

## The First Deacons and the First Martyr (Acts 6:1 - Acts 7:60)

### I. Introduction

#### A. *This Week in Clear Living*

1. Seven men were selected to administer care for widows
2. Stephen was arrested due to false accusations
3. Stephen preached to the Sanhedrin
4. Jewish leaders stoned Stephen

**Question:** Why did the first church have seven deacons?

#### B. The widows in the early church had needs that seemed to require more attention than the apostles could provide.

1. In verse 1, a dispute had arisen among the Grecians against the Hebrews.
  - a. Grecians (*Hellenistes*) - Greek-speaking Jews
  - b. This disagreement represents another form of defection in the early church. According to Dr. J. Vernon McGee, Ananias and Sapphira had also defected from the common good of all.
  - c. The Grecians complained because their widows were not being treated fairly.
  - d. *This is a clear example that their socialistic lifestyle was not working.*
2. In verse 2, the apostles said that their time would be better spent ministering the word than in trying to settle such disputes.
  - a. The same Greek word is used in verse 1 for "ministration" and in verse 2 for "serve".
  - b. *Diakoneo* - to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, or to wait upon.
  - c. Word (*logos*) of God - what someone has said, the sayings of God, the Old Testament prophecy given by the prophets.
3. Remember that the New Testament had not been written, so the apostles were devoting their time to the study of the Old Testament with the Holy Spirit as their Instructor.
4. *Notice the similarity between what the apostles did and what Moses had done when in a similar position.*
5. Exodus 18:21-22 says, "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee."
6. Tables (*trapeza*) - a table on which food is placed or the table or stand of a money changer, where he sits, exchanging different kinds of money for a fee (*agio*), and paying back with interest loans or deposits.
7. In a socialistic regime, someone must distribute to the people.

## **The First Deacons and the First Martyr (Acts 6:1 - Acts 7:60)**

- C. In Acts 6:3, the apostles instructed the people concerning the selection of men to help with the serve the bank.
1. Men (***aner***) - with reference to sex, of a betrothed or future husband, any male, or ***used generically of a group of both men and women.***
  2. They were to be:
    - a. Of honest report
    - b. Full of the Holy Ghost
    - c. Full of wisdom
    - d. They were to be used for the daily distribution of the goods.
  3. In Acts 6:4, the apostles would be engaged in prayer and ministering the word.
    - a. Ministry (***diakonia***) - to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, or to wait upon.
    - b. This is the same word that was translated "ministration" in verse 1 and "serve" in verse 2.
    - c. The apostles met the spiritual needs of the church, and the deacons met the daily physical needs of the church.
- D. ***Diakonia*** is also the word used in I Timothy 3:8 and following for the word "deacon". In that passage, the qualifications for a deacon are:
1. Husband of one wife - this does not refer to divorce. The phrase is talking about polygamy.
  2. They must rule their children and household well.
  3. They must be grave (***semnos*** - honest, venerable)
  4. They must not be double-tongued.
  5. They must not be greedy.
  6. They must hold the mysteries of the faith in pure conscience.
- E. ***Can a woman be a deacon?***
1. Husbands of one wife - In I Timothy 3:12, Paul used the same Greek word for husbands (***aner***) that Luke used in Acts 6:3. ***That word can refer to men, or it can be used generically to mean a group of both men and women.***
  2. Wife (***gune***) - a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow.
  3. It would seem that Paul's use of the word "wife" restricts his use of the word "husabands" to men ONLY.
  4. However, ***Romans 16:1-2*** says, "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a ***servant of the church*** which is at Cenckrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and ***that ye assist her*** in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a ***succourer*** of many, and of myself also."
    - a. Servant (***diakonos***) - this is the same word that was translated "ministration" in Acts 6:1, "serve" in Acts 6:2, and "deacon" in I Timothy 3:8 and following.
    - b. ***The bottom line, whether people like it or not, is that the Apostle Paul recognized Phoebe as a deaconess in the church at Cenckrea.***

## **The First Deacons and the First Martyr (Acts 6:1 - Acts 7:60)**

- c. Succourer (*prostatis*) - a woman set over others, a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources.
5. However, I Corinthians 14:34-35 says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."
  - a. When we study the Bible, we must decide when something is cultural or transcultural.
  - b. Cultural means that the passage was written to specific group of people or person for a specific moment in time (Deuteronomy 22:5 and Deuteronomy 22:11).
  - c. Transcultural means that the passage was written to all people for all time (Romans 10:13).
6. **My position on women serving as deacons:** I believe that the Lord first calls men to many of a church's leadership positions. However, when He cannot find a qualified or willing man, then He will use a woman that is willing and qualified (Deborah (Judges 4:1-24) and Huldah (II Kings 22:14-15)).
7. **My position on women serving as pastors:** I Timothy 3:2 uses the same wording for husband of one wife that I Timothy 3:12 used. But an example of a woman pastor is not present in the New Testament to expand that office to women. I believe that the Lord first calls men to be pastors, and I cannot find any instances where He has called a woman.
8. **My position on women serving as evangelists:** Evangelists are different than pastors. They do not have authority. They simply preach the Word, so I think that the calling of women to that position does not go against Scriptures.

**Question:** Why was Stephen taken prisoner? What did he tell the council when he was before them?

- II. In Acts 6:5, seven deacons were chosen.
  - A. At this time, the size of the church is between 7,000 (Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:4) and 25,000 people.
    1. Only seven deacons were chosen for that large number.
    2. Some churches have many deacons considering the size of their congregations.
    3. In Acts 6:6, the apostles laid hands on the deacons.
      - a. Dr. McGee wrote that laying on hands did not indicate a flow of power from the Lord.

## **The First Deacons and the First Martyr (Acts 6:1 - Acts 7:60)**

- b. Instead, it symbolically showed that a person had been set aside for service or partnership with the apostles.
- c. His suggestion of that symbolism was based on the Old Testament Leviticus sacrifices.
4. The result of all of this is that the church continued to grow.
- B. In Acts 6:8-15, Stephen performed many miracles and did great wonders among the people.
  1. As with the apostles, opposition soon arose.
  2. False charges were lodged against him, and he was arrested.
  3. Verse 15 says that the members of the council looked on him and saw his face as though it was that of an angel.
- C. In Acts 7:1-50, Stephen defended himself by telling the council about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and Solomon.
  1. Matthew 10:17-20 says, "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for *it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*"
  2. The council listened and all seemed to be going well.
- D. In Acts 7:51-54, he suddenly directed his remarks to their ungodly, rebellious attitude.
  1. He called them stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.
  2. He told them that they had refused the Holy Ghost, just as their fathers.
  3. He reminded them that their fathers had killed the prophets.
  4. He told them that they had killed the Just One (Jesus), which was the same thing that Peter and John had so often done.
  5. He told them that they had not kept the law.
- E. His words were more than they could take.
  1. In verses 55-56, he told them that he could see the glory of God and Jesus in heaven, and that caused them to go crazy.
  2. In verses 57-58, they cast him out of the city and stoned him.
  3. Saul of Tarsus was part of that lynch mob.
  4. In verses 59-60, Stephen was martyred, but in his parting breath he asked that his killers not be condemned for their evil act against him.

## The First Deacons and the First Martyr (Acts 6:1 - Acts 7:60)

**Question:** Do you think the Holy Spirit was leading him or not? If so, then why was he killed?

### III. Stephen was not acting alone.

- A. Acts 6:8 says, "And Stephen, *full of faith and power*, did great wonders and miracles among the people."
- B. He may have thought that he could preach before the council as Peter and John had, but no evidence exists to support that view.
  1. He was full of faith and power, and he did exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted him to do.
  2. Matthew 10:17-20 was true in his life. He said what the Holy Spirit wanted him to say.
  3. He could have tempered his message or try to reason with the council, but the Holy Spirit was in total control.
    - a. When Stephen spoke to them, he said what Jesus would have said to them.
    - b. Jesus never held back when He preached to the scribes and Pharisees.
- C. When Stephen died, he showed fellow church members that a cost is sometimes involved when one follows the Lord.
  1. Matthew 16:24-25 says, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."
  2. Matthew 5:45 says, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

**Question:** Did any members of the council repent as a result of his message? What prominent person oversaw Stephen's execution?

### IV. Stephen's death was not in vain.

- A. Acts 7:58 says, "And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."
- B. At that time, Saul was vehemently opposed to Christians, but Stephen's death probably contributed greatly to Saul's conversion.
- C. Saul of Tarsus probably did more to let the Holy Spirit build the church through him than any other person of that time.

### V. Next week's lesson: "Philip's Work and Saul's Conversion" (Acts 8:1 - Acts 9:43).