

The seed of the Gospel is sowed in many ways by many means. It is sometimes sown by unworthy men and women. It is often mixed with bad seed. Sometimes it is sown for envy and strife. But it is the seed that produces the harvest, no matter how it is sown. The seed of the Gospel is good, no matter how it is sown. But Jesus said the ground must be prepared. If the soil is bad, the good seed will not bring forth fruit. The Aquila Report I read this morning speaks to that truth; that the preparation of the hearer is more important than the preparation of the sower. I have been edified by bad sermons when my heart was prepared to receive the word.

I begin meditation on a passage of Scripture weeks before I preach on it. When going through Acts, I have read through the book a number of times, to make certain that what I say on a particular chapter fits the whole context of what Luke wrote. That meditation becomes intense in the week before I preach on a particular passage, before I write the sermon. I want my thoughts to be fresh and sharp and relevant; I do not always succeed, but I work hard at it.

I wonder if I should ask how many of you have read Acts 6 before you came to church this morning and mediated on it. You knew generally where I would be preaching this morning; did you prepare and bring something with you to the worship of the Lord? I don't say this to cause shame, but to stir you up. People prepare more for going on a picnic than they prepare for the worship of the Lord and hearing the Word of God. Our hearts are naturally hardened toward God; grace changes our hearts, but we are also commanded to [Hos. 10:12] "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

Let me read, now, the passage before us in our sermons on Acts. This week it is 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. 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. 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. 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 of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: 6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them. 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. 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 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. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. 11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God. 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, 13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 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. 15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." (Ac 6:1-15)

There are several things I would like to say concerning this passage:

- I. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in the Building of the Church.
- II. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in the Increasing of the Word.
- III. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in Faith and Power.

Introduction: At the start of this chapter we had two distinct groups in the church: the apostles and the multitude. At the end of this chapter we had three distinct groups in the church: the apostles, the deacons, the multitude. This was by the appointment of God. As a great building or as a great living plant, the church would grow in complexity and size. This was as it should be, and the Lord would direct everything from Heaven by His word and Spirit.

The apostles had already directed the church in the appointment of one to take the place of Judas, and Peter gave the biblical support for that before Pentecost, for the Lord Jesus even then was directing the structure of the church and preparing the soil for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that there be no lack in the needs of the church.

- I. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in the Building of the Church.
 - A. Jesus had said that he would build His church. He also said that the kingdom of God would be like a mustard seed that was the smallest of seeds yet would become a large plant; he also said that the church would be like leaven cast into the dough until it was all leavened. All of this implies growth and development.
 - B. This growth would be in numbers, in government, in doctrine.
 - 1. Rapid growth had been known already, but an explosion would soon take place that would take the gospel to the whole world and not just thousands, but millions and millions would hear and believe the Gospel among all nations.
 - 2. This huge expansion would require government and councils and gifts of the Spirit beyond what they had yet experienced. Paul speaks of some of these in 1 Cor. 12:28, 29 even in the early days of the church: "apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, governments, tongues, interpretation," and there are other lists in other scriptures: none of the lists are identical, for the gifts would be given to meet the needs, just as it happened in Acts 6; God provided for the needs of the church.
 - 3. The three main categories still exist today: The ministry of the word of elders and ministers; the deacons that serve the congregation in material things; the congregation. These have developed in different ways in the various nations where the Gospel has gone: the people of God; the physical needs; the spiritual needs.
 - C. The Apostles took the lead in the appointment of Deacons; but the congregation nominated and approved of them and they were ordained by the Apostles.
 - 1. This was not because the Apostles were too good to wait tables, but they knew what their role was in the church and delegated this business to others.

2. Prayer and the ministry of the word is not for lazy people or prideful people, for it is the hardest work of all, if done rightly.
 3. The servants of the congregation were to have honest reputations, be filled with the Spirit and wisdom: implying that not everyone in the congregation had these traits. The bible knows nothing of democratic socialism in economics or things of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are not given equally.
- D. So the church was built and the structure of the church begins to be seen.
- II. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in the Increasing of the Word.
- A. Colossians 1:3-6: "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:
 1. Your Faith in Jesus Christ
 2. The Love you have to all the Saints
 3. The hope laid up for you in heaven.
 - B. Calvin: "The Word of God is said to grow two manner of ways; either when new disciples are brought to obey the same, or as every one of us profiteth and goeth forward therein..." This would mean in extent and in doctrine.
 - C. Everyone had his part to play in this: There were no nonessential parts: as in the healthy and fully functioning body.
 1. The apostles: giving themselves to the ministry of the Word of God and prayer.
 2. The deacons: that the church be not distracted by controversy.
 3. The multitude: the godly living, faithful witness, loving and encouraging one another.
 - D. Verse 7: even a great number of priests, bringing their knowledge and education and influence into the church. What humility, in submitting to the apostles' doctrine; although this might have caused trouble later, for they probably brought their prejudices into the church also. But that would be dealt with later.
- III. The servants, the ministers, the multitude in Faith and Power.
- A. It is any wonder that God blessed His people with Faith and Power?
 - B. Stephen the Deacon did signs and wonders and gave witness to the faith. Wisdom and knowledge were not the function of the Apostles alone, for these things are found n abundance among the people of God when God is working in faith and power.
 - C. The opposition: Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicia, Asia. A great many parties among the Jew joined to resist Stephen and his witness.
 1. These were of the "Synagogue of the Libertines" Maybe these were free citizens of Rome who had come to live in Palestine to learn of the Jews, and had built themselves a synagogue in which to learn.
 2. It is common for those who are proselytes to a faith to become very zealous in defense of their new faith. So those who were thinking of becoming Jews might be

very zealous to defend what had learned from apostate priests, and turn their new learning against Christ.

3. They could not stand before Stephen, however. Their masters could not stand before Stephen's master; and they could not stand before Stephen. This infuriated them.
- D. Having lost the argument, they turned to false witness, and stirred up the unbelievers in Jerusalem with the scribes and elders.
 1. So Stephen appeared before the council as the apostles before him had.
 2. They misinterpreted Stephen's words, just as the Jews had slandered His master.
 - a. Christ was accused of saying He could build the temple in three days.
 - b. Stephen is accused of saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and change Moses. So we know what Stephen was preaching.

Application:

1. The church will prosper if each of us are content and zealous to play the role that God has given us to play. He is the master builder and the author of gifts and callings.
2. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of order and decency; the church is a building with many parts; an organism with a common life; a family, a household; a temple; a holy nation; a royal priesthood. No one figure exhausts the meaning.
3. The Spirit of Faith and Power is given by the will of God to each member of the church according to the gifts assigned to that person.
 - a. Faith: complete submission to Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth.
 - b. Power: the ability to do the work that is assigned.
 - c. You will fit somewhere in one of these categories: servant to the congregation in earthly things; ministry of the word of God; As a member: godly living, faithful witness, loving and encouraging one another; doing good to all men, especially the household of faith. There is plenty for you to do; if you meditate and pray and look around you.
 - d. None of these categories are static; for people move from congregation to office; from one office to another; out of office either by God or by the will of the spiritual council or congregation, according to the constitution.
 - e. Faithfulness is in short supply. Those who are faithful in a little will be given more. Those who are unfaithful will have taken from them even that which they have. And so it is.
 - f. Sometimes the most fruitful in the church are those who receive the least attention, for they serve humble and meekly before the Lord and are a joy and encouragement to those who get attention.

May God bless you. Amen and Amen.