

I. Introduction:

- A. When the church in Jerusalem was needing help for their widows and orphans, the congregation set forth seven men to serve as servants – “*deacons.*”
1. There was the famous **Philip**, and the not so famous **Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas & Nicolas**.
 2. In **Acts 6** these men were identified but not described, except that Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch.
 3. But there was one other man who **was** described; described in a very particular and special way.
 4. They chose “**Stephen, a man full of FAITH and of the Holy Ghost.**”
 5. It is as though this man was unique among the others and in the midst of the church – well-known for his faith and full surrender to the Holy Spirit.
 6. Do you suppose that Stephen was more “*spiritually minded*” than most of the rest of the church?
- B. Let’s say that the Lord has a special scale, which He will use at His judgment seat.
1. Let’s say that on the day of our judgment we are told to step onto the perfectly balanced scale.
 2. Once we step on, it either slowly sinks under our weight or it inexplicably rises.
 3. What if the Lord has a scale which on the one side our spirituality is measured and the other side reveals to what degree we are secular or non-spiritual?
 4. When Stephen steps onto this device he is immediately lifted up, indicating that he really is a man of faith and full of the Holy Ghost.
 5. But then when someone like Ananias, or his wife Sapphira, take their place, the scale instantly drops.
 6. The reason they drop is obvious: they are more interested in money and possessions, notoriety in the congregation and accolades.
- C. I confess that most of us are more like Ananias than Stephen, though perhaps not as radically so.
1. We are more secular and temporal than we are spiritual.
 2. What is the nature of your first specific thought when you wake up?
 - a. Is it related to the Lord or to your secular responsibilities for the day?
 - b. I’m not saying that you criminally worldly.
 - c. It’s just that in the midst of all our earthly responsibilities, most of us have to deliberately surrender and choose to think about the Lord, because our minds are naturally bent in an earthly direction.
 3. When you get hungry, does your heart think, “*I should spend this time in prayer and skip this meal. I should fast.*” I don’t think that way, because I live in a very demanding fleshly body.
 4. Even when we come to the house of God, so very often we have to struggle to focus on the things of God because our minds tend wander toward the things of the world.
 5. It’s natural. It’s the way of the flesh. But it is not the way that the children of God ought to be.
- D. “*Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people*” – **Acts 6:8**.
1. The unbelievers of Jerusalem “*were not able to resist the wisdom & the spirit by which he spake*” – **6:10**.
 2. This resulted in the arrest of the man of God and his famous defense of God’s truth. “*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*”
 3. Having heard that, Saul and others dragged the man out of the city and prepared to crush his skull with stones.
 4. At that time, “*Stephen calling upon God, & saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, & cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*”
- E. I hope I’m not putting things into his heart which weren’t really there.
1. But I’m of the opinion that Stephen considered his physical life to be of little significance compared to what he possessed spiritually.
 - a. This was not a theological position which he held; it wasn’t something Christians are supposed to say.
 - b. This was genuine. This was the real Stephen revealing himself.
 2. His spirituality made him fearless when it came to temporal things – even his temporal, physical life.

3. Stephen didn't look at Saul and these others as **his** enemies, but as common sinners before God and in need of the salvation which the Saviour had given to him.
4. They needed to hear that they were spiritually dead and lost in sin, and Stephen faithfully spoke out.
5. They needed to see "**Jesus standing on the right hand of God**" as he did.
6. When Stephen eventually steps up onto those special scales of the Lord, measuring his spirituality, it will reveal that he didn't consider the things of this world to be very important. He was a spiritual man.
7. Not even physical life is important when it appears that God is saying our earthly ministry is over.
8. Stephen died peaceably; at least as peaceably as those rocks allowed.

F. Now let me take you back to the words of Peter.

II. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

- A. Looking only through the physical eye-glasses that I have to wear, this statement is ridiculous.
1. Haven't there been lots of people who have followed that which is good who also suffered great harm?
 2. Wasn't **Job** physically harmed by all that Satan threw at him? Wasn't **Stephen** painfully slain?
 3. The man at the center of that execution, Saul of Tarsus, was eventually saved, becoming the Apostle Paul.
 4. And what became of him? He testified, "*I have been prison far more often than the rest of the apostles.*"
 - a. "*Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*
 - b. "*In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*
 - c. "*In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*"
 5. Someone might accuse Paul of boasting, but that wasn't his intention.
 6. And one of his lessons is that he kept going after each one of these attacks, because this physical abuse wasn't as important to him as those things which are spiritual.
 7. As I once heard in a movie, "*Pain don't hurt.*"
 8. The more spiritual we are, the more that statement makes sense, and the more logical **verse 13** becomes.
- B. "*Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*"
1. By the time Peter finishes this letter, he will have used the word "**evil**" nine times.
 2. And eight times he contrasts "**evil**" with the word "**good.**" The opposite of evil is good.
 3. Can you be more specific Peter? What good things are we supposed to do in order not to feel harm?
 4. Sure, he says, "*Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*"
- C. What are the good things which we should do as Christians?
1. John Gill pulled a few words out of his hat: be gracious, humble, loving and patient; be faithful to God.
 2. Then he referred to **Philippians 4:8** – "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*"
 3. Meditate on and practice these good things.
- D. Those comments made me think of the fruit of the Spirit – **Galatians 5:22-23** – "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.*"
1. The fruit of the spirit is always good, and how can we share that delicious fruit with others?
 2. That takes us back to Stephen, a man "*filled with the spirit of God.*"

III. “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be FOLLOWERS of that which is GOOD?”

- A. Despite living in fleshly bodies in a secular world, Christians know that they should bear the fruit of the Spirit.
1. But it’s one thing to know what we should do, and it’s another to do it.
 2. It’s one thing to be able to define all of those words in **Galatians 5** and explain all these good things.
 3. But it’s another to put them into practice.
 4. And why is it so difficult? Isn’t it because our temporal natures struggle against our spiritual natures?
- B. Peter says, “**be followers of that which is good.**”
1. The word he uses is “**mime-te-s**” (**mim-ay-tace**). Be a **mimic** or an **imitator**.
 2. I marvel at the way some of you can speak with an accent – Jamaican, German, English, whatever.
 3. I can’t do that, probably because I’ve rarely tried, and I’ve certainly never practiced it at all.
 4. And some of you can even speak a second language, not because you studied that language, but because you lived among those people and learned to mimic their words and phrases.
 5. Without trying to rob the Holy Spirit from His importance in this matter, Christian, maybe you and I aren’t as spiritual as we ought to be because we aren’t applying ourselves as we should.
- C. I found that the majority of those who comment on this verse go a step beyond “**mimic**” or “**imitator**,” saying that it might be better to use the word “**zealot**.”
1. “**Who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous followers of that which is good?**”
 2. One scholar even said, don’t use the **adjective** “**zealous**.”
 3. He recommended the **noun** – be a “**zealot**” in regard to that which is good.
 4. Brother Berg was telling some of us yesterday about the European fans of Formula One racing.
 - a. He described people who were almost going berserk in their love & fanaticism for their favorite drivers.
 - b. He described people zealous for their sport.
 5. Peter is telling us to be equally zealous, but in this case he wants us to be zealots for that which is good.

IV. “WHO is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?”

- A. As Gill said in his comments, **GOD** will not harm those followers of good.
1. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous to protect and defend them.
 2. His ears are open unto their prayers. He is on their side.
 3. “**If God be for us, who can be against us. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**”
 4. Have ye not read that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose?
 5. And **CHRIST** will not harm anyone who is zealous for good.
 - a. Remember that Christ is even at the right hand of God, making intercession for us.
 - b. He is ready to cheer us on in our struggle to do good in an evil world.
 6. **God’s angels** will never become death angels toward those Christians who are imitating good in their lives.
 - a. They encamp about the saints and minister to them.
 - b. They are there to protect us from evil and to encourage us in that which is good.
 7. And **the law** can no longer harm us, because Christ has silenced the sentence of the law toward us.
- B. Ah, but what about Satan and his minions, like Saul of Tarsus, can’t they harm us?
1. Well, what do you mean by “**harm?**”
 2. They certainly can’t take away your soul, or your salvation. That would be infinitely harmful.
 3. And they can’t even touch your body without the permission of the Lord, as we see in **Job 1** and **2**.

- C. On behalf of the Lord and our church, I used to go door-to-door visiting with my pastor, Ken Johnson.
1. Every once in a while we'd find a really negative Calgarian, who shared with us a few nasty words and slammed the door in our faces.
 2. I don't know how many times Brother Johnson would soon say, *"They can kill you, but they can't eat you."*
 3. I'm not exactly sure what that meant, but it was intended to be positive and encouraging.
- D. Stephen, they can kill you, but they can't really do you any **real** harm.
1. Looking at the next couple verses: *"if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."*
 2. Stephen proved ready to give his answer to that mob before they killed him.
 3. *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."*
 4. Didn't Paul later express how ashamed he was at persecuting the church of God and hinting at the murder of Stephen and others.
- E. Were the children of Job also children of God? I don't know for sure, but I'm going to assume that they were.
1. Toward the end of his life, their father, after the Lord gave to him another family and a great number of other blessings... did he ever think about those his children?
 2. I'm sure that many times those thoughts brought a little black cloud into his room.
 3. But he could also say with Paul, *"It all worked together for good."*
 4. He could agree with Solomon who said, *"the Lord (does) love him that followeth after righteousness."*
- F. I have often wondered if Peter had the privilege of reading some of Paul's epistles.
1. I know that it isn't necessary, because the Holy Spirit is really the author of both men's inspired words.
 2. But doesn't the exhortation of **I Thessalonians 5:15** sound like Peter? *"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good..."*
 3. David said in **Psalms 38** – *"They ... that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is."*
- G. I can't look into the future to see the judgment of these men. And I suppose that it really doesn't matter.
1. How will Stephen be honored by his Saviour? That is ultimately between Stephen and his God.
 2. What is important for me, personally, is to step onto the Lord's special scale and feel it rise.
 3. I hope that it will, but I have my doubts.
- H. What about you? To what degree are you spiritual, and to what opposite degree are you temporal?
1. Those who are spiritual and who truly follow after the Lord and what is good, know that nothing can harm them.
 2. And if they suffer for righteousness' sake, like Stephen, they are happy to do so.
 3. They aren't terrified at the scowl of Saul, even when he's picking up a boulder, because they have sanctified the Lord God in their hearts.
 4. Paul says in **Ephesians 5** – *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us..."*