

# The Christian – Winning by Losing

## Introduction

Acts 7:59-60 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

### **1. The life of the Christian is sometimes described in the Scriptures as a struggle or conflict.**

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

### **2. A conflict can be either "won" or "lost."**

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

### **3. How is the Christian to define "victory" — as the world defines it, or otherwise?**

### **4. The case of Stephen in the New Testament provides an interesting example.**

## **Stephen's Service**

### **Acts 6:1-8**

1. **Early in the history of the church in Jerusalem, there arose a problem.**
  - A. **Members of the congregation sold their property, pooled the money in a common treasury, and help was distributed, under the administration of the apostles, to any needy member.**  
**Acts 2:44-45**  
**Acts 4:32-37**
  - B. **The "Grecian" (KJV) Jews (Hellenistic Jews, who spoke Greek and came from places outside of Palestine) complained that their widows were being neglected in this "daily distribution"**
2. **The apostles offered a wise solution to the problem.**
  - A. **Seven faithful men were to be selected by the congregation to care for this business, so that the apostles would be free from such concerns and devote themselves wholly to teaching (Acts 6:2-4)**
  - B. **The men were to be "of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."  
(Acts 6:3)**
  - C. **Their work would be "service," hence this office in the church later came to be called that of the "deacon" (servant).  
(1 Timothy 3:8-13)**
  - D. **"Deacon" = servant (from *diakonia* = service, ministry)**

3. **Stephen was one of the seven men selected for this work (Acts 6:5-8)**
  - A. **The work was not simply a training period for the “higher” office of elder — it was important in its own right.**
  - B. **Stephen no doubt distinguished himself serving in this capacity, as well as in preaching.**

## **Stephen’s Sermon**

**Acts 6:9-7:53**

1. **Stephen’s controversy with the Jews in Jerusalem**  
**Acts 6:9-15**
2. **His speech before the Sanhedrin (longest recorded speech in Acts).**  
**(Acts 7:1-53)**
  - A. **Abraham (verses 2-8)**
  - B. **Joseph (verses 9-16)**
  - C. **Moses (verses 17-46)**
  - D. **Solomon (verses 47-50)**
3. **The point of Stephen’s speech was that God had never been confined to one geographical locality and was not then confined to the temple, as the Jews had thought he was. As Jesus Himself had said, God may be worshiped anywhere “in spirit and truth.”**  
**John 4:21-24**
4. **Stephen charged his hearers with having failed to obey the very Law in which they took so much pride in.**  
**Acts 7:51-53**

## **Stephen's Sacrifice**

**Acts 7:54-8:2**

- 1. The response in the Sanhedrin to Stephen's speech.**  
**Acts 7:54-56**
  - A. This was quite a different *reaction* than Peter got on Pentecost, because the *hearts* of the hearers were different!**
- 2. The stoning of Stephen.**  
**(Acts 7:57-8:2)**
- 3. Stephen thus became the first Christian "martyr."**

Acts 22:20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

- 4. The result of this mob lynching was a systematic persecution of the church by Saul (Acts 8:1), which in turn only caused the church to grow more.**

Acts 11:19-21 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

## Conclusion

1. The zealous young Saul, a brilliant student of Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14**), despised Stephen and his speech, and seemingly defeated Stephen by having him executed.
2. But it was hard for Saul to “kick against the goads” (**Acts 9:5**) and he later submitted to the gospel Stephen had preached.
3. Ironically, Paul later lost his own life in defense of the same principles Stephen had been stoned for.
4. Who won the struggle between Saul and Stephen the preacher? Stephen did.
  - A. Or more accurately, the Cause for which Stephen died was victorious.
5. Christians are promised a similar victory in Christ, but they must often “win” by “losing.”

**Matthew 10:39** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Revelation 2:10**

**Romans 8:35-39**

**2 Corinthians 6:4-10**

6. May we learn to distinguish between true success and failure.
7. Spiritually speaking, are you “winning” or “losing”?

