

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XIV. Stephen's Exemplary Preparation For An Effective Witness

(Acts 6:8-15)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 6:8-15 presents the exemplary preparation of the Church's first martyr for an effective witness, and we view the passage for insight and application regarding our own preparations for effective witnessing:

II. Stephen's Exemplary Preparation For An Effective Witness, Acts 6:8-15.

- A. Stephen's short ministry was a watershed one that highly impacted the Church in Church History (as follows):
 1. His address before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 "is the longest recorded message in Acts, which shows the importance Luke attached to it." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 369)
 2. In addition, Stephen's acts, and message "prepared the way for the gospel to reach outside the pale of Judaism," a great shift in the history of the Church. (Ibid.)
 3. Also, Paul revealed Stephen's great impact on him when he drew from Stephen's Acts 7 address by using Stephen's key verbs of *apotheo* ("repudiate") and *strepho* ("turn") in Acts 13:46-48 to mark the start of Paul's turning from ministering to Jews to minister to Gentiles. (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 102, 779 [s. v. *apotheo* and *strepho*]; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 13:48)
 4. This impact by Stephen is further magnified in noting that Paul who was so affected by Stephen's address wrote about half of the New Testament, what in turn has impacted millions of believers in Church History!
- B. We thus note the exemplary preparation of Stephen in Acts 6:8-15 for his enormously effective witness:
 1. Before he was elevated by the Church and the apostles to the role of deacon, Stephen **in particular** was **known** to be a man who was full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Acts 6:5a. After his elevation to the role of deacon, Scripture reports he was full of God's grace and power so that he was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people, Acts 6:6-7, 8 NIV. Obviously, then, Stephen spiritually fellowshiped with the Lord, relying on the Holy Spirit for life and service, cf. Galatians 5:16, 22-23.
 2. As a result of being known for his walk with God, Stephen was recognized by the Church as being eminently qualified to become a deacon to minister to the needy widows, so he was elevated to a position of prominence in the Church, being chosen to be one of the seven deacons, Acts 6:3-6.
 3. Once elevated, Stephen's ministry was given greater impact to where members of the Libertines synagogue that was composed of men from Cyrene, Alexandria and Cilicia debated with him about spiritual truths, and they were unable to overcome Stephen's wisdom or the Holy Spirit by which he spoke, Acts 6:9-10.
 4. This led to an even greater platform for Stephen's witness, for Stephen's Hebrew opponents unrighteously "induced men to make an accusation against him" of blasphemy, Acts 6:11.
 5. Stephen's foes then stirred up the people, the elders and scribes who arrested him and brought Stephen before the Hebrew Sanhedrin, the religious ruling body in Israel, Acts 6:12.
 6. There, Stephen's enemies set up false witnesses who claimed that he continually spoke blasphemous words against the temple and the Mosaic Law, claiming he taught that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the customs that Moses had delivered to them as a nation, Acts 6:13-14. Actually, there was some truth in the charges, for Christ predicted the temple would be destroyed, but not saying that He would do it Himself, and the Law is done away in Christ. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 368)
 7. Regardless of the false allegations, the Lord used them to put the spotlight on Stephen before Israel's ruling religious body, and when that occurred, God lit up his face as the face of an angel like He did for Moses whom the false witnesses charged Stephen with opposing! (Acts 6:15 with Exodus 34:35) This event gave Stephen undeniable credibility before the Sanhedrin as being led by the same God Who led Moses of old!

Lesson: *Stephen fellowshiped with the Lord, so the Lord elevated him in the Church to the ministry of deacon. In that position, his walk with God impacted others, leading to events that brought him before the Sanhedrin with God's help of undeniable credibility in arranging for Stephen's face to glow like an angel as had Moses' face!*

Application: *To prepare to be an effective witness, we must fellowship with God, and He will make us effective!*