

Acts Part 16 – Full of Faith, Spirit, and Power

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, December 23, 2015

† Acts 6:1-8

- 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 ministrations.
- 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.

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 ministrations.

As the church began to grow (the Bible says they multiplied) folks began to murmur. Isn't that what happens when you get a large number of people together? You can't please everybody and eventually somebody is going to start murmuring.

Grecians against the Hebrews. You have to understand the social classes we are dealing with here. The Grecians were from outside of Palestine, they were not Hebrews and they were often looked down upon by the Hebrews. Now some of these Grecians may have been Gentiles that become Jewish in their beliefs but probably the majority of them were Jews that were born and dwelt in Greece and spoke the Greek language. They are complaining that the Hebrew widows were getting preferential treatment and that their widows were being neglected. Perhaps this was the case or perhaps they just felt like that was the case. Either way they start complaining to the Apostles about it.

Neglected in the daily ministrations: Remember that folks were bringing their money and goods and laying them at the Apostles feet. So all of the wealth and goods were going to a general fund. Then the general fund would be used to distribute among the people in need, starting with the widows. Widows are always given first priority because they are the most vulnerable. You may recall over in the Book of James, he says: **James 1:27: Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.**

Obviously the Greeks felt their widows were being neglected so they are upset about it.

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.

Now we see some of the first organization in the Church. The Apostles were called to preach, not to do everything else. The single most important function of the Church is that the Word of God is preached and taught. Without preaching and teaching there is no need for the rest. So, they decide to appoint some men to take care of serving the Church. These men that were called are not necessarily deacons as we would consider the office of deacon. Many people preach and teach that this was the calling of deacons but there are many more qualifications necessary to fill the position of deacon than what is given here. See 1 Timothy 3:8-13 for the qualifications of a deacon. Certainly this was an early model for a deacon. Also, we know from Scripture that Stephen and Philip were considered evangelists and not deacons.

You can believe these were the first deacons if you want to. It doesn't matter to me. It's not something to get all hung up on. I just know the Bible does not call them deacons and it does not list all of the qualifications of a deacon as given later in Scripture and Stephen and Phillip did a lot more than hold the office of a deacon.

These men had to be honest and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. The Apostles would stay busy doing the most important work of the Church and that was praying and preaching the Word of God. This should also be the Pastor's top priority in the Church today. Too many people assume that the Church pays the Pastor to do all of the work, but that is not why a Pastor is paid. Pastors are paid because the Bible instructs the Church to pay the Pastor. There are several verses in the Bible related to paying the person that preaches the Gospel but I'll give you two verses concerning that: **1 Timothy 5:17-18: Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.**

1 Corinthians 9:14: Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

So, the Church doesn't pay the Pastor to do all the work, the Church pays the Pastor because it is Biblical and to allow the man of God to be able to do the work in which God has called him to do.

Now, of course I work a full-time job outside of the Church so that I do not burden the Church with keeping me and my family up. Just like the Apostle Paul who made his living sewing tents, I am a bi-vocational pastor. This allows me to not only make a living to support my family but also the tithe that I give to the Church enables the Church to further the Gospel. It is my desire one day to be able to retire from secular work and Pastor full-time. If the Lord allows that to happen then so be it. If not then I am satisfied with the way things are now.

The 1st Century Church pastors devoted their time to prayer and preaching the Word of God. So they appoint others to serve in the Church where needed.

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.

The main requirement for these men were that they be filled with the Spirit. There were some that were obviously Spirit filled men there and those were chosen. The Bible mentions 7 men all together. This is where some folks believe that there should be 7 deacons in a Church, but again, this isn't specifically the calling of "deacons" and just because there were 7 mentioned doesn't mean that is the requirement.

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.

Notice that when the word of God increases, the number of disciples multiplied. The word disciple here is not referring to the 12 but to those that followed Jesus in faith. I also see something in this verse that you can guarantee was troubling to the non-believing Jews, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees... "**a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.**" Wow, how this must have really angered those Pharisees that suddenly their priests were now defecting over to the Christian faith. Friends, this is going to cause a great disturbance.

Anytime God starts working, the devil starts working too. You can guarantee when things start going good when everybody is getting along, when things are getting accomplished, the devil is going to disrupt. He can't help it, that's his job, that's what he does. The sad part is that in order for the devil to disrupt he has to work through a willing vessel. May that willing vessel for the devil never be you friend...

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

Underline those words "full of faith and power." I want us to look closely at this and learn a great truth. There are many things that people can be full of. Full of envy, full of wrath, full of hatred, full of jealousy, full of bitterness, full of sadness, full of malice, full of evil, and the list goes on and on.

But what about Stephen? First of all in verse 5 the Bible says that Stephen was **full of faith and of the Holy Ghost**. The verse we just read said that he was **full of faith and power**. In Acts Chapter 7 and verse 55 the Bible says that he was **full of the Holy Ghost**. From the first mention of Stephen to the very last we see that he was a full man. Full of spirit, power, and the Holy Ghost.

Wow, what it must be like to be remembered as one that was full of faith and power. Friends, without faith we have no power. Without faith we can't do great wonders. Without faith, we can't lead others to Christ. Without faith our testimony is useless. Stephen was a man full of faith and power and because of this he was able to do great wonders and miracles.

The Bible doesn't say that Stephen was full of good looks and fancy words. Those are not the attributes that made him stand out amongst the crowd, no, it was his faith and power. Some people get hung up on looks. They think a preacher ought to look a certain way. He ought to be tall, dark, and handsome with a million dollar

smile. Ladies you need to put your romance books away. Some of the best preachers I know are short, fat, and ugly. Praise God I'm one of them! It was Stephens's faith and power that he was recognized for.

In order for us to be filled with the Spirit, we first have to empty ourselves of the clutter that is already there.

I was listening to a preacher one time, Allen Redpath, he is an Irish preacher. He told of a lady that he knew back in Ireland that decided to hold a cottage prayer meeting in her home. She invited her next door neighbor, who was of a different faith than she was, to attend. Oh no, the lady said, I'm not allowed to attend. So she held a meeting and the next day her neighbor asked her from across the fence how many people she had in attendance. The lady said oh we had a wonderful crowd of 27, my house was full you should come next week. Oh no the lady said, I'm not allowed to. So the next week she had another meeting and again the neighbor asked her how many she had. Oh there were 36, last night, my house was full, it was wonderful, come to the next one. Oh, no, can't come not allowed to. So she had a third meeting and the lady asked her again how many she had. Fifty one the lady said and my house was full. The neighbor looked at her and said "hmm, you said you had 27 the first night and your house was full, then you said you had 36 the next night and your house was full, and then you said you had 51 the last night and your house was full. How can that be that your house was full every night but you kept having more people? Oh that's easy the lady said. What do you mean easy? Why, it's impossible. Oh no the lady said, we just took every piece of furniture out of the house and put it out in the yard so we could fit more people.

Are you so full of the things of the world that you don't have room for the things of God?

Are you so full of television that you don't have room to study God's Word?
Are you so full of activities that you don't have room to attend God's House?
Are you so full of yourself that you don't have room for anybody else?
Are you so full of jealousy that you can't see the good in anyone?
Are you so full of anger that you can't be happy for someone?

It's time to do a little house cleaning, a little furniture moving and make room for God! You want to be full of faith, power, and the Holy Ghost? Those things require room in your life and there isn't enough room for them and everything else.

In **Luke 7:28** Jesus said "**there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.**" Yet in **John 3:30**, John the Baptist said "**He must increase but I must decrease.**"

Friends, we have to empty ourselves in order to be full. Maybe your life is filled with things that are taking the place of Godly things. You are never going to be full of spirit, power, and the Holy Ghost as long as you are full of other stuff.

Friend, what will people say about you when you leave? Will they say he or she sure loved the Lord and they were full of faith, power, and the Holy Ghost? Or will they say, "I don't reckon they ever trusted Christ as their Savior." I never saw any proof in their life that they were saved. As far as I know they never confessed Christ. Oh, what a sad testimony to leave behind. Let's look at the men in the early 1st Century Church and model our lives after them.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version