

Acts of the Apostles – 6

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- A. The Ordination of Deacons (1-7).
 - 1. Need for apostolic helpers (1-2).
 - 2. Qualifications of deacons (3-4).
 - 3. Ordination of deacons (5-6).
 - 4. Further growth of the church (7).
- B. The Example of Stephen (8-15).
 - 1. Power and gifts of Stephen (8).
 - 2. Confrontation with the Jews (9-10).
 - 3. False accusations of the Jews (11-14).
 - 4. The Lord was with him (15).

The Sense and Meaning

- A. God's division of labor calls for carnal helpers in the church to relieve the apostles (Acts 6:1-2).
 - 1. If we consider the conversions listed, we have a very large church (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14).
 - 2. These Grecians were converts (proselytes) to the Jews' religion (Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43).
 - a. The Pharisees were notorious for their missionary efforts (Matthew 23:15).
 - b. The gospel had not yet gone to the Greeks, who were not proselytes (Acts 11:19).
 - c. The gospel went first to Jews and then to Gentiles (Acts 1:8; 3:26; 13:46; Mat 10:6).
 - 3. The Lord has ordained His people should care for widows without the government.
 - a. There was a daily ministration to provide for the needs of the saved widows.
 - b. Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is to visit widows (Jas 1:27).
 - c. Our church, as a church of Christ, is to support widows (I Timothy 5:3-16).
 - 4. In this large church, the Jews apparently neglected the widows of Grecian proselytes.
 - 5. However, the apostles soon objected to being distracted with such carnal obligations.
 - a. It does not make sense for such men chosen and gifted by God to feed widows.
 - b. The apostles knew their time should be praying and preaching the Word (Acts 6:4).
 - c. Bishops must be dedicated to reading, exhortation, and doctrine (I Ti 4:13-16).
- B. The apostles give God's qualifications for men to oversee carnal aspects of the church (Acts 6:3-4).
 - 1. This church nominated men meeting the qualifications for the apostles to appoint.
 - a. Because of the murmuring in the church, the apostles had the church nominate.
 - b. Due to the practical nature of their work, deacons must be well received by all.
 - c. Paul's instructions to Timothy indicate that bishops should ordain deacons.

2. The qualifications here are opened more fully in Paul's rules to Timothy (I Ti 3:8-13).
 - a. They were of honest report – having a public reputation of impeccable honesty.
 - b. There were full of the Holy Ghost – having spiritual life of power and gifts (Acts 6:8).
 - c. They were full of wisdom – having great knowledge, discretion, and judgment.
3. The apostles intended to focus exclusively on their call to prayer and preaching.
 - a. Bishops cannot be distracted professionally or administratively (II Tim 2:4).
 - b. The more a bishop is allowed to focus on his calling, the more a church profits.
- C. The church was pleased with this resolution from God and chose the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5-6).
 1. Stephen is introduced to us first as a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.
 2. Philip later became an evangelist and preached quite widely (Acts 8:5-13,26-40; 21:8-9).
 3. Nicholas is identified as a proselyte, likely chosen to represent the Grecian widows.
 4. Church history indicates Nicholas may have originated the Nicolaitanes (Rev 2:6,15).
 5. Ordination to a work is simply an appointment to that work as indicated by the Lord.
 - a. The church nominated seven qualifying men and the apostles appointed them.
 - b. Even apostles prayed for blessing upon such men and figuratively laid hands.
- D. The church continues to grow mightily under the Holy Ghost and wise labor division (Acts 6:7).
 1. The ministry is like an ox (I Cor 9:9-10), which can bring great growth (Prov 14:4).
 2. When we do things God's way, we can expect Godly growth and prosperity.
 3. The word of God increased (metonymy), that is, conversions from the word of God.
 4. This large church in Jerusalem continued to multiply (not addition) greatly. Amen!
 5. And a large group of priests were also converted to public obedience (John 12:42-44).
- E. Stephen is further introduced as one of the deacons used mightily by God at this time (Acts 6:8).
 1. He was full of faith – confident God was able to perform according to His promises.
 2. He was full of power – the Holy Ghost had given him an apostle-like gift of miracles.
 3. He was able to do mighty signs and wonders to demonstrate the power of God visibly.
- F. A group of Jews choose to oppose Stephen and dispute unsuccessfully with him (Acts 6:9-10).
 1. This synagogue of foreigners reminds us of the African Methodist Episcopal church!
 2. They didn't like Stephen's doctrine or power, so they argued and debated with him.
 3. But they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit he had by Holy Ghost power.
 - a. Jesus had promised great spiritual wisdom in such events (Luke 21:12-17).
 - b. He answered them and also refuted them, denied them, and condemned them.
- G. When false religion cannot match your doctrine, it will resort to wicked methods of survival.
 1. **Suborn.** To seduce, bribe, or procure a person to give false accusations or testimony.
 2. Stephen certainly did not speak blasphemous words against either Moses or God.
 3. They used such wild and wicked lies to arouse the emotions of the people against him.

4. Then they set up false witnesses to provide an official justification for condemnation.
 - a. Observe that once on trial they modify their accusations to protect themselves.
 - b. They misrepresented Stephen's doctrine by listing only sensational elements.
 - c. They did not list his powerful Scriptural arguments proving Jesus was Christ.
 - d. Consider again the importance of the destruction of Jerusalem at this time.
 - e. Changing Moses' customs was part of the reformation at that time (Heb 9:10).
 - f. We should be able to understand the sound doctrine Stephen was preaching.
- H. God defends Stephen not only with wisdom from the Spirit but a visible sign of Himself (Acts 6:15).
 1. The Lord gives Stephen the glorified appearance of an angel to shame these sinners.
 2. All men forsook Paul, but the Lord stood with him and delivered him (II Ti 4:16-18).