



Part 6: Faith and Opposition

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60

Introduction:

Stephen was one of the leaders selected by the Hellenistic Jews to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of goods to all those in need (6:1-7). He is described as a man “full of God’s grace and power” who “performed great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8). Because of his incredible ability to explain and defend the Christian faith, he quickly encountered opposition. Take the opportunity now to share a story of how you have faced opposition to your faith. What was said? What provoked this hostility? How did you respond?

Read Acts 6:8-15

As a group, briefly explain why Stephen was accused of blasphemy.

What’s the emotional state of his accusers? Why are they escalating this to the Sanhedrin? (The [Sanhedrin](#) was the Jewish court system and supreme authority on all religious matters).

Verse 15 states that “his face was like the face of an angel”. What do you think Luke, the author of Acts, is trying to communicate about Stephen at this moment?

Can you remember a time when you were falsely accused? What did you do or say to defend yourself? Were you able to convince the accuser of your innocence?

Acts 7 records Stephen’s defense. Instead of addressing the false accusation, he uses this moment of opposition to further the cause of Christ. Using specific examples from Israel’s story, Stephen builds a case exposing the real reason why the Jews oppose him (and therefore Christ): Israel has a long history of rejecting what God offers. Stephen accuses them of being like their forefathers, “you stiff-necked people... you always resist the Holy Spirit!” (7:51). As the Sanhedrin tries to recover from such an accusation, Stephen has a vision of Christ standing at the Father’s side. And with this vision, Stephen seals his fate. He is stoned to death. Have you ever found yourself rejecting what God has offered?

Read Acts 7:54-60

As a group, notice all the emotional and physical reactions of those opposing Stephen. Why is Stephen's vision so offensive to them? In our own culture, what about Jesus can also be "offensive"?

Now notice the contrast between what is happening to the opposing Jews and what is happening to Stephen. How would you describe Stephen's emotional and spiritual state? What is his focus?

Moment of Prayer and Solidarity:

As Christ followers in America, we enjoy the privilege and protection of freedom of religion. Many of us are frustrated with the restrictions placed on worship gatherings due to Covid 19. And it is right and honorable to grieve the loss of Christian fellowship. Take a moment to pray for the spiritual and emotional well-being of the CCC family during this time of uncertainty. What unique emotional and spiritual challenges have arisen from these restrictions?

Additionally, let us also spend time praying for our brothers and sisters around the world who love and serve Christ without the protection of their governments. In fact, many of them face frustrating forms of intolerance such as job loss, harassment, threats. And many more have been jailed, tortured and martyred for Christ. According to Open Doors USA, an organization that tracks data on Christian persecution, "4,136 Christians were killed in 2019 for faith-related reasons" ([Open Doors USA 2019 Watch List Facts and Figures](#)). Persecution is a reality for a large number of Christians around the world. As a group, take a moment to pray for our spiritual family around the world.

Conclusion:

Even in a moment of deadly opposition, Stephen demonstrates his great loyalty for Christ. As he is put to death, his heart's desire is for his murderers to be forgiven! This is a visible demonstration of a new "law", the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Though we are shocked by this horrific moment of injustice and persecution against the Christian faith, Stephen models for us what a life dying to the self and living for Christ really looks like. Brainstorm how your group might be able to reach out in faith through acts of service and proclamation of the Gospel. How might your life group model the "law of Christ" in these uncertain times?