

A SOFT HEART
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"For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me." (Job 23:16)

A soft heart is not automatic with the new birth, nor is it simply a product of our own resolve. "God makes my heart soft," says Job, and though we must indeed grant Him permission to work in our lives. It is His working which produces a soft, con- trite and broken heart. The conclusion which Job reaches in our text is the result of the direct workings of the Lord. We read in verse 10, "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold . . . For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with *Him'* (23:10, 14). It is the very difficult and "tailor-made" circumstance Job is experiencing which has the effect of making his heart soft.

There are many advantages of having such an heart. Isaiah 66:2 declares: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." Psalm 51:17 tells us that "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God Thou wilt not despise." The worship for which God searches proceeds from a broken and contrite heart. Finally, we read in Psalms 34:18, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Close, intimate fellowship with Him is the direct result of owning a soft heart.

There are many more advantages of having this type of heart, but we will enlarge on only three of these. First, a soft heart must be maintained to allow God the opportunity of planting the Seed of His Word within us. Matthew 13 records the parable of the Sower, in which Jesus describes the Seed as the Word of God and the ground as the heart of man. There are varying conditions portrayed, one of which is "stony ground which has no deepness of earth." This type of ground may allow the seed to spring up very quickly, but it is soon withered. It is likened unto one who hears the Word of God and gladly receives it, but when persecution arises, he is offended because the seed did not really take root. This is the reason that a soft heart must prevail.

The parable of the Sower is not limited just to the truth of salvation. These principles apply to any truth in Scripture. A person may accept the Seed of salvation and be born again, but when God wants to plant more truth into his heart, the Seed is met with a cold, stony, rejecting heart. Such an one may even give joyous mental assent to the message (Matthew 13:20), but if a heart has not been broken to receive these deeper truths of Divine Grace, he will soon be offended by the persecution and ridicule which prevails in this present-day atmosphere of unbelief.

Israel was exhorted to "break up your fallow ground." Fallow ground is that which has been broken at one time, but has been left uncultivated and unsowed, and thus rejecting the seed. Christians can fall into this category and may have to go through some excruciating, broken experiences for God to bring forth His desired harvest.

In our present text, we see a Godly man whose heart was broken to receive more Seed. Contrary to the accusations of his "comforters," this man had done nothing amiss. He was

not in this difficulty because of some secret sin or failure on his part. God said to Satan, "you moved me against him without cause." Job was in that condition because God made a corporate decision in his behalf. Consider, however, some of the Seed which was planted--the triumphant message of "when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold." This is a reference to the very life of Christ being manifest in him. Job did not have access to Paul's Gospel, but he did learn the truth of it by experience, because God was able to plant that eternal Seed within him.

He also learned "I know my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth . . . yet in my flesh shall I see God." Job KNEW these things, and though his comforters derided him for it, the Truth took deep root within him. He also learned by experience the utter depravity and futility of the flesh as he cried out "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down . . . who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:1-4). This man discovered all these things, and many more, after his heart was broken by God, and we must travel the same path if He is to plant such seeds into our hearts.

Secondly, a soft heart is a forgiving heart. The Apostle Paul addressed Christians in Ephesians 4:31-32 as he says: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Ours is a day of great hurt, both physically and emotionally, and people sometimes have the mistaken idea that if they do not forgive an offender, they are somehow punishing him. These misguided souls nurse a heart of bitterness and animosity, refusing to release the hurt which they have experienced. They do not realize the harm being done to themselves.

In the wake of the High School shootings in Kentucky, one writer ridiculed school mates of the offending shooter when they openly declared that they forgave him. This man said that such people were not to be forgiven, they were to be punished! What he failed to realize is that granting forgiveness to an offending party does not remove the consequence of the act, but it does free the one who has been wounded. Having a soft heart is necessary for *self-preservation*. If we do not have a tender heart of forgiveness, it will be replaced with one of bitterness, anger, wrath, evil speaking and malice. When such characteristics are in the heart, they will eventually be manifest and we can become an offense to those around us, rather than a blessing.

Although people think they can justify their attitudes, hard, unforgiving hearts will lead to sure destruction insofar as spiritual fruit is concerned, because the grace of God's forgiveness is woefully lacking. Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding the unspeakable situation involving the incestuous man. The story does not end with the expulsion of the offender in I Corinthians 5. In his second epistle, Paul urgently exhorts: "ye ought rather to forgive him and comfort him ... Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For *to this end* also did I write that I might know the proof of you . . . To whom ye forgive anything I forgive also . . . for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ: *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices*" (II Corinthians 2:7-10). "To this end also" means that Paul's desire from the beginning was not amputation, but restoration. He wanted the Corinthians to show forth a heart of

love and forgiveness, and declares that a refusal on their part will open the door for Satanic bondage.

Paul' s remedy for this condition is outlined in the latter part of Ephesians 4:32. It will not only prevent a bitter heart, but will heal one already hardened. "Forgiving one another even as God for Christ' s sake hath forgiven you," is a powerful verse and one that may be misunderstood. The fact is that God has already forgiven all men, for all time, because all sins were laid upon Jesus at Calvary. He did not, and does not forgive because one sheds bitter tears of repentance and cries out for mercy, but because of the work which Jesus did over 2000 years ago on the Cross. Likewise, we cannot wait until one "asks" for forgiveness before we grant it. If we do that, we may harbor hurt and bitterness for a long, long time. Our only alternative is to lay the hurt on the Cross, just as God has done with all our own sins. Just as it is with an unrepentant sinner before God, the offending person does not experience the freedom from guilt in his own life until he asks for it, but we must forgive him in our own hearts to escape the terrible consequences of bitterness.

Joseph is a striking example of such grace. He was a teenager when his brothers sold him into slavery, but years later he reveals a heart that did not harbor bitterness and animosity as he says: "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). He said again after his father had died, "Am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good....." (Genesis 50:19-20). It is quite evident that Joseph' s heart was filled only with Divine Grace during those trying years in which he suffered such tremendous hardship directly because of his brothers.

A final thought in the area of forgiveness: We very well know that God can do nothing amiss. However, we can wrongfully accuse Him and hold Him responsible, as though He were to be held accountable if we do not have a tender heart of forgiveness. Job is once again our example. Having lost all his substance and children, this tenderhearted man responded: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). In addition to "blessing the Lord," we also note that he did not hold any animosity toward the instruments used to bring such loss to him. We, likewise, cannot afford to blame God or others whom we may perceive in our own minds to be responsible for our hurt.

The third benefit of a soft heart is that it must be very sensitive to the Lord Himself. King Josiah of Judah heard the law read when Israel was in a terrible time of spiritual declension. He was so moved by the message, that when he saw how deeply Israel had sunk into the mire of unbelief and sin, he rent his clothes and sent men to inquire of the Lord as to the writings in the book. God commended him for having such a tender sensitive heart, and though judgment was not averted, God did postpone it until after Josiah was gone, as a reward for his soft heart.

Elijah is another one who developed a very sensitive heart before the Lord. This man had tremendous success in his ministry as he called fire down from heaven and Israel fell on their faces before God. However, the next chapter in I Kings tells us that Elijah was in a severe state of depression. It was through all these circumstances, however, that he was brought to the place where his heart was so sensitive that God could speak to him in "the

still small voice." He could pull him close to His heart that He did not have to shout.

Likewise, Job experienced this benefit of a soft and tender heart. Chapter 42 records it thus: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Verse 5). Before this experience Job perceives God as somewhat afar off. He knows His voice and has heard OF Him, but after this long and arduous ordeal, Job is so sensitive to His presence that he is sure he has the ability to "see" Him.

God also wants to make our hearts soft to His touch, and like Job, He will do it as we allow Him to perform "the thing that is appointed for me."

*A father who emulates God
Is one who is faithful and true;
And if he is honest and strong,
His children will follow him too.*

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