

# Overcoming opposition and hardness (Quality: Good)

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Date: 29 January 1978

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[ 0 : 01 ] We'll speak from the 19th chapter in the Acts of the Apostle, and the 9th verse. The 9th verse in the 19th chapter of the Acts of the Apostle.

But when divers were hardened and believed not, but spake evil in that way before the multitude, he departed from them and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one for others.

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It is the mercy granted to the Church of God to know the other side of the preaching of the gospel, and to be given a picture of the dark crack cloth, as perhaps, to use a modern expression, behind the preaching of the Apostle Paul.

We should think it was all harmony, peace and excess. Did we not know differently? We should think it was all harmony, and we should think it was all harmony, and we should think it was all harmony.

[ 1 : 57 ] It is a well-balanced picture that enables us to get a clear view of the matters as they stand, whether they be natural or spiritual.

To know half the story is to know that little of it. So we are, by the good spirits, inspiring of the writer Luke, a scene, as this text said before us.

Divers were hardened, that is, the different ones. An old English word, divers, different ones, were hardened.

And, uh, believe not. Nor is this a new word. Nor is it, uh, found in the New Testament only.

This solemn matter of, uh, the hardening of the past, and the unbelief of it, as a consequence, is found, uh, also the word of God.

[ 3 : 23 ] It's an outstanding feature in the history of Pharaoh, that, uh, God hardened it up. And he didn't do it once, he did it nine or ten times.

So that when Pharaoh was on the point of giving way, and did give way, we read, the Lord hardened it up.

And all those years, that history of Pharaoh, they, in the, uh, archives of the church, the Jewish church, and, uh, it wasn't until the Apostle Paul came, that it was further revealed to him, that, uh, God raised him up for this purpose.

As he tells us in his epistle to the Romans, for this purpose I have raised him up, that I might show full my mighty power in thee.

It sets the seal, God's broad seal upon a most, uh, solemn act and action, and, uh, unequalled scenes in the history of the world.

[ 4 : 51 ] For there were never any such plagues as the Ten Plagues of Egypt. The song applies, uh, uh, in this chapter.

The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified by the very devilish opposition, the gracious overcoming of it.

The charming of it. Exactly the same thing. God, uh, magnified the name of, uh, uh, his dear son.

By virtue of the, uh, opposition. Uh, in this text, in this, uh, ninth verse, it is in the hardening of certain hearts.

And, uh, they're speaking evil of the way before the multitude. And ultimately, the, uh, next, uh, opposition is from the Jewish exorcist, the sons of Siva, who sought to imitate Paul.

[ 6 : 12 ] And received, uh, their just answer and reward. This, uh, evil spirit in, uh, these men said, uh, Jesus I know and Paul I know.

But, uh, who are you? Cause, uh, focused a■■■ from the Roman Yer Chi.

And the Dalaiinci hatte, he got rid of his evil spirit. And the conclusion of it is, as we've just read, in verse 17, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Now, how beautiful this is, and how comforting, because it's so true. And history, again and again, sets out the victory of Christ through that opposition.

And all that subtle work of the devil is brought to nothing. So that when the church comes into these places, she has a very firm foundation upon which to rest her hope.

[ 7 : 42 ] And that she is not turned aside. Neither does she despair when she finds that, so long ago as the prophet Isaiah, the question is still thorough, but who hath believed our report?

And of whom is the hour that the Lord reveals? So that the fact remains that it is, as in the time of Jesus, possible to come right close to him face to face, as the Pharisees and Sadducees did.

And it's worse not to have the slightest effect on them. In fact, just the reverse. to make them more angry and hide against him more fiercely than they did before.

And to charge him with lads for them. When he said to one man, that sins be forgiven thee, they raised the question, who can forgive sins but God alone?

Truth stirs up a latent depth of mud and mire, of enmity and bitterness that we didn't realise.

[ 9 : 20 ] And perhaps you felt it in your time, that the truth hurts, and it cuts deep and digs deep, and that it raises up, or did raise up, shall we say, in your heart, things that you said, that couldn't possibly be true?

And if they were, you to one won't be the believer. So with the text before us, divers were hardened.

This hardening of the heart, therefore, is not some touch from the Divine hand that makes that heart heart.

Any more than Pharaoh's heart, or any other like him, was suddenly made hard, whereas had it not been touched by the finger of God, it would have been sought.

The truth is that the heart, having been born in sin, and the only strife from birth speaking last, was that the harder because of the truth, and because of what is called God's interference.

[ 11 : 04 ] And this is what the Gospel did, in so many cases, as soon as even Pentecostal blessings came, from the second of Acts onwards, you find that there were those who were in the time of Stephen, not many days afterwards, who were so filled with rage, that they stole God's servant Stephen.

Their hearts were hardened, and they were left without repentance. They were brought to lay heavy hands, even be guilty of the blood of God's first martyr Stephen.

These things we believe are irrefutable. And we are placed as our forefathers never had been placed.

The fact that it's possible, as Jesus said, when he was speaking of these things, many shall say unto thee in that day, Lord, hast thou not prophesied in our street?

In thy name have we done many wonderful work. I will profess unto you, I never knew you. that with all the beauty of the word of God as regards it literary accomplishment, the inner meaning in writing of it could never have been written by any man whatsoever.

[ 13 : 16 ] because a human tongue could never, and would never, and never dare lay itself to such terrible things to accept.

Only the sacred tongue of the Lord Jesus would divide between flesh and spirit, and point out the abject state of the hypocrite.

Those who drew near with their lips and honored God with their mouth but whose heart was far from it.

Paul would not dare to write such things as this, nor would Luke, but divers were pardoned.

Which brings us then to the important question, what effect has the truth had upon us? Perhaps we ought to put it like this, what effect is it having upon us?

[ 14 : 27 ] Because some of us could look back to the time when it hardened us. And we hated it. And our hearts were hard under the sound of the truth.

And we understood it not in its length and breadth. You may be in that position now. Every time you hear the truth, you consolidate your position against Jehovah.

And your heart gets harder and harder. It's like the sun, you know, with its effect upon the clay.

The sun rays halved the clay. Whereas on the other hand, the rays of the sun soften the wax.

It has two different outcomes. Paul tells of Corinthians, the gospel to some is the cyber life under life.

[ 15 : 44 ] To others, cyber death under death. And in this there can be no dispute.

But it is possible to be gospel hardened. And to know the gospel so far. And to be as hard as the seat to sit on.

Or as the clay that is hardened by the sun. It has no softening effect upon you. You know, nothing of a melting frame.

You certainly couldn't see the first hymn. Heal us Emmanuel. Here we are, waiting to feel light up.

Deep wounded souls to the repair and save you, we'll start. Now that this is what the apostle had to fight.

[ 16 : 45 ] And his companions. And these were the things as which, oh, grieve them.

And yet they were powerless to water it. And the only thing they could do and the only thing they did do was to go on disputing and persuade them.

And when the scene became unbearable, he departed from, separated the disciples.

Disputing daily in the scroll of one to wrath. We had before a very solemn scene.

But not without keeping closely in mind the latter part of verse 17.

[ 17 : 48 ] The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Don't forget that, will you? Don't let these solemn things so rest upon your mind, you who fear God, as to cut yourself off.

Because through this very pathway, it may be, as it often has been, God's good pleasure to open up the understanding.

God's good. He's a great person. He's a great person. When he brings right down the rock bottom. And shows you the utter hardness of the carnal part.

And what endlessly, real endlessly, more than you feel to your fellow creatures, you may feel some bitterness to human souls.

And you cross over the road rather than speak to them. But this is about featherweight compared with the enmity against the holy, gracious, sovereign God.

[ 19 : 13 ] And the subject previous to this text is very difficult. We must say a word about it.

Because a new or younger will be faced with these verses all for your life, like us older ones have been.

And that is the question of the Apostle to these disciples. Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?

And their answer. We have not so much as heard that there be any Holy Ghost. And then the Apostle goes on to say, Unto what then were you baptized?

They said unto John's baptism. Then St Paul, John verily baptized for the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, They should believe on him, that should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

[ 20 : 28 ] And they heard this. They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them and they spoke with tongues and prophecy.

This is very much to the forefront today, with the evils of Pentecostalism. Very much to the forefront.

But we must take this very clear view, in my judgment, of the position at this time, that there was no New Testament.

We have the New Testament in all its sacred history. To these believers in that day, they were scattered.

And it tells us from whence they came. And Peter writes to them scattered over Asia and Asia Minor. Not a considerable distance, as distances go.

[ 21 : 36 ] Nevertheless, they didn't meet each other. And these twelve men, they come into Ephesus.

And this great question of the receiving of the Holy Ghost arises. Now, God gave these apostles in the interim period, between the Old and the New Testament being written.

He gave them these remarkable gifts. And they were from persons. They were the gift of tongues. You cannot but see how necessary a gift this was.

Translate your Bible today. In that day, there was the gift of tongues.

In that day, there were special miracles wrought. And were raised from the dead. As in the fourth of Acts.

[ 22 : 50 ] There were special blessings and powers outpoured upon the early church. So that it filled that place which God had desired.

They couldn't turn as we can to the Epistle to the Ephesians. They had nowhere else to turn.

And this was God's great blessing to his early church. That these gifts of various sorts were granted to them.

But what is sad is this, that they were abused. Like everything else that is put in man's hand, in that sense, in the religious way, it is improperly used, let us say.

That Paul had to devote several of his chapters in Corinthians to the unfolding and explaining of the right use.

[ 23 : 59 ] And it was far better, he said, to speak in a known tongue so that even just a few could understand you than try to speak in an unknown tongue and lead chaos.

For he says, if the trumpet is an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle. A most lively figure.

So that at this stage in which these words were written, these men had no knowledge of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

They had not so much as heard that there were such gifts. And these called by divine favour from an unknown source, who had already had their eyes partially opened, because we are told they were disciples and believers.

They, by the laying on of hands, another disused gift of the Holy Spirit. No longer needed.

[ 25 : 20 ] They were given the gifts of the laying on, by the laying on of hands of the Holy Spirit.

And they spake with tongues and prophesy. Now, the book of prophecy is sealed.

You would be utterly amazed, wouldn't you, if you heard a professed minister of the Gospel prophesy what's going to happen next week?

What's going to happen in the, shall we say, South African manner? Or an oppressive manner in Israel? You would say, well, my judgment of the matter is as good as yours.

And you would be right. There's no question of prophesying and foretelling what is going to happen in these solemn times in which we live.

[ 26 : 20 ] All we have is the word of God. And that's all we need. And we need to see that in this day Agabus prophesied that Paul should suffer as he did if he went up to Jerusalem.

And in these things has God pledged his church. But the point of the text is that there were those that were hardened.

Now, it is not for us, therefore, to look into these scanty details of those times in the apostles' life when he was so richly endued with a vision from heaven which, as I said, I think, last Sunday or recently he carried with him for 14 years and never said a word about it.

And then came the time for him to unfold the vision that he received. And the Lord is the word of God. In this day, therefore, we are favored with the whole answer to these questions.

Are there those that have hardened? Or does everyone that hears the word of God receive it in a humble heart? Does the seed all fall upon good ground?

[ 27 : 57 ] Are there those who know the outline, can define their age as head doctrinally, and know nothing about it in their hearts as regards it softening into it?

The magnifying of the name of the Lord Jesus. That's the weight to put in the scale, poor sinner.

If you can put that in the scale, and if I can, in preaching, put this in the scale, this softens everything.

Here lies the ultimate purpose of divine grace. Here are the five wise virgins.

Here are those that hear to profit, who find the name of the Lord Jesus magnified, enlarged, endeared.

[ 29 : 03 ] A name that increases in value as they grow up. That's more wonder because there is such a fullness in Christ that you will never be exhausted.

There can never come an end to the sacred reality of Christ, that it's going to be a heart softening as distinct from a heart hardening matter.

So that they refused. Their hearts were hard.

Now this is an experience. And it's an experience needed to be preached in order that it may condemn.

That it may strike home a blow for Christ's kingdom if it is worthy. And send someone home upon their knees with a solemn question in their heart.

[ 30 : 23 ] Which is it Lord? Am I hardened under the gospel? Do I get that experience that the scripture speaks of that I speak evil of this way?

What way? You see, nobody can diagnose this in your heart. No earthly minister can possibly say, It's you and you will know before your God can answer the question.

Do I speak evil of this way? And by speaking, we must remember that not only do we speak with our tongue, but we speak with our feet.

And it is in this way that the truth is made manifest. Which side of the line we stand on?

And where we stand? And what is our standard? Is it the word of God? Is it the work of Christ?

[ 31 : 54 ] Is his name magnified both in and out of the scripture? Because if it isn't, the only alternative for there is no middle core, must of necessity be a gradual hardening.

Now Peter was known for his outspokenness, wasn't he? Not only when he was a disciple, but when he was an apostle.

And he speaks of those in his epistle who knew or know the way of life and is having heard of it, but return like the sow to her wallowing in the mire.

And it's just like Peter, that's the following remark of that, isn't it? Or to the dog to its vomit. Not very palatable, you say.

We didn't come here this morning to hear that. Yes, you did. Oh, yes, you did. Because it's the truth.

[ 33 : 10 ] There are those who return like the dog to its vomit. And the sower that is washed to her wallowing in the mire.

What does she care for being washed? What is it to her when her native natural environment is to wallow in the mire?

And they do, don't they? You couldn't find, I should think, a more applicable figure than this that Peter uses.

And how solemn it is. And when you come into contact with it and find these living characters and people that you prayed for, in my case, baptized.

And a good many others too. Who go back to their wallowing in the mire. Better for them never to have known the way of life.

[ 34 : 28 ] Far better in the day of judgment. Now these are the ones that have hardened.

So the best side of this is the softening side. The word of God.

The word of God. The softening side. As stern as it is. And after all it's a judge, isn't it?

And judges are reputedly stern men. As stern as the crew did.

And the gospel has that other side to it. Which leads to the ultimate magnifying of the name of the Lord Jesus.

[ 35 : 33 ] And these thoughts which I have dreaded so far as a man. As I turned over in my mind during the last few days.

It's not an easy thing for me. But I must be faithful to your soul. For who can tell that what God will give you to consider.

The hardening nature of your evil heart of unbelief. Against the truth.

Against the work of grace. Whereby you come into the category of this ninth verse. And you speak evil of it.

Poor departed. You might say, well he shouldn't have done. No, but why not? Why shouldn't he have departed?

[ 36 : 41 ] He told them early on that. He said, see ye put it from you. Lo, we turn to the Gentiles. Why should he not have turned from them?

He could see. The dear man could solemnly see, feel and know that such were reprobates. Yes.

Yes. He could feel that the truth did not enter into them. Very different from Apollos in the previous chapter.

That learned Apollos. He was no reprobate, wasn't he? And when Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and expanded to him the way of God more perfectly, he listened.

What a different spirit. He didn't say to these two tent makers who hadn't a tithe of the ability that Apollos and the Father said, well what do you know about it?

[ 37 : 54 ] I'm not going to listen to you. No. So, with the word of the Gospel, you see, God takes the things that are not.

And you see, when you come perhaps to speak like this, as I have to this morning, do you think I feel very tall? I can assure you I do.

That what the mighty work is this that softens the heart of those who contend against it, who fight against it with hand uplifted heart, and yet come at last to see it.

How the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified. So that the apostle could see.

And although we cannot claim the same ourselves, any of us on the walls of Zion, the Lord Jesus is magnified.

[ 39 : 07 ] When it comes to laying some in the grave, whom we've known year after year, and seen them unaffected by the Gospel, I can assure you it's a very solemn funeral.

And I've had one or two. Laying them in the grave without hope. Without hope.

Without hope. No sign whatever of any, any spiritual life at all. Except perhaps in their dying moments, some cry.

I knew a man once whose cries for mercy extended all down the wards of the hospital. But all through his life, he sat under the Gospel as hard as the city said.

Some were hardened. Some were hardened. Some were hardened. Some were hardened. Some were hardened. On which side of the line then do you stand? And do I stand?

[ 40 : 30 ] Remember therefore that the opposite is softness. And the other ones, Paul left them. And then his disciples, he came away and disputed still and contended still in the house.

Not in the synagogue, in the house of one to run. And then he continued to declare the whole council of God.

But more this evening, if it's prayer. The Lord bless. These two things to you. Amen.