

Stephen - Some of the characteristics of a Christian

Part 1

Speaker	Norman Anderson
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[00:00:00] The life and death of Stephen and what we want to see there are eight or nine features of Christianity seen in these two verses as we see Stephen standing before the Sanhedrin, the council, the 70 men, the religious rulers and as he seals his testimony with his blood as a martyr and we want to see the features that came out in his life and his death which should be true in your life and in my life as as believers. So we're going to look this afternoon at the features of Christianity, at least some of the features of Christianity as we see as we see in this in this passage. Just a little background in connection with this, there are four or at least four or five outstanding factors about Christianity and one we know what that is, that's the death of our Lord Jesus [00:01:03] Christ, his crucifixion, his sufferings, his passion and how good we could, how wonderful we can relate to that, so how wonderful to relate to his death. But not only did he die but he arose again from the dead, he's a risen Savior, so how good to think about Christ being risen and the wonderful resurrection ministry of our Lord Jesus in the in the book of Acts as well as in the four Gospels we see his resurrection ministry. And then we know his ascension and glorification and that's what we're going to emphasize a little bit this afternoon, the Lord willing, as we look at these various features of Christianity. And then we know we know his soon return, his coming again to take us to be with himself. These are outstanding features of the Christianity. But in the life of Stephen as he's standing before these Jewish Sanhedrin giving them a history [00:02:06] of the nation of Israel and they're getting ready to stone him to death, in verse 55 notice what it says about Stephen, but he being full of the Holy Ghost. Now that's the first point, Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost. Now how is that so? Look back at chapter 6, chapter 6 and verse 5, chapter 6 and verse 5, the Apostles told him to select seven men of good report full of the Holy Ghost and they would appoint them as deacons. The local brethren cannot appoint them because we don't appoint deacons, but the Apostles did that. And in verse 5, the saying pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. And then down in verse 8, and Stephen full of [00:03:03] grace, your Bible says faith but it should read grace, what a gracious man Stephen was, and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people. Well anyone who's going to have such Christ-like features, there's going to be opposition, and there was opposition. Notice what happened, there arose of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. Notice verse 10, they were not able to resist the wisdom and the capital S, that should be a capital S, the Spirit by which he spake, not his spirit, but he spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. So here's one who is full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost, full of grace and power, wisdom, and here he spake by the power of the Holy Spirit. And then these Sabuan men, verse 11, which said we've heard him [00:04:04] speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God, 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. So here he is standing before the Jewish council, 70 men, the representatives of God on earth, and set up false witnesses which said this man ceases not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law, for we've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and show change of customs which Moses delivered us. And all that set an account, so looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. He showed whose company he'd been keeping, he'd been keeping company with that man in the glory, the man Christ Jesus, his face shown as a face of an angel. And so here's the background of this of this man, this deacon, who [00:05:02] was a wonderful man of God. Now back in chapter 7 it says he was full of the Holy Ghost. Now how can you and I be at least filled with the Holy Spirit?

Stephen was occupied with that man in the glory. How can we be filled with the Spirit of God? Because Scripture tells us to be filled with the Spirit, be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, don't be intoxicated by things down here, mundane things, but to be filled with the Spirit. How can that be? Well, can we pray and ask God to fill us with the Spirit? Well it's good to pray, it's good to be at the prayer meeting too, but praying will not fill one with the Holy Spirit, as important as prayer is. We should pray, confess any unconfessed sins in our lives so that he can fill us, but just praying will not fill one with the Spirit of God. What about reading your Bible? Well it's wonderful to read [00:06:03] your Bible, in fact we should study the Word of God, we should read the Scriptures, but reading your Bible doesn't fill you with the Holy Spirit. Well what about attending meetings? Well certainly we should attend the meetings, not forsaking of assembling of ourselves together as a manner of some is, encouraging one another so much the more as we see the day approaching, but just going to meeting doesn't fill one with the Spirit. You say, well what will fill one with the Spirit? To be occupied with that man in the glory that my life, my heart, and soul is so taken up with him, that is what will fill one with the Spirit. If we're occupied with that one who delights the heart of God, we will be filled with the Spirit of God. We'll be walking in the Spirit and will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Now this is a feature of Christianity, and if you [00:07:01] don't remember anything else that I say today, there are two major things. One, there's a man in heaven, the man Christ Jesus. Two, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer down here. That's what Christianity really is, that's what it's all about. So how wonderful that we too, we too can have the support of heaven if we're occupied with that man in the glory. So Stephen was full, not just filled, but he was full. You say, what's the difference between being filled and full? I believe on certain occasions God may have a job for us to do. Not that we shouldn't be full, but the scripture in Ephesians says to be filled with the Spirit. But sometimes if we have a special job to do, God will give us that special unction, as it were, to do that very job. And here's a man, Stephen, what a job he did giving the wonderful Hebrew history to these people. And they listened to him also to a certain point, to a certain point, and then after that they [00:08:01] stoned him to death. But he was full of the Holy Ghost. We too should be at least filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice what he did, he being full of the Holy Ghost. The second thing, he looked up. He physically, literally looked up. He did, because he's being stoned to death and he just looks up. Well, what about us? Where are we looking? If we look around at the world, we would become discouraged. If you look within yourself, you're going to become disgusted. If you're going to look at the brethren, you're going to become disappointed from time to time. But oh dear friends, if you look up, you can become delighted, delighted with that man, Christ Jesus. Look back at chapter 3 if you will, just a moment, I'm sorry, [00:09:04] chapter 1 of Acts and verse 11. It says, verse 11, which also said these two men in white apparel, Ye men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you in heaven shall so come in like manner as you've seen him go into heaven. They were told not to gaze up, they were told not to look up into heaven, because God was going to send the same Jesus right back and chapter 3 tells us that. But the nation of Israel rejected, they rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and so now we are to look up. We see Jesus crowned with glory and

honor and majesty, gazing on the Lord in the glory we sing in our hymn book. So we too are to look up, by faith of course, you don't have to physically look up, but how good it is we can go out and see the the [00:10:01] heavens, declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth forth his handiwork. So where are we looking? Are we looking up? Let's look up and we'll become, we'll become delighted because of that man in the glory. The third thing, he looked up steadfastly. Mr. Darby's translation says he fixed his eyes. It wasn't just a casual thing, of course we know there was one there that fixed, that Stephen fixed his eyes upon, physically, literally. Heavens opened and gave him a special revelation as he was being received in the glory, his soul and spirit. But what about us? Do we have purpose of heart? We're not just playing meeting are we? Or playing Christianity? I trust not that we really, we really have purpose of heart. As partakers of the heavenly calling certainly we should be gazing up steadfastly. Anytime during the day, in the evening, at night, we can look up. You [00:11:07] can be at home, you can be in the kitchen, you can be driving your car, you can be at work, you can be at the university, it doesn't matter where you are, you can look up. And how good that we can look up by faith and see of that man in the glory, the man Christ Jesus. So he looked up steadfastly. So let's not be casual about these things. I'm sure no one here is casual about them, but just in case there might be someone who is casual, these things are eternal verities. These are eternal realities that we're going to be occupied with for all eternity. And so it's so good to become familiar with them right down here in this scene while we're waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the fourth thing, he looked up steadfastly into heaven. That's where he looked up, he [00:12:04] looked up into heaven, physically, literally. But we too can look up in heaven. You know it was said of Moses, he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

So really, faith sees the invisible. We look up, we see the invisible. Noah, he did the impossible. Noah built an ark to the saving of his house. And so faith not only sees the invisible, but faith does the impossible. With Abraham, Abraham 100 years of age and his wife was 90, they were told they were gonna have a baby. Why? Faith believes the incredible. That's an incredible thing to happen, but it did happen. So faith sees the invisible, faith does the impossible, it believes the incredible. I'll tell you something incredible happened to me a few years [00:13:04] ago. I was in Norfolk, Virginia at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and I wanted to go over to Portsmouth, Virginia. If I could go through the tunnel, it only takes five minutes, but it cost what we call a quarter of a dollar, 25 cents. And I didn't have 25 cents. I had a check in my pocket, but I didn't have 25 cents. You know, the tollgate doesn't take IOUs or checks or anything like that. You've got to have a 25 cent coin and you put it in the slot and a gate comes open and you go across the tunnel and you're there in five minutes. Otherwise, it takes one hour to drive around the peninsula at five o'clock in the afternoon when cars are just coming up by the literally thousands. And you know what I did? I said, Lord, I need a quarter. You think a quarter fell out of heaven? Almost. I had purchased my mother-in-law's 62 Valiant automobile, Plymouth automobile, and I put [00:14:04] my hand right in the back seat of the car and there was my quarter. And I put it in the tollgate. The tollgate opened. I was there in five minutes. Now to me, that was incredible. Someone might say, oh, that was a coincidence. That was a coincidence. Your mother-in-law carried some older sisters to the meeting and one of those older sisters dropped a 25 cent piece in the seat. Well, of course that's what happened. Of course that's what happened. But the Lord knew I needed that quarter for that tollgate that afternoon at five o'clock.

I'm sure you could tell me some incredible things that have happened in your life too that the Lord has worked in your life. So really, dear friends, isn't it wonderful? The world knows nothing about that. Faith sees the invisible. Faith does the impossible and it believes the incredible. You tell someone that a man 2,000 years ago came down here to this earth and lived 33 and [00:15:05] a half years of age and he died on a cross, a shameful cross, and his blood is efficacious enough to save anyone

who would come to him and he arose from the dead. Why? They wouldn't believe you lest the Spirit of God works on their hearts and reveals it to them. But we believe it and we go on our way rejoicing and receive the benefit from it. So he looked up steadfastly into heaven. Well, what did he see? The fifth thing, notice in verse 55, he saw the glory of God. Must have been some phenomena that he saw. He saw the glory of God. But you know something? We too can see the glory of God because the glory of God is in resonance in the face of Jesus Christ. Turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 3, 2nd Corinthians chapter 3. Notice the last verse. Yes, I believe it's [00:16:07] verse 18, 2nd Corinthians 3 and verse 18. But we all, it says with open face, but it doesn't mean our face is open, that's not the thought. It means the Lord Jesus has an open face. But we all, beholding as in a glass, and I understand the word beholding is a Greek word which means also reflecting. It means beholding and reflecting, that's the meaning of the word. And so as we behold that man in the glory, as we behold the glory of God, that will be reflected in our lives. So we all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, all change unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. You see, the Lord Jesus doesn't have a veil on his face. Moses did. He had to have a veil over his face because the people couldn't look at him. But our Moses, the Lord Jesus, and [00:17:05] that's what that means, he has open face. He has an unveiled face, and we by faith can look up and behold the glory of God, because it's in resonance in the face of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit would occupy us with that man in the glory. And as we're occupied with that man in the glory, we too will see by faith the glory of God. Look at chapter 4 of 2nd Corinthians, verse 3, But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest a radiancy, or the light of the gospel of the glory, the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to [00:18:01] give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. You know the Apostle Paul, when he was converted, he said he saw a light from heaven, and then when he told it he said he saw a great light, and then later on he said it was a light above a noonday sun, and so that light just got brighter and brighter and brighter all the time. And you know dear fellow believer, as we are occupied with him there in the glory, we too will say that it's radiant. We too can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So might we too be occupied with him there in the glory. Also we should see the glory of God in our lives, in our families, in our assemblies, when things happen. We should praise the Lord that there's a blessing, or someone gets saved, or someone identifies himself to the assembly testimony, or a new baby comes [00:19:05] into a family. Why? That's all for the glory of God. Here's a man who's out of job, and he's not employed, and he gets a job, he's employed. Well praise the Lord about that. We can see the glory of God all around us, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. So certainly even though we don't see some strange phenomena as Stephen saw, we certainly can see the glory of God as occupied with that man in the glory. Back in Acts 7 verse 55, the sixth thing he sees, he sees Jesus standing on the right hand of God. We'll talk about standing in just a moment, but here Stephen sees Jesus. Why didn't he see Christ? Or why didn't he see Christ Jesus? Same person of course, same person, but he says he sees Jesus. I [00:20:04] think it's wonderful that one who was rejected by the nation of Israel, that one who mankind generally rejected, will not have this man reign over us, that very one, this same Jesus whom you've crucified, there he is, he's both Lord and Christ. You see the nation of Israel knew about Christ, they knew about the anointed one, if they read the Old Testament writings they knew there was one to come, but to say that this Jesus was Christ, oh no, they couldn't accept that, that infuriated them, and so he sees Jesus. And how good that we too can look up by faith and we see that object, that object for our faith, Jesus. Even in the last chapter of Revelation he says, I Jesus, he still remains the same.

Wonderful. I realize we're not in Jesus, we're in Christ and in Christ Jesus, but still we're identified with Jesus. And so Stephen looks up, what a sight to see, [00:21:02] what an object for faith for the believer down here, he sees Jesus standing on the right hand of God. We'll talk about standing in just a moment. Verse 56, the seventh thing that he sees, he says, I see the heavens open. He saw heavens physically opened. But you know something, we too can see open heavens by faith. At one time the heavens were closed, the heavens were brass as it were, but at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ the heavens opened and all the heavenly hosts welcomed his birth, glory to God on the highest and peace on earth, goodwill towards men. Angels had never seen the Lord Jesus before, he was seen of angels. So when he was born in Bethlehem, Manger, they welcomed his birth. Why, at his baptism the heavens opened, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. At his transfiguration, when he was transfigured on that high mountain, [00:22:02] the heavens were open. But oh dear friends, when he ascended, the heavens opened to receive him back up in glory, what a glorious reception he received when he went back to glory. You know something, the heavens are still open, God is now coming out and blessing to his creatures. Why, not only that the gospel of the glory can be preached, there's still open heavens. And you know for you and me for who are believers, what a support, what an encouragement to know that the heaven supports us. There are open heavens, not physically, literally, but by faith the heavens are open. We have every resource at our disposal. You don't have to feel sorry for yourself, you don't have to say poor me, nobody loves me, or that type of attitude. No, because we have every resource of heaven. Why, the Lord Jesus is there. We talked about heavenly resources already at this hall. The Father's house is there. Why, the heavens are open and [00:23:07] what a wonderful thing. And if you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth down here. So there are still open heavens. Oh yes, they're gonna literally open someday and that blessed one is gonna come back. He's gonna come back and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and shortly before that he's gonna call us there to be with him in the heavens, is he not? He's gonna rapture us to glory. Well, he sees the heavens open and then he says in verse 56, he says, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Now why doesn't he say the Son of God? He says the Son of Man. Well there's a reason for that. The Lord Jesus is uniquely the Son of Man. We read about Son of Man or a Son of Man, but here the [00:24:05] Lord Jesus is the Son of Man. What if you'll see the Son of Man ascend back up where he was before? What if you see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man? He calls himself the Son of Man, he is, and you know we can be thankful that he's there. He's there as a Son of God, God the Son, eternal Son, we realize that, but he's there as a Son of Man, and because he lives as a man in the glory, we too will live as men. We'll have a body of glory fashioned like unto his glorious body. So there he is, the Son of Man, but he's standing at this particular instance. You say, why would he be standing? Well if he were standing in chapter 3 we could understand that, because Peter says repent, be converted, have your sins blotted out, and God will send Jesus Christ whom the [00:25:01] heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things. If he were standing there we could understand that if a nation of Israel would have accepted Christ, at that point he would have come back right that moment established his kingdom. Now God of his full knowledge knew they would not do that. So if he were standing there, yes there would be a city of refuge, but that's not why he's standing. He is standing to receive his martyr Stephen into glory. Isn't that wonderful? The Lord Jesus was aware of what his faithful servant Stephen was going to have to go through. You know something? He is aware of what you may have to go through. He's aware of what I may have to go through. We remember we just heard about, in fact we were at the funeral service of our sister Minnie Anderson. She told her daughter the day before she died, she said, she said, I've seen the Lord. I knew a man in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the day he died, he sat up on his sofa, he sang a hymn from the, we [00:26:08] used to call it Little Flock Hymn Book, sang a hymn from the Black Hymn Book, he

said to his wife goodbye, he said to his brother goodbye, and to his sister-in-law said goodbye, he said, I see the Lord. He was gone, he was gone. Stephen is, sees the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, standing. Then the right hand, there's something about the right hand. Right hand speaks of power, right hand speaks of authority, right hand speaks of dominion. Now when he was on earth, all power on earth was committed unto him. He had power on earth to forgive sins, but his power goes further than that now. All power in heaven and on earth is his, now that he has risen and glorified at God's right hand. So how good to see him standing at [00:27:01] the right hand of God. Would you just glance back at verse 51, I just wanted to comment on verse 51. Before I read the verse I might mention this, someone might say at this point was this council, the Jewish nation, the representatives, were they rejecting Christ at this point? No, they had already rejected Christ and nailed him to the cross of Calvary. So this incident is not rejecting Christ, you say well what were they doing? Look at verse 51. Ye stiff neck and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do you. You're a bunch of a trash, you're a bunch of murderers, he says in the next verse. Now what they were doing at this point when they stoned Stephen to death, they were not rejecting Christ, they'd already done that. They were rejecting the testimony of the Holy Spirit about Christ, that's [00:28:03] true, but once a person rejects the Holy Spirit's testimony, the Holy Spirit's wooing and convicting, there's nothing for them. And at this point, at this point the nation of Israel was set aside until the tribulation period as a nation. Now anyone can be saved individually, individuals can be saved, but at this point the nation of Israel is set aside and by and large Gentiles, those of the nations, you and me, we are being saved through trusting Christ as Savior. So in that sense at this point, this is the great turning point in Christianity. Acts chapter 7, the stoning of Stephen is a great turning point in Christianity because shortly after that the Apostle Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles comes upon the scene. But now we don't want just linger on that, we want to get something practical, that's called, that's called dispensational truth. Look at verse 57, Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and [00:29:01] ran upon him with one accord. They cast him out of the city, and stoned him. A re-enactment of the death of Christ, not by crucifixion of course, but by stoning.

The Lord Jesus had told his disciples in the upper room and walking over to the Garden of Gethsemane that they think they would do Levitical service by taking people's lives, the religious people. And so he told them that, and just about every one of the Apostles were martyred, even Peter crucified upside down, as we as we see in the book of John's Gospel, John 21. So here they take Stephen's life, and look at verse 59, we're not going to take up about Saul, but verse 59, As they stoned Stephen, and they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Who else said receive my spirit? The Lord of glory says, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Now we [00:30:03] couldn't commend our spirits, the Lord could do that. The Lord Jesus literally gave his spirit permission to leave his body. When it says he dismissed his spirit, that means he was in control of everything all the way through. No man taketh my life, I lay it down to myself. On the other hand, wicked men crucified and slayed the Lord of glory, and yet the other hand, he laid down his life for himself, and he gave his human spirit permission to leave his body. But here Stephen says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And notice what he does, he's praying for his enemies, he's kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, the Lord Jesus cried with a loud voice, it is finished. And Stephen says, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. The Lord Jesus says, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. And then having said this, and when he had said this, he finishes his [00:31:07] course, he fell asleep, and he woke up in heaven. Now the last point is this, Stephen looked like Jesus, Stephen talked like Jesus, Stephen had a Christlike spirit, he had the Spirit of Christ, that doesn't mean the Holy Spirit, that's different from the Holy Spirit. That verse in Romans 8, when it says, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, that's not the Holy Spirit. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he's

none of his. It's illustrated in Paul's life, Paul wrote to the Philippians and he said, Brethren, you pray that I might have the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Why, it wouldn't be the Holy Spirit, he had already been saved 35 or 40 years when he said that. He wanted to have the same attitude, he wanted to have the same Christlike spirit as the Lord Jesus did when he stood before Herod, and Pilate, and Annas, and Caiaphas. He wanted to have the Spirit [00:32:08] of Jesus Christ. Here's one who has a Christlike spirit. Now that's the last point, what about us? Are you in a meeting where people don't speak to one another? I'm sure that doesn't happen here, but there are some meetings where people have an unforgiving spirit, they break bread together, they avoid one another. That takes the sharp edge off of the testimony. The Holy Spirit cannot feel free to work like He would amongst the Lord's people. I love to be free with every one of my brethren. Sometimes we have favorites, and it's not good to have favorites. I know we like people because they think like we do, but let us be Christlike, and if we have anything that's in our lives, the unforgiving spirit, judge it, take care of it, confess it, go to that person and say I'm sorry. That happened in a place, one place, I don't know if it was in this country, or maybe in [00:33:02] U.S. or Canada, and my, once people confessed those little things that were hindering, the blessing of God fell. There were showers of blessings, souls were saved, people came into the meeting, and it really was wonderful. And so let us, let us, let us too have a Christlike spirit. Now these lovely features are not enough that we've talked about this afternoon. These lovely features that were coming out of the life of Stephen and his life and his death, these features of Christianity can come out in our lives too. There's only one way, and that's having our lives occupied and taken up with that man in the glory, and of course, of course his wonderful things. So may we, may we also be like the Lord Jesus. May we have these wonderful features coming out in our lives as we're occupied with that man in the glory, the man Christ Jesus. May God add the blessing to his word for his namesake this afternoon.