

ROMANS Part 83

Chapter 9:15-18

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

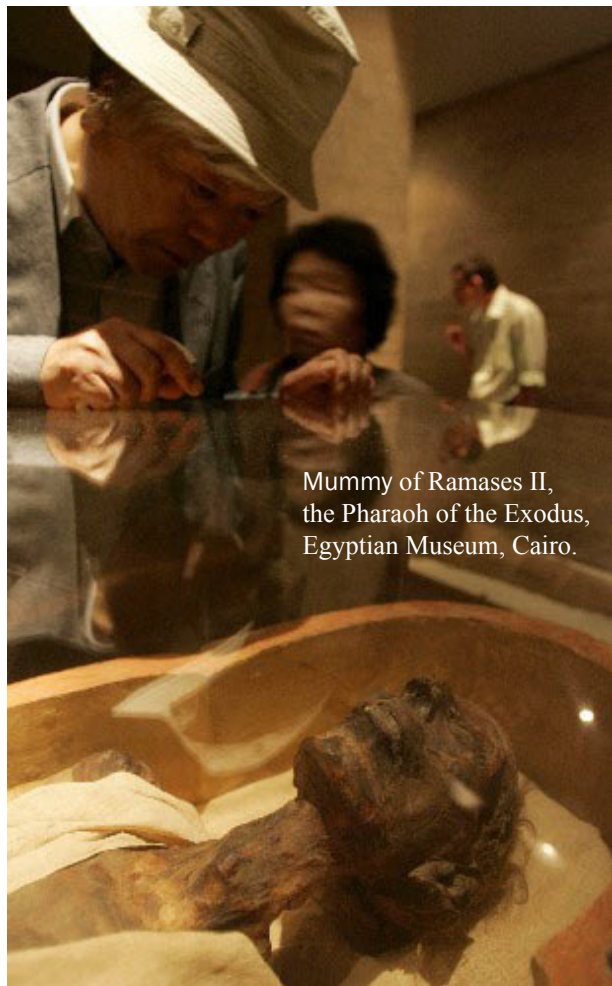
For to Moses He is saying, "I shall be merciful to whomever I may be merciful, and I shall be pitying whomever I may be pitying." 16 Consequently, then, it is not of him who is willing, nor of him who is racing, but of God, the Merciful. 17 For the scripture is saying to Pharaoh that "For this selfsame thing I rouse you up, so that I should be displaying in you My power, and so that My name should be published in the entire earth." 18 Consequently, then, to whom He will, He is merciful, yet whom He will, He is hardening.

Before anyone becomes offended at the degree of control exercised by God over Earth's citizenry, he or she must carefully consider the name of God at the end of verse 16. Here He is called: "God the Merciful." I like how *The Concordant Version* makes it a proper name—which it is. It's not "God, the merciful" (an adjective following a proper noun) but "God the Merciful" (a title). Kind of like "Attila the Hun" or "Ivan the Terrible," except with a tad more positive spin.

Ultimately, God the Merciful does everything. It's not as though He is "God the Merciful" when He shows mercy to someone here in this life, and "God the Cruel" when He hardens another person's heart to make that person a temporary though necessary enemy. I have never seen the title, "God the Cruel" in Scripture. God's mercy is famous for overshadowing everything, and every other viewpoint. Like love, mercy informs all of His actions. I admit that this is not always immediately seen. But please note the following statement from the Psalms:

Psalm 145:8-10—

Gracious and compassionate is Yahweh,
Slow to anger and with great benignity.
Good is Yahweh to all,



Mummy of Ramases II, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

And His compassions are over all His works.
 May all Your works acclaim You, O Yahweh,
 And let Your benign ones bless You.

If this is the case and God is compassionate to all—and it is the case because King David, under the inspiration of the holy spirit, said it is the case—then why does God purposely harden the hearts of some people? How can it be merciful or compassionate to make someone an enemy? Relatively speaking, it isn't merciful at all.

I agree that, in the context of Romans chapter 9, the act of God having mercy is set specifically against God's act of hardening Pharaoh's heart. The right conclusion is that, "God was not merciful to Pharaoh." However, this is only part of the picture. The title, "God the Merciful" refuses to go away. Re-read Romans 9:15—"I shall be merciful to whomever I may be merciful." Is this statement true only on the day it was written? Is it true only during Pharaoh's lifetime? Due to the fact that this statement appears in the section of Romans dealing with Pharaoh's hardened heart, we are tempted to limit the phrase to that time period, as if this were the only time in which God could do what He does (show mercy; be compassionate), or the only opportunity God would have to exercise mercy upon the likes of a man whose heart He hardened to begin with. "I shall be merciful to whomever I may be merciful" applies to this event in Pharaoh's lifetime (exempting Pharaoh from mercy *at the time*), but it is not limited to that event. In the future, during other events, God will *still* be being merciful to whomever He may be merciful. Among such people will be the likes of Pharaoh, to whom He had not previously shown mercy.

Since God is the Savior of all humanity (1 Timothy 4:10), we know that Pharaoh will eventually be saved. Will not God, at *that* time, show great mercy to Pharaoh? Yes, because, "I shall be merciful to whomever I may be merciful."

The same people (Christians) who object to God *not* being merciful to Pharaoh during his lifetime (they hate the very concept of God deciding ahead of time how people will behave), will be the same ones objecting when God eventually shows the same man the ultimate mercy by delivering him from death (1 Corinthians 15:26) and justifying him (Romans 5:19). Thus, instead of seeing God as responsible not only for Pharaoh's hardening but also for his salvation, these types presumptuously relieve God of the responsibility for both things. According to

the standard-issue Christian unbeliever, Pharaoh presides over his own heart, and therefore over his own fate. In this, the Jesus People are 0 for 2. They've bungled both ends of this thing—and there are only two ends. God is responsible for everything, the good and the bad. The Christians, however, make Him responsible for nothing—neither the good (the salvation) *nor* the bad (the hardening). I am of the opinion that Pharaoh will learn of God's sovereignty before these so-called friends of Jesus ever do, if indeed the



man was not so educated in his lifetime. Who's to say that he wasn't? If such a spirit-filled revelation as "God does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth" could have occurred to the arrogant king Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:35) even in the midst of his reign, I fail to see what could have kept such a revelation from a man who witnessed the ten plagues, lost his son to a death angel, and whose entire army came up missing in the Red Sea.

HERE'S HOW IT HAPPENED

Kings are known to be arrogant and stubborn people—they can resist anything—and yet God still controls their hearts. Proverbs 21:1—

A king's heart is like streams of water in the Lord's hand:
 He directs it wherever He chooses.

If God can control the hearts of kings, then He can—and does—control the heart of anyone. But let's stick to kings for now because these are supposedly the toughest nuts to crack.

It happened one day in Midian:

Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand. The Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

Here begins many things. For one thing, here lies the absolute reason behind Pharaoh’s obstinance: “I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go,” says God. It’s this simple: God did it. This announcement predated Moses even setting foot back into Egypt. It happened before Pharaoh ever heard the phrase, “Let my people go.” This is prophecy. It is not God saying to Moses, “This might happen, Moses, so watch out.” This is God telling Moses that it was *going* to happen. Moses alone receives this information. Pharaoh, at the time, never got it; Moses’ brother Aaron perhaps never even heard it; the Israelites slaving away in Egypt were certainly kept ignorant of the grand truth. It is as though God were withdrawing a curtain and calling his beloved servant into His confidence, saying, “Psst! Moses! Guess what I’m going to do?” It is important now for Moses to keep this fact in mind—that God will be the ultimate cause of Pharaoh’s refusal—because what’s going to happen in Egypt will challenge the credulity of even Moses.

GOD APPEARS TO OPPOSE HIMSELF

Before we get to Egypt, see how God appears to oppose Himself. God Himself said that He would put into Moses’ power many wonders. These we know to be the ten plagues of Egypt—and a couple of other side-marvels thrown in, like the staff-turned-to-serpent encounter with the Egyptian magicians. God *wants* these powers to be refused. In fact, He sets up the powers and then hardens Pharaoh’s heart *so that* the powers will be refused. For one who has been paying close attention to Scripture, there ought to be no surprise here. God worked a similar operation in Eden, telling Adam and his wife to stay out of the business of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. But then He made the fruit irresistible, refused to fence it in, and sent a tempter

to outwit the pair in every way possible. This, of course, was for their—and our—ultimate good. This “failure” brings to us the revelation of our insufficiency in the face of the coming Savior’s ability. Thus, the “failure” is only that in a relative sense. Absolutely, it was the best thing that could have happened *to* us, and ultimately *for* us. It was all planned ahead of time. God only acts surprised about it (as He does in the Eden account) so that the first couple can acutely—perhaps I should say “experientially”—feel what they’ve done. It all paves the way for Christ, Who was slain, in the mind of God, from the disruption of the world (Revelation 13:8). It’s



the same with Pharaoh and the Israelites in Egypt; God planned all of it ahead of time. He drew the blueprint for these events long before the events existed, and long before anything existed.

I could go on and on, and maybe I will: God employs the same principle when Joseph’s brothers sell Joseph into slavery; He employs it with Job losing his family and his health; He employs it with Goliath taunting the cowardly armies of Israel; He employs the same principle with Israel crucifying her own Messiah. On and on. At the surface view, all of these things appear to be disasters. To a BBC reporter at the scene, reporting through a knothole in a fence, all of these things *are* disasters. Rightly are they reported as such. Yet if there were someone looking above the fence through the telescope of time at the blessings that would ensue from these apparent catastrophes, the report would be different. Were someone privy to the ultimate Cause of these events, then light could be woven into the dark account. Were the information to become known that God was

the One operating all of these things in accord with the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11), and that God was working these same things—all of them—together for good (Romans 8:28), then God would be justified because of the good outcome of these works.

ON THE SCENE

Moses is now in Egypt. Let's fast-forward to the plague of the frogs. Here is the first hint to those on the scene that Pharaoh is suffering from some unaccountable heart condition. Exodus 8:12-15—

Then Moses and Aaron went forth from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to Yahweh concerning the matter of the frogs which He had appointed for Pharaoh. So Yahweh did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died from the houses, from the hamlets and from the fields. They piled them up, homer after homer, and the land stank. When Pharaoh saw that there came to be a mitigation, he hardened his heart, and he hearkened not to them...

The transcript of the BBC report would have read according to Exodus 8:15: "When Pharaoh saw that there came to be a mitigation, he hardened his heart." Was this true? It was. After all, the BBC reporter looked through the same knothole of the fence as the writer of the Exodus verse. Here is the live-action report from the field:

Ladies and gentlemen, the frogs are stinking very badly here, yes, I would even say that this is a rather disgusting disturbance, and that I have never smelled anything like it since visiting Buffalo, NY last summer to cover the Bills game. And the people have piled them up like sandbags, speaking of the frogs now, and I have never, *ever* seen so many frogs in one place, I can tell you that—except one time in Louisiana, but that's another story. And there are more frogs coming...*no, wait! There appears to be a development along that line.*

"I'm sending you over now to our patriarch-cam, and what you are seeing, live along with me, is Aaron and Moses, the two renegade brothers from Midian, and it appears to me, as I'm sure it does to all of you viewers there at home, that these men are now imploring their great Deity—just listen to the great and amazing words. So far, my favorite words are, 'cut it out with the frogs already'—and...*wait a minute...* I do believe that the God of their fathers is listening to Moses and Aaron; it appears to me that their Deity

is taking account of their words...This is *truly* amazing! We are toggling over now to the frog-cam, yes this is the live shot that you are now looking at from our frog-cam, and by all appearances—you are looking at it with me—the frogs have ceased and desisted, don't ask me how...it is amazing. Yes, you might even call it a miracle...*wait a minute...*I'm hearing from our flagship station back in London...yes, this is now confirmed to me through several frog-related sources that the devious hoppers are indeed coming to be no more; this is nothing less than a miracle, ladies and gentlemen...if you believe in such things, and I am beginning to.

But wait...what is this? We are switching you over now to the Pharaoh-cam...this is the only network *with* a Pharaoh-cam, as you know...and yes, that's him, there he is, the very Prince of Egypt himself that you are looking at now, the Pharaoh, who is pacing in his royal attire—I believe those to be his favorite boxer shorts that we reported on last month—and look at that disposition, my heavens—*what* a disposition! Is he ever in high



spirits. I have never quite seen him like this, he is beside himself with delight to be rid of the plague of the frogs, as you can well imagine—it has been a strain on us all, I can tell you—and by the way, as you can plainly see, the Premier of Egypt, namely Pharaoh—you're looking at him now—has at last descended the royal stepladder which, as we reported to you earlier last week, he had ascended to escape the green hordes—it set an Egyptian record for the length of time spent on top a stepladder by a head of state—so now one can only assume that the Israelites will surely be...*hold on, ladies and gentlemen... what is happening now in the throne room?*

"A profound change has come to the countenance of the Pharaoh...even as we watch...this is amazing! He is pacing the room still, yes of course, but I have never seen him clenching his fists like this—we're trying to get

a close-up now—and now he is looking *quite* agitated...I have not seen a change of disposition like this in so short a time, no, not since an ear fell off of the Sphinx last October; the Pharaoh appears quite irritated now; what an astounding difference from mere minutes ago...and now he is calling his wife to him—that *may* be the intent of the gesture you are now looking at...yes! Here she comes, and there she is, ladies and gentlemen, breathtaking as always, that classic icon of Alexandrian fashion and former Miss Egypt, *Pharessa*—as you know, she has been at her mother's down in Heliopolis during the entirety of this polliwogian outburst—and the Great Man appears to be saying something to her...let's try to get our microphones in there, allow me to turn up the volume of the Pharaohphone...we may be able to discern this for you and tell you *precisely* what the Pharaoh is saying...*all right, there it is...*



we have it now, confirmed in our audio booth in London...here are the words—we know that they were barely audible to you, our viewing and listening audience—and we are running them on the screen so that no one mistakes them, and here they are, from the man himself: ‘There is no (expletive) *way* I am letting these (expletive) pyramid-nosed, flea-bitten (expletive) losers out of my (expletive) country,’...and there you have it folks, from the horse's mouth, as it were. Pharaoh has hardened his heart. I repeat: *Pharaoh has hardened his heart.*”

And it was true—but only as seen through the knothole of the fence through which the BBC reporter looked. What the BBC reporter lacked was the inside, behind-the-scenes information as to *why* Pharaoh hardened his heart. Only God's intimates were privy to such disclosures, and among those are you, me and Moses. We learned before Moses even left Midian that God would harden the heart of Pharaoh. The reporter didn't know it, and it wasn't his business to know. His job was to report the action upon the stage, and no more. He saw only through the knothole of the fence. He is into effects, not causes. We have the privilege of looking *over* that fence into the cause of these stupendous matters. Here is the cause, and the great revelation that yet eludes most so-called believers: *Pharaoh hardened his heart because God hardened Pharaoh's heart.*

ONE LITTLE THING

I purposely left out one little thing from the end of the

verse that I quoted above, from Exodus—

When Pharaoh saw that there came to be a mitigation, he hardened his heart, and he hearkened not to them...
just as Yahweh had spoken.

Pharaoh hardened his heart (the relative/limited viewpoint), because God hardened Pharaoh's heart (the absolute/unlimited viewpoint).

ABSOLUTE VS. RELATIVE PERSPECTIVE—AGAIN

Some people think that, because these two viewpoints—the absolute and the relative—exist simultaneously in Scripture, that therefore the Bible contradicts itself. Absurd. These are not contradictions, but merely differing viewpoints of the same event. If I blow out a candle, someone could say, “Martin Zender extinguished that candle.” Someone else could say, “No, but his breath did it.” Are both viewpoints correct? Yes. One viewpoint is limited, however, not to mention too stupid to insist upon as even the immediate cause. Similarly, someone can correctly say that rain comes from clouds. Another, however, can quote Job 5:10 and insists that “*God* provides rain for the earth.” Who is right? Both are. As long as the cloud person acknowledges the limited, “knothole” nature of his viewpoint (compared to the other viewpoint), then all will be well. It ought to be acknowledged by any reasonable mind that the God-person has the ultimate viewpoint and the ultimate truth; God sends the rain. God does, however, *use* the intermediary agency of clouds.

An argument can only arise in this case when the limited viewpoint person insists that his or her viewpoint is the ultimate one. Now is when the stupidity enters. “No,” says the man of limited perspective, “the rain comes *only* from the cloud.” Here then is the trouble with the “Pharaoh hardened his own heart” contingent using Exodus 8:15 to insist upon human free will: They heed only the BBC knothole report, assuming the environment immediately surrounding Pharaoh to have ultimately caused the man's recalcitrance. This person of limited viewpoint is strangely (yet proudly) ignorant of the higher information. We, on the other hand, gaze into the face of the Higher Information, the Cause of all causes. Every informed and honest Scripture reader seeks and revels in the higher information.

Those of the free-will disposition must habitually brush aside absolute-viewpoint verses such as Ephesians 1:11,



Romans 11:36 and 2 Corinthians 5:18. They sacrifice these gems for the limited, earth-bound sayings. Why would anyone do that? Why not sweep away the smaller, limited verses? People like to feel big, and limited viewpoints lend false assurances to insecure humans, making them feel bigger, stronger, and more important than they are. If the cloud is the ultimate cause of the rain, then those humans staring at the cloud assume a mightier stature; after all, they can see the cloud, and perhaps they can even somehow sweep it away, or touch it. If Pharaoh hardened his own heart, then maybe *they* can resist such moral lapses to become pious, noble worthies before God—all in their own estimations, of course. The absolute viewpoint humbles humanity, and humanity generally doesn't like being humbled.

BRAIN PAIN

Others simply cannot grasp these two viewpoints, or understand why or how they could exist. One friend of mine in Ohio who used to believe in the sovereignty of God but denies it now, trips over small-viewpoint verses, assuming them to be absolute truth. My friend cannot grasp even the concept of one viewpoint being relative and another absolute, or how one verse can be big while another can be small. His mind somehow cannot penetrate the fact of two viewpoints describing the same event. My continual insistence on appreciating these two viewpoints has always puzzled this man. One day he said to me, "Martin, are you sure that this isn't a philosophy?" I've never forgotten that exchange. Appreciating two different perspectives of the same occurrence—one

high, one low—can only be a philosophy if noting the difference between light and darkness is a philosophy, or if stating that some things are red while other things are green is a philosophy, or if the distinction between verbs and nouns is a philosophy.

I sincerely believe that some brains, for whatever reason, simply cannot process or even recognize the difference between the relative and the absolute perspectives, or that two such perspectives could exist simultaneously. In some individuals, there is apparently an important synapse or a nerve that is missing in the cerebral cortex, *or somewhere*—or a hypothalamic fissure of some kind—disallowing a comprehension that to other people is simple: the rain comes both from the cloud *and* from God. Though one viewpoint is low and the other high, the high viewpoint eclipses the low—every time. The Jews and the Romans and Satan and God all killed Jesus Christ, but only one source is the highest source: God. Anyone insisting on the absolute culpability of any other player in Calvary's tragedy other than God is simply (and tragically) mistaken. Such an individual's doctrine will soon track down the tubes. Back to Exodus: God hardened Pharaoh's heart *and* Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Only one of these viewpoints, however, is the absolute one, while the other is merely a reporting through the knothole of a limited perspective.

Such a mental disability as my friend's compromises not only a knowledge of the sovereignty of God, but of a proper understanding of the relationship between Christ and Deity. The mentally disabled individual simply cannot fathom how Jesus Christ can be representationally God, though not God Himself. This is especially strange, as similar examples of a non-theological variety pose no challenge. Were I to show

such people a photo of my son Gabe and say, “This is Gabe,” they understand that it is not literally Gabe, but rather a likeness; an image. But were I to show them Christ and say, “This is God,” they fail to comprehend how the *image* of God (Colossians 1:15) could rightly be called “God,” even in the face of that Image’s own testimony that He is lesser than God (John 14:28).

Absolutely speaking, an understanding of the relative and the absolute perspectives can only come from God. Relatively speaking, it may be well for the apprehensionally-challenged to increase their consumption of salmon, walnuts and blueberries, as these are known in nutritional circles to be exceptional brain foods. —MZ

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Hey there, Martin. Yesterday I’ve watched one of your videos about the trinity doctrine being bullshit (which I agree) and then I’ve visited your channel and I was shocked since there was like a shitload of movies. So far I have watched like 15 of them so I have a lot to catch up...for the next few LIVES. But it’s okay since you’re funny and you don’t bore people to death, and the most importantly, you seem to speak the Bible truth. Among all the Christian youtubers you seem to be the only normal human being (even if you have around thousand subscribers, but I suppose Jesus would have even fewer). So thank you for your work and God bless you.

Greetings from Poland.

—M



“I suppose that Jesus would have even fewer subscribers.”

Greetings, Martin. It is refreshing to hear someone with a like mind. I love how you don’t hold back when it comes to God. I was lead to your teaching and i know that now. I do get some truth from your friends but you have stood your ground. I feel your pain and know all about suffering. It is one of the reasons i know you speak truth. You suffer for our Gospel. Martin, i get real depressed from the hurt and evil of this world. And when i get to my lowest in pain is when God always renews my spirit and teaches me. Everything i endure is necessary. I stopped trying to understand and just follow. All of the pain in my body and the hurt others cause me is God’s way of making me obedient. It is hard to see this world and all the lies told about God in his name. There is no way i would keep going if it wasn’t God keeping me going. I am free now because i stopped caring about this world and what it offers. Things are only going to get harder and the trials worse. I don’t let the cares of this world bother me. I know Jesus is my friend as we suffer. Sometimes it is hard to see. I am just a man and at times i am discouraged while suffering and just feel abandoned and alone. This is when the enemy attacks me, but God always renews my spirit to keep going. I don’t even worry about the chaos in the world. We know who is charge and that gives me peace inside. Thank you for standing up for our Gospel. When we hear false news it discourages many of us and makes us question things. I don’t find pride in you when you expose bad doctrine. I believe you care about the truth. You have a friend here even though we have never met. Our common ground is Christ and everyone in the body i call friend even if i don’t know any of them. God bless you and thank you for helping a broken, weak man like me find truth and peace in the midst of all my suffering.

Sincerely, —R