

*HOW A HEART GETS HARD*  
Alderwood Community Church  
ROMANS 11:1-10

**BIG IDEA:** A tender heart toward God is of immeasurable value.

**Romans 11:1-10**, *I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.* <sup>2</sup> *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew [i.e., the nation, not individuals]. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel:* <sup>3</sup> *"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?* <sup>4</sup> *And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."* <sup>5</sup> *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.* <sup>6</sup> *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* <sup>7</sup> *What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,* <sup>8</sup> *as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."* <sup>9</sup> *And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them."* <sup>10</sup> *May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."*

I. **HARDNESS OF HEART STARTS WITH SPIRITUAL DRIFT**

**VERSES 1-3**, *I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.* <sup>2</sup> *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel:* <sup>3</sup> *"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?*

1. Israel enjoyed divine favor
  - God selected Abraham
2. Israel possessed divine promises
  - God made a covenant with Abraham
3. Israel rejected divine prerogatives
  - Israel spurned their God-things
    - **Verse 3 is a quote from Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10**, *He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*
    - They rejected the **prophetic office**:
      - **Luke 11:47-51** *"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them."* <sup>48</sup> *So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs.* <sup>49</sup> *Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.'* <sup>50</sup> *Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world,* <sup>51</sup> *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.*
    - They rejected the **salvific altar**
      - **NOTE: Morris:** *There was, of course, to be only one altar in Israel (Deut. 12:13-14), but it seems that from time to time other altars were regarded as acceptable (Exod. 20:24; Judg. 6:24-26), and particularly would this be the case in the northern kingdom when it would be difficult for people to go to Jerusalem to worship (cf. 1 Kings 18:30).*
  - BUT, note that not everyone drifted...
    - Cf. Paul. **Morris:** *He underlines his Jewishness with three statements....The Jews venerated Abraham as the great forbear of their race; Paul will have this*

*in mind, but also the fact that the patriarch had special significance for him as the great exemplar of faith. Benjamin was the only son of Jacob born in the land of Israel. It was the tribe in whose territory was the holy city of Jerusalem; it was the one tribe that remained faithful to Judah. And it may not be out of mind that the first king of Israel came from this tribe and that his name was that of the apostle...*

- **NOTE: Verse 2, whom he foreknew—Morris:** *But did God foreordain the whole nation to be saved? That is not implied. Paul appears to have in mind that God chose Israel to be his people. The people in whom his purpose would be worked out in a special way. They would be the recipients of the revelation and of many blessings (cf. 9:4-5). God would never go back on that. But none of this ever meant that the entire nation would be saved.*
- **Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird*:** *The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience.*
- *Crumbling is not an instant's act,  
A fundamental pause;  
Dilapidation's processes  
Are organized decays.*

*'Tis first a cobweb on the soul,  
A cuticle of dust,  
A borer in the axis,  
An elemental rust.*

*Ruin is formal, devil's work,  
Consecutive and slow—  
Fail in an instant no man did,  
Slipping is crash's law.<sup>1</sup>*

--Emily Dickinson

4. Conclusion: Who rejected whom?

- **Bumper Sticker:** *If you feel far from God, guess who moved.*
- **Verse 1, I ask then:** *Did God reject his people? By no means!*
  - **Answer in Verse 2,** *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.*
  - **Quotation from 1 Samuel 12:22,** *For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.*
- **Morris:** *God is thoroughly reliable, and it is impossible to think of him first choosing and then rejecting a people.*
- **NOTE: Drift took place over generations.** *My friend D. A. Carson made an interesting observation in a personal conversation we had. He said that one generation believes a truth, the next generation assumes a truth, and the third generation denies a truth. Practically speaking, this means that every Christian family, church, and network or denomination is always a few generations, at most, away from death or heresy.<sup>2</sup>*
- **NOTE: Drift can even happen to an evangelical pastor—Ralph Turnbull!** *There is another discovery we shall make in the midstream of our life work. The apparent danger to many is not that we will turn into criminals or blackguards, that we will wreck our lives and shame our families or churches. There are not many black sheep in the flock. The danger is that we may become respectable, decent, commonplace, uninteresting mediocrities. If our minds are becoming sterile and anemic and our hearts cold and dead, it is because we have lost our passion for the Lord and the things pertaining to His Kingdom. In the meridian of life the mind and spirit may die long before the body. We are dead when we cease to grow in grace*

<sup>1</sup> In Charles Swindoll, *David* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), 188.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books: 2008), 55.

and in knowledge. The demand for youthful preachers today is not unfair when it is the wish for the minister to be a student of divinity all his days and not a wish to examine his birth certificate. The growing preacher will never lack for opportunities to minister, and happy is he who in midlife is still drinking from the fountain of the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

- **NOTE: We must arrange life so that sin no longer looks good to us.**<sup>4</sup>

## II. HARDNESS OF HEART CAN BE PREEMPTED BY GOD

**VERSES 4-6,** *And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." <sup>5</sup> So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

1. There is evidence for divine preemption
  - Elijah's remnant
  - Paul's remnant
  - **Godet:** *the indestructible existence of a believing remnant at all periods of their history.*
  - **Note Verse 4,** *"I have reserved for myself. Martin Luther: He does not say: When they were all cast away, seven thousand men were left over, or: When Nebuchadnezzar of the devil took them away, he left me seven thousand men, but: I myself kept them back, I who took them, i.e., the others, away.*
  - **Note on Verse 5,** *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.— Morris footnoting CGT: "It is God's free generosity, not their own desserts, which preserves the remnant."*
  - **Martin Luther:** *My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and to go against conscience or Scripture is neither right nor safe.*
2. There is grace for divine preemption
  - Grace is antithetical to works. **Verse 6,** *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works;--i.e., once you understand grace you understand that there is no place for works in salvation.*
  - Works empties grace of meaning

## III. HARDNESS OF HEART IS A CONSEQUENCE OF JUDGMENT

**VERSES 7-10,** *What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, <sup>8</sup> as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." <sup>9</sup> And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. <sup>10</sup> May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."*

1. Judgment is unimpressed by misguided zeal
2. Judgment starts with cognitive impairment (brain freeze)
  - **Morris:** *The passive may well ascribe the hardening to God (the passive was often used as a reverent way of avoiding the name of God). But, while it is certainly true that God did the hardening in verse 8, it is the people who do the stumbling in verse 11 and it is possible that the passive here is a neutral expression which may be taken either way. In either case we must remember that those who failed God did not do so because they had been hardened but they were hardened **because they had failed him.***
  - **FOOTNOTE ON PHARAOH: Romans 9:16-18** *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Turnbull, *A Minister's Obstacles* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1964), 166.

<sup>4</sup> John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 70.

- 1) In all fairness to God, **before** the Book of Exodus says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, two times it is mentioned that "*Pharaoh hardened his heart*" himself (**Exodus 8:15, 32**). Only **after** that does the Bible say that **God** hardened Pharaoh's heart. So Pharaoh set the sails of his heart and God then filled them with wind.
  - **Morris quotes Earle:** "*A drunkard may claim that he is not responsible for what he does. But he is accountable for getting into that state. So with those whose hearts are dulled by disobedience.*"
- 2) But, nevertheless, God could have applied mercy to this man's heart if He wanted to. Look how God wonderfully saved Paul who was a violent persecutor of the church! Why did God do it for Paul but not Pharaoh? I don't know. God just says, "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.*"
  - **Romans 11:7-8** *What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,* <sup>8</sup> *as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."*
    - **Verse 8 QUOTES A COMBINATION OF TWO VERSES:**
      - **Deuteronomy 29:4** *But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear.*
      - **Isaiah 29:10** *The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers).*
    - See Ortberg quote on incompetence in John Ortberg, "The Sin Tamer," *Leadership Journal*, Spring 2009, 32. *Somebody asked Dallas Willard once if he believed in total depravity. His reply was that he believed in "sufficient depravity." Never having run into that doctrine before, the interviewer asked for clarification. Dallas said, "I believe that every human being is sufficiently depraved so that no one will ever get into heaven and say, 'I merited this.'"*

*Perhaps we are sufficiently depraved that the more we grow spiritually, the more our awareness grows of the health and sanity of what a life freed from depravity would look like.*

*Psychologists who study incompetence say that the first result of incompetence is the inability to perceive my incompetence. Maybe spiritual growth involves an increased capacity to diagnose the true condition of my soul.*
3. Callousness:
  - **Psalm 17:10** *They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance.* [David's wicked, mortal enemies]
  - **Psalm 73:7** *From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.* [The arrogant prosperous wicked]
  - **Psalm 119:70** *Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law.* [the arrogant slanderers]
  - **1 Timothy 4:1-2** *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.* <sup>2</sup> *Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*
    - **kausthria, zw** pf. pass. ptc. **kekausthriasme, noj** (and **kekauthriasme, noj**); active *brand with a red-hot iron*; of a slave *mark with a brand*; figuratively, of destroying the function of conscience *cause to be insensitive, make unfeeling, harden*; passive and idiomatically **kausthria, zesqai th.n sunei, dhsin** literally *be seared in respect to the conscience, i.e. refuse to listen to one's conscience* (**1T 4.2**)
4. **Verses 9-10**, And David says: "*May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block [better trans = "the bait stick of a trap] and a retribution for them.* <sup>10</sup> *May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.*"

- **...are a quote from Psalm 69:22-23** *May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap.*<sup>23</sup> *May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.*
- **Ravi Zacharias:** *A few years ago when I was speaking in Poland I was taken to the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau. I shall never be the same. Many, many times in silence I have reflected upon my first visit there, where the words of Hitler envisioning a generation of young people without a conscience are aptly hung up on a wall, grimly reminding the visitor of the hell unleashed when his goal was realized.*  
*I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality....We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.*  
*On display for all to behold ate thousands of pounds of women’s hair, retrieved and marketed as a commodity by the Nazi exterminators, architects of the final solution that sent multitudes into the gas ovens. The incredible reminders—from rooms filled with pictures of abused and castrated children to the toiletries and clothing that are stacked to the ceiling—cast an overwhelming pall of somberness upon the visitor.*<sup>5</sup>

#### CONCLUSION:

1. **Mark Twain:** *Your conscience is a nuisance. A conscience is like a child. If you pet it and play with it and let it have everything it wants, it becomes spoiled and intrudes on all your amusements and most of your griefs. Treat your conscience as you would anything else. When it is rebellious, spank it—be severe with it, argue with it, prevent from coming to play with you at all hours, and you will secure a good conscience; that is to say, a properly trained one. A spoiled one simply destroys all the pleasure in life. I think I have reduced mine to order. At least, I haven’t heard from it for some time. Perhaps I have killed it from over-severity. It’s wrong to kill a child, but, in spite of all I have said, a conscience differs from a child in many ways. Perhaps it’s best when it’s dead.*<sup>6</sup>
2. *Years ago I was walking in New Delhi, India, with my father. We were hoping to catch a break in the traffic to cross the street when a boy approached us. He was probably six or seven years old, skinny as a rail, and naked but for tattered blue shorts. His legs were stiff and contorted, like a wire hanger twisted upon itself. He waddled on his hands and kneecaps, which were covered with huge calluses from the broken pavement. As I had many other times in India, I wanted to close my eyes and pretend people in such misery didn’t exist. But this persistent boy wouldn’t let me.*  
*He shouted at us, “One rupee, please! One rupee!” The little guy was amazingly fast on his kneecaps, managing to stay ahead of us and in our field of vision. Finally, realizing he wasn’t going to give up, my father stopped.*  
*“What do you want?” he asked.*  
*“One rupee, sir,” the boy said while motioning his hand to his mouth and bowing his head in deference. My father laughed.*  
*“How about I give you five rupees?” he said. The boy’s submissive countenance suddenly became defiant. He retracted his hand and sneered at us. He thought my father was joking, having a laugh at his expense. After all, no one would willingly give five rupees. The boy started shuffling away mumbling curses under his breath.*  
*My father reached into his pocket. Hearing the coins jingle, the boy stopped and looked back over his shoulder. My father was holding out a five rupee coin. He approached the stunned boy and placed the coin in his hand. The boy didn’t move or say a word. He just stared at the coin. We passed him and proceeded to cross the street.*  
*A moment later the shouting resumed except this time the boy was yelling, “Thank you! Thank you, sir! Bless you!” He raced after us once again—not for more*

<sup>5</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Nashville: Word, 1994), 23

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Silvester, ed., *The Norton Book of Interviews* (NY: W. W. Norton and Co., 1993), 86.

*money but to touch my father's feet. He blocked our way and alternated raising his hands with shouts of acclamation and bowing at my father's shoes. He was literally worshiping us.*

*This, I imagine, is how our God sees us—as miserable creatures in desperate need of his help. But rather than asking for what we really need, rather than desiring what he is able and willing to give, we settle for lesser things. And when God graciously says “no” to our misled desires and instead offers us more, we reject him. We turn away, cursing him under our breath. We simply cannot imagine a God who would give five rupees when all we desire is one.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Skye Jethani, “Stranded in Neverland,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2009), 55.