

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #26

COMMENTARY ON: 6:1-7

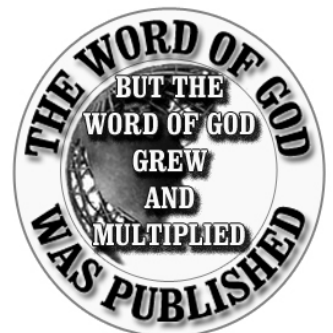
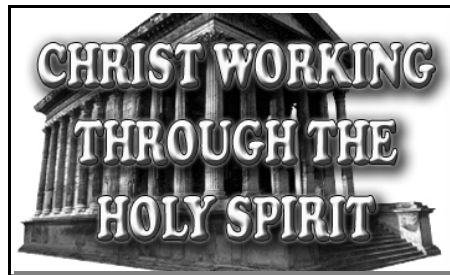
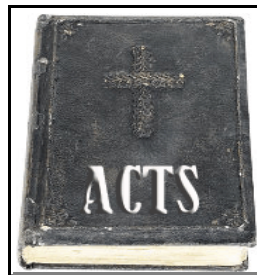
DISSENSION RISES, BUT IS OVERCOME

Having been caught off guard, Satan has now regrouped, so to speak, and is assaulting the church as depicted in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation. First he attacked it from without, through the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin. That effort failed miserably, and the church increased. Then he attacked it from within, through Ananias and Sapphira, who had been living too close to his domain. Again, the effort failed abysmally, and the church kept on increasing. Then he attacked it once again from outside, through the Sanhedrin and elders of Israel. This time, he was given leave to inflict pain on the apostles. However, the effort again failed, and the number of disciples still continued to increase. Jesus was building His church, and no Satanic effort could thwart it or impede it. As long as the people kept the faith, their cause was invincible. Because Satan is unable to learn, he now attacks the church again from within. This time he will attempt to corrupt it with murmuring, as he did with Israel.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

"... and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

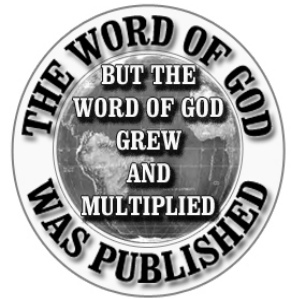


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 26



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God'S Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

DISSENSION RISES, BUT IS OVERCOME

“ ^{6:1} 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 ministration. 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.” (Acts 6:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

Having been caught off guard, Satan has now regrouped, so to speak, and is assaulting the church as depicted in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation. “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. . . . And the dragon was wroth with

the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:15,17). The people of God cannot afford to be naive about Satan's aggression. When approaching life, we are solemnly admonished, “**Be sober, be**

vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). The only way to effectively negate his initiative is by means of our faith. If our faith is small, or we have none at all, it is not possible to defeat this foe. Thus, Peter continues, “Whom resist steadfast

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

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in the faith . . ." (1 Pet 5:9). This being true, what we are witnessing in the book of Acts is the outworking of faith.

First Satan attacked the church without, through the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin. That effort failed miserably, **and the church increased**. Then he attacked it from within, through Ananas and Sapphira, who had been living too close to his domain. Again, the effort failed abysmally, **and the church kept on increasing**. Then he attacked it once again from outside, through the Sanhedrin and elders of Israel. This time, he was given leave to inflict pain on the apostles. However, the effort again failed, **and the number of disciples still continued to increase**. Jesus was building His church, and no Satanic effort could thwart it or impede it. As long as the people kept the faith, their cause was invincible. Because Satan is unable to learn, he now attacks the church again from within. This time he will attempt to corrupt it with murmuring, as he did with Israel.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO BE SEEN

There are some important Kingdom principles to be seen

throughout the book of Acts. Some of them have a particular bearing upon our text.

"Apostles"

First, there are repeated references to the "apostles" who are at the heart of our text. There are thirty references to the "apostles" in the book of Acts. Most all of them refer to the "apostles of Christ" (1 Thess 2:6) – men sent forth personally by Jesus Christ (1:2,26; 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2,12,18,29,34, 40; 6:6; 8:1,14,18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4; 15:33). Commencing with the fifteenth chapter, there are numerous references to these "apostles and elders" (15:2,4, 6,22,23,33; 16:4). There is one reference to the apostles sent forth by the Holy Spirit for a special work – "Barnabas and Paul" (14:4). With the exception of Barnabas, the "apostles" of reference are the "foundation" upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20). That is, they are the ones who put the Foundation, which is Christ, in place among men (Isa 28:16). They did this through the insightful preaching of the Gospel, as opened to them by the Holy Spirit.

In all of their recorded activities, they were functioning as the appointed representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their power and authority was not in their position, but in their living association with the Head of all things. In other words, **Christ was working through them to build His church**. The apostles in no way represented a hierarchical system of authority, as is practiced by the Gentiles (Matt 20:25-27). Their mission was not to establish a certain pattern of organization. Rather, working through them, Jesus was building His church. If we lose sight of this, we will find ourselves drifting toward lifeless religion – form without power.

"Disciples"

Second, commencing with this text, the word "disciples" will be used throughout the book of Acts – at least twenty-eight times (6:1,2,7; 9:1,10,19,25,26,36,38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 16:1; 18:23,27; 19:1,9,30; 20:1,7; 21:4,16). The other prominent reference to these disciples is "believers," or those who "believed." Both of these terms

(disciples and believers) are rather unique. Neither of them promote purely sectarian interests. Both of them convey the idea of personal involvement as opposed to a mere formal identity – like a member of a roster, or belonging to a particular group.

The word "disciple" means, "a learner, pupil . . . one who follows one's teaching," THAYER "one who directs his mind to something . . . apprentice . . . one who attached himself to a spiritual leader," FRIBERG "follower," UBS "a person who is a disciple or follower of someone," LOUW-NIDA and "adherent." GINGRICH



The word "disciple" does not represent a particular system of thought that has been embraced. It is not descriptive of membership in an organization, or confirmation of inclusion on a roster or listing. It rather speaks of a certain life-posture. Primarily, a "disciple" is a pupil, or learner. This does not speak of a self-taught person. **A pupil learns from someone else**. Thus, a "disciple" is someone who IS learning from someone else. In the sense in which our text is speaking, the Teacher is the Lord Jesus Christ. He uses means to accomplish this teaching. Inwardly, the Holy Spirit is the One who brings home the teaching to the individual. Outwardly, and in our text, He is employing the apostles, who were delivering the message through which life is realized. However, in both cases, it is still the Lord Jesus who is doing the teaching.

Jesus spoke directly to this matter of being a disciple, giving us a most vivid picture of its involvements.

⇨ "Take My yoke upon you, and **learn of** [from] **Me**; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt 11:29).

⇨ "My sheep **hear My voice**, and I know

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

⇒ “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, **he will keep My words**: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

Paul also described the posture of a believer by saying they listened to, and learned from, Christ Jesus. “But ye have not so **learned Christ**: if so be that ye have heard him, and have been **taught by Him**, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20-21). This, of course, is in keeping with the mandate that was issued from the Throne of God: “Hear ye Him!” (Matt 17:5).

The word “disciple” also carries

advantage from Him.

⇒ **TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY.** “And He said to them **all**, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily, and follow me**” (Luke 9:23). This speaks of determination – taking up the cross, and being ready to accept the consequences of following Jesus in this represent evil world. Again, this is required to follow Jesus and learn from Him. It is not an option, or a status achieved after considerable tenure with the Savior. It is not a higher level of discipleship, but is found in every part of spiritual life.

⇒ **NO COMPETITIVE ALLEGIANCE.** “If any man come to Me, and **hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also**, he cannot

forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Everything that a person possesses must be held lightly, knowing that it may be lost in a moment. To forsake all that one has is to acknowledge that it is temporal, and will not be allowed to dominate one’s thinking.

Jesus will receive no one who does not meet this criterion. In such a case, the person is disqualified from being taught or led by Jesus. That also means that no one who fails on these points can receive Christ, for it is not possible to receive Him, yet not be His disciple.

Applying This to Our Text

When our text refers to “the disciples,” it is speaking about this kind of people. They had forsaken all, and were following Jesus. They were taking up their cross daily, and were being taught by Jesus.

Our Present Circumstance

If you read the book of Acts with the church of today in your mind, it will look like a book of ideas. Or, perhaps, it will be perceived only as the record of beginnings. But you may be sure of one thing, it will bear absolutely no resemblance to the nominal church.

In our time, it is thought that there are two classes Christians: ordinary ones and committed ones. It is imagined that there are two kinds of saved people: those who only have accepted Jesus as their Savior, and others, more advanced, who have gone on to receive Him as Lord. It is also generally accepted that there are two kinds of Christians: spiritual Christians, and carnal Christians. These are commonly held views, and anyone who objects to them is considered to be too judgmental.

Every person who comes into Christ is freed from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2). That is how they all got started. If they come under the dominion of sin again, it is because they have drawn back (Heb 10:38-39). That is not the way they were “*created in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:10). Everyone who is baptized into Christ puts on Christ (Gal 3:27). If they come to a point where they must be admonished to put Him on again

The word “disciple” also carries the idea of a follower – one who adheres to a specific Person, and refuses to depart from Him. Their interests lie in another – their Teacher. In this case, the Teacher, and the One who is

the idea of a follower – one who adheres to a specific Person, and refuses to depart from Him. Their interests lie in another – their Teacher. In this case, the Teacher, and the One who is eagerly pursued, is the Lord Jesus.

Right here there is something important to note. There are restrictions on who is **allowed** to follow Jesus – particularly if they are to learn from Him. Jesus did not shroud these requirements with obscurity, but placed them squarely before the people.

⇒ **DENY SELF.** “Whosoever will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me**” (Mark 8:34). Those who deny themselves refuse to allow personal fleshly and worldly interests to draw them away from Christ. This is an absolute requirement for following Jesus and gaining spiritual

be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). At the point there is competition between one’s family and Jesus, the disciple must choose to follow Jesus. If this choice is not made, it is not possible to either follow or learn from Jesus.

⇒ **BEARING THE CROSS.** “And whosoever **doth not bear his cross, and come after me**, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27) – bearing up under the consequences of following Jesus. This is the life that follows taking up the cross of self-crucifixion. There will be repercussions to an individual insisting on following Jesus regardless of what it costs. If the person balks at this, and chooses a course of life that lessens the sufferings, he at once ceases to be a disciple. He can no longer follow or be taught by the Lord Jesus.

⇒ **FORSAKING ALL.** “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that

(Rom 13:14), it is because they have put Him off in deference to the flesh. That is not the way they got started. All of the children of God began newness of life with their old man crucified (Rom 6:6). If they must admonished to “put off the old man” again (Eph 4:22), it is because they left him off the cross. That is not the way they got started.

We really do not need preachers and teachers giving us a palatable explanation why there is sin in the church. It is because those who are so described have ceased to Christ’s disciples – if they ever were in the first place. They have **not** resisted the devil, and thus have been overcome by him. They have **not** crucified the flesh, and are

therefore dominated by it. To further complicate their situation, Jesus neither leads or teaches such people. If they are ever to recover from their plight, **they must again become a disciple** – a real one who forsakes everything to follow Jesus, and sits at His feet to learn from Him. That simply is what Jesus requires, and no honest person will balk at it.

IN THOSE DAYS

^{6:1a} And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied.”

The book of Acts is not a chronological journal in which every event is recorded. As was the manner with inspired men, they did not give a prolonged record of times in which a certain consistency existed – whether evil or good. **The period of Adam to the flood (approximately 1,655 years) is covered by six chapters in the Scriptures** (Gen 1-6). Three of those chapters are devoted to creation and the account of the fall of man. The events that are recorded include:

- ⇒ The creation, including the naming of the animals and the creation of Eve (1:1-2:25 – 56 verses).
- ⇒ The fall of man (3:1-24– 24 verses).
- ⇒ The birth of Cain (4:1 – 1 verse).
- ⇒ The birth of Abel (4:2 – 1 verse).
- ⇒ The first offerings to God (4:3-4 – 2 verses).
- ⇒ The murder of Abel (4).
- ⇒ Cain building a city (4:17).
- ⇒ Lamech taking two wives (4:19).
- ⇒ Lamech commits murder (4:23-24).
- ⇒ Men beginning to call on the name of the Lord (4:26).
- ⇒ The translation of Enoch (5:24).
- ⇒ God’s revelation to Noah of the

coming flood (6:8-7:5).

The point is that history can be measured by epochs – by things that occurred in a given period time. This is generally the way in which history is approached in Scripture. Our text is a sterling example of this.

IN THOSE DAYS

“And in those days . . .” Other versions read, “Now at this time,”^{NASB} “Now during those days,”^{NRSV} “Now in these days,”^{RSV} “But in those days,”^{DARBY} “At that time,”^{GWN} “About this time,”^{NJB} and “during this same time.”^{IE}

constituents were surrounded by enemies. All manner of seeming disadvantage was found among those who had been joined to the King, but it presented no insurmountable difficulty. Ponder the marvelous things that had taken place from the day of Pentecost to this point.

- ⇒ **DIVINE INTERVENTION.** The place where the disciples were seating was shaken, a rushing mighty wind was heard, and they were all filled with the Holy spirit (2:1-3).
- ⇒ **MIRACULOUS SPEAKING.** The disciples

That Kingdom was set up in a hostile realm, and its constituents were surrounded by enemies. All manner of seeming disadvantage was found among those who had been joined to the King, but it presented no insurmountable difficulty.

The time covered in this text was one in which the powers of darkness were doing their best to subvert the purpose of God. They were not in any way successful. In spite of the opposition the church encountered, it continued rolling forward like the stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:34-35, 44-45). Having been seated at the right hand of God, Jesus had inaugurated the Kingdom that Daniel said God would “set up” (Dan 2:44-45). **That Kingdom was set up in a hostile realm, and its**

declared “the wonderful works of God” in other languages (2:4,11).

- ⇒ **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Peter delivers an insightful account of the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (2:14-37).
- ⇒ **GLAD OBEDIENCE.** Three thousand receive His word gladly, and are baptized (2:38-41).
- ⇒ **STEADFASTNESS.** The disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles

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doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (2:42).

- ⇒ **SELFLESSNESS.** In a display of total selflessness, the disciples had all things common (2:43-45).
- ⇒ **CONTINUANCE.** They continued daily in the Temple and breaking bread from house to house (2:46).
- ⇒ **DAILY INCREASE.** The Lord added daily to the church such as were being saved (2:47).
- ⇒ **HEALING.** A man who was lame from birth is healed by Peter and John (3:1-8).
- ⇒ **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** As the people rush to behold what had happened, Peter delivered another insightful proclamation of the exalted Christ (3:12-26).
- ⇒ **LARGE NUMBERS BELIEVE.** Five thousand men believed the word Peter delivered (4:4).
- ⇒ **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Peter and John are arrested, and deliver a Word concerning the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus (4:1-3, 5-22).
- ⇒ **FERVENT PRAYER.** Upon hearing of the threatenings of the Temple authorities, the disciples pray with one accord for boldness to speak the Word, and it is granted (4:24-33).
- ⇒ **SHARING.** The disciples again had all things common, and no one among them lacked. Brethren began selling lands and houses in order to meet everyone's need (4:34-37).
- ⇒ **PURGING.** The church is purged of moral pollution, as Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead by God (5:1-10).
- ⇒ **SIGNS AND WONDERS.** Many signs and wonders were done by the apostles, and multitudes of believers were added to the Lord (5:11-14).
- ⇒ **HEALING.** Multitudes came out of the surrounding cities, bringing their sick to be healed, and "every one of

them" was healed (5:15-16).

- ⇒ **DELIVERANCE.** The apostles are arrested, put into prison, and released by an angel during the night. The angel tells them to return to the Temple and declare all the words of this life (5:17-19).
- ⇒ **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Upon returning to the Temple and resuming their preaching, the apostles are arrested and questioned. During that time, Peter again delivers a stirring declaration of the death, resurrection, exaltation, and present work of Jesus (5:26-32).
- ⇒ **DELIVERANCE.** The council, being cut to the heart, determine to kill the apostles. However, providentially, Gamaliel is used by God to turn their hearts. After beating the apostles and charging them to preach no more in the name of Jesus, they are released (5:33-40).
- ⇒ **PREACHING AND TEACHING.** The apostles return to their preaching and teaching, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus (5:40-42).



This is the context for the phrase "those days." As you can see, this was not an environment produced by human strategies or plans. It was not the result of an apostolic conference. This was the working of the Lord, and was wrought within the framework of faith and discipleship.

Some have affirmed that this is the way things were at the first, but is not the way things were intended to remain. The official position is that the miraculous was terminated with the death of the apostles. Then the church entered into a period of, what is viewed as, normalcy. By default, that gives a prominent place to natural aptitudes and the wisdom of men, even though that is not always acknowledged. Of course, this position is taken because of the vast chasm of difference that exists between the early church and the church of our time.

However, it is more likely that this difference can be accounted for by a departure from the faith, than a change in the Divine manner. Christ's Kingdom is an increasing one, not a diminishing one. In fact, it was prophesied there would be "no end" to its increase (Isa 9:7), and that before it is finished it will fill "the whole earth" (Dan 2:35,45).

It seems to me that a very limited purpose is served by confining events, such as those mentioned, with the beginning of an era. I suppose it could be affirmed that this establishes the legitimacy of the church. However, that is a very weak view, both intellectually and spiritually. It would be like saying the miraculous order revealed in the nation of Israel ended when they left Egypt, or when Moses died, or when Joshua died, or when David died . . . etc. None but a fool would be willing to confirm such a position.

Our text speaks of something that occurred "in those days." The point was not to limit the possibility of what follows to those days, and I do not believe anyone is willing to affirm such a postulate. This will rather confirm to our hearts that when the Lord is working, that does not mean the devil ceases to work – at least while the world remains. It does not mean that when the disciples are of one heart and soul that disruptions will not occur. When there is peace, we are not to imagine that an encroachment cannot be made among the brethren.

The truth is that disruption, encroachment, and similar things, provide an occasion to prove the superiority of the wisdom that comes

down from above. If the people are walking by faith, and if they and their teachers are abiding in Christ, imaginations will be cast down, and every thought taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WAS MULTIPLIED

“ . . . when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . . ” Other versions read, “when the number of disciples was multiplying,”^{NKJV} “the number of disciples was increasing,”^{NIV} “the disciples were increasing in number,”^{NRSV} “the number of disciples grew,”^{GENEVA} “the disciples had become numerous,”^{MRD} “the number of disciples continued to grow,”^{NAB} “as the believers rapidly multiplied,”^{NLT} “with the believers multiplying rapidly,”^{LIVING} “more and more people were becoming followers,”^{IE} “the number of disciples was growing larger and larger,”^{ISV} “the number of disciples was greatly increasing,”^{AMPLIFIED} “the number of disciples was continually increasing,”^{PHILLIPS} “a lot of people were now becoming followers of the Lord,”^{CEV} and “the number of disciples kept growing.”^{GNB}

We must not lose sight of what is

It was what was being preached that drew these disciples, for “*faith cometh by hearing*” (Rom 10:17). That preaching was absolutely Christ-centered. “Disciples” are not the result of a soul-winning campaign, as ordinarily conceived. Jesus had commanded His disciples, “*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, , baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” As they went forward with that work, He promised, “*and lo, I am with you, alway even unto the end of the world*” (Matt 28:18-20). Mark gives the same perspective: “*And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15-16). That is the proper framework for the making of “disciples,” or learners, or pupils—between “teaching” and “teaching.” In the place of “teaching all nations,” more recent versions read “make disciples.”^{NKJV/NASB/ NIV/NRSV} The Greek word from which “teaching” (in both verses nineteen and twenty of Matthew twenty-eight) is translated is μαθητεύσατε (math-ayt-yoo-say-tay). The lexical meaning of this

average Bible College or Seminary student? Few people will have the courage to say it is. Such people are an aberration in the average church. In fact, proportionately few Christians have any significant perception of what Jesus taught – particularly about being His disciple.

Over the past fifty-five years, I have preached in hundreds of churches. The relative rarity of real disciples has been a consistent perception that registered upon my spirit. The same has been true of my travels abroad, with the single difference that people in those countries were generally more eager to become disciples. There are countless multitudes who say they are Christians who have no appetite for the Word of God – even though it is the means of sustaining newness of life (Lk 4:4). They are not following Jesus wherever He goes, abiding in Him, or cleaving to Him with purpose of heart. They entertain only a casual interest in Him, and are not seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. **Such people are not disciples!** Either they have not heard the kind of preaching and teaching that makes disciples, or they have heard it and lingered on in the church with their fingers in their ears.

The teaching that was being done produced these kind of people – people who left all to take up their cross every day and follow Jesus, adhering to His teaching. In your judgment, is this the kind of people that are the products of modern evangelism?

If this is a proper assessment of the conditions among professed believers, why does it exist? **One of the reasons is that too much emphasis is put on recruitment for the institution.** There is also the uncomely aggressiveness to baptize people who have not yet given any indication they want to be a disciple of Jesus. This is one reason why Paul affirmed, “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect*” (1 Cor 1:17). This does not minimize the importance of baptism. It does, however, suggest that we had better be sure our teaching has produced genuine disciples – the kind of disciples that will be of “one accord,” “one heart and soul,” and steadfast continuance in the “*apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.*” If that is not the kind of people who are being produced, they have not been added to Christ’s church, and remain “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” If this is not true, then the

being said here. This was not an increase in membership, as commonly conceived. There are numberless churches whose membership far exceeds their active people. A church with 1,000 members will probably have only about 500-600 active people – and that is a high estimate. It was the number of **DISCIPLES** that was increasing – people who were forsaking all, taking up their cross, and following Jesus. These were people who were sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from Him as Mary did (Lk 10:39).

word, in this tense, is, “to make a disciple, to teach, instruct,”^{THAYER} “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower,”^{FRIBERG} and to make “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower.”^{LOUW-NIDA}

The teaching that was being done produced these kind of people – people who left all to take up their cross every day and follow Jesus, adhering to His teaching. In your judgment, is this the kind of people that are the products of modern evangelism? Is this what is being produced on the average mission field? Is this the description of the

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

New Covenant is no better than the Old Covenant, which left men unchanged.

From a practical point of view, the **TEACHING** is what makes the

difference. That is what produces good disciples, for a disciple is a learner.

This is clearly what Jesus had said to his disciples: *“preach the Gospel.*

... teach all nations . . . teaching them.” That is what will yield real **disciples** – disciples who will not balk at any commandment delivered to them by the **Master.**

THERE AROSE A MURMURING

^{1b} . . . *there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”*



This is the sixth attack of the body of believers.

- ⇨ From without, the Temple authorities confronted and incarcerated Peter and John (4:1-3).
- ⇨ From without, Peter and John and examined by the council and threatened (4:5-21).
- ⇨ From within, Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit (5:1-10).
- ⇨ From without, The council arrests the apostles, putting them in the common prison (5:17-18).
- ⇨ After an angel released them, the apostles are again arrested, beaten, and released with the command to speak no more in the name of Jesus (5:26-40).
- ⇨ From within, murmuring arises among the disciples (6:1-7).

After these attacks there was an significant increase in the number of disciples.

- ⇨ Five thousand men believe (4:4).
- ⇨ Multitudes of men and women were added to the Lord (5:14).
- ⇨ The disciples were multiplied (6:1).

Now, amidst the swelling multitudes of disciples, a potentially dreadful thing occurs.

A MURMURING OF THE GRECIANS

“ . . . there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews . . . ” Other versions read, *“there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists,”*^{NKJV} *“a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews,”*^{NASB} *“the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews,”*^{NIV} *“the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews,”*^{NRSV} *“there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews,”*^{ASV} *“protests were made by the Greek Jews against the Hebrews,”*^{BBE} *“Greek-speaking Jews complained about the Hebrew-speaking Jews,”*^{GWN} *“the Grecian disciples murmured against the Hebrew,”*^{MRD} *“there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew,”*^{NLT} *“there arose a grudge among the Greeks against the Hebrews,”*^{PNT} *“Those who spoke only Greek complained,”*^{LIVING} *“the Greek-speaking Jewish followers had an argument with the Aramaic-speaking followers,”*^{IE} and *“complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews.”*^{AMPLIFIED}

Murmuring was the downfall of

over half-a-million Israelites. The occasion of record was when the ten spies brought back a false report of the land of Canaan, and the people believed them. That was a sad day for Israel, for their sin had escalated out of control. At that time the Lord said, *“Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me.”* (Num 14:29). At the time of the evil report, Moses told Israel, *“ye murmured in your tents”* (Deut 1:27). Hundreds of years later, David also made reference to the occasion: *“Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD”* (Psa 106:24-25). Now, murmuring has arisen among the disciples of Christ. Will that murmuring spread as it did in Israel, or within the framework of the New Covenant, will there be a more God-honoring response? In this case, we will see the superiority of the New Covenant lived out in a very dangerous circumstance.

The Grecians

These were not Gentile Grecians, but Jews who were there from other parts of the world. Prior to the dominion of Rome, and in strict accord with the prophecy of Daniel concerning the succession of world empires (Dan 2:31-35), the Greeks had conquered the world under the leadership of Alexander the Great, which had previously been conquered by the Persians. Alexander was the *“rough goat”* of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 8:21). He headed up the empire depicted as a *“kingdom of brass,”* and was third in the succession of world empires that began with Babylon (Dan 2:39). The Grecian kingdom was also depicted as a swift leopard which had dominion given

to it by God (Dan 7:6). Because he ruled over all the world, Alexander the Great launched into a campaign to bring all the world to speak the Greek language. In history, the period of time during which the Greek language dominated the world is referred to as the Hellenistic Age. It spanned a period of over six hundred years. It is for that reason that the Gentile world is often referred to as "Greeks" (Acts 19:10,17; 20:21; 21:28; Rom 1:14,16; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22,23,24; Gal 3:26; Col 3:11).

At the tower of Babel, the language of the people was confounded, and they were dispersed throughout the world. A little over three hundred and fifty years before Pentecost, although driven by ignoble motives, an effort was launched to unite the language of the world. Providentially, this was in order that all the world would be able to receive the Word of God, and hear and read the Gospel of Christ.

In all of this the peculiar Jewish language – Hebrew – was still spoken in the "land of the Jews" (Acts 10:39). Yet, at the time of our text, there were "devout Jews" from other nations visiting the city for the Passover Feast. While there, many of them – perhaps thousands – heard the Gospel, believed, and had become disciples of Jesus. Now, in an effort to disrupt and even remove the body of Christ, Satan foments a set of circumstances that causes murmuring to erupt. Within the church, the Greek speaking Jews complained against "the native Hebrews."

THEIR WIDOWS WERE NEGLECTED

"... because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." Other versions read, "because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution,"^{NKJV} "because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food,"^{NASB} "because their widows were not taken care of in the distribution of food every day,"^{BBE} "claimed that the widows among them were neglected every day when food and other assistance was distributed,"^{GWN} "saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food,"^{NLT} "because their widows were despised in the daily

ministration,"^{TNT} "that their widows were being discriminated against, that they were not being given as much food, in the daily distribution, as the widows who spoke Hebrew,"^{LIVING} "They claimed that their widows were not getting their share of the things which the widows received each day,"^{IE} "because their widows were habitually overlooked in the distribution of alms,"^{MONTGOMERY} "because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministration (distribution of relief),"^{AMPLIFIED} and "complained that in the daily distribution of food the Hebrew widows were being given preferential treatment."^{PHILLIPS}

Here we have a glimpse of what was involved in the sharing of goods

basis. There was a "daily ministration," or "distribution."^{NKJV} Food and other necessities were distributed in the same manner as God gave Israel manna during their wilderness journeying – "daily" (Ex 16:5). In this way the hoarding of food, or the temptation to have more than others, was neutralized.

Keep in mind that until this time, apart from the twelve apostles, there was no manager of this daily distribution. It was done within a context of unity and accord, because the people "were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). The storehouse of resources was managed by the apostles, for the money obtained from the sale of properties and goods was

However, in due time, the flesh was allowed to enter by means of some form of indiscretion. Whether it was owing to something intentional, as the complaint affirmed, or simply unintentionally because of a lack of wisdom, we do not know.

among the disciples. Previously, there have been at least three references to this practice.

⇨ "And all that believed were together, and had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, **and parted them to all men, as every man had need**" (Acts 2:44-45).

⇨ "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: **but they had all things common**" (Acts 4:32).

⇨ "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: **and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need**" (Acts 4:34-35).

Here it is apparent that distribution was not made on a crisis

brought to them (4:35,37; 5:2).

However, in due time, the flesh was allowed to enter by means of some form of indiscretion. Whether it was owing to something intentional, as the complaint affirmed, or simply unintentionally because of a lack of wisdom, we do not know.

Historians position the events commencing with the apostles imprisonment and beating as much as two years after the day of Pentecost. A considerable amount of time had elapsed without any significant disruption among the disciples themselves. However, alas, now there is a small breach, and it can become potentially large, threatening to spread and hinder the propagation of the Gospel. How did such a thing occur?

Apart from the complaint registered by the Greek-speaking Jews, we are not told the specific weakness that allowed for potentially contaminating influences. However, we do know from Scripture that someone had made a place

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for the devil, whether on purpose of because of ignorance. This is why we are warned to be “sober” and “vigilant,” for the devil is prowling about, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). It is not without reason that believers are admonished, “Neither give place to the devil,” or “do not give the devil an opportunity”^{NASB} (Eph 4:27). If we are ignorant of Satan’s devices, he will gain “get an advantage over us” (2 Cor 2:11).

The people of God must not be overly simplistic in their relationships with one another. It is, for example,

possible for believers to develop a carnal familiarity with one another so that they fail to “put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). He is looking for an entrance point, and the people of God must take care not to provide him with one. An “occasion to the flesh,” or “opportunity for the flesh”^{NASB} (Gal 5:13), is not necessarily equivalent to the indulgence of the flesh. It is rather a circumstance that leads to the indulgence of the flesh. Perhaps it is an unguarded moment, a lack of wisdom, a

thoughtless word, or some naive deed that has not taken results into consideration.

The manner in which the apostles address this situation confirms that it did not result from some deliberate sin – like the pride and covetousness of Ananias and Sapphira. They will therefore labor to avoid it leading to a sin which requires repentance. A congregation is blessed that can foresee evil and hide themselves from its encroachment (Prov 22:3; 27:12).

THEY CALLED THE MULTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLES

“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.”

“called together the general body of the disciples,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “convened the multitude of the disciples.”^{AMPLIFIED}

(2:47). Then five thousand men believed (4:4), bringing the number to well over eight thousand, one hundred and twenty. As long as two years later, “multitude of both men and women” were added to the group (5:14), besides the multitudes added between the healing of the lame man and then. It seems to me that an ultra-conservative number can be estimated to be at ten thousand minimum, and as high as fifteen or twenty thousand. There were a lot of people, and the records confirm that to have been the case.

At this time, there is an obvious submission to the apostles, whom Jesus placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). With gracious authority, they summoned the whole body of believers together. This is itself a staggering thing to consider. In fact, if “the unity of the Spirit” was not present, it could not have been done.

THE TWELVE CALLED THE DISCIPLES

“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said . . .” Other versions read, “summoned the multitude of disciples,”^{NKJV} “summoned the congregation of disciples,”^{NASB} “gathered all the disciples together,”^{NIV} “called together the whole community of the disciples,”^{NRSV} “summoned the body of disciples,”^{RSV} “sent for all the disciples,”^{BBE} “summoned the full number of the disciples,”^{ESV} “convoked the whole company of the disciples,”^{MRD} “gathered all the disciples together,”^{NIB} “called a full meeting of the disciples,”^{NJB} “having called near the multitude of the disciples,”^{YLT} “called the whole group of followers together,”^{LIVING}

At this time, there is an obvious submission to the apostles, whom Jesus placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). With gracious authority, they summoned the whole body of believers together. This is itself a staggering thing to consider. In fact, if “the unity of the Spirit” was not present, it could not have been done. We do not know the number involved in this gathering, but it would be large, even in today’s mega-church environment. In general terms, we can get some idea of the magnitude of this group. First, things began with a least one hundred and twenty (1:15). Then, three thousand were added, bringing the minimum number to three thousand, one hundred, and twenty. After that, “the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved”

Can you imagine convening a multitude of that size? Better yet, can you fathom such a mass of people being managed by twelve men? I know of congregations with barely over 1,500 members who have a paid staff of fifteen or twenty, with scores of other leaders and committees. However, there is no indication in the record that gathering this multitude together was attended by any great difficulty. This is the effect of regeneration upon the individuals, and the unity of the Spirit collectively.

SOMETHING UNREASONABLE

“ . . . It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” Other versions read, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables,”^{NKJV} “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables,”^{NASB} “It would not be right for us to neglect the

ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables,"^{NIV} "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables,"^{RSV} "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables,"^{ASV} "It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables,"^{CSV} "It's not right for us to give up God's word in order to distribute food,"^{GWN} "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program,"^{NLT} "It is wrong for us to quit teaching God's message to serve tables instead,"^{IE} "It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect [preaching] the Word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "It is not right that we should have to neglect preaching the Word of God in order to look after the accounts."^{PHILLIPS}

Although popular modern preachers are known for their administration, this was not the way of the apostles of Christ. **Here was something that had to be done, but it was out of order for the apostles to do it.** Jesus had not called them to be business managers, or to superintend special programs of the early church. It is not that such things did not need to be done. Rather, it is that the apostles were **not** the ones to do it.

When men are asked to leave laboring in the Word and the doctrine to administer food programs, it is wrong, for it is against sound reasoning. However one may choose to view ministries pertaining to our bodies, they come "AFTER" the teaching gifts (1 Cor 12:28). That is the order in which God placed them in the church, and they must not be allowed to be given the chief place, or require the extensive involvement of those who are teachers of the Word of God. I once knew a very gifted man who had a fair grasp of the Word of God and the ability to communicate it. Because his brethren did not prefer that kind of labor, he ended his life handing out food and clothing at a rescue center. It is not that assisting the poor was wrong, it was that it was wrong for him to be required to do it. It was not sound reasoning on his part to leave teaching the Word to engage in that work, and it was wrong for anyone to expect him to do so.

The fact that the work about to be addressed was important is confirmed in the qualifications for those who would be chosen to do it. Spiritual Babylon is widely noted for its faulty allocation of Kingdom people. It is not unusual to find them assigning a genuine teacher to janitorial work, or some other service duty. It is equally as normal to find those who ought to be serving tables occupying the role of a teacher.

It is always wrong to expect someone to do something for which they have not been duly gifted by the Lord. It is also wrong to not ignore the ministry

⇒ The ability of the congregated disciples to select spiritually qualified men.

⇒ The presence of several competent men into whose hands an essential ministry could be placed.

When a person has spiritual insights, and the ability to communicate them, it is not right for them spend their time in servile functions of the body of Christ. That involves unfaithfulness to the stewardship of the truth. Notwithstanding this circumstance, the modern church is intent upon hiring

The apostles knew where Jesus had placed them, had a hearty appetite for the Word of God, and refused to be moved from giving themselves to it.

for which one has been suited by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Head of the body (Col 1:18), and the Holy Spirit is Administrator of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4,7-11). When men refuse to honor the choice of Jesus and the governance of the Holy Spirit, it is a serious matter.

The Priority of the Word of God

The words of the apostles confirm the absolute priority of the understanding and preaching of the Word of God. **At this point, the burden of the preaching was directed to the disciples themselves, who were continuing steadfastly in "apostles doctrine" (2:42).** They were living out what Paul would articulate with unusual clarity some years later. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16). The development of maturity among the brethren, resulting from the preaching of the Word, will be confirmed in this very text.

professional clergyman who carry out the religious requirements of congregational leaders who frequently present no evidence of spiritual maturity. The actual grasp and preaching of the Word of God is not very high on their religious agenda. Further, congregations as a whole provide very little time for hearing the Word of the Lord. The result of this distorted sense of values is so evident that only the disinterested fail to see it.

The apostles knew where Jesus had placed them, had a hearty appetite for the Word of God, and refused to be moved from giving themselves to it. God hasten the day when preachers and teachers within the professed church will see the need for such commitment, and refuse to submit to the stunted desires of those who have no understanding of these things. It simply is neither right nor reasonable to submit to people who have no understanding of this.

The Matter of Missions

A word needs to be said about the matter of missions. In recent decades, an immature church has produced missionaries and missionary programs that are largely given over to relief work.

Although I have not traveled extensively throughout the world, I have noted with remarkable consistency the absence of spiritual maturity and knowledge in foreign missions. Rarely will you find a gathering of believers among whom the people are being changed from glory unto glory.

There remains a remnant of faithful workers who see the priority of preaching the Word of God. However, they are in a decided minority. **Although I have not traveled extensively throughout the world, I have noted with remarkable consistency the absence of spiritual maturity and knowledge in foreign missions.** Rarely will you find a gathering of believers among whom the people are being changed from glory unto glory. It is true that many have left idolatry and reprehensible personal and social practices. However, they are often not adept at handling the Word of God, comprehending the mysteries of the Kingdom, or being able to admonish and edify one another. This is not an acceptable situation – particularly when it has continued for many years. **It exists**

because someone has left the Word of God to serve tables, and it is not right. God does not have a separate standard for third world countries.

The Priority of Prayer

Lest the uniformed imagine that the apostles are speaking about the development of spiritual bookworms, there is also the consideration of prayer – of **leaders** giving themselves to prayer. This is not a morning or evening prayer, but a manner of life in which there is total dependence upon the Lord of glory. **The apostles were men who were keenly aware of the necessity of Divine leadership.**

Jesus Himself is the example of being given to prayer. Throughout His

prodigious ministry, He would withdraw for prayer (Matt 14:23; Mk 6:46; Lk 6:12; 9:18,18; 11:1; John 17). We know that these occasions were not infrequent, for it is said that he “*oftimes resorted*” to prayer in Gethsemane “*with His disciples*” (John 18:2). Since “*the servant is not greater than his master*” (John 13:16), the apostles would not be turned aside from prayer in order to meet the temporal needs of the people. **However, this did not mean they were willing to ignore them.** They would, in godly wisdom, provide for that ministry to continue to the glory of God.

The Serving of Tables

What does it mean to “*serve tables?*” The word “*serve*” means to “*minister to one . . . supply the necessities of life, relieve one’s necessities, provide care for, distribute, etc*” STRONGS. As it is used here, the word “*tables*” means “*a table on which food is placed, an eating table,*” THAYER “*a place for spreading out meals,*” FRIBERG “*a dining table,*” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “*a meal, food.*” GINGRICH Here, then, the apostles are referring to **the distribution of food** to those who were lacking. Widows were the particular focus of the complaints, but others might very well have been included who were remaining in Jerusalem, although they were from other countries.

A WORK THAT REQUIRED INSIGHT AND SPIRITUALITY

“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.”

What kind of men are required to administer the procurement and distribution of food among believers? Remember, this was not a food program for the poor people of Jerusalem and the surrounding cities. It was not a program to which the multitudes of beggars might repair, finding their daily needs. No man of sound mind will frown on such a work, but that is not the focus of this text. Here we are speaking about providing the needs of the brethren.

CHOSEN FROM AMONG

YOURSELVES

“*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men . . .*” Other versions read, “*seek out from among you seven men,*” NKJV “*choose seven men from among you,*” NIV “*select from among yourselves,*” NRSV “*pick out from among you seven men,*” RSV “*Take then from among you seven men,*” BBE “*search out, and elect from among you, seven men,*” MRD “*Now look around among yourselves, dear brothers, and select seven men,*” LIVING “*find from among your own number seven men,*” MONTGOMERY “*select out from among yourselves, brethren, seven men,*” AMPLIFIED and “*You, our brothers, must look round and pick out from your number seven men.*” PHILLIPS

At this time, and in keeping with

the nature of the Kingdom, **there was not an organization that specialized in the training of special servants.** There was not religious school to which they could appeal, or any training institute. They were not to import someone from another place who had success in this type of work. **The resource pool was the congregation itself.** Being a healthy body, they could find the needed people “*among*” themselves. There are countless congregations that would disappear from society if they were limited to their own number for people to administer valid works – particularly if they had to meet the qualifications laid down by the apostles, who had the mind of Christ on the matter.

Seven Men

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There is no indication of the magnitude of this work. However, the total number of this congregation could well have been between fifteen and twenty thousand. If only one percent of them required aid, that would be between 150-200. Five percent would be 750-1000. Without indulging in distracting speculation, it is evident that this was a sizeable work. How many men will be required? Some rather small churches have 6-8 deacons, whose only job is to pass the communion and collection trays. Surely this work will require a fairly good number of men.

Endued with the wisdom that comes down from above, the apostles specify "seven men." Proportionately, this would be similar to the "seventy" men provided to Moses for judging of Israel – dealing with their complaints (Num 11:16). That was a situation involving a traveling city of, conservatively speaking, two to five million people.

As you can see, in the cases of both Moses and the apostles, the number of administrating men differed significantly from the thinking of the church of our day. After Moses, and prior to the Kings, Judges were given to Israel one at a time. When Jesus chose men to reach the entire world, He selected twelve, who gave particular attention to the Jews (Gal 2:7-8). When He chose a man to reach the entire Gentile world, He chose one single man – Paul. This conflicts with the world's notion about organization, responsibility, and management. You would be hard pressed to find any local congregation who operates with this kind of wisdom.

Something About the Early Church

The church to which we are now being exposed had not yet been corrupted. **Therefore, things can be seen in it that attest to the nature of spiritual life.** Here was a significantly large body of people who were decidedly familiar with one another. Although they numbered in the thousands, they would be asked to select seven of their number who met particular qualifications. There are still those who insist that believers can get "lost in the crowd," and so they prefer small congregations, where everyone knows each other. If that is

really sound reasoning, how do we account for this text? How was it possible for them to have the kind of familiarity that will be necessary for this assignment?

Remember, this was a church that was continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). They met together "daily" in the temple, and from house to house (Acts 2:46,47; 5:42). They were "of one accord" (2:46; 5:12), and "were of one heart and of one soul" (4:32).

It is within the context of frequent gatherings and singleness of heart that they became familiar with those among them who were unusual or gifted. They came to know each other as brethren within the framework of consistent devotion and expression. This was also the environment in which spiritual gifts were cultured, so that those possessing them could confirm their reality through insightful expression. This will be apparent in the words of instructions that follow.

CHOOSE A CERTAIN KIND OF MEN

"... of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom..." Other versions read, "of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."^{NKJV} "who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."^{NIV} "of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,"^{NRSV} "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom."^{RSV} "of good name, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,"^{BBE} "well reported of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,"^{DARBY} "whom the people know are spiritually wise."^{GWN} "of whom there is good testimony, men full of the Spirit of the Lord, and of wisdom."^{MRD} "who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom."^{NET} "who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom."^{NLT} "who are well testified of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."^{YLT} "wise and full of the Holy Spirit, who are well thought of by everyone."^{LIVING} "of good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom."^{AMPLIFIED} and "of good reputation who are both practical and spiritually-minded."^{PHILLIPS}

The seven men to be chosen had to meet a certain standard. Three



qualifications were specified. Remember, the distribution of food was the responsibility, together with the various details associated with it.

Men of Honest Report

These had to be men who were highly regarded by the Christian community. The words "honest report" have to do with spiritual qualities – things related to faith and one's association with the Lord and His people. Cornelius had a "good report" among the Jews (Acts 10:22). Ananias, called of God to set Saul of Tarsus aside for the apostleship had "a good report of all the Jews" who knew him (Acts 22:12). Through faith, "the elders" among Israel "obtained a good report" (Heb 11:2). All of the saints of past ages, because they lived by faith, "obtained a good report" (Heb 11:39). John the beloved spoke of one Demetrius, who "had good report of all men and of the truth itself" (3 John 1:12). Young Timothy was "well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). A widow who was being supported by the local congregation was required to be "well reported of for good works" (1 Tim 5:10).

This would be a godly person whose commitment to the Lord was beyond all question. When the brethren gathered together, this is a man who would be there, not forsaking the assembling of himself with the saints (Heb 10:25). He was active in holy expressions, with "good and attested character and repute."^{AMPLIFIED}

How many men do you know like this? If you do know of any, it is because of the acquaintance you developed with them in the work of the Lord. This qualification does not have to do with

mere human kindness and domestic integrity. Such qualities, while not to be despised, can be obtained independently of faith and commitment to Christ.

There are vast numbers of churches who never meet often enough for a person to obtain a good report. Even when they do meet, the structure of their gatherings does not allow for the surfacing of godly qualities. Holy assemblies, when brethren dwell together in unity, are times when each individual becomes like a city *“that is set on a hill”* (Matt 5:14) – like a candle that is put on a stand shedding light throughout the whole house (Matt 5:15). I do not know if it would be possible to obtain the *“honest report”* required by these instructions independently of meeting with the saints.

“Full of the Holy Spirit”

Once again, keep in mind that we are speaking of distributing supplies to those with need. **Those selected for this**

condition. It is one in which the whole person – heart, soul, mind, and strength – is being influenced by the Holy Spirit. This describes a person who is not a surface Christian – a member of the Sunday-morning-only crowd. **It is a person who has a love for the truth and is culturing it.** This is the person described by Jesus: *“He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him . . . If a man love me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him”* (John 14:21,23).

This is a person who neither grieves nor quenches the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). He is walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25), and being *“led by the Spirit”* (Rom 8:14). Through the Spirit he is mortifying *“the deeds of the body”* (Rom 8:13), and is abounding in

FRIBERG *“to act wisely – to be prudent,”* LOUW-NIDA and *“sound judgment, intelligence, practical wisdom.”* LIDDELL-SCOTT Wisdom would be required to make an equitable division of supplies among the people receiving support – particularly the widows, so that none would be neglected.

This is not a wisdom that is acquired through schooling, but has more to do with discernment, which enables the individual to use knowledge in such a manner as will glorify God and assist His people. The area of distribution had already become a troublesome one, and the early church could ill afford for that condition to continue.

A Question

How do you suppose the average American church would respond to a directive like this? Would they know what it meant? **Keep in mind that the church was under two years old at this time.** Many of the believers had been added well after the day of Pentecost. The apostles, who had the edge over the others in experience as well as giftedness, had just been subjected to an additional three years with the Lord Jesus Himself. **Yet, behold what things are being done by these believers!**

Some might object, saying they had access to supernatural insight and wisdom, and therefore cannot be compared with our time. Is this a proper assessment of the case? **Is the era of the New Covenant stronger at its beginning, having benefits that were not provided to later generations?** Is there anything foretold about the New Covenant, or any exposition of it after its inauguration that suggests this kind of thing? Did the early church have spiritual resources that were **unique** to them – things not included in *“all spiritual blessings”* (Eph 1:3), and *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Pet 1:3)? Is such a view ever prophesied or proclaimed?

If such a view cannot be substantiated, then the early church had nothing more to work with than we do. Their faith could not access more Divine resources than the faith that is obtained today. Of course, that is the precise point that Peter makes in his Second Epistle. *“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained*

This is not a wisdom that is acquired through schooling, but has more to do with discernment, which enables the individual to use knowledge in such a manner as will glorify God and assist His people. The area of distribution had already become a troublesome one, and the early church could ill afford for that condition to continue.

work were required to be full of the Holy Spirit.

The language here is precise, and must be grasped – particularly in view of much contemporary teaching about the Holy Spirit. The qualification **does not** say, “one who **was** filled with the Holy Spirit” – pointing a particular time in the past. Warped sectarian theology has taught people to view being filled with the Spirit as a particular point in time, so that it is seen as a solitary, or perhaps infrequent, experience. But that is not the kind of thing referenced here.

The word *“full”* refers to a **present**

hope *“through the power of the Holy Spirit”*^{NKJV} (Rom 5:13). The *“fruit of the Spirit”* is evident in him (Eph 5:9), and he is waiting for *“the hope of righteousness”* through the Spirit (Gal 5:5). To be *“full of the Holy Spirit”* is to be filled with the things He does.

“Full of Wisdom”

It ought to be readily apparent why those responsible for distributing food were required to be filled with wisdom. Again, this is a present condition: *“full of wisdom.”* Wisdom involves *“broad and full intelligence,”* and here means *“skill in the management of affairs.”*^{THAYER} Other lexical meanings are, *“the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior, insight, understanding,”*

like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1). Other versions read, "a faith of the same kind as ours," ^{NASB} "a faith as precious as ours," ^{NIV} "a faith of equal standing with ours," ^{RSV} and "obtained an equal privilege of like precious faith with ourselves" ^{AMPLIFIED}. There is, after all, only "one faith" (Eph 4:5), and it is "the faith of God's elect," not the faith of the apostles (Tit 1:1).

This is why the apostles could charge the whole congregation of disciples as they did. As the children of God, they had access to all of the resources required to select men who were filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom. That condition – being filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom – was not unique to the first century. Nor, indeed, were men of this caliber only available at that time.

Let it be clear, this was not the operation of a democratic process, where people voted their preferences. **Rather, this involve the exercise of discernment.** It was a process through which God's own choice was implemented. In a sense, their responsibility was to concur with Divine judgment by recognizing the qualities that were necessary for the work – a **daily work**.

APPOINTED OVER THE BUSINESS

"... whom we may appoint over this business." Other versions read, "put in charge of this task," ^{NASB} "We will turn this responsibility over to them," ^{NIV} "appoint to this duty," ^{RSV} "give control of this business," ^{BBE} "establish over this business," ^{DARBY} "put them in charge of this problem," ^{GWN} "place them over this business," ^{MRD} "appoint to this needful business," ^{TNT} "set over this necessity," ^{VLT} "confirm them to be over the work," ^{IE} "appoint them to undertake this duty," ^{WEYMOUTH} "assign to look after this business and duty," ^{AMPLIFIED} and "put them in charge of this matter," ^{PHILLIPS}

Here is an exercise that involved the use of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 16:19). The apostles knew what had to be done, informed the disciples what was required, and prepared to ordain the men to the work.

There is no responsibility within the body of Christ that does not require a good and godly reputation, wisdom, and being filled with the Spirit – even food distribution! This would, if known, revolutionize the choice of leaders and servants within modern churches. It would also emphasize the necessity of

things that are really not needed. In Paul's letter to Titus, he spoke to this issue. "And let ours also learn to maintain good works **for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful**" (Titus 3:14). The word "ours" means "our people," ^{NKJV} or *we Christians*. The "good works" of reference are "honest labor and honorable

The teaching, therefore, is that believers are to learn to engage in honest and honorable employment in order that they might obtain the necessities of their life in this world, and assist in meeting the needs of their brethren as well. In this way, they will not be drawn aside into vain and worldly living that stops the bearing of fruit unto God.

spiritual maturity – growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15) – as well as inducting massive changes.

"This Business"

The average American associates the word "business" with making money. But that is not how the word is used here. This term is translated from the Greek word *χρεία* (cry-as), which means "necessity, need . . . necessary uses," ^{THAYER} "necessity . . . needful," ^{FRIBERG} "that which is lacking, and is particularly needed," ^{LOUW-NIDA} and "use, advantage, service." ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

In this sense, therefore, "business" is an orderly and godly approach to meeting some necessity. We know from the creation itself that God does things in an orderly manner. Experience will tell you that randomness cannot yield consistent profit, because it has no arrangement to it. The human body is another example of orderliness. As soon as something becomes random, it does not function correctly. The door is then opened to weakness and infirmity. In the necessity being addressed in this text, a daily distribution could not be properly accomplished by sporadic and undisciplined means.

The teaching of Scripture also accents this aspect of necessity, as compared with luxury, and a quest for

employment." ^{AMPLIFIED} "Necessary uses" refers to the necessities of life, as compared with its luxuries. It can also refer to the rising of critical needs among those around us, as in this text. The word "unfruitful" refers to a state of non-productivity, where life becomes vain and pointless – bearing no fruit unto God. The teaching, therefore, is that **believers are to learn to engage in honest and honorable employment in order that they might obtain the necessities of their life in this world, and assist in meeting the needs of their brethren as well.** In this way, they will not be drawn aside into vain and worldly living that stops the bearing of fruit unto God. It ought to be apparent that laboring for this world's luxuries has an inhibiting effect upon spiritual life.

This must not be interpreted as making a law concerning why we are employed or how others are to spend their money. However, in each believer's thinking, the priority must be given to a quest for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We must maintain a tenacious grasp on the fact that "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor 7:31), and "all that is in the world... is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15). That perspective will enable us to make a proper assessment of what is "necessary."

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

GIVING THEMSELVES TO PRAYER AND MINISTERING THE WORD

“⁴ But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

At this point we are confronted with the **priorities** of the apostles – and spiritual leaders must have the **proper** priorities. It is further apparent that **men** cannot establish what takes the precedence in matters pertaining to the work of the Lord. If this was not the case, the murmurers would have moved the apostles from prayer and the word to waiting on tables. I fear that this is exactly what has happened in a significant portion of Christendom.

GIVE OURSELVES CONTINUALLY

“But we will give ourselves continually . . .” Other versions read, *“devote ourselves,”* ^{NASB} *“give our attention to,”* ^{NIV} *“continue steadfastly in,”* ^{ASV} *“give ourselves up to,”* ^{DARBY} *“spend our time in,”* ^{NLT} *“use all of time to,”* ^{IE} *“continue to devote ourselves steadfastly to,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“devote ourselves wholeheartedly to.”* ^{PHILLIPS}

One of the strategies of the devil is to get believers to fritter away their time by doing much and only accomplishing a little. In our text, this would happen if the apostles spent their time distributing food rather than in the task for which Jesus had chosen them. Let it be clear that God is **not** glorified by **primarily** serving people. As simplistic as it may sound, the Lord is served **directly**, not indirectly, by doing His will, pleasing Him, and accomplishing what He has sent men to do. Jesus, for example, did not spend all of His time washing the disciples feet. We know this was not a constant activity of His, because when He did do it, it was a surprise to them. In fact, Peter responded, *“Thou shalt never wash my feet”* (John 13:8). On another occasion, when the people were pressing Jesus to such an extent that He could not leave them, he responded, *“I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for **therefore am I sent**”* (Luke 4:43).

Men cannot serve God in any meaningful capacity without becoming expert in His Word, by which they live. I

do not believe there is any spiritual gift, or aptitude, that can be effectively ministered independently of the Word of God and prayer. Notwithstanding that perception, spiritual Babylon has carved out a number of professions and areas of service in which a person can remain miserably ignorant and unacquainted with God’s word. Unless God has changed His manner, such activity is really a waste of time. I seriously doubt that the blessing of God can even be upon it. If men *“live by every word of God”* (Lk 4:4), how is it possible for them to ignore it and still serve God? If the Scriptures have been given *“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Tim 3:17), what work is there within the body of Christ that can be done to God’s glory while a person remains unlearned in Scripture?

When servants of God are required to devote their attention to doing the will of men, they are being asked to leave the path of discipleship. This will be clear in what the apostles here affirm.

Those who labor for the Lord must give themselves to it. That is, they must invest of themselves in their work, pouring their hearts, souls, minds, and strength into it. Peter referred to this when he wrote, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: **that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen**”* (1 Pet 4:11).

The circumference of our activity within the body of Christ is determined by the ministry in which God has placed us. It is written, *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him”* (1 Cor 12:18). This is the area in which special grace will be ministered to each person, and is the domain in which individual labors are to be expended.

A Word Concerning Discovering Your Place Within the Body of Christ

First of all, it is important to note that the nominal church suppresses the



very idea of members being in a *“body.”* Members are rather viewed as being part of an institution, whose purpose they are expected to serve. Within that context, the various spiritual gifts that are mentioned in Scripture have little meaning. These gifts include the following.

- ⇨ Apostles (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28)
- ⇨ Prophets (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10,28)
- ⇨ Evangelists (Eph 4:11)
- ⇨ Pastor/Teachers (Eph 4:11)
- ⇨ Ministry, or service (Rom 12:7; 1 Pet 4:11)
- ⇨ Teaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28)
- ⇨ Exhorting (Rom 12:8)
- ⇨ Giving (Rom 12:9)
- ⇨ Ruling (Rom 12:8)
- ⇨ Showing mercy (Rom 12:8)
- ⇨ Word of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)
- ⇨ Word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)
- ⇨ Faith (1 Cor 12:9)
- ⇨ Gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9,28)

- ⇒ Discerning of spirits (1 Cor 12:10)
- ⇒ Speaking differing languages (1 Cor 12:10,28)
- ⇒ Interpreting different languages (1 Cor 12:10)
- ⇒ Working of miracles (1 Cor 12:10,28)
- ⇒ Helps (1 Cor 12:28)
- ⇒ Governments (1 Cor 12:28)
- ⇒ General speaking gifts (1 Pet 4:11)

The question here is not whether or not all of these gifts are still valid. **They are Divinely placed in the church – the real church – and men have no power at all over their placement.** Further, their role is to fulfill the will of God. The variety of gifts will perfectly accord with the work God has laid out for the congregation and the area in which they reside. We should not expect the gifts that were found in the Jerusalem church to be found in every church. That is why the gifts mentioned in Ephesians differ from those mentioned in Romans and Corinthians.

As with every facet of spiritual life, the individual finds their role within the framework of the life of the body. Further, the purpose of the teaching and leadership gifts is to mature the body, so that each individual part can effectively function. This is the perspective that is developed in both Ephesians and Colossians.

Ephesians outlines the purpose of the four proclamation and teaching ministries (Eph 4:11-16): apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. The latter gift emphasizes the leadership and care (pastor), and is the means through which it is accomplished (teacher).

- ⇒ These gifts are designed for the “perfecting,” or maturing, “of the saints”(v 12a).
- ⇒ That maturity has to do with fulfilling their role in the body: “the work of the ministry”(v 12b).
- ⇒ The aim of that work is *the edifying*

of the body”(v 12c).

- ⇒ Edification is intended to bring the brethren into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (v 13a).

OBJECTIVE OF THE TEACHING

PERFECTING THE SAINTS

THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

EDIFYING OF THE BODY

UNITY OF THE FAITH/KNOWLEDGE

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

NO MORE UNSTABLE CHILDREN

SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

GROW UP IN ALL THINGS

BODY FITLY JOINED TOGETHER

EVERY JOINT SUPPLYING

INCREASE OF THE BODY

EDIFYING OF ITSELF IN LOVE

- ⇒ The unity of reference targets spiritual maturity, with each member fulfilling their role in the body, functioning in that role as Jesus Himself (v 13b).
- ⇒ The intent of maturity is that the people no longer be tossed to and fro by the winds of false doctrine (v 14).
- ⇒ That stability enables them to speak the truth in love (v 15a).
- ⇒ Speaking the truth in love enables the members to grow up into Christ in all things (v 15b).
- ⇒ Growing up into Christ brings the people to a point where Jesus can minister to His body through the individual (v 16a).
- ⇒ That mutual ministry causes the body to increase in the image of

Christ (v 16b).

- ⇒ That increase brings the body to a point where it can edify, or build up, itself in love (4:16c).

The point of this rather lengthy section is to confirm that you will find your role in the body of Christ in the valid activities of that body – just as surely as the seven men mentioned in this text found theirs. They did not find it on a mountain, in isolation from the rest of the body, but in the steadfast involvements of that body.

It is apparent that this objective is like a lost jewel in the modern church. Yet, this is precisely what we see being lived out in the book of Acts. The apostles knew the Lord’s objective, as well as their role in it. Their awareness of these things was cultured in the presence of Jesus, and with their fellow disciples. That is the spiritual environment in which they were nurtured. This is all involved in the apostles refusal to leave their role to serve tables. They will so direct the brethren as to enable both their maturity and their increased involvement, which is the result of their maturity.

Much of the history of the church, and even the world, will depend on the stability and mutual ministry of the church in Jerusalem. It must be strong, with all of the members growing up into Christ, and thus becoming equipped to fulfill the role in which God had placed them.

PRAYER AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

“ . . . to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” Other versions read, “prayer and servicing the word.”^{NRSV} “prayer and the teaching of the word.”^{BBE} “praying and to servicing in ways that are related to the word.”^{GWN} “spend our time in prayer, preaching, and teaching.”^{LIVING} “pray and to teach the message of God.”^{1E} “prayer and to the delivery of the Message.”^{WEYMOUTH} “prayer and the word of God.”^{WILLIAMS} and “whole-heartedly to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”^{PHILLIPS}

As was taught under the Law, the priority of their activity related first to God, then to men: prayer (God), and the ministry of the Word (men). This priority

is reflected throughout Scripture. Here are a few examples.

- ⇒ *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And **the second** is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”* (Matt 22:37-39).
- ⇒ *“But **seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness**: and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Mat 6:33).
- ⇒ *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is **acceptable to God, and approved of men**”* (Rom 14:17-18).
- ⇒ *“And this commandment have we from Him, That he who **loveth God love his brother also**”* (1 John 4:21).
- ⇒ *“Submit yourselves therefore **to God**. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

the professed church have obscured this truth. Those who teach distorted religious emphases in the name of Christ are much like the Philistines who filled the wells dug by Abraham with “earth” (Gen 26:15,18). This is a very serious infraction, and the results it has yielded confirm it.

Prayer

The apostles affirm that they will continue to give themselves to prayer. That is, **they will yield themselves to this priority**. The point here is **not** the nature or subject of their prayers. Prayer can take many forms: Thanksgiving, praise, supplication, intercession, etc. The point here is that **prayer was a means of withdrawing from the world and culturing the soul in the presence of the Lord** – as Jesus did (Matt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16; 6:12; John 6:15).

Even David, living in the time of lesser revelation, knew the significant role prayer plays in the life of faith. *“For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness”* (Psa 84:10). Men

New Covenant. In prayer, a certain awareness of God and His will is developed that is essential to life.

The Ministry of the Word

The apostles declared that the selection of seven spiritually competent men to oversee the daily distribution was in order that they might give themselves to *“the ministry of the Word.”* What does this mean? As used here, the expression *“ministry”* means “service, ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others,” ^{THAYER} “arrangement for provision, serving, preparation,” ^{FRIBERG} “contribution, support, help,” ^{UBS} and “distribution.” ^{GINGRICH}

The person who ministers the Word brings the Word of God to the table of thought. He has an understanding of the objective of Scripture, and is able to correlate it with circumstance. Those who receive the ministry of the Word become more God-conscious, and advance in their understanding of Christ’s Person and work, and the Divine intent behind God’s *“so great salvation”* (Heb 2:3).

The effective minister of the Word is approved of God, and is able to correctly handle that Word (2 Tim 2:15). He is acutely aware of the fact that he will give an account to God for the manner in which he handles Scripture. Because this kind of minister plows in the field of Scripture, and not in the nettle-strewn fields of human wisdom, he can preach the Word, being instant, or ready, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2). That is involved in ministering the word of God.

In our time, the ministry of the Word does not rank very high in the church world. Preaching and teaching the Word of God is given very little time, and during very few occasions. Under the leadership of low-ranking novices, men are being taught that praising God takes the precedence, and therefore more time is given to it in the contemporary churches. That is, people are actually being taught that what they say to God is more important than what He says to them. We now have youth groups that emphasize games, videos, music, and the likes, with little or no subjection to the Word. It is not unusual to have senior citizen groups in the church that go on pleasure outings regularly, yet remain

Men must grow accustomed to the presence of the Lord before they can profitably engage in His work. There is no valid ministry that does not require an acute consciousness of God and His will. No person can properly expound the Word of God who is not in active fellowship with Him through Christ Jesus.

The Reasoning

The reasoning here is this: if it is God to whom we are reconciled in Christ, there is no legitimate activity that requires Him to take second place. If Jesus is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18), then anything that draws our primary attention from Him cannot possibly be right. **There is no way to justify involvement in anything that tends to lessen the importance of the One who saved us and our relationship to Him.** Although this represents rudimentary Kingdom thinking, we are living in a time when the message and activities of

must grow accustomed to the presence of the Lord before they can profitably engage in His work. **There is no valid ministry that does not require an acute consciousness of God and His will.** No person can properly expound the Word of God who is not in active fellowship with Him through Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the apostles will give themselves to prayer, wherein their spirits will be cultured, and through which Divine direction will be realized. This is in keeping with the nature of salvation and the spiritual fabric of the

fundamentally ignorant of the word.

It all may sound innocent, but it

is not. Somewhere along the line, the Word of the living God is not being given the priority, and the results tell the story.

The apostles refused to adjust to such a posture and perspective, and we must refuse to do so also.

THE SAYING PLEASED THE MULTITUDE

^{5a} **And the saying pleased the whole multitude.** Other versions read, “the statement found approval with the whole congregation,”^{NASB} “This proposal pleased the whole group,”^{NIV} “what they said pleased the whole community,”^{NRSV} “his saying was pleasing to all of them,”^{BBE} “what they said pleased the whole gathering,”^{ESV} “The suggestion pleased the whole group,”^{GWN} “this proposal was acceptable before all the people,”^{MRD} “Everyone liked this idea,”^{NLT} “the thing was pleasing before all the multitude,”^{YLT} “This sounded reasonable to the whole assembly,”^{LIVING} “The suggestion met with general approval,”^{WEYMOUTH} “This plan commended itself to the whole body,”^{MONTGOMERY} and “This brief speech met with unanimous approval.”^{PHILLIPS}

You can see from some of the versions of Scripture that the translators (if they can be so called) had their sectarian glasses on when they put the text into English. “The twelve” did not deliver a “suggestion”^{GWN} to the people. Their words were not a “proposal,”^{MRD} nor were they the expression of an “idea”^{NLT} – something they had conceived.

THE SAYING

“And the saying . . .” The word “saying” comes from the Greek word ὁ λόγος (the log-os). That is, **this was a succinct and cogent thought, delivered through the power of the Holy Spirit from Jesus Himself.** In one sense, it was an answer delivered from heaven. In another sense it was a directive to take proper action. **It was wisdom from above compressed into a message.** The article “the” is in both the Greek and the English. That indicates it was not a general word, but a specific word, pointed and complete in all aspects.

This was a word spoken from the Head through the key members of His body. That is how the Lord ministers to the church. Therefore it is written, “And

not holding the Head, **from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God**” (Col 2:19). The point of this word is that some men came to the church with “beguiling words” – words that were nothing more than their own carnal perceptions. In their case, handling the Scriptures was nothing more than them “intruding into those things which” they “had not seen, vainly puffed up with” their “fleshly mind” (Col 2:18). They were trying to direct the church independently of the Head of the church! **The church, therefore, was to pay no attention to them.** They were only cluttering the landscape of life with foolish notions.

It is Jesus who nourishes the

gain a foothold, causing division in the church. If this same circumstance had taken place today, leaders would probably have pioneered a Greek-speaking church and a Hebrew-speaking church, separating the disciples to avoid contention. In contradiction of an expression of worldly wisdom, the apostles deliver a word that will allow for the **correction** of the problem that has arisen. Their word also provides for the ongoing of their work, which will result in the establishment of the church as well as the spread of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners.

There is no record of a single dissenting word. Rather, the whole multitude of people are “pleased” with the word delivered by the apostles. The

This is not a display of successful salesmanship, or even of powerful persuasion. The word was brief, yet all of the people – “the whole multitude” were in thorough agreement with it. They saw the sense of it, and were therefore not opposed to it. In fact, they immediately embraced the word and set out to obey it.

church (Eph 5:29). It is the “Great Shepherd of the sheep” who directs them (Heb 13:20). In this text, He is doing it through the twelve apostles.

PLEASED THE WHOLE MULTITUDE

“ . . . pleased the whole multitude.” Even though murmuring had arisen among the believers, men had not yet become divided. They were still able to take hold of the truth, and recognize wisdom when they heard it. In other words, the Holy Spirit so orchestrated these sensitive brethren that Satan’s objective was thwarted. **When men are “slow of heart to believe”** (Lk 24:25), **the devil can more readily**

word translated “pleased” does not indicate a mere emotion. It rather means the people adjusted their thinking, coming into agreement with the apostles. The word from which “pleased” is translated means, “to accommodate oneself to the opinions, desires, and interests of others,”^{THAYER} to be “won over” to the thinking of another,”^{FRIBERG} to “accept” what is said,^{UBS} “to feel good about,”^{LOUW-NIDA} “to satisfy,”^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} and for something to be seen as “good.”^{LEH}

This is not a display of successful salesmanship, or even of powerful persuasion. The word was brief, yet all of the people – “the whole multitude” were in thorough agreement with it. They saw the sense of it, and were therefore not

opposed to it. In fact, they immediately embraced the word and set out to obey it.

This would be considered a kind of epoch if all that was involved was the average church board or group of elders. Few people would consider this possible for any size congregation. Normally churchmen operate on the majority rules. But here everyone agreed and was pleased – **everyone**. Let us not forget that we are not considering a small group of people. Prior to Jesus' exaltation, there were times when the apostles were not agreed among themselves (Matt 20:24). Here, by way of comparison, we are speaking of thousands of people – as many as 15,000-20,000! How is it that such a marvelous unity could be found among them?

This is owing to several key circumstances.

⇒ These were **real** converts, having

believed, obeyed, and become disciples of Jesus.

- ⇒ They had been taught **properly**, following *"the apostles' doctrine."*
- ⇒ They had brother **love**, continuing in fellowship and prayer with one accord.
- ⇒ They had a proper sense of **values**, continuing daily in the Temple and from house to house in their quest for the things of God.
- ⇒ They had been in a deeply **spiritual** environment, where the Word and work of God were prominent.

Here is an example of *"the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:1). There was no more murmuring, for the issue that caused it was brought to an abrupt conclusion. This is also an example of *"the unity of the faith and of*

the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13), for the brethren all saw the issue alike, and were pleased with what they now saw. **It is possible to have a view of unity that is nothing more than patiently putting up with one another, or not condemning one another over lesser matters.** In some circles – particularly the one from which I came – this was considered to be a gigantic stride forward. However, how do such achievements appear next to this text? Is it really a giant leap forward when we can talk without fighting, or meet together without condemning one another? Is that really spiritual growth?

It seems to me to be on the part of wisdom to cease from holding forth baby-steps as through they were broad-jumps. Better to set forth noble examples of real unity, like that of our text – where one word is received from one source, and everyone sees the sense of it, are pleased with it, and instantly obey it.

THEY CHOSE THE MEN

^{45b} . . . **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.** Other versions read, *"they made selection,"* ^{BBE} *"they elected,"* ^{MRD} and *"they selected."* ^{WEYMOUTH}

have cast it in religious stone and made it a law for choosing servants.

Here, the point is not the procedure but the accomplishment. These were people who had the same life, purpose, and perspective. They had been

idea of what being *"full of the Holy spirit"* meant. A significant percentage of Christendom would have no idea what it meant. Imagine selecting five different professing Christians and asking what was meant by *"full of the Spirit."* Presume you asked a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Pentecostal, a Methodist, and a member of the Christian Church. Can you even imagine all of them giving the same answer – and there are literally hundreds of additional sects in Christendom! **The people in our text, however, all agreed, having the same understanding and making the same choices.**

How do you suppose the various church bodies would interpret *"full of wisdom?"* Some would consider it to be equal to a college education, others to seminary training, and still others to having experience in social work. Again, these believers knew what to do, which is a revelation of their perception and commitment.

These people were the fruit of

These people were the fruit of apostolic preaching and teaching. They had continued steadfastly "in the apostles' doctrine," and this is some of the fruit realized from it – the ability to comprehend the truth, Take hold of, and do it.

THEY CHOSE

" . . . and they chose . . ." The method of choosing is not specified. Considering the vastness of the multitude, it may not have been by means of casting lots. It appears to me that there is a reason for not spelling out the details of the choosing. Men would

instructed to choose men who were *"full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom"* (verse 3). The people did not ask what that meant, but simply proceeded to do it. Ponder what a state of confusion would be caused if that qualification were declared in a straight-forward manner today. Each denomination would have their own

apostolic preaching and teaching. They had continued steadfastly *“in the apostles’ doctrine,”* and this is some of the fruit realized from it – the ability to comprehend the truth, Take hold of, and do it.

STEPHEN

“ . . . Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, *“a man unusually full of faith and the Holy Spirit,”*^{LIVING} *“a man of great faith and full of the Holy Spirit,”*^{IE} *“a man full of faith (a strong and welcome belief that Jesus is the Messiah) and full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit,”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“He had great faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*^{CEV}

Here is a most unique man. He is the subject of the next seventy verses (6:5-8:2). Several things are said of him.

- ⇒ He was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (6:5).
- ⇒ He was full of faith and power (6:8).
- ⇒ His presence in the synagogue was so significant that certain from the synagogue of the Libertines, together with others outside of Judea, disputed with him (6:9).
- ⇒ He spoke with a wisdom and power that could not be resisted (6:10).
- ⇒ He was full of the Holy Spirit (7:55).
- ⇒ He was the first one of record who saw Christ after He was enthroned (7:55).
- ⇒ He was the first Christian martyr (7:59-60).

The record of the message he delivered covers **fifty-one verses** comprised of 1,268 words (7:2-53). So far as the record is concerned, that is exceeded in length only by the sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). By way of comparison, the record of other messages and teachings after Jesus’ exaltation are as follows.

- ⇒ Peter on the day of Pentecost – *twenty-four verses* (Acts 2:14-37).
- ⇒ Peter in Solomon’s porch – *fifteen*

verses (Acts 3:12-26).

- ⇒ Peter at the Jerusalem conference concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles – *five verses* (Acts 15:7-11).
- ⇒ James at the Jerusalem conference – *nine verses* (Acts 15:13-21).
- ⇒ Paul in Antioch of Pisida – *thirty-two verses* comprised of 782 words (Acts 13:16-47).
- ⇒ Paul in Athens – *ten verses* (Acts 17:22-31).
- ⇒ Paul’s defense – *twenty-one verses* (Acts 22:1-21)
- ⇒ Paul’s defense before king Agrippa – *twenty-seven verses* comprised of 660 words (Acts 26:2-23, 25-27,29).

Of course, this does not mean Stephen was more prominent than Peter and Paul. It does, however, substantiate that much faith **does** much. The eighth verse of this same chapter affirms that Stephen was *“full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”* So far as the Scriptural record is concerned, this is first mentioning of any person who was **not** an apostle being so distinguished.

Full of Faith

What a marvelous description of a man! In all, of the Bible, the only two men said to have been *“full of faith”* are Stephen and Barnabas. Stephen is twice said to have been *“full of faith”* (Acts 6:5,8). Barnabas is said to have been *“full of the Holy Ghost and faith”*(Acts 11:24).

Elsewhere the Scriptures affirm that Abraham was *“strong in faith, giving glory to God”* (Rom 4:20). Those who were commended to God prior to Jesus *“obtained a good report through faith”*(Heb 11:39). The apostolic doctrine also speaks of us drawing near to God *“in full assurance of faith”*(Heb 10:22). Paul commended the Thessalonians because their faith *“grows exceedingly”*^{NKJV} (2 Thess 1:3). The faith of the saints in Rome was being *“spoken of throughout the world”*(Rom 1:8).

Throughout the years, I have been impressed with the seeming

unimportance of faith in the professed Christian community. There is little talk of it, and even less evidence of it. I do not hear people being commended for their faith, and there is little being said that is calculated to strength or increase faith. Yet, where faith is *“little”* (Matt 6:30), *“weak”* (Rom 14:1) or not at all apparent (Mk 4:40), spiritual growth is, at the very best, very slow. Those in Christ are admonished, *“But ye, beloved, **building up yourselves on YOUR most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost**”* (Jude 1:20). Some versions read, *“IN your most holy faith.”*^{NASB/NIV} **Faith is the practical foundation upon which spiritual lives are built.** Those lives can extend no further than the foundation upon which they are built. Little faith – little life. Small faith – small life.



Technically, being *“full of faith”* was not a qualification for the servants that were to be chosen. The precise specifications were:

- ⇒ Of honest report.
- ⇒ Full of the Holy Spirit.
- ⇒ Full of wisdom.

However, all three of the specified requirements are **based** upon faith, which is the engine of spiritual life. **We are children of God “by faith”**(Gal 3:26). **We live “by faith”**(Rom 1:17). **We stand “by faith”**(2 Cor 1:24). **We walk by faith**(2 Cor 5:7). **We receive the promised Spirit “through faith”**(Gal 3:14). **We wait for the hope of righteousness “by faith”**(Gal 5:5). **Christ dwells in our hearts “by faith”**(Eph 3:17). **The righteousness of God is obtained by faith**(Phil 3:9). **We**

obtain the promises of God *“through faith”* (Heb 6:12). We are kept by the power of God *“through faith”* (1 Pet 1:5). In the matter of salvation, everything we obtain from God is held by faith.

It is not possible to be *“full of faith,”* and yet not be full of the Holy Spirit. Nor, indeed, can one be *“full of faith”* and be dominated by ignorance, or not filled with wisdom. **Faith is the cognitive principle of the Kingdom of God.** It is what enables the individual to traffic in heavenly realms. It neutralizes the attractiveness of *this present evil world,* and causes one to *“taste of the powers of the world to come”* (Heb 6:5).

An Important Thing to See

Stephen is an example of what a

have been among *“the seventy,”* whom Jesus chose and sent out to preach midway through His ministry. Thus, he did not have the advantages of the twelve, the seventy, or many other disciples who followed Jesus closely – like Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others. Yet, he excelled to a remarkable degree.

- ⇨ He excelled the others who were chosen.
- ⇨ He excelled other Hellenistic Jews.
- ⇨ His labors excelled the office for which he was chosen.

It is the nature of salvation to promote spiritual growth and excellence. Once a person commences living by faith

or higher standing. ^{NASB}

These principles, as well as a host of others, are being lived out in the book of Acts. Let them be an encouragement to your heart.

PHILIP

“... and Philip...” Philip is also a distinguished man in this group. Having used the office of a deacon well, he later went down to Samaria *“and preached Christ unto them”* (8:5). He was also a prodigious miracle worker, for it is written, *“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:6-8). Philip’s ministry in Samaria was of such magnitude that a well known sorcerer in that city, Simon by name, *“believed also, and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip”* (8:13). Philip was not an apostle, and thus these converts eventually required the key men to come and minister to them. When the church in Jerusalem *“heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they had come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost”* (8:14-15).

Following the conversion of Samaria *“the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”* (Acts 8:26). Upon arriving at the designated place, *“behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship”* (Acts 8:27). The angel told Philip to go near and make contact with the man. He did, and the result was that this man from the African quadrant of the world believed, was baptized into Christ, and went on his way rejoicing to Ethiopia (8:28-39). Philip was then *“found at Azotus, and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea”* (Acts 8:40).

Much later in this book, Paul and

Thus, he did not have the advantages of the twelve, the seventy, or many other disciples who followed Jesus closely – like Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others. Yet, he excelled to a remarkable degree.

member of the body of Christ can be. He was not an apostle, and was apparently not from Jerusalem. The name Stephen indicates that he was one of the Hellenistic Jews – perhaps among those classed as *“devout men, out of every nation under heaven”* (Acts 2:5). This is further confirmed by the fact that he was teaching in the *“synagogue of the Libertines,”* or *“Freedmen, as it was called”*^{NIV} (6:9). The narrative states that the people meeting in this synagogue were *“Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia”* (Acts 6:9). That means they were from North Africa, Alexandria, and Asia Minor. History confirms that Jews coming to Jerusalem from other countries had synagogues in which their own language was spoken.

If, as it appears, Stephen was one of these people, he had probably been converted on the day of Pentecost, or perhaps later in Solomon’s porch. He had likely not have been a follower of Jesus during our Lord’s ministry, unless he had come to one of the feasts where Jesus taught. In my judgment, he could not

and walking in the Spirit, there is no known limit of what that person can do. The only true boundary is determined by the will of God as reflected in *“the measure of faith”* given to the individual (Rom 12:3). That *“measure”* is what determines the role of the individual in the body of Christ (Rom 12:4). In no way, however, is it to be thought of as a limitation.

Take, for example, the office of a deacon, or servant. This is the kind of role we are seeing in our text. A person can be faithful in this office and use it as a means to obtaining an even more extensive ministry. Thus it is written, *“And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless . . . For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 3:10,13). Stephen is a perfect example. First, he was *“proved,”* or tested, being found full of faith, the Spirit, and wisdom. Second, He used the office well moving on to a *“good degree,”*

his companions stayed Philip's home. It is written of that occasion, "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy" (Acts 21:8-9).

Thus, we have another marvelous example of how a person can excel in the body of Christ.

THE OTHERS

"... and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

This is the only time these five brethren are mentioned in Scripture. The only things we know about these particular men are as follows.

- ⇒ They were men of honest report.
- ⇒ They were full of the Holy Spirit.
- ⇒ They were full of wisdom.
- ⇒ They were chosen and set before the apostles.
- ⇒ The apostles laid their hands on them," appointing them over the business of food distribution.

The very mention of such men brings an honor and dignity to them that cannot be otherwise be realized in this world. We have here a sort of miniature picture of the day of judgment, when those who have excelled in Christ Jesus will be praised by God Himself.

One of them, **Nicolas**, was a convert to Judaism from the Gentiles – "a proselyte of Antioch." A "proselyte" was "one who has come over from a Gentile religion to Judaism," ^{THAYER} "one who has come over into Judaism from another religion, becoming a full Jew by being circumcised and by accepting the obligation of observing Jewish laws," ^{FRIBERG} and "a convert to Judaism." ^{UBS} **Here, then, was a man who had rapidly advanced in the faith.** Originally from a heathen background, this man had embraced Judaism, and obviously moved forward in the ranks. He heard the Gospel, perhaps on the day of Pentecost, believed on the Lord Jesus, and grew quickly to a man of note among the disciples.

If you wonder how significant it is for an individual to be mentioned only briefly in Scripture, consider how you would feel if it was your name in the

text. The very mention of such men brings an honor and dignity to them that cannot be otherwise be realized in this world. We have here a sort of miniature picture of the day of judgment, when those who have excelled in Christ Jesus will be praised by God Himself. If we are not drawing much attention in this world, let us seek to obtain the spirit of these seven men.

Then, with determination, and putting your hand to the plow, recall the marvelous words of First Corinthians 4:5: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: **and then shall every man have praise of God**" (1 Cor 4:5). God be praised for the rich heritage of those who put their trust in God!

THEY SET THEM BEFORE THE APOSTLES

" 6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

In our day, there is considerable confusion about who are premier people in the church. Today is a time when motivators, life-coaches, counselors, organizers, administrators, and the like, are being given the preeminence. However, this was not the manner of the early disciples. They did not put a value on those who were expert in the ways of the world, or were especially trained in special schools to do religious work. **The early church listened to the apostles, continuing in their doctrine, even though they were totally lacking in worldly credentials.** Their total upbringing was

within the context of Jewish life. The same was true of the apostle Paul, who obtained his learning at the feet of an esteemed Jewish leader who was an expert in the law of Moses.

Ancient philosophy had been in vogue for over six hundred years, beginning in the Grecian culture around 585 B.C. Socrates, credited with laying the foundation for Western philosophy, was born in 470 B.C., and died in 399 B.C. His greatest student was the Greek philosopher Plato. He lived from 428 B.C. to 348 B.C. Great Jewish leaders, members of God's chosen race, who lived during the time of Socrates and Plato include the following: Malachi, Ezra, Joel, and Nehemiah. Most of the time of

the philosopher's influence fell in the inter-testamental time between Malachi and John the Baptist.

Yet, with all of that ancient prominence, their wisdom did not creep into either Judaism or the early church. The believers during the time of our text gave no indication whatsoever of any reliance on, or high regard for, worldly wisdom. They rather relied on holy men who had been with Jesus, who Himself totally rejected the wisdom of this world. This is confirmed in the record before us.

Something to Note

These servants were only chosen when there was a work for them to do. They were not filling an office, but a

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

function in which it was necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. **When the organization of the local assembly includes the creation of offices that are not dictated by need, the church has started to drift on vanity's ocean.** No office should be appointed and filled unless there is a genuine need for it. Furthermore, no one should be appointed to a formal function in the body of Christ who does not have an good report, and is not full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Therefore, having selected suitable men for a necessary function, the men are placed before the apostles.

THEY SET THEM BEFORE THE APOSTLES

"Whom they set before the apostles . . ." Other versions read, *"brought them before the apostles,"*^{NASB} *"presented these men to the apostles,"*^{NIV} *"had these men stand before the apostles,"*^{NIV} *"they took to the apostles,"*

Other versions read, *"after praying,"*^{NASB} *"who prayed,"*^{NIV} *"they praying,"*^{DOUAY} and *"prayed for them."*^{NLT}

It is appropriate that the men who gave themselves to prayer would do so as certain men were set apart for the work of the Lord. I understand this to have been a committing of the men to the work to which they were appointed, calling upon the Lord to sustain them with appropriate gifts and abilities. It is always a solemn occasion when someone is set apart for the work of the Lord.

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM

" . . . they laid their hands on them." Other versions read, *"they imposed hands upon them,"*^{DOUAY} *"and placed their hands upon these,"*^{GWN} and *"as they laid their hands on them."*^{NLT}

Throughout the history of God's people, the laying on of hands has been a

bullock before the Lord, then sacrifice it (Lev 4:15).

⇨ When the Levites were set apart for the Lord, the children of Israel were directed to lay their hands upon them (Num 8:10).

⇨ When Moses set Joshua apart to take his place, God told him to lay his hand upon Joshua, set him before the priest, and *"give him a charge in their sight"* (Num 27:18). Moses did so, laying his hands upon Joshua (Num 27:23).

⇨ Later Joshua is said to have been *"full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him"* (Deut 34:9).

⇨ When Saul of Tarsus was set apart to the apostleship, Ananias *"laid his hands upon him"* (Acts 9:17).

⇨ When Barnabas and Saul were set apart for a particular work, according to the direction of the Holy Spirit, the leaders in Antioch *"fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away"* (Acts 13:3).

⇨ Timothy was set apart for the work of the Lord by means of a gift given to him *"by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery,"* or *"body of elders"*^{NIV} (1 Tim 4:14). Again Paul wrote of his own involvement in Timothy being set apart. *"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands"* (2 Tim 1:6).

This is the act of a mature believer who validates the qualification of the person being blessed. It is a symbolic way of conferring the blessing of the Lord upon the individual for a God-sanctioned work. In the act, a certain consciousness of the gravity of the work to which the people are dedicated is created in them, as well as those who witness it. It is also a means of calling the Lord to bless the work and empower the workers in order that His name might be glorified. It is an occasion attended by great sobriety.

I understand this to have been a committing of the men to the work to which they were appointed, calling upon the Lord to sustain them with appropriate gifts and abilities. It is always a solemn occasion when someone is set apart for the work of the Lord.

^{BBE} and *"they put these men before the apostles."*^{IE}

These were the primary people in the body of Christ, placed there *"first"* by God Himself (1 Cor 12:28). However, it brought great glory to Christ when the people **recognized** this and submitted their choice to the apostles for validation and dedication.

The choice of the people was subject to the assessment of those who were skillful *"in the word of righteousness"* (Heb 5:13). This confirms that the church is not a democracy.

WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED

" . . . and when they had prayed."

formality that has been honored. It is even listed as part of the elemental principles of the doctrine of Christ: *" . . . the principles of the doctrine of Christ . . . of laying on of hands . . ."* (Heb 6:1-2).

⇨ Early, before the giving of the Law, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, laying his hands upon them (Gen 48:14).

⇨ In the tabernacle sacrificial service, the high priest laid his hands upon the sacrifices (Ex 29:10,15,19; Lev 1:4; 3:2,9,13).

⇨ If the whole congregation of Israel sinned a sin through ignorance, not knowing what they really did, the elders were to lay their hands upon a

THE RESULTS OF SOUND JUDGMENT

“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.”

Now that the murmuring has been addressed, has the solution been a sound one, and will it yield good fruit. That is the acid test of any decision made in the name of the Lord. As stated before, looking behind the scenes, this was an attempt of the devil to penetrate the church and introduce corruption, as he did with Israel. We will find that the New Covenant is superior to the Old one in every way. It has a greater glory, and it will be seen, in part, by the effects of the decisions of godly men among a godly assembly.

THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED

“And the word of God increased . . .” Other versions read, *“the word of God spread,”* ^{NKJV} *“the word of God kept on spreading,”* ^{NASB} *“the word of God was increasing in power,”* ^{BBE} *“the preaching about God flourished,”* ^{CSB} *“the word of God kept on spreading,”* ^{NAS} *“God’s message was preached in ever-widening circles,”* ^{LIVING} *“God’s message was influencing more and more people,”* ^{IE} *“And the message of God kept on spreading,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} *“So the Word of God gained more and more ground,”* ^{PHILLIPS} and *“the word of God was growing.”* ^{EMTV}

This is a most marvelous expression, and is totally foreign to modern concepts of church growth. It is an locution inspired by the Holy Spirit, who searches the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10). It is therefore stated most precisely, reflecting exactly what took place.

The word of God did not increase in its volume, but in its effectiveness. It filled and satisfied more and more hearts, and more of it was being fulfilled. In its wake unbelief was conquered and imaginations were cast down. Satan had thrown up obstacles, and not only had they been cast down, there was an increase in the effectiveness of the Word.

There are other expressions of

this kind of growth.

- ⇨ *“But the word of God grew and multiplied”* (Acts 12:24).
- ⇨ *“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”* (Acts 19:20).
- ⇨ *“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth”* (Col 1:5-6).
- ⇨ *“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you”* (2 Thess 3:1).
- ⇨ *“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound”* (2 Tim 2:9).

In this text we have a fulfillment of something God said of His word through the prophet Isaiah. *“So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”* (Isa 55:11).

A QUESTION

Is this how men would describe a growing church today? Is there a church growth program in all the world that yields results like this? People think of the number of people growing, but what of the Word of God multiplying and increasing? Can it be said of our time that the Word of Christ is dwelling in men richly? Or that it is producing fruit? Or that it is not bound? Do we not have men and circumstances that *“suppress the truth by their wickedness”* ^{NIV} (Rom 1:16). Is this not a time like that of Isaiah, when it was said, *“ . . . for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth”* (Isa 59:14-15).

This circumstance is not owing to any reduction in the power of the truth itself. Whenever truth is known, regardless of the circumstances, it makes

men free (John 8:32). Truth is *“fallen”* and *“fails”* when it is **not proclaimed**. It will not stand independently of proclamation. If men do not take the Word into their mouths and speak it from their hearts, it will not do its work. Faith always comes by hearing – but if the Word, particularly the Gospel, is not heard, faith will not come, and the Word will not increase.



What we have in our text is the effect of Gospel preaching and believing, coupled with pure hearts and the power of the Holy Spirit. There was no strategy developed by men in order to produce these results. It requires committed and insightful men to proclaim the truth, and tender hearts to take it in. Those are the kind of circumstances in which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, and comforts and strengthens saints. **That is the framework within which the Word of God will be increased.**

When the Word is increased it is dominant in the hearts and minds of the people. Every other form of speaking or thinking takes a back seat, if, indeed, it is given any seat at all. Methods, techniques, humanly conceived programs and strategies all appear for what they really are in the light of Divine glory. It is then that they will properly be assigned to the dung heap, to be carried out with the rest of the trash.

DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED IN JERUSALEM

“ . . . and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly . . .” Other versions read, *“and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem,”* ^{NKJV} *“The number of disciples in Jerusalem*

increased rapidly,^{NIV} *“and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly,”*^{ASV} *“and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem became very great,”*^{BBE} *“and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was very greatly multiplied,”*^{DARBY} *“and the number of disciples in Jerusalem grew very large,”*^{GWN} *“The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem,”*^{NLT} *“and the number of disciples increased vastly in Jerusalem,”*^{LIVING} *“The group of followers in Jerusalem became larger and larger,”*^{IE} *“and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was increasing exceedingly,”*^{MONTGOMERY} and *“and many more people in Jerusalem became followers.”*^{CEV}

Carefully note how the Holy Spirit states this case. He does **not** say the number of church members was multiplied. He does **not** say the number of Christians was increased. He does **not** say the congregation in Jerusalem grew larger. All of those descriptions could include people whom the Lord Himself had not received. Such descriptions are too generic, and in the current Christian climate do not mean much.

The kind of people that were being multiplied were “disciples.” These were people who were learning from Christ (Matt 11:28), for Jesus came to give men “an understanding” (1 John 5:20). They had forsaken all to follow Jesus (Lk 14:33). They had refused to allow any other relationships to get between them and Christ (Lk 14:26). They were taking up their cross every day and following Jesus, for that is what a person must do to be a disciple (Lk 9:23). Does anyone imagine that Jesus was not serious when He defined the requirements of a disciple? Is there a person among us who imagines that those qualifications can be ignored, and yet the person maintain an identity with Jesus and profit from His presence?

Prior to this, when the council had arrested the apostles, they said, “ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (5:28). They did not fill Jerusalem with their praises, but with their doctrine! The city was not filled with their programs, but with the doctrine – their teaching! Do you know of a city or a town anywhere or of any size that is being filled with the apostles doctrine? That is what the

council called “your doctrine.” It was “the apostles’ doctrine” – the same doctrine in which the whole church was continuing steadfastly (2:42). If they thought the teaching of the apostles had pervaded Jerusalem before this, one can only imagine what they thought now.

The Head of the church plainly said, “Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **teaching** them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mat 28:19-20). The words are clear, and there is no ambiguity about them. Yet teaching is the weak point of the modern church. Its constituents are not learned in the ways of God. They do not know what Jesus and apostles taught. **It is for this reason that the results of Acts are not witnessed in our day.** You cannot have the right results without the right means.

A GREAT NUMBER OF PRIESTS WERE OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH

“... and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Other versions read, “and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith,”^{NKJV} “and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith,”^{NASB} “and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith,”^{NRSV} “and a great number of priests were in agreement with the faith,”^{BBE} “and a great crowd of the priests obeyed the faith,”^{DARBY} “large number of priests accepted the faith,”^{GWN} “and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith,”^{NJB} “and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too,”^{NLT} “a large number, even of priests, continued to surrender to the faith,”^{WILLIAMS} “and [besides] a large number of the priests were obedient to the faith [in Jesus as the Messiah, through Whom is obtained eternal salvation in the kingdom of God],”^{AMPLIFIED} “Even a large number of priests put their faith in the Lord,”^{CEV} “Even a great crowd of the priests were attending to the faith,”^{LITV} and “while a considerable proportion of the priesthood accepted the faith.”^{PHILLIPS}

As you can see, the various translators had a difficult time with the expression “obedient to the faith.” **This phrase speaks of a response to the faith**



that God gives. Keep in mind that the qualities and aptitude of faith require that its Source be outside of ourselves. Those who have faith can see “Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). By means of that faith, the individual has “access with confidence” to God (Eph 3:12). Precisely what is there in the human constitution that can produce these results? Further, if fallen man cannot produce this kind of sight and access, then how is it that faith can be found in them? What did Adam give us that enables us to see Him who is invisible? What resource came from him that moves us to have access to God with confidence? **These are just two of the marvelous qualities of faith that transcend all human aptitude.**

Of course, it is foolish to engage in argument about this subject, for God has spoken directly to it. It is written that faith is “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). I do not believe there is a single translation that does not clearly say this. A few of the versions read that God will “give” or “grant” faith, instead of saying it is “from God” – but the meaning is the same. Of the forty-four versions I have, there is no exception to this observation. **Among other things, that means that the language is so absolutely clear that no one could miss it.** It is also stated that it has been “given” to us “to believe” (Phil 1:29).

On the human side of things the faith that is given by God, or comes from God, is “obtained” by men. Thus it is written, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have **obtained like precious faith** with us through the righteousness of God and our

It is a sad day when men who profess to be from God fail to preach a Gospel that has a strong appeal to devout people. When Jesus chose His apostles, they were all in this category. When God chose the prophets, they also were all in this category. The mother and father of John the Baptist were also devout, as well as Mary the ,mother of our Lord.

Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1). In our text, obedience to the faith is another way of saying it was "obtained," or "received." ^{NASB} Some of the versions convey this idea more precisely: "were in agreement with the faith," ^{BBE} "accepted the faith," ^{GWN/PHILLIPS} "made their submission to the faith," ^{NJB} "surrender to the faith," ^{WILLIAMS}

These priests, therefore, did **not** "resist the Spirit," as the council had done, and will do when they put Stephen on trial (Acts 7:51). They did **not** "quench" or "grieve" the Spirit of God. From another point of view, the Lord opened their hearts so they could attend, or "respond to the things that were spoken" ^{NASB} (Acts 16:14). Behold what marvelous workings were taking place as the Word of God "increased," and "kept on spreading." ^{NASB}

One More Thing

Observe the kind of people that are identified as being "obedient to the faith." It was not a group of publicans or harlots, although I do not doubt that many such people were also being

obedient. However, the Spirit takes the time to specify another kind of people. He does not say it was a large number of young people or old people. Rather, he specifies a "great company of priests." This is not the first time we have read something like this. On the day of Pentecost the kind of people who responded were identified as "devout men" (2:5). Cornelius is also described as a "devout man" prior to his new birth (10:2). In Thessalonica a great multitude of "devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few" believed and "consorted with Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:4). When Paul was in Athens, the Spirit makes a point of him disputing "with the devout persons in the market place daily" (Acts 17:17). Of course, nearly every time Paul went into a city, he went to the synagogues, where such people were more apt to be found (9:20; 13:5,14-15; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8).

It is a sad day when men who profess to be from God fail to preach a Gospel that has a strong appeal to devout people. When Jesus chose His apostles,

they were all in this category. When God chose the prophets, they also were all in this category. The mother and father of John the Baptist were also devout, as well as Mary the ,mother of our Lord. **What is the source of the teaching that represents Jesus spending the majority of his time with the more unseemly segment of society?** Why did the apostles preach in the Temple and in the houses of the disciples? What is more,. How can people be familiar with the Word of God and miss this aspect of preaching.

The Gospel is certainly intended for all men, even those with extremely uncomely backgrounds. But **they** were never intended to be the sole focus of the Gospel.

The real Gospel can have a strong appeal to "devout" people – those who take life seriously, and have a respect for more noble things. **It is time to stop filling up the churches with disinterested people who need to be entertained, and bring in some people who delight in sober and holy thoughts.**

I seriously question that a fun and games approach can be called a ministry. There certainly is not anything like this in Scripture. If someone imagines there are such approaches in the word of God, they need to ferret them out and share it with us. If it such cannot be found, then they owe the church an explanation for their preference of such an approach. Until they give a satisfactory one, they ought to be relieved of all of their duties.

CONCLUSION

It is important to again emphasize that we are reading the account of Jesus building His church. It is also an account of the administration of the Holy Spirit, dispensing gifts within the body. This is also an account of what was involved preaching the Gospel, and how it was appropriately received. There are no hirelings, no schools of high learning, and no self-help manuals. There are no youth ministries, recovery ministries, or organized efforts to reach

society. At the time of our text there was no orchestrated efforts to change the laws in the land, put new people in the senate, or teach people how to be good financial managers. All of that comes much later – **and it came when the church was dead.**

Only when we have a rooted and grounded church will we really know the power of the Gospel, and the effectiveness of faith. Until that time,

anyone, except those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit, are only speculating about religion, or needs, or priorities. People are prone to speak about what the world needs. One of the things that can be put on the list is a strong church that is being kept from evil. How sorely that witness is needed in our world. It is doubtful that much will be accomplished until that happens.

When Jesus prayed in

In the midst of the multiplication of disciples, trouble surfaces among them – and is resolved– by Given O. Blakely

Gethsemane, **before** He prayed for those who would believe on Him through the apostles' word, He said to God, "I pray for them: I pray **not** for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and

Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We

are . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:9-11,15). **What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the answer to our Lord's prayer.** We do well to join Him in it.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/27/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Twenty-seventh lesson will cover verses 8 through 15 of the sixth chapter: "STEPHEN IS OPPOSED." Satan has failed in his first two attempts to corrupt the church from within. In both instances, the number of disciples has increased significantly. Now he attacks the church once again from without. The attack will be more aggressive than previous ones, and the sin will be against an even greater amount of proclaimed truth. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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