

Q. You say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of the people who did not believe Jesus. Doesn't this make God unfair, unloving, and unmerciful as well as the author of sin?

A. In a single word, No. Let me explain. In doing so, bits of what I will say I have covered in other articles. But most of this is new material.

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?

Notice that this passage says that God has mercy on whom He will and

hardens whom He will. Thus, having mercy on someone and hardening that person are put in opposition. Some have one, some the other. Yet, God is the cause of both.

Then Paul, anticipating the kind of question you have asked, says, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault?" Why are people responsible if it is God who has hardened them? Paul answers in two parts. First, he says that the creation has no right to find fault with its Creator. The Creator has every right to make some for honor and some for dishonor. In the King James Version and some others, Paul puts the second part of his answer in the form of a rhetorical question (it can also be translated as a statement, but I will use the KJV): "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?" In other words, God, as the Master Potter, puts up with the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction so that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy that He had prepared in advance for glory (see also Matthew 13:28-30).

God is the ultimate and first cause of everything (Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 44-45; and many other Scriptures). But He is not the immediate cause of all things. We need not try to dance around the obvious meaning of Isaiah 45:7: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." God is the ultimate cause of sin because He has brought all things into being. But God is not the immediate cause of sin; that is, He does not sin. The sinner sins.

God is the ultimate cause of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* because God is the cause of the entire universe, John Bunyan and his book included. But John Bunyan is the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Likewise, God is the ultimate cause of Judas Iscariot's sin of betraying Jesus Christ. This is because He created the universe, and He created the universe with the intent of glorifying His Son by creating humans whom He determined would sin and need His Son as their Savior, and Jesus would be their Savior by atoning for their sins on the Cross, and to do this He needed to be betrayed so God determined to create a man called Judas Iscariot for the purpose of betraying His Son. Yet, it was Judas Iscariot who committed the sin and is responsible for it. Thus, God is the ultimate cause of sin but never the author of it.

Perhaps you will say it is not fair. But God is not held to your standard of fairness.

So, is God unfair, unloving, and unmerciful? Absolutely not! Notice some of the verses from Psalm 136: "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever" (verse 10); "But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever" (verse 15); "To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever" (verses 17-20). So, smiting the firstborn of Egypt, which included tiny infants, and overthrowing Pharaoh, and smiting famous kings are all acts that are in accord with God's mercy which endures forever.

What nonsense people sometimes espouse by saying that there are forces at work over which God is not sovereign! What arrogance they raise up by saying that they know better than God what is fair, loving, and merciful!

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.

You want to hold God to your standard of right and wrong, but He will not be held to it. Here is why.

- God is the standard of right and wrong. Whatever God does is right. If He smites the firstborn of Egypt, it is right and good. If He hardens Pharaoh's heart, it is right and good. If He is the ultimate cause of Judas betraying Jesus, it is right and good for God even if Judas is held accountable for his sin.
- God knows the end from the beginning and everything works for the good. Therefore, God knows that everything that He is doing is good, even if it seems bad to us. On the other hand, our inner motives for sinning are our own selfish reasons. God created Pharaoh as someone who would harden his heart, so, ultimately, God hardened Pharaoh's heart and this glorified God and brought about good. But, as far as Pharaoh knew, he hardened his own

heart for his own selfish reasons, and so he was responsible for his sin. Judas did not betray Jesus so Jesus could be our Savior. He did it for sinful reasons, but God caused it for our good.

- God is not subject to any law or standard. If there were a law or standard above God, it would be God. Laws are merely created things and inferior to God. God is above all law, including His own. And God is not subject to our puny, human standards of what is merciful, just, or fair. We must not twist Scripture to try to say that God did not do what it says He did simply because this seems contrary to our standard of love and mercy.
- God can do with His creation as He sees fit. He holds the power of life or death, salvation or damnation over everyone. God can decree sin, yet He is never responsible for it. God can be the ultimate cause of sin, but those who commit the sin are the ones responsible.

So, God's being the first cause of Pharaoh's hardened heart does not make Pharaoh any less responsible for his sin. This is true for anyone whose heart God hardens. This is absolutely not contrary to God's fairness or justice, His love, or His mercy. It is just that we must understand those terms as God defines them in the Bible and from the perspective that we are all undeserving sinners. And it does not make God the author of sin. We are the authors of our own sins.

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By the way, the best book I have found on this subject is a little one (only 55 pages of text) by Gordon H. Clark. It is called *God and Evil: The Problem Solved*. You can buy it on amazon.com.

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