

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #234

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 6

Deacons are appointed.

1. 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.
8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

The Jewish people have always felt responsible for the poor and downtrodden, for the widow and the orphan. According to Barclay, every Friday they would pass a collection basket around the market place and at private homes, where the people would give either money or goods. Later in the day they would distribute these goods among the poor. Those who were temporarily out of work or sick received enough to keep them going, and those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for 2 meals a day for 14 days.

The Christians had continued this custom, but there was a slight problem. There were two sets of Jews: the local Jerusalem and Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and who prided themselves on being “pure” Jews who had no foreign influence, and the Jews from foreign countries who spoke Greek. The Aramaic Jews looked down on the foreigners. The complain was that the Greek speaking Jews were being neglected-possibly deliberately-by the Aramaic Jews. The Apostles felt that they were to give their time in studying the Word and decided that a group of deacons could solve the problem so as not to tie them up.

Notice that the Apostles did not appoint these men. They allowed the people to choose the deacons, but the Apostles validated the people’s choices by praying over the deacons and laying hands on them and thus ordaining them. 1st Timothy 5:22 which says to lay hands suddenly on no man is talking about ordination, not praying for people. I would, however, be careful whom I prayed with and whom I allowed to pray with myself by the laying on of hands, as I have seen people pick up negative spirits through this process.

Later we are told in 1st Timothy 3, what the qualifications of deacons should be:

- a. Must be a believer, not an outsider
- b. Must have good character and reputation inside and outside the church
- c. Must be full of the Holy Spirit
- d. Must be full of wisdom
- e. Must be reverent
- f. Must not be double-minded or two-faced
- g. Must not be a drunkard
- h. Must not be greedy for money
- i. Must have a clear conscious
- j. Must be proven first and not a novice
- k. Must be above reproach and blameless
- l. Must have a wife who is full of reverence too
- m. Must not be a gossip or slanderer
- n. Must have self-control
- o. Must be faithful
- p. Must be able to rule his own house
- q. Must be the husband of one wife

The Difference between Elders and Deacons (Kevin Conner)

- a. Elders were chosen and ordained by the Apostles. Deacons were chosen by the people and ordained by the Apostles.
- b. Elders were chosen to rule. Deacons were chosen to serve.

(Note: We have been wrongly taught that women were not to serve in the office of deacon and in the five fold ministry offices. Paul himself, for example, recognizes Phebe as a deaconess, and there are many examples in scripture of 1st Century Church women leaders.)

This passage ends with an exciting fact. Many of the priests were turning to Jesus as the Messiah. No doubt they had been deeply affected by the tearing of the veil of the temple and knew the stories on the streets of Jesus being resurrected and walking on the streets. It seems that finally they were getting it, but there is almost always dust stirred up when God's people began to get it, as we see in the next passage of scripture.

Stephen is brought before the Council.

9. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia, and Asia), disputing with Stephen.
10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.
11. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."
12. And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.
13. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.
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."
15. And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

The Jews knew that they were the chosen people of God, but they misunderstood why God had chosen them. They thought that His choosing meant that they were to have special privileges. They thought that the Lord had no use for other nations. According to Barclay, at their best they thought Gentiles were created to be their servants. At their worst they believed Gentiles were created to be fuel for the fires of hell. They did not realize that being chosen meant that they were chosen to bring all nations and peoples to relationship with the One True God, which the Jews enjoyed.

They could not understand that Jesus came not only for the lost sheep of Israel but also for *other sheep I have which are not of this fold* (John 10:16). We have not yet gotten to the scriptures, which deal with the opening of the Gospel message to the Gentiles, but this passage of scripture foreshadows this. The Jews, in this case those foreign Jews, came against Stephen because of the Christian message. They were exactly right that Jesus would change the customs, which Moses taught, not because these former customs were wrong, but because there was a new covenant under Jesus.

No doubt these foreign Jews were motivated by jealousy and envy. Try as they may, however, they could not trip Stephen up so they resorted to what many do when they cannot get their way: they lied, either not knowing or not caring the high disdain the Lord has for lying.

Here we are back at the Council again. This is the third time the Christians have been brought before the Council since the Day of Pentecost. This time Stephen had touched on two of the most sacred things to the Jew: the Temple and the Law. Stephen had been preaching the words of Jesus where He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Stephen was trying to emphasize that God did not dwell exclusively in any temple made by human hands, and wanted to save the whole world instead of just those who practiced their religion in Jerusalem at the temple. This greatly angered them. Yet they could all see that his face glowed like an angels.

Without Him
Mylon LeFevre

Without Him, I could do nothing. Without Him I'd surely fail.
Without Him, I would be drifting like a ship without a sail.

Without Him I could be dying. Without Him I'd be enslaved.
Without Him life would be hopeless, but with Jesus, thank God, I'm saved.

CHORUS
Jesus, O Jesus,
Do you know Him today?
You can't turn Him away.
O Jesus, O Jesus,
Without Him how lost I would be.