

"The Struggle with Trouble"  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
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"And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel." (Acts 6:8-15)

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Scripture tells me that Stephen was "full of grace and power." Apparently the disciples got it right when they appointed Stephen because he was a man "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Pastor Wally said that Stephen being "full of grace" had no selfish desires, he was relying fully on God – his life was completely in the hands of his Master. Stephen was also full of the Holy Spirit's power. As we have previously discussed, we are simply the conduit through which the Holy Spirit's power flows to do His work. The work being done in this case was the Holy Spirit "doing great wonders and signs" through Stephen "among the people." Is being "full of grace and power" just a New Testament thing or a Stephen thing, or is Stephen's condition set out in Acts 6 possible and expected of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in general and in me, specifically? Explain.

Stephen, a Greek disciple, is speaking to Greek Jews in the synagogue of the Freedmen and though the Greek Jews try to dispute his assertions, they "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." So, if they couldn't refute Stephen's assertions, then what do I believe was their real beef with him since I know that they "secretly instigated men" to distort (bear false witness) what it was Stephen had said?

Let's put this into a 21<sup>st</sup> century church situation...certain members feel that the pastor is neglecting the senior members of the church because he's on some "youth evangelism outreach kick" and they want to get rid of him, but the pastor is not preaching heresy in fact he is accurately parsing God's Word and has not done anything that would disqualify himself from serving as a pastor...they just don't think he's doing "enough" for the church's members and want to vote him out. What are some accusations/excuses that may come out to "stir up" the congregation against the pastor and why?

Going a little further, the Greek Jews claimed that Stephen wanted to “change the customs that Moses delivered to us” (think circumcision – see Acts 15:1; Acts 21:21). So, this 21<sup>st</sup> century pastor wants to change the church’s constitution to get rid of voting because he sincerely believes that voting causes division within the church or he wants to change how the church does its Christmas Eve service which has been done the same way, without change, for decades. What then? What kind of accusations might arise for a pastor who wants to “change the customs” of the church and why?

Have I seen or heard of churches that have split over the desire on the part of church leadership to “change the customs” of the church, or of churches that treated their pastors to the same type of accusations and trumped up charges as the Greek Jews levied against Stephen? If so, how so? If not, why not?

In the midst of being falsely accused of having done something or of saying (not saying) something, what is the very first response I have regarding the accuser and/or the accusation? Explain.

Pastor Wally said that “God is not punishing you, but refining you. How easy or difficult is it for me to make that distinction in the heat of battle (trouble) when the arrows of accusations are flying at me and why?

What are some of the arrows that Satan loves to throw at me when I’m struggling with trouble?

How well do I handle Satan’s arrows? Do I take up the “the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16) or do I have some other “secret weapon” that I normally try to employ?

Pastor Wally said that I have a choice to accept or grieve the Holy Spirit and asked “who’s on the throne”...especially when trouble surrounds me? And??? Explain.

The Scripture in Acts 6 tells me that Stephen's "face was like the face of an angel". Pastor Wally said that the face of an angel who is a messenger of God shines because the angel has been in the presence of the Almighty. What kind of image of an angel pops into my mind when I read this passage of Scripture?

Revelation 10:1-3 describes an angel: "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded." "Then the LORD commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon, but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD." (1 Chronicles 21:27-30) Do these descriptions of angels in any way change my image of Stephen's face as seen by the counsel? If so, how so? If not, why not?

In what way(s), if any, have troubles caused me to need and depend on God in the past couple of months? Explain.

Pastor Wally said that today's trouble reminds me of what is to come. "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18) R.C. Sproul once said that "[g]lory has to do with light and beauty, but those aspects do not sum up what the Bible means when it speaks of the glory of God. Interestingly, the Hebrew word kabod, which is translated into English as "glory," has the root meaning of "weight" or "heaviness." This offers a clue that glory has to do with weight, and this is confirmed by passages such as 2 Corinthians 4:17, which speaks of the "weight of glory." But when we speak of glory as having to do with weight or heaviness, what exactly do we mean? Essentially, we are talking about worth or value. Things of value are often measured by their weight, for example, precious gemstones such as diamonds. Scripture often speaks of the weight of precious metals when it is talking about prices or trying to measure generosity and wealth (Gen. 23:16; 24:22). So, glory and worth are correlative concepts. God has a glory that surpasses the glory of anything else in existence because He is of infinite value and worth. So, when we are ascribing glory to God, we are ascribing worth to Him. We are telling others of His value and unsurpassed worth." In what way(s), if any, have I undervalued God's glory?