

Teaching Tips

October 2
Bible Study Guide 5

Words You Should Know

- A. Brotherly love** (Hebrews 13:1) *philadelphia* (Gk.)—Mutual love
- B. Tongues** (1 Corinthians 13:1, 8) *glossa* (Gk.)—Has the simple idea of “languages”

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Steadfast Love. People search for a workable and reliable definition of love. The writers of Hebrews and 1 Corinthians define love and tell us that it is greater than faith and hope.

- A.** Pray for your students and lesson clarity.
- B.** Read and study the entire lesson.
- C.** Pray the Aim for Change for yourself and your students.
- D.** Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.
- E.** Bring pictures or prepare a PowerPoint presentation on the many different ways that people show love.

O—Open the Lesson

- A.** Open the class with prayer, and provide an opportunity for receiving prayer requests.
- B.** Have students silently read the In Focus story. Discuss.
- C.** Ask: *What are some of the ways that you show love?* Let volunteers share.
- D.** Share your pictures or PowerPoint.

P—Present the Scriptures

- A.** Tie the Aim for Change objectives into the Unifying Principle. Discuss.
- B.** Have volunteers read the In Focus verses.
- C.** Use the Background, The People, Places, and Times, At-A-Glance outline, and In Depth to introduce the lesson.

E—Explore the Meaning

- A.** Have volunteers respond to the Discuss the Meaning questions.
- B.** Summarize the type of love that Christ has for the Church and believers should have for each other (*agape*).

N—Next Steps for Application

- A.** Summarize the lesson.
- B.** Allow students to write salient points under Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts.
- C.** Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Faith Requires Mutual Love
Song: “They Will Know We Are
Christians by Our Love”
Devotional Reading: John 13:31–35

Faith Requires Mutual Love

**Bible Background • HEBREWS 13:1–6; 1 CORINTHIANS 13 | Printed Text •
HEBREWS 13:1–3; 1 CORINTHIANS 13 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 13:31–35**

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DEFINE Christian love and discuss its implications; REFLECT on the ways we experience Christian love in our lives; and PRACTICE love as it is rooted in our faith in Christ.

In Focus

Joyce was president of the church's Usher Board. She was always on time, dressed impeccably in the standard black and white uniform with white gloves, and knew all of the hand signals. Whenever Joyce was on duty, the members had their envelopes and fans before they requested them; she would immediately move forward when she heard crying babies—firmly removing them from their parents' arms and delivering them to the nursery so the services could proceed quietly.

As she moved about the sanctuary this morning, Joyce was clearly irritated. She had met with the pastor on Saturday afternoon, and he had been critical of her work. The pastor had complimented Joyce on her faithfulness and dedication. He had even praised her as one of his most reliable members. However, the pastor had gone on to tell her that while it appeared that she enjoyed being an usher, unfortunately, he was concerned that she didn't love the members. Her actions seemed to resemble duty and order more than love and affection, which was not what was best for the congregation.

Nothing can replace our love for others. Working on their behalf is fine, but it is meaningless unless our work is motivated by love. In today's lesson, we will see how Christian love is essential to effective ministry.

Keep in Mind

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."
(1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

1 **Corinthians 13:1** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The People, Places, and Times

Corinth. Located in southern Greece, about 50 miles from Athens, the Corinth of the ancient world was actually a city that had been destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C., and then rebuilt by the emperor, Julius Caesar in 46-45 B.C. A Roman colony, Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia.

Corinth was socially, culturally, and religiously diverse. In fact, in 49 A.D. a good number of Jews who were expelled from Rome resettled in Corinth. The Christians of Corinth reflected the diversity of the city. Congregations included the wealthy, merchants, enslaved individuals, and those who were formerly enslaved.

Corinth was home to numerous temples dedicated to pagan gods and goddesses including

Apollo, Hermes, Isis, Poseidon, and the Pantheon, which is a temple dedicated to all of the gods. When Paul arrived in Corinth (about 50 A.D.) the city's reputation for immorality was widely recognized. The infamous temple of Aphrodite had fallen into ruins but was home to hundreds of "temple prostitutes," making it popular with the numerous sailors visiting the city. The Greek word *korinthiazesthai*, which means to live like a Corinthian, meant that one lived immorally.

Background

In Paul's letter to the believers in Corinth, we see the challenges that faced the early church. Corinth was a large metropolis with a diverse population. The house churches that the Corinthian Christians worshiped in

reflected the city's diversity. One issue Paul addressed to the Corinthians was unity among themselves, emphasizing the importance of their relationships with one another.

At-A-Glance

1. A Plea for Brotherly Love
(Hebrews 13:1-3)
2. Love is the Basis of Our Faith
(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
3. Love is the Proof of Our Gifts
(vv. 4-7)
4. Love is Permanent (vv. 8-13)

In Depth

1. A Plea for Brotherly Love (Hebrews 13:1-3)

The Scripture opens with "Let brotherly love continue." Our world is full of hurting people, who in turn only know how to hurt other people. As a result, our newspapers and online and TV news reports are full of stories detailing terrible murders and horrific assaults committed by and on people in every age group. Thank God that believers who have found forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ have a new and divine nature. Because of Christ's forgiveness, we are capable of loving others in a deeper and more spiritual way. We are now capable of loving the way that God loves us. However, this capacity to love one another must be exercised. Each day, we have to plead as Jesus did, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (see Matthew 26:39). It is our love for God that must be the source of our love for others.

We want to remember that verse 1 is not a request nor a mere suggestion. This reminds us that there is a possibility for our love for one another to stop. Two possible reasons are failure to ask for forgiveness when we sin and

refusing to forgive someone who hurts us. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to ask God to "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Hebrews 13:3 hearkens to customs of the Ancient Near East. In that time, people traveled great distances on foot. It was a common practice for a family to provide a meal and night's lodging to traveling strangers. Our world is very different today, and the expectation to open one's doors to a stranger hardly seems reasonable. We can, however, ask God to provide us with opportunities to assist strangers and share with them. Hospitality is a hallmark of Christianity. We want to show the same grace and kindness toward strangers that God has shown toward us. Jesus taught that, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Hebrews 13:3 offers yet another motivation for our Christian hospitality. The Scripture says that in doing this, we might be visited by an angel. The Old Testament has many accounts of people who were visited by angels of God. However, the word "angel" translated here means a "messenger" and not necessarily a divine creature. While a present-day angel may never actually visit most saints, God's human messengers will most certainly visit us when we express Christian hospitality.

2. Love is the Basis of Our Faith (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

We want to remember that when Paul wrote this letter, he was keenly aware of the Corinthians' fascination with the gifts of the Spirit. They were attracted to knowledge, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. Paul is teaching that these gifts were meaningless without love. When Paul speaks of "charity" we should read that word as "love." More importantly, we should know that Paul is speaking of a specific form of love. He is not talking about *eros*, or the sensuous

or erotic form of love. Nor is Paul describing *philia*, which means “a brotherly affection or friendship.” Rather, Paul is describing *agape*, “a commitment of the will to cherish and uphold another person.” In the Bible, this is the form of love that is always used when we describe God’s love. *Agape* describes our willful and deliberate decision to treat others with the utmost care and concern and allows us to esteem the best interests of our brother or sister above our own.

We must remember that this form of love is only possible when we love God first. Without this, the love toward one another is a sham, a mere imitation. This prerequisite is demonstrated in the Scripture when we read that there are two great commandments. The first is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” The second is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27).

When Paul speaks of “tongues of men and angels,” he is not primarily describing *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues. Rather, he is saying that it is more important to act lovingly than to be able to speak all the languages of heaven or earth. That definitely includes the conduct of those who practiced *glossolalia*. Without love, Paul is saying, the ability to communicate is useless. Similarly, Paul tells us that if he was able to explain all the mysteries of the Scriptures, but he wasn’t a loving person, it would be meaningless.

3. Love is the Proof of Our Gifts (vv. 4–7)

Contrary to what many of us believe, love is not an ethereal (heavenly) notion. Love is practical and must be put into practice on a daily basis. Christians must constantly measure their love and ask themselves, “Did I show love in that situation or toward that person?” And, more importantly, “Am I growing?” Paul shows that love can indeed be measured and that love results in characteristics that can be seen and heard.

4. Love is Permanent (vv. 8–13)

True love will produce patience, kindness, and honesty. As Christians, we have to identify and remove things from our lives that prohibit us from being able to manifest these qualities of love. Paul identifies these hindrances as jealousy, boastfulness, resentment, and ill temperament. He understood that when Jesus returned, sin and death would end. He knew that the gifts of the Spirit would no longer be needed. Paul uses two analogies to support this. First, it would be unimaginable to think that a mature adult would resort to childlike behavior. Secondly, an actual portrayal of a person could never be obtained by looking at a reflection of poor quality. Paul was teaching the Corinthians and us that when Christ returns, Christians would have direct access to Him. Our relationship with Him will be personal and intimate. Paul was trying to dispel the Corinthians’ pride in temporary supernatural gifts. Much of Paul’s ministry had been spent teaching about the importance of faith and hope. Now, he places love right alongside them, and in fact, elevates love above the others.

Search the Scriptures

1. According to Paul, what is necessary for any service or ministry to be of value (1 Corinthians 13:3)?
2. After our spiritual gifts cease to exist, what will remain (v. 13)?

Discuss the Meaning

If all spiritual gifts are predicated on love, why do some workers within the churches seem to believe or behave as though it is not essential to Christian ministry efforts?

Liberating Lesson

Paul makes it clear that for the believer, love is the key. It is love that enables us to reproduce the very character of Jesus Christ in our lives and in

our ministry efforts. It is only when we have love that we can access the other fruit of the Spirit. Without love, we cannot genuinely be patient, peaceful, good, gentle, or display any of the other qualities. We may be able to imitate them, but without love, they won't be a part of our character; nor will we be able to fully embrace them in order to do the Kingdom-building work Christ has commissioned us to do.

Application for Activation

We are often frustrated in our work in churches. Sometimes it feels as though others are not as committed as we are. Over the next week, pray and ask God to reveal to you areas where you may have failed to demonstrate love toward your co-laborers. Then, ask God what you can do to remedy the situation. Also, ask Him how to show love to those who don't show it to you. It may call for you to make apologies and seek forgiveness and forgive others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 13:1–3; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

The instructions in these verses are about life in the community. These words flow directly from Hebrews 12:28, which called for a giving of thanks and worship that is acceptable to God. It is important that the service of God is not in a vacuum but is expressed by moral dispositions and behaviors in common. “Brotherly love,” or “mutual love” (Gk. *philadelphia*, fil-ad-el-FEE-ah), the first practice that the author enjoins in Hebrews 13:1, is an important virtue in the New Testament. It is a Christian ideal as we see in Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Peter 2:17. “Brotherly love” is not merely a matter of sentiment but involves a set of dispositions and behaviors and is intensely practical. It involves meeting the needs of others through a mutual sharing of possessions and activities. An affectionate love for fellow Christians not only restrains us from tripping them up but also prompts us to give them every encouragement possible. The author makes an insightful play on words in the use of the imperative *meno* (MEN-o), which means “remain” or “continue.” Love must remain; unlike other things which will be shaken.

To “brotherly love,” the author adds “hospitality” (Gk. *philoxenia*, fil-on-ex-NEE-ah) or “love of strangers,” a concrete expression of mutual love. It was highly esteemed in the ancient world and was certainly very important for Christians. The verse is better understood against the backdrop of itinerant preachers in the New Testament. Inns, or hotels, were expensive and

had bad reputations. But as Christian preachers traveled, believers housed them and facilitated their mission. Without hospitality in Christian homes, the spread of the faith would have been much more difficult.

The author takes an additional step concerning practical love by turning his attention to prisoners. In the early days of Christianity, many believers were unjustly jailed because of their faith in Christ. The readers were probably tempted to ignore and neglect their colleagues, who were in chains, because of the associated shame. In the first century, prisoners were not well treated and depended on sympathizers for necessities such as food. People withheld help for fear of identifying themselves with the prisoners and suffering similar punishment. But Christians should have compassion on those in prison “as if you were there yourself” (Hebrews 13:3, NLT). But as Paul writes, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it,” (1 Corinthians 12:26, NLT); there is something of the same thought here.

1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

The Corinthian Christians were fascinated with spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. But Paul reminds them that the gifts are worthless without love. The Greek word *glossa* (gloce-SAH), translated “tongues” has the simple idea of “languages” in some contexts (Acts 2:11; Revelation 5:9). Paul goes on to say that prophecy, knowledge, and faith to do

miracles are likewise irrelevant apart from love. Giving oneself to be burned is a barren gesture unless it is inspired by love. Paul’s point is clear: The Corinthian Christians were missing the motive and the goal of the gifts, making the means to become their own end. But for Paul, love trumps all. Also, for Paul, it is not an issue of love *or* gifts; neither must it be for us. Paul is stressing the focus and end of the gifts: love. The gifts are not for their own sake. For gifts to be effectual, love must guide their use.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, Paul shows a life characterized by love. The word *agape* is often used for God’s love, not ordinary human love. Paul’s description of the characteristics of love is a matter of other-directed behavior described with action words. Love suffers long. It is the type of love that characterizes God (2 Peter 3:9). If God’s love is in us, we will be longsuffering to those who annoy us and hurt us. Love is kind. Kindness is demonstrated in simple acts, such as giving a cup of water to the thirsty (Matthew 25:42).

In 1 Corinthians 13:4b–6, Paul enumerates the opposite characteristics of love. Love does not envy. Whereas jealousy says, “I would like to have what you have,” envy says, “I wish you did not have what you have.” Envy is an unproductive and damaging sin for those who allow it. It accomplishes nothing, except to hurt the one who harbors it. But love keeps its distance from envy and does not resent it when someone else makes progress. Love does not parade itself: Love in action can work

anonymously. It does not have to have the limelight or the attention to do a good job or to be satisfied with the result. Love gives because it loves to give, not out of the sense of praise it can have from showing itself off.

Love is not puffed up. To be puffed up is to be arrogant and self-focused. It speaks of someone who has a “big head.” Love does not get its head swelled; it focuses on the needs of others. Love does not behave rudely; it is not ill-mannered or brash. Where there is love, there will be kindness and good manners. A person who loves does not just speak his or her mind but minds his or her speech. Love does not seek its own benefit. Paul expresses this idea in a slightly different manner in Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:4. This is being like Jesus in a most basic way: being an others-centered person instead of a self-centered person.

Love is not easily provoked. This is perhaps the most difficult to understand among the characteristics of love. In plain language, love is neither touchy nor irritable. Love thinks no evil. It does not store up the memory or keep an account of any wrong it has received. It puts away the hurts of the past instead of clinging to them.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity: “I told you so” and “it serves you right” are familiar but don’t reflect the language of love. Love desires the best for others and does not derive personal satisfaction from the failure of others. Instead, love rejoices in the truth.

Paul ends the discussion of the characteristics of love on a positive note, stating the things that love does. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. The Greek word *pantos* (**PAHN**-toce), is translated “all” and can also be interpreted as “always” (1 Corinthians 13:7). Paul’s point is that love never tires of support, never loses faith, never surrenders hope, and never gives up. Most of us can bear all things and believe all things

and hope all things, but only for a while! The greatness of *agape* is that it keeps on bearing, believing, and hoping. It does not give up.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

The verse begins the concluding paragraph of the chapter. Here, Paul attests to the permanence of love as he continues to put the spiritual gifts and virtues in perspective. Love never fails. Paul is addressing the over-emphasis of the Corinthian Christians on the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. He shows that they should emphasize love more than the gifts because the gifts are “containers” of God’s work; love is the work itself.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. 13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Paul gives the reason other gifts apart from love will cease. Those gifts, such as tongues, prophecy, or knowledge, are specifically meant to equip the believer to endure in this age. Therefore, all gifts except love can be characterized as partial.

In mistaking the part for the whole and the partial for the final, the Corinthian Christians, unlike Paul, are childish. It is wrong to suggest that verses 11–12 sees tongue speaking and prophecy as childishness, considering Paul claims to do both. What Paul is saying is that there is an appropriate age to do so and that

now is that age. When the completion of that age finally arrives, then it will be time to set aside what was appropriate and needful for that age. For Paul, the three great pursuits of the Christian life are not miracles, power, and gifts. Though the gifts are precious and given by the Holy Spirit, they were never meant to be the focus or goal of our Christian lives. Instead, we must pursue faith, hope, and love.

In conclusion, it is fitting to say that Paul's discussion in the chapter is not only powerful but also heart-searching. It calls for a careful examination of our motivation for service. There is a reason Paul put this chapter in the midst of his discussion of spiritual gifts. He wants the Corinthian Christians to remember that giftedness is not the measure of maturity; the display of love is.

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Say It Correctly

Corinth. **KAWR**-inth, **KOR**-inth.
Hermes. **HUR**-meez.
Poseidon. poh-**SI**-duhn.
Pantheon. **PAN**-thee-on, -uhn

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

I Love You, O Lord
(Psalm 18:1-6)

TUESDAY

Faithful Love
(Deuteronomy 7:7-11)

WEDNESDAY

Obedient Love
(Deuteronomy 5:6-10)

THURSDAY

Taught to Love
(Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

FRIDAY

Love One Another
(John 13:31-35)

SATURDAY

Love Your Enemies
(Luke 6:27-36)

SUNDAY

Faith, Hope, and Love
(Hebrews 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 13)

Teaching Tips

October 9
Bible Study Guide 6

Words You Should Know

A. Synagogue (Acts 6:9) *synagoge* (Gk.)—A place of worship for Jewish people

B. Blasphemous (vv. 11, 13) *blasphemos* (Gk.)—A disrespectful attitude expressed in an act directed against God’s character

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Courage to Speak. Stephen, in the face of opposition, demonstrated the power and wisdom of the Spirit to speak the truth of Christ.

A. Read Acts 6 in several translations so you can understand the passage.

B. Read and study the entire lesson.

C. Pray the Aim for Change for yourself and your students.

D. Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living®* Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open the class with prayer, asking God to make us bold in witnessing for Him.

B. Have students silently read the In Focus story. Discuss together.

C. Ask: Do you think there might have been another way for Anthony to witness to Cleveland? What are some reasons for witnessing in situations where it is forbidden?

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Tie the Aim for Change objectives into the Unifying Principle by stating that Stephen was a bold witness for Jesus.

B. Briefly summarize the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.

C. Discuss why God allows His children to suffer for being a witness for Him.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have volunteers respond to the Discuss the Meaning questions.

B. Then explain that the martyrdom of Stephen meant that the Jewish Christians scattered all over the known world for that time and carried the Gospel with them.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Divide the class by twos and role play ways to share the Gospel.

B. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Stephen’s Arrest and Speech
Song: “Jesus Is All the World to Me”
Devotional Reading: Proverbs 8:1–11

Stephen's Arrest and Speech

Bible Background • ACTS 6:8–7:53

Printed Text • ACTS 6:8–7:2A | Devotional Reading • PROVERBS 8:1–11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISCUSS** the stand that Stephen took as a response to his faith; **FEEL** motivated to confront principalities and powers of our day; and **SEEK** the power and wisdom of the Spirit in our efforts to speak truth.

In Focus

Cleveland volunteered at the city-run homeless shelter. He was a hard worker with a cheerful attitude. Ms. Martin, the supervisor, was very happy with Cleveland's participation, especially because she seemed short of volunteers.

One day, she overheard Cleveland telling Jesse, a man living at the shelter, that the reason for his joy was Jesus. Jesse asked him how he could get this "Jesus joy."

So Cleveland explained, "First, we tell Jesus that we are sorry for our sins. Then we thank Him for dying on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. And lastly, we ask Jesus to save us." Right then and there, Cleveland and Jesse bowed their heads, and Jesse asked Jesus to save him.

Now Cleveland's joy was so great, he felt like he could walk on air. But just as he was going back to clean up food that a child had dropped, Ms. Martin came up to him with anger written all over her face.

"Cleveland, this is a government-sponsored facility so you cannot come here and talk about your religion!"

How do you think Cleveland will respond to Ms. Martin? What will he say? Have you ever had someone challenge your Christian witness?

Today we will see how Stephen was able to witness with great power and grace.

Keep in Mind

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."
(Acts 6:8, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

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

2a And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken;

The People, Places, and Times

Synagogue of the Libertines (Freedmen). Jews who were born in the Holy Land and spent most of their lives there spoke Aramaic, which was a form of the ancient Hebrew in which our Old Testament is written. But there were other Jews born in other places who had returned to Palestine, and they did not know Aramaic or Hebrew. They only spoke Greek, which was the language of the educated people of the day. Perhaps they had been slaves in other countries, but now they were all proud to be free people. Some of them came from Cyrene, an important city located in what is modern-day Libya in northern Africa. Others came from Alexandria, the chief city of Egypt, and others came from Cilicia and Asia. Ephesus was a grand city located in Asia Minor. Tarsus, where Paul was born, was located in the northern part of Asia Minor in what is now known as Syria.

Pious Greek-speaking Jews attended the Synagogue of Libertines or Freedmen. Paul would have attended this synagogue, and Barnabas probably did also. Among all these

Greek-speaking Jews were a few Christians, but the most outspoken was Stephen. The Holy Spirit spoke through him as he reasoned, discussed, and argued for Jesus Christ.

Background

At the beginning of Acts 6, the early Christians were having problems. The Aramaic-speaking Jews were probably attending the big Temple in Jerusalem. But the early Jewish Christians, who spoke Greek, were attending the Synagogue of the Freedmen. The Jews had the wonderful custom of collecting donations for the poor among them; thus, the early Christians followed this custom and gave to needy widows. (Widows in those days had few ways to raise money to feed themselves, much less their children if they had any.)

The apostles were among the Aramaic Jews and were the early Christian leaders. They were in charge of the distribution of gifts to the widows, yet they were forgetting the Greek-speaking Christian widows. This could have been because of snobbery, because of language

differences or because they just overlooked the Greek-speaking poor.

The godly solution of the apostles was to appoint Greek-speaking Jewish Christians to take charge of distributing food and money to the widows and other poor among them. The Greek-speaking Christians would know who was in need. The seven men chosen for this task were also chosen for their outstanding spirituality. Among them were Philip and Stephen, who is the focus of today's lesson.

At-A-Glance

1. Introduction of Stephen (Acts 6:8–10)
2. Opposition to Stephen (vv. 11–14)
3. Stephen's Effect on the Sanhedrin (vv. 15–7:2a)

In Depth

1. Introduction of Stephen (Acts 6:8–10)

Stephen did much more than hand out gifts to the needy. Until this time, Scripture had only mentioned the apostles performing miracles, but now we see Stephen doing great wonders. (We'll read later of the miracles that Philip performed). Scripture tells us the reason for Stephen's ability to perform miracles is that he is full of grace and power. We would expect to hear about the power in conjunction with miracles, but maybe we are surprised by the accompaniment of grace. Grace is always an unmerited gift of God. Therefore, we see that God working through Stephen, not because Stephen is so wonderful, but because God is wonderful and empowered him to do these amazing things.

At this time, all Christians were converted Jews and all attended synagogues. The Christian Jews were a tiny minority among the other Jews. The Jews whose primary language was Greek attended the Synagogue of the Freedmen. As Stephen, who

attended this synagogue, performed miracles in the name of Jesus, other Jewish members who did not follow Christ opposed. They debated with Stephen, but their arguments did not stand up against him for two reasons. First of all, the Holy Spirit was enabling him to use great wisdom. Secondly, the things that Stephen said concerning Jesus Christ were true.

2. Opposition to Stephen (vv. 11–14)

Those who opposed Stephen thought they were defending things that good Jews believed, but they were probably jealous of him as well. Obviously, Stephen garnered a lot of attention from the miracles he performed and his brilliant exposition of the true meaning of Old Testament Scriptures.

Opposition spread from the Synagogue of the Freedmen to the great temple in Jerusalem and to the influential Jews who had also opposed Jesus. As a result, they seized Stephen and brought him before the great Jewish religious council, the Sanhedrin. This was the same religious council that put Jesus on trial. As they had with Jesus, they also brought false witnesses against Stephen and used some of the same arguments.

They accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple in Jerusalem. They said the Jesus he preached about had threatened to destroy the Temple. In John 2:19, Jesus said that if they destroyed "this temple," meaning His body, He would raise it again in three days. We know that they were twisting the words of both Jesus and Stephen without really trying to understand the message.

In addition, they accused both Stephen and Jesus of trying to destroy the Old Testament Law, again twisting their words. Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). And because they were accusing Stephen of speaking about the Temple and the Law, they were in essence accusing him of speaking against God.

3. Stephen's Effect on the Sanhedrin (vv. 15–7:2a)

When Stephen's accusers finished what they had to say, they noticed his face looked like that of an angel. We are sure this does not mean he resembled the childlike pictures of angels we often see portrayed nor is it likely that he looked like some type of avenging angel. But because we have never looked into the face of an angel, we can only imagine a face that reflected the holiness of God Himself.

At that point, the high priest asked Stephen whether the charges of his accusers were true. This was probably Caiaphas, the very same man who had presided over the trial of Jesus. But that did not scare Stephen, who then launched into a history of the Jewish people, including their rejection of the prophets that God sent and finally the crucifixion of their Savior. The result of Stephen's sermon was that he was stoned and received by Jesus into heaven.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Stephen communicate the Gospel to people (Acts 6:8–10)?
2. What did the false witnesses testify that Stephen said (v. 14)?
3. As the council looked upon Stephen's face, what did they see (v. 15)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Stephen was mighty in both miracles and words. Do you think you must have these abilities to witness to others about Jesus Christ? What are the characteristics we need to witness effectively concerning Jesus?

2. Stephen had wonderful spiritual gifts and he was very proactive in using them, yet it seemed he had a short time on earth before he died. Why do you think God would allow him to be sacrificed after such a brief time as a Christian? Acts 8:1 tells us that Saul was watching all this. Do you think Stephen's martyrdom had any influence on Saul?

What other things happened as a result of Stephen's death? Acts 8:1 reveals one of those things.

Liberating Lesson

In the days of Stephen, Jewish society was very religious. Christians retained some of the good things from the religious Jews, such as collecting contributions for the poor, and thus the Christians made regular gifts to the widows, the most vulnerable in their society. Unlike the context of Stephen's ministry, our society today is continuing to become increasingly secular. But even though the people of Stephen's day were very religious, they were extremely hostile to the Good News of Jesus Christ. In our society, people are seemingly becoming more hostile to the Jesus of the Bible. What are some of the things that evoke hostility to the Christian message today? How do these things compare to the type of hostility in Stephen's day? What are some ways we can reverse this trend? Stephen, the other deacons, and the apostles demonstrated the love of Christ in the things they did for the poor. How can similar programs help prepare the way for our Christian witness?

Application for Activation

What are some situations when you think you could be a witness to the message of Jesus Christ? What are some of the things keeping you from speaking out? Ask God to empower you to tell people about our Lord. Ask Him to give you wisdom for the things to say and do. Before you speak up for Christ, demonstrate your love for others in the things you do.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 6:8–7:2a

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

By the time we get to this verse, we already know quite a bit about the character of Stephen and his spiritual gifts. Acts 6:3 tells us that the qualifications of the seven deacons was that they were to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Stephen measured up to this and his name is a special description from which we can surmise that he is a man of deep faith, full of the Spirit, power, and wisdom. In Acts 6:8, the NIV substitutes the word “grace” for what is stated as “faith” in the King James Version. The Greek word for “faith” in the KJV is *pistis* (**PIS-tis**). This can be translated as moral conviction, particularly reliance on Christ. This combined with power presents us with a wonderful combination of traits, leading to a strikingly Christ-like character.

Verse 8 shows us that not only was he full of faith and power but that he also did great wonders and miracles among the people. Up until this point, only the apostles demonstrated miracles, but we will soon see that not only did Stephen perform miracles, but Philip did as well (Acts 8:6). Those involved in missionary work—spreading the Good News where people have never heard it before—may have this special stamp of the Holy Spirit. What they are telling people is really from God.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

The synagogue of the libertines or freedmen was composed of Jews who had been in captivity in other lands but were now back in the Promised Land. Perhaps not all of them had been slaves. However, as Jews from other countries, they could not speak the Aramaic that the inhabitants of Israel could. And so, they worshiped in a synagogue in Jerusalem, separate from the Temple. Although they came from many different countries, they all spoke Greek, the language spoken by the educated people of the Roman Empire. Some of them came from Cyrene and Alexandria, two of the most prominent cities in North Africa. And some came from Cilicia and Asia, two other prominent provinces in the Roman Empire. Saul of Tarsus probably belonged to this synagogue because Tarsus was in Cilicia.

Although the men of the freedmen’s synagogue were well educated in the Greek translation of the Scripture, they did not expect that it would be so difficult to debate with Stephen. Jesus had promised His followers that He would give them words and wisdom that none of their adversaries would be able to resist or contradict (Luke 21:15).

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

Unable to counter Stephen’s amazing presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they began a smear campaign. “Suborned” is an archaic English word meaning “bribed.” The Greek for “suborned” is *hupoballo* (hoo-po-BAL-lo), and it means to throw in stealthily, or

to introduce by mutual consent. The religious leaders gathered together for a secret meeting to conspire against Stephen. Because they could not discover any holes in Stephen's logic and exegesis of the Old Testament Scripture, they had to resort to false charges.

Looking at the charges against Jesus and Stephen, we see that blasphemy was not simply taking the name of God in vain. The religious scholars of that day broadened the charge to include speaking against the Temple, which was considered the throne of God, or anything that seemed to assail the Word of God or in particular the Law. We will see in the chapter to follow that Stephen was presenting Jesus as the Son of God and as the fulfillment of the Law.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

Because the religious leaders could not logically tear apart Stephen's defense of the Gospel, they resorted to working up the crowd with issues sure to upset the Jews of Jerusalem. As a result, before Stephen was brought to trial, everyone from the common person to the rulers of the Sanhedrin had already decided that they wanted to get rid of him. In today's legal system, this would be setting up a prejudicial attitude among the people. Trial lawyers know that this can cause a trial to be thrown out or moved to another, presumably less, prejudiced area.

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

Verse 13 reveals the next step of this villainous plan, which was to bring false

witnesses against Stephen. "This holy place" refers to the Temple and all the religious rites performed there. Godly Jews based their entire lives upon the Law, so the Temple and the cultic traditions would have been very dear to them. Those opposing Stephen had already incited the crowd with hot-button issues and now sought to press these issues further with witnesses paid to testify against Stephen. They were not blatantly lying; they just twisted the truth enough to stir up the crowd using one of the very same charges brought against Jesus.

In Matthew 26:61, two false witnesses said that Jesus declared, "I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days," (NLT). This was a shocking statement. It had taken 46 years for Herod's Temple to be built, but Jesus was not referring to Herod's Temple; He was referring to His body. John 2:18–22 contains this statement, but John clarifies it. The religious rulers may have thought they destroyed Jesus when they hung Him on the Cross, but we know that the climax of the story is Jesus' Resurrection from the dead three days later. John tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples remembered this statement from Jesus and finally they understood and believed.

Many Scriptural passages, the prophetic ones in particular, have double meanings. In Ephesians 1:22–23, we read that the Church is the body of Christ. All of us who have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior are a part of that body. The body of Christ has gone through many trials and much persecution, sometimes even martyrdom, but the Church of Christ will not be snuffed out.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Stephen's face was shining, similar to Moses' face when he came down from Mount Sinai

after receiving the Law. In Stephen's case, he demonstrated through his words and his ministry that the Law was fulfilled in Jesus. The apostles had not yet understood that although they were attending the Temple as observant Jews, this had been superseded by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. There was no more need to sacrifice the lives of animals to pay for their sins. Although the Ten Commandments, which is God's moral law for all human beings, is still in effect, all the rituals of the Old Testament have been fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus. We still need to study the entire Bible, but these parts have significance primarily to demonstrate the meaning of the Cross.

7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? 2a And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken.

Stephen had to respond directly to the charges leveled against him. At the first reading of his speech, we may think it's just a repetition of Old Testament history, which his listeners were well acquainted with. But it is really much more radical than even the apostles realized. Next week, we will look at part of Stephen's speech.

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Say It Correctly

Suborn. suh-**BORN**.

Cyrenians. si-**REE**-nee-uhnz.

Alexandrians. al-ig-**ZAN**-dree-uhnz.

Libertines. **LIB**-er-teens.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Barriers between You and Your God
(Isaiah 59:1–8)

TUESDAY

Falsehood, Deceit, and Deception
(Jeremiah 8:22–9:9)

WEDNESDAY

These Things You Shall Do
(Zechariah 8:14–19)

THURSDAY

My Mouth Will Utter Truth
(Proverbs 8:1–11)

FRIDAY

Guided into All the Truth
(John 16:12–15)

SATURDAY

Full of Faith and the Spirit
(Acts 6:1–7)

SUNDAY

Full of Grace and Power
(Acts 6:8–7:2a)