

Acts Chapter Six

Acts 6:1-4

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Source of conflict:

James 4—what is the source of quarrels among you?

Strategy of evil one:

- Direct opposition and intimidation/threats
- Corruption within
- Divide and conquer (satan loves to use an unintentional wrong to begin a conflict)

Disciples increasing in number—probably around 25,000 at this point

Complaint arose:

- Hellenistic Jews—Greek speaking Hebrews—came from throughout the Roman Empire. More inclined to embrace Greek culture.
- Native Hebrews—spoke Aramaic. More inclined to embrace traditional Hebrew culture.
- No one had planned for a welfare system. Culturally—the Jews had relied on the institutions of the Priesthood/Temple to care for the needy---now they were often separated from what they could rely on for welfare. Normally, widows were cared for within families...now their conversion was also causing a separation from relatives.
- Baptism could separate them from one family as they were being embraced by others.
- Sharing had become the lifestyle of the early church—because they regarded one another as family.

- As pressure developed financially due to increase—division came along ethnic/linguistic lines. The question of status arose.
- There are problems that go along with rapid multiplication.

Apostles Response:

- In Exodus—Moses faced the need to administrate in the context of growing numbers and people needs. Must learn to delegate.
- It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God—to serve tables.
- Distribution of tasks allows for further distribution of gifts
- Need doesn't determine response—our energies can be dissipated when we don't keep this in mind.
- Prayer/Word—Key for advancing Kingdom

Choosing the Seven

- Church is given the task to select these men for themselves (they will know who had the right character—and they would trust who they chose).
- Apostles will delegate their authority/lay hands on them
- Qualities of men: good reputation—full of the Spirit—wisdom
- To be in charge of material things requires more spirituality, wisdom and prayer than just attending to the task itself.
- They needed to be spiritual men who could make application of the truth—in deed.

Acts 6:5-6

And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- Seven men all had Greek names—probably the Hellenists (significant when you realize there were probably more Aramaic speakers in the church).

- They are not referred to as deacons in this chapter—but were the first to fulfill the office described in I Timothy 3:8-13.
- Men of good reputation—honest report, free from scandal, trustworthy
- Full of the Holy Spirit—yielded and reliant upon; flesh/soul subdued and subjected;
- Wisdom—one who can apply truth and the knowledge of how to regulate ones' relationship with God. Those who can be led by the Lord and not need direct apostolic oversight (those who would respond with the same spiritual maturity as the apostles).

Laying on of hands:

- Set them aside/apart for the task (devoted)
- OT —transfer of authority
- Practiced by Jews when men were admitted to Sanhedrin

Acts 6:7-15

And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. And *yet* they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God." And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. And they put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

What the church did right:

- Hellenists made their need known
- Hebrews recognized in the conflict the legitimate need
- Seven accepted a call into service
- Apostles addressed the need through delegation.

- Word of God kept spreading—priests became obedient to the faith (one benefit of daily meeting in the Temple).

Stephen:

- Full of grace and power
- Performing great wonders and signs (as well as functioning in the practical arena)
- He functioned at a high level of wisdom from the Spirit—those who disputed with him were unable to withstand him.
- Opposition secretly brings about false witnesses (Luke probably gained this information through Paul after his conversion. He came from the synagogue in Cilicia).
- Brought him before the Sanhedrin.
- Stephen speaks about the fulfillment of God's purposes (this is often accomplished by changing the vehicle through which He moves).
- Four key tenets of Judaism at the time: the Temple, the Law, Holyland, national/ethnic identity. Jesus has brought about fulfillment of many former practices/traditions.

Saw his face like the face of an angel:

- Description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of His glory as a result of being in His presence (Ex 34:29)
- A light illuminating from the inside—He stood as the Temple—holding and displaying the Glory of the Lord (II Cor 4:5-11).

Acts Chapter Six—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

Read I Timothy 3:1-10. How are these qualities developed in the life of a believer?

Dig:

- 1) From the context of Chapter 6—why would the apostles 'lay hands' on the men that were chosen?
- 2) What qualifications did someone need to have, in order to oversee the distribution of food/funds to the widows?
- 3) What aspect of ministry would the apostles focus on?
- 4) Who chose the seven new leaders?
- 5) What do we learn about the Word of God in chapter six?
- 6) Describe the ministry of Stephen.
- 7) Where does opposition come from in this chapter?
- 8) Who are the seven chosen to act as deacons?
- 9) According to chapter 6, Stephen is full of four things—what are they?

Discuss:

- 1) What is the root of rivalry? (vs 1)
- 2) In what ways would Hellenistic Jews and native Hebrews differ? Is there anything similar to this in today's church?

Point of Prayer:

Pray for new church leaders to be raised up and released in this generation.

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) What is the most recent step you have taken in "becoming obedient to the faith"?
- 2) Describe what it is like to hear someone function like Stephen does in verse 10.
- 3) Are there religious customs that have been passed down to you that are without life? (vs14)
- 4) Consider how they chose the seven 'deacons'. How does someone gain trust with a group? How does someone lose trust with a group?
- 5) Does the church have any practices specifically aimed at caring for the elderly? What part does the family have responsibility for? What part is the church responsible for?
- 6) What can we learn from the apostles about how to deal with a dispute?