

STEPHEN THE MARTYR

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." (Acts 6:1-8)

STEPHEN: A MAN FULL OF FAITH

Faith is that subtle chain that binds us to an infinite God, and infinite power, something far beyond and above us, but it can be developed IN us.

FAITH HAS THREE MAIN TRAITS

1. Faith is an ACT OF THE WILL in receiving Christ. The first thing Stephen did to become a man full of faith was receive the Lord Jesus Christ. **"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, to them that believe on His name." (John 1:12)**

So, faith is an ACT OF THE WILL in receiving God. It's the door that opens the great treasure chest of God's power and God's anointing.

It's God's life to you that that you can begin to live in a different realm, supernatural realm that people will not be able to understand. Your friends, your neighbors, will probably worry about you at first, and then eventually probably begin to persecute you (unless they get saved!).

2. Faith's second trait, OBEDIENCE. If you have faith, you will obey God. **"Then Peter and the apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)** It won't matter whether friends love you or curse you; give you honors, or nail you to a cross. YOU say, I'M GOING TO BE OBEDIENT TO CHRIST REGARDLESS OF THE COST! That's faith. Only he who obeys believes, and only he who believes obeys. If you don't obey Jesus Christ, you are an unbeliever, and without faith.

True faith will always render obedience unto God. **"And we are his witnesses of these things; and [so is] also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts 5:32)**

Stephen was a man full of faith. He had performed an act of his will by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving Christ as his Lord and having not yet seen Him, yet believing, he rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. He had rendered obedience to Christ, even unto death.

3. Faith is LEAVING ALL THINGS IN THE HANDS OF GOD. **"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." (II Corinthians 4:13-14)** He trusted in the faithfulness of God and left everything in the hands of God. We can trust in the faithfulness of God. He is absolutely trustworthy. **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)** If you can say, "Father, I know that you love me and You have only my best interests in mind. I know that all things that you do are working your will and good pleasure in my life." then you are a person full of faith. To be full of faith means that there is no room for doubt, no fear in the heart, even as there is no room for anything else in a full vessel.

Some people today think that if you're not rich, you don't have faith. That is not true! **"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2:5)** Whether you are sick or healthy, rich or poor, doesn't have a thing to do with how much faith you have.

STEPHEN: A MAN FULL OF GRACE

Stephen was also full of GRACE. Great grace is receiving everything when we did nothing to deserve it ... unmerited favor. Salvation is the grace of the Lord. **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)**

Some people think grace is a whitewash job that lets a rebel continue to be a rebel, and lets a selfish man continue to be a selfish man. They think it justifies and positionally changes a man, but never practically changes him. But, that is not real grace!

Peter said **"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;" (Titus 2:11-12)** The same grace that saves us also TEACHES us. If your grace isn't teaching you, then it hasn't saved you. Saving grace immediately begins to TEACH us to deny ungodliness and worldliness and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

God's grace shows itself in many wonderful ways. It is STRENGTH to equip us. **"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (II Corinthians 12:9)** His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

No, we shouldn't run around trying to be weak, but we need to be careful lest we be exalted above measure (as Paul may have been in danger of being). He had the "thorn in the flesh" to buffet him about in his body lest he be exalted.

The Lord emphasized to him, "When you feel weak, that is when my grace will be sufficient for you, and I will lift you above the storm clouds and show My strength in a mighty way, and reveal My power through you. That's the kind of God I am; full of mercy and grace!" We don't have to run the show by ourselves because we've got One on the inside of us. His name is Jesus, and he's full of grace and strength.

"Let your speech [be] always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Colossians 4:6) Grace enables us to speak; how to preserve, and how to be preserved.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid [them] down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." (Acts 4:33-35)

You can't do that without the grace of God upon your life! We are all naturally selfish but when God's grace opens us up, we unfold like a little rosebud that gives its fragrance in its season. The grace of God in our lives makes us more loving and kind than we have ever been in our lives before.

STEPHEN: A MAN OF POWER

God wants to use us, give us power and liberally bless us. Stephen was a man who bore abundant fruit because he was full of grace and POWER.

Power is the ability to do things. All of us have missed countless opportunities to witness at the shopping center, at work, at the grocery store or gas station, because we didn't open up our mouth to make Christ known; to rebuke sin and unrighteousness. Stephen, full of power, did miracles among the people. You say, "He was special, holy, 'called'" NO! Stephen was just a deacon, a young man in the church they selected. He already had these things before they selected him. This is why he was made a deacon. . . He HAD THESE things. He didn't have them because he was called to be a deacon. He was just a normal, everyday believer.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17-18) There have been occasions where God has used special men in special times, but in the last days I don't think God is doing that. We've seen many people healed through the power of prayer in many different cities. But, I don't believe that God is going to share His glory with another in these last days. I don't think there will be any BIG NAME evangelists and healers as such, but I believe that, in the last days, the Lord is going to **Restore to the whole body of Christ, His gifts, His authority and His power, and every member of the body is going to rise up and fulfill that function and that place that only He can fulfill.**

It's the WHOLE BODY that's going to get healed and raised up, and get on the wing of God. That promise, "These signs shall follow them that believe," is for everyone. It's time to get FULL OF POWER. It's time to go to the prisons and the hospitals, lay hands on power of the Holy Spirit. You and I can be dispensers of the medicine of God. We can go forth and heal people and cast out devils, etc.

It's not just for a few special people. The Lord never asks us to do anything without giving us the power to do it. He has asked us to evangelize the world. It's not evangelized because many of us are running around powerless. We have not sought after God to become filled with power.

At Christ is the Answer we have seen some of the weakest, most unlikely candidates go out in the field preaching the Gospel, performing the miraculous, and winning a multitude of souls to Christ. They pressed in and sought God until they got filled with power. Stephen was full of courage. He faced persecution and death, and it didn't change him. He opposed those who opposed the Lord. His conviction and courage resulted in the conversion of Paul. Augustine said, "But for Stephen's testimony, the church would not have had the Apostle Paul."

STEPHEN: A MAN FULL OF LOVE

Stephen was also full of love. **"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:57-60)**

The stones which the persecutors hurled at him broke his head. His lips might have been drenched with the blood of persecution, but they couldn't stop his pouring forth of Love's intercession. He interceded for those that were killed him. It was love that caused him to tell the Pharisees and Saducees that they were uncircumcised, guilty, stiffnecked, and always resisting the Holy Ghost even as their forefathers did. **It was love that caused him to say such open direct inflammatory things.** Because he loved them, he told them the truth!

The great lesson to be gathered from the life and testimony of Stephen is that there is no condition in life, no office to be filled, there is no testimony that we have to bear; there is no death of any type that we may face, but that Christ is not sufficient to carry us through.