



Brown Community Group

Discussion Guide

Acts 7:53-58, March 7th, 2021

I. Starter Thoughts and Context:

Have you ever done anything for God or his Word that you thought you risked your life or personal injury to deliver? Have you ever felt inadequate or insufficient in talking or discussing God's Word?

Have you been in a situation where something you said, while perfectly correct, was either misinterpreted or misheard, which then lead to tremendous problems? Especially from those that may not have your best interest in mind?

We will study today Stephen example of how his powerful message of Jesus and deliver before the religious leaders of the day lead to his death. What a testament to following, serving and being a Christian until the point of death. Today we will learn some powerful examples of what it means to follow Jesus.

II. Discussion of Scripture – The Stoning of Stephen:

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

We previously learned from Acts Chapter 6 that Stephen was full of grace and power from the Holy Spirit and had been performing many great wonders and signs among the people. This was causing many problems with some in the synagogues and the Jewish leaders.

It was also very interesting to note that while Stephen was performing these miracles and speaking, no one could stand up to him due to the wisdom and truth that he spoke. He was a wise man filled with the spirit in all his actions.

As we approached Chapter 7, the Jewish officials became increasingly agitated and mad with Stephen concerning the attention from the people and his "apparent" powerful miracles. This led to Stephen being "framed" and setup with outright lies. As we discussed last week, the words of Stephen were truth, but the ears of the Jewish leaders were "deaf" to hearing and understanding the eternal truth of Jesus. They simply could not understand the wisdom that Stephen spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a result of Stephen's submission to God's call on his life, he became the church's first martyr. The witness of Stephen's life as a follower of Christ marks an important and instructive moment in the life of the church. We learn that being a follower of Christ can sometimes lead to physical death and that our discipleship is not living "our best life now"—that life is yet to come. But it also teaches us, in a profound way, how the Holy Spirit

enables our witness and is powerfully present in the most threatening moments. To fully understand the link from last week, let's review the last few verses of 51-53 that ultimately set off the Sanhedrin leaders and today's scripture.

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

In Scripture, the one who is "stiff-necked" is one who is unwilling to recognize, submit to, or "bow" to God's authority. It is active resistance and rebellion against God. Clearly, Stephen is speaking to people who are actively rejecting God and His rightful place in their lives.

Can you imagine standing in front of "God's Leaders" on earth and powerfully stating verses 51 to 53! Wow, what a powerful proclamation that put his personal security in tremendous danger. While God's word clearly demonstrated that the Sanhedrin did not and could not understand the eternal truth of Jesus Christ, to those leaders Stephen's words were pure blasphemy since they most likely had never been accused in this way before.

While we may never know whether Stephen was scared, we do know that his directness with the crowd brought rage and physical violence against him. The power of the Holy Spirit led him through any of his inadequacies in the fulfillment of God's plan. We will never be inadequate or not filled with the necessary spirit and power when we are working in God's plan. Sustainable courage only occurs when we've moved or pushed beyond the limits of our own self-sufficiency. Filled with the Holy Spirit and full of grace and power, Stephen found where courage is found.

III. Group Discussion Questions:

1. List out several points from the Sanhedrin's perspective that caused them to be furious? Beyond the more obvious points, were there some personal objections or vendettas against Stephen?
2. Do we see in our culture today similar resistance to God's leadership by the church?
3. In verse 55, do you think what Stephen saw was physical? Spiritual? Why or why not?
4. Why was verse 56 seemingly so blasphemous to the Sanhedrin? Had anyone ever seen God before in scriptures?
5. In verses 56 and 57, someone talk to me about the courage that Stephen had "in the moment" knowing what the result most likely would be? Do you think he knew his actions would be cause his death? Do you think Stephen thought God would save him because of his actions? Did he care?
6. Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).
 - Notice that Jesus' distinction is not between those who fear and those who do not. I can't imagine that Stephen was fearless in this circumstance. What distinction did Jesus outline in the verse above?
7. God created us wholly dependent on him, His Spirit provides the strength we need as a follower of Jesus. Fear is often a barrier to our obedience, but Scripture encourages us and reminds us that we must always be carried by the Father. What does this moment tell us, about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?