

# THE DOCTRINE OF SCAR TISSUE (HARDENING OF THE HEART)

## I. Introduction.

- A. The heart is the physical organ at the center of man's body that, by contracting rhythmically, maintains the circulation of the blood, which carries oxygen to every part of the body.
- B. The term is seldom used in the Bible of the physical organ. IISam. 18:14; IIKings 9:24; Jere. 4:19 *These three occurrences appear to be the only out of the 726 times that heart is used to refer to the physical organ.*
- C. Metaphorically, it means that which is at the center of something, the innermost or most essential part. Ex. 15:8; Deut. 4:11 *The heart of the city, the heart of the matter.*
- D. According to the Bible, the heart is the center not only of spiritual activity, but also of all the operations of human life. Prov. 4:23
- E. The heart, as the seat of all life, is the **current you** that is shaped by reason, emotion, knowledge, understanding, conscience, experience, memories, environment, your volitional choices and volitional pattern, and perhaps more. Prov. 23:7, 27:19
- F. Just as the physical heart can be damaged by various processes, so the believer can have his heart damaged by various forces and his volitional response to them.
  1. The heart muscles may become hard in conditions like amyloidosis and sarcoidosis in which the muscles become hard and lose their elasticity.
  2. The heart fails to fill properly with blood and to pump out the blood again to the body; this condition is known as restrictive cardiomyopathy.
- G. The biblical concept of the **hardening of the heart** does not refer to the physical heart or the processes that may damage it; rather, it refers to the spiritual processes that result in the believer rejecting doctrine and failing to maintain doctrinal circulation.

## II. Vocabulary.

### A. Hebrew vocabulary.

1. חָזַק (chazaq), verb, lit. to be or become strong, to strengthen; when used with the Hebrew noun לֵב (lebh—heart), it has the nuance of acting arrogantly, and hardening the heart. Ex. 7:13,22
2. כָּבֵד (kabhedh), lit. to be heavy, burdensome, hard, or grievous; when used with the noun **heart**, it has the idea of insensitivity, refusal to listen, or heaviness or hardness of heart. Ex. 8:15
3. קָשָׁה (qashah), verb, to be hard, severe, or cruel; when it is used with the Hebrew noun עֹרֵף (‘oreph—neck), the verb and cognates have the nuance of hard of neck, stiff-necked, stubborn, or obstinate. Ex. 7:3; Deut. 9:6
4. אָמַץ (‘amets), verb, to be stout, strong, bold, or hard; when used with the term **heart**, it has the idea of making the heart hard, being obstinate, refusing what is right. Deut. 2:30, 15:7
5. קָשָׁח (qashach), verb, 2X, to have a hard heart, to be unconcerned; it is used as one of the direct results of rebelling against God. Isa. 63:17

B. Greek vocabulary.

1. **πωρόω** (poroo), verb, 5X, used as a medical technical term to describe the action of covering over with a callous. Mk.6:52, 8:17; Jn.12:40; Rom.11:7; IICor. 3:14
2. **πωρώσις** (porosis), f.noun, 3X, used as a medical technical term to denote the covering over with a callous or a thick growth of skin. Mk.3:5; Rom.11:25; Eph.4:18
3. **σκληρύνω** (skleruno), verb, 6X, as a medical action, to petrify or harden. It is always used metaphorically in the New Testament to refer to the process of becoming obstinate, acting stubbornly, or refusing to change one's mind. Acts 19:9; Heb.3:8,15
  - a. **σκληρός** (skleros), m.adjective, 5X, to be hard, harsh, or unyielding. When used of people, it has the sense of hard, demanding, or strict. Matt. 25:24
  - b. **σκληρότης** (sklerotes), f.noun, 1X, to be hard or petrified. This term is used to denote those that have a resistant attitude, those that are unreceptive, stubborn, or obstinate. Rom. 2:5
  - c. **σκληροκαρδία** (sklerokardia), f.noun, 3X, lit. hardness of heart, stubbornness, obstinacy. Mk. 10:5, 16:14
  - d. **σκληροτράχηλος** (sklerotrachelos), m.adjective, 1X, lit. hard of neck, stiff-necked, headstrong, obstinate. Acts 7:51
4. **καυστηριάζω** (kausteriazō), 1X, lit. to brand something with a hot iron; used of the effects of such action, the resultant scar tissue, insensitivity or hardness. I Tim. 4:2

III. Definition and description.

- A. Hardening of the heart, or scar tissue on the soul, must be distinguished from other biblical concepts such as testing, temptation, and even Divine discipline.
- B. The primary reason for such a distinction is the fact that there is a prohibition (negative imperative) against hardening the heart, but no such prohibition exists with regard to testing, temptation, or Divine discipline. Ps. 95:8; Heb. 3:8
- C. Therefore, while there are guidelines for dealing with testing (James 1:3; IPet. 4:12), temptation (ICor. 10:13; James 1:13-14) and Divine discipline (Heb. 12:5-11), there are no commands to avoid them.
- D. Given the fact that there are commands not to harden the heart, doing so must be understood as a volitional choice that any person can make, or choose to avoid making. ISam. 6:6; Heb. 3:8,15
- E. Hardening of the heart comes about as a result of arrogance and pride in the mental attitude, which exalts the volition of the individual over the volition of God. Isa. 14:12-14
- F. This conceited mental attitude then makes a conscious decision to reject what light (Divine viewpoint) has been, or is being provided; this leaves the one rejecting the light with no other option than darkness. Jn. 12:35,46
- G. Based on this, it is not surprising that scar tissue can accumulate on the souls of both unbelievers and believers.
- H. As we will observe, scar tissue comes as the result of volitional choices, and can become more severe based on the significance, the extent, and the duration of those choices.
- I. We will define hardening of the heart as the arrogant choice an individual makes to reject the Divine viewpoint, which spiritually damages (produces scar tissue on the soul) that person; this results in an obstinate rejection of the Divine viewpoint, which leads to an accumulation of scar tissue that has severe, and eventually catastrophic effects.

- IV. Unbelievers and the principle of the hard(ened) heart.
- A. The Bible makes it clear that all unbelievers, by definition, have a hard or stony heart from the point of birth. Ezek. 11:19, 36:26
  - B. This is based on the indwelling sin nature, which renders all people spiritually dead at birth; therefore, all unbelievers lack the spiritual circuitry (the human spirit) to respond to the Divine viewpoint. ICor. 2:14
  - C. However, God the Holy Spirit acts on behalf of the hard heart and provides clear and understandable information with respect to the gospel. Jn. 15:26; IJn. 5:6-8
  - D. For this reason, when an unbeliever permanently rejects the witness of God the Holy Spirit, which must be true since God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), he has committed the unpardonable sin, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness. Matt. 12:24-32
  - E. As the unbeliever, in the state of spiritual death, continues to reject the light of Divine viewpoint, his heart continues to harden, eventually affecting his entire existence in an adverse fashion. Rom. 1:18-32
    1. Whatever principles of the truth that the unbeliever may have been inclined to accept, he may begin to suppress. Rom. 1:18
    2. His rejection of God is not based on a lack of understanding with respect to God's existence, since there are two ongoing witnesses to the fact of God's existence.
      - a. The first witness is the internal witness of the thought processes, which leads all people to the conclusion that God exists. Rom. 1:19
      - b. The second witness is often referred to as **natural or general revelation**, which argues for an intelligent designer, and which demonstrates the power, divine nature, and goodness of God. Ps. 19:1ff, 50:6; Acts 14:17; Matt. 5:45; Rom. 1:20
    3. As unbelievers reject the light of revelation, they manifest that rejection in a lack of gratitude for the goodness of God. Rom. 1:21
    4. They live in a world that demands an explanation, and since they have rejected the true explanation of reality, they begin to substitute foolish and worthless explanations for reality. Rom. 1:21
    5. As a result of the rejection of the light, their heart moves into the satanic darkness, which promotes evil and human viewpoint. Rom. 1:21
    6. In spite of their claims of great wisdom, the Divine viewpoint labels these people as spiritual morons. Rom. 1:22
    7. Their spiritual decline manifests itself in a substitutionary reaction; rather than worship the glory of God, they exchange that for the worship of inferior objects, which are listed on a scale of descending value. Rom. 1:23
    8. As a result, God acts in judgment, abandoning the unbeliever to the most base aspects of human existence. Rom. 1:24-25
    9. This is seen most specifically in the sexual realm, in which those that have rejected the light of Divine viewpoint pursue the most abominable lifestyles imaginable. Rom. 1:26-27; Lev. 18:22
    10. Paul's description leaves nothing to the imagination as he literally describes these men as **males with males, working out the shameless, despicable deed.**
    11. These people eventually develop so much scar tissue that they become insensitive to God; therefore, He simply removes any restraints and abandons them to the most corrupt and ungodly of human behaviors. Rom. 1:28-31

12. This brings further judgment from God, which manifests itself in the decay of their society and institutions once he removes the normal divine restraints that have been in place.
  13. The most hardened of these haters of God then begin to act as corrupt cheerleaders for those that pursue these abominations. Rom. 1:32
  14. Amazingly enough, even in this state of maximum scar tissue, they cannot rid themselves of the knowledge that God has made His revelation clear in these matters. Rom. 1:32
- F. Jesus Christ made it clear that the reason for the Divine concession of divorce was related to the problem of people (primarily men?) being hardened with respect to the Divine Institution of marriage. Mk. 10:5
- G. Examples of unbelievers and scar tissue of the soul.
1. One of the most notable examples in the Word of God has to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus generation.
    - a. Koncharis (the last pharaoh of the XIII Dynasty)<sup>1</sup> serves to demonstrate the arrogant rejection of the Divine viewpoint and the devastating temporal consequences of having a hard heart. God made it plain (via omniscience and foreknowledge) to Moses before the fact that Pharaoh was not going to accept the revelation that the children of Israel should be allowed to leave Egypt. Ex. 4:21
    - b. The means by which God hardened the heart of Pharaoh was simply by providing the Divine viewpoint with respect to the future of the Israelites; while this called for a volitional response, it did not involve coercing the volition of Pharaoh in any way.
    - c. Although Pharaoh saw and heard the miraculous displays of the power of God, he obstinately continued to reject the clear directive of God for the Jews. Ex.7:13,22, 8:15,19,32, 9:7,34,35
    - d. While some have struggled with the theological implications of God **hardening the heart of Pharaoh**, it is to be understood as a continued determination on God's part to provide the light of the truth to someone rejecting it. Ex. 7:3, 9:12, 14:4
    - e. As Pharaoh continued to reject the light, God continued to provide it; the overall effect was further scar tissue for Pharaoh, which eventuated in his destruction. Ex. 14:8-9,23-28
    - f. Although God is not the author of evil, when Pharaoh hardened his heart, it served as the means by which God:
      - 1.) liberated the Jews from captivity, while allowing them to plunder the Egyptians. Ex. 3:20-22
      - 2.) evangelized the Egyptians. Ex. 7:3-5
      - 3.) evangelized the Gentile nations. Ex. 9:16
      - 4.) provided for the salvation of Rahab, an ancestor of Messiah. Josh. 2:8-11; Matt. 1:5
  2. The Jews of the First Advent generation.
    - a. As the Bible makes plain, the Jews were largely a nation in unbelief, having accepted a works oriented theology, which was coupled with racial and historical arrogance. Jn. 6:28; Matt. 3:9
    - b. That fact alone indicates that the first elements were in place for the Jews to develop scar tissue on the soul, since they were already racially arrogant, and tended to reject grace.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications* Donovan Courville

- c. When Jesus Christ appeared, proclaiming His message of salvation by faith in His person, He was immediately at odds with those offering a works oriented religion. Jn. 6:28-29
  - d. Secondly, when He manifested a rejection of the Pharisaic religious traditions, He incurred the hostility of the religious establishment. Mk. 2:23-24, 3:2
  - e. Thirdly, when He proclaimed the unique nature of His person, He challenged people to look beyond the physical, and see the truth of God's unique revelation. Jn. 5:18, 10:33
  - f. However, the light of the truth did not convince the religious leaders of the truth; they stubbornly continued to reject these obvious manifestations of His messianic credentials, and ultimately formed a conspiracy to kill Jesus. Mk. 3:6, 11:18
  - g. They not only manifested their callused nature by virtue of rejecting Christ and His free offer of salvation, they manifested it in their utter lack of compassion toward others. Mk. 3:5
3. Judas Iscariot.
- a. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, chosen by Jesus Christ Himself, Judas was privy to all of Jesus' teachings and the attendant, corroborating miracles. Jn. 6:70
  - b. Nevertheless, Judas rejected the Divine viewpoint on the matter of salvation, and fulfilled the prophecy of the **son of perdition**. Ps. 41:9; Jn. 17:12

V. Scar tissue of the soul and believers.

- A. All believers begin their spiritual lives by manifesting a real humility that accepts and believes the doctrine of the gospel. Isa. 66:2; Jn. 8:24, 12:36
- B. Like the unbelieving counterpart, a believer may manifest an arrogance that results in rejecting the light of Divine revelation after salvation. ISam. 15:23,26; IJn. 1:5-6
- C. This may come about due to various tests, trials, or difficulties that cause the believer to reverse his position on matters of the truth. Ex. 4:31, 6:9
- D. Additionally, like the unbeliever, the believer must be able to account for the nature and condition of the world around him.
- E. When he rejects the Divine viewpoint, he is forced to seek other explanations that are compatible with his spiritual arrogance; therefore, it is not unusual to find that the believer that hardens his heart will accept false views of reality. IITim. 4:3-4
- F. This not only results in rationalizing his own rejection of God's will, it often results in slandering and maligning the truth and those that hold to and espouse it. James 3:14; IIPet. 2:2
- G. The believer that rejects the light becomes spiritually dull, refusing to process the information he has, which results in the inability to receive new insight. Mk. 6:52

VI. The events that lead to scar tissue of the soul in believers.

- A. The first priority for all believers is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. IIPet. 3:18
- B. In the Church Age, this involves a number of factors that are absolutely necessary if one is to advance spiritually after salvation.
  - 1. One must become and remain a part of a properly functioning local church, which is the household of the Living God. ITim. 3:15
  - 2. One must orient to the authority of the spiritual leader, who was placed into his position by God the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17

3. The believer must be in fellowship, since God the Holy Spirit is the unseen teacher, who uses the teaching of the pastor-teacher to communicate His plan to His people. Jn. 14:26; ICor. 2:10,12
  4. This presumes an understanding of and consistent application of the rebound technique; the believer must be willing to rebound as often as is necessary. IJn. 1:9
  5. The believer must maintain an attitude of true humility, since God is opposed to the proud, but provides grace and light for the humble. IPet. 5:5
  6. This means that the believer must maintain an attitude of intellectual honesty, being willing to submit himself and his beliefs to the doctrines of the Bible. Lk. 8:15
  7. The believer must steadfastly hold to the teaching (ITim. 1:13-14; Rev. 3:11), and patiently apply the doctrine in his niche as opportunities arise. Lk. 8:15
- C. A breakdown in any of these stages of the GAP process will eventually result in the hardening of the heart syndrome/scar tissue.
- D. This manifests itself in two distinct reactions, the first of which is directed toward God; the second evidence may be directed toward others.
- E. The reaction toward God involves a believer getting distracted from his first priority of spiritual growth; he begins to focus on other things and people, which can cause him to experience various reactor factors, such as disillusionment, self-pity, boredom, loneliness, and frustration.
1. Once the believer has lost his focus on doctrine, his mental attitude contentment and happiness suffers, and he begins the frantic search for happiness; this attempt to compensate for his unhappiness may take either a legalistic or lascivious form.
  2. This sets the believer up for the boomerang effect, in which his misguided attempts at obtaining pleasure inevitably backfire; this leads to discouragement, which may intensify into depression, and loneliness, which may result in increased spiritual isolation.
  3. This leads to the emotional control of the soul, in which emotions no longer function as the appreciators of the soul, but as the rulers of the soul.
  4. Instead of deriving contentment from doctrine, various emotional experiences become the object of pursuit; at this point, believers become quite troubling to themselves and others, and should be avoided. Rom. 16:17-18
  5. While negative volition toward doctrine may be expressed as apathy or indifference, the truth is that an active revolt is occurring; in some cases, the revolt may manifest itself in attacks directed toward the pastor or other believers in the local church.
  6. At this point, the believer may begin to believe the delusion that doctrine doesn't work; this is simply another way of blaming his spiritual condition and unhappiness on God, rather than taking personal responsibility.
  7. Willful rejection of doctrine results in a vacuum in the soul, which allows human viewpoint and the doctrines of demons to attack, and possibly replace, the doctrines that were previously accepted.
  8. The longer this process continues, the more scar tissue develops, making it increasingly difficult for the truth to penetrate the soul.
- F. The hardening of the heart will also manifest itself in the manner in which a person deals with other people; this involves refusing to demonstrate compassion for others.

- VII. Manifestations of scar tissue on the soul/hardening the heart.
- A. Stubbornness/obstinacy. Ex. 4:21; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20
  - B. Selfishness, as manifested in callousness toward others. Deut. 15:7; Mk. 3:53
  - C. Rebellion against duly constituted authorities. IIChron. 36:13
  - D. Slander, maligning, and generally speaking evil of the truth and those that represent it. Acts 14:2, 19:9
  - E. Lack of ability to perceive the Divine viewpoint. IICor. 3:14
  - F. Lack of faith in the truth, even when one hears it clearly. Ex. 8:19; Mk. 16:14
  - G. Failure to learn from clear spiritual examples. Mk. 6:52, 8:16-17
  - H. Arrogance, as manifested in a refusal to listen to the truth. Neh. 9:29
  - I. Arrogance, resulting in bad (even deadly) decisions. Ex. 14:8,17; Josh. 11:20; Prov. 28:14
  - J. Refusal to receive correction. ISam. 6:6; Jer. 17:23
  - K. Unrestrained indulgence of the sin nature. Eph. 4:18-19
  - L. Marital problems. Mk. 10:5; Col. 3:19
- VIII. Concluding observations.
- A. Hardening of the heart/scar tissue of the soul may occur in both unbelievers and believers alike.
  - B. The reason is simply the fact that the individual exhibits pride, and exalts his views against those views that are being, or have been revealed by God.
  - C. This arrogance leads to an obstinate refusal to acknowledge the light that one is given, leaving the person with the only one other choice—darkness.
  - D. This belligerent refusal to acknowledge and orient to the truth damages the individual in terms of current perception, as well as any future perception.
  - E. In that regard, the idea of the **stiff neck or the stubborn shoulder** are terms used to denote the negative volition that causes one to reject God’s revelation. IIKings 17:14; IIChron. 30:8; Zech. 7:11
  - F. Scar tissue of the soul is evident in the manner in which one deals with God, as well as in the manner in which one deals with others.
  - G. As the individual hardens his heart, God is free to continue providing the light of the truth, which only serves to further harden the individual in view.
  - H. This explains how God can sometimes be the agent that hardens an individual, without coercing human volition, and without violating His own essence. Ex. 9:12
  - I. The believer is commanded not to harden his own heart, which comes about through the deceptive nature and activity of the STA. Heb. 3:13
  - J. All believers should recognize the danger of hardening the heart, and all believers should seek to provide the appropriate encouragement so others do not fall into this syndrome.
  - K. Prophetically, the nation of Israel is under a partial hardening, due to their unbelief, which will remain until the harvest of Gentile positive volition is complete. Rom. 11:25
  - L. Those that **harden the heart or stiffen the neck** will ultimately pay the price for their negative volition, arrogance, and rebellion. Prov. 28:14, 29:1