

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 20 | ACTS 5:40-6:7

ACTS 5:21-42 | TEMPLE OPPOSITION

- Verses 21-28 – see session 18
- Verse 29-39 – see session 19
- Verse 40 –
 - One should not be terribly impressed by Gamaliel's advice considering that the result was still that the apostles were **beaten** and **commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus**. So though the Temple officials **let them go** they did not *let them free*.
 - Historical note: all theocracies prohibit religious freedoms. John Calvin presided over the deaths of several "heretics" because of the theocracy he created. Theocracy cannot accept "heresy." Theocracy is *not* God's plan for government in our day.
- Verse 41 - Later, Peter would instruct his followers to rejoice upon persecution - 1 Peter 4:16.
- Verse 42 –
 - Once again take note that the Apostles are still **daily in the temple**, something that would not be allowed for those who had rejected the Law.
 - The phrase **in every house** can, in the Greek, simply mean, *at home*.
 - A word about the beginning of the "church."
 - If teaching and preaching Jesus Christ is the distinguishing mark of the church, it has clearly begun.
 - If the arrival of the Holy Ghost is the distinguishing mark of the church, it has also clearly begun.
 - If the distinguishing mark of the church is acceptance of the gift of eternal life by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law, there has been no mention of it.
 - It is possible to say that the *church* has begun but the *age of grace* has not.

ACTS 6:1-7 | THE MINISTRY OF SERVICE

- Verse 1 –
 - Luke does not give a clear indication of the meaning of **those days**, but it would be outside the normal scope of words for the time frame to be far removed from the previously mentioned events.
 - As with any large crowd of people, a **murmuring** can quickly arise. In this case, it was **the Grecians against the Hebrews**.
 - Note that **Grecians** were Jews, but of a hellenistic thinking and background as opposed to a Hebrew background.
 - The Greek word is Ἑλληνιστής [hellenistes]. From Oxford English Dictionary: "A person who used the Greek language and was influenced by Greek culture, although not a native Greek; *spec.* a Jewish person of the Diaspora, who used the Septuagint and the Greek language in the synagogue (opposed to a *Hebraist*)"
 - The **daily ministrations** were the care of all the group - see Acts 2:44-45. The **widows** of the group were most likely to be overlooked.
- Verse 2 –
 - Note that **the twelve** had the position of leadership, and were distinguished from **the disciples**.
 - The apostles argued that to **leave the word of God** in order to **serve tables** had no desirable **reason** (i.e.: not justifiable).
 - We have not been told who had been doing the work of serving tables up to this point, but surely it was not **the twelve**. Now they state plainly that they are not going to do this service.

- While there is doubtless application for the modern pastor, one should beware of making this a basis for a pastor's refusal to do "table serving" kind of ministry. There is a general principle, however, that the ministry of the Word is the pastor's primary task.
- Verse 3 –
 - Note that **murmuring** (v. 1) was not condemned (as is too often the case) but was rather quickly addressed, and the apostles (who were clearly in charge) did not create another problem by solving the problem at hand.
 - If indeed these **seven men** were the prototype of deacons, then they were selected to be **over this business**. The modern church wants to prohibit deacons from business-related activities (a move typically promoted by the Pastor, who prefers to do the **business** himself, and thus **leave the word of God, and serve tables** (v. 2)).

*"...the Deacon is not to be involved in **any** church decisions regarding the governing of the local church. Nowhere in the Bible are they shown to make any leadership decisions determining the direction of the church. It is very clear they are ones that "serve tables"; i.e., they are the workers, not the overseers of a local church. ...Church after church has been destroyed allowing Deacons to make leadership decisions for a church. According to the Bible only the Pastor is called by God to lead the local church. ...the Deacon has **zero** business in church decisions according to God's Word. Deacons should follow the leadership of the Pastor and if they do not like his decisions, as with anyone in the church, they can simply leave."*¹
 - Since there were only **seven men** it is likely that **this business** was the business of making sure that the particular problem at hand was solved and the Grecian widows were no longer **neglected in the daily ministrations** (v. 1). Due to the size of the overall group of believers, it is unlikely that the seven were in charge of the daily distribution for all people (which must have already had a system that was mostly working).
- Verse 4 -
 - How could the apostles have been meeting all the needs of this "Jerusalem congregation" to this point? Quite simply, there is nothing in the book of Acts thus far that shows this movement to be a "local church" with all of its functions. There was likely little (if any) scheduled programming, organizational structure, facility preparation and upkeep, etc. In short, the apostles were not "pastors" of a church.
 - It was their desire to give themselves **continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word**. Note that **the word** was the word of the Kingdom and its King, Jesus Christ, based on the Hebrew Scriptures. At this point, there was no "New Testament" in any form.
- Verse 5-6 –
 - The "movement" that was taking place had clear apostolic leadership, but even the apostles themselves were not *dictatorial*. Rather, **the whole multitude** seems to have given assent in some manner and was **pleased with the saying** (which was clearly a *recommendation* and not a command).
 - In some sort of congregational manner, **they chose** (that is, the congregation, not the apostles) the seven men. All seven names are Grecian. From what we know of **Stephen** and **Philip**, the only two of whom we have any further information, they are clearly holding strongly to their Jewish faith. We are told that **Nicolas is a proselyte of Antioch**, that is, a convert to the Jewish faith.
 - While the congregation selected the men, **the apostles** are the ones who *ordained* them by prayer and the laying on of hands (for more information on the laying on of hands, see Acts 13:3, 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:6).
- Verse 7 – Clearly the movement has plenty of strength and is not hindered by small problems. It is a focused movement, not an organization, not a "church" as we understand the term. At this point the movement remains **in Jerusalem** and has not yet spread beyond. It is so successful that even **a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith**. These were Jewish priests, presumably both *before* and *after* their faith that Jesus was the risen Lord and coming Messiah.

¹ <http://thomastaylorministries.org/blog/biblical-church-government-role-deacon/>