

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 22

### I. Exposition of Chapter Six (Continued).

#### A. The appointment of Deacons (Continued).

##### 1. Verse 1 - A Conflict pertaining to assisting the Widows.

a. “..when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” – Notice that the believers were called “disciples.” A “disciple” is defined as; “more...than a mere pupil or learner. It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.”<sup>1</sup>

b. “...there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists...”

1) The word “complaint” means, “grumbling” and “murmuring”.<sup>2</sup>

“Acts 4 tells of the first attack on the Church from the outside. Acts 5 describes a problem on the inside. In both cases the Holy Spirit took care of the situation and the Church kept growing. Now we see in Acts 6 that the number of ‘disciples’ (or, ‘learners,’ so-called because they were all believers desiring to learn more about Jesus and the gospel; 2:42) was still increasing. What happens when a community of people grows? All those newcomers crowding in cause problems. In this case the growing Church was a cross section of society as it was in Jerusalem and Judea.”<sup>3</sup>

2) Dr. Thomas Constable gives further insight pertaining to the relationship between the Hebrew Jews and the Greek-speaking Jews.

“Within Judaism, frequent tensions arose between these two groups, and this cultural problem carried over into the church. The Hebrews observed the Mosaic Law much more strictly than their Hellenistic brethren. Conversely the Hellenists typically regarded the Hebrews as quite narrow-minded and self-centered.”<sup>4</sup>

c. “...because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” – The word “neglected” means, “to look past something, i.e., to overlook, neglect, slight” and the word “distribution” is the Greek word “*diakonia*” and is a noun form of the word we get for “*deacon*”. The word means “waiting at table,” or in a rather wider sense “provision for bodily sustenance.”<sup>5</sup>

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.”

Acts 6:1 – New American Standard Version

##### 2. Verse 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.’”

a. By now there are thousands of Christians so when it states that they “...summoned the multitude...” it may not mean they all attended. Even so, this could not have happened in someone’s home. Dr. Robert Utley suggests: “This must have taken place in the Temple itself, probably Solomon’s Portico (cf. 3:11; 5:12).”<sup>6</sup>

b. The apostles were quick to bring resolve to this problem. Richard Longenecker asserts a very important principle:

“The apostles’ response in this matter was to call the Christians together and suggest a solution. It is significant that the apostles were not prepared simply to ignore the problem; they seem to have realized that spiritual and material concerns are so intimately related in Christian experience that one always affects the other for better or worse.”<sup>7</sup>

c. We also see that the apostles recognized that just like the serving of the Greek-speaking widows was being hindered, their ministry of the Word of God was being hindered by their need to serve tables, This is why every member of the Body of Christ must do their part so other’s ministries are not hindered. When this happens, everyone is blessed. (cf. Ephesians 4:7-16; I Corinthians 12:12-28) Also see . Exodus 17:8-13 and Exodus 18:13-23.

<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993))

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 133.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 147.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “*Διακονέω, Διακονία, Διάκονος*,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 126.

### 3. Verses 3-4 – They sought out seven men with certain Qualifications.

a. Verse 3 – “...seek out...seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...”

- 1) “**Good Reputation**” – “to speak well of a person on the basis of personal experience—‘to speak well of, to approve of’”<sup>8</sup>
- 2) “**Full of the Holy Spirit**” – In the context of the book of Acts, this must be referring to the experiences as described in **2:4** and **4:31**. This includes the Baptism in the Holy Spirit initially and subsequent fresh fillings of the Holy Spirit to empower the believer to meet new needs. (See Part 17).
- 3) “**Full of...Wisdom**” – “**Skill in the affairs of life, practical wisdom, wise management as shown in forming the best plans and selecting the best means, including the idea of sound judgment and good sense.**”<sup>9</sup>

“Most probably, this election gave precedent for what we find as an office in local churches later. (See 1 Tim. 3:8-12; and Rom. 16:1, where Phoebe is a deacon, not deaconess.)”<sup>10</sup>

b. Verse 4 – [B]ut we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

- 1) “...give ourselves continually...” – “used metaphorically of steadfastness and faithfulness in the outgoings of the Christian life”<sup>11</sup> Several other translations use the word “devoted”.

“It is not necessarily suggested that serving tables is on a lower level than prayer and teaching; the point is rather that the task to which the Twelve had been specifically called was one of witness and evangelism.”<sup>12</sup>

- 2) The word “**ministry**” here is the same Greek word translated as “**distribution**” in verse 1. So, certain ones would now be “**distributing**”, or “**servicing**” tables and others, the apostles would be “**distributing**” or “**servicing**” the Word of God. Both ministries are important!! This in no way suggests that the apostles, or even God, considered serving tables to be beneath them.

### 4. Verse 5 – “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,”

- a. All of these men had Greek names which means they may have been part of the Hellenist group. No one is certain of this, however, because many Palestinian Jews had Greek names at that time as well.
- b. This verse introduces us to Stephen who will be the main figure in the remainder of this chapter 6 and all of chapter 7.

- 1) Stephen is predominant in the list and it states that he was “...full of faith and the Holy Spirit...” – Not only was he full of the Holy Spirit, but he was full of faith or confident in the faithfulness of God. (NOTE: In verse 8 it mentions Stephen as being “...full of faith and power...”.

- c. The only other one of the seven who we hear of again is Philip. He is seen in **chapter 8** and in **21:8**, he is referred to as an evangelist.

### 5. Verse 6 – “whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

- a. “...they laid hands on them.” - The Bible mentions that there is a “**doctrine of the laying on of hands**” which is a foundational doctrine. (cf. **Hebrews 6:1-2**).
- b. The laying on of hands is an act in which one person places his hands upon the body of another person, with some definite spiritual purpose. Normally this act is accompanied either by prayer, or by prophetic utterance, or by both. Through the laying on of hands one party imparts, or transfers, something to another. (E.g. **Gifts ; I Timothy 4:14; Healing; Mark 16:18; “...they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.” Luke 4:40; Luke 13:11-13; Acts 5:12; Acts 19:11; Acts 28:8. Baptism in the Holy Spirit; Acts 9:17; Acts 8:14-18; Acts 19:1-6**.)

### 6. Verse 7 – This verse shows the result of delegating ministry and each one doing their part.

- a. “...the word of God spread...”
- b. “...the number of the disciples multiplied...”
- c. “...a great many priests were obedient to the faith.”

<sup>8</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 417.

<sup>9</sup>Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*

<sup>10</sup>Horton, *Acts*, 135.

<sup>11</sup>Zodhiates.

<sup>12</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 126.