

ACTS CHAPTER 6

Acts chapters 6-7 center on the ministry of Stephen and the martyrdom of Stephen, a spirit-filled believer who was crowned by the Lord. There are two words for “*crown*” in the New Testament: *diadema*, which gives us the English word “*diadem*” and “*stephanos*, the victor’s crown, which gives us the popular name Stephen. The latter part of **Revelation 2:10** records Jesus saying, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*” Stephen was faithful both in life and in death and therefore, he would be a good example for present day Christians to follow. Chapters 6-7 will demonstrate Stephen was a faithful believer in four areas of ministry: 6:1-7 as a servant; 6:8-15 as a witness; 7:1-53 as a judge; and 7:54-60 as a martyr.

Vs. 1 – Even though the early church was experiencing miracles, the sharing and generosity of the church was contagious, you could think the early church was near perfect. But no church will ever be perfect until Jesus comes back again for His church; no matter how things may seem; every church has and will experience some problems. The early church was experiencing growing pains, and this was making it difficult for the Apostles to minister to everybody. The Hellenists were the Jewish people who grew up outside of Israel hence they spoke Greek. The Hebrews were Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Old Testament. Hebrews tended to regard Hellenists as unspiritual compromisers with Greek culture, and Hellenists regarded Hebrews as holier-than-thou traditionalists. There was already a natural suspicion between the two groups, and Satan tried to take

advantage of that standing suspicion by planting the seed of *divide and conquer*; and he is still doing this today. In Jewish law a woman did not receive an inheritance; she depended upon family. The early church took its responsibility to help support widows seriously because they often had no other support; but they also expected these widows to serve the church faithfully (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Vs. 2 – We see an example of wisdom exemplified by the Apostles because they had the Holy Spirit operating in them. The Apostles knew taking care of the widows was an important need; they were also careful to recognize the priorities that are placed on church leaders by God. The Apostles then and pastors today number one priority is prayer and the word for their growth and development and to feed the sheep. When Peter was restored Jesus told us the number one priority of the pastor – “feed the sheep.” A pastor should not have his time consumed in tasks that are essentially serving tables. Yet there is something wrong with a pastor who considers such work beneath him. The 12 here are the original disciples minus Judas but plus Matthias.

Vs. 3-4 – Regarding the phrase “*seek out*” - The selection process reflected the men who would serve and become what we call today “deacon” and they had to have some key attributes (read qualifications of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The Apostles received input for the solution with a lot of communication

and input from among the people. They even asked those who felt wronged, to suggest men of good character to do this work. They delegated and brought more people into doing ministry work. Meeting unmet needs is a great way to bring more people into ministry. How we address problems in ministry can lead to more people joining a ministry. Now pay close attention to the phrase in **vs. 3** “*whom we may appoint over this business.*” The final decision rested with the apostles. They asked the congregation to nominate the men (seek out from among you), but the decision really rested with the apostles. This was not an exercise of congregational government, though the apostles wisely wanted and valued the input from the congregation. Notice deacons emerge in the early church via congregational nomination but pastoral appointment and approval. *Nowhere in these verses does it say the people the congregation voted on the final appointment of the deacons).* This process teaches us if you are in a position of leadership and you find yourself overwhelmed by responsibilities, determine your God-given abilities and priorities and then find others to help. *The Biblical qualifications of deacons is found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.* The church is filled with too many people with God given gifts, but they use them primarily on their secular jobs. **Vs. 4** represents the power source of the Apostles to minister the word to the people – prayer.

Vs. 5-6 - The seven men all had Greek names, indicating that they were probably Hellenists themselves. The people (and the apostles) showed great sensitivity to the offended Hellenists by appointing Hellenists to take care of the widows' distribution. **Vs. 6** reflects the people nominated the men, and the apostles approved them by laying hands on them, after praying for God's guidance and approval. The laying of hands was not for these men to receive the Holy Spirit, because the seven men were already full of the Holy Spirit as already indicated in **vs. 3**. Instead, the laying of hands was symbolic in that the Apostles were conferring these men the responsibility of carrying out the ministry after they had prayed to God to confirm them. This principle of laying of hands goes back to the book of **Numbers 27:15-23** whereby Moses engaged in doing this.

Vs. 7 – When we are not ashamed of the Gospel, when we aim to resolve problems through prayer and supplication God is honored; He blesses and growth occurs. Growth took place because the Apostles shared the Good News. The church must adopt a “*each one reach one*” philosophy. How many of you share the Good News with unsaved people; how many of you invite unsaved people to join you for the worship and the word experience online/who starts a watch party? The text reflects even some priests were being converted which was an obvious violation of the Sanhedrin Council's

wishes and this endangered the priest's position. But they were freed from the law because Jesus had fulfilled the law. We must also understand no one can single-handedly change the world by themselves, but each one can reach one. Each one can share the Gospel in their sphere of influence, so all of our evangelism efforts are necessary and needed.

Vs. 8-10 – A local synagogue was a local place of worship, a community center, and a place for training and equipping. Tradition states a synagogue was to be established in a place that had at least 10 Jewish men. This particular group of slaves had been freed by Rome and they formed their own synagogue in Jerusalem for Hellenistic Jews from outside of Jerusalem. There is no indication that Stephen was smarter, better educated, or a better debater than these Jews. We should attribute his upper hand in the debate to the Spirit by which he spoke. The most important prerequisite of a church being a church is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the word of God being rightly divided and publicly and privately lived. It is by the power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit that people in the church exercise the gifts of God. Up to this point, it was only the Apostles who performed miracles but now God gave this power to Stephen also...Now we are to run in the lane of our spiritual giftedness, but don't ever think you are the only one capable of doing something for kingdom advancement. God can use anyone He chooses.

Vs. 11-14 – These verses prove not every synagogue (church) was established by the Lord and had His anointing or the Holy Spirit operating in it. We see resistance of the Gospel had moved from discussion to debate; from debate to slander; and now from slander to violence. The great issue was not the completed work of Jesus on the Cross but the core traditional Jewish religion (which did not include a relationship with Jesus by grace through faith voiced with a confession from our lips that Jesus is Lord and Savior). Doesn't the accusations from Stephen sound familiar? The charges were the same as was brought against Jesus in ***Matthew 26:59-61***. Regarding the phrase in **vs. 11** "*They secretly induced men to say*" - the opponents of Stephen could not win a fair fight, so they used lies and secret strategies to shape popular opinion against Stephen. The same tricks people use today to try and win the public approval (2020 election with its Trump lies of voter fraud; the states that have conducted audits have come back with more votes for Biden than the original number given at victory). In **vs. 12** when it says *they stirred up the people*" - popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that praised Jesus (***Luke 19:35-40***) soon called for His crucifixion (***Luke 23:18-23***). The crowds that loved the apostles (***Acts 2:47, 5:26***) cry out against Stephen. This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest on God's eternal Word.

Vs. 15 – It was not even necessary for Stephen to speak in order to give witness for the very glow on his face told everyone that he was a servant of God. Remember Moses’ shining face after coming off the mountain having spent time with God (**Exodus 34:29-30**). It was as though God was saying, this man is not against Moses. He is like Moses, he is My faithful servant. The phrase “*the face of an angel*” also means that Stephen was at perfect peace. His face was not filled with fear or terror, because he knew his life was in God’s hands and that Jesus never forsakes His people (**Isaiah 26:3**).