

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Stephen: The Man who was Faithful To the End (Part 5)

As we finished up last month, we were discussing that Stephen was Faithful in His Declaration. The first thing that we noticed was The Accuracy. Before we move on to our second point, I want to reiterate the truth that being Spirit-filled will lead to an accurate knowledge of Scripture. We can see this in many instances. Peter was Spirit-filled in Acts 2 and quoted from Joel and the Psalms. He did so accurately. Peter would again accurately quote Scripture while being Spirit-filled in his messages recorded in Acts 3 and 10. Later we find Paul filled with the Spirit and accurately using Scripture in Acts 13 and 26. He will use many quotations from the Old Testament in his epistles while he is controlled by the Spirit. Stephen accurately details the history of Israel and three times makes direct quotations from the Old Testament. He is filled (controlled) by the Holy Ghost, and he accurately knows the Word of God.

What am I trying to prove by mentioning all of this? You are not filled with the Spirit if you are not knowledgeable about the Word of God. You are not filled with the Spirit if you do not accurately interpret Scripture. The Holy Ghost, the One Who guided the men who wrote Scripture (II Peter 1:21 says the men “*were moved by the Holy Ghost*”), knows His Word, and He will help the one who is filled with Him to understand that very Word. If you are ignorant of Scripture, you are not filled with the Holy Ghost. You are filled with the flesh which is why you cannot be filled with the Holy Ghost, and therefore are ignorant of Scripture. One evidence of being filled with the Holy Ghost is a knowledge of Scripture and the accurate use of it. Peter, Paul, and Stephen are great and powerful examples of this. May we learn from Stephen’s example here to be filled with the Spirit and know God’s Word.

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One may wonder which happens first, being filled with the Spirit or knowing the Word of God. I think that question is similar to others we may have such as, “Does the Holy Ghost begin to convict a sinner first, and then they desire to listen to preaching or read a tract,” or “Must a person receive a witness either in verbal or written form, and then the Holy Ghost begins to convict?” I do not know that any of these kinds of questions can be answered from Scripture as to the exact order. What I do know is what we have already seen in Scripture—a Spirit-filled person will know Scripture. Ephesians 5:18 commands us, “*Be filled with the Spirit.*” Many verses throughout Scripture talk about what we should do with Scripture (read, memorize) and the value of Scripture (a light to guide; water to purify us, etc.) They are both essential to a proper Christian life. If we need to know what to do first, begin to read and study Scripture. While doing so, confess your sins, clean up your life, and ask the Holy Ghost to fill you. From that point on, keep reading and studying Scripture, keep your life pure, stay filled with the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost will make Scripture come alive to you.

The second area that we notice concerning Stephen’s faithfulness in declaration was The Application. As I would read messages of long years ago, I noticed that some preachers divided their messages into two parts. They would give an explanation of Scripture for a period of time, and then they would apply that to their congregation. The pastor that I grew up under followed this format in many of his messages. (I follow a different pattern and give application all through the message.) As I studied this message of Stephen, I see that this is what he did. He had given what we could call an exposition of Scripture. Now he is going to apply it to his listeners.

Stephen begins his application in Acts 7:51. There are four ideas that stand out as Stephen makes his application. The first idea that we see is that Stephen’s application is *Direct*. Four times Stephen says, “Ye.” He said directly to his listeners, “**Ye** are stiffnecked and uncircumcised.” “**Ye** resist the Holy Ghost.” “**Ye** are just like your forefathers.” “**Ye** betrayed and murdered Christ.” [Emphasis added.]

Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost and preached directly to his audience. He did not begin by apologizing for how hard he was going to be. He did not say, "I am sorry that you have to hear this." He was under the control of the Holy Ghost. He was not concerned if the message was offensive to those listening to him. May God deliver us from the fear of people. Stephen, as the apostles earlier, was filled with boldness, not fear. In the day and time in which we live, we are abounding with timid men in the pulpit. Many know what must be said, but they go about it in a way that will be least offensive to the people. That is not what people need to hear. They need to hear a message directed straight towards them.

Some will offer these sorry excuses: "The day is different now. You cannot preach like that today. People will not like it." Well, I reply, "The day is not different now." People are still sinners, and they must be told so in the plainest, most direct manner possible. Do not apologize for being direct. Do not apologize for being bold. Shoot the "gospel gun" as straight as it can possibly be shot. What I do not understand is why this time period is so much different than any other time. Did Elijah live in a different time than Isaiah? Was John the Baptist living in a different time than Malachi? Of course, they were. But their message did not change. Our message cannot change either. Yet, colleges are turning out students that do not preach with the same boldness or directness as preachers of yesteryear. Why? It is not the times that have changed. It is our gutless, Spiritless manner. We want to fit in and not be so looked down on. You cannot love Jesus and the world. At the same time, you cannot love Jesus and be loved by the world. It is not the day that has changed. It is that we have lost our boldness.

To the second sorry excuse, I reply, "You can preach like that today." I also say, "We must preach like that today." Because people are still sinners, because sin seems to be more widespread and open, because the command is given in Isaiah 58:1, "*Cry aloud, spare not,*" we must be direct in our preaching. If you wonder what kind of preaching this generation needs, read the Bible and see what kind of

preachers God sent in the Old and New Testaments. Read the messages of the prophets. They preached directly to the people. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 5. He repeatedly said, "*I say unto you.*" Read what Peter said in Acts 2:38, "*Every one of you.*" Read what Paul said in Acts 17:22, "**Ye men of Athens.**" [Emphasis added.] Over and over again, in both the Old and New Testaments, God's preachers were direct in their deliveries to the people.

One of the greatest compliments a preacher can receive is, "It seemed like he was preaching directly to me." Every person in the audience should feel that way. The preacher must preach directly to the ones in front of him. I have heard many testimonies where unsaved people said that they felt the preacher was preaching right at them. That is the way it should be. That is what Holy Ghost-preaching will be like. That is what they needed in Stephen's day, and that is what we need and must have today.

I can answer the third sorry excuse by saying, "People of every generation did not like the direct manner in which the prophets, or Jesus, or the apostles, or more recent preachers, delivered their messages." Have you never read the Bible? In II Chronicles 24, Zechariah was stoned after delivering God's message. Jeremiah was put in stocks and a dungeon for being direct. Jesus was hated and crucified by the ones who hated his direct attacks on them—the Pharisees. We will get to it in more detail later, but Stephen was stoned because of his direct manner of preaching. Sinners in their natural state will not like nor enjoy the direct manner of Biblical preaching! **BUT THAT IS THE MANNER IN WHICH PREACHING MUST BE DONE!** We must be direct. In fact, I dare say, that if what you are doing is not directed toward the people, then you are not preaching at all. You are just talking and wasting everyone's time. True, Spirit-filled, Biblical preaching is direct. May we preachers today not be intimidated by the people inside the church, the people outside the church, nor the demons that will oppose us. May we be so filled with the Spirit that we cannot but help preach Jesus in the direct manner that the people need. May we

be like Stephen and preach directly to the people.

Stephen's application was not only direct, it was also *Disturbing*. I use that term because the people were bothered, or disturbed, by what the Holy Ghost said through him. Biblical preaching should and will disturb those who hear it. If the lost can sit through a message and not be disturbed, then it is not a Biblical message. Over and over again as the messages are recorded both in the Old and New Testaments, the people reacted one way or another. Sometimes they would respond to the message and get saved or right with God. Other times they would respond in anger to what was said and take out their anger on the prophet or preacher. C. I. Scofield makes a similar comment in his note on Acts 5:33. He writes, "The Gospel when preached in the power of the Spirit convicts or enrages." Bro. Scofield was right. What I have said so far is right because that is what the Bible shows over and over again. When men are confronted with their sin, it disturbs them. Notice the words that Stephen uses. He says they are stiffnecked, uncircumcised, and resistant to the Holy Spirit. We will examine these comments in detail next month.