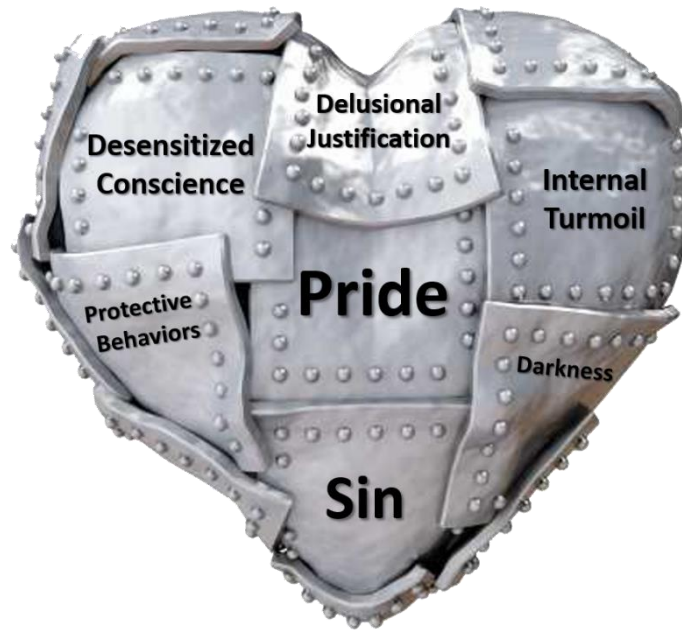


God's Grace and the Hardened Heart



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God's Grace and the Hardened Heart

This writing describes the functions, characteristics, and consequences of two opposing conditions of our spiritual heart described in the Bible: one is a hardened heart, the other is a broken and contrite heart. The intent is to illuminate the importance of being aware of the spiritual condition of your heart; to recognize why we (and others) do what we do; and to witness the transformational influence of God's grace upon a hardened heart.



“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” Proverbs 4:23

Hardened Heart

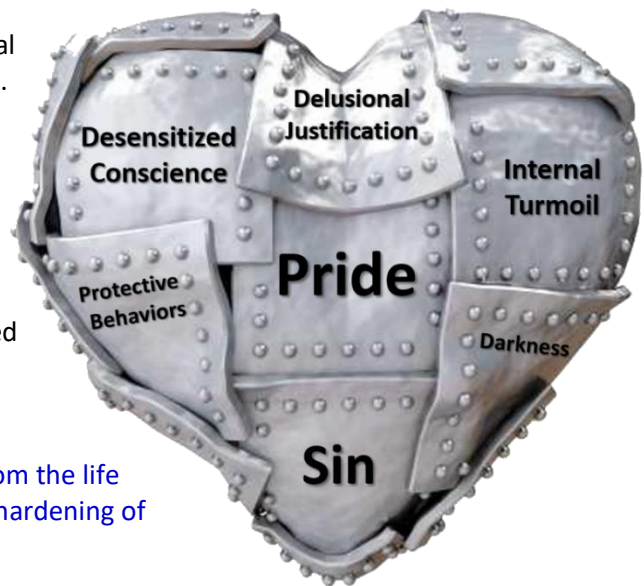
“Happy is the man who is always reverent, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.” Proverbs 28:14

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Romans 2:5

There are three primary pathways that lead to a hardened heart:

- Sin
- Works-based religion: saved by adherence to behavioral laws and not God's unmerited grace in Jesus Christ. Example: Pharisees who believed salvation was based on adherence to religious laws and works (Matthew 23).
- Unforgiveness

As a heart hardens, defensive shields will develop to circumvent (repel, evade, thwart, stop) what the eyes see and what the ears hear. The consequences are constricted spiritual awareness; an obstructed reception of God's grace; and an ever-increasing darkness within.



“They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life Of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” Ephesians 4:18

The hardened condition of our heart will become even stronger when we encounter the will of God via the Holy Spirit—and we decide to fight His will by holding onto our pride; and our arrogance; and as we foolishly justify our decision based upon a self-centered deceptual lie. The only means to maintain our position—and disagreement with God—is to increase the hardness of our heart. There is no other option for the stubborn and unwilling heart of one who decides to not listen and obey the Holy Spirit.

For example, consider how the heart of Pharaoh was hardened—even when he witnessed miraculous signs from God. (Exodus chapters 7-14). He dug his heels in; he would not listen; he would not obey; and he would not yield—because his heart was hardened.

The consequences of our folly are a disconnection from the One who loves us, desensitization of our conscience, internal turmoil, and worsening behaviors intended to protect and maintain the heart's hardened condition. This is what occurs when we decide to turn away from the Truth—Who continues to scream at us with a very quiet, patient, and loving voice calling us to repentance. But praise God in that His voice cannot be muted...because God fulfills all His promises. Even if we attempt to run...He said He would never leave us nor forsake us. Hebrews 13:5

Meanwhile, we do everything possible to not listen, and blindly seek means to overcome the darkness within our soul. We self-medicate. We blame others. We seek to satisfy the lusts of our flesh. We consume useless mind-numbing information. We listen to demonically-inspired lies that align with—and justify—our deceived minds. But we know...deep within our soul...we are wrong. Dead wrong.

Hardening of a Christian Heart

Hardening of the heart may be even stronger for one who knows Jesus Christ...than one who does not know Him. This type of hardening can occur when one who has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit decides to reject His Lordship, and return to their old "self." When this occurs, to continually reinforce a deceptional lie one must actively repel all truth—which requires layer upon layer of additional "armor." Meanwhile, there are two options if they continue their destructive path: (1) they can stay within the church body and hide behind a fake front, or (2) they can leave their church body. Meanwhile, the Christian will live a life "in between" the non-saved and the saved: a spiritual "limbo." Their hardened heart causes them to be unable to relate to those in the world (because they know, understand, and see the consequences of sin); and because they are not able to relate to brothers and sisters in Christ because of condemnation and guilt.

Unfortunately, all of us can relate to living life "in between" because we have all been there! This struggle defines the decisive battle of who is Lord of our soul. In the midst of trying to maintain control; in the midst of being pulled in multiple directions, in the midst of all the noise, confusion, pain, and darkness...is a desire deep within our heart to be right with God; to be more like Him and less like ourselves; and to be free from that which binds our soul.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Jesus Christ used parables to challenge our thinking, enlighten our understanding, and reveal spiritual truths that can only come from the One who designed us. The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector reveals God is more interested in the attitude, desires, and condition of our heart...than our outward behavior.

Jesus spoke "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14



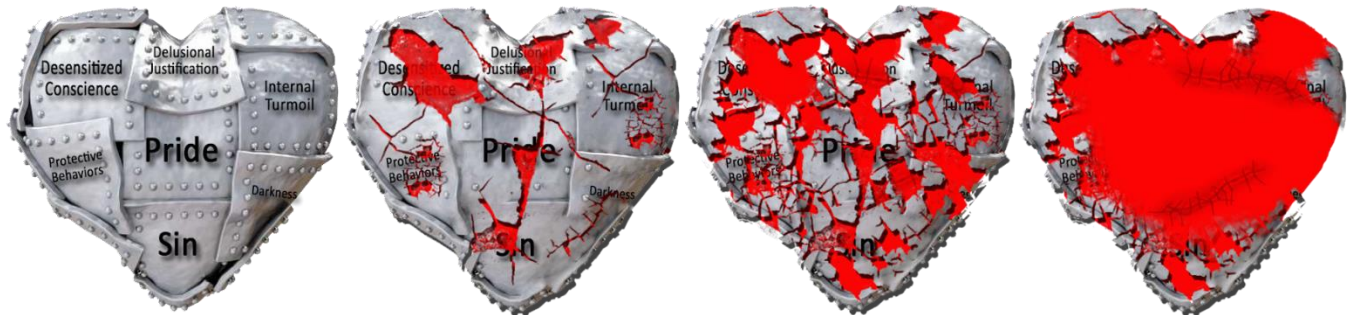
The Pharisee believed salvation was based on adherence to religious laws and works, and did everything he thought was required. As such, he thought he was "good enough." However, he exhibited an additional darkened dimension of a hardened heart: judgmental hypocrisy. This is when we judge others while failing to recognize our own flaws. But what's truly sad, because of his hardened heart he was unable to understand the heart of God.

Those who place their faith in God's grace—extended to us in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ—like the tax collector, will see themselves—and God—from a completely different perspective.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” Ephesians 2:4-5

Broken and Contrite Heart

Softening and “healing” of our hardened heart begins when we’ve reached the point where we have had enough, and when the pain exceeds the pleasure. This is when we ask God for forgiveness; this is when a crack occurs in our heart’s armor that allows a “sliver of light” via the Holy Spirit to enter and illuminate His Truth; this is when our hardened heart begins to weaken from the internal pressure of regret and sorrow; this is when God’s grace acts as a solvent to dissolve the hardened layers, and soften the scars; and this is when we experience the miraculous influence and power of God’s grace upon our heart’s broken and contrite transformation.



Broken is defined as damaged, altered, or disrupted by change. Contrite is a feeling or showing sorrow and remorse for sin. However, a broken and contrite heart is more, much more. A broken and contrite heart occurs when we:

- See and understand the depth of our depravity.
- Despise who we are.
- Are repulsed by what we have done.
- Accept responsibility for our behavior.
- Realize the uselessness of relying upon our flawed self-centered decisions...and decide to trust God.
- Desire to become more like Jesus and less like ourselves.
- This is when:
 - Our pride melts into humility.
 - We humbly kneel before the mercy of God and Lordship of Jesus Christ.
 - God can change us from within.



“But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” Isaiah 66:2

“For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.” Psalm 51:16-17

In addition, a broken and contrite heart will:

- Grieve over their sin (a key requirement for repentance).
- Not judge others, but will be filled with understanding and compassion.
- Not allow sinful thoughts to fester into unrighteousness.
- Seek the strength of God to move towards His holiness.
- Be renewed via trials and tribulations.
- Experience agape love.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26

“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’” Isaiah 57:15

I pray this writing provides you with a greater understanding of the condition of your heart. But more important, you yield moment-by-moment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit prepares us to live for eternity with our Savior.



“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

Click the link below to hear a wonderful song of praise that will bless your soul.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXVUYC_ykwE

All for His Glory!
Harold D. Thomas