

Q. Many Calvinists say that it is God who hardens people's hearts. But John 12:40 uses two different pronouns: "He hath blinded...I should heal them." Certainly, God heals, so the "he" who hardens seems to be someone else. Doesn't this mean that God does not harden people's hearts?

A. Let's look at this in context.

In John 12:37, we read, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." Jesus showed them many miracles, but they did not believe on Him. Why? Verse 38 tells us: "That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Why didn't they believe? To fulfill Isaiah's prophecy (see Isaiah 53:1). John emphasizes this again in verses 39 and 40: "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Once again, they could not believe because of Isaiah's prophecy.

The prophecy referred to in these verses is in Isaiah 6:10: "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." Now let's read the previous verse in Isaiah 6: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not" (verse 9).

God told Isaiah to go to the people and tell them to hear and not understand, see and not perceive. Doing this would make the hearts of the people fat, their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they should see and so forth and convert and be healed. Notice that "be healed" is

passive. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that only God can do this. Thus, God told Isaiah to say something that blinded the people so they would not convert and be healed by God.

Who told Isaiah to do this? God. Did Isaiah as a mere mortal have the power to blind, deafen, and harden the people? Of course not. Isaiah was only the tool. So, who blinded, deafened, and hardened the people? God.

Now, in John 12, John says that the people not believing on Jesus was a fulfillment of this same prophecy from Isaiah. Even though Jesus did miracles in front of them, they did not believe on Him so that this prophecy could be fulfilled. Admittedly, the way John wrote the prophecy in John 12:40 sounds a little confusing because of the pronouns he used. But who could make sure that this prophecy was fulfilled? I can think of no one who could do this but God. And the fulfillment of the prophecy depended on the blinding and hardening. Thus, it was God who blinded and hardened. And certainly it is God who would have healed them if they had believed and been converted.

Now, you can argue for two different persons here if you want to. But who would they be? Perhaps John purposely reworded the prophecy to apply to Jesus' case in this way: God has blinded their eyes...so they should not see...and be converted and I [Jesus] heal them. Or, perhaps, someone might want to say that the he who blinds is the devil. This agrees with 2 Corinthians 4:4, although I will point out that it doesn't fit the context of John 12. Nevertheless, even if this is a reference to the devil, I must still ask, Who made sure the prophecy was fulfilled? Would the devil want to make sure a prophecy was fulfilled? If the devil was involved, he was involved only as a tool of God.

There are people who seem not to want to believe that God hardens people's hearts because they do not want to accept that God is sovereign to that degree. Some have said, for example, that God did not harden Pharaoh's heart because this would make Pharaoh not responsible for disobeying God, and it would be contrary to God's loving-kindness and mercy. But, in fact, they are placing their human reasoning above the Bible. One such reader quoted Exodus 7:13, "And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said," and then the reader said that "he hardened" cannot refer to God. But this reasoning ignores the weight of Scripture.

A literal translation of Exodus 7:13 shows that the first part is in the passive voice: "And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as Jehovah had said" (*A Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, Copyright © 1976 – 2000 by Jay P. Green, Sr.). It is not the first part of the verse that tells us who hardened Pharaoh's heart. It only tells us it was hardened. It is the last part that tells us that this was done "as Jehovah had said." And how did Jehovah (or the Lord in the King James Version) say it would be done? He said it would be done by Him, that He would harden Pharaoh's heart (see the next paragraph). So, it is wrong to say that the "he" that appears in the King James Version in Exodus 7:13—"he hardened Pharaoh's heart"—refers to someone other than God because in the Hebrew there is no "he" there at all. What is important is that God said that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened as God said it would, and the way God said it would be hardened is that He, the Lord, would cause it.

Exodus 4:21 says, "And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go." Who says He will harden Pharaoh's heart? God. Exodus 7:3 says, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." Who says He will harden Pharaoh's heart? God. Exodus 14:4 says, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so." Who says He will harden Pharaoh's heart? God. Exodus 14:17 says, "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." God hardened the hearts of the Egyptians. Joshua 11:20 says, "For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses." Using *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone, we see that without any possibility of a doubt God hardened Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of the Egyptians.

Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." This means that He can harden it or soften it or cause it to decide this way or that. In fact, God is sovereign over every human being. Is this unfair? In Romans 9:17-24, we read:

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

God can do with His creation as He sees fit. And let's remember something else. Because of our naturally wicked hearts, not one of us deserves salvation. The only reason anyone is saved is because God intervenes and turns some of our hearts to Him, giving us faith in His Son as Savior, thereby saving some people. God's graciousness is based on His sovereignty, and without God's sovereignty, no one would be saved.

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