

Are God's Commands Burdensome?

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Introduction

i. When we open our Bibles, we often turn to passages in which men and women came in contact with God or with the Gospel and refused it like it were a piece of rotten fruit. We chuckle at their stupidity and remark at how we would have acted differently if we were there. “How could those foolish Jews disobey God over and over? How could the Christians disobey Jesus when his apostles were writing them personally? How could Pharaoh be so stupid to try to stand against God when he wanted His people to be let go?”

ii. We will talk about some of the reasons that God was disobeyed in past times. But we want to learn in reality why God is disobeyed in the present. Could it be that God's commands are simply too burdensome?

Discussion

I. The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus

A. What Did It?

1. Exodus 9:12 says God hardened his heart while 8:32 says Pharaoh hardened his own heart; which is it?; obviously, both

2. God made a demand of Pharaoh—“Let my people go!”—and Pharaoh made up his mind that he would not do it

a. God's part was making a demand upon him

b. Pharaoh's part was making up his mind—hardening his heart—not to do it

3. we see the simple principles here that were present in the Garden of Eden and are present in 1994: a command of the living God and the free choice of man to obey or refuse

B. The Meaning in the Text

1. as in most literature and in figurative language “heart” really refers to the mind as the center of emotions and thoughts the heart in the Bible; thus, a hardened heart is simply a mind that is made up and set

2. three different Hebrew words are used in the text, but all are translated “hardening of heart” in English, and all are defined similarly

a. “to make insensitive, unmovable or unimpressionable”

b. Pharaoh had made up his mind and nothing was going to make an impression upon him to change; he was in a state of mind that was stubbornly set upon rebellion and rejection of the commands of God

C. Why Was Pharaoh's Heart Hardened?

1. the command was made by a God whom he neither knew nor feared

a. Pharaoh's set of gods was artificial and included him as well

b. obeying another would have displaced self as his object of worship

2. the command was communicated through messengers whom he did not believe were from God

a. he did not respect them

b. the message was of secondary importance to the messenger

3. the command was contrary to his personal desires and plans

a. his heart was set upon building up his wealth

b. this command would cost him the tools he needed to succeed physically

4. the urgency of the command was decreased in his heart by the relief from the plagues that God allowed; on the occasions when Pharaoh was impressed with the plague and promised to obey God, God took away the plague; when the trouble passed, Pharaoh returned to rejecting God

D. What Was The Result?

1. Pharaoh continued to rebel against God; evidence suggests his soul will be lost for eternity

2. but God's plan succeeded without him!

II. What Does God Ask of Us?

A. We Must Love Him: Mark 12:28-30

1. this verse perhaps more than any shows the total commitment to God that He commands of his children
2. heart, soul, mind, and strength (ὅσους)—the latter implying “to the extent of one’s ability”
3. the command to love God sums up all that we must do in relation to Him in order to please Him and maintain a good relationship with Him

B. We Show This Love In What We Do: John 14:15

1. one may say that he loves Jesus, but the proof is in the facts—does he keep the Lord’s commandments
2. there are a million people in the world who claim to love Jesus but the facts betray them
 - a. I know those who claim to love Him in between using filthy language
 - b. I know those who claim to love Him in between nights at the local bar
 - c. I know those who claim to love Him but have forgotten the way to the meeting house
 - d. I know of one who claims to love Jesus and yet murdered two people
3. this command is not my own; not an attempt to twist the scriptures in any way: 1 John 2:3-6
 - a. with some, it is not even a question of loving the Lord, it is as if you don’t know him at all
 1. one who claims to know the Lord and be close to Him betrays his assertion when he lives as a foreigner from His words
 2. you can call yourself a Christian—you can have T-shirts made up with Christian printed all over them—you can legally change your name to Joe Christian, but if you do not abide in the gospel, it doesn’t mean a thing!
 - b. he who wears the name but rejects his words is a liar!
 1. as if I claimed to be a disciple of Socrates
 - a. I know nothing of his teachings; I don’t follow any of them so far as I am aware
 - b. calling myself a disciple of Socrates would not make it so
 - c. simply calling myself a disciple of Jesus doesn’t make it so either!
 2. you may fool men, but “the Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19)
 - a. instead of worrying whether or not brother Jeff or brother Alton knows if you are abiding in Christ you should be concerned with what Jesus is seeing in your life
 - b. you might hide any number of things from us but you’ll never hide anything from Him!

C. Specifically

1. he commands that we believe in him, confess him and render obedience in the waters of baptism for the remission of our sins
2. he commands that we maintain a proper relationship with him through abiding attention and obedience to his will
 - a. he commands that we gather on the first day of the week to worship him publicly
 - b. he commands that we worship him in all that we do every day: Col. 3:17
 1. before doing anything questionable, test it: can I do this in the name of the Lord
 2. can I go to this place of entertainment and take Jesus there with me?
 3. can I stay home on Wednesday night and watch TV with the Lord—or might he be more interested in what is going on over on Wonsley Drive than what is going on at Melrose Place?
 3. it seems like everyone of these lessons comes back to attendance sooner or later
 - a. attendance has been called the barometer of spirituality
 1. if someone’s attendance is poor, the chances are that the rest of their lives is even worse in spiritual terms
 2. attendance is usually the most obvious part of someone’s dedication to God—if it is poor, then he is most often in worse trouble at home and elsewhere
 - b. perhaps though, God’s command to gather to worship is burdensome
 1. alas, God gives us only 168 hours a week, how dare he expect four and a half of them back in the form of assembled worship?—the nerve!
 2. all Jesus did was die for us—how dare he expect us to remember him around the table each Sunday?

3. but you say, “I would never say that or even think that.”
 - a. oh yeah, remember your actions speak louder than your words
 - b. Jesus said to keep his commands—do you do that?
- c. John said that God’s commands are not burdensome in 1 John 5:3
 1. what do your actions say?
 2. Jesus commands that you be here on Sunday morning but you have a house full of company who wants you there—what do you do?
 3. Jesus says be here to study on Sunday night with your brethren but you already spent two and a half hours here this morning and you’re tired—what do you do
 - a. I wonder if Jesus was tired as he hung on that cross
 - b. you know what—he hanged there longer than he expects you to sit here each week!
 4. Jesus says be here on Wednesday night but the kids have school in the morning and you know how important education is—do you really?

III. The Hardening of Men’s Hearts

A. God’s Commands Are Not Burdensome

1. believe, repent, confess and be baptized
2. walk in Christ—be disciples in deed

B. Some Are Hardened Against The Gospel Through Lack of Fear of God

1. many hold to a myth that the God will exercise a different kind of mercy upon mankind in judgment than what is described in the Bible
2. if you want to take that chance, maybe you should plan on having a hot time in eternity

C. Some Are Hardened Through Disrespect For God’s Messengers

1. many hate to hear sermons that step on their toes—it hurts!
2. they despise the preacher that shows them the insufficiency of their service to God or the foolishness of their rationalizations
3. you can forget who it is that says it to you, if it truth, then it will stand
 - a. if an atheist walked in here and said that homosexuality is sinful, it would be 100% true
 - b. the message is the important thing, not the messenger
 - c. if you find it difficult to accept the truth from me, we’ll talk about that, but don’t reject the truth based on that—it will be your soul that will suffer, not mine

D. Some Are Hardened By Personal Desires That Outweigh the Will of God

1. work is necessary but is taking too many away from service to the Lord
2. work at home is important, showing hospitality to company is important, school and homework are important—but not before the work of the Lord
 - a. put services ahead of them and put home Bible study ahead of them
 - b. put the Biblical education of your children ahead of them

E. Some Are Hardened By Patience

1. some count God’s patience in allowing them to continue to live until now as a sign that their lack of concern for Him will never catch up with them: Romans 2:4-5
2. others count the patience of the brethren as a sign that they will never be disciplined for walking disorderly; don’t count patience as sign that the situation isn’t urgent, that repentance and an orderly walk can wait a while longer
3. the situation is urgent when your soul is in peril: 1 Tim. 4:2 and Titus 1:16

Conclusion

You must realize that God has the power to save the obedient and punish the disobedient and choose which group you want to be eternally joined to. “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” but come to the Lord and be added to the saved or take the steps back to them.