

Acts Chapter 6

Acts Chapter 6 is a short chapter, with much instruction. In the beginning text, we find a breakdown of the generous sharing of goods seen in 4:34-37. Apparently, the problem revolved around racial tension over the daily ration of food for widows. The Hebrew, who traditionally did not associate with the “unclean” gentiles, was unwilling to serve certain other Jews who had integrated into the Greek culture. This caused grumblings from the Grecian converts, because “their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.” The Apostles then call for an election of seven devout men, to assure that equality would prevail. Among those chosen, are Phillip and Stephen, a convert said to be devout and “full of the Holy Ghost”.

The story then goes on to unfold around Stephen as he “full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” This caused a stirring of local resistance, among whom were the “synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia”. They did not like what he had to say, apparently, but were unable to dispute it. They therefore rounded up men to lay false accusations upon Stephen, including charges of rejection of the Jewish laws, and blasphemy. The chapter ends with Stephen sitting before the council.

It is interesting that such a turn of events could proceed from such a seemingly un-noteworthy event. Waiting on tables would hardly make for a good story of the faith, one would think. Is it not strange, though, that so quickly these followers could abandon the kindness and unselfishness they had shown so shortly before? This is demonstrative of the importance of nurturing one's faith, of not allowing your passion for Christ to grow cold. Is it possible that these Jewish converts were studying the scripture and growing in their faith, yet could act so coldly toward their fellows?

Certainly it is noteworthy, that such a man as Stephen was chosen to be a server of tables. Did not Christ say that he, who would be greatest among the brethren, let him be there servant? This principle is clearly shown here, as Stephen is described as a man of great faith. Service is an extremely important and often overlooked necessity of the Christian walk. Since Jesus Christ was a servant, and he is our example (as well as our savior), should not one of our primary goals as a follower of the Way be to serve in meekness?

We then proceed to verse 6:7 which shows how the word was unimpeded by human problems and that the number of Christians had increased; but this contributed to the ever building tension between the believers and the religious leaders who were already jealous and hostile. It serves to link the previous events, with the events to follow.

Then, as we continue to follow through the chapter, the situation explodes. What started out as a relatively small event has transformed into a trial of one man's faith. Stephen is brought before the council, and accused of blasphemy and a form of antinomianism. Yet his face was "like that of an angel". This verse seems to be saying, that although the entire council was staring at Stephen, trying to ascertain his guilt, that his entire personage and demeanor demonstrated his clear innocence. Apparently, until asked to speak, Stephen felt it completely unnecessary to defend himself from such ridiculous charges. We would do well to remember such teachings today. Shaking one's fist, ranting and raving, and "putting on a show", is not the type of actions we are called to. Much like Christ who was "Led to the slaughter", many times we should remain silent, until it is time to speak. Not only do such things help our case in an immediate sense, but it is an excellent unspoken testimony of the peace within us, through our Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit.

Looking at such "heroes of the faith", can give us guidance in how we should conduct ourselves. Though placed in first a demeaning situation, and then a demanding one, Stephen never compromises. Though the Holy Spirit guides us, and gives us strength, ultimately our actions are result of our choices, for good or bad. May we choose obedience, the way that Stephen did.