

REPROOF REBUFFED

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Exodus 14:13-31

“He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” Proverbs 29:1

In plain speech and simple terms, this text brings together three profound, weighty truths of Scripture. First it expounds the mercy of God. God reproves sinners. Nothing requires Him to do this. Every sin is committed against His holiness, and is an affront to Him. Were He to send the sinner to destruction upon the occasion of his first offense, it would only be justice. But rather than judging, God reproves. Moreover, this reproof is repeated; He reproves “often.” God never judges without first warning the sinner, often repeatedly. This is divine mercy and grace.

Second, it expounds the rebellious nature of man. He “hardeneth his neck.” This metaphor comes from the age before motorized vehicles when oxen were used to plow the earth and pull men’s wagons. The beast was not always cooperative. When an ox walks and pulls the load, his head will be slightly lowered. But when he decides he doesn’t want to cooperate, he lifts his head, stiffens his neck and refuses to move. Other biblical texts use the expression “stiffnecked” to describe human rebellion (Ex. 32:9; Acts 7:51). When a man “hardeneth his neck” he resists God’s reproof.

Third, it expounds the judgment that befalls those who resist God’s reproof. They will suffer destruction. Two features of this destruction are given. First, it will be sudden, implying that when they least expect it, and by means least expected, it will overtake them. Second, it will be irreversible and irremediable. There will be no undoing the destruction. It will be a final verdict, “without remedy.”

These truths are illustrated abundantly in Scripture. They are seen at the personal level. Pharaoh rebuffed God’s will as it was expressed through Moses, and was destroyed (Ex. 7-14). Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phineas, “hearkened not unto the voice of their father” when he warned them regarding their wickedness, and in one day they both were killed (I Sam. 2:25, 34; 4:11).

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are city-wide illustrations of this truth. The example of godly Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen. 14), the pleading of Lot and the intervention of angels with miraculous power were rebuffed by the Sodomites, then destruction fell upon them (Gen. 19).

This scenario of reproof, rebellion and destruction once befell the entire world. Only Noah and his family escaped (Gen. 6-8). His preaching of righteousness while building the ark was rejected by his hearers. The ark, a visible reminder of coming judgment, was assembled piece by piece before the eyes of an unbelieving public. They refused to heed these warnings, and were destroyed suddenly and utterly.

“The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Pet. 3:6, 7). “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (II Pet. 2:9). “He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1).