

## Acts 6 – The Organization of Service

### I. The Appointment To Serve (1-7)

#### A. The Church Faces Another Problem (1)

##### 1. The Church Continues to Grow

- a. “In those days” shows that the church was growing in the face of the events of chapter 5
- b. Corruption from within (Ananias and Saphira) and persecution from without cannot stop the growth of Christ’s church

##### 2. A Division Arises Among The People

- a. Satan failed to stop the Church with internal corruption and persecution, now he attempts division
- b. A division occurs between Hellenistic Jews and Palestinian Jews
  - i. The division was brought by the foreign born Jews – they “murmured” that their widows weren’t receiving the same treatment in food distribution
  - ii. Hellenistic Jews (i.e. Grecians) were Jewish people born or descended from Jews in other countries. They are also called diaspora Jews. Many had returned to live in their ancestral home of Jerusalem.
  - iii. Palestinian Jews (i.e. Hebrews) were those who were born in Judea.
    - Some also believe the distinction was one of language. The Hellenistic Jews may have spoken only Greek while the Hebrews probably spoke Aramaic and Greek
    - The point is that there arose a division among the people that emerged on party lines. It was “us against them.”
- c. We are not told whether the oversight of certain widows was intentional or an effect of the overwhelming growth of the church

#### B. The Apostles Organize A Solution (2-6)

##### 1. The Apostles Delegate Responsibility (2-4)

- a. The Leaders Must Remain Faithful To Their Calling (2)
  - i. The Apostles Themselves Can no longer handle the food distribution
    - Up to this point they have done it themselves

- Now the Church is too big and people are being missed
- ii. The Apostles cannot allow the administration of felt needs to interfere with their calling
  - The Leaders of the church are required to spend time in both corporate and private prayer for wisdom and spiritual need
  - The Leaders of the church are required to spend time digesting, studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God – both for evangelism and teaching
  - But the task of administration is very important. A solution must be found that will provide for needs and free them to obey their calling.
  - The Apostles won't cut back in their prayer and study to "serve tables." This makes it sound like serving in the food distribution is a menial task. That is not what is meant. They were already doing the work – it is extremely important which is why they appoint men over it.
- b. The Congregation Chooses Men to Oversee Service (3)
  - i. The Apostles Invite the Church to Choose men to handle the food distribution
    - Notice that they didn't just dictate a solution
    - They allowed the assembly lodging the complaint to choose trusted men to oversee
    - The Apostles genuinely wanted the issue fixed
  - ii. The Qualifications of the Men to Be Chosen
    - Honest report – they must be men of good reputation among the people
    - Full of the Holy Ghost – They must have shown a life of a real spiritual transformation
    - Full of Wisdom – They must possess the aptitude to make wise decisions regarding the administration
    - Notice that these qualifications are different from those required to replace Judas among the twelve
- c. The Leaders Focus on Prayer And The Ministry Of The Word (4)

- i. The Apostles main responsibilities are prayer and the ministry of the word
  - ii. Notice that Both Areas of Service are Important
    - The word “ministration” in verse 1 – speaking of the food distribution, is the same word translated “ministry” in verse 4. Serving the daily food distribution and serving the word – they are both service to the church.
  - iii. Prayer – includes praying for the congregation, spiritual needs, evangelism, ministry, individual needs, and preparation for service
  - iv. Ministry of the Word – includes studying the Scriptures, applying the Old Testament to the realities in Christ, teaching the church for their edification, and preaching in public to grow the church
2. The Deaconate is Ordained (5-6)
- a. Seven Hellenistic Jews Are Selected to Serve (5)
    - i. The entire congregation agrees to the solution proposed by the Apostles
    - ii. The text does not say how the seven men were chosen
    - iii. Notice that all seven of these men have Greek names – which implies that they would be representative of the Hellenistic Jews in administering the food distribution
    - iv. Notice that Luke gives special attention to Stephen, who will be the subject of this and the next chapter
      - He is full of faith
      - He is full of the Holy Spirit
    - v. Also Philip will be integral to the gospel going to Samaria in chapter 8. Philip is also called “The Evangelist” in (Acts 21:8)
    - vi. THESE MEN ARE NOT SIMPLY TABLE SERVANTS – Their ministries and influence will pave the way for the growth of the gospel outside of Jerusalem
  - b. The Seven Are Ordained By the Apostles (6)
    - i. The Apostles pray over the men – that God would give them power and wisdom to serve
    - ii. The Apostles lay their hands upon them
      - The practice of laying on of hands is done to ordain men for service

- The practice goes back to Moses transferring his authority to Joshua by laying on of hands (Num. 27:23; Deut. 34:9)
- The laying on of hands signifies the Apostles recognition of these mens' gifting from the Holy Spirit, their appointment as representatives, and the expectation of God's blessing on their work.

### C. The Newly Organized Church Continues To Grow (7)

1. The growth of the church is directly related to what has come before
  - a. The Apostles are free to apply themselves to prayer and the word
  - b. The "Deacons" are free to minister and serve
  - c. This new organization allows the church to flourish and grow
2. The word of God increases – due to their renewed focus
3. A great many of the priests are also converting to Christ
  - a. They would be forced to hear much of the preaching that was taking place in the Temple Complex
  - b. The Word of God does its work in the hearts of those who hear it
  - c. Now truly, things are getting serious for the religious leadership

(The second part of Acts 6 focuses on Stephen's ministry and is connected with chapter 7. In the interest of time, we will look at chapter 6 as a unit and chapter 7 next week)

## II. The Persecution of Service (8-15)

### A. Stephen Ministers With Power (8)

1. Stephen is a man who is full of faith (some early manuscripts say "grace") and power
  - a. Earlier Stephen is said to be full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit
  - b. There was something remarkable about this man's life, practice, and testimony
2. Stephen does wonders and miracles among the people
  - a. As one who is intimately involved with those in need, Stephen has exceptional access to those who are sick or hurting
  - b. The Lord works through Stephen as he ministers
  - c. He doesn't just "deliver food" – He is a minister of the gospel who is meeting needs among the people

B. Stephen Testifies With Power (9-10)

1. Stephen is Opposed By Members of the Synagogue (9)

- a. His powerful ministry immediately draws the attention of the synagogues
- b. It is not clear whether this was one synagogue composed of Jews from different nations, or many ethnic synagogues
  - i. Synagogues were meeting places for Jews to discuss community issues, share meals, conduct instruction, and worship services
  - ii. They were meeting halls and schools as well as worship centers
  - iii. They were also places traveling Jews would find rest and a place to stay
- c. The “Libertines” (i.e. freedmen) were Jews who were either freed from Roman slavery or descendent from those who were previously slaves. They were Jews, but they were steeped in Greek culture because they were not from Judea
- d. The diaspora Jews would be zealous for their national heritage and Stephen’s teaching threatened that
- e. They disputed with Stephen’s claims
  - i. Interesting note: Some of these synagogue members were from Cilicia
  - ii. The major city in Cilicia was Tarsus – of which Saul was from
  - iii. Saul of Tarsus could have very well been present as Stephen debated with the Jews. And in Chapter 7, we see that Saul stands by in approval as Stephen is stoned to death
- f. Stephen would have continually spoke of Jesus as the Messiah and the fact that the Temple and sacrifices were now obsolete

2. Stephen’s Testimony Cannot Be Overcome (10)

- a. Stephen spoke with wisdom – he was practical and knowledgeable
- b. Stephen spoke by the Spirit which gave his words power and authority
  - i. This was the fulfillment of what Jesus promised in Luke 21:15 – “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.”
  - ii. They were unable to disprove Stephen’s claims

C. Stephen Is Falsely Accused and Arrested (11-15)

1. The Jews Fabricate Blasphemy Charges (11)

- a. They gathered men who would testify that Stephen was blaspheming Moses and God
  - b. Strange that they would put them in that order – you would think God would be first on their minds
  - c. They were steeped in the law of Moses and believed Stephen's teaching nullified the law and dishonored it
  - d. Anything that rejected the Temple sacrifices and the law of Moses was considered a blasphemy and serious crime
  - e. But Stephen had not actually blasphemed
2. The Jews Incite False Witnesses (12-14)
- a. Stephen is arrested and charged with speaking against the "holy place" (Temple) and the law
  - b. False witnesses are brought forth to lie about what Stephen has said and done
  - c. They said Stephen claimed Jesus would destroy the Temple and do away with the law of Moses
    - i. This was a perversion of what Jesus actually said in John 2:19 and Matt. 24:2
    - ii. They accused him of wanting to change the customs of Moses

D. Stephen's Face Radiates His Innocence (15)

- 1. Luke shows here that the council itself could see Stephen's innocence
- 2. The picture is that of Moses coming down from the mountain after speaking with God. His face shined with radiance after being in God's presence (Exodus 34)
- 3. How ironic, this man who was being accused of blaspheming Moses, stood before the council with the same radiant face that Moses had after being with God.
- 4. Stephen was approved of God in the same way Moses was as He delivered God's word to the people.