

ACTS LESSON 6

Acts Chapter 6

Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

e-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Memory verses for this week: *Psa 119:166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

Introduction: In last half of Chapter 5, we saw Peter and the apostles brought before the religious leaders again for preaching Jesus Christ, and they once again said that it was better to hearken to God rather than man. The chapter closed with Gamaliel telling the group to let them go.

If they were false teachers, nothing would come of the preaching. If they were true, it would mean that they were fighting against God, and they could not win. Praise the Lord that what they preached is what we preach today, and it is just as true today as it was in their day.

Two events are described in this short chapter 6. The events leading to the appointment of the first deacons in verses 1-7. The ministry of Stephen and the reaction from official Israel in verses 8-15.

I. Checking Dissension in the Church

In chapter 6, we see the two major methods used by Satan against the work of God. Satan does not want the church to function and be effective in reaching the lost. And the two methods he uses to keep us off track the most are to cause trouble from inside the church by inward dissension, and then to bring persecution against us from the outside. We have God's promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail against us, so we must recognize these ploys of Satan and not lose sight of our main objective.

Acts 6:1 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 early church continued to grow, and, with its growth came problems that needed attention. It was the custom of the Jewish Temple to assist widows who had no children. As the church became an abomination to official Israel this practice was

stopped for Christian widows and the church took up the practice. There were two types of Jews living at Jerusalem.

(1) The Jews who were native to the land were called Hebrews. These also included Jews who had returned from the eastern diaspora in Babylon and such areas.

(2) There were also the Grecians or Hellenist Jews who had returned from the western dispersion. These Jews spoke Greek and were 'western' in their culture in distinction to their eastern brethren.

Evidently, as the church attempted to meet the needs of its widows, the Hellenistic ones were inadvertently neglected. This caused a murmuring amongst the Hellenist Christians. All the makings of a schism within the church were in place as this oversight was taken as a slight. People began to secretly buzz about the assumed wrong and favoritism of the leadership. The devil looks for such situations to exploit, finding fertile ground in carnal and immature Christians.

Acts 6:2 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.

Acts 6:3 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.

The apostles handled the potentially explosive situation wisely and justly. They knew it was not expedient for them to leave the ministry of the Word of God and spend their time serving food. The apostles sought to appoint others to assist, particularly in the more physical and less spiritual areas of the ministry.

Though these men are not specifically called 'deacons' here, both their ministry and the words used to describe them leave little doubt, these were the first deacons. In verse two, the phrase "and serve tables" uses the word (diakonew) diakoneo which means to serve. It is the same root word used for ministrations in verse one (diakonia diakonia) as well as deacon (diakonov diakonos) in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8-13.

New Testament deacons were appointed by the church at the direction of the Lord through the apostles to assist the spiritual leadership. In no case were deacons the 'board' of the church. The word "board" in the sense of an oversight committee does not appear in the Bible. Deacons are distinct from elders. In Titus 1:5-7, elders and bishops are equated as one and the same individual. Philippians 1:1 further makes it clear the deacon and the bishop are not the same. A deacon is not an elder. Scripturally, deacons were never a board with authority or power over the pastor or bishop. Their ministry was to assist the pastor-bishop.

1 Timothy 3 provides the qualifications for the office of deacon. Notice the prerequisites given here. A deacon is to be a man of honest report. The sense of the word so translated (*marturew martureo*) is of 'one who has been witnessed.' He has been observed by others to be of good report. He has no accusations or character flaws observed against him. The first qualification at this point is integrity of character. The second is that he is "full of the Holy Ghost." This is a spiritual qualification. He is to be a spiritual man.

The third qualification is that he is to be "full of wisdom." He is to be a wise man. These were to be appointed, evidently by the church, to take care of this business. The word so translated (*creia chreia*) literally means 'necessity,' 'duty,' or 'need.' It does not necessarily imply that the deacons are to take charge of the 'business' of a church. Rather, they are appointed to deal with necessary needs or problems. Their job is to take some of the load from the spiritual leadership enabling them to remain focused upon the spiritual aspects of the ministry.

The number seven in this instance does not appear to have any great significance. They evidently thought this number would be sufficient to address the impending need. The apostles enjoined the entire church to identify these that would be called to serve.

We see that the church in Jerusalem was made up mainly of Hebrews and the Hellenists, which were the Grecians. The Hebrews were the Palestinian Jews which spoke a mixed Hebrew Tongue which was called Aramaic. Most of these Jews were more rigid in the daily devotion to the rites and the traditions of the past than were the Hellenists. The Grecians were Jews that were born in other lands where Greek was the main language used. These Greek speaking Jews had many Gentile ways about them since they were brought up among Greeks.

We see in the first two verses that Satan is trying to stop the wonderful peace and accord that existed in the church by having these Grecians complain about how their widows were being taken care of. It was very common for the church to help those in need with food and other necessities. Many churches today never concern themselves with the care of widows or the poor that are members or those we come in contact with in our daily lives.

God is honored and glorified when we help those that are in need. Here is was the widows of the Grecians who were not being cared for enough in the eyes of the members. Paul instructed young Timothy as to what kind of windows were to be helped.

1 Tim 5:3 Honour widows that are widows indeed.

1 Tim 5:4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

1 Tim 5:5 Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

1 Tim 5:6 But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

1 Tim 5:7 And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless.

1 Tim 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

1 Tim 5:9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man,

1 Tim 5:10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

1 Tim 5:11 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;

1 Tim 5:12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

1 Tim 5:13 And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

1 Tim 5:14 I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

We see that those that were under 60 years of age would not qualify for ongoing help, and that makes good sense. And only those who had worked as good Christian women would qualify also. So it appears that the Grecians had come to the apostles about the problem. While this may not have sounded too serious, these small issues can sometimes divide a church.

Warren Wiersbe said in his study that the apostles showed great insight in not ignoring these “outsiders”, the Grecians, and immediately dealt with the problem. By doing this, Satan got no foothold in the church. It was interesting that the apostles say they were to blame by not having enough time to pray and study God’s Word. Many a pastor is given far too many tasks to do, and it stifles his productivity in the things most important.

D.L. Moody once said that it is better to put ten men to work than to try and do the work of ten men. We all might learn from his insight. When problems come up, it gives us an opportunity like the apostles to increase our faith. Not only in God, but sometimes in one another as we take on more tasks to correct the problem at hand.

Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The focus of the spiritual leadership of the church ought to be continually of “prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” Deacons, hopefully, can alleviate some of the ‘physical’

and 'material' aspects of the work of the church, freeing up the spiritual leadership to focus more effectively upon that which God has called them to do.

We see that the apostles considered the preaching of the Word of God of much higher necessity than the feeding of the hungry. Every man, woman, boy, and girl has a need for spiritual food. And every one that does not know Jesus as personal Savior needs to hear the gospel and accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. While we need physical food to survive, we know that we must also have the spiritual food to prosper and grow in the Lord. And the major task of a preacher called of God is to preach the Gospel.

There are many other duties, but the number one thing is to preach the Gospel and grow in God's Word. If our pastor never studied and meditated on the scriptures, he would be ineffective in his ability to preach and to lead the church. The same is true for we that teach. We can't wait to read these verses and hope we can understand what the bible is saying. Each day, I set aside time to read God's Word, and hopefully some other resources to grow that I can effectively teach our lesson.

These apostles tell them that they should not stop the work and study of scriptures to go and wait tables daily. So we see that they tell them to seek out men that were honest, full of the Holy Ghost, and wise in the Word of the Lord. Perhaps these were ministers of God's Word.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Prov 9:11 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.

So to have wisdom, we must first fear the Lord. These were the type of men the apostles sought. Many believe these selected were the first deacons of the church. In whatever their capacity, the pastor (in this case pastors) of the church sought them out and appointed them. This was not a church decision or something the church as a group decided to do. It says they would seek them out and "That We may appoint over this business."

In too many churches today, the pastor's role is not understood by the church. I overheard some couples discussing their church a few months ago, and the people who really ran their church wasn't the preacher, but the Sunday School teachers. He said they are the only ones that know what is going on in the church because they are with the people. That may be their perception, but I think we can clearly see that God appointed the Pastor to be the under shepherd of the church. Jesus is the head, and the pastor is to lead the church by the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Not a board of directors, a board of elders, or any other church group. This goes against a lot of beliefs in various denominations today, but I believe scripture backs it up. God

calls his men to be pastors, and by leadership of the Holy Spirit, the church calls the pastor to lead the flock.

Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

1 Tim 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

1 Tim 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

1 Tim 3:3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

1 Tim 3:4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

1 Tim 3:5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

1 Tim 3:6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

We see the office of the pastor being explained as a bishop in I Timothy. The pastor is also referred to in other scriptures as an elder.

Acts 6:5 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:

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

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 men were chosen from among them. Thee potential crisis was dissolved. The congregation was pleased. The word translated chose (eklegomai eklegomai) is directly related to the word (eklektov) eklectos from whence the English word 'elect' or 'election' derive.

Seven men meeting the prescribed qualifications were ratified by the church. Of the seven men chosen, each had a Greek name implying they all were Hellenist Jews. Evidently, there would be no question as to their fairness to the Hellenistic widows in the ranks. Godly wisdom was skillfully exercised, and the church was strengthened. Nothing is further said of any of these other than that Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost and that Nicolas who was a proselyte from Antioch. A proselyte in this instance was one who had been converted to Judaism and not born as a Jew.

These men were presented before the spiritual leadership of the church who prayed over them and laid their hands upon them.

We see that what they decided pleased the whole church. The saying that pleased them was looking out the men that met the qualifications listed, and appointing them over the secular work.

By this laying on of the hands, this could mean that these were ordained as pastors in an ordination service. The laying on of the hands was much more common in these days than we see it today, whether that be good or bad.

J. Vernon McGee said that the apostles did good in appointing these to do this work.

“The apostles were right in spending their time in prayer and in the study of the Word of God. It is important for every church to recognize that the minister should have time to study the Word of God and should have time for prayer. Unfortunately, the average church today is looking for a pastor who is an organizer and a promoter, a sort of vice-president to run the church, a manager of some sort. That is unfortunate. As a result the church is suffering today. When I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, I had to move my study to my home. I built a special room over the garage for my study. I found out that all I had in the church was an office, not a study. They didn’t intend for me to study there. They didn’t want me to study there.”

That is unfortunate, and we need to be on guard against making the pastor wear too many hats that he was never meant to wear. When he needs help, we should be willing to help and never expect him to take away from his prayer life or study life to do menial tasks.

Acts 6:7 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.

The Word of God was preached, and many souls were saved. The potential conflict in the church was resolved and the apostles were freed up to focus more effectively upon the ministry, *“the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.”* The power of the gospel began reaching not only the common people, but also those in the Jewish priesthood.

Notice that turning to Christ is referred to as being *“obedient to the faith.”* They obeyed the scriptural command to repent and come to Christ. This, no doubt, caused great consternation to Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests, as well as the Sadducees, in general, of which were mostly priests.

So after they appointed these seven men, what happened? We see the word of God increased and the number of disciples increased greatly. You can't beat God's way of doing things. Men have lots of ideas and gimmicks, but the church is God's House, and things truly should be done the way that He ordained in His Word. Note that even a great number of the priests were saved.

Sounds like something that should not have to happen, right? I mean, how would a religious leader need to get saved? The reality is that the religious leaders in that day were far from God. I'm afraid we have too many churches today being led by Satan's men rather than God's men. What did Jesus say to the scribes and Pharisees, the leading religious group?

Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Mat 23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Mat 23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Mat 23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Mat 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Mat 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Mat 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

Mat 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Mat 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Mat 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

Mat 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

The reality is that everyone must come to Jesus for salvation, there is no other way. No earthly council of men, no ordinance of the church, nothing can save us but the blood of Jesus.

II. The Third Persecution

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Acts 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

The fullness of the Spirit most frequently manifests itself in spiritual power to witness or preach. Stephen manifested that spiritual power as will be seen in the following. He also did wonders and miracles among the people. These again are manifestations of the interim temporary gifts of the Spirit to the early church in the absence of the yet-to-be completed New Testament.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. In addition to the Temple in Jerusalem, there were numerous synagogues. These began in the diaspora (dispersion).

As such Jews in time moved back to the land of Israel, they would reestablish synagogues according to the national origins whence they came. This would be roughly analogous in the United States to various churches which were built around the ethnic origins of American immigrants. Evidently, Stephen had gone and preached in certain of the Hellenistic synagogues. What is noteworthy is that the region from whence young Saul of Tarsus came is included.

He, in all likelihood, sat in such a synagogue and heard Stephen preach and testify of Jesus Christ. Notice also that they of these synagogues disputed with Stephen. It may be surmised that Saul of Tarsus, the disciple of Gamaliel, therefore debated with Stephen in such a synagogue. As we shall see in verse 10, he could not refute what Stephen preached.

As Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost, God gave him supernatural wisdom and power to confound his adversaries. Stephen's Spirit-filled witness overwhelmed them. They could not win the debate. They spoke tradition and were blind to the truth. Here is clear example of the effect of Spirit filled witnessing.

A good argument that these men may have been ordained is how effective Stephen is here in his preaching. He had the power to do miracles as was the case of many special apostolic gifts in the days of the apostles. John Calvin said these men who were Stephen's opponents were foreigners who were in Judea on business or because they wanted to learn about the new things going on in the church.

He said they were most likely Roman citizens that had organized the building of a synagogue for the Jews who came to Jerusalem from their provinces. You would have thought that if they cared for the things of God, they would have been quick to listen to Stephen. But rather, they turn against him. The synagogue of the Libertines meant “freedmen”, which implies they had been taken slaves but were set free. They could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which Stephen spoke.

Acts 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

Acts 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

Acts 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

These who were defeated in debate with Stephen took steps to falsely accuse him of blasphemy (a capital criminal offense in Israel). They proceeded to arrange a mock court similar to that which our Lord faced. False witnesses brought false charges against him.

We see that after they could not win the debate with him, that they bring him before the Sanhedrin council. They got men to speak against Stephen, and said he said blasphemous words about their temple. Stephen may have revealed the fact that it was an empty house that had served its day. Perhaps he had quoted the words of our Lord concerning the upcoming destruction of the temple.

Mat 24:1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.

Mat 24:2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

We know that this destruction did come at a later date just as the Lord had prophesied.

In verse 13, it says he spoke against the law. I’m sure he told them that the types and shows and rituals of the law had been completed, fulfilled, and there was no more use for it. (All which was true.) Those offerings could never take away one sin, but pointed to the One who would die and pay with His blood for our transgressions. We have a different priest, a Great High Priest that really knows us and understands us.

Heb 7:11 If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

Heb 7:12 For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

Heb 7:13 For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.

Heb 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

Heb 7:15 And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there arise another priest,

Heb 7:16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

Heb 7:17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Acts 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Nevertheless, as the assembled Sanhedrin prepared to examine him, *“they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”* Precisely what this means is not clear. He may have been, under the power of the Holy Ghost, so they could not take their eyes off him, as if he were an angel. It may imply that God caused his countenance to shine physically even as did Moses, coming down from Mount Sinai. In any event, Stephen’s enemies were mesmerized as he stood in their midst.

The reality of the situation was that Moses had commanded that the people hear all things concerning Jesus. They did not want to hear, but Stephen was preaching the truth. Stephen was content, and he knew he was doing the very will of God. And it says that his face glowed as if it were that of an angel. A person who is close to God takes on the attributes of God, and God is totally righteous. This man was probably the closest example of a man being an angel that we have in the word of God. There was one who witnessed this, and I believe he never forgot Stephen. His name was Saul, who later became the apostle Paul.

Acts 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

Acts 3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Matthew Henry pointed out that even Stephen’s appearance made those in attendance know something was different about this man.

We are here told how God owned him when he was brought before the council, and made it to appear that he stood by him (v. 15): *All that sat in the council, the priests, scribes, and elders, looking stedfastly on him, being a stranger, and one they had not*

yet had before them, *saw his face as it had been the face of an angel*. It is usual for judges to observe the countenance of the prisoner, which sometimes is an indication either of guilt or innocence. Now Stephen appeared at the bar with the countenance *as of an angel*. 1. Perhaps it intimates no more than that he had an extraordinarily pleasant, cheerful countenance, and there was not in it the least sign either of fear for himself or anger at his persecutors. He looked as if he had never been better pleased in his life than he was now when he was called out to bear his testimony to the gospel of Christ, thus publicly, and stood fair for the crown of martyrdom. Such an undisturbed serenity, such an undaunted courage, and such an unaccountable mixture of mildness and majesty, there was in his countenance, that every one said he looked like an angel; enough surely to convince the Sadducees that there are angels, when they saw before their eyes an incarnate angel.

KJV Bible Studies are prepared and distributed free of charge. The lessons may not be sold without consent. If you have questions or wish to discuss the lessons, or possibly need help in finding Jesus Christ as your Personal Lord and Savior, contact us at the email below.

Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net
e-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.