

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

A common mistake made by people, not peculiar to religion, is to isolate a text from a larger context. We see this at work in our own society today, which seems fixated on the sound bytes provided by the talking heads on TV, followed by their inevitable (and many times, misguided) comments. We could call this the folly of isolation.

This folly of isolation occurs often, though, as noted earlier, in the arena of religion. And to direct it to your point, [NAME WITHHELD], Calvinists and non-Calvinists have argued over the hardening of Pharaoh's heart for quite some time. In learning what exactly occurred in this situation, we need to make sure we do not commit the folly of isolation.

The folly of isolation, in this discussion, could be exemplified like this:

And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart¹, so that he will not let the people go. (Exo 4:21)

The text clearly states that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that answers our question.

We need to recognize (as I'm sure you have) that more is said on this subject that Exodus 4:21.

Consider the following passages:

*(10) So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the LORD commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. (11) But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so **the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.** (12) For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents.*

¹ A point to be noted here is on which the religious world at-large misses today. There is a principle in argumentation and rhetoric- *what assumes too much, proves too little*. The person who turns to Exodus 4:21 and from that opening concocts a doctrine in which God overrules the free-will of individuals assumes too much. The phrase I like to use is this- this text tells us what, not how. Exodus 4:21 tells us that God was involved in hardening the heart of Pharaoh; however, the text does not tell us how God hardened Pharaoh's heart. **Sometimes, all a text tells us is what, not how.**

*But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. (13) And **Pharaoh's heart grew hard**, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. (Exo 7:10-13)*

*Then **the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard**, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. (Exo 7:22)*

*(13) So the LORD did according to the word of Moses. And the frogs died out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields. (14) They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. (15) But **when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart** and did not heed them, as the LORD had said. (Exo 8:13-15)*

*(34) And **when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased**, he sinned yet more; and **he hardened his heart**, he and his servants. (35) So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses. (Exo 9:34-35)*

Exodus 4:21 states that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and I certainly do not argue with that (and, indeed, no Bible-believer should); what is left to be determined is how that was accomplished.

Exodus 7:10-22 indicates for us that the magicians of Egypt played a role in hardening Pharaoh's heart. By mimicking, in some degree, the miracles performed through Moses and Aaron, the magicians led Pharaoh to believe that they were just as powerful as the God of Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 8:13-35 indicates for us that Pharaoh was responsible for hardening his own heart. His attitude was an attitude that is still replicated today- *I'm going to live for myself until the hard times come, and then I will cry out for help; after the help comes, I'll go back to my old ways* (I know the phraseology is rather crude, but I think you get the gist of what I'm saying).

So we see at least three people/groups of people responsible, to some degree, for hardening Pharaoh's heart: the Lord, the magicians, and Pharaoh himself.

To attribute the hardening of Pharaoh's heart to the Lord alone and to accuse Him of violating Pharaoh's free-will is without proof. If we are going to say that because of Exodus 4:21 that God violated Pharaoh's free-will and hardened his heart, then

we will have to say that the magicians violated Pharaoh's free-will and hardened his heart. And, to carry this logic to its fullest extent, we are going to have to say that Pharaoh violated his own free-will and hardened his heart. The last two statements are ridiculous, yet they are based upon the same logic as the first statement. With that being the case, we find there is something amiss with the first statement, namely the assumption that God violated Pharaoh's free-will.

In reality, nobody violated Pharaoh's free-will. Bible-believers can say the following and rest assured that they stand on solid footing:

God hardened Pharaoh's heart by making requests that went against Pharaoh's own desires (namely, to let the people go- Exodus 5:1,2; 14:5).

The magicians hardened Pharaoh's heart by, to some degree, replicating the signs of Moses and Aaron, thus planting seeds of doubt within Pharaoh's mind as to the power of Almighty God.

Pharaoh hardened his own heart by refusing to accept the words of the Lord and by refusing to see the signs and the wonders for what they were: demonstrations of the power and supremacy of God.