

Sports & Rec Plus
THE BOOK OF ACTS
Lesson 13. The Choosing of the Seven
Acts 6:1-7 (NIV®)
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The Choosing of the Seven (Acts 6:1-7)

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

INTRODUCTION

These verses are best seen in three divisions.

1. The discontent among the disciples about the distribution of the public charity, verse 1
2. The election and ordination of seven men who should take care of the matter, verses 2-6
3. The growth of the church, verse 7

Rick's Part

Acts 6:1-4

The Choosing of the Seven

6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, Growth often brings challenges. Here we shall see that the growth of the church brought about problems concerning how to take care of the new people while keeping the long-term members satisfied and their minds kept on the purpose of the church—evangelism and discipleship—not in just taking care of the needs of the long-time members.

However, we will see that their concerns were not entirely unjustified.

the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The longtime members, like charter members, felt that the needs of their family members were not being met like the new members' needs were.

6:2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. The apostles were called to preach the Word of God not to the daily administration of the church. Preaching the Word of God is a full-time job and responsibility. If they let other things take that place, they would be leaving their first calling.

They did not want to be taken away from the preaching of the Word of God by doing the daily administration of the church. They were to let nothing take them away from the preaching of the Word of God not even the beatings and lashes laid on their backs.

Preaching the Gospel is the best work that a minister can be engaged in. He must not entangle himself in the everyday affairs of this life. Prayer and the ministry of the Word does not just involve preaching from a pulpit but all that is necessary to preach the Word—study, prayer, and reflection—which involves seeking God's face—which is prayer.

NOTE: A note of further explanation is due here. This does not mean that the minister should spend 100% of his time reading and studying his Bible and preaching from a pulpit. But it does mean that he does not need to

have the day-to-day, item-by-item responsibility within these areas when there are other people in the church who can do it. But he will have the ultimate and final responsibility in these matters.

The preaching and teaching of the Gospel can also be done through friendships, through common interests and hobbies, and through even part-time employment as you meet and spend time with other people. But we must never let anything other than studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God be our main work.

Wait on tables the word “tables” can refer to tables used in monetary matters as well as those used for serving meals, (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; John 2: 15). To be involved in either financial matters or in serving meals would take the Twelve away from their first priority, (Acts 6:4, "prayer and the ministry of the Word").

6:3 Brothers and sisters. These words were addressed to believers.

choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Not just anyone could be involved in this. They had to be people full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

We will turn this responsibility over to them. Once selected, this task was turned over to these seven men.

6:4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. Prayer and the ministry of the Word described the highest priorities of church pastors and leaders.

Rod's Part:
Acts 6:5-7

6:5 This proposal pleased the whole group. This idea was a win-win in that the Apostles would be able to focus on the ministry of the Word of God. Of course it was not beneath them to serve, but serving those in need would have taken them from their primary duties and responsibilities. Of course, we know that this decision was the result of prayer and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The qualifications for this new position were to select men known to be full of the same Holy Spirit which was already guiding the Church. The Apostle Paul will in about thirty years write a letter to Timothy outlining the qualifications in greater detail. Reading from 1 Timothy 3:8-12:

“⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.

From this passage we can know the qualifications expected by God for the office of deacon.

1. **A deacon is self-controlled in speech, appetites, and actions** (Verses 8 and 11). According to Paul, deacons must be “dignified, not double-tongued, not a drunkard, and not greedy for dishonest gain.”
2. **A deacon is to be sound in their faith** (Verse 9). Deacons must “hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” which means that they must have a firm grip on the truths of the Gospel and live consistently with these principles of Scripture.
3. **A deacon has been tested** (Verse 10). Paul writes, “Let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” Practically, this means that deacons should have a proven track record of faithful service before they are approved to serve in the office of deacon.
4. **Likewise, the deacon’s wife** (verse 11). It is proper to look at the man’s wife because his leadership in the home can be evaluated, in part, by his wife’s conduct. She is to be **reverent, not a slanderer, temperate, and faithful in all things**.
5. **A deacon is faithful to his spouse** (Verse 12). He must in all ways be a faithful and loving husband to his wife loving her as Christ showed love to the Church (Ephesians 5:25-29). This passage doesn’t require that to be a deacon, he must be married. However, being married with a family is a strong indicator of his leadership which brings us to the next requirement.
6. **A deacon manages his children and household well** (Verse 12). The way he manages his household is probably how he will serve the church. The basic message is that deacons are to be Christians whose trustworthiness, self-control, and soundness in the faith show that they are able to be trusted:
 - a. to faithfully care for the church’s physical needs
 - b. to serve as an example of faithful service to others.

While the Apostles did not have this list of qualifications, they did have the same Holy Spirit as Paul. So, they chose seven men.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. Of these seven men, only two are ever mentioned again in Scripture. The other five know about their service in the faith from non-biblical sources. All seven men had Greek names which maybe means that possibly they were all Hellenists which would have helped in the dispute from verse one.

1. **Stephen.** We read in this verse that he was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. We will see in the coming messages that he will be arrested and become the first martyr.
2. **Philip.** (Not to be confused with disciple of Jesus). Scripture tells us several things about Philip. He was an evangelist in Samaria (Acts 8:5–12). Philip was used by the Holy Spirit to bring the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch in (Acts 8:26–39). Immediately following the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away to Azotus, where he continued to preach the Gospel in the towns from there to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Twenty years later, Philip the evangelist is mentioned again, still in Caesarea That is the last time the Bible mentions the evangelist Philip. Paul, Luke, and others were traveling to Jerusalem, and they stopped at Philip’s home in Caesarea (Acts 21:8–9). They stayed with Philip for several days. Philip had four unmarried daughters at that time, all of whom had the gift of prophecy.
3. **Porcorus.** Apart from this mention in Acts 6:5, Prochorus is otherwise unknown in the Bible. Tradition suggests that he was one of the seventy-two sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1, that he became bishop of Nicomedia, and that he died a martyr at Antioch.
4. **Nicanor.** As with Porcorus, Nicanor is only mentioned in this one verse. Traditionally, he was also one of the seventy-two sent out by Jesus.
5. **Timon.** Timon is mentioned only in this one verse. Tradition says that he served in Greece and was martyred with fire.
6. **Parmenas.** Parmenas is also only mentioned in this one verse. Tradition says that he preached in Asia Minor and died in Philippi.
7. **Nicolas.** Again, there is little known about Nicolas. From our passage today we know that he was from Antioch and had converted to Judaism before becoming a Christian. He has been the subject of controversy going back to the first century when he was not remembered fondly by early writers. Some have said that the heretical sect of the Nicolaitans condemned in the Book of Revelation. Whether this Nicolas is the same person cannot be verified. What we as believers today can learn is that we must fight the good fight clear to the end as Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

6:6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. In this case, the people nominated the men, and the apostles approved them by laying hands on them, after praying for God’s guidance and approval.

- It was important to lay **hands on them** even if their service was for the practical needs of the widows. Practical service is spiritual service. The same Greek word is used for both *distribution* (Acts 6:1) and *ministry* (Acts 6:4). The idea behind the word in both places is *service*, whether in practical ways or spiritual ways.
- People should count it a privilege to serve the Lord in these basic, practical ways, instead of seeing it as an “unspiritual” burden. Apart from the cross, Jesus showed the ultimate measure of love by simply washing His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-5).
- Nowhere in this chapter of Acts are these men called *deacons*, but most consider they were the first to fulfill the office of deacon as described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The word *deacon* simply means “servant,” and these men were certainly servants. They could claim the same promise for faithful service that Paul specifically made to deacons in 1 Timothy 3:13: *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

6:7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. Considering all that could have gone wrong when Satan tried to attack through division, everyone involved deserves much credit.

- *Those with the complaint*, the Hellenists, did the right thing: They made the need known instead of complaining and whining, and they trusted the solution of the Apostles.
- *Those of the other party*, the Hebrews, did the right thing: They recognized that the Hellenists had a legitimate need and they trusted the solution of the apostles.
- *The seven* chosen men did the right thing: They accepted the call to unglamorous service.
- *The Apostles* did the right thing: They responded to the need without distracting themselves from their central task.

Because this situation was handled with wisdom and sensitivity to those who were offended, a potentially divisive issue was defused, and the Gospel continued to go forth.

- These men were chosen to serve tables – to do common things; but they were found doing uncommon things – working signs and wonders among the people, preaching the Word of God, and starting churches.
- Satan’s strategy failed. He tried to divide the church, and it did not work. But Satan’s second strategy also failed. The Apostles were not distracted from the focus on the ministry God had for them – to focus on the Word of God and on prayer. If anything, the church was strengthened as a new office was formed so that the children of God would receive better care, both physically and spiritually.

And a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. The people recommended the seven, the Apostles laid their hands on them giving their approval, and of course it was the Holy Spirit of God who orchestrated everything including drawing many of the Jewish priests to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

The strife that existed in the church because the Hellenistic widows felt that they were being neglected was resolved. There was no church split not even the loss of a single member. God's wisdom instead prevailed. God's wisdom only prevails when we diligently seek it. James reminds us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask for it. The example of the twelve Apostles here shows that they were diligently seeking wisdom, guidance, and direction from God. It was unfortunate that the problem arose in the first, because no one in need should remain in need.

We should apply this same action as we see needs arise in the church today. Without argument or any disharmony, but in total agreement we should seek the Lord's wisdom, guidance, and direction just as the early church did. The Apostles involvement to select from amongst themselves seven men demonstrated a trust in the people and that they were not dictators over the church. Pastors should take note of this when leading a church so not to try to control everything but learn to delegate. When a pastor takes on everything, he will not have the time to devote himself to prayer and the Scriptures.

Satan's strategy to divide the church is the same today. Our fight is a spiritual battle. We, just as the first century church must never become distracted from our duties and responsibilities in our personal and corporate callings by the Lord whether as the pastor, a deacon, or a member of the body.

Our prayer here at Sports & Rec Plus for you is that every message we send out is an inspiration and blessing in your personal walk with the Lord. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about this or any of our messages. And take a few minutes to visit our website and see how we can come alongside you, as you take the Gospel to your community and the world. Here is our contact information:

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