

“Dangerous Words”
Pastor Wally Contreras
August 23, 2020

“And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. 'But I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' 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. “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: “‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet

says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?" "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7)

* * * * *

The children's "warm-up" song was "The God of Wow!" Does that description of Him reflect my true feelings about Him? If so, how so? If not, why not?

When was the last time I was truly amazed by what God had done in my life where I realized that God is the God of Wow? Explain.

It has been said that church is a safe place to hear a dangerous message. If the message is dangerous, how can the church be a "safe place" if the church is openly and outwardly acting on the dangerous message that is being taught? Explain.

In his discussion of Acts 7, John MacArthur pointed out that "people have said, "Forget about the Old Testament. All we really need is the New Testament." And there are many people who carry around a New Testament who know very little about the Old Testament. Some people would say, "Well, Abraham and Moses have very little to do with us. All we need to do is stick to the things that are revealed at the coming of Christ and afterwards." And some people would cut off the New Testament from the Old, Christ from Israel. Martin Luther faced it in his own day, and he made this statement: "The Old Testament is the cradle in which the Christ child is laid." It is not irrelevant to study the Old Testament, for the New Testament finds its birth in the Old. The Old Testament heritage supports the New Testament and explains it. And that is exactly Stephen's point as he preaches in Acts 7. He builds everything he says on the Old Testament. And our faith in Jesus Christ is rooted upon the fact of the Old Testament, that He is the Redeemer promised to Israel, the one who fulfills all of the Old Testament types, patterns and prophecies. And this is the way Stephen directs his attention, and the attention of his hearers, in chapter 7." How versed am I when it comes to the Old Testament? Do I see the Old Testament as "the cradle in which the Christ Child is laid"? Explain.

Notice how God turned the tables so that Stephen the defendant became Stephen the prosecutor and the prosecuting Jews and Sanhedrin became the defendants. When the high priest asked, "Are these things so?" regarding the accusations found in Acts 6 made against Stephen (Blasphemous words against Moses; Blasphemous words against God; Speaking against the holy place; Speaking against the Law; and saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and alter the customs which Moses handed down), the high priest (the legal high priest was Caiaphas), the high priest was the prosecutor and Stephen the defendant, but Stephen through his recitation became the accuser when he pointed out to them that they misunderstood their own spiritual roots (Acts 7:1-8); they rejected their God-sent deliverers (Acts 7:9-36); they disobeyed their law (Acts 7:37-43); they despised their temple (Acts 7:44-50); and, they stubbornly resisted their God and His truth (Acts 7:51-53) (see Warren Wiersbe Commentary) and the high priest and 70 religious leaders of the Jewish Supreme Court became the accused. What are some lessons that I can take away from Stephen when it comes to my defending the Faith?

Stephen, not mincing any words, boldly called out the high priest and the Sanhedrin: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit." Deuteronomy 6:16 ("Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn) is all about cutting away my stubbornness. Have I got a little whittling to do on my uncircumcised heart (stubbornness)? If so, why so? If not, why not?

The council was "stiff-necked" because, as John Piper pointed out, "[Stephen] says that Israel "Always resists the Holy Spirit." This means, first, that God had been working for Israel again and again with repeated acts of mercy and patience and long-suffering throughout their history. And it means, secondly, that they had repeatedly hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks and stopped their ears ("talk to the hand" as Pastor Wally described it) to the work of God." This is also the third time that an Apostle had been called in to give an explanation regarding their bold preaching of the Gospel and healing to the council (Acts 4:1-22; Acts 5:17-42; Acts 6:7-Acts 7:60). Might I also be classified as being a bit "stiff-necked" when it comes to my daily walk with Him where He has repeatedly shown me "acts of mercy and patience and long-suffering" and I have "stopped [my] ears to the work of God" in my life? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Charles Spurgeon pointed out regarding the person of the Holy Spirit that: "In the 4th chapter of Ephesians, verse 30, it is said that the Holy Spirit can be grieved: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." In Isaiah, 63:10, it is

said that the Holy Spirit can be grieved: "They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them." In Acts, 7:51, you read that the Holy Spirit can be resisted: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" And in the 5th chapter, verse 9, of the same book, you will find that the Holy Spirit may be tested. We are informed that Peter said to Ananias and Sapphira, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Now, these things could not be emotions which might be ascribed to a quality or an emanation; they must be understood to relate to a person; an influence could not be grieved, it must be a person who can be grieved, tested, or resisted." So it is possible to rebel against and to grieve the Holy Spirit; it is possible to resist the Holy Spirit and to test the Holy Spirit." In each of these examples it doesn't turn out well for the person who does one of those things to the Holy Spirit. Do I view the Holy Spirit as a person or "an influence" and to what degree, if any, do I continue to grieve, test or resist the Holy Spirit in my life?

In what way(s) have you seen the truth in Pastor Wally's assertion that "trusting Jesus is dangerous to [my] selfish ways"? Explain.