

You never know what you're going to hear or see when you watch the news, but you do know that someone is likely to say or do something "stupid." Whether it is Mayor Kwami Kilpatrick of Detroit, the Governor Spitzer of New York, or Senator Debbie Stabenow's husband, they've all done some insane things in recent weeks. What were they thinking off? Were they out of their minds? Did they take some crazy pills? Maybe the answer is yes. There is a tremendous gulf that separates hot emotions from cool emotions. When we're cool, we can be calm and collected. But watch out when you get hot because you can do crazy things, too. Sometimes we need a little time to cool down and get control of our emotions before we act.

That would have been good advice for the members of the Sanhedrin and the men who belonged to the Synagogue of the Freedmen before they condemned Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The religious leaders of Israel were hot under the collar when Stephen was brought before them. Stephen had been selected by the early church as one of seven men chosen to assist the disciples with caring for the people. So Stephen was a dedicated follower of Christ and a leader among the first Christians. His faith got him in trouble. The people who rejected Jesus also rejected His followers. He was accused of blasphemy, of misrepresenting God, for his faith in Jesus and was brought before the Jewish High Court.

When the formal hearing was called into session, Stephen was given the opportunity to offer his defense. He told the story of the children of Israel, God's chosen people, emphasizing their rebellion against God. As the men listened to Stephen, they became more and more irritated with him until he said this to them, "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!" (Acts 7:51 NLT) That was it. They had heard all they would take and started boiling over. The account continues, "The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage." (Acts 7:54 NLT) The leaders were hot.

Hot emotions can be deadly. Things turned ugly, fast. The court room turned into a mad mob scene as the religious leaders rushed Stephen, dragged him out of the city limits and began to throw stones at him. They didn't stop until Stephen had died. But Stephen didn't deserve to die. The religious elite got too hot and bothered and took it out on Stephen.

People have been doing insane things in the name of religion for a long time that continues still today. Why do the Sunnis fight with the Shiites in Iraq or the Hindus with the Muslims in India? Because they get too hot about their religion! Why do men like the Rev. Wright say the insane things that they do from the pulpit or the members of Pastor Fred Phelps' church picket at high

profile events? Because they think they are right and everyone else is wrong. When people get too hot about their own interpretations or ideas and not about what God says, look out!

The alternative to hot emotions is cool faith. Stephen certainly showed that. While the mob was throwing stones at him, Stephen prayed, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**” (verse 59) Then he said, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” (verse 60) Sounds like the words of Jesus from the cross. Stephen’s cool faith got him through.

Cool faith is trust in God. It is trust in the truth that “**the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by human hands.**” (verse 48) The Lord God made us, we didn’t make Him. We get into trouble when we try to create a god in our own image. It doesn’t work. God is not limited to social or theological houses that we’ve built for ourselves. A cool faith knows that nothing in our world can contain God. This kind of trust in God helps us to keep our cool when everyone around us is losing theirs.

Cool faith is also sacrificial. Like Jesus, Stephen didn’t fight back when the mob attacked him. Stephen was the first follower of Jesus to die as a Christian martyr, to lose His life for the sake of Jesus. But cool faith doesn’t just call for us to sacrifice our lives. We are called to make other sacrifices. Good parents sacrifice time at work to be with their children. Husbands and wives give up some of their own desires to satisfy the needs of their partner. Christian young people may have to sacrifice some of their popularity to follow Jesus. People in the church sacrifice their time, ability and money to grow God’s family. Sacrifices can have a significant impact on others. When Stephen was stoned to death, the mob threw their coats at the feet of a man by the name of Saul. Saul never forgot what happened that day, especially after he encountered Jesus and became one of His apostles.

Finally, a cool faith is a forgiving faith. Stephen asked God to forgive those who were killing him. Jesus prayed for those who nailed him to the cross. We are in the forgiveness business. We have been forgiven to forgive others. We don’t really have an option. Jesus says that if we don’t forgive others, He won’t forgive us. To forgive is to let go of the anger that we feel towards those who have hurt us. It also means asking God to show them mercy. Forgiveness stops the churning of anger and puts an end to the desire for revenge that can eat us up on the inside and destroy us. We don’t have to wait for a person to ask to be forgiven by us. We can let go before they ask. After all, Jesus died on the cross before we asked for forgiveness.

So remember when your emotions start to get too hot, keep your cool and keep your faith. Amen.