

Acts Series Part 18

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[0 : 0 0] Euthanasia is very much in the news. Just this past week, the Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales issued guidelines that inform as to the circumstances in which an individual could be prosecuted for assisting a suicide, which remains a criminal offence.

Now, as was emphasized by the aforementioned gentleman, this does not change the law, the guidance that he is giving.

And yet, those who are relentlessly pushing for a change in the law consider this a victory in their campaign.

Now, that applies to England and Wales, though it was very much in the news across the country in these past days. In Scotland, as we've commented in the past, Margot MacDonald continues to sponsor a private member's bill that would legalize physician-assisted suicide.

And that intention of hers has moved on. She has now secured the number of MSPs required for this matter to be debated on the floor of Parliament, something that had not been achieved in previous attempts.

[1 : 2 7] You require 18 MSPs to support a bill, or a proposed bill, for it to be debated. So now, the bill is being drafted in the different committees, and we await when it will be put before the Scottish Parliament, possibly before the end of the year or in the early part of next year.

And really, the proposals that she originally presented, and we await to see what the final bill that is presented will look like, but the original proposals really went beyond the headline title of Physician-Assisted Suicide, and contemplate euthanasia, where the physician would not only be giving indications as to what drugs could be taken, but would actually be applying those drugs.

Well, we await the events. I hope not only await them, but involve ourselves in this. As it happens, I just mentioned this in the passing. This is really just an introduction to where I'm going, but I take the opportunity to mention in the passing that there are a number of our MPs, MSPs for Aberdeen and the Northeast, who have indicated that they are undecided on this matter.

I don't actually have their names to hand, but it would certainly be well worth that we would, as citizens and as constituents, make known our opposition.

And that could, well, be significant in them coming eventually to a decision. The nightmare scenario, really, of the elderly and the disabled being pressurized into doing the decent thing and calling it a day rather than continue being a burden on their loved ones looms large.

[3 : 3 1] It would seem that on this occasion, this bill is unlikely to prosper, but it has gotten much further than previous attempts, and so this is a continuing process.

This is what they call euthanasia. Now, euthanasia literally means a good death, from two Greek words, a good and death.

And as we think of this prospect, the words of the prophet Isaiah seem chillingly opposite. Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, that which is evil, described as good.

This evening, we will consider a cruel and brutal death, and yet one that most assuredly can be described as a good death.

And I refer to the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. And we're going to read the account that relates his death in Acts chapter 7, as we continue considering this book in Acts chapter 7.

[4 : 51] And we'll read from verse 51 through to the first verse of chapter 8. So, Acts chapter 7 from verse 51.

Here described a very cruel and brutal death, and yet one, I repeat, that we could legitimately describe as a good death. Reading then from verse 51, you stiff-necked people, and just to place this in context, this is the close of Stephen's address, having been accused by the Sanhedrin, and having related a history of the people of Israel in a way that was relevant to the charges that were being made, he now accuses his accusers.

And we enter into the reading at that point. You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears, you are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.

You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it. When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

[6 : 12] But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

At this, they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there giving approval to his death. The Word of God.

Now this evening, what I want to do in considering this account of the stoning of Stephen is to focus on the three sentences pronounced by Stephen before his death as they are recorded for us in this passage.

[7 : 21] There in verse 56, we find the first of these statements or sentences of Stephen, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

So we'll consider this the first sentence recorded for us. And then in verse 59, we have a second sentence pronounced by Stephen, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And then finally in verse 60, the final statement or sentence of Stephen, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

So that's the manner in which we'll consider the passage considering these three cries of Stephen. And in so doing, just to further explain the manner in which we're going to be dealing with the passage, we have these three sentences and we'll attach to each one of them a one-word exhortation for us.

Firstly, the word look relating to the first sentence. Secondly, learn as we consider the second one. And thirdly, imitate as we consider the third one.

[8 : 36] And I hope as we develop it, all will become clear or at least clearer. First of all, the first sentence or the first expression attributed to Stephen in this passage that relates his death.

There in verse 56, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Now, the passage has already described this scene for us, but it's only in verse 56 that we have Stephen himself expressing what he sees.

And so, that's where we are going to be concentrating our attention. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

As Stephen invited his accusers to look, so he invites us to look also, to get a glimpse of glory.

And as we consider what it was that he saw and that he invites us also to see, we can consider this statement, this description, these words of Stephen by posing three questions.

[9 : 55] First of all, how did he see? Stephen talks of seeing these things and yet, what he is seeing is very unusual. It's very out of the ordinary.

And so, we're left a little uncertain as to what he means by saying that he saw these things. How did he see them? What is he actually stating concerning this vision that he has, if indeed that's the right word to use?

So, we just want to think about that. How did he see? But then, perhaps more importantly, who did he see? And very much related to that, what is the one he sees doing?

So, these three questions that will help us to consider this first statement of Stephen recorded for us. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

First of all, how did he see? The experience of Stephen, as I think I've already mentioned, is unusual. It's unusual in the extreme. And for that reason, it's difficult for us to describe or analyze.

[11 : 07] He is describing an experience that we have not experienced. It's outwith our experience. We can't say, oh yes, I know what he's talking about. Yes, I've seen something similar.

At least, I'm not in a position to make that claim. I can't presume to speak for others. Now, before trying to answer the question then, how did he see?

It's maybe helpful just to take a quick step back and make clear some important general truths concerning this matter that we can then have in the background as we return to think about Stephen's particular experience here.

The general things that I want to highlight are these, that the Bible is clear. that there is a seen and an unseen world. There are these two realities.

There is the seen world. I can see you folk in front of me and you have to or can see me as well, whether you like it or not. We're part of the seen world.

[12 : 15] We go outside and we see the autumn leaves. We see things. It's part of the seen world. But the Bible is very clear that there is also another reality which is an unseen world.

And both are equally real. The unseen world is, as the name suggests, invisible. We cannot see it with the naked eye.

It's certainly invisible in normal circumstances. Here, we are presented with extraordinary circumstances, but in normal circumstances, this unseen world that is real is not visible to us.

It's all around us. We might say close to us, but invisible. Because it is invisible, many conclude that it doesn't exist.

And so many would say, well, that's just nonsense. There is no such world. That's just a fairy story. That's not so. But the Bible's view is a different one.

[13 : 17] The Bible presents this unseen world as a very real reality, if we can speak in those terms. Others who might not go so far as to say, well, this unseen world simply doesn't exist.

It's the product of people's vivid imagination. They might say, well, it may exist, but it's certainly less real than the real world in which we live.

It's something that isn't as tangible, as real, as this seen world that we operate in. Or in any case, we might say, well, yes, it does exist, but it's far away.

And we might think of it spatially and say, well, it's up there, rather than down here in the real world where we all move and operate and live.

now, with this in mind, this basic, I would say, biblical truth, that there are two realities, equally real, one that is seen and one that is unseen, with this in mind, we come to Stephen's experience.

[14 : 32] Now, Stephen is granted the privilege of seeing the unseen world. It's not that something has appeared in time and space that wasn't there before, if we can express it that way.

The reality he is seeing and that he describes has always been there. You know, this is not something that hadn't been there before, it's always been there, but he wasn't able to see it. Now, he is able to see it.

It was previously for him as it was for all those who live in the seen world invisible. They could not see these things.

But he has granted the spiritual discernment to see that which had been so far in his experience unseen.

And it would seem that it is only Stephen that is granted this capacity. Stephen in his excitement expresses and cries out there in verse 56, look, he said.

[15 : 38] He's addressing presumably this exhortation to those around him. He's saying, look, look what I'm seeing. But of course, they don't see anything. They see what they'd always just seen.

They see the seen world. He is seeing something that they cannot see, even though he is so enthused by it and it is so real to him. He says, look, but they, I think we can safely conclude, see nothing.

They do not have those who are surrounding him, his accusers, those who will soon become his killers, do not have this spiritual perception that has been granted to Stephen.

So, what is new in this account or in this moment? What is new is not the existence or the presence of the heavenly court of God and of Jesus at his right hand and indeed of the angels in that court.

That is nothing new. That has always been there. The new element is the capacity of Stephen to see that court. with his own eyes.

[16 : 50] It's also interesting and I think worth noting that the verb here translated open in verse 56. In this statement of Stephen, look he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

And it is a verb. It's the idea of heaven being open. The picture that it seems to paint in our minds, certainly in my mind, is of a door being open. But the verb here that is translated heaven open is ordinarily used, not exclusively, but ordinarily used in the New Testament to mean that the perception of a person is opened up rather than to describe the disclosure of that which was hidden.

So maybe explain that a little further. it would seem, and I would be reluctant to state it more categorically than that, it would seem that here the idea is not that the door of heaven has briefly been opened to allow Stephen a little peek, but rather that the eyes of Stephen have been opened.

The eyes of Stephen have been granted a spiritual capacity to see the unseen. he sees heaven open.

He describes it in those terms, but what is actually happening is that his eyes have been opened to see heaven, a reality that is as real as this seen world that we live in, but unseen to us.

[18 : 31] So, if I've in any way managed to explain what I've been trying to explain, I would in any case draw this part of what I want to say together with this summary statement, and it is this, that today this unseen reality, this unseen world, remains all around us.

We can't see this unseen world, we can't see this heavenly reality, it is unseen, but it is no less real for all that.

That then, to just briefly consider this initial question, how did he see? And I am conscious that because it is so extraordinary, it's difficult to maybe come to definitive conclusions on exactly what it was that Stephen experienced, but I hope that, at least in a measure, moves us along in our understanding.

Perhaps more importantly for us is to answer the next question that I had highlighted, and it is this, who did he see? Who did he see?

Moving on from how he saw, who did he see? Well, he himself gives us the answer to that question. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

[20 : 02] This title that we know from the rest of the New Testament is a title for Jesus, the Son of Man. This is the only occasion that this precise definition or title is used of Jesus outside of the Gospels.

And within the Gospels, it is only used by Jesus himself it is only Jesus who self designated himself in this way as the Son of Man.

But here we find Stephen speaking of him in those terms or with this name the Son of Man. And as I say, it's the only occasion where we find this title outside of the Gospels.

A similar title is found in the book of Revelation but not the precise terminology that we have here that is exactly equivalent to the way Jesus used this title.

Now, we make that point because that I think helps us to understand what it is or the significance of this experience for Stephen.

[21 : 14] To put it this way, why does Stephen use this designation for Jesus? He could have said what he said in other ways. He could have said, I see heaven open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

That would have been a perfectly reasonable and accurate way of expressing himself, but he doesn't. He says, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Why then the use of this particular title? And I think the clue is to be found in a previous trial. Here is Stephen's standing trial.

Well, in a previous trial, also of an innocent man, we have the clue to why this designation is used. In fact, we have already read the passage that is relevant for our purposes.

But we are going to read again part of it in Luke's Gospel, chapter 22. Luke, chapter 22, and reading from verse 66.

[22 : 13] Here we have Jesus, very similar to Stephen's experience standing at trial. And what do we read concerning what he says?

Well, there in verse 66, we read, at daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. If you are the Christ, they said, tell us.

Jesus answered, if I tell you, you will not believe me. And if I ask you, you would not answer. And then listen carefully to what Jesus goes on to say. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.

They all asked, are you then the Son of God? He replied, you are right in saying, I am. Then they said, why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.

So here we have Jesus standing trial, and what, if you wish, seals his faith from the human perspective. What seals his faith is this claim that he makes.

[23 : 18] From now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God. It was precisely this, on this occasion, prophetic claim.

Jesus is speaking of where he will be in due course. It is this claim that, as I say, sealed the fate of Jesus. This claim that was rightly understood to be a claim to divinity.

Jesus claimed he would sit down at the right hand of the mighty God, and he was killed for it. And now Stephen, now Stephen sees heaven open, and we might say surprise, surprise, though it should be no surprise, there he is, there is Jesus, there is the Son of Man, just as he had said it would be at the right hand of the mighty God.

Stephen sees this, describes what he sees, and he also is killed for describing the scene that is presented to him.

Now, of course, what Stephen sees not only serves to confirm the truth of what Jesus claimed at his trial. You see here, the accusers of Stephen are really being accused yet again by these words of Stephen.

[24 : 39] They had killed Jesus for making this outrageous claim according to them. And Stephen says, well, you killed him for it, but there he is, just as he said he would be.

And so, the error of their course of action, the folly of what they had done, is once again confirmed to them.

Hence, their incandescent rage at hearing what Stephen says. But of course, what Stephen sees not only serves to confirm that what Jesus had said was true, that it has been fulfilled, just as he said, and Stephen is a witness to it.

It serves that purpose, but it not only serves that purpose, it also confirms for Stephen that as he sees the heavenly court, and as he sees Jesus at the right hand of the father, it confirms for Stephen that he has nothing to fear from the earthly court that stands in judgment over him.

Here he is before these mighty and powerful men, these men who in a few moments will be bringing him to a seemingly untimely death, and yet he has nothing to fear from them because he sees a higher court, he sees the son of man at the right hand of the father.

[26 : 07] He sees, he really sees this higher court and this higher judge, and the judge he sees is Jesus, the son of man at the right hand of the father.

This is who he sees. But what is the one he sees doing? Or now that we've identified who it is, we can simplify the question, what is Jesus doing?

as Stephen is a witness to the heavenly court. Well, there we have it. I see heaven open and the son of man standing at the right hand of God.

Now, this description of essentially the posture of Jesus standing at the right hand of God generates some debate.

the question that is posed is why was Jesus standing and not sitting? And the reason the question is posed, and it's an entirely legitimate question, is that Jesus in his trial, in the passage that we've read, had spoken of sitting at the right hand of God.

[27 : 17] And this is the usual terminology that goes right back to the Old Testament and particularly to words in Psalm 110. that we'll be singing at the close of our service.

Words in Psalm 110 that are quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon. If we simply go back a couple of pages to Acts chapter 2 and verse 34, we have Peter quoting Psalm 110 and we read, For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

And then Peter says that this psalm is speaking of Jesus. And what does the psalm describe? It describes Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father. Jesus himself spoke in those terms.

And yet here, Stephen has something different. We might say not dramatically or radically different, but different nonetheless. I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing standing at the right hand of God.

Why this difference? That's the question that we turn to. Many suggestions have been made, but of the many suggestions, I would suggest that two complementary explanations would seem to explain the posture of the Lord standing.

[28 : 51] Firstly, he stands to acknowledge Stephen as one of his own, innocent of the charges leveled by his accusers.

And he does so. He stands to acknowledge him in fulfillment of his own promise of heavenly acknowledgement to all those who would be loyal to him.

Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 12. 12 and verse 8. And we can read them now. Luke 12 and verse 8. Listen to what Jesus had said.

This promise that he had made, I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man, the same designation that Jesus was so fond of, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.

This was the promise that Jesus had made. And Stephen, perhaps of all the Christians up to this point, had most assuredly acknowledged Jesus before men, even knowing that this would lead to his imminent death.

[29 : 58] And so Jesus is true to his promise and he stands to acknowledge Stephen as one who has been loyal to him. And he stands in acknowledgement of his faithfulness and of his loyalty and of his innocence, even though he is being accused by this seen earthly court.

But also, and it's connected with this first suggestion, also this picture of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father could well be intended to describe Jesus standing to welcome Stephen into heaven.

Jesus knows full well that in literally just a few fleeting moments, Stephen will be dead, he will have been killed by his accusers, and he will be welcomed into heaven by Jesus himself.

And so Jesus, it is suggested, stands to welcome his faithful servant home. One of his own is coming home.

And coming home in the most honorable of circumstances, and the king stands to welcome and to receive him. Well, perhaps that is a way of understanding why it is that Stephen, as he is granted this spiritual perception of this heavenly reality, sees the Son of Man not sitting as he is normally described, but standing at the right hand of God.

[31 : 38] And of course, for us, we are reminded that such an acknowledgement, such a welcome awaits those who acknowledge him before men.

Is that true of us? Are we of those who without fear acknowledge King Jesus before men? Are we of those who speak of Jesus before men?

Are we of those who are ready and willing to present him for who he is? King of kings and Lord of lords, regardless of what others may think and how others may reject or mock or scoff us for that conviction.

But those who acknowledge him before men will, we are promised by Jesus himself, be acknowledged by him. So, Stephen's cry that we might look rings through the millennia and reaches us today.

We, perhaps, and maybe we could state it more strongly than that, we will not be granted in ordinary circumstances certainly the privilege of seeing the unseen.

[32 : 51] And yet, there is a sense in which having this occasion recorded for us allows us to see, to have a glimpse of the glory of God, to share in what Stephen saw, to see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Father, and indeed to contemplate and consider this Jesus standing in acknowledgement of those who are loyal and faithful to him.

But let's move on quickly to the second statement or sentence that Stephen pronounces, and we will do so more briefly. In verse 59, we read, while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

This is the second sentence pronounced before his death, and one to which we attach the exhortation learn. I think we can learn two things from these words of Stephen.

First of all, we can learn concerning who Jesus is, but also we can learn as to how to die well. Who Jesus is, first of all.

The final two sentences pronounced by Stephen before his death have, quite rightly and understandably, been presented as constituting a striking parallel with the death of Jesus.

[34 : 14] We are, I'm sure, many of us familiar with that parallel, but let's just listen to Jesus as he approaches his death. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And the parallel and the similarity with the words of Stephen are very evident. And then we think also of other words of Jesus as he approached his death. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

And again, a striking similarity with words of Stephen, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. But there is one striking difference.

Though they are very similar, there is one crucial and striking difference. And it is this, or I could pose it in the form of a question. To whom does Jesus address his cry and request?

To whom does he address his cry? Well, he addresses it to the Father. And yet, to whom does Stephen address his cry and request? Though the words are very similar, he addresses his cry to the Lord Jesus.

[35 : 18] Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And then when he goes on to say, Lord, do not hold this sin against me, it seems entirely reasonable that again, he is explicitly addressing Lord Jesus, the Son of Man.

He is addressing. So there is the difference. The words are very similar, the sentiments are very similar, but there is a difference in who they are addressed to. And this teaches us, from this we learn concerning who Jesus is.

The effect of Stephen addressing Jesus in this way is that he is, to all intents and purposes, putting him, putting Jesus, on a level with God.

As Jesus was able to address the Father in these terms, so Stephen is able to address Jesus in these same terms. It's been expressed in this way by one commentator.

The work in heaven is now shared between God and the one at his right hand. Here is evidence of a high Christology, of a high view of who Jesus is.

[36 : 25] Prayer is now made to Jesus and requests to heaven go through him. And so these words of Stephen teach us, we can learn concerning who Jesus is, but they also teach us, we can also learn how to die well.

The picture of the death of Stephen is a contrasting one. On the one hand, we have stomach-churning violence, and yet we read, while they were stoning him, a serenity and a peacefulness that defies understanding.

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And these words, I think, reflect certainly three realities for Stephen at the point of his death. They reflect an assurance that the Lord's time has come.

He knows that he is about to die. And he is about to die in the Lord's time, not at the time of his appointing. He doesn't write the final chapter to his life story, as some would wish to do today.

No, the Lord's time has come, and he has that assurance as he faces his death. His is not, though it may seem to many, an untimely death.

[37 : 36] He dies at precisely the time that the Lord had determined for him. That reality finds expression in these words, but also these words speak of a confidence of being received by the Lord.

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. This isn't some request that he hopes may find a response on the part of Jesus.

No, he says these words with the absolute confidence that he will indeed be received. Of that he has no doubt. Let's not forget he is seeing the Son of Man at the right hand of the Father.

With his very eyes, the scene is before him, and that is where he's going. And he says, receive my spirit. There is a confidence of being received by Jesus at the point of his death.

And then another reality that's very related, really, to that second one, is that these words speak of a relationship, the reality of a relationship that transcends death itself.

[38 : 42] Stephen, a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus, a friend of Jesus in this life, but that relationship, that friendship, it transcends death itself.

And that Jesus awaits him on his death. the same Jesus who had known him and loved him in this life, waiting for him in the next.

And so, we can learn from these words of Stephen, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. We are given an insight into who Jesus is. Very God of very God.

And we are also given insight into how we also may die well with these same realities accompanying us when our time comes.

That we, with Stephen, would be able to say, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. But then finally, we have the final statement of Stephen recorded for us.

[39 : 43] And it seems reasonable to presume that not only the final statement recorded, but his actual final statement. Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And to this final sentence of Stephen, we attach the exhortation, imitate. Look, learn, and now imitate. Now, as we have already noted, the words of Stephen echo the words, certainly the sentiments of Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And these words of Stephen, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. They define adequate description. Some have suggested that these words of Stephen calling for forgiveness are as remarkable as the vision of the open heaven and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

That is a remarkable thing. It's unusual. It's noteworthy. And yet, it does seem reasonable to me to say that these words of Stephen are, if anything, certainly as remarkable that he is able to express himself in this way.

Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Stephen demonstrates, doesn't just pontificate on this matter, he demonstrates what is required of us as we are commanded to be imitators of God, to be like Jesus, to love as he loves, to forgive as he forgives.

[41 : 09] And as we develop this just a little further, let's just notice in closing two specific applications or imitations relevant to us. As we consider the manner in which Stephen here expresses himself, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

Two things. The first thing that I think that it highlights for us that is important and that we can bear in mind and seek to apply is this, that in our proclamation of the truth, which we are called to as Christians and as the Church of Jesus Christ, we must and we can both condemn and love at the same time.

Now I say that because this is the same Stephen, this Stephen who says, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. This is the same Stephen who moments before, just moments before, had been saying concerning these same people and to these same people, you stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. You have betrayed and murdered the righteous one. He stands in condemnation of these people, of his accusers.

This same Stephen who is interceding for them, this same Stephen who is now seeking forgiveness for them, is the one who moments before had launched this brutal salvo of accusations against them.

[42 : 41] And yet there is no contradiction. You see, he was duty-bound to condemn them for they were guilty. He was duty-bound to state the truth of their guilt and to make their guilt clear to them, to condemn them if you wish.

But also, together with that, he was able genuinely and sincerely to intercede for them that they would be forgiven, that the sin would not be held against them. You see, today, many would say, well, that's contradictory.

You can't do these two things. And those who are Christians and who would seek to highlight and to condemn those things that are wrong and that are sinful in the society we live in, we would be accused of not loving people, of not having concern for people.

And yet here we find Stephen where these two things can go hand in hand. He condemns with a passion, if you wish. But he loves with a passion that God would help us so to combine these two duties that are incumbent on us.

But also, a second thing just to notice as we would seek to imitate Stephen, and it is, and it flows from what we've just commented, that it is a specific challenge that we too, with Stephen, would pray for our enemies, that we would pray for the persecutors of the elect, for the enemies of the cross, for the mockers and scoffers that surround us.

[44 : 09] But we do so not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because we believe that the Lord Jesus, who himself prayed in this manner, is entirely disposed to listen and to respond to our prayer of intercession in favor of the enemies of the cross, the enemies of God.

Just as the Lord Jesus listened and responded to Stephen in regard to a young man who stood approvingly over the crushed body of the one who cried out in his defense.

And we know to whom I am referring. He prayed for his persecutors. He prayed that the sin would not be held against him. And certainly one of those for whom he prayed, the Lord Jesus, answered his prayer and forgave him his sins and granted him a great task to perform in extending the church of Jesus Christ.

Saul was there giving approval to his death. And so we pray for our enemies because that is what we are presented as our duty. But we pray also confidently that the one to whom we pray is most favorably disposed to hear and to answer our prayers.

And to forgive and to draw to himself those who today blaspheme his name and seek to do damage to his people. So let us imitate Stephen.

[45 : 39] Lord, do not hold this sin against him. Well, as we close, we began by making reference to euthanasia. And we commented on the literal meaning of the word dying well or a good death.

Well, I approve of dying well. And as we have considered Stephen, we can say that to die well is to die when God ordains.

It is to die engaged in God's service. It is to die with Stephen, a witness of God's glory, with forgiveness on our lips, acknowledged by the heavenly court, received and welcomed in glory.

So let us all die such a good a death. Let us pray. Why? Let us pray. Do you even pray? Why does■, we pray? Because God I won't as something the feelings of splendor with don't have to PAL.

So let us pray. And once we pray food, pour for example, at the time our goodaker managed lineup, our mistakes, and mismos against my intuition. One way to storms,