

# Stephen: A Trophy of Grace

by Danny Bond

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*The sermon highlights Stephen as a model of grace and effective ministry in the early church, emphasizing the importance of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in discipleship.*

**Duration:** 47:43

**Scripture:** Acts 6:1

**Topics:** "Stephen"

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## Description

In this video, the speaker discusses the shift in churches from prioritizing the Word of God to focusing on entertainment. He highlights how technology and the rise of video watching have contributed to a decline in reading and thinking. The speaker argues that this has led to a thirst for entertainment rather than a thirst for the Word of God. He emphasizes the importance of discipleship and contrasts it with the emphasis on programs and church growth strategies. The speaker encourages a return to the biblical model of making disciples through teaching the Word of God and emphasizes the unity, commitment, love, and courage displayed by the early apostles in their preaching.

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## Transcript

Today we're going to talk about Stephen, one of the early church servants who became a great trophy of God's grace. And we come to Acts chapter 6, it runs from verse 1 down to 15, and I thank God for this passage. I'll tell you why.

Because I have lived long enough to see, as a Christian, born again, to see a great love for the Word of God when God dropped his spiritual atom bomb on Southern California and the Jesus movement erupted in the early 70s. Before that time, you may be interested to note, there was no church in the country over a thousand people at that time, especially in California. Then the Word of God was opened, the Holy Spirit was poured out, the Jesus movement began to happen, God saved so many people, and Bibles were opened in pulpits across the country.

And then the church grew mightily, disciples were made, big churches came to pass, as people loved the Lord and loved his Word. Then there came a time where the technology increased and the video watching increased and television has increased in the land. And now there is a time where people do not read, they do not think, they watch.

This is a video generation from the youngest to the oldest, and thus people have become watchers. And as a result, the thirst for the Word of God, which involves reading, has gone and it has been replaced by a thirst for entertainment. So now in the pulpits you do not have the Bible anymore.

You have entertainment, you have positive speeches that give you warm fuzzies and three or four good steps to help you with your week. However, it is my observation that very few disciples are being made in our day. In our text, we have disciples.

We do not have bodies and buildings and people in church, we have disciples. So everything I am saying is to say this, we are now seeing it done man's way in church at every turn. Programs that have been put together by the church growth experts.

So you do not need the Holy Spirit to guide you, you do not need a spirit-filled life, you do not need the Bible, you just need the programs. Give me the package, give me the brochures and we will open up shop. That is not the way they did it in the book of Acts.

In the book of Acts we see how God did it, how God did it. Let us read over the passage and we will take a running leap at it. In Acts 6.1, now in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God. It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God. That is as fresh and true today as it has ever been.

It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God. And wait on tables, serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

For we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the same pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicholas, who was actually a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles.

And when they had prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them forth. And the word of God spread. The word of God spread as the apostles gave themselves to the word of God and prayer.

The word of God spread. And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. And there arose some from what is called the synagogue of the freedmen. Cyrenians, Alexandrians, those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke. So they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people, the elders, the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him to the council.

They also set up false witnesses. Does that sound familiar? It's the same thing they did to Jesus Christ. They rejected Jesus Christ officially as a nation.

They are now officially rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit. And they are ripe for God's judgment. And so they find false witnesses and say, This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us. And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. The Holy Spirit of God was upon him.

Now we are studying here the early church. And I want to just take a running leap of this passage and then we'll look at the choosing of Stephen. In the early church, as you recall, they were commissioned by Christ.

They were sent forth by Christ. In Acts 1.8, if you look over there, hold your place here and look to Acts 1.8. Jesus, after he rose from the dead and before he went back to heaven, commissioned them. He said, You will receive power.

It all began with the receiving of the power of the Holy Spirit. It's all centered on the work of the Holy Spirit, the centrality of Christ. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria and all the way to the ends of the earth. And then he went back into heaven. They were given their commission.

So on the day of Pentecost, the church was born by the power of the spirit. And in the power of the spirit, they began to fulfill their commission. Do you remember what the great commission is that Jesus gave at the end of Matthew? He said, Go into all the world and make sure you get bodies into buildings.

Go into all the world with good programs. He said, Go into all the world and make disciples teaching them. Make disciples teaching them all things that I have taught you.

The word. Go into the world and make disciples by teaching them the word of God. And they began to do this.

And why were they effective? Because they had unity. They were of one mind in this. They were all committed.

They were loving each other. They had courage. We have seen them go through persecution.

We've seen them thrown in jail. We've seen them whipped and beaten. And we see that they continue to preach the word.

They all had, may I say it, if you look at all this, total involvement. They had total involvement. Persecution has a way of flushing out the uncommitted.

And when God's people are committed and born along by his Holy Spirit, they want to be part of the action. It has been said there's three kinds of people in church. Do you know what they are? Three kinds of people in church.

There are the people who make it happen. There are the people who watch it happen. And then there are the people who aren't sure what is happening.

I think that's accurate. In the early church, they were all the kind of people who made it happen. They weren't spectators.

Spectator-itis is a disease today. People file in and they file out. And they watch.

But not in the early church. They were all involved. They all spoke the word of God with boldness.

Remember? After they prayed and the place was shaken, threatened to stop preaching the word, they spoke with boldness. All of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

These are the tongues we read. Another thing is they kept their message pure. They kept their message pure.

They refused, may I say it, to allow secular thinking to come in and water down the message. They kept their message pure. You could put it this way.

These people fought in Bible. They fought in Bible. May God raise up a generation of people right here who will learn the Bible and think in Bible.

And as a result of thinking in Bible and the word of God and the terms of the word of God, they allowed God to work his plan his way. In the early church, in the book of Acts, we are watching Jesus build his church. His way.

God's plan worked God's way. What was that way? Well, God used Peter to launch the ministry in Jerusalem to the Jews. That was his plan.

Now, follow this. God used Stephen and his death to bring about an outbreak of persecution, which scattered the people in the church to such an extent that the gospel went out to the Gentile world. That was God's plan.

They weren't sitting around one day with a committee saying, how can we make the church in Jerusalem grow? And one guy pipes up and says, I know. How about if Stephen dies? How about if he's a martyr? If he gets out there on the line and really gets them upset, that'll cause it. That'd be a good way.

You can see Stephen over there, right? Volunteer me. Why don't you? But you see, that isn't what happened. What happened is God led Stephen.

God filled Stephen. God blessed Stephen with power and signs and wonders and miracles. And God drew attention to Stephen.

Stephen preached the word. And Stephen ended up being martyred by these Christless, godless, religious leaders. That was God's plan.

They would have never thought that up on their own as a program. But that was God's program. And Stephen's life becomes proof that it's not the length of your ministry so much that counts as the effectiveness of it.

Not so much the length of it, but the effectiveness of it. His life is so effective. He is in every way a trophy of grace.

God made this man. The word of God made this man. The Holy Spirit of God made this man.

And so he died at a very young age, martyred. And he is not alone. Many have followed in that same vein throughout the years in the history of the church.

I think of Henry Martine, who was a great missionary to India. When Henry Martine got off the ship after his long voyage to India, he got down on this sandy beach. And he kneeled down and he prayed and he said, Now, God, let me burn out for you in this place.

He was dead at 30. But he made a massive impact. David Brainerd, who was a missionary to the Indians here in America, tremendous man of God.

His journals continue to minister to people today. He was dead at 30. Robert Murray McShane was a pastor in Scotland.

When he died, all of Scotland wept. He died at 30. In more modern times, you may know the name Elizabeth Elliott.

You know that name because her husband, Jim Elliott, was led by the Holy Spirit to go down to South America and preach the gospel to the Alka Indians. Before he went, he wrote in his journal, It is no sacrifice to give up that which I cannot keep or that which I cannot lose. He went down to minister to the Alka Indians and a native threw a spear through him.

He was dead at 30. Elizabeth Elliott then took Val, who was at the time two years old, put on a little pappus-type device on her back and went in to live among the Alka Indians. And she led the entire tribe that killed her husband to Jesus Christ.

And from there, she has been given a ministry to go around the world preaching and ministering the word of God and telling her story. But you see, Jesus Christ himself ministered publicly for three years and he was dead at 30. It isn't so much the length of your ministry as the effectiveness of it.

And that is what counts. And I bring that up to say this. I see Stephen on the scene and I see him gone and I see him die very young.

And I know that we don't all come to the Lord young enough to die that early. So effective for God. So the question comes up, what about me? I'm getting a late start.

Is there any hope for God to use me? Absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, I was thinking the best thing to cause our church to go is to have somebody here martyred.

So we'll be choosing volunteers after. But let me say, if you're getting a late start, the wonderful thing is this. Thank God you have a start at all.

Thank God you have a start at all. You know, Jesus Christ, he can still use you. He is Stephen in a remarkable way.

And I'd like to look at just four things in this passage about this man. His choosing, his character, his courage and his countenance. That's what's here before us.

Let's look at his choosing. And in doing so, we'll pick up some valuable insights and principles moving to the passage. To begin with, what happened here, Satan, if you haven't noticed, sought to divide the people.

To divide the people and thus discourage the leadership, draw them away from the word. Diversion, Acts 6.1. In those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Notice now, here it is.

The New King James says multiplying. It's not just addition of people to the church, but it is disciples multiplying. It's multiplication.

And it's beyond just bodies and buildings. These are real disciples and it's beyond addition. They are multiplying.

It's beginning to explode effectively. The last figure Luke gave us was that of 5,000 men. That doesn't mention the women and the youth.

Then he stopped counting. So, there is easily about 20,000 people or more in the church now. It's gigantic.

So, here in the middle of this, the devil has failed in his persecution. He failed with Ananias and Sapphira to bring worldliness in. Now he seeks to get among the people and fracture the flock by worldly thought.

Worldly thought. And you find that in the contrast of the terms the Hellenists and the Hebrews. See, the history here is this.

The Hebrews were the native Jewish people that populated Palestine. The Hellenists were the Grecian Jews that were out there scattered from the Diaspora, the great scattering of the Jews, the Diaspora. So, what happened is they came up for Passover.

To worship, they stayed for Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, remember 3,000 were saved. So, many stayed and lived there.

They stayed on and lived there and joined the church. And they were Grecian by culture and they spoke Greek by language. And if they studied the scriptures, they studied the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

So, the history there was one of tension. The Hebrew Jews sort of looked down their noses at the Hellenists. They looked at themselves as Orthodox.

They looked at the Grecian Jews as being looser because they were more forward to embrace the things of the culture that the Greeks had brought in and so on. So, there was always this tension. Well, that's out in the secular world.

What happens is as many of the Grecian Jews are converted and join the church, that secular mindset of prejudice creeps in. And as a result, when they're distributing the food to the widows, which the Jews were very apt to do, they were not giving any to the Grecian widows. They were only giving it to the Hebrew

widows in the church.

And as a result, then the Hellenists or the Grecian Jews, who were now believers, became upset and they're mad at their brothers and sisters for not including them. And the devil wanted to use that as a handle to bring division. And it was on its way toward doing just that.

We need to guard against that. We need to guard against allowing prejudices from the worldly mindset out there into our minds and here in the church where we have prejudice one with another. And we need to just be godly centered on Christ and love one another and treat one another the way the Word of God says that we should.

Paul wrote to, I think, the Thessalonians and he said, I have no need to write to you to do this, for you're already taught by the Holy Spirit to love one another. So the apostles had to take action here. Why? They had to safeguard their priority, which was to preach the word, to study the word.

In Acts 2, the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable. We should leave the word of God and serve tables. Now, this word tables can be translated to refer to tables that are used in monetary matters or tables used for serving meals.

Either way, it combines the idea of handling money to purchase food to distribute to those in need. So they need some individuals to take care of this who can be trusted to love the Grecian widows and trusted to handle the money that's given and trusted them to be faithful. And they need to be wise in how to do it.

So we find here that they are looking then for those that can do this. And the reason is, they say in 6.4, we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. So we need to find brethren, seven of them.

Verse 3 says, Therefore, brethren, seek out among you seven men of good reputation and so on. What we find here is this. There is no greater priority for the shepherds than the word of God and prayer.

And honestly, I have to resist the temptation to spend weeks on that. Really, it is an act of the will this morning that stops me from making this four or five part series on the word of God and prayer for the leaders. But we'll do that some other time.

Please notice that Luke has greatly blessed us by recording for us through the situation the priority of the apostles who were the shepherds to prayer and to the word of God. And because of that, they were freed up then. After they had these men come in to go on and give themselves to that, there is no greater priority.

I'm battling the temptation not to just say a lot of things that are in my heart right now. I'll just squeeze out a few. One is this.

If you don't give yourself continually to prayer and to the study of the word of God long hours to the point of exhaustion, as Paul said to Timothy, labored in the word to the point of exhaustion. How then can you get up and stand in the pulpit and have from the abundance of the heart the mouth speak? How can a pastor rightly divide and preach the word if he's not in the word all the time? He can't. If he doesn't do it every single Sunday, how can he do it anytime, any other time? He can't.

Whatever you study is what you think about most. If you study Newsweek and time and current events and the news and always working on how to be relevant and clever, then guess what? All your time is spent in those things and not in the word of God. It takes long, long hours in the word of God to rightly divide it and feed the flock of God.

These men knew that. They knew this was a diversion to take them away from that, but they refused to let go of that priority. I don't know what happened to that in the church today.

But men who call themselves pastors are not doing this too often. And it's sad, it's tragic. Pray that God raises up many who will return to the biblical priority.

I pray God raises up men here to follow in this priority. Now, the requirement then to serve up a solution, if we could put it that way, to serve up a solution, what kind of men do they need to take care of these widows? They need someone who is a good man. It's a threefold requirement.

They need a good man, someone of good reputation, verse 3. They need a godly man, someone full of the Holy Spirit, verse 3. They need a gifted man, someone who has wisdom, verse 3. I say gifted with wisdom because you can be godly and not have wisdom. You know what wisdom is? It is the ability to apply the knowledge of the word of God to specific situations. And not all godly men are really super wise men.

It takes a gift of God to be able to put that all together, a certain working of the Holy Spirit. So look for a good man of good reputation, a godly man full of the Holy Spirit, gifted men, those that can actually apply the word of God that they've been learning to the situations that will come up. And I'm so glad also that this is here because this should be a longstanding principle in selecting individuals to serve in the ministry.

These things, good man, godly man, gifted man. Too often we use other criteria to have people serve in ministry. It has been said that leadership in the local church should be determined by spirituality, not notoriety.

I have to chuckle at that because our initial reaction and tendency is to look for the beautiful people. What we need here is the beautiful people. We'll put them in ministry.

It's nothing wrong with being one of the beautiful people if you're naturally that way. But if you have to work full-time on it, you have a full-time preoccupation, it might not be the beautiful people that are really the godly ones. You may be swift, you may be gifted in oratory or dealing with people, but that doesn't mean you're godly, doesn't mean you're wise.

Sometimes it is one of the individuals that you would never suspect who is the most godly, full of the most wisdom. And here we have this man, Stephen. We have Philip, we have these others that are chosen because they are like this and they are known to be this way.

So Stephen was a godly man chosen from among the multitude. And we read in verse 5, the saying pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith. Then look at these names, they're all Greek names.

This is a Greek problem. The Hebrew Jews were mean to these Greeks. It's causing division.

But now God has spoken to their hearts, the apostles are guiding them in the right way, and now they're being loving and they choose out all Grecian Jews to minister to the Grecian widows. It is a wonderful act of the people responding in grace to let the Lord make them godly and Christ-like. We're sorry, we're going to even let your people handle this situation so you are properly taken care of in every possible way.

All Greek names, Stephen, then one of them. Now, the saying pleased the whole multitude. Look at verse 5. And they chose Stephen.

Now let's just stop there for a minute. You have a multitude of maybe 20,000, maybe 30,000 people. Go choose out seven men.

Stephen's the first in the list. And how did he get there? How did he get there? Evidently, among the multitude, many people knew Stephen. Otherwise, how could they find him among the multitude? Now, if many people knew Stephen and wanted to choose him for this position of serving the widows, certainly they knew him through the servanthood he manifested before them in their friendships and in the church.

So that Stephen stood out among the multitudes as a friendly, serving man. And that is monumental to me, as did Philip and the others. That's monumental to me because here comes a man from obscurity.

He's not an apostle. He is taken from among the ranks, if we could put it that way. He goes from the back of the church to the front in terms of activity by the Holy Spirit in his life and usefulness.

From the back to the front. Where did he start? He started by serving and being friendly. There's a tendency, I think, on the part of all of us to wait for people to come to us and be friendly.

And over the years, I've heard so often people will come to me and they'll say, you know, I've been coming here and there's no love here. And I always look at them with the same thought in my mind, the same thought as I bring up this mirror. And I want to give it to them.

It's all mental, it's all in my imagination, but I want to say here, take this mirror, could you? It magnifies seven times your face. You can see your pores, the little hairs on your face, the peach fuzz, everything. Look in the mirror.

Now look in this mirror and say it again. There's no love here. You got it.

It's the person in the mirror. You see, the Bible says, if a man will have many friends, he must first show himself to be friendly. You become friendly.

You manifest love. And you'll find there's all kinds of love here. Stephen was a man who was friendly.

People knew him because he was friendly. He wasn't waiting in some corner, filing in, filing out, and bitter, roaring out of the parking lot in his chariot. You know, uptight, because there's no love here.

He was walking around loving people, serving people, so when they said, choose seven among you, among the multitudes, we just want seven that can do this. Everybody's going, hey, how about Stephen? The guy's so friendly, he's so loving, he's so genuine. That's how he got in.

That's where he started. That's where we all start. So his choosing.

Let's go to his character. Verse five. Stephen was a man who was described here as being full of faith.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith. What a way to be marked. Full of faith.

Full of faith in what? I think it's saying here he had faith in so many ways, but especially we find out he was full of faith in God's Word. Full of faith in God's Word. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith.

He believed it so much, he was willing to study it to the degree that he was able to skillfully, rightly divide it. So that in chapter seven, when he's taken before the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders of the day, the ones that studied the Word all the time, he rightly divides it, and he steadfastly works his way down through the entire history of the Jewish people, showing how Jesus Christ is woven through as the Messiah all the way through their scriptures, and he brings them right up to make a decision for Christ, and they kill him. And he does that with the greatest scholars in the nation, and he doesn't back down.

And he does it with an ability they didn't have. He obviously loved the Word of God, believed the Word of God enough to actually study it, to where he became deeply skilled into it, and he could rightly divide it with anybody who came in contact with him. Further, he had faith in God's sovereignty and timing.

He's a man of faith. Faith in God's sovereignty and timing. He trusted God to do what was right in his life, even if it cost him his life.

You know, when he went into that meeting with the Sanhedrin, they brought him before the council, and his face is shining like an angel. There was a point in the middle of his message where he's thinking to himself, I'm a dead man. I'm a dead man.

This all sounds so familiar. False witnesses, just like they did to Jesus. A trial, just like Jesus.

They frame me, just like Jesus. They're going to kill me, just like Jesus. I might as well preach it all to them.

So he just lets it, if I can put it this way, rip. He lets it rip. We like to say he shredded.

He shredded the Bible. It's kind of a surf term. It goes with the shirt.

But he shredded. He got in there, and he just let it go, and he knew. I'm a dead man.

But you know what? He didn't back down. And he had faith in God that if he was to die that day for the Lord, for his witness, then so be it. God could be trusted.

And he did die. And you know something? Stephen was a man of faith, even as he was dying at the hands of his religious persecutors. Look at Acts 7.58. I look at this kind of faith, and it makes me pray, O Lord, make me a man of faith like this.

Acts 7.58. They cast him out of the city, and they stoned him. That means they threw rocks the size of hard balls at him until he died. First, they would have thrown him off a little cliff they had there in Jerusalem to break his sternum.

They would drop a huge rock on the sternum. If you didn't die from the fall and the rock crushing your sternum, then they would pelt you to death with rocks the size of hard balls. They cast him out of the city, and they stoned him.

Acts 7:58. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he knelt down.

He's in the praying position, and he cries out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. That is a New Testament term for dying.

It's a very gentle term the New Testament uses for dying. And so it is that Stephen had faith in God's sovereignty and his timing and his word, and we don't marvel then that he was so full of the Holy Spirit. The two go hand in hand.

He's such an example to me of what the spirit can do with a yielded heart and life. We read an interesting thing in this chapter. Look at Acts 6-7.

Go back to Acts 6. Look at verse 7. It says, Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly. Before it was multiplying, now it's multiplying greatly. In Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Luke puts that in there on purpose to say that even though the religious leaders, the high priests, were not coming to the faith, many of the other priests were. But now follow this. That's wonderful.

However, we do not read of the priests doing the great and mighty things we read of Stephen doing. You know what that tells me? That tells me that there is a great deal of difference between a formal belief and a dynamic faith. There is a great deal of difference between a formal belief and a dynamic faith.

So that, yes, Stephen believed, but it went beyond just formal belief. It was dynamic faith. So he's filled with the Holy Spirit.

He makes a huge difference. He just cuts a swath through all of the opposition and raises up Christ. Alexander McLaren put it so well.

He said he was filled to capacity with the influence of God. This man then, and we read further on, he was full of grace and power. What controls this man? This man is controlled by faith, by the Holy Spirit, by grace and by power.

Faith toward God, the Holy Spirit in communion with God, and then grace toward people and power with people. And this is just a man chosen to wait on tables. You say, well, that standard is pretty high.

You know, a good man, a godly man, a gifted man, high standard. Really? He was chosen to wait on tables. He wasn't chosen to be apostle.

He was chosen to wait on tables. So in the end, I realized the standard isn't so high as it is normative. It's just that this is the Bible and this is the book of Acts.

And what's normal in the Bible is now abnormal or extra credit or supersonic in our minds today because we're so accustomed to low level. We're so accustomed to shallow. We're so accustomed to formal belief rather than dynamic faith.

Here's a man filled with the Holy Spirit. God made him what he was, full of faith. And he believed in the work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to salvation.

Do you? I do. I think Stephen, follow me on this. I think Stephen believed you have to fight your way into hell if you ever get there.

You have to fight your way. You have to fight God every step of the way. You have to fight the Holy Spirit every step of the way to even get into hell.

He was full of the Holy Spirit, so he understood and believed in the work of the Holy Spirit. And I'm certain he believed you have to fight against the Holy Spirit every step of the way to get into hell. Do you believe that? Let me show you why I believe Stephen believed it.

In Acts 7.51, he's in front of the council and he says, You stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always... What does it say? Resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Acts 7.51. You stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears.

I'm a dead man, he's thinking. You are. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. You always resist the Holy Spirit. That is the only way anybody will ever go to hell.

They have to fight the love of God calling them to free salvation, full forgiveness in Christ every step of the way. It is very hard to go to hell because God is such a loving God. These are all the matters of the Holy Spirit.

These are all things so far from man's programs. These are all the things attendant to the church when God is building it. So, we read of the result of the apostles being freed up to stay in the word of God and prayer in Acts 6.7. The word of God spread.

The disciples multiplied greatly. And, may I say, you would never have seen such growth in Stephen had his leaders not been teaching him the word of God. There's no way.

There's absolutely no way. You would never see this kind of growth in a man who's just out there in the multitudes if he wasn't being taught by men who gave themselves continually to the word of God and prayer. So, we read in verse 8 that Stephen was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people.

This man willing to just serve God's people waiting tables is taken by the spirit of God from the back to the front and he is mightily used really on a level and to an extent that we only find the apostles being used in Barnabas and Philip. So, when we read the book of Acts in the end, who do we remember? We remember Peter, we remember Paul, we remember Philip, and we remember Stephen basically in Barnabas. Those are the names that stand out.

But he started just as a brother loving the flock, ministering to the flock. He's choosing his character. Let's go to his courage.

This man is full of holy courage. He is not afraid to take a stand for the gospel. Look at verse 9. There arose some from what is called the synagogue of the freed men, Cyrenians, Alexandrians and those from Cilicia, disputing with Stephen.

Cilicia, by the way, is where Saul was from. Saul of Tarsus. He was from Tarsus was in Cilicia.

So, here is a synagogue. And these men from these places go to the synagogue. And maybe there was three, one for each place.

But one thing Luke is telling us, because he brings in Saul after, is these men are in the synagogue from Cilicia. Paul is from Cilicia, Saul, disputing with Stephen. I would gather from that that Stephen was disputing, follow this, with none other than Saul of Tarsus.

Tutored by Gamaliel. Super genius. Super intellect.

Roman citizen. Greek culture. Hebrew training.

This guy is staggeringly awesome. The champion of Judaism. Yet, here is a brother from the back of the church come forth to wait on tables.

He is being taught the word, loves the word, studies the word, learns the word, filled with spirit, full of faith. He begins to dispute with these men and they cannot resist his spirit, the Holy Spirit, or his wisdom. His understanding in the scriptures.

That is tremendous to me. He manifested a wisdom that can only come from the Holy Spirit and hard work in the scriptures. And in verse 9, we find him disputing with Stephen.

But before we move on, just let me say this. He wasn't afraid to dispute his faith. He wasn't afraid to have what the British commonly call a good argument.

Not uptight, not angry. A good debate on the issues. Too often we back down.

We won't dispute anything because we're afraid of offending someone. Have you ever thought of all the times in your life you've offended everybody over some sinful issue that you wouldn't back down on? Something you held to in your life? But when it comes to the faith, why is it we back down so quick? Well, they're a relative. Have you ever shared Christ with them? No.

Why? Well, he's a relative. Oh, I see. That automatically exempts them from you talking to them about Christ.

But he's a relative. Can you come with me and pray for this person? They're dying in the hospital. Have you ever shared the gospel with them? No.

Why? He's a relative. Stephen wasn't afraid to back down with his countrymen. To dispute with them on the things of the faith.

May God help us. There comes a time where you can in love. Guy's got a face of an angel.

You can in love with the face of an angel. Dispute the issues of truth and falsehood. And raise up Christ and the gospel.

You don't have to back down. Just because it's a relative. Hey, if they're a relative, you have to love them, right? You have to love them enough to share the truth with them.

And God will guide you in how to do it lovingly with the face of an angel. And so they weren't able to resist his wisdom. And they did what they did when they got to that point with Jesus.

They killed him. Took him out and stoned him. They sought to kill him.

In verse 11, they secretly induced ministry. We've heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. Most likely he was saying that Christ had fulfilled the law.

So the law was being put away because it was fulfilled in Christ. While Moses put away, fulfilled by Christ. Moses was a type of Christ.

And most likely he was saying now that the Holy Spirit's come out of the temple to dwell in our hearts. You are now the temple of the Holy Spirit. Temple worship has been fulfilled in Christ.

When he died on the cross, the veil was rent. The way into the holiest being made open to all. So temple worship, Mosaic law were fulfilled in Christ.

So they will go away and worshiping God in Christ in spirit and truth will become the dominant thing. I'm sure that's what he was teaching, but they perverted it in order to gain a foothold with the people who were now following the apostles. And the people were the bosses were popular with all the people in order to get them to follow the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill them.

They took the matters of Moses and the law, twisted it and got them on their side with some false witnesses. And so they lied. They twisted it.

Verse 12, they stirred up the people, the elders and scribes and seized him and brought him to the council. They set up false witnesses who said this man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place in the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the custom which Moses delivered to us.

Lie, lie, lie. They twisted it all. Same strategy they used to get rid of Jesus.

But his courage is manifest even more as we go into the next chapter. His countenance where we end up, verse 15, all who sat in the council looking steadfastly saw his face as the face of an angel. This is so great because and we'll get into the rest of it next time they come in.

They surround them. We're going to nail this guy. We've got our false witnesses.

We've got this airtight. We're going to get him. And as they come in and sat down and they began to look so steadfastly on him, they're just like all of them.

And he's over there. How would you be? He's over there just twinkling his face like the face of an angel. And he's about to preach to them.

He's fired up. He's excited. He's filled with the Holy Spirit.

I love what Charles Spurgeon used to say, training young ministers. He said to his students, when you talk about heaven, let your face light up with a heavenly glory. When you talk about hell, well, your everyday face will do.

I like that. Stephen is going to tell them about the way to heaven. His face is all lit up.

And they will end up denying all of that testimony because you know why? Not because they couldn't understand it. Because they love darkness rather than light. Not everybody's like that.

And so we share the word. We're willing to dispute with an angel face in love to reach those that will believe. And we love the word of God.

We love the Holy Spirit. We love to lift up Christ and make him central. And that is how God builds his church.

That is how he builds up his people. And that is how his name is glorified. No other way.

Only when life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. Father, thank you so much for your word today. Oh God, you made Stephen what he was.

These early church people, what they were. Make us into the same kind of believers. Full of faith.

Full of your Holy Spirit with the love of God flowing through us. Lord, we'll give you all the glory. As we seek to be used of you in the way that you would have us to be used.

Make your calling clear to us. Guide us and lead us. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. May the Lord bless you as you go.

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