

Acts 6:1-7

The First Church Office Bearers and Lay Leaders

The Jews feel a great sense of responsibility for the less fortunate.

Routine Custom in the Synagogue....

- *Two collectors...every Friday morning...went around the market and private houses to collect for the needy...partly in money; partly in goods. Distributed later in the day.*
- *Kuppah, or Basket---Those temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on; those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for 14 meals (2 meals per day for 1 week)...*
- *Tamhui, or Tray---A house-to-house collection made daily for those in pressing need*

The Christian Church had taken on this custom.

Two (2) Kinds of Jews in the Christian

1. *Jerusalem and Palestinian Jews..spoke Aramaic..prided themselves that there was no foreign mixture in their lives.*
2. *Jews from Foreign Countries who came up for Pentecost and made the great discovery of Christ. Many had been away from Palestine for generations...forgotten their Hebrew and spoke only Greek.*

.....Aramaic Jews looked down on the foreign Jews.

.....It affected the daily distribution of alms and a complaint that the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews were being---possibly deliberately---neglected.

The Apostles felt that they should not get themselves mixed up in a matter like that...the seven (7) were chosen to straighten out the situation.

Additional responsibilities bring on added responsibilities...When the decisions are overwhelming, delegate authority. Moses had to delegate and organize...give duties to others. Every good leader does.

Please note that the Church was “reaping the harvest.” Increasing in numbers (v. 1, 7)...(this is 5th reference of the Church adding to its numbers); even a large number of priests accepted the faith (v. 7)

What do you think the church should do for the widows....the homeless...the fatherless...the families that are in need?

Acts 6:8-15...A Champion of Freedom Arises...Stephen

Let's look at the seven..

- *Only Greek-speaking Jews who are involved.*
- *Not one of the seven has a Jewish name*
- *One, Nicolaos, was a Gentile who had accepted the Jewish faith.*

Stephen..had a vision of a world for Christ.

To the Adamant and Staunch Jewish Leaders, two (2) things were specially precious...

1. *The Temple, where a personal sacrifice could be offered and God could truly be worshipped.*
2. *The Law, which never changed*

Stephen..preached that God's Temple is not made with hands (v48) and that the law that Jehovah God had put into effect, was not being obeyed by even the Sanhedrin. (v. 53).

Stephen's Defense was attack..

He gave the Sanhedrin a History Lesson and Cited certain Truths as Condemnation of his own nation...Stephen preached:

- *That the men who played a really great part in the history of Israel were the men who heard God's command*
- *That men had worshipped God long before there ever was a Temple*
- *That when God's chosen people crucified Jesus they were doing the very thing that they had always done...persecuting the prophets and abandoning the Leaders that God had raised up.*

The Sanhedrin...again lied and connived a plan to get rid of Stephen...they stated that Stephen was a blasphemer....blasphemed against Moses and God, (v. 11).

Acts 7:1—8:1 Truth and Consequences

The history lesson...

Abraham...with him, for the Jew, history began...

Stephen saw 3 things in Abraham:

- 1. A Man Who Answered God's Summons.***
- 2. A Man of Faith***
- 3. A Man of Hope.***

Abraham never saw the promise fulfilled, but he never doubted that it would be.

Joseph...the man for whom seeming disaster turned to triumph.

Stephen sums up the Godly Traits of Joseph in two words...Grace and Wisdom!

Moses...a man who answered God's command to go out.

A man who gave up a kingdom to answer God's summons to be the leader of His people.

Moses...A man ready to answer God's summons and leave the comfort and the ease he might have had...

unlike the Sanhedrin...who was enthralled in the past and jealous of Moses privileges..they did not want to give up their customs..did not want to give up the privileges of “their religion.”

Stephen's Implication had condemned the attitude of the Jewish Rabbis and Israel's Council...the Sanhedrin.

Now he explicitly condemns them by:

- Insisting that they (the Jewish Nation) have continually disobeyed God....(quoting Amos 5:27 in Greek)***
- Insisting that the Jewish Nation have had the most amazing privileges.....(succession of the prophets; the tent of witness; the Law...***

The more privileges a man has the greater his condemnation if he takes the wrong way. Stephen continues to condemn the Jewish Nation by stating the fact that they had every chance to know better they continuously rebel against God.

- Insisting that they have wrongly limited God.***

The Temple which should have become their greatest blessing was their greatest curse; they had come to worship it instead of worshipping God.

They had a Jewish God living in Jerusalem rather than a God of all men whose dwelling was the whole universe...a house not made with hands.

- Insisting that they persecuted the prophets and now have, out of rebellion and refusing to look at the facts, have murdered the Son of God..***

Stephen does not excuse them on the plea of ignorance as Peter did. He explicitly states that it is not ignorance, but rebellious disobedience which made them commit that crime.

Stephen dies...not because he was condemned to die through judicial process...his death was a lynching. The Sanhedrin had no right to put anyone to death.

Stephen's death...We can see:

- *The Secret of His Courage...*

Beyond all that men could do to him he saw awaiting him the welcome of his Lord.

- *Stephen Following his Lord's example.*

As Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his executioners (Luke 23:34), so did Stephen. The man who follows Christ the whole way will find strength to do things which it seems humanly impossible to do.

- *The Dreadful turmoil finished in a strange peace.*

Peace comes to a man...even in death's grip, when the man has done the right thing even if the right thing kills him.

The military has capitalized on this truth...We are a nation because of this truth. We are free because of this truth.

As a Christian we are free because of this truth...

Saul enters the scene..8:1...as a witness to the murder of Stephen. The man who was to become the apostle to the Gentiles thoroughly agreed with the execution of Stephen

The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen.

The blood of the martyrs even this early had begun to be the seed of the Church.