

Take a Stand

Acts 6:8-10 NIV

“Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)-Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia - who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.”

How many of us know, that when you do great things for God, opposition arises. That presents an opportunity for us to take a stand. Certain men had begun to argue with Stephen. Whenever we get on fire for the Lord - things are going good - we're hitting on all eight cylinders - then all of a sudden we get resistance and opposition. That's called *normal Christian life*. When we begin to move out for God, and to advance the Kingdom, we actually fall into Newton's Third Law - *“for every action, there is an equal but opposite reaction.”*

That's the enemy's attempt to stop us from moving, and after several times of that, and later, as we get older in life and faith, we say, *“Well, I don't want to get moving too fast, because every time I get excited about the Gospel, God's Word, or worship, things break - stuff happens.”* That's resistance, and it's exactly what happened to Stephen as he became full and began working and stepping out in the things of God, birthing the new Church. Opposition arose. They began to argue with Stephen as *he* took a stand, *“but they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.”*

Now, we're all dealing with questions every day having to do with moral issues in our culture. In our church or group we can be all over the line on those issues, but we *will* be called upon - if we name the name of Jesus - to take a stand. Right now, there are things in our faces - elephants in the room, roaming around and stepping all over our toes and bumping into us - elephants of culture and things we have to deal with.

The answer isn't always as clear and simplistic as we think, but, here's the thing, if we have a biblical world view, then we have a “true north” - a *compass* - a divine GPS that can map our way and navigate us through the crazy world that we live in right now. We have a True North in Christ. We have the Holy Spirit - the Person of the Holy Spirit living and dwelling in us giving us directions - and even though we have to take a stand, he will be with us in the fire.

“You’ve got to stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.” - Aaron Tippin

The Bible says that Stephen took a stand. The Church had just been birthed - things were beginning to happen, and they were seeing a lot of people come to faith in Christ. They were sharing their faith, and all of a sudden in Jerusalem, there was *“no small stir”*, and it got the attention of government and religious leaders who felt very threatened by the new teaching that was disrupting what they believed.

Acts 6:11-13 NIV

“Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, ‘This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.’” [all of these were based on a lie]

Stephen had taken a stand - he had a Christ-confidence about his life - he knew who he was. He understood that he was *called, loved, and kept* by Christ Jesus (Jude 1:1). And, he understood his *mission*, because when you know who you *are*, you’ll know what to *do*. He was able to be utterly confident in the face of accusation and railing threats. A pastor recently said, *“I have made a decision before God to give up my right to be offended. I’ve given up my right to live with anger.”* Being angry isn’t sin - but what we do with it is what matters.

Stephen had done the same thing, because in Christ, he completely understood that he had been crucified with Christ - buried with him - and had been raised to walk in new life in Christ. Therefore, Christ lived his life in and through him - so, they could all stand there, pointing their fingers at him - lie about him - and, instead of him losing his mind over it - having a complete panic attack and melt-down, or throwing his chest out and challenging them to a fight, he sat there with such peace in the midst of massive lies and accusations - *“and his face was like the face of an angel.”* That’s confidence. That’s security. Stephen was being accused, but he laid down his right to be angry, and he maintained his peace through it all.

Acts 7:54 NIV

“When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.”

Stephen had stood up and recounted, beginning with Genesis, the entire story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and then told them that *they* were the reason that Christ was crucified - that his blood was on them - and they didn't take that news very well. In that moment they were furious, and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen had laid down his right to be offended - to be angry - and had literally died to himself.

Acts 7:55-60 NIV

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep."

Like Jesus, who was living his life in and through Stephen, he took a stand, and it cost him his life - but really, he *gained* Life. He knew that if they *didn't* kill him, he would continue to preach the Gospel, and many more would then be born again, but, if they *did* kill him, he would count it a victory because he would be in the very presence of Jesus, the One whom he loved.

"If you would be put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Are we living our life in such a way that it is so compelling and disruptive in nature for the cause of Christ? In another event, Peter and John were on their way to the Temple to pray, and a lame man asked them for alms. Peter looked at him and said:

" 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." - Acts 3:6-10 NIV

The man had just got healed - God had just moved - and Peter and John were arrested, interrogated, and beaten, just for helping the man in the name of Jesus. No one is offended when "God" is mentioned - that can be interpreted loosely - but the room suddenly gets very quiet when "Jesus" is mentioned. The name and Person of Jesus is divisive, and there will come a day - in a moment - when we will have to take a stand. Up until now, our culture in America has been somewhat kind to us - but it won't continue that way forever.

Acts 4:16-20 NIV

" 'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.' Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, 'Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.' "

Pastor Jimmy's devotional from this morning

Oh, that it would be said of us, "They were full of faith, the Holy Spirit, God's grace, and power. They did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." (Acts 6:5,8). Stephen, a martyr for Christ, will be forever remembered for the stand he took regarding his Lord and Savior, Jesus. He stood his ground knowing full well, it would be his last stand. Would you stand if called upon? It could happen in our lifetime.

What will your epitaph say? What is the message of your life? That you worked hard and accumulated great wealth? That you rose through the societal ranks of your social circles? That you had millions of "Likes" and "Followers" on social media?

Pause and think about this question: "When people remember me, what will rise to the surface first? What will they remember? Will they think only of me, or will they recall that my life was lived in service, obedience, and love of my One True Lord and King?"

We need to come to a point where we're more emboldened in our faith - in our witness. We may not have to take a stand in a court of law, but we might have to by the water cooler or the coffee machine in our office, or out in the field in a truck, or digging holes with a group of dudes.

Throughout life we'll have to take stands - to defend our faith - to stand up and say, *"I'm not going to do that - it wouldn't please my God."* We *will* be called upon to stand, and what will we do? Will we stand for our King? Will we refuse to take a step back or to cave in? Will we give no quarter and say, *"I will not deny my Lord."*?

None of us knows where all of this is going in our culture right now - in our nation - but, it's looking like we're entering into some wild times, and we need to make up our minds now, to stand when we're required to stand - that we'll not give in *or* give up - that we'll not straddle the line when the time comes... *but we'll take a stand for Jesus.*

Prayer

Father, we love You and honor You. We thank You for the privilege of taking a stand.

You're our Lord and our King. Stephen stood - and it cost him. Peter and John stood - they were beaten, but they were freed and then continued to produce fruit for Your kingdom.

Lord, if we live or die, that's irrelevant - but what matters is that we stand.

Give us the grace to stand!

In Jesus' name. Amen