Hard Hearts

When the Bible speaks of man's heart it is an examination of one's intellectual (see Proverbs 23:7), emotional (Matthew 22:37), and intentional (Hebrews 4:12) capacities. The heart of man is to be formed or patterned after the instructions found in God's word (see Romans 12:1-2). The gospel message directs man in paths he must go to please the Lord (see Jeremiah 10:23). The heart of man hears, considers, and determines to do the will of God.

Interestingly, it is the very gospel of Jesus Christ that promotes either obedience or disobedience in people. The apostle Paul writes, "But thanks be unto God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and makes manifest through us the savor of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one a savor from death unto death; to the other a savor from life unto life..." (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). The Calvinists may conclude from this passage that God arbitrarily pre-selects some to understand and benefit from the gospel message and some are no so pre-selected.

Furthermore we find that God actually hardens the hearts of the ungodly. The prophet Isaiah writes, "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 turn again, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:10). Again, the prophet writes, "Jehovah hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes, the prophets; and your heads, the seers, hath he covered" (Isaiah 29:10). Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote, "And for this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Furthermore, the Bible tells us that it was
Why does the gospel harden some in sin? Why does God harden the hearts of men? The picture painted in our minds from the above statements is that of one unable to come to truth and obedience because it is not what they want out of life. When God commanded Pharaoh of Egypt to let the Hebrews go he would not do it because it was not what he wanted to do (see Exodus 5:1-2; 10:1-3). Here are people who will not subject themselves to the standard of God and are thereby hardened in sin (see Romans 8:5-7). Sadly, the more truth some hear the more it hardens their hearts against God.

God permits sinful man to make sinful choices and live in sinful ways (see Romans 1:24ff). God has not predestined man to failure or success but rather leaves man with a free will to make his or her own choices. While some would say that the above passages confirm Calvinism (born in sin with no free will in the matter) it is obvious that the opposite is true. God desires all men to be saved yet many are more desirous to do their own will rather than the will of God. When the will of man is placed over the will of God there are two things that occur. First, God's divine standard has separated the just and righteous from the refuge (see Isaiah 28:17). Secondly, man makes it manifest who he is interested in serving in this life (see Matthew 13:10ff; Romans 6:15ff and 1 John 3:7-10).

When solid book, chapter, and verse preaching occurs many are angered and hardened. The call, from the hard hearted, is that of soft and peaceful words that do not convict nor make one feel uncomfortable. Isaiah wrote of the rebellious of Judah as they proclaimed to the prophets of their day saying, "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isaiah 30:10b). Again, Jeremiah writes, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jeremiah 5:31).

The bottom line is one's heart. Will we be those who are hardened by the gospel or will we read God's word, understand it, and live it? No doubt it is easier to get angry at the Lord and his gospel message and never render obedience. Yet, such a choice will never lead one to heaven. Never loose sight of heaven and you will do well.

John C. Robertson
The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Introduction:

Never has the world heard such a message that brings such various responses. The gospel of Jesus Christ inflames some because it convicts (see John 15:19-25; Hebrews 4:12-13) and comforts others (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Some mock and some are willing to hear more of the gospel (Acts 17:32). Those who are able to see the end of this life and the consequences of all choices will look to the gospel as that power of God to save man's souls (see Romans 1:16). This lesson shall examine the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. The Identity of the Gospel:
   A. The gospel is the truth (Ephesians 1:13).
   B. Greek - euangelion = messenger / announce, proclaim, publish news. Basically the term means "good news."
   C. The Good news - Luke 2:10-13 / 1 Corinthians 15:1ff
   D. A law (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2; James 1:25; Hebrews 7:12, 18; 8:6-7).

II. The Gospel in Prophecy:
   A. Gospel spoken of in the OT (see Isaiah 2:1ff; Jeremiah 31:31ff).
   B. Gospel is God's own words to man (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1).
   C. Gospel is of a divine origin (1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13)
   D. The gospel is not:
      1. Something that I think or dream up on my own (John 16:1-2; Matthew 16:17).
      2. Something that any man or woman invents of their own (Matthew 15:9).
      3. Apostles, evangelists, elders, and members of the body of Christ were to keep the gospel separate from human reason (purity of truth) (see Galatians 1:6; 2 Peter 2:1ff).

III. The Gospel at Work:
   A. The gospel calls men to repentance and forgiveness of sins (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:1ff).
   B. Through the gospel men and women are called to be members of the kingdom of God (1 Thessalonians 1:12).
   C. The gospel saves men's souls (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24).

IV. Man's Approach to Truth:
   A. Willing to hear (Romans 10:17)
   B. Willing to study to know (John 7:14-18; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
   C. Confident that we can know and understand the gospel (John 8:31-32; 14:3-7; 1 John 2:21).

Conclusion:

The gospel is indeed the power of God to save man's souls. When man hears a message that convicts them of wrong doing some will be thankful and correct their lives yet others will be angered. Let us all clearly see that truth does not change with the times, geography, and race of man (see Hebrews 13:8). What is truth for America is truth for China (1 Corinthians 5:3). What was truth for the apostles remains truth for us today (1 Corinthians 4:17). Truth is not different for the wise, foolish, mighty in strength, weak, noble or ditch digger (1 Corinthians 1:26). Those who receive and obey the one true gospel will never be disappointed.