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| ***Title:*** | Embrace the Yoke |
| ***Text:*** | Acts 7:1-60 (6:11-14 is the accusation he is answering in chapter 7:1-53) |
| ***Subject:*** | What caused the Jews to resist God and reject Christ? |
| ***Compliment:*** | Their pride! |
| ***CIT:*** | Stephen, on trial, charges the court of Jewish leaders with pride as the cause for their constant resistance to God and their rejection of Christ! |
| ***Purpose:*** | To help believers see the effects of pride with regard to one’s ability to hear from and follow God! |
| ***Homiletic Idea:*** | Pride is capable of rendering man incapable of hearing from and following God in any capacity. |
| ***Intro:*** |  |

A yoke is designed so that an ox or horse can be controlled and made useful in work. As long as the ox wears the yoke his great strength can be harnessed and employed in a number of tasks at the direction of the farmer. The farmer can lead and guide the ox or oxen exactly where he wants it or them to go. I actually saw a picture of a small boy working an ox to plow some land all by himself. I am not exactly sure how a yoke works, but apparently for a small boy to be able to control this mighty beast, it must be pretty effective.

Not all oxen are accustomed to a yoke, and some flat out resist. This makes it virtually impossible for the farmer to get any use out of the ox. The farmer is rendered incapable of being able to lead and guide the ox where he wants it to go. The term for this ox is “stiff-necked.” He refuses to be yoked and thus refuses to be lead. He is uncomfortable with the yoke and thus chooses to resist it. That is where the term ‘stiff-necked’ originated from.

This same term is applied to the nation of Israel by God in Exodus 33:5, “For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye [are] a stiffnecked people.” It is applied again here by Stephen to the religious Jews who have him on trial, and is said to be the cause for their resistance to God all throughout history. To be stiff-necked is to be full of pride to the point that one refuses to submit, to follow, to yield. That is and always has been the Jews problem all throughout history in their relationship with God!

CIT stated: ***Stephen, on trial, charges the court of Jewish leaders with pride as the cause for their constant resistance to God and their rejection of Christ!***

Read Luke 2:34-35: This is what the Gospel of Jesus will do!

* Stephen preaches the gospel and that is what happens.
* He is arrested and put on trial.
* He is then charged and asked to make his plea regarding these charges (Acts 6:11 – 7:1).

Transition: What was he charged with?

* First, he was arrested because of the gospel he preached and the way it pulled the people away from the tyrannical rule of the Jewish leaders.
* False Charge One (all these were manufactured to give them a reason to shut Stephen up): Blasphemy against Moses. 6:11
* False Charge Two: Blasphemy against God. 6:11
* False Charge Three: Blasphemy against the Temple. 6:13
* False Charge Four: Blasphemy against the law. 6:13
* Evidence for this is the “eye witness” accounts of Stephen preaching that, “this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.” 6:14
* The above message is labeled as “blasphemy”, which means to speak against or reject.

In chapter 7 Stephen is asked simply in verse 1, “Are these things so?” At this point Stephen is given an opportunity to defend himself.

Stephen’s response is inductive in form (which means the main idea or the moral comes last and the rest builds up to it) and it is like he is saying, “Ok, let’s consider these charges for a moment.”

NOTE: It’s funny because the one on trial here is Stephen, but by the time he pleads his case it seems as though the religious Jews before him are the ones being charged!

Transition: So Stephen makes his case.

1. Stephen accomplishes two things as he recounts Israel’s history beginning with Abraham.
   1. First he clears himself of all charges.
      1. He lifts God up as the “God of Glory” and credits Him with being the essential character in all of Israel’s history! 7:2 (& through the entire response)
      2. He demonstrates, rather than simply claiming, appreciation for the law by the way he readily and accurately presents its content throughout his defense! 7:2-53
      3. He deals favorably with Moses, and he even points out that Moses himself was looking ahead to Christ! 7:20-37 \*\*\* key is V30-36 &37

NOTE: It is ironic that Stephen, who is accused by the Jews of his day of Blaspheming Moses, is defending and representing Moses against the Israelites of Moses’ day that were indeed resisting him! 7:35

NOTE: The only thing they could have even come close to pinning on him was less regard for the temple than they had (He may have been implying that they had too much regard for the temple). He seems to emphasize throughout his account the idea that God met with His people long before there was a temple and in many diverse places. Abram was reached in Mesopotamia, spoken to in Haran, and led to and out of Egypt by God. God spoke to Joseph in Egypt. God met with Moses in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the land of Midian. Even still, he did not blaspheme the temple.

Transition: So the first thing he does is clear himself of the charges.

* 1. Second he exposes Israel’s history of pride, and rebellion and resistance to God and to God’s messengers.
     1. The patriarchs sold Joseph into slavery because of envy. 7:8-10

NOTE: Gen. 37:1-11 – Say what you will about Joseph being favored, but dreams had significance back then and his parents and his brethren knew it. That is why, in verse 11, Jacob observed that which Joseph dreamt about. ***God was doing something through Joseph and the patriarchs were jealous!***

* + 1. The children of Israel rejected Moses as a leader, even though it was obvious, at least to Moses, that God would use him to deliver the Israelites. 7:24-29, 35
    2. Not only did the Israelites reject Moses, but they resisted and rejected the Law given by God through Moses! 7:38-39
    3. As if this wasn’t enough these Israelites also rejected God Himself. 7:40-43
    4. And the icing on the cake is the fact that it seems Stephen is implying that the Jews placed too much emphasis on the temple. 7:44-50

NOTE: I think Stephen would have made a good lawyer. Some say he was one of the first apologists (or systematic defenders of the faith).

Transition: Having thoroughly identified a pattern of rebellion and resistance to God and the work God was trying to accomplish in the history of the Jewish nation…

1. Stephen drives home his indictment for the Jews standing before him. 7:51-53
   1. Charge One: Stiffnecked – unwilling to yield or submit or be led. 7:51
   2. Charge Two: Uncircumcised in heart and ears – spiritually they had not entered into a covenant with God (though physically they had) and thus their ears could not be inclined to hear Him! 7:51
   3. Evidence to this fact:
      1. “ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” 7:51

Transition: It is almost like Stephen is saying, “You don’t believe me? Consider this!”

* + 1. Can you find one prophet your fathers didn’t persecute? 7:52a
    2. Now look what you did! 7:52b-53

If anyone blasphemed and resisted God, and Moses and most of God’s messengers it was your fathers. God was trying to work then as He is trying to work now. Your fathers resisted then and you are resisting now!

They killed the prophets and you killed The Holy One of which they prophesied!

**CIT:** ***Stephen charges the court of Jewish leaders with pride as the cause for their constant resistance to God and their rejection of Christ (having now killed their Messiah), and let’s face it that is the real reason for this mock trial!***

They were so overcome with conviction that they killed him. 7:54-60

**Transition to Application:**

***All throughout history the Jews have had trouble following God and hearing from God because of their pride. Stephen’s generation of Jews is no different and this time they missed out on their own Messiah because they were unable to see what God was doing!***

There is a lot to learn from this passage, but one of the main ideas is this: **Homiletic Idea:** **Pride *is capable* of rendering man *incapable* of hearing from and following God in any capacity!**

Transition: Why?

* Because it causes them to be stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ear.
  + Stiff-necked – unwilling to be led.
    - A lost man that is proud and stiff-necked will resist the Holy Ghost’s work drawing him to salvation.
      * It will keep a man, ignorant of his need for the Gospel, ignorant of his need for the gospel because he will be unwilling to accept that he does not know what he truly does not know; he will say, “I am fine.”
      * It will keep a man who is aware of his need for the gospel from accepting it because he isn’t interested in being seen as one who needs anything.
      * It will keep a religious man clinging to his religion unwilling to admit that his religion is insufficient or incomplete or inaccurate.
    - A saved man that is full of pride and stiff-necked will not live life God’s way because he refuses to be led!
      * So often it’s not that we aren’t hearing from God it’s just that what He has revealed we aren’t willing to follow.
      * We may not openly confess that, but one merely has to watch our lives to identify an inconsistency with what our lives reflect and what our mouths say.
      * The Holy Ghost is working to lead; we just refuse to be led.
    - In both cases man misses out on the good God has because he is unwilling to be led; stiff-necked.
  + Uncircumcised in heart and ears – religious outwardly without much religion inwardly.
    - Outwardly we go through the motions, but inwardly our hearts are far from God and our ears are not inclined to hear from Him.
    - We aren’t listening for Him.
    - Our plans are made, and our course is usually determined before the day begins and we aren’t looking for Him to lead.
    - God did not have their hearts, and there are many Christians today that the same could be said for.
      * God does not have their hearts.
      * By virtue of God not having their hearts, He doesn’t have their ears.
* Regardless of the details, those that are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart are characterized by this one trait: ***They resist the Holy Ghost.***
  + In Salvation.
  + In God’s will.
  + The Holy Spirit attempts to lead in every area of life, but the man that is full of pride is not willing to be led, just like an ox that is unwilling to be yoked.

Conclusion:

The response to the convicting power of the Truth for the Jews was the murder of Stephen. They responded to the truth regarding their resistance with more resistance when in reality they could have done like so many other Jews convicted by the Truth before them. They could have submitted. They could have allowed themselves to be broken.

That is a good word, “broken.” It is the opposite of “stiff-necked”. Stiff-necked means that one refuses to be led, and resists any attempts by others to lead. Broken means that an animal accepts the yoke in whatever form it comes in. One can be led. The other cannot be.

The Jews, unwilling to be led and disinclined to hear from God, missed out on the biggest moment of their nation’s history; the inauguration of their Messiah! What good might you miss out on because you are unwilling to be led and disinclined to hear from God?

* What good in marriage?
* What good in parenting?
* What good in relationships?
* What good in career?
* What good in friendships?
* What good in life?

You don’t have to be like the Jews that had Stephen on trial. Incline your heart and your ears to God. Surrender yourself to Him. Allow yourself to be broken. Embrace the yoke.

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| ***Dates and Locations Delivered*** | |  |
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