

HARDENED

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12 NKJV

CHRISTIANS, ON THE OCCASION OF REREADING the chronicle of Israel's Exodus sojourn, like to comfort themselves that they, while certainly not perfect in their faith, are not nearly as fickle and untrusting as their ancient Jewish brethren.

...and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Exodus 17:1b-3

But what comfort can we take from the realization that, in fact, we quite often behave not like God's chosen people, but more like the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, the *bad* guy in the story?

Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." Moses said to him, "As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's."

Exodus 9:27-29

The Lord God, who commands everything by His sovereign will, repeatedly expresses that will in our lives—sometimes in a whisper, but sometimes powerfully, majestically, painfully. In myriad ways He demonstrates His deity, and there may be times when we need to be slapped upside the head by His "thunder and hail." Those who pay attention know that God is in not just the demonstration, but also the ceasing. And both contain the power to drive us to our knees, declaring before Him, "Yes, Lord, I have sinned!"

But then, once the storm has passed, we can forget His might—and thus forget our fear.

But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

Exodus 9:34-35

The Hebrew word translated "hardened" means *strong*, or *strengthened*. In other words, once the trial was over, Pharaoh once again thought himself strong against the Lord, able to withstand whatever He might send his way. And his fleeting humility evaporated like a shallow puddle in the blistering Egyptian sun.



It is born in the heart of man to think himself strong. But strength—imagined or real—is first cousin to arrogance and pride, those unsightly twins that encumber repentance. For when we think ourselves strong, we think God weak. The heart is thus padlocked against His mercy and grace.

Even believers swim upstream against the hard-coded pride of flesh—but that does not mean we are left helpless. God in Christ offers us a most remarkable tool for combating this inherent, negative force:

Faith.

"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith."

Habakkuk 2:4

Living this way—training ourselves through practice—we exchange self-pride for pride in the things of Christ. We exchange our own glorification for glorying in the sacrificial love of Christ Jesus.

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

