

# The Old Paths

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## “Stephen Never Knew!”

Jarrod Jacobs

Last Sunday we studied about the life and death of Stephen, and how the events surrounding his death made an impact upon the apostle Paul. As is often the case in preaching, after I finished, I realized that there was another point that I should have brought out in the study! So in this article, I want us to again look at Acts 6-7 and study about Stephen, and make some points applicable to our lives.

In last week's lesson, we looked at the life and death of Stephen and how this ultimately had a positive effect upon the apostle Paul, as well as the rest of the world due to his conversion to Christ, and the fervor and fire Paul had for preaching God's word to lost souls. We spent time last week noting several similarities between Stephen and Jesus, and then noted the similarities between Stephen and Paul. When these two giants met, it truly was a great day.

Yet, for all the good things that were accomplished as a result of Stephen's death, and for all the many people Paul won to the Lord as a result of his forceful and vigilant preaching, one thing stands out. Have we ever taken note of the fact that Stephen played a part in influencing one of the greatest preachers of the gospel in history, and yet STEPHEN NEVER KNEW IT!?!

By the time Saul was converted, Stephen was dead, and the brethren had buried his body (Acts 8:2). Stephen may have been conscious of Saul's presence at his execution (Acts 7:58), but he never knew the “rest of the story”! He never knew how Saul would one day fight just as hard if not harder “for” the Lord than he ever did “against” Him! Stephen never knew that Paul would take the message of Christ from Jerusalem to Damascus, and Asia, and all the way to Rome! He did not know about the countless churches Paul helped start. Yet, for all of this, I am convinced that Stephen played a pivotal role in Paul's life. It is through Stephen's death that Paul saw what it means to “spend and be spent” for others (II Cor. 12:15). Paul's willingness to die for the Lord (Acts 20:24, 21:13) was no doubt a reflection of Stephen's own attitude of being ready to die if necessary for the cause of Christ (which he did). Stephen did not compromise the truth of God's word for any man, and Paul did not, either! Both men gladly and readily faced the consequences of that decision, too.

The point I hope we see in all of this is that though Stephen never knew what had happened with Paul, Stephen's influence still lived on and made an impact upon the apostle to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit said it this way, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow

them” (Rev. 14:13). May we never forget that the deeds we do today echo in eternity!

Friends, let us realize that our influence is being felt daily! We have opportunities for good or for evil every day. The question is, how will we respond to our challenges and temptations? Are we aware that there are others who are interested in what we are doing, too? This is the reason Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16)!

We have the opportunity today to show a right and proper example for our children, spouse, friends, enemies, and strangers. Will we seize this golden opportunity? Let us also remember that our influence can be felt on folks even in mere moments (Bear in mind, Saul did not know about Stephen for very long!). In light of this fact, we must make sure that we are conscious of our example when in public. We never know when someone is looking at us to see what a Christian acts like and talks like! What do folks see when they look at us? Do they see Jesus in us (Matt. 5:16; Gal. 2:20), or do they see someone motivated only by selfish interests?

Even in Stephen's last breath, he spoke of Christ before the murderous mob (Acts 7:59-60). Paul's last written words includes his confidence in receiving a crown of righteousness from Jesus because he fought the good fight, finished his course and kept the faith (II Tim. 4:8). Such words could be spoken at the end of their lives only because Christ was their focus during their lives! What is our focus in life? Let us be like Stephen and teach and influence folks for Christ and godliness to our dying breath!

## Short-Sightedness

Jarrold Jacobs

- What if Christ had refused to go to the cross because He did not want to endure the pain and humiliation?
- What if a wife did not want to have children because of the pain?
- What if a husband refused to get a job because he was afraid he might not be able to do what was asked of him?
- What if a “first-grader” would not go to second grade because he was afraid he would not like it?

The above questions seem silly, don't they? Yet, all the examples above reveal an attitude of being short-sighted! In contrast, Hebrews 12:2 says this about Christ: “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” In other words, Jesus looked beyond the immediate pain and mockery of the moment, and saw something greater; something which produced joy not only in God, but in all men who would submit to the Lord's plan for salvation. For this reason, He endured the painful suffering of the cross for the moment!

In like manner, consider the wife who does not want to have a child if it means enduring temporary pain. Mothers would tell her that she is being short-sighted, for there are many blessings to come if she will endure that momentary pain (Ps. 127:3-5).

To the husband in that example, we'd tell him to straighten up and get to work, wouldn't we (I Tim. 5:8; II Thess. 3:10)! To the scared child, we'd console and encourage that young one, and then place him in his proper class.

When considering spiritual matters and remaining in a right relationship with God, we find far too many who are short-sighted. Tragically, the road of life is littered with folks who had a “good start,” but could not “finish well”! Perhaps they thought that being a Christian was a sprint rather than a marathon! Regardless of their reasons, the fact remains that they gave up too soon and did not finish. In reading Hebrews 12, we see that after folks are encouraged to look to Jesus as an example of enduring the cross and looking ahead to what is better (v. 2), the statement is made, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:3). In other words, we need to look at Jesus as our example of One who was not short-sighted. He could see past the momentary problems, the temporary suffering and humiliation of the cross, and see the “better thing” on the other side. Therefore, let Christ's example encourage us!

Delaying pleasure for something

better later on is a sign of maturity. It is children who want things “now, now, now!” Children cannot endure for long at all before demanding the thing(s) they want. The mature person knows how to delay immediate pleasure in order to receive that which is better. Yes, the mature person can even endure pain for a while if he knows the pain is temporary and a greater prize awaits him!

The problem is that there is too much spiritual immaturity in the Lord's church. There are too many who cannot see beyond the end of their nose, spiritually. Folks, we need to understand that it takes vision and foresight to be able to endure in this life. If we cannot do this, we are setting ourselves up for problems, both physically and spiritually. If as parents, we do not prepare our children for the time when they are teenagers and adults, then we are failing them due to our short-sightedness. Parents have a responsibility to teach and train their children (Eph. 6:4; Titus 2:3-5). It is short-sighted and sinful to allow our children to grow up with no direction, leadership, or training in God's word, including how to be a Christian. On a personal level, if we are not preparing for eternity right now, we may very well lose our soul due to short-sightedness! This certainly is a serious matter, and worthy of spending our time in thought and action to make sure we are looking ahead and preparing for eternity.

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### **MEETING TIMES:**

**Sunday Morning Bible Study** \_\_\_\_\_ **9:30 am**  
**Sunday Morning Worship** \_\_\_\_\_ **10:20 am**  
**Sunday Evening Worship** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:00 pm**  
**Wednesday Evening Bible Study** \_\_\_\_\_ **7:00 pm**

Our call-in radio program is on **WBIO, FM 94.7**, Sunday afternoon from 12:30-1:00 pm. **Call: 683-9246 (WBIO)** with your Bible question.

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