



# 11 | ACTS 6:1-7

## THE FIRST DEACONS

*The normal Christian life is one of exemplary power and Spirit-filling with much fruit.*

### Outline

1. **THE DIFFICULTY** (6:1-2)  
The Difficulty of Growth  
The Danger of Division  
The Dynamic of the Main Thing
2. **THE DEACONS** (6:3-6)  
Men with Servants' Hearts  
Men of a Good Reputation  
Men Full of Wisdom  
Men Who Support the Word  
Men Full of Faith  
Men Full of the Holy Spirit  
Men Recognized for their Gifts
3. **THE DIVINE FAVOR** (6:7)

### Call to Worship

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.  
<sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come  
and appear before God? —Psalm 42:1-2

### Songs

*All Creatures of Our God and King*  
*Sanctuary (Randy Scruggs)*  
*The Cause of Christ (Jobe)*  
*Holy, Holy, Holy*  
*He Will Hold Me Fast*

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**WELCOME:** We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet from the Welcome Center if you are visiting with us.

**GIVING:** You can still give over Zelle through your bank with no fees. Use [secretary@livinghopechurch.net](mailto:secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. **This is a promise from the Lord.** “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” – Malachi 3:10

**Farewell Fellowship:** for Pastor Garcia, May 16 after the service. We are asking you to bring a Spanish dish and a side or dessert.

**Testimonies and Baptisms:** We will be having testimonies and baptisms again in June. If you are a believer but have not yet been baptized, we as elders encourage you to be baptized. If you are looking for church membership, please let one of the pastors or elders know. We will be having a Membership class as well in the coming weeks.

**PASTORAL CANDIDATE FOR SPANISH MINISTRY:** Bro. Jose Salgado is our pastoral candidate for our Spanish ministry. Please pray for him as he goes through the candidate process. He will be preaching for a joint service on Sunday, June 6. He will be taking over the preaching duties from Pastor Garcia. We will also be having a Q and A with him as a congregation, date and time TBD.

## Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called “Life on Life Discipleship.” Our title this morning is: “The First Deacons”.

I don’t know whether you’ve ever experienced growing pains. When I was a kid, the growing pains were so bad at times that they woke me up out of my sleep. My mom would tell me, “It’ll be ok, you just have growing pains.” When I got to be a teenager, I can remember some emotional growing pains, as I was trying to adjust to the awkwardness of teenage life.

Those of us who are on the road of spiritual maturity, we know something about growing pains as well, because, just as you grow physically through pain, you grow spiritually through pain. We hear it in the Psalms. It’s only when God enlarges our heart, that we have the power to be faithful in trials.

Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress. —*Psalm 4:1, KJV*

When you’re being stretched, you know you are growing. Not only do individuals have growing pains physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but churches have growing pains. With growth comes pain. It was true of the early church. It is true of any church that grows. The church in Acts had a difficulty as they were growing in great numbers.

Key thought: The normal Christian life is one of exemplary power and Spirit-filling with much fruit.

In the early days of the church, as the church grew at an incredible rate, there were problems that could only be solved by Spirit-filled servants of God, who helped the apostles so they could preach and pray. All of us need to be those Spirit filled examples of the believer, because difficulties and problems will come. We can’t just ignore it. We have to step up when difficulties come. Listen to Dr. Luke describe the difficulty.

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## 1. THE DIFFICULTY (6:1-2)

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**Acts 6:1-2** | Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.<sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”

### THE DIFFICULTY OF GROWTH

**Acts 6:1a** | Now in these days ... the disciples were increasing in number...

It’s hard to be a growing church. There has to be a mentality of victory and faith, or the church will isolate and insulate itself from problems. We must not have an insulated view of the Christian life. We are called to pierce the darkness, not run away from it.

The church in Jerusalem was not running away from evangelism because they were being persecuted, they were lifting up Christ in the midst of severe persecution. The apostles had just been jailed, released by an angel, and then beaten with 39 lashes. They don’t get out of jail and out of their beating and say, “You know what, things are less tyrannical in Syria or North Africa. Let’s move.” I understand our freedoms are being taken away in this state of Illinois where we live. But the apostles didn’t make a march out of town. They stayed, were imprisoned, beaten, and they kept preaching in that tyrannical city of Jerusalem. They were told to stop preaching Christ, but they stayed and preached Christ.

Because they had this mindset of evangelism in the face of tyranny, the church in Jerusalem is no longer growing by **addition**. It was addition in Acts 2. Now it is **multiplication**. There’s something terribly wrong with any church, small or large, that is not growing. We don’t run away from tyrants. We confront them with the claims of Jesus Christ.

We ought to be interested in growing right where we are in this dark time in history. I know there is a great temptation to want to run away from the expansion of tyrannical government powers in our state. We all want to live peaceably and enjoy the Christian life. But we really on a rescue mission. We are on the offense; we are going right up to the gates of hell and snatching people out. Christ will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail. Those gates cannot keep people bound. The Son will set them free. I love the quote from the missionary to Africa. It’s of my favorite quotes of all time.

Some wish to live within the sound of a chapel bell; I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell. — *C.T. Studd*

If we all have this mentality, we are going to grow. But growing is not **automatic**, nor is growing **easy**. These early disciples prayed that they might grow. They planned that they might grow. They cultivated, and they watered, but it was God that gave the increase (1 Cor 3:6). But, in the last analysis, their growth was there because of their spiritual vitality—their walk with God. Numerical growth is the result of spiritual growth.

We know three thousand joined the one hundred and twenty on the day of Pentecost. Then five thousand heads of households came to Christ, likely twenty thousand if you include women and children. So that’s around twenty-three thousand. But now there is multiplication. The disciples are “increasing in number.” Some have estimated that up to a

hundred thousand would join the church in the first six months. That's a revival of historic proportions, especially since the world's population at the time was only 300 million at the time of the book of Acts.

There are a number of ways the church increases in number. We pray. We preach. God draws people, but the church has to be bold and preach the Gospel. Without the word, no amount of prayers will bring anyone to Christ. A person cannot be converted without the Word of God. That's where we come in. We must always be "ready to give an answer" as Peter says (1 Pet 3:15).

How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? —*Romans 10:14*

If we give the Word, the Spirit will convert the hearts, and numbers of people will be added to the church. But with growth comes problems.

### THE DANGER OF DIVISION

**Acts 6:1** | Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

As the church was growing at an incredible rate, the early church in Jerusalem had a specific difficulty. What happened is this: There were two types of Jews in the early church. There were the **Hellenistic** Jews, and there were the **Hebrew** Jews. The Hellenistic Jews were adapted to Greek and Roman culture. They spoke Greek. The Hebrew Jews were separate from the culture and lived an exclusively Jewish life. They spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. At this time, there was a division between the two. Some of those who were of the Hellenistic group felt that they were being overlooked, even discriminated against. And to see how wrong it was, Luke mentions that these were widows. Widows, in that day, had no other means of support. There was no Social Security. These widows had to be taken care of by the church, if they were to survive. They were being overlooked, and the apostles saw this and began meeting their needs, but it took them away from the preaching of the Word.

The natural response to problems in those days and in ours is complaining. The Scripture says, "**a complaint**" arose and there was a division between the Hebrews and the Hellenist Christians. People's mothers and grandmothers were involved. This is Satan's scheme when the church is growing. He's going to tempt us with division, with complaining.

When new people come into the church there can be jealousy. There can be a shuffling of duties and gifts. There also can be neglect, which was happening in Jerusalem. Ephesians warns us.

Walk... worthy... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. —*Ephesians 4:2-3*

We must not divide, which means we find our identity in Christ. Unity, not complaining, is the way of the Spirit of God. It's fine to bring a legitimate need, but there ought to be no murmuring as the church grows. Murmuring is the devil's way to divide when God wants to multiply. Paul said,

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. —*Philippians 2:14*

I want every Christian, every believer in this church, to hear that. Do all things without grumbling or complaining. Why? Because **when you have people, and you progress together, you are going to have problems.** And the problem in the Jerusalem church was not **doctrinal**; it was **functional**. It was not primary; it was secondary. Now, it was necessary that it be addressed; but it's generally not the big things that divide churches today. It is the small things, the functional matters, the petty matters.

"They moved our classroom. They divided our class. We were not notified. Our opinion is not important." Well, no one should do things carelessly, but anybody can make mistakes. And, dear saint, the most dangerous thing that you can do to the fellowship of the church is to murmur. Remember this: that anything that grows must adjust, and anything that moves generally makes friction. And there's always more opportunity for problems in a growing church than in a church that's not growing. But **I'd rather be in a growing church than a dead church.** The apostles guarded the growth of the church by bring a solution to the problem.

### THE DYNAMIC OF THE MAIN THING

**Acts 6:2** | And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

What was the solution? They have to **keep the main thing the main thing.** No matter what, the preaching has to go forward. Let's keep first things first. The Word of God and prayer have to be first. The teachers and elders cannot be serving tables as their main job. Their job is the word and prayer. So they need to set apart for ministry those who will be flexible and take on these duties. We ought not be overcome by problems. Be flexible. Be a servant. It's not ok to complain. But be communicative. **When problems arise, it's an opportunity to serve.**

Notice that the main thing has to remain the main thing. The Word of God has to be primary. **The Word of God and prayer are the primary means for the congregation to be filled with the Holy Spirit.** It is the primary way to grow the church. If measures are not taken to lift up the Jesus through the Word and prayer, in evangelism and discipleship, then the church will die. It was vital for the early church to set apart qualified men to be what would become the office of deacon in the church. Now as we look at these first deacons (though they are not called deacons, but they function as deacons), we are going to see that they are exemplary men.

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## 2. THE DEACONS (6:3-6)

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**Acts 6:3-6** | Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup>And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup>These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Now, the solution here was a very simple, wonderful solution. You're going to find out that the Bible is a very practical book. Any person who walks with God is going to be deeply spiritual and intensely practical at the same time. God is a God of order. And so, God had an orderly way to deal with this problem. You're going to find that when the Holy Spirit moves, he always brings an orderly cosmos out of chaos.

He moved upon the darkness there in the early chapters of Genesis, and he took that chaos, and he made a cosmos out of it. And, if things are out of order, God will make order. Disorder is generally a mark of carnality. I confess that my desk, is sometimes very carnal. The Bible says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." And so, the church organization is engineered by God, and the machinery is oiled by the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, learn this about this church, or any church. Any church that is growing is going to have to adjust, but there are no problems too big to solve; only people too small to solve them. They looked among them, likely around **23,000 people**, and at least 6000 or so heads of households. They set apart servants for the church. These are not called deacons, but they were definitely a model for the first deacons.

And what we find as we see them described, is that they are each an example for the believer. Remember we are all to lead exemplary lives as believers.

Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. —1 Timothy 4:12

These men, as we will see, set an excellent **example for the believer**. We are all called to be like these deacons. First, we are called to have the heart of a servant. The officer in the church must be willing to serve, to stretch, to lay his life down for the church. That's the life of a slave of Jesus. We must have a servant's heart, like these first prototypes for the deacons.

### MEN WITH SERVANTS' HEARTS

Acts 6:2 | And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

These were superior men. It takes a superior man to serve. In this passage, there are a cluster of Greek words that have the word *deacon* or *diakonos* in them, which means "deacon" or "servant." These men, these seven men, may have been the very first deacons. Not just anyone was chosen. They had to search for these men. These were not inferior men.

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. — Matthew 10:28

Jesus said he came to be a deacon. He also said we all should be ministers or "servants."

But whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister. — Mark 10:43

The word here "minister" (Mk 10:43) literally means "your servant." There are two principles in serving the Body of Christ: **expendability** and **flexibility**. All parts of Christ's body are **expendable**. None of us is needed. We can give way to others. But on the other hand, we need to each be **flexible**, and when we are needed, we should be willing to step up. We should all be willing to do anything for the Lord Jesus Christ.

## MEN OF A GOOD REPUTATION

Now, what qualities does it take for a man to be a deacon in any New Testament church? These were men of a good reputation. They were clearly living out the Christian life with joy and consistency.

**Acts 6:3a** | Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute.

Out of the 23,000 souls converted thus far, most of them were Aramaic speaking, Hebrew cultured Jews. Yet every one of the men they choose are Greek-speaking Jews. They are cultured in Rome and Greece. But notice that culture doesn't matter. It just makes things more interesting. What matters is character. It doesn't matter what culture you are from. There is so much diversity and culture here at Living Hope, and we celebrate that. That ought never divide us. Just as a body has many parts, so the body of Christ has many cultures. We celebrate the diversity, because God gave you your culture to do your part of his Kingdom work. Our society would have you focus on culture as something that divides us. But in Christ culture is celebrated. Christ's body is made up of every culture. God wants his churches to look like heaven.

I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes.  
—*Revelation 7:9*

What matter in the Kingdom is not so much culture but character. These men could speak Greek. They had experienced areas of culture that the Hebrew Jews didn't. But that's not the most important thing. Character and a good reputation is what matters. I constantly have told my children, you may get a great education, be very talented, be popular, and gain the whole world, but if you don't have Christ you are a total failure. What we need is children and parents who want to be conformed to the image of Christ. We need that kind of reputation: constantly growing and changing to be like Christ.

## MEN FULL OF WISDOM

**Acts 6:3** | Men ... full of ... wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Deacons are to an example of the believer, and that means they are to be **wise and understanding in the congregation**. In this passage, there are a cluster of Greek words that have the word *deacon* or *diakonos* in them, which means "deacon" or "servant." These seven men were the first deacon prototypes. Not just anyone was chosen.

### *Know the Lord*

They were men who were full of wisdom. That means they didn't just know the word and doctrine, but they knew how to walk with the Lord and walk in the word, applying it to their lives. The greatest step forward in wisdom is the fear of the Lord, or what we might call "practicing the presence of God". Until you realize that the word is not the end but a means to an end, that of knowing God in Christ, then you cannot say you are wise.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. —*Proverbs 9:10*

So wisdom is really knowing how to walk with God. Think of Enoch. He was walking with God so closely, and then God just took him to heaven without dying.

Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. —*Genesis 5:24*

### *Know the Bible*

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. —*Psalms 119:105*

It's not just the pastors that need to know the Bible. And of course, deacons should know the Scriptures, but not just them. Each Christian should be "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). Every Christian should be competent to counsel and instruct each other. We are to build each other up in Christ our head (Eph 4:11-16).

### *Know People*

Not only does wisdom mean we know God, but we have compassion on our brothers and sisters. Deacons are to know what is going on in the lives of the people. At this time, these men were **to get to know what was happening in the lives of these widows**. This means deacons are peacemakers and problem solvers. What Paul says of the Romans, should be true of all of us. He says:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. —*Romans 15:14*

**Are you full of wisdom?** If you are a new Christian, you can at least start giving the Gospel to those around you. If you came to know Christ, then you have the ability to share how you were saved. But don't stay there. You are your brother's and your sister's keeper (Gen 4:9). Gain the wisdom of not just knowing the word but walking in the word (Jas 1:22-25). Don't just be a "forgetful hearer" but be a "doer" of the work. You'd better not wait until you get a Ph.D. to start helping your brothers and sisters grow. It's just like a family. Wisdom is gained by doing. Go and learn how to apply the word of God to your life. Help others do the same. That's wisdom.

## **MEN WHO SUPPORT THE WORD**

In some functional ways, the apostles are the counterpart of the pastors and the preachers and missionaries today. They had to continue the ministry of the Word of God. Look, if you will, in verse 2. They said,

**Acts 6:2** | "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

Now, it's not that they were too good to do it. It just did not make sense. Look in verse 4:



**Acts 6:4** | “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

They’re saying, “We can be more effective if we do that which God has called us to do, and that is to pray and minister the Word of God.” The early deacons were not there to free the pastor from work, but to free the pastor to work. It’s not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to serve. They had a different assignment. They were getting behind with their prayer, with their sermon preparation, with their soul winning, and with their preaching and the ministry of the Word of God. And they said, “This doesn’t make sense.” In other words, the pastors and elders who stayed long term after the apostles’ work, knew that if they didn’t evangelize and disciple those who were coming to Christ, the church would die.

Many in the ministry today have left the emphasis on prayer and the word of God. They are so involved in the administrative details of their church that they have **little time left for intercession and study of the Word**. Yet pastors and elders are given to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Their calling is to mature the saints so they can do the work of the ministry. By neglecting that calling, they doom their congregations to languish in spiritual infancy. **Programs are no substitute for the power of God and his word**. Those whom God has called to the ministry of prayer and the word must make it their priority.<sup>1</sup>

I’ve learned a long time ago that a preacher who’s always available isn’t worth a whole lot when he is available. He needs to be alone with God. He needs to be in the Word of God. And the best time that I can spend on your behalf is not when I am before you, talking to you about God, but when I am before God, talking to him about you, and filling my heart with the Word of God, and preparing to preach, and then ministering the Word of God, and serving, and equipping you to serve.

So, the early apostles said, “Now, it doesn’t make sense that our ministry be cancelled out by doing these things.” And so, they need to continue to do what God had called them to do. So, there was the *spiritual ministry*—that is, for spiritual food.

## MEN FULL OF FAITH

**Acts 6:5a** | And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith.

Stephen was an exceptional man of faith. We see that by his confrontation of the Sanhedrin in the next chapter. Deacons are to be those who are well grounded in the faith. This is not only doctrinal, which we will find out is absolutely necessary, but also, these men are not just financial men. They are that. They help with the distribution of the funds to the needy. But they are to be full of faith.

Deacons are to be an example of the normal believer who is not only supposed to be a good steward, a person of ethics, but **also a person of vision and faith**. God works in ways that go “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20).

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 179.

## MEN FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**Acts 6:5** | And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

Now all these men have Green names because they were all Hellenists. They all spoke Greek. But Stephen is singled out here. We know why. Gamaliel is training someone very important who is also a Hellenist: Saul of Tarsus. Saul of Tarsus is going to take over where Stephen leaves off. Stephen in the next chapter will boldly proclaim Christ at the cost of his own life. But God saves that other Hellenist Jew, Saul of Tarsus, and Saul, also known as Paul (his Hellenist name) will take the Gospel not only to Samaria, but to the ends of the earth.

Not only was Stephen filled with faith, he was **filled with the Spirit**. This is the prototype not only for a deacon but for any believer. Officers of the church are to be those who are examples of the Spirit-filled life. To be Spirit-filled means that these men are not characterized by anger, anxiety, despair or worldliness, but by the presence of God in their lives. What's a Spirit-filled life look like? It looks like a heart filled with the word, with worship, and with the wonder of gratitude.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,<sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. —*Ephesians 5:18-21*

Remember, if your heart is not filled with the word of God, with worship, and with wonder, then you are withering away. The flesh will wither you. Be filled with the Spirit! The Spirit-filled life is the opposite of the anger and anxiety of the flesh. It's not the fleshly life that is never satisfied.

G. Campbell Morgan said that the Spirit-filled life is the normal Christian life.

A man full of the Spirit is one who is living a normal Christian life. Fulness of the Spirit is not a state of the spiritual elite, to which few can attain. Anything less than the fulness of the Spirit for the Christian man is disease of the spiritual life, a low ebb of vitality. Fullness of the Spirit is not abnormal, but the normal Christian life.<sup>2</sup> —*G. Campbell Morgan*

There is **zero room for fear and faithlessness**. Stop being paralyzed by your anger and anxiety. **Stop drinking from the broken cisterns of the world**. Put on the Lord Jesus. Rest in him. Look at how Paul describes this powerful Spirit-filled life. Look at what it is not and then what it is.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such

<sup>2</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1924), 174.

things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. —Galatians 5:19-24

There is a sense of unrest and doublemindedness in the fleshly heart. You are tossed about by your emotions and paralyzed by the devil. But the Spirit wants to bring you emotional maturity. Some of you think you are Spirit-filled because you have sound doctrine. The Spirit promotes sound doctrine, for sure, but you can have sound doctrine and be filled with the works of the flesh. The evidence of the Spirit is the heart at perfect peace and love and joy in God. There is this wonderful rest and faith and sweet character that proceeds from the child of God, one of gentleness and not of frustration or fear, one of self-control, and not sexual promiscuity, but purity.

Is your heart pure? Are you at peace? Are you Spirit-filled? There's only one way to the Spirit-filled life. It's a life of total trust and surrender to the Spirit. Your flesh will lie to you, so you must insist on believing the word of God despite what you feel. Trust in God. Stop striving. Rest in Jesus, and God's peace will come to you.

### *Nicolaus the Gnostic?*

It is interesting that even the apostles do not have infallible discernment. **Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch**, is said later to have gone astray, and some believe he is one of the major proponents and founders of the Gnostic heresy, which taught that the body was worthless and only the Spirit mattered. This brought about a great lawless kind of living and great immorality in some who called themselves Christians. The book of 1 John is a polemic against this false teaching.

Later Paul had a companion named Demas. Remember Paul's report about this man who had traveled with the great apostle? "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Tim 4:10).

Jesus chose twelve apostles, but one of them was a devil. We must do our best to choose godly, Spirit-filled men. We don't want a Demas or a Judas. We want the faithful, Spirit-filled men, like Stephen. God have mercy on us that we might all be examples of the Spirit-filled life.

## **MEN RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR GIFTS**

**Acts 6:6** | These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

These men are recognized by the apostles for their gifts and their servant's heart. The **apostles set these men apart and ordain them**. The apostles pray and look to God for the church to be cared for through the gifting of set apart men. They laid hands on them. What does that mean? It means they recognized their gifts. That's how it is in every healthy congregation. The elders and pastors will recognize those who are living an exemplary Christian life with servants hearts and set them apart for service to the church. These men, though humble, are recognized here by the apostles for their gifts and their ability to serve.

We also recognize something else: though each of these men is a Greek speaking Jew, they serve the majority who are Aramaic speaking Jews. What a beautiful display of unity—

especially considering that all those chosen had Greek names. The Greek cultured people were serving the Jewish cultured people. The Holy Spirit was reigning. The result?<sup>3</sup> God's blessing and favor was manifestly upon them.

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### 3. THE DIVINE FAVOR (6:7)

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**Acts 6:7** | And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The organization of the church freed the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and the Word. It also avoided a church split. Luke closes this section, as he has before, by noting the development of the church. The word of God kept on spreading from the church as a direct result of the freeing of the apostles to carry out their primary ministry, and also of the church's unity.<sup>4</sup>

What was the result? The blessing of God continued and increased! The church was still unified (Acts 6:5), multiplied (Acts 6:7), and magnified (Acts 6:8). In Acts 6:7, Dr. Luke describes the climax of the ministry in Jerusalem, for the persecution following Stephen's death will take the Gospel to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles. It has been estimated that there were 8,000 Jewish priests attached to the temple ministry in Jerusalem, and "a great company" of them trusted Jesus Christ as Savior!<sup>5</sup>

#### *Conclusion*

I wonder, are you living an exemplary Christian life? Are you serving the way you want to serve? Are you filled with faith and the Holy Spirit? If not, I know that if you are a Christian, you are miserable. We Christians can only be happy if we are humble and holy. We must have the fullness of the Spirit or we are miserable. The world no longer satisfies us. As you live the Spirit-filled life, you will go beyond "hoop jumping" of good behavior. You will have a heart rich with God's presence, and your happiness will flow out of you. You will bear fruit, not only joy and peace, but souls. That is the normal Christian life.

We as a church must be committed to lifting up the Word. That means we all need to be serving where God puts us. Pastors teaching, equipping, leading the congregation in prayer. Deacons, Spirit-filled examples of service. And the entire congregation building itself up in love, being fitly formed together under Christ.

Service is not another program of works. Seek first the Kingdom. Let God show up and show out. You yield your life to him, and he will be seen in and through you!

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 98.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 1, 184.

<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 430.