

Episode #1132 Acts 6 Part 1-Choosing the Seven

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. The believers were all in a Great Unity in Jerusalem, Acts 4:32. This was in answer to the Lord Jesus' request in John 17:21. In Acts 5 we saw the two great challenges to that unity: the first from within by the duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira misrepresenting their giving; the second in the arrest of the twelve and their beating by the Sanhedrin for teaching in the Lord Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit met both, first by striking dead Ananias and Sapphira and removing the destructive element, the second by empowering the apostles and giving them strength for the ministry. Now a second challenge from within arises in a complaint.

III. Choosing the Seven. Acts 6:1-6.

- A. Acts 6:1. Sellers: "It will be well here to keep in mind that in Israel, no distinction was ever made between the civil government and the religious life of the people." There was no separation of church and state; all religious laws were enforced by the civil government. To all who governed in Israel, it was their responsibility to care for widows: Deuteronomy 14:28-29. Widows were among the poorest in Israel, because women couldn't work without their husbands or fathers. The twelve apostles were destined to judge, that is govern, the twelve tribes of Israel, Matthew 19:28. From Pentecost on, they were God's rulers over all who had received Jesus Christ. They therefore had the same obligations that all rulers in Israel would have. It is evident that the apostles had unlimited funds under their disposal, Acts 4:34-35. In giving their all to the unity, many had given their possessions to distribute to the poor. If any widow was neglected, it was not due to lack of means. The twelve distributed the money when the number of disciples was small. Now with the huge number of believers, this task was being neglected. Hellenists were not Gentiles. They seem to be Jews who do not natively speak the local language of Aramaic. These were common in and around Jerusalem, for many Jews from other lands would move back to Israel if they became wealthy enough to do so. It seems that the Greek-speaking Jews thought that they were being discriminated against. Their murmuring was not specifically against the apostles, which they would hardly dare to do after Ananias and Sapphira. Therefore, they simply murmur against all Hebrews. Really, all widows were losing out, not just Greek-speaking ones. Yet this discord challenged the great unity, as all hearts were not beating as one.
- B. Verse 2. The twelve act quickly. Sellers: "The apostles were busy men, but not in the sense of being working with a thousand and one duties to perform. They had one great task which more than demanded every minute of their time. Everything they had known about the Old Testament had to be carefully reconsidered in the light of what had taken place in the three years previous to Pentecost. Hundreds of former ideas and interpretations had to be abandoned, and new understandings of the Old Testament had to be carefully and cautiously arrived at. Of course that required consideration, investigation, and meditation. All this had to be seasoned with continual prayer. Then they needed to recall to mind and reconsider every word and every act of the Lord while He was with them on earth. The Holy Spirit would bring all these things to mind, John 14:26. Then this had to be delivered to the waiting

people, many of whom never departed from the temple in fear of missing some word which the apostles brought forth. It may have been that at first the work of distributing the funds was a present and relaxing interlude in their labors in the word, but when the number of the disciples multiplied, the time which could be given to this work was insufficient. This caused the Hellenists to murmur at the Hebrews and the neglect of their widows. It is unreasonable to say that this incident was recorded to show ministers how to deal with those who murmur in their congregations, or that this shows us how to organize and carry on the work of the church. The reason that this record is enshrined in the Word of God is to teach men a lesson in Spiritual values: that service in relationship to the Word is more important than service in relationship to men. Luke 10:38-42. In order to read the present church system into Acts, the seven men chosen in this chapter are called the first deacons. Schofield in his notes. Lensky even reads Robert's Rules of Order into the passage! Nothing in the churches can ever be made to conform to Scripture; everything in the Scripture must be twisted and wrested until it conforms to church practices. The simple fact is that the twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them. The Holy Spirit guards carefully against calling this the church. The apostles tell the disciples what must be done. This is done kindly but firmly. This is not a proposition to be considered, but a directive to be acted upon." They had their priorities right. The Word of God was more important even than caring for the poor! They had much truth from the Bible to bring forth, and they could not neglect this most important job.

- C. Verse 3. They present the solution. One must be of good reputation if he is to handle money! The believers should pick out seven that meet these criteria. "Holy Spirit" here has no "the" in front in Greek, and means His power. The twelve will then appoint them over the distribution of money. This was not something the believers got to vote on. These seven men were not elected to an office. They were given a job. They were never called deacons. They were never controlled by the apostles, or by the multitude. No one could audit them. These were God's orders. If they misused their position, they would have died at the hands of the Lord, like Ananias and Sapphira.
- D. Verse 4. This is not an example of how to order a church. Churches are nothing like the Great Unity, and their leaders are not the twelve. But this does show us that prayer and ministry of the Word is more important than good works, even feeding people!
- E. Verse 5. The multitude was pleased with this arrangement. In Greek, the name listed first is most important. Stephen means Crown, and he earned a reward by his faithful service. Though all these names are Greek, we cannot build a lot of ideas on this. Many Hebrews had Greek names, like Philip and Andrew. There is no reason to call these men the first deacons, since the word doesn't occur here.
- F. Verse 6. The apostles pray before doing this. The mind of God in this matter had to be sought. The laying of hands was not ordination, but identification, not with the apostles, but with the Lord. Identification was made a reality three ways in Scripture: anointing with oil, John the Baptizer used water, and the apostles used the common ceremony of the laying on of hands. This signified the passing of this task from the twelve to the seven. The Lord was now responsible for what the seven did. Laying on of hands meant shared responsibility. I Timothy 5:22. We should be careful whom we identify with in the Lord's work! The apostles knew that God would watch over what

the seven did. If they were dishonest, they would share the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.

IV. Conclusion: The unity among believers was threatened when the apostles no longer had time to distribute the funds they were given to those most truly in need. The Hellenists brought the complaint first, but pointed it against their Hebrew brothers, threatening the unity. However, God acted through the apostles to bring about His solution. No hint of division would be allowed to break the unity as long as He maintained it. He is truly the source of all peace!