

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart June 2022

Why Was Stephen Stoned?

by Danny Myers



It is not uncommon to find Christians who are confused and discouraged by the times. ...yet the Scriptures remind us that the people of God have in every season faced opposition—yet not without purpose. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on Acts 6, said:

The Church has had to fight for her life from the very beginning. We have seen how the apostles were arrested and thrown into prison, how they were threatened, how they were commanded to stop preaching. From the moment it was born, the church has faced a world that has done everything it could to exterminate Christianity.

Although this perhaps tempts us to be more anxious than anchored, it reminds us that what we

face is, in fact, not entirely unprecedented. It also causes us to look to the early church to see how they faced difficult circumstances and remained faithful. The life of Stephen, in particular, can help us understand how we are to live.

Stephen was chosen to serve the church and at his choosing, the needs were growing alongside the opposition. It is important we remember how glorious the truth is that our God is sovereign. The world does not rule, the world will not win, and the church can be confident that with every assault thrown at her, she will ultimately not fail—not because she is strong but because the One who stands behind her and dwells within her is strong. ... Luke tells us that Stephen was filled not to be full, but to be faithful.

Luke says that Stephen was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5), “grace and power” (Acts 6:8), and wisdom (Acts 6:10). A “man of faith” can be used simply

as a cultural phrase that amounts to nothing, so what does Luke mean when he says that Stephen is “full of faith”? ... Faith trusts in Christ’s work alone for the forgiveness of sins, that His record is reckoned to us as Jesus took our payment. This is why the author of Hebrews can say, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” because it is faith that makes us right before God (Heb. 11:6).

... It is why the father in the Gospel of Mark exclaims, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). When there are challenges, trials, and struggles, we may feel unstable or insecure. ... Our experience or feelings of faith are mutable, while the source of our faith is not. Stephen is full of faith because, having been justified by faith, he now lives confident in that justification, prepared to forsake any worldly treasures for the cause of Christ. Having such a faith enables one to face trials and persecutions because the One in him was greater than

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those persecuting him.

Stephen was also full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5; 7:54). This is not a new phrase for Luke, for he also used it in the context of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), with Peter and John before the Sadducees (Acts 4:8), and even in the prayers of the church for boldness (Acts 4:29, 31). It's a wonderful truth to understand that the Holy Spirit lives within all who have been born again. This brings confidence because it reminds us that we do not receive only some of the Spirit; instead, we receive the entirety of the Holy Spirit. Luke is reminding us that the ministry of the Spirit supplies all that we need.

Stephen, being full of faith and the Holy Spirit, is also full of grace, power, and wisdom. The grace of God that saves us also changes us. There is a status change, but there is also a character change. We live differently because we are different.

God was present in the life of Stephen, and it showed in the ministry of Stephen. One perhaps could summarize what Luke is saying by looking to what Paul says in Ephesians 1: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). What was the purpose of being filled with every spiritual blessing? It was so that Stephen would be faithful.

Stephen is opposed by those who seek to destroy him, but Luke states that their aim is not the destruction of Stephen but the suppression of truth (Acts 6:10–13; 7:51, 57). What takes place with the persecution of Stephen has a great deal of similarity with the persecution of Jesus. The enemies of Christ attack Stephen's theology—specifically his doctrine of God and his theology of worship—and they send false witnesses to accuse him. But why? Stephen was peeling back the layers of their hearts and showing that true worship isn't the place, and it certainly isn't the building,

but it's the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. ... Being in the presence of God changes us.

Stephen became the first Christian martyr. He is an example of what it means to live well and die well. Yet, we would miss the overarching point if we saw Stephen as a model merely during trial and tribulation, when one's life is at stake. Stephen reminds us that those who have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, having been filled with every spiritual blessing in Christ, will be shown faithful because of our faithful God even when we are not under trial. Our faithfulness is not only expressed at moments of trial or in opportunities to defend the gospel but is displayed each Lord's Day when we demonstrate our understanding of faithfulness by coming into the presence of Almighty God in worship. ... May we as the people of God recognize together that we have been filled that we might be faithful in this life as we journey into the next.

[Taken from Tabletalk, May 2022]



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