

“YOU ALWAYS RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT!”

Acts 6:8-7:60 (51)

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

In today’s passage, Stephen rebukes the Jewish Rulers for always resisting the Holy Spirit. Do you think it is really possible for someone to resist the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God, right?! And much stronger than any person. Of course, if the Holy Spirit decides to occupy someone’s heart, that person cannot stop Him. Just as we saw with Saul before he became the first king of Israel. (Samuel 10:9-10) This was an exception, however, to how the Holy Spirit works after coming down on 120 believers on the day of Pentecost. Since then, and as we have seen in our study of the book of Acts so far, the Holy Spirit worked powerfully.....only in those who obeyed the word of God the Apostles preached. Like when Peter told the crowd right after Pentecost: Repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (2:38) Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and about 3,000 people received the Holy Spirit that day. This continued day after day (2:47) so that the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. Even a large number of priests, among the religious leaders, obeyed the message of repentance and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. (6:7)

So now that we know what it means to receive or embrace the Holy Spirit, what does it mean to resist the Holy Spirit? Yes, it is to prevent the Holy Spirit from working within our hearts when we reject and disobeying the word of God! Just like the Grecian Jews and the Jewish Rulers, in today’s passage. The question is, why did the Jewish Rulers always resist the Holy Spirit? Let’s learn from today’s key verse! I sincerely pray that as we listen to God’s word today none of us resist the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Let’s look at verse 8. Stephen was one of the first believers in the Jerusalem church. He was a Grecian Jew. This meant, unlike the Hebraic Jews, Stephen were not a native Israelite. Instead, Stephen grew up as a Jew and lived like a Jew..... but in a foreign Greek speaking country somewhere around the Mediterranean Sea. Then what was he doing in Jerusalem? Probably, like many other Grecian Jews, Stephen traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and/or Pentecost celebrations. However, while in Jerusalem, he listened to Peter telling the crowd God made Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ. (2:36) Stephen was cut to the heart. (2:37) When Peter said, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (2:38) Stephen obeyed immediately. Then received the gift of the Holy Spirit in his heart! Who began to work personally in Stephen’s heart.

Instead of returning home after Pentecost, Stephen remained in Jerusalem. He devoted himself to the apostles’ teaching..... he devoted himself to the fellowship of the believers in Jerusalem to the breaking of bread.....and to prayer. (2:42) And as Stephen grew in maturity in the Lord, he also grew fuller of the Holy Spirit (6:5) until he was full of wisdom (6:3) full of faith (6:5) and (look again at verse 8) full of God’s grace and power. As we would say today, Stephen was on fire for the Lord! That explains why he was the first of seven men to be appointed as a deacon in the Jerusalem church. (6:5) It also explains why, like the Apostles, (look again at verse 8) Stephen did great wonders and signs among the people. **Wow! Praise God for the Holy Spirit who worked powerfully in and through Stephen! Praise God for giving us Stephen as an example on how to embrace and grow with fullness of the Holy Spirit.**

Sadly, however, not everyone in Jerusalem responded to God’s word like Stephen. Look at verse 9. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called). Like Stephen, these members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen were all Grecian Jews from cities outside of Israel.....like Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. One day, they went out to listen to Stephen telling people about Jesus. Then, just like Peter told Stephen, so Stephen told his fellow Grecian Jews repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (2:38) However, instead of obeying God’s command, the men began to argue with Stephen. But look at verse 10. They could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave Stephen as he spoke. We do not know exactly what they argued about, but it is safe to say, no matter how clearly Stephen proved them wrong.....and no matter how vividly Stephen revealed Jesus as God’s Christ.....they refused to yield to God’s word. In doing so, they resisted the Holy Spirit! Now as we

have seen with Stephen, when we embrace the Holy Spirit through obedience to God's word, our hearts and lives are transformed for good, right?! But what happens if we resist the Holy Spirit, through disobedience to God's word? Like these Grecian Jews?

Look at verse 11. (Read) Here we can see, that when we resist the Holy Spirit, the sins and wickedness hidden in our hearts are not only activated but grow in power. When the Grecian Jews could not stand up against Stephen, they decided to kill him. But instead of doing it quietly, they used the oldest trick in the book, by falsely accusing him of blasphemy, to publically shame and kill Stephen. How wicked they were, right!? Their sin knew no bounds for (look at verses 12-14) after they stirred up the people..... AND the elders..... AND the teachers of the law.....(in other words, the whole community) seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin as if he was the worst criminal. Yet since they had no evidence against Stephen, they produced false witnesses, who testified:..... "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." It was all lies to convince the Sanhedrin to execute Stephen for blasphemy. Look at verse 15. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen to see if he would be scared to die. But to their amazement, they saw that unlike the dark and rigid faces of the Grecian Jews, Stephen's face was like the face of an angel.

At the time, this seemed very strange. For according to those present at the hearing, Stephen was in the wrong for speaking against Moses and the temple. And the Grecian Jews absolutely right for resisting this new teaching about Jesus that filled all of Jerusalem. So how could Stephen open their eyes to see the truth of the matter? Yes, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Stephen referred them to Scripture from the books of Genesis and Exodus. Let's look at chapters 7:1-5. (Read) **Why do you think Stephen began his address with this account of Abraham? It was not only because the Jewish rulers all revered Abraham as the father of their nation. But also to remind them that the reason God chose and bless Abraham as the father of Israel; was because of his attitude towards God and His word!** Abraham was already 75-years old when God appeared to him. Yet, when God commanded him to leave his country and his people and go to land God would show him (3) Abraham immediately and absolutely obeyed the Lord's command. Later, when Abraham arrived in the Promised Land, God gave him no inheritance there, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land. Amazingly, even though at that time Abraham had no child (4-5) Abram believed the Lord! So God credited it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:6) Indeed, Abraham had an absolute attitude towards God and His word. He did not limit God with human logic nor did he insist on his own sinful ways. But **believed God's promises and obeyed God's command. Stephen, had the same attitude as Abraham.....that is why his face was like that of angel.....that is why he was full of the Holy Spirit.**

Let's return to Stephen's address. In verses 9-16 Stephen continued to remind the Jewish Rulers that later, as God had promised, He gave Abraham a son, Isaac..... a grandson, Jacob..... and 12 great-grandsons that formed the 12 tribes of Israel. One of Abraham's great-grandsons, however, Joseph was sold to Egypt because of his brothers' jealousy. But in this was God's providence to bring Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all, (14) to Egypt and mold them into a great nation (9-16). Look at verses 17-19. (Read) God saw that his people Israel suffered under godless rulers. So He called Moses to deliver the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptian king. When God called Moses, he too was already 80 years old. Moses had thought he was living in a land of nobodies. But God called this Moses and said, "Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt" (33,34). Moses was afraid to return to Egypt, because he had killed an Egyptian. Also, his own people had rejected him, saying, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" Nevertheless, God Himself sent Moses to them as their ruler and deliverer. (35) It was a very hard command for Moses to obey. But like Abraham, Moses obeyed God's command anyway. When he obeyed God, God gave him the strength to lead his people out of Egypt and to perform wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for 40 years in the desert. (36) Here again, we can ask why **Stephen reminded the Jewish Rulers about God's work through Moses? It was to point their hearts to the living God. The Jewish Rulers saw Moses, but not the God of Moses. They practiced religious rituals but did not see God who gave**

them the law. They were men of practical unbelief. But Stephen, just like Moses, was a man who saw God and absolutely obeyed His words. That is why he was full of the Holy Spirit!

Indeed, the history of Israel is filled with men and women like Abraham and Moses, who lived before the living God and absolutely obeyed His word. Their attitude towards God and His word serve as good examples of how NOT to resist the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, there were also countless people in Israel's history who did the exact opposite. Look at verses 38-41. (Read) Here we can see, that God's very own people, the Israelites, whom God graciously brought out of Egyptwere quick to reject God and His word. They had the exact opposite attitude toward God and His word.....than their father, Abraham, and their leader Moses. Then how did God respond to them? Look at verse 42. God turned away from them. **Here we must learn that no matter who you are or how long you have been in the Lord, the Holy Spirit turns away from those who has the same attitude as the Israelites in the wilderness. This is not only a warning to us, but was a stern warning from the Holy Spirit to the Jewish Rulers in today's passage!**

Let's look at our key verse, verse 51. Let's read it together. "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" The members of the Sanhedrin were just like their ancestors. They had the exact same attitude as their ancestors in the desert. Just like their ancestors refused to obey the word God gave them through Moses, so the Jewish Rulers refused to obey God's word given to them through Jesus. Just as their ancestors rejected Moses in their hearts and returned to Egypt, so the Jewish Rulers rejected Jesus and remained in their lives of sin. And just as their ancestors created their own gods, so the Jewish Rulers created a false version of God.....and worshipped him in their own way.....instead of God's way. With this attitude.....and just like their ancestors, the Jewish Rulers always resisted the Holy Spirit.

This brings us back to the question we asked right at the beginning of the message: why did the Jewish Rulers always resist the Holy Spirit? Look again at verse 51. Stephen said it was because they were stiff-necked. Have you ever had a stiff-neck before? Apart from it being very painful, it prevents one from turning your head to the right, and to the left. Someone with a stiff-neck can also not look up or down! But face only one way, and that is forward. That is exactly what happened with the Jewish Rulers. Spiritually, they were stiff-necked because they simply refuse to yield to God and His word. As we have seen through Stephen's address how the word of God exposed their sin. The word of God commanded them to repentto turn away from sin to Jesus so the Holy Spirit could refresh their hearts and lives. (3:19) But they refused to yield to God's word. They refused to turn away from their sin. They refused to give up their lives of sin. Instead, with their stiff necks.....they wanted walk in one direction.....by keeping their lives just as they were.....by holding on to their false religion.....and clinging to lies Satan fed them. If this was their attitude, can we still wonder why the Holy Spirit turned away from them?

I am sure none of you want to be a stiff-necked person; right? But what causes such a stiff-necked attitude? Look again at verse 51. Stephen said to the Jewish rulers: Your hearts and ears areuncircumcised. **An uncircumcised heart** is proud, rebellious and closed to the word of God. It is a heart that is so full of worldly ideas and sinful desires that it cannot yield to God nor will it obey His word. To understand it better, let's consider the opposite of what an uncircumcised heart is. In contrast, when someone's heart is circumcised, that person is humbled (Lev 26:41) and obedient to the word of God as the Spirit cuts off any sin between us and God. With this said, we understand why Stephen said the Jewish rulers had uncircumcised hearts. **What about uncircumcised ears?** Uncircumcised ears represent those who hear the Word of God imperfectly, usually because they hear only what they want to hear, or they hear with such a strong prejudice that they reject the truth out of hand. Just like the Jewish Rulers. So it is our uncircumcised hearts and ears that makes us to have stiff-necks and resist the Holy Spirit.

How did the Jewish Rulers respond to Stephen's rebuke? Look at verse 54. When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. Then, they completely lost it when Stephen said (look at verses 56-58) "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. What about you and me, here today? Does the word of God offend us

also, to the point where we cover our ears and yell at the top of our voices to not hear the rebuke of the Holy Spirit? Or are we willing to yield to the Holy Spirit, so He can circumcise our hearts and ears, to sincerely repent of our sins before the word of God.....and obey Him absolutely in our lives? Just like Abraham, Moses and Stephen!

In conclusion. Being spiritually stiff-necked, is to always resist the Holy Spirit! It is absolutely fatal to our relationship with God. But this is exactly why God rebukes us, also! It is because He loves us and wants His Spirit to dwell with fullness in our hearts, just as He did with Stephen! Of course, it is not easy to hear that we are stiff-necked and have uncircumcised hearts and ears. But we must never respond to this rebuke like the Jewish Rulers. Instead, we should humbly obey the word of the Lord to embrace the Holy Spirit, so that He may circumcise our hearts and ears.....and so cut off the sin that stands between us and God. My biggest fear is always that we become a ministry full of stiff necked people. A people who claim to know God and His word. Yet, in truth, we refuse to repent of our sin and obey the word of God. May this never ever happen in our ministry!! Let's yield to the Holy Spirit this morning. Let's repent of our sin before the Lord today. Amen!