**23 – Steadfastness of Stephen**

*Acts 7:55-60; 1 Corinthians 16:13*

The steadfastness of Stephen is emphasized when we look to the situation surrounding his message, the message itself, and his martyrdom.

**1 Corinthians 16:13**

* A Christian is one who does not compromise. When THE faith is threatened, a Christian contends for it (**cf. Jude 3**). When subjective faith is questioned, a Christian gives an answer for it (**cf. 1 Peter 3:15**).
* Stand fast – to be stationary, i.e. (figuratively) to persevere: — stand (fast).
* Brave – to act manly: — quit like men. ***(“quit you like men”*** KJV).
  + Barnes – “It means, to render one manly or brave; to show oneself a man; that is, not to be a coward, or timid, or alarmed at enemies, but to be bold and brave.”
  + **2 Peter 1:5** – virtue – properly, manliness (valor), i.e. excellence. (The moral courage to live your faith; to do what is right.)
  + **Manliness is a characteristic put on by both male and female Christians. Christians are not timid and cowardly, but stand strong and firm in conviction and proactive faith.**
* We are to stand fast by being manly (brave) and strong.

**Setting of Stephen’s message**

* **Acts 6:11-15** – falsely accused of blasphemy. Framed with false witnesses. Presented before the council (Sanhedrin).
  + **Stephen preaching the truth, but perceived as blasphemous because of the refusal of Jews to accept Christ’s doctrine**.
* **John 12:42-43; Matthew 27:20-21** – The Jewish leaders, those to whom Stephen was brought before, knew Jesus to be the messiah and convinced others who were inclined to believe Him to crucify Him.
  + Stephen’s message was directed especially toward them that knew better, or should know better, and did not just answer the question of the temple (**cf. 7:44-50**), but about Jesus as the Messiah.
* **Essentially, Stephen knew the likelihood of negative reaction toward his message, and preached in with firm conviction (and manliness) anyway.**
  + **Despite whether the recipients of the gospel are likely to receive it gracefully, we must not water down the message, but convict them of their sin.**

**Stephen’s Message**

* Stephen spoke concisely of the history of the Israel nation to those who would likely know it best.
  + He did this to show their ignorance of the purpose of God’s law.
  + They knew it, but they didn’t know it (**cf. Matthew 13:13-15** – why does Jesus speak in parables?)
  + **Galatians 3:23-25** – Stephen’s message was essentially the same, with an emphasis on their rejection of that truth.
* Promise to Abraham – **Acts 7:5, 8 (Land, nation, Seed – Christ)**
* Joseph sold – **Acts 7:9-1** (Speaking a vision from God, and rejected)
  + God delivered patriarchs in time of trouble (**Acts 7:11**).
* Moses given by God to deliver Israel from bondage but rejected – **Acts 7:20, 23-29**
* Moses spoke of Messiah – **Acts 7:37** (they rejected Him – **7:52**)
* Temple served use for Jews under old law, but God is not contained, and never has been – **Acts 7:44-50**.
* Stephen was being accused and questions, but he turned the tables. The council then became the accused, and convicted of wrong doing.
  + Their false claim against Stephen showed their ignorance for the purpose of the OT.
  + Stephen exposed this by showing their rejection for God’s plan by rejecting Christ.
  + He topped it off by explaining their ignorance with regard to the nature of God.

**Stephen preached this message knowing they would likely be outraged, and that his life could come to an end.**

* **Revelation 2:8-10** – we are to be steadfast even with the knowledge of possible death.
* **Leviticus 24:16** – Stoning was the proper response to blasphemy under the Old Law.
  + **Stephen knew this, and knew they accused him of blasphemy (cf**. 6:13).
  + **He knew this was a possible end to his message**.
  + **He knew they would likely consider this more blasphemy**.
  + **He preached the message anyway**.
  + **2 Timothy 4:2** – In season and out of season means when they want to hear it and when they don’t want to hear it.
    - **Some contend that Stephen should not have provoked them**. But to not provoke them would be to compromise just because they didn’t like God’s word.
    - **Stephen was inspired (cf. 6:5, 8, 55**).
* **Matthew 16:25** – we are supposed to be steadfast even to death.