

Acts Chapter 6

During our last study in the book of Acts we saw *the first persecution of the church*. In chapter 5, verse 40, Peter and John were beaten for preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ.

In chapter 6 we see the first problem of the church.

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

The church was described as disciples—followers of Jesus Christ. This passage once again clearly teaches the distinctiveness of the church body. Their numbers continued to grow.

The church was continually growing and with growth comes some problems.

One of the problems was since the church grew the needs of the body continued to grow as well. According to verse 1, the church was involved in the feeding of the widows who were a part of the church. Notice that it was the *daily ministration*. Day after day the widows came to the church for food and it was a common practice for the church to give them food. But other problems rose which were more serious than that. It is clear that the ministration of food or the food distribution was not an issue. It went on just fine. But what were the more serious problems?

(a) Cultural and racial prejudices produced problems. The Grecian widows were called Hellenist, which means that they spoke Greek and were not native Jews, but proselytes who became Jews by converting to the Jewish religion.

(b) Lack of caring and sharing produced a problem. Verse 1 says that the widows were being *neglected*. The word, neglected means, *a side-by-side examination*. In other words a pure Hebrew widow would stand side-by-side to the Hellenist widow and the ones distributing the food completely ignored and overlooked the needs of the Hellenist widows. This was wrong.

(c) The results of both afore mentioned problems produced another problem. This problem was murmuring (gr.: Gongusmo, complaints among the ranks.)

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

The word of the problem got back to the Apostles and they recognized that the problem not only needed to be resolved, but also *could* be resolved.

How do we handle problems in the church?

- Problems that occur in the church need not destroy the love or the work going on in the church for God. *All problems have solutions* and the church would do well to understand that when problems arise, *murmuring is not the answer*.
- *Neglecting the word of God* is no answer either. Verse 2. It would be a grave error for the apostles to be diverted from their own ministry to handle these problems, even though the problems were serious.
- *Leadership's responsibility is never to set aside God's priority of teaching the word of God to do work that others are capable to do*. For the apostles to set aside the word of God to serve food would be foolish, especially since there were more than enough people who were capable to serve food.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

- Problems that arise in the church must be solved from the biblical viewpoint with men who are of noble, impeccable and proven character, which are Holy Spirit filled and who are filled with the wisdom of God. *The absence of these men in the distribution of food to the widows was a direct cause in this problem to begin with*. In all areas of church life, the spiritually qualified are the ones to be chosen to do God's work, none others.
- The ministry of the church is a shared *ministry*. No one man or group of men are ordained to do all of the work in the church. Acts 2:41-46, 4:31-35, and 5:29,41-42.
- The congregation followed the instructions of the leadership to search among their midst for the men of highest spiritual character traits, and then to bring them to the Apostles, and in turn the Apostles would appoint them over this matter of food distribution.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The primary responsibility of church leadership is prayer and the word of God. He or they, as the case may be, are not to be engaged in that which would take him, or them, away from the word of God and prayer. Notice that during this time that the Apostles were engaged in constant prayer over this matter. It is interesting that the word, ministry, is the same word, ministrations in verse 1. The people

were responsible to serve tables and the apostles were responsible to serve the word of God!

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

The entire congregation was in agreement over the spiritual instruction that was given by the Apostles. If a church is walking in the Holy Spirit and being led by the Holy Spirit, then spiritual instructions should please the entire church. **AND THEY CHOSE**, they who? The congregation. The ministry is a shared ministry and the people of God are to be involved in the ministry of and in the church.

All seven of these men have Greek names. They, in the minds of many commentators, were Hellenist Jews who were chosen to minister to the needs of the Hellenist widows. This move on the part of the church eliminated any further problems about race, food distribution and murmurings in the ranks of the church. It also showed to the Hellenist that they were just as important to the ministry of the body of Christ than the native Jews.

6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

The chosen men were set before the leadership and the leadership prayed, then they laid their hands on them.

There a very important point here that needs to be made: *The apostles would do nothing without prayer and they would make no decision about the selection of these men without prayer.*

Laying on of hands was a means of identifying these men as a chosen part of the ministry which they were set apart for.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Look at the result of the problem being solved:

- The word of God **increased**. (Spreading)
- **The Jerusalem disciples grew greatly**. (Surpassing what was expected, a growth beyond belief, growing beyond measure, growing more and more, abundance)

- ***Priest, in great numbers, were obedient to the faith.*** This phrase clearly means they were saved. This is what salvation does. ***It causes people to obey the faith.*** The faith being the entire revealed truth of the word of God. *Romans 1:5, 6:15-18, 16:17-19,25-27, Galatians 3:1, 5:7-8, Luke 11:27-28.*

Stephen, A Man of Faith - Acts 6:8-15

As I have shared with you many times throughout the years of teaching and studying the word that one of the greatest blessings that we can discover are the various character studies of the men in the scripture. One such man is this man of faith, Stephen. We first see him in this chapter as one chosen by the congregation to be placed over the distribution of food to the widows of the church. In verse 3 of this chapter we see that the Apostles instructed the congregation of the type of men that were to be chosen for the work of God, and in verse 5, we see that Stephen was a man full of faith. Full, meaning that he was ***completely faithful in his trust for God.***

Stephen demonstrated in his life the true meaning of being ***full of faith.*** It is important to note here that these character studies are not to be read as nice little stories that happened in the early church with no effect on how we live today. Rather, they are examples of how ***we*** should live as believers. Men who have demonstrated the faith of which we ***say*** we have.

These character studies have one major goal: *To cause us to strive to live for Jesus Christ as they lived. To emulate their faith. To see that it is possible to live for God, completely faithful, in a church environment where defeat and faithlessness have become the **norm** of much of what is called Christian living today.*

If the lives of these men will not change you, will not compel you to trust God in the midst of the most frightening and trying times, then you have wasted your time and have needlessly missed what God was trying to teach you. This, my brothers and sisters, is the purpose of learning the character studies of these men in the scriptures.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

In verse 5, we see that the chief character trait of Stephen was that he was ***faithful.*** (Read vs. 5a) Notice again that the scriptures say that Stephen was a man full of faith. This is no accident. This needs to be examined. God has always honored the man or woman who has fully trusted him by faith. The scriptures are filled with people who have fully trusted God and God has honored that faith. The entire 11th chapter of Hebrews is a catalog of faithful men and women.

Stephen was a man full of faith, and full of power. The ability that he had came, not of or from himself, but from God. We do not know much of this man's life at all, but it is safe to assume that he had a close walk with God. Stephen was a man who in the plan of God was a man who could be trusted with God's power not to corrupt it for his own. I believe, and it is my own convictions, that every Christian does not possess this kind of power that Stephen had. I believe that if you study the scriptures you will see clearly and without any shadow of a doubt that very few men exercised this kind of power and ability in the plan of God.

I believe that few men could be trusted with this kind of power lest it corrupts them and they take the glory for themselves as many men who claim to possess the power of God do today.

The power that Stephen had by God, gave him the ability to perform great wonders. Wonders are divine operations that cause the one's seeing them to marvel in amazement. It is to cause awe in the sight of the one's seeing them. The word miracles mean, signs signifying divine authority. The two words together means that God, through Stephen, used this man to perform great and awe inspiring miracles that caused the people to know that the miracles indeed were from the hand of God.

The church at this time was at its apex and it's high point. The power of God was unstoppable. The apostles and a few certain men who were empowered by God were performing miracles. The church as a whole did not have this power and nothing in a systematic study of the book of Acts should cause anyone to believe that they did. The first church did not place the main emphasis of its existence on performing miracles, but rather, to go and to proclaim the gospel of the resurrected Christ. To try to lead people today that this power that was demonstrated in the book of Acts is available to every believer is wrong. It is incorrect theology. It is this kind of wrong teaching that has caused the discouragement and physical death of many Christians. Men who claim to have the powers of healing telling people who come for a healing to "go home, claim your healing". This is nothing but heresy. They go home and instead of being healed, they stay infirmed and oftentimes they die. This errant teaching has no place or example in scripture, so it is to be rejected for what it is—heresy. When men possess this kind of power, **everyone** gets healed. No one goes home claiming anything. When men possess this kind of power, there will be no doubt in anyone's mind about the credibility of the work and miracles of God.