

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Six – First Church Problem – Stephen Accused

ACTS 6:1-7:

In this lesson, due to the growth of the body of Christ in Jerusalem and the many from other areas remaining, an issue bubbled up to the surface. The complaint came to the surface in the form of a murmur, so it did not immediately present itself.

For all intents and purposes, the Apostles of Christ are acting as the shepherds of the flock in this early setting (something that will be taught by them, for local order – elders or shepherds in each church – **Acts 14:23**; once the Gospel creates other flocks in other locations). As such, they will demonstrate a congregational system of order, which will take precedence by pattern.

That pattern would become – seek out by qualification and appoint for God’s order in a local format.

Text #1:

Acts 6:1-2 “Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.* ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”

Multiplying: As I mentioned in the intro, the body of Christ in Jerusalem has expanded tremendously; in **Chap. 2:41**, 3,000; **Chap. 4:4**, they are up to 5,000 men; **Chap. 5:14**, they are adding multitudes, and in this passage, they are still multiplying. This is a vast number of saints to shepherd; especially in the face of a daunting commission to continue to preach the Gospel.

Complaint: This is rendered “**Murmuring**” in the King James Version. The Greek word is ‘gogguzó’, noun, in the sense of a secret debate in the form of a complaint or displeasure among a group or people.

This indicates that the problem had existed in this form even before the Apostles of Christ became aware of it. Although the problem of murmuring is not addressed in this location, the concept of murmuring is condemned as undermining the foundation of unity.

Philippians 2:14 “Do all things without complaining and disputing”

Jude associates this act with the characteristics of the ungodly, note:

Jude 1:16 These are grumblers (‘murmurers’ – Greek – ‘goggustés’ one who complains), complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.

The practice of murmuring has the same effect on the foundations of authority as the surf at the ocean to the sand under your feet. The longer you stand in the surf, the washing back and forth continues to remove the foundation under your feet.

The Apostles do not address the issue of how this complaint came to be; but demonstrate that if it had come to the fore-front immediately it could have been handled with the proper concern and order!

Hellenists: These are simply non-Greeks who speak Greek as their primary language. It is used more than any other for Jews who are foreign born to Judea and have used Greek as their primary language.

Leave the Word of God: It is obvious that the needs of the widows mentioned here for the daily distribution was a legitimate concern (later Paul would give Timothy, while in Ephesus, the qualifications for the legitimate widows in need and the collective responsibility to them – **1 Timothy 5:3-16** – in addition, they are saints, members of the body of Christ, all benevolence that has been rendered by the body of Christ from **Acts 2** to now, has been for needy saints); however, what we learn by the statement of the Apostles is that there is a understanding of priority. There is no greater act of benevolence to anyone than that of the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostles of Christ understood this, and it should stand as a foundation for all shepherds of God's people to this day! Physical benevolence for needy saints is important, but only after the needs for the souls of men and women has been met first!

Text #2:

Acts 6:3-4 “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;* ⁴ *but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*”

Therefore: Based on the now surfaced understanding of the problem and the acknowledgment of the priority; here is the suggested course of order to take.

Seek Out: The assignment for the implementation of this system of order is going to be placed on the entire body of Christ (“**from among you**”). They will have no one to look after this, but themselves.

Qualifications: The men to be selected out from among them, were not to be random, it was not to be based on popularity, but on specific qualifications.

1. **Good Reputation.**
2. **Full of the Holy Spirit** – knowledge. It is possible that the Holy Spirit being mentioned here may be speaking of spiritual gifts. We know that some of these men will demonstrate these gifts in chapters to come. As knowledge and wisdom in scripture are often tied together (one demonstrating the other and vice a versa towards productivity for the Lord – **Colossians 1:9-10**); in either case, this is not a random insinuation since it is

connected to wisdom (the Spirit of God being that which is working through gifts and the Apostles towards the education of saints, till the written word would come).

3. **Wisdom.**

They were to have these qualifications (not on the job training), even for what may seem to only be a menial task to be responsible for. Once again, when we look to the wisdom of God and use His qualifications for everything, He has given through Christ Jesus our Lord, we can know that the detractors and grumblers, will have no ammunition and order will prevail.

As the qualifications for shepherds will be given for their continuation in the bodies of Christ for local order (**1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**); this becomes a pattern to demonstrate that the members of the body of Christ must select from among them, men to fulfill this order based on the specific qualifications. In addition, it allows us “**to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you**” – **1 Thessalonians 5:12**.

Seven Men: To the Jews, the number seven represented an oath or something complete, all of which may have a bearing on why this is the number of men for this work; however, it may be nothing more than the fact that the Apostles felt it to be just a seven-man job?

We Will Give Ourselves: Here once again, we have the established order of priority that the Apostles make known to the brethren. Having established this orderly method for the supervision of the distribution, they will continue to see to the greater charge they acknowledge has been given them (I might add that they will see to the priority without any complaint by the members of the body either, in fact, the saying is going to please the whole multitude).

Text #3:

Acts 6:5-7 “**And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,** ⁶ **whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.**

⁷ **Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”**

It speaks volumes on behalf of the brethren in Jerusalem in a various number of subjects that they were pleased with the orderly solution, and that they were able to select out the seven men without turmoil, dispute, or interjecting their own ideas.

Oh, that the Lord's people today were more concerned with the pure and undefiled wisdom of God and achieving His wisdom and will above their own.

Laid Hands on Them: In the word of God, this action has two important purposes: one, is to give approval to those given a charge (**Acts 13:3** – Barnabas and Saul); and second, to bestow spiritual gifts (**Acts 8:17**).

We know that in this case, at least the first one is surely being employed. We cannot determine by the context whether the second is employed here or has already been employed. We do know that at least two of these men would demonstrate the receipt of spiritual gifts.

Summary: When the instructions of the Apostles are followed exactly as given and order ensues; the results are unquestionably what every single body of Christ should desire:

“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Why do members of the body of Christ, continue to deny His order; or even worse, continue to attempt to re-write it?

We need to be diligent to seek the unity of these brethren through true submission to the order given!!!