

heart. If the reader will turn to the following passages, he will find it affirmed in every one of them that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Ex. vii. 13; ix. 12; x. 1; x. 20 & 27. And yet if he will read another class of passages he will find it just as explicitly affirmed that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. See Ex. vii. 22; viii. 32; ix. 34. And yet though there is an apparent contradiction between these two passages, every intelligent Bible student knows they are in perfect accord with each other. Pharaoh loved that which was wrong, and clung to it; and, as a punishment for his sin, God withdrew His gracious spirit from him and left him free to work out his own ruin. He did not harden his heart by infusing an evil principle, but by withdrawing His mercy from him.

The fact is, his heart was naturally hard, and made harder still by the obstinate rejection of the light, and persistent disobedience to the commandments of God; and whatever of softness he had experienced at any time was superinduced by the gracious dealings of God with him, and the operation of His Spirit upon his heart. If he had promptly yielded to those influences it would have been well; they would have saved him from the ruin which his obstinacy and rebellion brought upon him. He would have escaped the judgments in which he became involved, and the signal and tremendous overthrow by which he was finally overtaken. But the mercy of God which was bestowed upon him was abused, and, by the retributive judgment of God, it was withdrawn from him. His was but one of thousands of similar instances which have occurred in all ages and are constantly occurring in our own. The opportunities which come to us, if they are not promptly improved, pass away from us and return no more for ever. The choicest of these opportunities come to us in the form of those gracious influences which are unconditionally shed upon our hearts. Yielded to promptly they mean salvation, but resisted or trifled with, they will result in a deeper condemnation and weightier judgment from God.

That we may the better understand this and its bearing on the question under consideration, let us take a simple illustration. We shall find it in the blacksmith's shop. The iron is in the fire, and now it is a clear white heat, soft and malleable, ready to receive any form that the smith may be disposed to impress