

13 Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1-53)

Introduction

I can remember getting in trouble a lot as a young boy. I loved to tease, and more often than not, the trouble I got into was related to teasing my sister. And when I got into trouble, my younger sister would have already brought charges to my mother against me. My mother would state the charges to me, and ask me a simple question, “**Are these things so?**” I would have a brief opportunity to state my case. That is how our passage today begins. The Sanhedrin Council asks Stephen a simple question, “Are these things so?”

(Acts 7:1-53) “The high priest said, "Are these things so?”

There are a few big differences between Stephen and myself. I was a foolish young man, and full of mischief. I was a young man walking according to the flesh. I did not speak graciously to my sister. I was deserving of every thing that was coming to me. I was usually guilty as charged. On the other hand, Stephen was a man of character. He had a good reputation, and was full of the Spirit and of wisdom. He was full of grace and power.

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

(Acts 6:8) “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”

The second difference was our appearance. When the Council fixed their gaze on him, they saw his face like the face of an angel. I never had the face of an angel. The glory of the Lord was upon Stephen. On the other hand, my face was that of a mischievous young man and had trouble written all over it. My mother really did not need to ask me, “are these things so?” She could see the mischief and the guilt on my face. Our appearances were quite different.

(Acts 6:15) “And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.”

Unfortunately, both our consequences came out the same. I usually got a spanking, which I deserved. The Scripture says that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it from him. I got what my folly deserved. Stephen did not get what he deserved. He was entirely innocent. He was a wise man, a man with character, and full of the Holy Spirit. He was stoned to death for bearing witness of our Lord. He was martyred and will receive a martyr's crown.

(Pr 22:15) “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”

What things is the high priest referring to? What are the charges that have been leveled against Stephen? We have to go back to Acts 6 to find what these things he is talking about. Some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen secretly induced men to bring four false accusations and charges against Stephen. They knew exactly how to stir up people against Stephen. There were a few very dear things to the Jews, and anyone who spoke against these things were in trouble.

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(Acts 6:11-14) "Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." {12} And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. {13} They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; {14} for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

The first charge was that Stephen had spoken against Moses. The second charge was that he had spoken against God. The third charge was that he had spoken against the temple. The fourth charge was that Stephen had spoken against the Law. These four things were dear to the Jews, and they knew that charges would surely stir up the people against Stephen.

Our passage today is about Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin Council. First, Stephen responds to all four of these charges. Second, he brings five charges against the religious leaders.

Stephen's Defense

1. Stephen's Defense before the Council
2. Stephen's Charges to the Council

1. Stephen's Defense before the Council

Stephen identified with his accusers. Stephen begins his defense by saying, "Hear me brethren and fathers!" He calls them brethren. He is identifying himself with them. He is a Jew, and has not denied his Jewish heritage. He also addresses the Sanhedrin Council as fathers. This was giving them the utmost respect. Fathers were honored and Stephen shows them great respect and honor. Stephen asks them to hear him. The Greek word is *akouo*, which means to hear with understanding. He is asking them to listen carefully with understanding.

(Acts 7:2-4) "And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, {3} and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' {4} "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living."

Stephen does not just identify himself with them as brethren, but he further identifies with them by going back to Abraham. The Jews consider Abraham as the father of their faith, so it is only fitting for Stephen to begin his defense by going all the way back to Abraham's beginning. He tells them that the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. Notice that he says, "our father Abraham." He is identifying with them. He is telling them that he has not left or departed from his Jewish faith.

Stephen recounts the story of how God told Abraham to leave his country and relatives and come into the land that they are now living. Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. He tells of how God promised to give Abraham an inheritance for his descendants, even before he had a son. Abraham began by faith, believing what God had promised him.

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(Acts 7:5-7) "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that 'He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him.' {6} But God spoke to this effect, that his 'descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.' {7} 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.'"

Next, Stephen tells how God spoke prophetically about his descendants, and how they would be aliens in a foreign land, where they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. The Jews loved hearing about Abraham and their forefathers. Stephen has gained their attention and they are agreeing with everything that he has said. There is a lesson to be learned about witnessing and defending the faith. We should try to identify with people. We should try to gain their agreement as much as possible.

Paul used this technique in Acts 17 when he spoke to the Athenians. He acknowledges that they are religious in all respects, and brings up an inscription on one of their objects of worship. He is identifying with them, and then he uses this as a springboard to introduce Christ to them. We should try to identify with people as much as possible, and look for ways to introduce Christ to them.

(Acts 17:22-24) "So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. {23} "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. {24} "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Stephen gives a brief overview of Jewish history. He tells them of God's covenant of circumcision with Abraham. This circumcision was a sign of the covenant, and distinguished them from the rest of the nations. Stephen will come back to the circumcision at the end of his message, but he has simply reminded them of it at this point.

(Acts 7:8) "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs."

Stephen fast-forwards to the time when Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt. Stephen is very respectful, and calls them patriarchs. He mentions of how God was with him and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh. Joseph is made governor over Egypt and all his household. Even though Stephen is hitting the highlights, these religious leaders are probably recalling all of the details of Joseph's life while they are listening. They are still tracking with everything that Stephen is saying at this point.

(Acts 7:9-10) "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, {10} and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household."

Joseph is in Egypt, but the Jews as a whole are not there. Stephen tells of how God uses a famine to

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get the Jacob and the Joseph's brothers to come to Egypt. There were seventy-five people in all that went down to Egypt.

(Acts 7:11-14) "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food. {12} But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. {13} On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. {14} Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all."

Stephen tells of how Joseph and their fathers died. He is still identifying himself with them. He said, "he and OUR fathers died." He also recounts how they were laid in a tomb in Shechem that Abraham had purchased.

(Acts 7:15-16) "And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. {16} "From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Stephen has already told them that God told Abraham they would be mistreated for four hundred years. Now, he shares how the Jews had increased in number, and how they began to be mistreated by the new king of Egypt. Stephen has still not responded to the first charge, of speaking about Moses. He has given a historical account leading up to their time in Egypt, where Moses comes into the picture.

(Acts 7:17-19) "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, {18} until 'there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph.' {19} It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

Now, Stephen introduces Moses. The first accusation about Stephen was that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses. His narrative of the life of Moses is critical. He does not slander or speak evil of Moses. He said that the baby Moses was lovely in the sight of God, and that he was nurtured three months in his father's home, set aside, and then raised by Pharaoh's daughter. He was well educated, and was a man of power in words and deeds. There is no hint of speaking ill against Moses. Stephen shows respect and honor towards Moses.

(Acts 7:20-22) "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. {21} And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. {22} Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds."

Stephen recounts Moses' first dealings with his brethren. At about the age of forty, he visited the brethren, and saw one of them being mistreated. He defended his fellow Jew and struck down the Egyptian. He thought that by doing this that his Jewish brothers would understand that God was granting deliverance through him. Moses had the right message and calling, but it was not going to be by the flesh, but by His Spirit. It would be God that delivered the Jews through Moses. When God calls us to do something, we must do it, but we must do in God's timing and by his power.

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(Acts 7:23-25) "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. {24} And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. {25} And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand."

On the following day Moses saw two of his countrymen fighting. He tried to reconcile them. Again, it was the right message and calling, but he was not accepted as a mediator. The one injuring his neighbor questioned Moses about who had made him a ruler and judge. Then, he asked Moses if he was going to kill him like he did the Egyptian. As a result, Moses fled to Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Moses' lack of self control had hindered his ability to lead.

(Acts 7:26-29) "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' {27} But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? {28} 'You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?' {29} At this remark, 'Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian,' where he became the father of two sons."

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul exhorts us to run our race in a way that we might win. As a former professional golfer, I understand and fully appreciate his exhortation to run in a way that we might win. I trained hard. I exercised and buffeted my body. I worked hard at the different parts of the game that are vital to winning in golf. I worked hard at the mental side of golf. I wrote a book, that I never published, called "Prepare to Win." It was primarily on the mental side of golf.

(1 Cor 9:24) "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."

Paul goes on to say that we must exercise self-control in all things. We have to run our race with purpose or aim. We must discipline our bodies and make them our slaves. Why? Because if we do not have self control in all things, we will be disqualified. Moses had disqualified himself from being a mediator and delivering God's people by his lack of self control. Moses had some things to learn, so God moved him to Midian, where he spent the next forty years preparing himself for what God was calling him to do. He was learning self control and to discipline his body in all things.

(1 Cor 9:25-27) "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. {26} Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; {27} but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. The Lord met with him and told him to take off his sandals, for he was standing on holy ground. The Lord tells Moses that He is the God of his fathers, "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." Stephen has not spoken ill of Moses, and he has not denied the Jewish faith. He has defended their faith and their fore fathers. He is innocent of the first accusation that they have brought against him.

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(Acts 7:30-33) "After forty years had passed, 'an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, 'in the flame of a burning thorn bush.' {31} When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: {32} 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. {33} 'But the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'"

God then sends Moses back to Egypt to rescue them. It was now the right timing. We do not always understand God's timing. We wonder why He did not deliver them earlier, and why He allowed His people to suffer. We just do not always understand God's timing. The hearts of the people needed to be receptive to leaving. The heart and character of Moses needed to be prepared for the assignment. When God tells us to do something, one of the first questions we need to ask is about the timing. "Lord, is this something that You want me to do right now? Is this something for next year? When do You want me to do this for You?" Moses knew what he was supposed to do forty years earlier, but now was the proper timing. **Moses brought deliverance at the proper time.**

(Acts 7:34) "I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and have come down to rescue them; **come now**, and I will send you to Egypt."

The deliverance of God's people by Moses was a prophetic picture of what Christ would do for us. He brings us out of bondage and captivity, and brings us into the promised land. When did Jesus come? Paul writes in Galatians that He came in the fullness of time. While Jesus was ministering, He was always aware of proper timing. When His brothers encouraged Him to go to the Feast in Jerusalem, He told them that His time is not yet here. He was always aware of proper timing.

(Gal 4:4-5) "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, {5} so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

(John 7:6-8) "So Jesus said to them, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune.... {8} "Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come."

Now, Stephen shares how the people had disowned Moses, by asking who made him a ruler and a judge. He tells them that it was God who sent them to be a ruler and deliverer. Stephen is doing more than giving a historical overview. He is telling them that the Jews had a history of rejecting the prophets that God had sent. He is subtly inferring that they too have rejected the Messiah in the same way that their forefathers had rejected Moses. The Council members may not have grasped what he was saying yet, but Stephen would become more direct in a minute.

(Acts 7:35-37) "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. {36} This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. {37} This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.'"

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The second and fourth charges against Stephen pertained to God and the Law. Stephen is now going to address these. First, he tells how Moses received the living oracles on Mount Sinai. He has not spoken against the Law. Instead, he tells how OUR fathers were unwilling to be obedient to Moses and had wanted to go back to Egypt. They had also asked Aaron to make other gods for them. They made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol. He said OUR fathers rejected God and asked for idols. Stephen is on God's side, not on those who rejected God and worshiped idols.

(Acts 7:38-40) "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. {39} Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, {40} 'saying to Aaron, 'make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.' At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands."

Stephen tells how God turned them away from their idols during their forty years in the wilderness. He mentions the Egyptian gods that the house of Israel worshiped.

(Acts 7:42-43) "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? {43} 'You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'"

The third charge pertained to the temple. Stephen said that they had a tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness. God spoke to Moses and directed him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. Moses met with God in this tabernacle, and the Jews continued to use it until the time of David.

(Acts 7:44-45) "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. {45} And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David."

He has now introduced David, who wanted to build a temple and dwelling place for God. Even though David wanted to build the temple, it was Solomon who built the house. David had merely made provision for it. Then, Stephen gets to the heart of the matter. He said that the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands. He quotes what Isaiah, the prophet, said, "Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?" (Is 66:1)

(Acts 7:46-50) "David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. {47} But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. {48} However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: {49} 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, 'or what place is there for My repose? {50} 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'"

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Stephen is not just telling them that he has not spoken against the temple. More importantly, he is correcting their theology. A building cannot house the Lord. The temple of the Lord, which was where His presence was, could never be contained in a building.

I was coming back from Houston last year and had to fly to Dallas before catching a connecting flight to Albuquerque. On my Dallas leg, I sat beside a building contractor. I asked him what project he was working on. He began to tell me about the Baptist Church that he was renovating. The budget for the building renovation was one hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000.00). Included in that figure was the media and sound system, which was eight million dollars (\$8,000,000.00). These structures are merely facilities. They cannot house the Lord. We are the church. We are the ones that house the presence of the Lord. Look at what Paul wrote the Corinthians. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" It was not the temple that David built, or the facility that 2nd Baptist of Houston built. **We are the temple that God chooses to dwell in.**

(1 Cor 3:16) "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

2. Stephens Charges to the Council

Having defended the charges against him for speaking against God, Moses, the law, and the temple, Stephen now brings five charges against the Sanhedrin Council. He accuses them of being just like their fathers. He says they are "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, and are always resisting the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did. He tells them that their fathers persecuted the prophets. Their fathers killed the prophets who had announced the coming of the Righteous One. He tells them that they are now the betrayers and murderers. He accuses them of not keeping the law that was ordained by angels. Their fathers had rejected Moses. Their fathers had turned to idols and away from God. Their fathers had persecuted and put to death the prophets, and now, they were following the way of their fathers. They have rejected the Righteous One, that is Jesus. The prophets had prophesied of his coming, and they had rejected the deliverer that God had sent.

(Acts 7:51-53) "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. {52} Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; {53} you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

1. Stiff-necked

The first charge is that they are stiff-necked. By this he means that they are stubborn and cannot be led. It was an agricultural term applied to a stubborn ox. The plow was usually drawn by two oxen. The plowman would use one hand to guide the plow, and he would carry an ox-goad in the other hand. This was a light pole, shod with an iron spike. With this he would prick the oxen upon the hind legs to increase their speed, and upon the neck to turn, or to keep a straight course when deviating. If an ox was hard to control or stubborn, it was "hard of neck," or stiff-necked. **In the Scriptures, stiff-necked refers to a stubborn person who is not responsive to God's guiding in his life.** God had sent prophets to guide and warn them. They had been stiff-necked and had refused to be directed by the Holy Spirit. They were acting just like their fathers.

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What about you and I? Do you and I take time to listen to the Holy Spirit? When the Holy Spirit whispers something in our ear, do we turn quickly, or do we keep plowing ahead in the same direction? Does God have to use a sharp ox-goad to prod us to do things? Does God have to stick us in the neck with an ox-goad to get us to change course? Do you and I welcome the counsel and input of others in our lives? Do we listen to the warnings of our spouse? Do we heed the warnings in the Scriptures? Are we stubborn, or are we a people who respond quickly to the Lord?

I know this, I want to be a person that the Lord whispers things. I don't want to be a person that must be painfully goaded by the Lord. Solomon told us in Proverbs 29:1 that a man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy." In other words, there is a window of opportunity for us to respond to reproof. At some point, after much reproof, God will use other things to break us. I spent three years in prison ministry working with many who had been broken because they had hardened their neck and not accepted reproof.

(Pr 29:1) "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy."

Solomon tells us to "turn to my reproof." If we do, God will pour out His spirit on us. If we do not turn to His reproof and neglect His counsel, we will have calamity and dread come upon us. That is not the picture that I want. I want to be those whom He pours out His Spirit upon. Church, let's not be stiff-necked. Instead, let's be easily directed and led by the Holy Spirit.

(Pr 1:23-27) "Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. {24} Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; {25} And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; {26} I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, {27} When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you."

2. Uncircumcised in heart

The second thing that Stephen says to them is that they are uncircumcised in heart. The circumcision was an external sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. But, it was very clear that the **circumcision was never meant to be merely external. God was looking for a people that were circumcised in heart.** In Deuteronomy 10, Moses tells us what the Lord requires of us. He wants us to fear the Lord, to walk in all His ways and love Him, to serve the Lord our God with all our heart and soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments.

(Deut 10:12-13) "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, {13} and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"

He said everything in the heavens and earth belong to the Lord. However, the Lord set His affection on His people to love them. He concludes with an exhortation, "so circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer." For us to fear God, walk in His ways, love Him, and serve him with all our heart, we must have a circumcised heart. A physical circumcision was not going to change our behavior. **We need a circumcision of heart in order to do what the Lord requires of us.**

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(Deut 10:14-16) "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. {15} Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. {16} So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer."

Jeremiah exhorted the Jews to circumcise themselves to the Lord, and to remove the foreskins of their hearts. It is obvious that God wanted more than a physical circumcision. God wanted a circumcision of the heart so that we could love and serve Him.

(Jer 4:4a) "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart..."

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses tells us that God will circumcise our hearts so that we can love Him with all our heart and soul. God tells us to circumcise our heart, and then in this verse, He says that He will circumcise our hearts. I believe this speaks of cooperating with God. When we submit our lives to the Lord and confess Him to be our Lord, there is a spiritual circumcision that takes place.

(Deut 30:6) "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."

In Romans 2, Paul distinguishes between an outward circumcision and an inward circumcision. He concludes that a Jew is not one outwardly, but inwardly. True circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter of the Law.

(Rom 2:28-29) "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. {29} But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

Stephen is telling these religious leaders in the Sanhedrin Council that they were uncircumcised in heart. They had never had an inward change. They had an external circumcision, but had never had a true circumcision. Therefore, they could not fear God, love God, and serve Him, which is what God requires of all of us.

What about you? Has there been an inward circumcision in your heart? Do you fear God? Do you love God with all your heart? Are you serving the Lord with all your heart? Do you need a circumcision of heart? It is not going to church that circumcises your heart. It is not looking good and doing the right things. True circumcision takes place when we repent and put our trust in Jesus Christ. Then, we are able to love God with all our heart, and serve Him. These deeds come from the heart and are evidence of the inward circumcision.

3. Always resisting the Holy Spirit

The third charge that Stephen brings against them is that they were always resisting the Holy Spirit. He wraps up his defense and connects all the dots. He asks them which one of the prophets did their fathers not persecute. Their fathers had rejected Moses, saying, "who made you a judge and ruler over us?" They had rejected Isaiah and the other prophets, who had prophesied of the coming of the righteous One. They had a history of resisting the Holy Spirit.

13 Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1-53)

(Acts 7:51-52) "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. {52} Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;"

What about you? Do you listen to the Holy Spirit? Do you follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit? One Sunday, I was greeting, and the Neuman family showed up. I saw Shurette go get a water bottle and then leave. She took it to the lady weeding across the street at the medical clinic. Shurette told me that the Holy Spirit told her to go give that lady a water bottle. What a wonderful example she has set for all of us. What a wonderful witness she was to that lady, who happens to own the property that the medical clinic leases.

4. Betrayed and murdered the Righteous One

Stephen also tells them that they have betrayed and murdered the Righteous One. Just as their fathers had put the former prophets to death, they had rejected and put the Messiah to death. They are the ones that have rejected God. Even though they had accused Stephen of speaking against God, it was them that had betrayed God.

The truth is that all of us put Jesus to death. Christ died for all of our sins. If we had not sinned, He would not have had to die for our sins. My sins were nailed to that cross. Your sins were nailed to that cross. It was our sins that made it necessary for Jesus to die. God made provision for our sins because He loves us. We simply need to receive His forgiveness for our sins.

5. Violators of the very law that was given to them

Finally, Stephen tells them that they, who had received the law as ordained by angels, did not keep it. They had accused him of speaking against the law, yet it was them that were not keeping it. They were the ones that God had given and entrusted His word. They, of all people, should be the ones that fear God's commands and keep them.

(Acts 7:53) "you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

What about you and I? We have also been given God's word. Do we receive it? Do we keep it? Are we hearers who delude ourselves, or are we doers of the word? Do we look intently at God's word? Do we abide by God's word, or are we forgetful hearers? Are we effectual doers? God promises to bless us in whatever we do when we become doers of His word.

(James 1:22-25) "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. {23} For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; {24} for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. {25} But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

Conclusion

This morning, we have looked at Stephen's defense. He was respectful to his accusers. He identified with them. He defended himself by giving a narrative of their Jewish history. Yet, he spoke truth to them. We must always speak the truth in love. He confronted these religious leaders about their stubborn refusal to receive Christ. He confronted them about their uncircumcised hearts. He confronted them about resisting the Holy Spirit. He confronted them for their sins. We must respect and honor others when we defend our faith, but we must also speak the truth in love.

This morning I want to close with a passage in Acts 26. Paul was sharing his testimony with King Agrippa. His testimony is given in Acts 9. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest and persecute any believers that he found. He, like his fathers, was putting to death the prophets. Paul was a Pharisee, and he was the one that was holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen. Paul heard Stephen's message. Listen to what Paul shares with King Agrippa.

(Acts 26:14-15) "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' {15} And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'"

Paul shares that he had fallen to the ground, and he heard a voice ask him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Paul finally understood the message that Stephen preached. Paul had been stiff-necked and was kicking against the goads or proddings of the Holy Spirit. He had been rejecting the Righteous One, the Messiah. Paul responded to the Lord, and surrendered his life to Jesus. He went on to Damascus, and was filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized by Ananias.

What about you this morning? Have you received Christ? Have you been resisting the promptings of the Holy Spirit to receive Christ? Has the Lord been prompting you to turn your life over to Him? Have you been plowing ahead in your own direction?

This morning, God is saying, "stop kicking against the goads." God is saying, "Stop resisting the Holy Spirit." God is saying, "I want to circumcise your heart, so that you can love Me and serve Me." Let me ask you several questions. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son and came to die for our sins? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead? Will you stop kicking against the goads? Will you confess Jesus as Lord this morning? If so, we have people like Ananias, who will pray with you this morning. Come forward now. Follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and receive the Righteous One.

Let's pray.

Introduction (Acts 7:1-53, 6:3, 8, 15, Pr 22:15, Acts 6:11-14)**1. Stephen's Defense before the Council**

- Stephen _____ with his accusers. (Acts 7:2-4, 5-7, Acts 17:22-24)
- Stephen gives a brief overview of _____ history. (Acts 7:8-50, 1 Cor 9:24-27)
- Moses brought deliverance at the proper _____. (Acts 7:34, Gal 4:4-5, John 7:6-8)
- We are the _____ God chooses to dwell in. (1 Cor 3:16)

2. Stephens Charges to the Council (Acts 7:51-53)**A. Stiff-necked**

- In the Scriptures, stiff-necked refers to a stubborn person who is not _____ to God's guiding in his life. (Pr 29:1, 1:23-27)

B. Uncircumcised in heart

- Circumcision was never meant to be merely_____.
- God was looking for a people that were circumcised in _____. (Deut 10:12-13)
- We need a circumcision of heart in order to do what the Lord _____ of us. (Deut 10:14-16, Jer 4:4a, Deut 30:6, Rom 2:28-29)

C. Always resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-52)**D. Betrayed and murdered the Righteous One****E. Violators of the very law that was given to them** (Acts 7:53, James 1:22-25)**Conclusion** (Acts 26:14-15)**Introduction** (Acts 7:1-53, 6:3, 8, 15, Pr 22:15, Acts 6:11-14)**1. Stephen's Defense before the Council**

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