so vividly as the words of Scripture itself:

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and, when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. (Ex. 12:21-30)

Then, finally, when that blow fell upon them, there went forth the command: Depart! This command, however, was not given out of a heart filled with love, but a heart which now despised any remembrance of Jehovah, the God of salvation. Now, on the one hand, these plagues demonstrated the supremacy and the glory of the Lord over the Egyptian gods. The devouring of the serpents by the serpent into which the rod of Moses had been turned was directed against the serpent-worship of Egypt; the turning of the water into blood was an assault on their sacred river, the Nile; the plague of the frogs, the gnats, the flies, all tended to bring objects of idolatrous worship among the Egyptians into contempt; the murrain among the cattle was directed against their Apis worship; Apis was the idolized sacred bull, but he, too, was afflicted and died; the plague of boils, brought

on by the casting of ashes from the furnace or altar of sacrifice into the air, a rite which they followed to arrest evil, showed how God could reverse their omen and make what they used for good to turn to evil; the hail and storm plague was directed against their worship of the elements or of deities supposed to preside over them; the plague of darkness poured contempt on their worship of the sun-god; and the death of the firstborn, which wound up this terrible series of plagues, showed that in the hand of God alone was the life of all His creatures. A mighty and a memorable lesson was thus dealt out before both Egyptians and Israelites. In the case of the former, it had its effect in weakening their attachment to their idols, and in the case of the latter, it confirmed them in their reverence for Jehovah as the only true God.

Now these plagues, on the other hand, demonstrated that God desired to convert Pharaoh's heart. But, when Pharaoh would not receive God and His grace into his heart, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Therefore, the first of these plagues were aimed at Pharaoh's heart to change it and to call it to repentance and faith in God. However, since Pharaoh would not heed God's call, and since he continually hardened his heart against God, God finally hardened Pharaoh's heart. The point of seeming difficulty lies in the expression "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." This has been taken by some to mean that God, while sending judgments and plagues upon the Egyptian Pharaoh, acted in such a manner upon Pharaoh's heart that he could not do otherwise than he did, so that the rejection of God's demands was not really the act of Pharaoh, but was caused by God's compulsion. But if this were the case, how could God punish Pharaoh for doing what he could not help doing? In other words, God would then have acted unjustly; He, God, would have been at fault, not Pharaoh. When we meet with seeming acts of injustice ascribed to God, we ought to realize that they are being misunderstood by us, that there must be some explanation which removes the apparent injustice. In order to better understand this, we need to take a look at the Hebrew text. A careful survey shows us that different expressions are used. Although in our English version only the word "harden" is used, in the Hebrew original three different terms are employed: קשה and כבד חזק.

חזק is a pe guttural verb which means in the Qal = to tie fast, to bind, to be strong, to be hard, or more often used as the intransitive - (expressing an action or state as limited to the agent or subject, or as ending in itself) to become hard or hardened (self-hardening). The Piel always indicates an utter, complete, or total action and this particular verb in the Piel also has a causative action = to harden someone (hardening by God). According to Theo. Laetsch, the self-hardening is to be found in the Qal and is used as such four times, Ex. 7:13, 22; 8:15; and 9:35. The Piel is used in the hardening of the heart by God and is used as such eight times in all, Ex. 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, and 17.

כבד in the Qal = to be heavy, to be dull, hindrance of the use of the senses, also of the mind not easily moved, and therefore obdurate (self-hardening). In the Hiphil this verb has a causative action = to make heavy, to make hard, to harden the heart (self-hardening and the judgment of hardening). According to Theo. Laetsch, the Qal is used only in the self-hardening, Ex. 7:14 and 9:7, and the Hiphil is used three times in the self-hardening, Ex. 8:11, 28, and 9:34 and is used once in the judgment of hardening Ex. 10:1.

קשה in the Qal to be hard, to be heavy, used of the hand of God in punishing. In the Hiphil it means to make difficulties, to make heavy, to make hard, to harden, followed by (heart) to harden any ones heart. As Theo. Laetsch notes that in Ex. 7:3 the Hiphil is used in God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh, but that in Ex. 13:15 it is used in the sense of Pharaoh making difficulties for the children of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

In following these Hebrew verbs in the original text, we find that, with the exception of the two passages (Ex. 4:21 and 7:3) in which the divine agency in hardening is beforehand announced to Moses for his instruction, the hardening process is during the course of the actual history, in the first place, traced only to Pharaoh himself. Thus, before the ten plagues, and when Aaron first proved his divine mission by converting the rod into a serpent, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened," (Ex. 7:13-14) that is, by himself. Similarly, after

<sup>3</sup> *Concordia Theological Monthly*. (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1932). Vol. 3 Jan., 1932, p. 8.

each of the first five plagues (7:22, 8:11 (Eng. 8:15), 8:15 (Eng. 8:19), 8:28 (Eng. 8:32), 9:7) the hardening is also expressly attributed to Pharaoh himself. Only when still resisting after the sixth plague do we read for the first time, that "the Lord made firm the heart of Pharaoh" (9:12).

Und nun lesen wir nicht wieder, wie bisher, dass Pharaos sein Herz verstockte, sondern: 'Der Herr verstockte das Herz Pharaos.' Sechsmal hatte Pharaos sein Herz verhartet. Nun tut der Herr selber, was Pharaos bisher getan hat. Wenn der Mensch hartnäckig auf sein eigenes Herz, das von Natur schon hart ist, eingeschlagen hat, um es noch härter zu machen, dann schlägt auch Gott schliesslich ein auf das Herz, nicht mehr zu dem Zweck, um das stolze Herz zu zerbrechen, zu zerkleinern, zu bekehren, sondern, O graues Gottesgericht! um es in seinem Trotz und in seinem Ungehorsam zu verhärten, zu verstocken. Nachdem der Mensch immer und immer wieder mit Wissen und Willen die Tür seines Herzens verschlossen hat, sie gegen alle Versuche Gottes, in das Herz einzukehren und es zu seiner Wohnung zu machen, zugeschlagen und verammelt hat, dann nagelt Gott wohl selber die Tür dieses Herzens zu und nagelt sie so fest zu, dass niemand sie öffnen kann. Damit tut Gott abet nur, was der Mensch in eigener Selbstverschuldung zuvor getan hat. Gott vollendet und vollführt sozusagen nur das von dem Menschen begonnene Werk.<sup>4</sup>

From this hardening process which we have been speaking about, we realize that while the first six plagues were chastisement, the last four were judicial punishment. Chastisement, for example, is that suffering which has for its end the good of the sufferer. A father punishes his child in order to correct faults in his child. So God sends us trials and tribulations, either to bring our sins to our remembrance and to lead us to repentance, or to strengthen our faith. Suffering because of judicial punishment, on the other hand, is that which has for its chief end the good of others. For example, an officer of a bank embezzles a large sum of money, and the penalty provided by law is a long period of imprisonment to deter people from committing similar crimes. So it was with Pharaoh. God sent Moses to show by way of miracles that the God in whose name he spoke was worthy of his faith and worship. God offered to Pharaoh His grace in the Messiah of Israel, but Pharaoh rejected this offer of grace and pardon. He followed up this testimony by other evidences of His almighty power to bring Pharaoh to his senses and to repentance and faith. However, Pharaoh deliberately refused to obey God's command to let His people go and after the removal of each plague, he renewed his stubbornness and defiance, as if determined to prevail against God's almighty power. And then it was that fighting against his Maker and perversely impenitent, God sent punishments that were entirely judicial for the purpose of vindicating His name and honor. We must keep in mind that in this matter Pharaoh acted, first of all, sinfully, then God acted judicially. In other words, Pharaoh, first of all, hardened his own heart against God and then, and only then, did God harden this confirmed sinner's heart.

Thus, as we have seen, neither here nor elsewhere do we find that God makes it impossible for men to come to faith in Him and become an heir of everlasting life. Nowhere in the Bible do we find any mention of some foregone decree of God by which he has forever shut out some from all chance of being anything but reprobates. Pharaoh, as is shown from the history of his obduracy, was by his own voluntary, deliberate, personal wicked acts, fitting his heart for this "hardening." Therefore, we should take Pharaoh's obduracy as a relevant warning for ourselves, because anyone may bring the same condition upon himself. If God's messages and judgments are continually and willfully rejected, if the voice of conscience is stifled, the result is that such a man "hardens his heart." But God is not the cause. However, like Pharaoh, man by his own haughtiness, insolence, pride, etc. which causes man to reject God and His grace, invites God's eternal judgment upon his heart.

In this connection Luther can point to the mysterious phenomenon of human obduracy. God is equally harsh both when He hardens a man's heart and when He does not bestow His Holy Spirit

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

on an individual. Isn't God, then, the cause of obduracy and responsible for it? In the case of obduracy, God is not the cause of sin, He executes judgment upon it. "This is an act of divine judgment whereby God, in full justice, allows a man who has steeped himself in the habit of sin (*hominem habitualiter malum*) to fall into even more grievous vice, because of some antecedent avoidable transgression committed with full individual consent."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, an essential factor for us to bear in mind when studying God's Word and when applying it both to ourselves and to our fellow men is that God earnestly wants to save all men. God plays no favorites; He is no respecter of persons. He has not predestined anyone to eternal damnation. His love is so great that He has a fervent desire in His own divine heart to gather all His erring and wayward people unto Himself and to bestow upon them the precious gift of life eternal. For, indeed, God "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

Accordingly, even Pharaoh (of whom it is written, Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17: In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth) perished, not because God had begrudged him salvation, or because it had been His good pleasure that he should be damned and lost. For God is not willing that any should perish, 2 Pet. 3,9; He also has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, Ezek. 33, 11.

But that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, namely, that Pharaoh always sinned again and again, and became the more obdurate, the more he was admonished, that was a punishment of his antecedent sin and horrible tyranny, which in many and manifold ways he practiced inhumanly and against the accusations of his heart towards the children of Israel. And since God caused His Word to be preached and His will to be proclaimed to him, and Pharaoh nevertheless willfully reared up straightway against all admonitions and warnings, God withdrew His hand from him, and thus his heart became hardened and obdurate, and God executed His Judgment upon him; for he was guilty of nothing else than hell-fire. Accordingly, the holy apostle also introduces the example of Pharaoh for no other reason than to prove by it the justice of God which He exercises towards the impenitent and despisers of His Word; by no means, however, has he intended or understood it to mean that God begrudged salvation to him or any person, but had so ordained him to eternal damnation in His secret counsel that he should not be able, or that it should not be possible for him to be saved.<sup>6</sup>

The same truth is taught in Rom. 9:22-23, where Paul says that God endured the vessels of wrath "with much long-suffering." In other words, he is saying that God sought to convert and save them too. In this connection Stoeckhardt in his *Römerbrief* says,

Gleichwohl hat er die Gefässe des Zorns, vor erweisung seines Zorns in grosser Langmuth getragen. Damit ist nicht nur gemeint, wie z. B. Hofmann will, dass Gottzorn and strafe aufgeschoben hat. 'Eine blosser *prolongatio irae*, welche das Strafgericht verzögert, ist nun einmal keine Langmuth. ' Weiss. Die *μακροθυμία* Gottes hat immer die Busse and Besserung der Sunder zum Zweck. 'Gott hat Geduld mit uns *μακροθυμία εἰς ἡμᾶς*, and will nicht, dass jemand verloren werde, sondern dass sich jedermann zur Busse kehre.' 2 Petr. 3, 9... Wir haben oben

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., vol. 23, Oct. 1952, p. 732.

<sup>6</sup> *Triglot*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), F.C. Thor. Decl. XI. p. 1091.

gezeigt, dass das Gericht der Verstockung, welches den schliesslichen Zorn im Gefolge hat, von dem Menschen verschuldet ist, immer die Selbstverstockung des Menschen zu seiner Voraussetzung hat. Gott hat denen, die er zuletzt verstockt and verdammt, zuvor Gnade angeboten and sie ernstlich retten wollen. Aber sie haben nicht gewollt. Und nun hebt Paulus an unserm Ort hervor, dass Gott gegen die Gefässe des Zorns auch gar geduldig and langmuthig gewesen ist, dass er sie nicht nur einmal, sondern wiederholt zur Busse and Umkehr gemahnt, gereizt and gelockt hat. Und zwar hat Gott auch dann noch die Gefässe des Zorns in grosser Geduld getragen, als sie schon reif waren zum verderben."<sup>7</sup>

God would, therefore, draw us to Himself by the constraining attraction of His long-suffering love. But He does not use His almighty power to enforce such obedience. Enforced obedience is without value. Enforced love is not love. Love is essentially free and spontaneous. God calls us, invites us, warns us, threatens us, chastens us, manifests love towards us, that the sight of that great love may kindle the flame of love in our unloving hearts. He came down from heaven for us and our salvation. He gave himself into death for our sins and thus manifested the fathomless depths of His great love. He declares His love through the Cross of Christ. And if then there is no response on the part of man to that love, man becomes hardened against such love and becomes doomed forever as a heart-hardened sinner. That is why the rejection of divine love, God's grace, is such a great sin, for it is a damning sin. Therefore, the tragedy of unrequited love finally turns into the tragedy of avenging justice. Both love and justice are divine qualities. God cannot deny either. When we despise our opportunities, these opportunities must turn into divine judgments. God's dealings with us rust have issues; we cannot play with them as we like. If God acts in mercy, He does not forego His claim. We cannot toy with God's mercy. We cannot trifle with His gracious approaches. God's grace, when persistently spurned, is finally withdrawn, and then He must deal with us as obdurate and heart-hardened sinners and pronounces us in His judicial decree as such. This decree does not prove, however, that God does not seriously will the salvation of all men.

On the contrary, the Scriptural doctrine of obduration proves that God seriously willed the salvation of these men. According to Scripture, God does not harden a man according to an absolute decree, but his hardening results from his own guilt, from man's resistance to God's Word and will. Obduracy is God's dreadful judgment upon those who despise the grace offered them and resist the operation of the Holy Ghost. It sets in, as Rom. 11:9 expressly states, as 'a recompense unto them.' That is clearly seen, too, from the context of the passages in the Gospels which speak of hardening, blinding, hiding of the grace, etc.: John 12:40; Matt. 13:14-15; 11:25-26; 23:38; etc. The words of John 12:40: 'He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,' are preceded try the words: 'Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you .... While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus and departed and did hide Himself from them. But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him.' The account of the hiding of grace (Matt. 11:25): 'Because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent,' is preceded by the account of how urgently God had offered His grace to them, v. 20 ff.: 'Then He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not,' etc. And by describing the persons from whom God's grace was hidden as 'the wise and prudent,' Christ indicates that here a judgment of God is being executed on people who set their own wisdom against the divine revelation of grace. Yes, it is stated that God withdrew His grace from the Jews (Matt. 23:38): 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.' But mark well, the words that immediately precede are these: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,

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<sup>7</sup> Stöckhardt, *Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1907). Pp. 457-458.

thou that killest the prophets ...how often would I have gathered thy children together ...and ye would not.' If Jews were hardened, this hardening came upon them because, as Stephen tells them: 'Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye' (Acts 7:51). The Scripture doctrine of obduracy is thus no proof against, but for the *gratia seria et efficax*."<sup>8</sup>

Yes, today, and every day, the grace of God through Christ Jesus ought not to be trifled with. It is offered to the children of men, and when persistently rejected, the avenging wrath of God is inevitable. The one great unpardonable sin is the persistent rejection of grace. There is noticeable today a wide-spread spiritual desolation, which is due to the fact that Jesus Christ is rejected. The Spirit of God wants to dwell in our individual hearts. We are to be temples of the Holy Ghost. But God will not dwell with those who reject His Son. There are so many diversions in our day which would make our religiousness seem a matter of small concern. And yet our eternal destiny depends upon our attitude towards the mercy that God offers us. We are either in humility to accept the grace of God or to deliver ourselves to His avenging justice. Rejection of the crucified Savior is such a great sin because it spells the doom of an immortal soul over which God Himself has yearned and for which the Son of God gave up His life.

What accounts for this attitude of rejection or heart-hardening? Why do so many persons reject God's Word and the offer of salvation through Christ? Can it be that God does not desire to extend His grace to them? We have already said enough to answer this question, for God is, "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). What then is the reason? It is man's stubborn refusal of God and His grace. That is the reason why so many are lost. It is altogether their own fault. They are not willing, nor do they desire to turn away from their sins and receive God and His grace through faith.

Gottes Wort sagt uns, dass wir zum glauben kommen nach der wirkung der allmachtigen stark. Gottes, welche er gewirkt hat in Christo, da er inn von den toten, auferweckt hat, Eph. 1,19.20, dass also die bekehrungsnade eine allmachtige grade ist. Dasselbe Wort Gottes sagt uns, dass die menschen die traurige macht besitzen, sich gegen these allmachtige, heil spendende gnade zu verhärten and zu verstocken and also an ihren teil den allmächtig wirkenden gnadenwillen Gottes ausser kraft zu setzen. Gottes Wort sabbt uns, dass es Gottes ernstlicher wille sei, alle menschen zu bekehren and selig zu machen. Dasselbe Gotteswort, sagt uns auch, dass derselbe barmherzige, gnadige Gott in gerechteza gericht gewisse sunder verstockt, verhärtet, sie in ihren verkehrten sinn dahingibt, aufhört, noch weiter an ihnen zu arbeiten, ihnen schon bei ihren lebzeiten gelegenheit un kaum zur busse abschneidet. Die selbstverstockung des menschen ist die grausigste sunde, deren der mensch sich schuldig machen kann, die verstockung des menschen durch Gott das grausigste gericht, das in dieser welt über einen menschen kommen kann.<sup>9</sup>

The righteous judgment or judicial punishment upon such willful rejection, therefore, results in Gods sentence of declaring their hearts now and forever hardened. This, as we have seen, happened to Pharaoh, who rejected God and His grace. Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord" (Ex. 5:2).

Not all, however, who die in unbelief have been guilty of obduracy. This sin means that as a result of it God cuts short a man's time of grace before he dies. He continues living, but has no more chance to repent because God has hardened him. This is a judgment of God pronounced on a person who has hardened himself before he dies. It is not possible for us to know when God has inflicted this on an individual. Hence, we can only warn people against hardening themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951). Vol. II, pp. 30-31.

<sup>9</sup> Concordia Theological Monthly, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 7.



Thus Pharaoh's obduracy is a relevant warning for us today. For the punishment that befell Pharaoh will befall everyone who spurns the chastisement of the Lord, who will not hear God's Word of salvation and as a result reject God and His grace. If we were to continually say as Pharaoh did, "I know not the Lord," the Lord would surely say to us, "I don't know you." If this were to happen, then we would live and one day die the death of a heart-hardened sinner, whose reward is hell.

### TRANSLATIONS:

No. 1 - Hoenecke, pp. 443-444,

By nature from his very origin man finds himself in a condition of hardening of the heart, because by nature his heart is hard. It is by nature unreceptive for the working of the Word of God. Also this natural hardening of the heart is spoken of in the following passages: Hes. 36:26; Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5 16:14. In these particular Scriptural places people are not presented who have "*actualiter*" closed themselves against the working of the divine Word. For this reason a person could very well with Meisner note the difference of the original hardening which are mentioned in these places and an actual hardening.

No. 2 - Hoenecke, p. 442

Under hardening of the heart we understand that condition of a sinner, who neither pays any attention to the preaching of the Law or the Gospel it makes no impression upon his heart.

No. 3 - Concordia Theological Monthly, p . 108.

And now we read not again, as before, that Pharaoh hardened his heart; but: "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh." For six times Pharaoh hardened his heart. Now the Lord does the same thing which Pharaoh before hand had done. For when a person in a hard-necked way has refused to do something against his own heart, which by nature is already hard, in order to make it still harder, then God finally strikes in upon that heart, not anymore for this purpose, to break the proud heart, to make it smaller, to convert it, but, O very gruesome judgment of God!, in order to harden it in its opposition and disobedience. After man again and again with his will and his knowledge has closed the door of his heart against all of the efforts of God to enter into that heart and to make it into His dwelling place, after God has closed this, then God indeed Himself nails the door of this has closed and nails it so fast that nobody is able to open it anymore. Herewith God, however, is only doing that which man, responsible for himself, has already done. God finishes and brings to a conclusion, so to speak, only that work which man has begun.

No. 4 - Stöckhardt, pp. 457-458.

God endured the vessels of wrath with much long-suffering, before venting His wrath on them. This patience does not merely mean, as Hofmann holds, that God postponed wrath and punishment. "A mere *prolongatio irae*, delaying the judgment, is after all no long suffering." Weiss. The *μακροθυμία* of God always has as its aim the repentance and improvement of the dinner. "The Lord... is long-suffering to usward, *μακροθυμία εἰς ἡμᾶς*, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," 2 Pet. 3:9.... We have shown above that the judgment of obduration, on which the extreme wrath follows, is brought upon men by themselves, always has as its necessary antecedent condition the self-hardening of man. God has previously offered grace to those whom He ultimately hardens and condemns and has earnestly sought to save them,

but they would not. And now Paul stresses in our passage that God has been very patient and long-suffering toward the vessels of wrath, that He not merely once, but repeatedly urged and invited them to repent and be converted. And note that God even then endured the vessels of wrath with much long-suffering when they were already fitted to destruction.

No. 5 - Concordia Theological Monthly; p. 7.

The Word of God tells us, that we come to faith by the working of the almighty power of God, which He has worked in Christ, that He raised Him from the dead, Eph. 1:19,20; that, therefore, the conversion grace is an almighty grace. The same Word of God says to us, that men possess very sadly this power to harden themselves against this almighty salvation-giving grace and to harden themselves also on their part against the almighty working of the gracious will of God and to put themselves out of its power. God's Word says to us, that it is the earnest will of God to convert all men and bring all to salvation. This same Word of God tells us also, that this same gracious merciful God in righteous judgment hardens certain sinners, gives them over in their perverted thinking, and discontinues further to work upon them, already in their lifetimes cutting off from them the opportunity and place to repent. The self-hardening of man is the most gruesome sin which man can make himself guilty of, the hardening of men through God the most gruesome judgment, which in this world can come over men.

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