

Acts Week 18

Chapter 7:1-

Acts 7:1; Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

We need to go back and look for what is being addressed, what things would he be asking about?

Verse 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."

The high priest is addressing Stephen, keep in mind he is standing before the high priest as before a judge. We know they have brought in those who agreed to give false testimony, why? What was so frightening with Stephen that was worthy of death? Pride and Jealousy are walls man puts up to protect themselves from admitting the wrong they do. To lose face is a disgrace.¹ Stephen now takes them back to the beginning of Israel hoping they might grasp the changes he so desperately seeks them to understand and admit.

Our Bibles do not say that Jesus said anything about changing the customs as it is claimed here. He did address the temple, that "not a stone would be left standing," **Luke 21:5**. As we go back to **Acts 6:15**, we find the face of Stephen changed, **And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. Verse 6:10; And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.** Can we even begin to understand the contempt they had for the wisdom of Stephen, they could not out speak him for his wisdom was unmatched and he possessed a countenance, a face that shown, as an angel. This should bring back memories of Moses coming down from talking with God.

Powerful men who attempt to disgrace the well learned man of wisdom will fail every time. The use of resist here is (*anthistēmi*) "to set oneself against, to withstand, resist, oppose. What we can see from this is that they were not able to resist, at least not directly, the words of God are more powerful than man, but pride will drive a man to make fatal decisions. This fatality may not be seen on earth but it will inevitably be fulfilled in judgment. **Isaiah 2:12; The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled).** Negative pride has no room for others to be looked upon as having superior wisdom, pride deceives and man begins to believe he is the only one who knows and understands.

The prideful person shames themselves as we find the Saducees and the priest doing when persecuting Stephen. We struggle with the understanding of pride because we have seen it too

¹ loss of reputation or respect as the result of a dishonorable action: "he left the army in disgrace"

Synonyms: dishonor, shame, ignominy, discredit, degradation, disrepute, ill-repute, infamy, scandal, stigma, odium, opprobrium, obloquy, condemnation, vilification, contempt, disrespect, disapproval, disfavor, disapprobation, humiliation, embarrassment, loss of face, strife, disesteem, reprobation, derogation, unpopular, in disgrace, In bad odor

many times as a negative. Unable to resist Stephen they chose a diabolical scheme to remove him from their sphere of nobility, his wisdom exceeded theirs and his notability frighten them, they were afraid of the people, their evil was conducted in darkness.

Ecclesiastes 8:1; Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed. Sternness, a number of various bible versions use different words here, I think the NLT probably does it justice. As we see the word sternness is sounds as though the wise man has become angry or resistant to those persecuting him, sternness and boldness are two words that would indicate a harden very purposeful look, but it is indicating the sternness is fading. The angel face or shining face shows us God's work never goes out useless, He builds people up, He makes them stand out, not in pride but in humility. It is in humility we realize we can do nothing on our own, it is the beginning of both surrender and wisdom. Pride says, "look at what I can do," humility says, "look at what God can do through us." Faith in God, acting and believing on that faith is how God saves souls through His people.

"As Thomas Scheff, Ph.D., emphasizes (in his Psychology Today post, "Genuine Pride Does NOT Goeth Before the Fall": "The English language, particularly, confuses authentic pride with what might be called false pride or egotism . . . [and] to the point that it taints the positive meaning of pride."

We are looking at those who persecuted Jesus out of fear of the multitudes beginning to follow Him, envy, loss of power is how this picture has been painted. Is pride always used in the negative in the bible? No, but overwhelmingly it is. Here are a few verses that address boasting, which is often the result of a prideful attitude. Pride occurs 49 times in 46 verses in the King James Version, boast is used 20 times in 19 verses, boasting used 9 times in 9 verses. Galatians is one of the very few places in the bible where pride is seen as a positive.

Galatians 6:4; But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Even if I look only at my own work and I see I am doing good, how can I ever measure that good without comparing it to something? Every equation must have a reference point and I believe it best in this case to see what we are doing in our Christ Jesus, He should be the standard we all seek to walk in and not become appeased or apathetic with where we may be at any given time. Our knowledge of the bible should be always growing, our desire to become more Christ-like never ending as long as we are given the time.

1 Corinthians 9:16; For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

I think Paul was trying to make the point that all power, strength, and wisdom are from above. "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." So his boasting is found only in being obedient to the word, not of his own power but that of the Holy Spirit in him. **James 1:22; But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**

2 Corinthians 12:9-10; And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 11:30; If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

James 4:16; But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Those who persecuted Stephen failed to acknowledge the strength of our Lord in him, in his dying words he put it all on display. The stoning to death is one of the most painful ways a person could suffer and yet he cried out with a loud voice, **“Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” Acts 7:60.** This was a testimony to the power and faith in our Lord.

Stephen now continues on to address the history of Israel before his persecutors. He addresses Abraham and how the Lord chose him to lead what was to become God’s chosen people. Theologians have only guessed as to why Stephen has gone all the way back to the beginning with the nation of Israel, perhaps it was to demonstrate his knowledge of the Scripture and maybe their lack of. Something happened in his countenance which Luke brought to our attention. What was it, may be that at the end of his discussion he points his finger at the leaders of the law, claiming them to have murdered Jesus. This accusation required the severest of penalties, and so it was.

Acts 7:5; is interesting, “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.

Where was Abraham when God first called him to leave? This is for anyone who can find the answer and come back with it next week.