

Living out our faith Pt 8
Acts 6:1-15

V1-4

- We left off with the disciples rejoicing that God would allow them to suffer injustice and persecution for His namesake. They also did not want to misrepresent Him by retaliating in the flesh, but would endure this attack and they would model patience and joy in the midst of suffering. In chapter 2 we read that God added to the church such as should be saved. Here again we see the multiplication of disciples in the church. Today there are groups who study numerical growth within the church and the focus of their study is sheer numbers. But, here it's not just about numerical growth. In between the adding and the multiplying, Chapter 5 speaks of subtraction from the church; when the Lord removed Ananias and Sapphira for introducing hypocrisy to the church.
- When numbers look good from the outside, it's something to cause our flesh to feel better about. But numbers don't tell the real truth concerning spiritual growth. Numerical examples in scriptures:
 1. Gideon- from over 30,000 to 300 God delivered Israel (**Judges 7**).
 2. David- Satan stroked David's ego by provoking him to number the people and it displeased God. David trusted in numbers and not Him, so God took 70,000 out of those numbers (**1 Chronicles 21**).
- With addition and multiplication in the church there will always be blessed subtraction, if there is real spiritual growth. We see it here, first, addition, then subtraction, afterward multiplication. Do personal inventory and find out where you are. Recognize that with growth there will be problems. The women were divided into two groups, the Hebrew Jews and the Greek Jews. The Hebrew Jews grew up in Jerusalem speaking Aramaic and steeped in Jewish customs, while the Greek Jews grew up in Greek culture speaking Greek and were raised in gentile customs not Jewish tradition. The Hebrew Jews tended to look down on the Greek Jew and this was apparent in the distribution to the widows. This was their welfare system, where the elderly was taken care of by the church not the state. Much has changed over the years.
- Verse 2 – The response in most churches, when a problem arises, is to call the pastor or the leadership. But that's not always the right solution. Peter acknowledges there is a problem, but it's not for him to step in and fix it. Instead he suggests they select seven men from among themselves to perform the duties where there was a problem. Often, people will come to me with an issue and ask, "What am I going to do about it". Often I've tried to fix it and in doing so I neglect another area of ministry. Peter recognizes that his primary ministry was prayer and the ministry of the word. Don't always look to leadership to solve the problems. It may be that God made you aware of the situation and because you are feeling the burden you've been called to be part of the solution. We should recognize the qualifications of these men:
 1. Good reputation (**Proverbs 22:1**) - ask could you trust them with finances?
 2. Full of the Holy Spirit – how do you know this about someone?

3. Full of wisdom – observe that wisdom follows a person who is under the control of God.

V5-15

- In the early church for someone to meet the physical needs of the church, one would have to be deeply spiritual before they would be allowed to wait on tables, to pass out food and to be entrusted with handling problems unrelated to doctrine and teaching. If only the present day church would follow this example so many horror stories could have been averted. Verses 5- 6 they chose seven, two of them we'll see prominently in the coming chapters. Then the Apostles laid hands on them; and verse 7 we then see the word of God spread. When people are operating in their God given gifts growth is the result. Verse 8 it's because Stephen was full of faith and power he was able to do signs and wonders among the people. A believer should never be following signs and wonders; the signs and wonders should be following us, almost like they're trying to keep up with us. However, it is in verse 9, we see that attacks come with growth.
- God knows who should represent Him when it comes to public attacks. Many of us should not seek public battles. If our pride has not yet been subdued enough, and someone publicly humiliates us, we may not know how to respond. Therefore, during a dispute – meaning to question jointly, discuss and reason – what is needed is not a fighter, but an expositor (**1 Peter 3:15**). It is in verse 10 we read Stephen's spirit is linked to wisdom; and they could not resist, meaning stand against, and was unable to give a reasonable argument against what Stephen said and what Stephen was doing. This shows you can have more than one gift to allow you to perform more than one duty. As we see, Stephen didn't just have a heart for the pantry but also the pulpit. Verses 11 – 14 - in an effort to silence him they hire people to lie about what Stephen had said, just like they did concerning Jesus. In **John 15:18 –20** Jesus said a servant must be like his master.
- **Verse 15** is always so fascinating to me. One of the hardest things for a human being to do is sit quietly while people are falsely accusing them and blatantly lying on them. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin – the most powerful council in Jerusalem and the same council that pronounced judgment upon our Lord so he knows what their capable of – yet he's sitting there completely undisturbed. Just an amazing picture of total trust in the Lord, and mastery over the flesh. **Mathew 10:16** tells us we should be wise as serpents yet gentle as doves. Wisdom and gentleness are signs of a person who is full of the Spirit of God. Stephen is an example of a person who exemplifies **Zechariah 4:10** which tells us not to despise the days of small things. Yet so many people do. They are reluctant to do seemingly insignificant tasks; they think menial tasks are beneath them as they are called to greater works.
- But to God there's no such thing as big ministry or small ministry, there's only faithful and unfaithful. If we're to be used effectively for God we must be faithful in whatever duties God gives us. The reward for faithfulness in service is more service, and sometimes that service will require suffering.