

## Suppressing the Truth in Unrighteousness (Acts 6:8-15)<sup>a</sup>

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### Context in Book of Acts

1. **Church established in Acts 2**
2. **Deacons appointed in Acts 6**
3. **Men who are “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” primarily responsible for service in relation to practical needs so the elders/teachers can focus on service in the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2-3).**
4. **In today’s passage, one of these men, by the name of Stephen, stands as a powerful witness to God's truth.**

### Today's Passage, Acts 6:8-15

*8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia),<sup>2</sup> disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.*

1. **Title: “Suppressing the Truth in Unrighteousness,” which could be subtitled, “Nothing Has Changed Much in 2,000 Years.”**

### Three Principles

1. The primary responsibility of the believer is to testify to THE truth—God’s truth
2. Because of sin, the truth will often be rejected
3. Our testimony still serves God’s purpose even when our message is rejected

**FIRST - The primary responsibility of the believer is to testify to THE truth—God’s truth**

1. **Notice how Stephen testifies to the truth**
2. **Wonders and signs (v. 8) - certify the messenger, but especially the message**
  - A. **Jesus is not present**
  - B. **The NT has not yet been written**
3. **Wisdom and Spirit - a highly-effective God-ordained combination: Godly wisdom delivered under the power of God's Holy Spirit.**
  - A. **NOTICE: Stephen has *everything* possible to ensure success: knowledge of the Scriptures (next chapter), Godly wisdom, and a message delivered under the guidance and power of the Spirit.**
  - B. **Stephen will “succeed,” although not in a way that most of us would identify as such—by becoming the first martyr of the Church.**
4. **Ability to engage, when necessary, in a dispute**
  - A. **συζητέω [syzēteō] - “to express forceful differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution”<sup>3</sup>**
  - B. **This required: first, that Stephen had knowledge of the truth; second, in his ability *and willingness* to uphold the truth in the midst of an adversarial atmosphere—regardless of the motive of his opponents.**
  - C. **There are often silent observers who are the real beneficiaries of the interchange.**

Who can but doubt but that the scene of Stephen's witness and subsequent martyrdom played over and over again in the Apostle Paul's head during the days he was blinded and fasting in Damascus (Acts 9:9)?
5. **Effective - unanswerable directly**

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## **SECOND - Because of sin, the truth will often be rejected**

1. **When the truth can't be withstood directly, what is the response? How is the truth rejected?**
2. **Since opponents can't overthrow the truth, they resort to other common tactics.**
3. **Tactic #1 - Attack the messenger**

- A. **Acts 6:11** - *Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”*
- B. **Same as Jesus**
  - I. **Matthew 26:59** - *Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death . . .*
- C. **Acts 6:13** - *They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law”*
- D. **So common, there is a Latin phrase for this: *ad hominem*, meaning “to the man” or “to the person”**
- E. **“If you don’t like the message, shoot the messenger”**
- F. **Accused of blasphemy, a serious offense punishable by death (Lev. 24:16)<sup>5</sup>**

#### 4. **Tactic #2 - Misrepresent/distort the message**

- A. **Another common tactic, sometimes purposeful, other times not: repeat a kernel of truth, but distorted, grossly misrepresented, or simply misunderstood.**

As one commentator remarked: “[the falseness of the witnesses] lay not so much in its wholesale fabrication but in its subtle and deadly misrepresentation of what was intended.”<sup>6</sup>

- B. **Acts 6:14** - *for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.*
  - I. **Accusation: “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place”**
    - a. **Truth: Jesus *prophesied* the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in judgment, but the destruction would turn out to be at the hands of Rome as allowed by Wahweh, the God of Abraham—the very God they said they revered and followed.**
    - b. **Moreover, when Jesus referred to His own involvement in the destruction of the temple, He was not speaking of a building**

**John 2:19-21** - *19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*

## II. **Accusation: “Jesus of Nazareth . . . will . . . change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”**

- a. **Truth: Jesus completed or fulfilled the law, He did not come to change it.**

*Matthew 5:17-18 - Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

- b. **Jesus fulfilled the law which no other man could do thus removing the curse of the law from those who approach God by faith alone (Gal. 3:10-14).**

### 5. **Recent example: book and video production, “Evolution's Achilles' Heels” produced by [Creation Ministries International](#)<sup>c</sup>**

In January 2014, we posted the first official trailer for the EAH movie on YouTube. This received . . . [the] attention [of atheists] and was almost immediately ‘mirrored’ (pirate copies appearing on YouTube). The duplicate videos had the effect of reducing our ‘hit’ count, meaning our videos were bumped down the search list. We have had enough experience with verbal vitriol, insults and objectionable language from the opposition to know that we should turn off the comments feature for the video. Yet, the mirrored versions had comments enabled. Also, several of the mirrors were very low quality (one looked like it was filmed by a hand-held camera phone), making it look like we were creating poor-quality material. And, of course, there was no way for our supporters to know which video was legitimate, meaning that by watching one of the others they were inadvertently helping them and hurting us and being subjected sometimes to disgusting language in the comments. “Denial of free speech” and claims like that were used to justify breaking copyright law. YouTube at least acknowledged our rights and they deleted the mirrors promptly. Yet the damage was done. They had blunted our inertia during those first critical days. . . . After we posted the second trailer in May of 2014, a skeptic blogger posted a link to the trailer with several key words listed, one of which was “crazy people”. This post was picked up and mirrored by many other blog sites, including Richard Dawkins' site. Overnight, we had over 2,000 ‘dislikes’. Since the rank of a video in YouTube is based in part on the like/dislike ratio, this had the effect of driving the trailer off the first results page. We were happy that the skeptics were aware of our project, even if few of them actually watched the trailer, but their attention had a huge negative impact. . . . Not satisfied with the fact that our videos were still available online, sometime in August 2014 all of the highest-ranked EAH-associated videos were flagged as “inappropriate”. There is no reason for YouTube (owned by Google) to flag this video, except based upon complaints. . . . Flagging our videos as inappropriate was obviously done with malicious intent. The result is that if someone now wants to watch our videos they have to deliberately disable Safety Mode, meaning they would then be exposed to

very non-family-friendly search results and advertisements. Of course, we have notified YouTube, but at the time of writing, and after two weeks, we are still waiting for their answer. . . . It has been an uphill battle, but the truth cannot be totally suppressed.<sup>7</sup>

## 6. When testifying to the truth:

- A. **DON'T** expect the majority of those opposed to Christ to engage in serious interaction, especially where it requires attention to subtleties or careful and thoughtful listening.
- B. **DO** expect things you've said to be taken out of context, twisted, and even seriously distorted.
- C. **Caveat for believers:** never accept a report by the secular media concerning another Christian's behavior without checking out the details.

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## THIRD - Our testimony still serves God's purpose even when our message is rejected

- 1. **God's sovereign purpose in adversity often confounds our expectations**
- 2. **Sometimes, like Stephen, our job is to serve as an adverse witness**
  - A. **Our message of reconciliation may ultimately be rejected**
  - B. **Brought as a testimony to test and confirm hardness**
    - I. **Consider Moses, commissioned to lead Israel out of Egypt**
      - a. **God told Moses, in advance, *I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand* (Ex. [3:19](#)).**
    - II. **Consider what Scripture reveals concerning aspects of evangelization at the end of this age**
      - a. **Jesus said, *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come* (Mat. [24:14](#)).**
      - b. **The book of Revelation provides numerous examples of testimony which serves in judgment, *But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither***

**see nor hear nor walk (Rev. 9:20 cf. Rev. 2:21; 16:9-11).**

- C. **When our message is rejected, we need to accept the difficult truth that this result serves God no less. For example, the rejection of the testimony we provide will be part of God's "due process" by which He righteously judges the lost (Rev. 20:12).**

Matthew 11:21-24 - **21** "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. **22** "But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. **23** "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. **24** "But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

- D. **We must believe that God will give us the appropriate message**

Luke 12:11-12 - Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

3. **We do not own the results of our testimony: whether truth is accepted. Our job is simply to carefully, wisely, faithfully proclaim Gods' truth as we'll see Stephen do in the next chapter of Acts.**

4. **In the end, truth is guaranteed to prevail**

- A. **Although we are called to uphold the truth and oppose error, as salt and light, it is not us who ultimately determine whether truth will stand.**
- B. **Truth has a distinct advantage over error: God upholds truth: therefore it is guaranteed to manifest in history.**
- C. **Although we may despair over the many falsehoods which are promulgated in our age, we need to remember that these falsehoods are ultimately fighting a losing battle.**

I. **Reality is driven by God's Word.**

II. **The Word of God will stand—regardless of whether we are around to "help it" or not!**

5. **Pattern of chapter 7, Stephen attests to their historic refusal to yield to God:**

- A. **In reaction, in part, to Joseph's dreams, his brothers sold him into Egypt . . . but God was with him (Acts 7:9)**

- B. **Moses was opposed by fellow Jews when he killed an abusive Egyptian—and forced to flee (Acts [7:24-29](#))**
- C. **When Moses was sent back by God to deliver Israel from bondage, he was opposed by his fellow Jews (Acts [7:35](#))**
- D. **They rejected Moses yet again in making the golden calf (Acts [7:39-40](#))**
- E. **The climax of Stephen's testimony: The rejection and betrayal of Messiah Jesus**

*51 You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it (Acts [7:51-53](#)).*

- F. **The result: Stephen is stoned.**
- G. **Did Stephen and his testimony fail?**
- H. **“Resistance to the gospel had gone from discussion to debate, from debate to slander, and [soon] from slander to violence.”<sup>8</sup>**

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## Summary

1. **We pray that we may serve as ministers of reconciliation—helping people to be reconciled with God, to find peace with God (2Cor. [5:18](#)) through faith in Jesus Christ.**
2. **However, there will be times where our role will be like that of Stephen—serving as a witness to hardened skeptics who will continue in their steadfast refusal to turn to God and be saved.**
  - A. **Don't be surprised when they attack us.**
  - B. **Don't be surprised when they distort and misrepresent our message.**
  - C. **This may be according to the sovereignty of God.**
  - D. **Who are we to say how God should use us? Are we not His servants to do according to His bidding?**
3. **Like the example of Stephen, if we maintain a godly perspective, we can experience peace and fulfillment in the midst of the storm.**

**A. Acts 6:15 - And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**

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Endnotes:

1. [Ref-0442](#), Acts 6:8
2. "Descendants of Jewish slaves captured by Pompeii (63 B.C.) and taken to Rome. They were later freed and formed a Jewish community there."<sup>1</sup>
3. [Ref-0436](#), 33.440
4. [Ref-1297](#), 9:336
5. "Later rabbinic law held that "the blasphemer is not culpable [and therefore not subject to the penalty of death] unless he pronounces the Name itself" (M Sanhedrin 7:5, based on Lev 24:10–23). But in the first century of the Christian Era, the definition of blasphemy was more broadly interpreted along the lines of Numbers 15:30: "Anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people" (cf. G.H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, tr. D.M. Kay [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909], p. 314)."<sup>4</sup>
6. [Ref-1297](#), 9:336
7. CMI, email, *The documentary the skeptics don't want you to see!*, Sep 4, 2014
8. [Ref-0526](#), Acts 6:12

Sources:

- CMI** [Creation Ministries International](#)<sup>e</sup>
- Ref-0436** Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.). New York: United Bible societies.
- Ref-0442** MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed.). Nashville: Word Pub.
- Ref-0526** Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). The Nelson study Bible : New King James Version. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.
- Ref-1297** Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996).

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/21\\_Acts\\_6\\_8-17/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/21_Acts_6_8-17/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://creation.com/evolutions-achilles-heels>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- e - See <http://creation.com>.