

Rigor Mortar

Hard Hearts in God's Hands

June 27, 2021

Today we're learning why **God kneads us**.

But before we get to *that*, answer me *this*: **Do you despise the riches of God's kindness?**

I myself find it *shockingly, disgustingly* easy to do.



And that's because **we do it by passing judgment** – which is *different* from the “fruit inspecting” we were talking about last Sunday. Passing *judgment* is when we render a verdict in *our* heart regarding someone *else's* heart, **as though we're the final authority rather than a recovering sinner in the same boat**. And even though it seems so *very* easy to *justify* and *excuse*, well ...

¹ You have *no* excuse, *whoever* you are, when you *judge* others; for in passing judgment on another *you* condemn *yourself*, because you, the *judge*, are doing the very same things. [Just under different headings. So why do you *do* it?] ... ³ Do you imagine, *whoever* you are, that ... [1] *you will escape* the judgment of God? [Even those in Christ experience consequences down here, and loss up there (1 Cor 3:15)] ⁴ Or [2] *do you despise* the riches of His *kindness* and forbearance and patience [regarding *everyone's* ongoing *sin*]? Do you *not realize* that *God's* kindness is meant to lead *you* to repentance? [Once unto new birth to be made *perfect in* Christ; and then *daily* unto *maturity* to be made *holy like* Christ (Heb 10:14)] ⁵ But by your *hard* and *impenitent* [*defiant*] heart you are storing up *wrath* for *yourself* ... ¹¹ For *God* shows *no* partiality. [But *we* sure do! He judges the *heart*. We judge what we *see* on the *outside*. But] ... ²⁹ A person is a *Jew* who is one *inwardly*, and *real circumcision* is a matter of the *heart*—it is *spiritual* and *not literal*. – Romans 2:1-29 NRS



Growing up in what is now the Youth House, our back porch was often overrun with wild, feral, wrecking yard cats. They kept the rodent population in check. You *couldn't* pet 'em, but we could catch the smallest, sickest, and most likely most diseased. I always wanted to take 'em to the vet. But that wasn't practical. Plus the vet knew they needed to be put down. Mom opted for the shotgun. She was practical that way. So my sister and I would put 'em in a box with a little blanket, and try to treat 'em ... while dodging *bullets*. And I'd get up in the morning and reach under the blanket in the box hoping to touch something soft and warm and moving.

But that wasn't generally the case. Early on I learned the cold, hard fact, that **dead things are cold and hard**, and that **living things are warm and soft**. Which is why *Jesus* is so very concerned that our *heart* remain soft and warm to *His* touch, because 1) **hardness of heart is spiritual death**, and 2) **He came to replace it with something soft and warm and moving**.



I will give you a *new heart* [that's *pliable*] and put a new *Spirit* in you; [to *mold* you and *make you holy*] I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put *My Spirit* in you and *move* you to *follow* My decrees – Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV



Do I have *any* pleasure at *all* that the *wicked* should *die*?" says the Lord God, "and not that he should *turn* from his ways and *live*? ... Repent, and *turn* from *all* your transgressions ... and *get* yourselves a *new heart* and a *new Spirit*. [Whoever you are] – Ezekiel 18:23, 30-31 NKJ



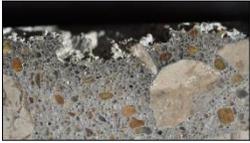
That's something *no* religious *ritual* can accomplish. But it's the very *definition* of the "circumcision of the *heart*"! At Pentecost, Peter told the crowd that they had *despised* God's *Word* when they crucified Christ.



When the people heard this, they were *cut* to the *heart* – Acts 2:37 NIV



Because it's spiritual and not literal. And **Jesus only brings life when His Word cuts to the heart.** Ever make something with clay? You know how you need to knead it to make it soft and warm and pliable, so you can form it into the thing you intend it to be – and as soon as you set it down, it starts setting up and growing cold again? Well guess what:



We are the *clay*, [and] You ["O Lord ... our Father"] are the Potter; we are *all* the *work* of Your hand. [And that's why God "kneads" us] – Isaiah 64:8 NIV

That's why we need to put ourselves in *His* hands *every* morning, **to be kneaded and molded and slowly made holy.** Bump. Bump. Bump. Because the moment *we* set *Him* aside, telling ourselves we're not needin' His kneadin', we're startin' to go cold. And beware: **we can rationalize our rigamortis like nobody's business!** His Spirit gently whispers, "Soften toward that person just a *bump*." And we softly reply, "No thank you," unaware of the stone formation encasing our heart. Salvation is by grace through faith. But as we saw last Sunday, that's where it *begins*, not *ends*.

By *one* sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. – Heb 10:14 NIV

For *we* are *God's* workmanship, created *in* Christ Jesus to *do* good works – Ephesians 2:10 NIV

Faithworks! We can't earn or add to our *salvation*, but we knead to add *daily* to our *faith*, to remain pliable in Dad's hands so that *through* His *Word* He can mold us into what He intends to.

His divine power has given us *everything* we need for *life* and *godliness* through our [Bible] *knowledge* of Him ... For *this* very reason, make *every* effort to *add* to your *faith goodness*; [the desire to be made holy/mature] and to goodness, [Bible] *knowledge*; and to [Bible] *knowledge*, self-control; [as you *do* what you *trust* to be *true*] and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; [as you begin to resemble *Him*] and to godliness, brotherly kindness; [as you *extend* the riches of *His* kindness] and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess *these qualities* in *increasing measure*, they will *keep* you from being *ineffective* and *unproductive* in your [Bible] *knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Because they soften us within] – 2 Peter 1:2-9 NIV



Who'd get your vote for the most hardened heart in the Bible? A good guess would be Pharaoh, because ...

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 heart, so that he will not *let* the people go." – Exodus 4:21 NKJ

People get all crazy about this statement, like God *wires* certain souls to be rebellious and reject Him. But different scriptures regarding the same event say things like:

When Pharaoh *saw* that there was *relief*, *he hardened* his heart – Exodus 8:15 NIV

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*. – Exodus 9:34 NKJ



So did God harden Pharaoh's heart or did Pharaoh? Yes.

Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore [over time] the heart of the sons of men [who *ignore* and *thereby* and therefore *despise* His *kindness* and *patience*] is *fully set* in *them* to do evil. – Ecclesiastes 8:11 NKJ

"Fully set" like the bricks and mortar they were making and baking in the sun for Pharaoh, or the rigor mortis setting in throughout the land because of the plagues.

So *how* did God *move* Moses? With His mercy and authority. And how did God *harden* Pharaoh? Same way. 'Cause **the same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay**. So all God had to do was to get a guy on the throne who'd *chose* to resist, of his *own free will*, and despise God's grace when He withheld His wrath. **Dad didn't violate Pharaoh's will, He accommodated it!**

Why didn't God just wipe 'em out? *Ten* plagues? Why not just start with the plague of hammers to the head and be done? I guess it wasn't *hammer* time. Also, "'Do I have *any* pleasure at *all* that the *wicked* should *die*?' says the Lord God, 'and not that *he* should *turn* from *his* ways and *live*?'" Don't be despising the riches of His kindness.

Plus, if He *had*, His kids would've *stayed put*. Have you *read* the story? **They didn't want to go, and then they kept trying to go back into bondage!** Some people's kids! So Dad didn't knead Pharaoh to *release* 'em, He kneaded him to *remove* 'em!

The Lord had said to Moses ... [Pharaoh] *will* let you go from here, and when he *does*, he *will drive* you *out completely*. – Exodus 11:1 NIV

How often do *we* force Dad to drive *us* to do *His* perfect will for *our* eternal best? When Moses and Pharaoh came face to face with His *mercy* and *authority*, **Moses saw a promise**, while **Pharaoh saw a threat**. So one heart *softened* and one *hardened*, but **the desire of the heart determined the outcome**. Which is why so many who were *waiting* for a *Messiah* rejected *Jesus*.

What Israel sought so earnestly *it did not* obtain, but the *elect* did. The *others* were *hardened*, – Romans 11:7-8 NIV



They were *hardened*. Like concrete. Like everyone who's set in their *own way* and unwilling to submit to *the Way*. Know what "Israel sought so earnestly"? *Righteousness*. But tragically, when they came face to face with its very personification, **their hearts saw a threat instead of a promise**. They didn't add to their Bible knowledge.

[And so] Since they did not *know* the righteousness that comes from *God* and *sought* to *establish* their *own*, they did *not submit* to *God's* righteousness. – Romans 10:3 NIV

You see, **everything seems backwards in eyes that despise**. "To be set free, I gotta surrender? To be *rich*, I gotta give stuff away? To be *significant*, I gotta serve? Um ... no thank you."

But God chose what is *foolish in* the world to shame the wise; [because their wisdom can't save 'em because they're only wise in their own eyes] God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [because true power comes from a soft heart not a hard body] God chose what is *low* and *despised in* the world, [So how can His kindness *not* be despised *in their eyes*?] even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that *are*, [because they actually *aren't*, even if they seem like they are] so that *no* human being might [think they can] boast in the presence of God. [Because *that* kind of thinking will blind you to the *fact* that *you* are earnestly seeking the *source* of your *death*, and that] *He* is the *source* of your *life* in Christ Jesus, whom God *made* our *wisdom* and our *righteousness* and *sanctification* and *redemption*. [Because we aren't and we can't and we won't on our own without receiving a *soft heart* and *His Spirit*] – 1 Corinthians 1:27-30 ESV

But sadly, **His kindness is repulsively blinding to the egotistic self-serving**.



This isn't limited to the high and mighty. A likely candidate for the hardest heart in the Bible is the thief who mocked Jesus as he hung next to Him. **He's minutes from death and inches from Life**. But his hardness holds him back from easily receiving what's being so freely offered. Both criminals began the day by mocking Jesus, but as the day wore on the heart of the Son *softened* one.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled [more] insults at Him ... But the *other* criminal rebuked *him*. "Don't you fear God," he said, "... We are getting what our deeds *deserve*. But this Man has done *nothing* wrong." [In response to the insults] Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be *with* Me in paradise." – Luke 23:39-43 NIV

Two condemned criminals waiting for death next to Jesus. Both start out mocking. But the same Son who hardens the one, melts the other. Same Jesus. Same love. Same authority. Mark says:

With Him they *also* crucified two robbers ... So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." – Mark 15:27-28 NKJ

That's a line from Isaiah, who wrote:

When You make His *soul* an offering for *sin* ... He shall see the *labor* of His *soul*, and be *satisfied*. ... Because He *poured out* His *soul* unto *death*, and He was numbered with the transgressors, – Isaiah 53:10-12 NKJ



That thief was the first soft heart to be carried back home. And Jesus died satisfied because He wasn't going home empty-handed! He's taking the *one* thing we *can* take with us when we go! Just before He poured out His soul unto death, He basically said, "Catch you on the other side."

[Moses] received living words to pass on to us. But our fathers *refused* to *obey* him. Instead, they *rejected* him and *in* their *hearts* turned *back* to Egypt. – Acts 7:38-39 NIV

They refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. *They* made their *hearts* as *hard* as *flint* and *would not* listen – Zechariah 7:11-12 NIV

Every Sunday, before I come up here to speak, I ask the Lord to open our eyes, unstop our ears, and soften our hearts and draw us in, so *we'll* be warm and fuzzy and *moving* in the morning. Because **that rigor mortar starts setting in long before we're under that blanket.** And so:

Today, if *you* hear His voice, do not harden *your* hearts – Hebrews 3:15 NIV

As most of you know, this is where I grew up.

And what-do-ya-know, I'm *still* trying to treat you *cats*!

I just got me a *much bigger* box, and a *Vet* that can do *miracles*!