

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text
Acts 6:8-15

Topic
Although slandered and seized,
Stephen sits with his face glowing

Title
To Boldly Glow...

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Acts 6:9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.

Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

Acts 6:11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council.

Acts 6:13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;

Acts 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

Acts 6:15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Introduction

I am fascinated with things that glow in the dark. By far my favorite is something called *pixie-dust*. In the rooms of the Disneyland Hotel there is a wallpaper border all around the top near the ceiling. During

the day it absorbs light. At night it gives off, for several hours, a glow. You fall asleep with Tinkerbell spreading pixie-dust over you.

Moses is mentioned in our verses and will be a central figure in Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. You might recall a glow-in-the-dark moment in Moses' life. After meeting with God Moses would come down from Mount Sinai and his face would be glowing (Exodus 34:29-30). Moses was exposed to God and he'd retain it for a time before it would gradually fade.

Looking at Stephen the people saw **the face of an angel**. In their culture it meant he was glowing, as Moses did, because he'd been in the presence of God.

When Moses spoke to the Jews about God he would put a veil over his face to hide the fact that the glory of God was fading away. The fading glow of Moses' face was put in the Bible to be a spiritual illustration. The law given to Moses was glorious but it must eventually fade away. No one could keep the law; it only showed you how far short you fell from pleasing God. The law must one day be replaced by something that would not fade. That something was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen was a man full of the Holy Spirit. He was glowing and it wasn't fading. He was evidence that the glory of the law had been replaced by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Should **we** glow? *Yes, we should!* In Second Corinthians we read,

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We may not glow physically but we should glow spiritually in the dark world around us. We should stand-out from it as if we are glowing from within.

We can look at the traits and the portrait of Stephen to see how we, too, can be glowing. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1

List The Traits That Most Control You, and #2 Look At The Portrait That Best Captures You.

#1 List The Traits That Most Control You
(v8-10)

Stephen will, in just a few verses, become the first martyr of the Church Age. His mom and dad probably had something different in mind when they named him. Stephen means *crown*. Whatever crown they hoped their son would one day earn and wear it probably wasn't the crown of a martyr. Yet, in retrospect, it was far more precious than any earthly crown.

Without taking anything away from Stephen we should look upon him as an average, every-day believer. He wasn't an apostle. True he was a deacon. But the things that described him as a deacon ought to characterize every believer.

If we look at Stephen as representing an average, every-day believer then certain traits emerge from this account. If we list them we can examine ourselves by them. The first two are in verse eight.

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Wonders and signs were not confined to the apostles. Conservative Bible scholars are always trying to confine wonders and signs to the apostles or at least to only the first century. There is no reason biblically to believe that wonders and signs have ceased.

The first two traits that contributed to Stephen's glow were **faith** and **power**. He was **full of faith**. Faith here should be translated *grace*.¹

On the one hand **grace** means you fully understand that God saved you by His grace. You did not merit it and could do nothing to earn it. There is thus a sense of gratefulness to God no matter how your life on earth unfolds.

¹ Vine's: In **Act 6:8** the most authentic mss. have **charis**, "grace," RV, for **pistis**, "faith."

On the other hand being **full of grace** means you are always extending God's offer of grace to others. It means you portray God as gracious – not as judgmental or condemning.

Stephen was also **full... of power**. It's the word *dunamis*. It's the relationship with the Holy Spirit Jesus promised and told the disciples to wait for in the Upper Room. It's the experience called the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit coming upon you to empower your witness. It is received by faith when you realize that, though you can do nothing without Jesus, you can do all things through Him.

We won't see the next trait until verse ten. In the mean time the story advances in verse nine.

Acts 6:9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.

Synagogue worship probably started when the Jews were exiled in Babylon. Away from their Temple, they would gather for instruction from the law of Moses. After the return to the Holy Land synagogue worship continued.

A synagogue would be named according to the type of people who gathered there. **Freedmen** were slaves who had won or purchased their freedom from Rome. These were from parts of Northern Africa and Asia. **Disputing with Stephen** probably means that he would go to their synagogue and debate with them from the Scriptures about Jesus.

Jesus had gone to the synagogues; so would Paul later. Lively debate about Scriptural issues was welcomed.

Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

Two more traits are now listed. The **wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke**. They are two traits but linked together. They depend upon each other.

Wisdom here refers to knowledge of spiritual truth gleaned from the Word of God. But wisdom is more than an accumulation of such knowledge. It is the right use of it and for that you require the **Spirit** of God. Since every believer has the Spirit something more must be intended. What is intended is a sensitivity to the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide you into what to say, when to say it, and how to phrase it. Only He knows how best to penetrate the heart or hearts of those you are speaking to.

These four traits emerge from Stephen: Grace, power, wisdom and the Spirit. There is nothing difficult about them. They are available to average, every-day believers like you and I.

Let me make one observation. Perhaps they build upon one another. If you have **grace** then the rest will follow. Too often Christians are characterized by things other than **grace**:

1. You don't have to look very far to find Christians who are judgmental and condemning.
2. But even among those who seem to understand **grace** there is a tendency to become distracted. We get caught-up in politics and the other issues of the day when the one issue we should be most focused upon is eternity.

We should have the **grace** of our Lord Who looked upon men as lost and in need of saving. Then we can be sure of the **power** we need to witness and the **Spirit** will use our **knowledge** – however limited – to reach them.

#2 Look At The Portrait That Best Captures You (v11-14)

The Gospel always has an effect – *just not the one we'd like!*
Stephen's works and words were about to get him killed.

Acts 6:11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

It's possible Stephen pointed out to the Freedmen the fading glow of Moses as the fading away of the law. Even if he didn't use that

language, he certainly described the failures of the law to save men and the need for them to be born-again. Instead of seeing the connection between Jesus and their Scriptures they saw blasphemy.

Secretly induced could be translated by our word *suborned*. We're most familiar with it in the phrase suborning perjury, which means to obtain false testimony from a witness.

They suborned people to say that Stephen was blaspheming. He wasn't. He was simply debating from the Scriptures. **Use God's Word** – *not* your opinions. If folks have problems let them be with God and not you.

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council.

Stephen was saying the same kinds of things Jesus had said. He was doing the same kinds of things Jesus had done. He said and did all this in the same spirit. It should come as no shock that he would be treated the same way Jesus was!

Be like your Lord and you will, in some measure, be treated like Him.

Acts 6:13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;

- being changed to bring change -

The **witnesses** are described as **false**. They gave a false sense of what Stephen was saying.

1. Regarding the **holy place**, the Temple, he was undoubtedly telling them that *they* were now the temple of God on earth and could be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Is that really against the holy place? No; it is the fulfillment of it.
2. Regarding the **law**, Jesus and His followers had a higher regard for it than any of the Jews! Their regard for it was so great that they showed how it condemned you and could not be kept by outward observance. But it could be fulfilled by receiving Jesus as Savior. You could have it written on your heart and 'keep' it from within.

Acts 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

Jesus never said He would **destroy** the Temple. He warned the Jews that it would be destroyed if they rejected Him. They didn't know it but they were just about forty years from its destruction by the Romans in 70AD.

As for the customs which Moses delivered, Moses himself spoke of a Prophet who would come after him and fulfill the law. It wasn't a change so much as it was a fulfillment.

All this builds up to the portrait of Stephen in verse fourteen:

Acts 6:15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

I think his face actually glowed because of the comparison to Moses. Even if it didn't, his traits would shine against such a dark background and leave a portrait in their minds of the glory of God.

Do you have a favorite picture of yourself? One that you think best captures you? Maybe not – but you know what I mean. We talk about our 'best side' when taking pictures. Of course now we can airbrush our pics so that we look just like we want.

- being changed to bring change -

It's a weird mental exercise but I want you to think about your spiritual portrait. What would it look like to others? Would there be a glow because of your traits against the background of your life? Or would it be hard to see you in the shadows?

The traits we studied a moment ago are what make your portrait glow. See that they characterize you.

Conclusion

Stephen will give his defense in chapter seven. He will be stoned to death for it. Chapter eight begins with the words, **and Saul was consenting unto his death**. Saul is the man we know as the apostle Paul.

It was Paul who wrote about the fading glow of Moses' face being a spiritual picture. Do you think it was because of this incident – his presence at the seizing and stoning of Stephen?

Of course it was!

Paul would not be saved that day. He would go on for a while and savagely persecute the Church. But Stephen's testimony would stay with him. It was a seed planted deeply in his heart.

You may not see the result of your testimony. *It doesn't matter!* Concentrate on the traits of being **full of grace and power**, speaking with **wisdom** and the **Spirit**. You will leave an indelible portrait in the minds of those who see and hear you.

Your portrait will be worth a thousand words.

