

Stephen – Faithful Unto Death (Acts 7)

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The apostle John wrote to the church in Smyrna,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

John was warning them that they were going to be persecuted but God promised that if they would be faithful even if it meant their physical lives that He would give them a crown of life. Even in the face of death we must be faithful to God. Becoming a Christian is just part of going to heaven. After one has become a Christian one must then live faithfully unto death which could mean even if it means dying for Christ. Stephen is a great example of being faithful unto death. Stephen comes into the Biblical text as one of the seven men chosen to serve tables (Acts 6:1-6). But it's not long before we find him preaching and teaching the word. Acts 6:9-10 says,

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

They did not like the truth Stephen was speaking so they caught him and brought him before the Jewish council and brought false witnesses against him (Acts 6:11-15). Acts chapter seven is Stephen's sermon before the Jewish council. In that sermon Stephen gives them a history lesson beginning with Abraham's call out of the land of the Chaldeans (Acts 7:2-7). Then he brings them through the Egyptian bondage, their deliverance, the wilderness wandering, their taking of the promise land and ends with Solomon building the temple (Acts 7:8-47). In that sermon Stephen points out their fathers rebellion (Acts 7:39-43). Then he makes application to his audience,

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

Like Peter in his sermon as recorded in Acts 2:23, Stephen pointed the finger at them and told them that they were guilty of killing Christ. But instead of saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37), they gnashed on Stephen with their teeth (Acts 7:54) and then took up stones and stoned him to death (Acts 7:57-60). Stephen did not back off or try to smooth things over. It cost him his life but he told them what they needed to hear. He spoke God's word boldly. Like Ezekiel of old, Stephen, the watchman, had warned them and in so doing had delivered his own soul (Ezekiel 33:7-9). Stephen truly spoke the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Stephen was faithful unto death! The same thing is required of us today.

Regardless of what comes our way we must be faithful in all things. Revelation 2:10 teaches us that faithfulness is required in order to receive a crown of life. Oh I know there are those in the religious

world who believe and teach that once a person is saved then they are always saved and cannot lose their salvation but the Bible teaches just the opposite. Read these Bible verses carefully.

- *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”* (Galatians 5:4).
- *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Hebrews 3:12).
- *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1).

If a Christian cannot fall away then why would the Bible talk about restoring such a one? The demand for faithfulness implies that if we aren't faithful in living the Christian life then we will be lost. The apostle Paul knew that he could lose his salvation (1 Corinthians 9:27). The Bible says, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58). This isn't an option for the Christian, this is what he/she must be. Too many Christians today have the attitude that one is faithful just as long as they attend church services and worse yet some think they are faithful if they just attend Sunday morning service. No doubt we must be faithful in assembling with the saints. The Bible says, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:25). But there's more to being faithful than just showing up for church services. Are we faithful to live the Christian life after we leave the church services? Are we Christians in our work places? Are we Christians in our homes? Are we Christians on our vacations? Are we Christians in our recreational activities? We can't live like the devil in our daily lives and then come to church services and be counted faithful. God told His people of old,

Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? (Jeremiah 7:9-10).

Sounds like many Christians today. They think they can smoke, drink, cuss, lie and gamble and then come to church on Sunday and everything be all right. Sorry, it's not all right! That's all wrong! The Bible says, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Titus 2:11-12). Stephen was faithful unto death in preaching the word of God. The apostle Paul told Timothy,

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves

teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Preachers need to take note here. We live in a society that has adopted the policy of no offence, nothing negative and no name-calling. Of course this is nothing new. We have some examples in the Bible where people adopted such a policy. Israel adopted this policy (Isaiah 30:9-10). Jehoiakim adopted this policy (Jeremiah 36:23). Herod adopted this policy (Matthew 14:3-4). But did the Old Testament prophets adopt the policy of no offence, nothing negative and no name-calling? Notice what Jeremiah was told, *“Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant”* (Jeremiah 1:9-10). Notice he was to “root out, pull down, destroy and to throw down.” All negative terms. Jonah’s message was negative, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* (Jonah 3:4). Did Jesus adopt the policy of no offence, nothing negative and no name-calling? Read Matthew 15: 12-14; 23:13-33 and then you tell me. Did the apostles adopt such a policy? Peter charged the Jews with the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23). Paul charged the Jews of being hard hearted and dull of hearing (Acts 28:26-28). Paul called the names of false teachers (2 Timothy 2:17; 1 Timothy 1:20). Paul withstood Peter to the face and told him his wrong (Galatians 2:11). The charge given to Timothy and Titus involves negatives (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:15). No, the apostles did not adopt the policy of no offence, nothing negative and no name-calling. Did Stephen adopt such a policy? No he did not! Stephen was faithful in preaching the truth. He didn’t tell them what they wanted to hear, he told them what they needed to hear. If we are to be faithful in proclaiming the word of God then we must do the same.

Some people don’t want to hear what the Bible teaches on marriage, divorce and remarriage (Matthew 19:9) but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear the truth on the one church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4) but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear about the necessity of baptism (1 Peter 3:21) but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear about the sinfulness of smoking, drinking, dancing, gluttony, and gambling but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear about church discipline (1 Corinthians 5: 2 Thessalonians 3:6) but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear that the use of mechanical instruments in worship to God is sinful (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) but we must preach it anyway. Some people don’t want to hear that the Bible is the only book from God (2 Timothy 3:16-17) but we must preach it anyway. Being faithful in preaching and living the truth may cost us our life, it may cost us our job, it may cost us our family and friends, it may cost us our social standing but regardless of what it costs we must be faithful unto death.

After all is said and done can we say with the apostle Paul, *“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:6-7)? I want to hear what the Lord said unto the two and five talent men, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord”* (Matthew 25:21, 23). Are you a good and faithful servant? Stephen was! If you’re not then you need to become one. You can by obeying the gospel. Do you believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus said, *“that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”* (John 8:24). Are you willing to repent of your sins? The Bible says, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to*

repent” (Acts 17:30). Are you willing to confess your faith in Christ as the Son of God? The Bible says, *“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”* (Acts 8:36-37). Are you willing to be immersed in water for the remission of your sins? Peter told those in Acts 2, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:37). When we come out of that watery grave of baptism we are servants of God. The Bible says of Lydia, *“And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us”* (Acts 16:15). Could she be judged faithful? Yes! She had obeyed the gospel. Dear reader, can you be judged faithful to the Lord?