

Outline

1. Choosing men to serve
 1. Issue of distribution among widows
 1. This was a “problem” related to growth (“when the number of the disciples was multiplying” – Acts 6:1)
 2. Hellenist Christians thought their widows neglected in the daily distribution.
 2. Possible problems presented
 1. Accusation of favoritism toward the Apostles
 2. Necessity of laying aside what was important to deal with that of lesser significance
 3. Solution presented
 1. The congregation was to select seven men
 1. “of good reputation”
 2. “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”
 3. “whom we may appoint over this business”
 2. Seven chosen
 1. Only 2 are given some characteristic
 1. Stephen (“full of faith and the Holy Spirit”)
 2. Nicolas (“a proselyte”)
 2. The Apostles
 1. prayed and laid their hands on them
 2. continued in prayer and the ministry of the word
 4. Result
 1. The word of God spread
 2. Continued growth
 3. Many of the priests now also begin to believe
2. Stephen accused
 1. The man described

1. “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:3)
2. “full of faith and power” (Acts 6:8)
3. Evidently able to perform miracles (“did great wonders and signs among the people”)
2. Dispute with the “Synagogue of the Freedmen”
 1. Unable to refute Stephen
 2. They resorted to lying
 3. Had Stephen arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin

Commentary

What we see here is possibly some formalization of the efforts mentioned in passages such as Acts 2:44-45 and to the money “laid at the Apostles’ feet” in Acts 4:34-35. Neither text limits itself to only widows although, by this point, widows were likely the major recipients of the funds collected.

While the text does not directly show alignment with the qualifications laid forth in 1 Timothy 5:9-16, the overall spirit would tend toward these being the types of widows who were in desperate need. This would also lend strength to the need causing the complaint to arise. Those who had widows to care for were already doing so.

The text also fully indicates the scope of the recipients of the help rendered. The assistance was not being offered to all the widows of Jerusalem, but the widows among the disciples.

While the apostles condone the work of caring for these widows, it is important to note that there is a more important work. They were unwilling to “leave the word of God” to see fully to this need. This should set the proper tone for understanding what the church does. While it is good and proper for the church to see to the physical needs of the destitute among its membership, it cannot lay aside its primary purpose (the spreading the word of God) to do so.

The seven men all have Greek names. However, this does not mean that there were no

Hebrews among them. Some men, such as Saul/Paul, had both Hebrew and Greek names. While it is likely that all seven were Greek, we are certain of only one of them (Nicolas the proselyte).

In the accusation lodged against Stephen, we can see a parallel to the charge against Jesus.

1. Jesus: Matthew 26:61 (“But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’ ”)
2. Stephen: Acts 6:14 (“for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”)

Thought Questions

Consider the following questions:

1. What does Acts 6 teach us about the work of the church?
2. What would have prevented the men selected to take care of the daily distribution from displaying bias against the Hebraic women?
3. If Stephen was selected to handle the work of the distribution in Acts 6:5, why is he preaching to the “Synagogue of the Freedmen” in Acts 6:8?
4. What parallels can you find between the beginning of the trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:57-60; Mark 14:55-59) and the beginning of Stephen’s trial?
5. What is the point of telling us that Stephen’s face was “as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15)?