

The Acts of the Apostles

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“Organized for Service”

Acts 6:1-7

We are working our way through the Book of Acts otherwise known as The Acts of the Apostles. It is called the Acts of the Apostles because they continued the work of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke addressed his Gospel to Theophilus [lover of God] as a record of all that Jesus began to both do and teach; the former account, O Theophilus. [Acts 1:1]

The Acts of the Apostles was also written by Luke and is the continuation of what Jesus did through His Holy Spirit, beginning when the Day of Pentecost was fully come. [2:1]

When Jesus ascended to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit, as He had promised, and it is as though Jesus is still on earth as the Holy Spirit works through the apostles.

Peter and John are the main characters in the first part of Acts until Saul of Tarsus is converted from a hater of the Gospel into the Apostle Paul.

Peter preaches that Jesus of Nazareth, who was murdered by the Jews, is the promised Messiah. But Peter makes it absolutely clear that while the Jews did it with “wicked hands” and are responsible, that God was fulfilling prophecy by using their wickedness. [Acts 2:23]

“Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...”

Peter heals a man who was lame from his mother’s womb and who lay as a beggar at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, for most of his forty years. When Peter preaches about the healing of the man he invokes the prophecy of Moses; that God would raise up a Prophet from among Moses’ brethren. Jesus of Nazareth is that Prophet, the one sent from God to reveal the Truth of God.

Peter preaches in the temple that Jesus is Messiah and he and John are put in prison. They are severely beaten and commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Their answer is that they must listen to God and not to men.

The Gospel is preached and church is growing.

We saw how the church expressed its love by sharing all of their possessions. Barnabus sold some land and gave the proceeds to the church. [Acts 4:36-37]

But then Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be thought of as being generous, but they lied to the church and to the Holy Spirit, and God killed them.

Peter and John continue to preach about Jesus and the resurrection and the Sadducees, who did not believe in life after death, in angels, and certainly not in a resurrection, had Peter and John put in prison again.

In an act of great irony God sent an angel to turn them loose.

The temple guards find Peter and John back in the temple preaching Jesus and the resurrection and they are brought again before the council.

Gamaliel, a Pharisee of great reputation, comes to the defense of Peter and John and we pointed out how his arguments were based on false criteria.

- 1) Jesus is compared to a list of other men;
- 2) The criterion used to measure the truthfulness of their preaching was “success”;
- 3) Gamaliel’s advice is against Jesus Christ.

Acts 5:40-42

⁴⁰ And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

That is a rather brief recap in order to get us to Acts 6:1-7.

“Organized for Service”

Acts 6:1-7

Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 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. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

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, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

As the Gospel is preached the number of disciples was multiplying. We have looked at the generosity of the believers with material wealth share with the needy.

Things seem to be going along well with the sharing until prejudice enters the scene. Long held prejudices die hard and in future studies we will see just how difficult it was for Peter, even as a believer, to accept the fact that in the matter of being justified that God loves the Gentiles as much as He does the Jews.

It is also a fact that until the Apostle Paul was sent to the Gentiles that most Christians were Jewish. But there were Jews and Greeks in the same local church and these old prejudices are stirred.

The problem is the accusation that the Jewish Christians were favoring the Jewish widows and neglecting the Hellenists [Greek] widows.

... there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

In the wisdom of God there is a solution to be had and that is the subject of our lesson for today, getting “Organized for service.”

Before we examine our text in Chapter 6, let’s briefly review the ministries being exercised in the local church.

In Acts Chapters 2 - 5 there are four kinds of ministries to the church that are seen.

The Greek words that define these ministries are:

1) ***Kerygma*** The proclamation of the message of Jesus Christ; viz. the Gospel!

The Gospel is the message of His virgin birth, of His sinless life, of His atoning death, of His resurrection, of His ascension, and of His sending of the Holy Spirit, all according the Scripture. And that Christ died for sinners!

Who is Jesus? What did Jesus do? Why did Jesus do it?

If you can answer those three questions correctly you know the Gospel!

2) ***Didache*** The apostles' teaching aimed at producing maturity in the believers.

... they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

If whatever you call Christianity is not according to the apostles' teaching it is a false religion.

3) ***Koinonia*** Fellowship and the voluntary sharing of their lives and possessions.

4) ***Iasis*** Ministry to the sick, healing, and deliverance from evil spirits.

Then in Chapter 6 we are introduced to a fifth important ministry:

5) ***Diakonia*** Servanthood, ministry to others.

In Acts 6, we are not told specifically that this is the church office of deacon but it seems fairly obvious that is the function of the seven men who are chosen by the church to serve the church.

Here is an interesting note. The word for servant occurs 101 times in the New Testament, but only five times does it refer to the office of deacon. That shows us that the local church may set apart men to serve as deacons but every Christian is a servant in some way or other.

“We are saved to serve!”

In Acts there is a progression of Servanthood.

First, there is voluntary sharing {2:42 – 4:37}

The response to Jesus’ teaching and with the moving of the Holy Spirit over 3000 souls came to know and to love one another. As they come to know their fellow believers they learn that many of them were poor. When their needs were known they spontaneously shared their belongings. No one had to command them to help those in need.

The church grows and Acts 4:4 tells us that there were about 5,000 men in the church. That number of men expands to well over 10,000 men and women and young people. They were together every day and no one was without food or other necessities.

Second, there is a cleansing {5:1-11}

While there is genuine love and sharing, there is hypocrisy and deceit. Ananias and Sapphira try to “one-up” Barnabus with their act of generosity but in the process they lie to the church and Peter says that is the same as lying to God!

Third, they get “Organized for Service” {6:1-7}

By this time the church would be over 20,000 people. They met mostly in homes scattered around the city of Jerusalem.

Acts 6:1 tells us that the distribution of food was a “daily” activity.

Acts 2:46 tells us that they gathered “daily” in the temple and from house to house for teaching. After these daily meetings food was given to the poor.

The need for an organized Servanthood grew out of a breakdown in this system of distribution of food.

It’s bad enough to be poor but matters become worse when you are being overlooked. While miracles of healing are happening and the church is literally exploding in growth the age-old sin of prejudice rears its ugly head!

Conflict! {6:1}

There were the Hebraic Jews, born and raised in Judea; their language was Aramaic, which derives from the Hebrew.

And there were Grecian Jews, born and raised in foreign countries, that is, foreign to Judea, and their language was Greek. Greek was the “universal” language used in the Roman Empire.

The “real” Jews, those born and raised in Judea, considered themselves more “Jewish” than the foreign Jews, and this was the root of the problem that arose in the daily distribution of food.

One factor in the breakdown may have been that twelve men could not logistically supervise the work load. The apostles didn’t realize there was a problem until complaints of unfairness are voiced.

How to solve the problem

What the apostles did: {6:2-4}

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. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The apostles did five things to solve this problem:

1) They assembled the believers together [2].

An effective leader in a church will not try to resolve difficult issues by himself. He will get the counsel of other leaders and most importantly get the church at large involved. The problem of the widows being overlooked was a matter for the whole church and not just the apostles.

2) The apostles instructed the church what their role was and that they could not do everything. [2]

They were primarily gifted to study and preach the Word of God. This is not a case of them thinking they are too important to do other work it is just an acknowledgement that God gives different spiritual gifts to certain men and that others could do certain functions better than they could.

3) The apostles then instructed the church exactly how to solve the problem. [3]

4) The local church was assigned the responsibility to resolve the matter of food distribution and to choose out the men from among them who would serve them. [3]

5) The apostles agreed with the church's choices and passed the matter to the seven men chosen by the church.

What the local church did: {6:5-6}

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, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

The church readily fulfilled its responsibility. There is no evidence of trying to blame anyone or make excuses. It is noteworthy that when the seven men were chosen by the church that all seven of them had Greek names. The Hebraic Jews made sure that the Greek widows would not be slighted and the Grecian Jews accepted their responsibility to care for all of the widows.

The Seven: {6:5-6}

It is likely that the seven men were emerging as leaders and this was recognized by the church. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Philip and Steven serve in ministry beyond the distribution of food.

The title of “deacon” is not used for the seven; they are simply called “the seven.”

Without going into a detailed study of the office of deacon it may be well to be reminded of the qualifications given for deacons.

The local church has two offices: 1) Elders, bishops, pastors are all the same office and the different words describe the different functions of the same office.
2) Deacons are not required to be able to preach although many are able.

We believe that the model for church polity is elders, with plurality and equality, and deacons. One of the problems in most modern Baptist churches is that the deacons serve the function of an elder.

The typical model is a “Senior” Pastor with Deacons.
We believe the Scriptural model is a plurality of elders with deacons.
Cf. Philippians 1:1

In 1 Timothy 3 the Apostle Paul gives the qualifications for bishops and deacons.

1 Tim 3:8-13

⁸ Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. ¹¹ Likewise, *their wives must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Compare 1 Timothy with the qualifications outlined by the apostles in Acts 6.

³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

The laying on of hands: {6:6}

⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

The practice of laying on of hands stretches all the way back to the patriarchs.

The laying on of hands had the following meaning:

- 1) To bestow a blessing as when Jacob blessed Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Cf. Genesis 48:1-21
- 2) To identify with someone. The apostles expressed their approval and identification with the seven.
- 3) To commission someone for some important work.

Num 27:22-23

²² So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. ²³ And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Nelson's Bible Dictionary:

The placing of hands upon a person by a body of believers in ceremonial fashion to symbolize that person's authority or his appointment to a special task.

The practice of laying hands on someone or something occurs frequently in the Old Testament-particularly the laying of hands on the head of an animal intended for sacrifice. In the account of the ritual of the [DAY OF ATONEMENT](#), the priest laid his hands on the [SCAPEGOAT \(Lev 16:12\)](#). This probably symbolized the transferral of the sins and guilt of the people to the goat, which was taken away into the wilderness. The act of laying on of hands in the Old Testament was also associated with blessing ([Gen 48:18](#)), installation to office ([Deut 34:9](#)), and the setting apart of Levi ([Num 8:10](#)). These passages seem to express the idea of transferral of authority and quality.

In the New Testament Jesus laid his hands on children ([Matt 19:13,15](#)) and on the sick when he healed them ([Matt 9:18](#)). In the early church the laying on of hands was also associated with healing, the reception of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 9:17](#)), the setting apart of persons to particular offices and work in the church ([Acts 6:6](#)), the commissioning of Barnabas and Paul as missionaries ([Acts 13:3](#)), and the setting apart of Timothy ([1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6](#)). The ritual was accompanied by prayer ([Acts 6:6](#)).

The laying on of hands was not a magical or superstitious rite that gave a person special power. It expressed the idea of being set apart by the entire church for a special task.

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Please note that the laying on of hands did not impart the Holy Spirit to the seven, they were already full of the Spirit before they were chosen.

The results: {6:7}

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Luke tells us three things that immediately resulted from this act of getting organized for service.

- 1) The Gospel was spread.
- 2) The number of disciples continued to multiply greatly in Jerusalem.
- 3) And a great many priests were converted from Judaism to Christianity.

Brother Walter preached about harmony in the church from Philippians 4:1-3 where Paul called on Eudodia and Syntyche to get over whatever differences they had in order that the work of the Lord be not hindered.

Nothing is more disruptive in the mission to spread the Gospel than church squabbles.

My first mentor now some 40+ years ago was Quincy Caldwell. I was a new believer and I witnessed a deacon of the church lose his temper and literally curse and stomp out of the building. I was stunned!
I asked, "Can a Christian act like that?"

Brother Caldwell wisely said to me, "Jim, the church is sometimes like Noah's Ark. If it wasn't for the storm, on the outside you couldn't stand the stink on the inside."

As Brother Walter pointed out this local church is at peace. We went through a bad spell over a decade ago but we survived by the mercy of God and there is any unrest I am not aware of it.

If and when an issue arises may the Lord Jesus give us His Holy Spirit in the same measure that He did in that early church with Hebrew and Greek widows.

Incorporate these notes on verse 7

Acts 6:1-7

What was the result? The blessing of God continued and increased! The church was still unified ([Acts 6:5](#)), multiplied ([Acts 6:7](#)), and magnified ([Acts 6:8](#)). [Acts 6:7](#) is one of several "summaries" found in the book statements that let us know that the story has reached an important juncture (see [Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:12-16; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:31](#)). In [Acts 6:7](#), Dr. Luke describes the climax of the ministry in Jerusalem, for the persecution following Stephen's death will take the Gospel to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles. It has been estimated that there were 8,000 Jewish priests attached to the temple ministry in Jerusalem, and "a great company" of them trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour!

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Acts 6:5

And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith - a phrase implying that the believing reception of the Gospel is an act of obedience, and if so, surely it is the highest. (See [John 6:29](#): compare [Rom 1:5; 16:20](#); and see the note at [Rom 2:8](#).) This accession of a great multitude of the priests was the crowning triumph of the Gospel, whose peaceful prosperity was now at its greatest height. For, after Stephen's teaching and trial made it clear that the sacerdotal interests could not stand with the Gospel, such priestly accessions became rare indeed.

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Acts 6:5

[Were obedient to the faith] The word "faith" here is evidently put for the "Christian religion." Faith is one of the main requirements of the gospel ([Mark 16:16](#)), and by a figure of speech is put for the gospel itself. To become "obedient to the faith," therefore, is to obey the requirements of the gospel, particularly what requires us to "believe." Compare [Rom 10:16](#). By the accession of the "priests" also no small part of the reproach would be taken away from the gospel, that it made converts only among the lower classes of the people. Compare [John 7:48](#).

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