

Stephen, A Lesson in Faithfulness

The Story of Ananias and Sapphira

“Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.” (Acts 5:5-6)

“Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.” (Acts 5:9-10)

1. The young men were volunteers in the church at Jerusalem.
2. They were present in the congregation and arose when needed.
 - a. They wrapped and buried the body of Ananias.
 - b. Then stood by to wrap and bury the body of Sapphira.

The Need for Deacons in the Early Church

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (no deacons). Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable (pleasing to God) that we should leave the word of God and serve (deacon) tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit 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 the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:1-7)

1. Stephen – His name means “crown.” He is mentioned first as:
 - a. Full of faith – Studied the word of God and put it to use daily.
 - b. Filled with the Holy Spirit – Prayed with tongues each day and walked in the direction and counsel of the Spirit.

2. He began taking care of the widows needs.
3. Each one, in a place of service, needs to be full of the word and the Holy Spirit.
4. Promotion can come to those faithful in the deacon's ministry (1 Timothy 3:13).

Stephen Was Promoted to the Office of Teacher

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:8-15)

1. When a person operates in the Word and the Holy Spirit they cannot be resisted.
2. This type of person stands out in a crowd of believers as one who will be used by God and go far.
3. A person who is balanced in the word and the Holy Spirit is rare.
4. Stephen began his ministry outside the church by debating the religious Jews in the temple.
5. Celicia is mentioned. It was in Asia Minor. The capital was Tarsus.
6. Saul was probably one who debated Stephen. He and his religious friends would gnash their teeth in anger against him.

Stephen's Sermon and Stoning

1. His sermon is one of the greatest in all the New Testament.
 - a. It ranks with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.
 - b. It also ranks with Paul's sermon on Mars Hill.
2. He began his sermon being anointed with the visible glory of the Holy Spirit. He ended it being taken into that glory.
3. Stephen's sermon told of deliverer after deliverer sent to Israel. But all were rejected or killed by the people (Acts 7:52-60).
4. Stephen was stoned to death and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father. Jesus is usually seated.
5. Stephen went to heaven and received the first martyr's crown (Revelation 2:10).
 - a. “crown” - στεφανος “stephanos.”
 - b. The name “crown” was given for Stephen.
6. The circle is complete. Faithful men are always needed (Acts 8:2).