

Consummate Hostility and Consummate Love.

Acts 7:54-60.

Sunday morning, January 31, 2010.

I. Consummate hostility. Vs. 54-58.

“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart (furious), and they gnashed at him with their teeth.”

A. Why the anger and the severity of it?

1. Stephen had turned the tables on them.
Stephen had been on trial for speaking blasphemy against Moses and against God; for speaking blasphemy against the temple and the law. Ch. 6:11,13.
2. By the end of Stephen’s address the Sanhedrin is on trial.
 - They are on trial for having become “the betrayers and murderers of the Just One.” Vs. 52.
 - They are on trial for “having received the law by the direction of angels, and not keeping it.” Vs. 53
 - They are on trial for resisting the Holy spirit. Vs. 51.
 - Finally they are on trial for persecuting the Lord’s servants as did their fathers. Vs. 52.
3. Alongside the words of accusation laid at the Sanhedrin’s feet by Stephen, there was the convicting and convincing work of the Holy Spirit, Who testified to their hearts that these things were indeed so.
4. Alongside Stephen’s words of indictment and the Holy Spirit’s inward testimony there was another voice in the hearts of the Sanhedrin. It was the voice of their own carnal natures. It was the voice that desired to have the upper hand, and for that reason it spoke with the emotion of force, that is anger.
5. They gnashed at him with their teeth, thus expressing the hostility and frustration that is in their hearts. It is language used to describe the souls in hell, indicating that hostility and frustration rule the hearts of the lost for all eternity. Hell is no place of repentance; only of hardness of heart.

Application:

When confronted with the indictments Stephen lays at their feet, the Sanhedrin makes the decision to listen to the voice of their own carnal natures.

What should they have done?

They should have taken a recess, or adjourn the meeting to the next day for the purpose of humbly and prayerfully taking inventory of their own hearts and lives. Was there any truth to what Stephen was saying? Had they miss-carried justice in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ? Were the miracles of the apostles and the transformation in their character evidences of His resurrection?

What do you do when accusations are laid at your feet? Do you mount an immediate defense? Do you dismiss the charges out of hand? Do you immediately fire back with counter charges? Do you look to discredit your accusers? Do you get angry?

Or are you able to receive such charges and humbly and prayerfully lay them, and yourself, before the Lord, looking to Him to do His gracious work in you and in your accusers? Here the Lord’s words apply that he who would save his life will lose it.

B. Pushed over the edge.

1. Whatever hostility and frustration the Sanhedrin was feeling, up to the present time they expressed it in a concealed manner by gnashing their teeth. These were men who were holding back the rage they were feeling inwardly. Their fear of the people, and of the Romans, may have had something to do with that.
2. All that would change however by what immediately followed. Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, was granted to see heaven opened at that point. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
3. The veil separating heaven from earth, symbolized by the veil in the temple, was lifted, or thinned out so as to become transparent, and Stephen said: "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"
4. Why standing? He is actively engaged rather than a passive observer. The Lord Jesus Christ opened the heavens to Stephen, and came to his aid.

Application

Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is standing for you as well at the right hand of power? That He is actively engaged in your plight and struggles? That it is only a veil that separates you from Him?

5. At this point the Sanhedrin openly gives vent to their hostility.
 - They stop their ears; they can not stand the thought that this condemned and crucified criminal, Jesus of Nazareth, is standing at the right hand of God.
 - They cry out with loud voices so as to drown out anything else Stephen might have said.
 - They cast him out of the city and stone him to death.
6. This was not justice; this was mob rule. There was no weighing of evidence; no reaching of a verdict; no pronouncing of a sentence; no waiting of a mandatory day before execution, and no appeal to the Roman authorities who were the only ones who could lawfully execute a condemned criminal. John 18:31.

II. Consummate love. Vs. 59,60.

Stephen did drink deeply of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have in Stephen's final words and disposition three echoes of the Lord Jesus' life

- A. He called on the Lord Jesus as the Lord had called on the Father saying "receive my spirit."
- B. He prayed for the transgressors as the Lord Jesus had done: "Lord do not charge them with this sin."
- C. In doing so Stephen retains a gracious disposition and love toward his enemies. He desires God's best for them to the very end. He keeps himself in the love of God. The Lord Jesus, having loved His own, loved them to the end. John 13:1.

Application:

What is your disposition toward your enemies? Do you sincerely desire God's best for them? Do you carry the love of God in your heart toward them even to the end?