
Hard Hearts in the House of God!

By David Wilkerson

September 1, 1997 What I am about to say may shock you - but I believe it with all my heart: The hardest hearts in this world are not among the ungodly - but among God's people!

When we think of hardhearted people, most of us tend to think of avowed atheists such as Madalyn Murray O'Hair - the woman who was instrumental in removing prayer from public schools. Atheists like O'Hair ridicule the very idea of God. Whenever they refer to Christians, their words have a harsh, biting edge. Other atheists flaunt their hatred for God - such as the rock performer Marilyn Manson, who rips up Bibles during his stage show. Whenever we hear about such people, we think, "Those are the most hardhearted people in the world!"

Or, we may think of militant gay activists, such as those who marched up Fifth Avenue in New York City several weeks ago. Many of those marching homosexuals mocked Christianity and blasphemed God's name. One man carried a sign reading, "Jesus Is Gay." Whenever we hear of such people, we think, "Their hearts have become hardened because of sin. They're impossible to reach!"

Or, we may think of the communist nations that for decades persecuted Christians. In Cuba, for instance, just miles off the Florida coast, Fidel Castro's communist regime closed all churches and began turning cathedrals into training centers for communism. Cuba's leaders boasted, "We have wiped out all religion!" And at the time, many Christians thought, "No one could be more hardhearted than these God haters!"

I could go on and on, describing all kinds of scoffers, mockers, blasphemers, rejecters of Christ. And, indeed, each of these could accurately be described as being hardhearted. But if you want to discover the hardest hearts of all - the ones the Lord most despises - you have to look in God's house. The hardest hearts are always found among his people!

According to the Bible, The Hardness of Heart That God Most Despises Has to Do With the Hearing and Rejecting of His Word.

"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).

The Hebrew word for "reprov'd" in this verse refers to corrective teaching. And the word for "without remedy" here is "marpe" - meaning, "without a cure," "without any possibility of deliverance." This verse first tells us that hardness of heart comes as a result of rejecting repeated warnings - of pushing aside all warnings of the truth. And, second, it tells us that over time such hardness becomes impossible to cure. So, who are the people that most often hear these warnings? They are supposedly Christians - those who sit in God's house each week listening to sermons of reproof!

The tragic truth is that in spite of hearing fiery messages sent from heaven, multitudes of Christians do not practice what they hear. They refuse to allow God's entry into certain areas of their lives. And as they continue to hear without heeding, a hardness begins to set in. In the end, they will be cut off without hope of ever being cured!

In contrast, there are some gay activists whose hardness of heart has been cured. At first they cursed

Christ and shook an angry fist in God's face. But when they heard the gospel and felt the pure, loving reproof of the Holy Ghost, their hearts melted. They repented and turned to Jesus, their hardness being cured.

Now, you may be thinking, "Wait a minute. Are you saying that a sin-hardened, radical homosexual has the hope of being cured of his hardness - but a sin-hardened Christian has no such hope? How could this be?" The difference is, the homosexual referred to hasn't heard message after message of reproof and continually hardened himself to it. But the Christian has!

The life of Madalyn Murray O'Hair's son illustrates this. He had been raised in probably the most atheistic household in America. And he later worked for his mother, crusading against God and religion. But when he heard the gospel, he got gloriously saved - and he later became a minister, preaching Christ instead of cursing him. This man's hardness was curable also - because he hadn't sat under sermons of reproof and continually rejected them.

The same is true of many people who lived for years under communist rule. When the Iron Curtain fell, the gospel immediately flooded those formerly communist countries, and thousands accepted Jesus. Red Army troops converted left and right, and even some top generals became powerful witnesses for Christ. Within a matter of days, government officials, schoolteachers and even the KGB were asking for Bibles and preaching Christ to those under their influence.

Our ministry held crusades in Poland just before the collapse of communism in that country. It was one of the few times officials had allowed anyone in to openly hold religious meetings. Each night as I preached, hundreds of young people literally ran to the altar - weeping, brokenhearted, hungry for Christ. They all had been brainwashed against religion. But their hardness was curable - because they had not sat under continual reproof and hardened themselves to God's word.

In my experience, the hardest hearts - the incurable kind - have always been found within earshot of Holy Ghost-anointed preaching. Such hardness doesn't exist in cold, dead, formal churches, where the gospel has been corrupted for generations. No - it is always found where a pure word is preached from the pulpit - and rejected in the pews!

You may ask, "What exactly is a hard heart?" A hard heart is one that is determined to resist obeying God's word. It has become impossible to stir, immune to the convictions and warnings of the Holy Spirit.

Please don't mistake me: Hardening one's heart is not just a matter of turning against God, or rejecting Christ, or refusing to go to church. The fact is, your heart can become hard even if you're at church every time the doors are open. You can become hard while listening to teaching tapes...singing God's praises...serving as an usher, a teacher, a member of the worship team. Indeed, you can become so hard to God's word while performing acts of service that even if Jesus himself were to preach from the pulpit, you would turn a deaf ear to him!

Right now, you may be saying to yourself, "Whoa! This all sounds a little too scary for me." Rest assured, I don't want to frighten anyone into contrition of heart. But the truth is, if you regularly ignore the warnings of God's word, you'd better start attending the deadest church you can find. That way you won't be judged as severely as you would by continuing to sit in a Holy Ghost church and reject the anointed word you hear. If you keep doing that, your heart will harden beyond any cure!

Let Me Hold Up the Plumb Line, and Measure You According to the Gospel Truth You Have Heard.

I want to give you a test, to see whether you have already taken the first steps toward hardness of heart. Let me ask you the following questions:

1. How many times have you heard or read messages about the danger of neglecting daily prayer and Bible reading?

I have many written messages on this subject, knowing that hard times are about to fall upon our society. And yet many readers still refuse to pick up their Bibles or spend just five minutes speaking to their heavenly father. Beloved, if you neglect your secret closet at home - if you think praying at church takes care of all your needs - you will never survive the troubled days ahead. Think about it: If you won't heed the word that is meant to heal and strengthen you in good times, how will you ever find power to overcome during the difficult days to come?

If you have ignored the Holy Spirit's wooings to draw you to the secret closet for intimacy, then you have taken the first step toward hardness of heart. You may fill all your time doing good works, blessing people and pouring your heart out in Christian service. But if you neglect time with the Lord - refusing to seek his face or heed his word - you will become weak, fearful, depressed, and finally a prey for the devil. Having a personal knowledge of your heavenly father is the only way to prepare for what is coming!

2. How many times have you been warned of the awful consequences of gossip?

At times, my warnings on the subject of gossip have been like soft, gentle rain - and at other times, they've been like rolling thunder. I have written about how gossip and murmuring cost Israel everything. Time after time, the Israelites were warned of the dangers of this sin. But they persisted in disobeying the Lord - and it brought them a lifetime of misery in a snake-infested desert!

Now, let me again hold up the plumb line to your life: Have you said something against a brother or a sister during the past week - something you had no business repeating? Or have you listened to any gossip about that person? If so, did you allow a seed of doubt about him or her to be planted in your soul?

I ask you - how could you continue to gossip, in light of all the warnings you've heard? The only answer is that you've already started down the path toward hardness of heart!

3. How many warnings have you heard against harboring a secret sin?

What about that besetting sin in your heart - the one that God's Spirit has continually spoken to you about? Over the years I have written many warnings about the dangers of flirting with a pet sin. Yet not only have I preached against sin, but I have taught of God's resurrection power. I have preached that the Lord both endues us with overcoming power through his Spirit, and puts a will in our hearts to do right.

Yet I know people who have sat under my teaching at Times Square Church for years - and they still drink, smoke, curse and carouse. Beloved, that is a hard heart! Who dares to sit under loving reproof

week after week and yet go on sinning, never allowing conviction to sink in? It is someone who's heading down the path toward hardness of heart!

It Is Possible to Love Hearing God's Word - to Appreciate And Approve of What Is Preached - and Yet Grow Incurably Hard While Listening!

You can sincerely believe you have accepted a sermon simply because you have heard it, thought about it and discussed it over Sunday dinner. Yet you can do all that and still be a hearer only - and not a doer of God's word!

The children of Israel loved to hear the powerful preaching of Ezekiel - but they never obeyed it: "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice...for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezekiel 33:31-32).

Many people in our congregation have approached me after a service, hugged me and said, "Pastor, that was a powerful word you preached." But as they walked away, the Holy Spirit whispered to me, "They didn't hear a word you said!"

The book of Hebrews gives us a powerful warning: "As the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (Hebrews 3:7-8). "For some, when they had heard, did provoke [rebel]..." (verse 16). These passages clearly show that hardness is not connected to atheism, communism or any other "ism" - but, rather, to hearing and not doing God's word.

I know many people in Times Square Church who are kindhearted, gentle, sacrificial - and yet they are in danger of becoming hardhearted! I have sought the Lord about this, asking, "Father, how can these dedicated, hardworking people hear sermon after sermon of reproof, and yet never change? They come to your house week after week, worshiping you, praising you - but they're not growing into maturity. I know this, because I hear them gossiping, and I know about the other sins in their lives. They love to hear your word preached - but they simply don't obey it. Lord, what keeps them from obeying your word?"

God showed me that it all goes back to their conversion. These neglectful people were never converted in the first place! You see, the Bible speaks of two types of conversions: First, there is a conversion that leads to healing and deliverance from all sins. This is the kind most Christians have experienced. But there is also a conversion that leads to hardness and blindness. Let me give you an illustration.

Israel gladly listened to the powerful preaching of the prophet Isaiah - yet they continually justified their sins, calling evil good and good evil. So, God instructed Isaiah: "...Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:9-10).

God knew the Israelites were not willing to lay down their besetting sins. They loved their fleshly

pleasures and ungodly companions too much. So the Lord told Isaiah, "These people are never going to change their hearts. And from now on, I won't speak a word to them. Instead, I want you to hurry them into their hardness, Isaiah. That way, perhaps some will listen before it's too late!"

Simply put, God was calling for a full surrender from his people. He was saying, "If you're going to be called by my name - if your heart is going to be converted - then it has to happen in a way that delivers you from your sins, heals you and sets you free from all bondage!"

I thank God for the multitudes of Christians who started their walk with Jesus the right way - by loving truth and obeying God's word. They had godly sorrow over their sins, and their repentance was wholehearted. When they forsook the ways of their flesh, they fell in love with the Lord, and his word became to them a guiding lamp. And today they give themselves unreservedly to obeying his word.

The Second Kind of Conversion Is What the Army Calls "Foxhole" Religion.

This second type of conversion is what happens to some soldiers when they go into battle. Once they hear the bullets whizzing by and see the bombs dropping all around them, they look death in the face - and they quickly cry out to God!

This is the type of conversion Pharaoh had. At one point he'd heard seven reproofs from the Holy Ghost, but he still wouldn't obey the Lord's command to free Israel. And now God sent Moses to Pharaoh for an eighth time, with this message: "...Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exodus 10:3).

God had already warned Moses about what Pharaoh's reaction would be: "...Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart..." (verse 1). You may ask, "What chance did Pharaoh have? After all, the Lord had hardened his heart." No! The wording here can appear misleading. Pharaoh's hardening did not happen by eternal decree; rather, scripture tells us in an earlier passage: "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said" (8:15).

Each time Pharaoh refused to obey the Lord's command, God visited Egypt with a severe plague. And each time Pharaoh would cry, "Okay, Lord - I'll do anything you want. Just get me out of this mess!" Yet once he was delivered, he always went back to his rebellion.

The Bible says the same thing about Israel's fathers: "But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks..." (Nehemiah 9:16-17).

God always knows what's in a person's heart. And he knows when someone will listen but not obey, choosing instead to go his own way. He knew this about Pharaoh - because after seven reproofs and plagues of judgment, Pharaoh's heart had grown steadily harder.

Now an eighth plague was about to fall upon the Egyptians, and it was something they greatly feared: locusts. Throughout the Bible, locusts signify ruin and destruction. In many instances they represent

God's retribution upon a people. Indeed, the prophet Joel likens a particular invading army to a swarm of locusts: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten...my great army which I sent among you...that executeth his word..." (Joel 2:25, 11).

God didn't always send such plagues merely to punish, but rather to bring about his divine order and will. Many residents of our Timothy House and Sarah House ministries know this firsthand. They've lost jobs, finances, health, marriages, families - all because the locusts of alcohol and drugs devoured everything in their lives. Yet, it was through such plagues that these men and women turned to Jesus.

In Egypt, swarms of locusts descended on the land overnight, devouring everything in sight - crops, plants, new growth, even the bark on trees. By the time these bugs were finished, not even a blade of grass remained:

"The locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they...for they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees...and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt" (Exodus 10:14-15).

The massive swarms filled the Egyptians' houses. Everywhere the people turned, they saw locusts - on the floor, in the kneading trough, in the milk, in their clothes, in their beds. These locusts buzzed their wings with a terrifying sound and chomped and chewed everything in sight. Within days, Egypt lay in total ruin.

At this point, a small but very important word appears in scripture - the word "then." "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you" (verse 16).

Pharaoh confessed his sin, admitting his wrongdoing. And it sounded like his repentance was full and complete. But what was his motive in repenting? Scripture spells it out clearly in Pharaoh's own words: "Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only" (verse 17). Pharaoh was saying, "Yes, I sinned - and I'm sorry. Now, hurry up, Moses, and get me out of this mess. Pray to your God for me. I'm in trouble, and I have to have relief!"

Pharaoh saw that he was about to lose everything - so he repented in hopes that God would deliver him from the mess he'd brought on himself. All he wanted was relief from his trouble!

What First Brought You to the Lord?

Did you first come to the Lord as Pharaoh did - only because you wanted something from God? Did you turn to him in order to kick a drug habit, to have your marriage restored, to be delivered from financial trouble? Did you say to yourself, "If I come to Jesus, maybe he'll work things out."

The truth is, Christ will work miracles for you. He will do the impossible in your life. But if you come to him only to get something from him - only to be delivered from your problems - you will never grow an inch in maturity. On the contrary, you will only grow hard!

Think back to the time of your conversion. Did it happen after some locust had eaten everything away? Was your health debilitated in some way? Was one of your children in trouble? Did you end up in devastation, with death and ruin hovering over you?

Please don't misunderstand me. Of course, God loves to save people who end up in ruin. When all is lost, he is always near - and he is faithful to deliver. But, beloved, you cannot come to Jesus just to get relief! You must come to him because he is God - and because he deserves your life, your worship, your obedience.

It is a dangerous thing to come into God's house and go through the motions of worship. You may teach, you may usher, you may sing in the choir - and you may tell yourself, "I remember my conversion well. I asked Jesus into my heart five years ago." But if your heart truly had been converted at that time, it would show in your life today.

You would be growing spiritually - reading the Bible often, taking all your needs and problems to God, spending precious time with him in your secret closet. And whenever you heard warnings about coming locusts, you would take heed - because you know your father's commands issue out of his love for you.

Right now you may be saying, "Yes, Brother Dave - I admit I've been neglecting God's word. And I'm still bound by a besetting sin. Am I too hardened - too far gone - to receive the Lord's healing touch?"

No - not at all! If you will begin to call on the Lord today, in the midst of your need, he will bring you times of refreshing. Whenever you bring to him a truly repentant heart, he will act not as your judge, but as your mediator and intercessor. Right now he is saying to you, "Just call on me, and I will do it for you. I will come to you, supplying all you need to keep your heart tender and broken before me."

Do you want to grow into maturity in Christ? Do you want the Lord to keep reproving you in love and guiding you toward life and godliness? Then call on him today. Nothing will keep you on his intended path for you more than a broken and contrite heart!