

# Stand Up for Jesus

Stephen shares his faith amidst opposition...

September 9, 2007

**Icebreaker:** *Have you ever faced persecution that resulted in something good?*

Before the summer break we saw the church begin at Pentecost, grow by the thousands to the point that the religious leaders could no longer ignore it. Christians began facing persecution by the Pharisees yet the church continued to grow. In today's chapter the persecution has reached a boiling point that will have unexpected consequences.

## Acts 6:8-15

Even though Stephen was doing God's will he met opposition. *Have you ever tried really hard to do what is right but people got upset with you anyway?*

*What two accusations did the false witnesses say about Stephen?*

- He spoke against this holy place—the temple
- He spoke against the law—The Law of Moses

The question comes to Stephen in **Acts 7:1** - “Are these charges true?”

Stephen's answer makes it clear that he is not at odds with the temple or the Law of Moses. He is at odds with their failure to believe in Jesus as Lord.

- 7:37-38—he shows his respect for the Law of Moses calling it “living words”
- 7:46-47—he shows his respect for the temple of God

But Stephen does more than defend himself, he goes on the offensive in **7:51-53**. Stephen is saying that they are the ones who have not listened to the law of Moses. *What things does Stephen accuse the Pharisees of?*

- They were calloused
- Resist the Holy Spirit
- They had killed the Messiah!

*What makes this a bold thing to say?*

- Stephen's life was in their hands.

Stephen was living the commission even though it wasn't easy. *When have you faced opposition to sharing your faith? What did you do?*

The Sanhedrin could have listened and believed Stephen's words. Instead they rejected his teaching and insisted on his death. *Why is it often hard to change our minds and admit we were wrong?*

## Acts 7:54-60

*What differences are there between the expressions and attitude of the Sanhedrin and that of Stephen?*

- Sanhedrin—angry, snarled faces
- Stephen—calm and peaceful

Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr. The reason was because the Sanhedrin was bound up in their own traditions and by their own pride. *How can pride be harmful to our effectiveness in living the commission?*

*How do you think Stephen was able to stand up to these men the way that he did?*

- Stephen stood up for Jesus because he had a relationship with Jesus. He knew scripture. He knew the Lord. *How can we stand up for Jesus today if our relationship with him is weak and we don't know much about scripture?*

*What can we learn from Stephen about how to stand up for our faith in Christ?*

We can learn from the Sanhedrin as well as Stephen. There are times in life when we are in the wrong and we are faced with making a change. Like the Sanhedrin we are faced with a decision to admit we are wrong and accept what is right.

*If you were a Christian at this time and heard about Stephen's death, would it make you want to share your faith more or less? Why?*

## Acts 8:1-4

*What good thing resulted from Stephen's death?*

- the church scattered and grew throughout the world.

Because the church is God's church, no harm can be so great that it brings an end to the church. God has bigger plans.

### **Application:**

*What settings do you spend time in that are hostile to Christianity?*

*How can you be a better witness for Christ in those places?*

*How can we better encourage each other to be strong at these difficult times?*

### **Prayer & Fellowship**

Pray that we can find opportunities to share our faith even in the difficult times and places.