

At the writing of this article, the Facebook Bible reading group that I lead is reflecting on Acts chapter seven. It is the account of Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. He has been serving the people and performing great signs and wonders. Opponents eventually rise up to confront Stephen and debate him, "**but they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.**" (Acts 6:10). They then concoct some trumped up charges and the religious leaders seize him and bring Stephen before the council. Finally, in Acts 7:1, the high priest questions Stephen, "**Are these things so?**" Stephen then launches into sermon through what we call the Old Testament. Starting with Abraham and going through Solomon, Stephen recounts God's work among his people. I read through Stephen's sermon, and it took me about seven minutes to complete it. For seven minutes or so, the council listened without objection. They had no problem with what he was saying. There was no heresy, nothing offensive, and definitely nothing divisive. It wasn't until verse fifty-one that Stephen got into trouble when he said, "**You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you...**" When Stephen applied the text and spoke the truth to them; the truth that they are sinners, the council became enraged.

And whether you like it or not, what Stephen said to that council that day also applies to you: **You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.** Please do not stone me like what they did to Stephen. Hopefully you can handle the truth. And besides, it is not me declaring this truth but rather God. But even so, many resist proclaiming this truth out of fear of being stoned by others. But as I like to say, you cannot truly hear the Good News of Easter until you have gone through Good Friday.

And so, I invite you to embrace this Lenten season. Reflect on your sinfulness and confess your sins. Remember that from dust you came and to dust you shall return. Remember that without God, death will embrace you forever. Remember and acknowledge your stiff-neckness (yes, I know that is not a word). Remember all of this but also know that there is a Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Good News. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus is the Resurrection, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life and the Light of the world. Jesus is the only Gate to God's pastures, the Narrow Way.

And so, ***You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears,*** do not resist the Holy Spirit. Embrace this Good News and praise Him, always and forever, Amen.