

Paul Is a Pattern of the Lord's Patience; Saul Complicit in Martyrdom of Stephen, Acts 7:57-60; Last Sayings of Jesus & Stephen; the Plan of God Keeps Saul Alive

1 Timothy 1:16 - Nevertheless, because of this I received mercy that in me, as foremost of all sinners, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience ...

7. The Lord's patience with Paul is used as a prototype by Him in dealing with all other members of the human race which is expressed in the propositional phrase:
πρός ὑποτύπωσις, *pros hupotupōsis* - "pattern, model, example, or prototype"
8. Paul, because he is the worst sinner to ever live, is used by the Lord as the model for demonstrating God's perfect patience with the rest of the human race.
9. Paul is identified as the person with sins that are the worst on record. But the Lord's patience allowed Paul time to arrive at Gospel hearing where he responded to the message and became the greatest believer on record.
10. Because Paul's epistles constitute virtually half of Church Age revelation, then he exceeded Moses, the prophets, and even the other apostles in his knowledge of doctrine.
11. Paul, the prototype who demonstrates God's grace and patience, was saved by grace through faith, therefore the pattern or prototype of God's grace has been established.
12. The greatest challenge that divine grace ever confronted was history's worst sinner, Saul of Tarsus. Here are some of the crimes on his rap sheet:
 - 1) He was complicit in the martyrdom of Stephen:

Acts 7:57 - But they [the high priest and members of the Sanhedrin] cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed him [Stephen] with one impulse [the emotion of religious hatred].

v. 58 - When they had violently driven him out of the city [Jewish law did not allow an execution within the walls of Jerusalem], they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul [the worst sinner in human history].

v. 59 - And while they were stoning Stephen, he was calling upon God, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my human spirit.

v. 60 - And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this he fell asleep [physical death].

There are parallels between the last sayings of Stephen and of Jesus. The Lord verbally dismissed His human spirit into the hands of the Father (Luke 23:46) and, previous to this, He prayed for the forgiveness of the very same people for whom Stephen intercedes (Luke 23:34).

Note the sequence of events: Jesus prayed that those who crucified Him would be forgiven—Romans as well as Jews, but the Sanhedrin and other Jews were responsible for bringing the charges to the attention of Pilate who really wanted nothing to do with the case.

It is apparent that this prayer was answered since many of these same people were around to again assuage their murder lust, this time at the expense of Stephen.

While they were doing so, Stephen offers a similar prayer as the Lord's, that his executioners be forgiven and on this occasion one of those responsible was none other than Saul. It is possible this is Saul's first official act as executioner for the Sanhedrin.

Note the sovereign plan of God: in eternity past God knew from omniscience that if He were patient enough with the worst sinner in human history that he would become the greatest believer, greatest apostle, and greatest intellect in the history of the Church Age.

Therefore, it was divinely decreed that Stephen must be allowed to die a martyr's death in order to spare Saul enough time to make it to the Damascus Road for the salvation of his soul and imputation of eternal life.

Such a sacrifice was uniquely honored by the Lord at the moment Steven was advanced upon by members of the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον, ***sunedrion***, Acts 6:15).