

# (Through the Bible) Acts 5-6

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of love and faith in the church, highlighting the dangers of hypocrisy and the need for purification and power.*

**Duration:** 1:22:56

**Scripture:** Acts 4:32

**Topics:** "Early Church", "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the early church and the practice of pure Communism among the believers. While it was a beautiful gesture of love and unity, it ultimately led to financial difficulties for the church. The speaker also highlights the importance of the church being effective in reaching out to the world with the gospel, as there are still many who have not heard of Jesus Christ. The sermon emphasizes the need for the church to be purified and powerful, so that signs and wonders can be manifested among the people.

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## Transcript

Chapter 5, the Book of Acts. Now, in the end of the fourth chapter, we have the second mention of the early pure communism that was practiced in the first church, where those who had possessions sold them and they shared. As we made note last Sunday night, financially it was disastrous.

Spiritually, it was a very beautiful gesture that the wealthier Christians had such a great love for the Lord and for the body of Christ that they were willing to sell their possessions and put everything in a common kind of a purse so that no one was with need in the early church. No one had to go without. But it did turn out to be a financial disaster to the extent that later on, Paul had to take offerings from among the Gentile churches to support the poor brethren in Jerusalem.

Because after the monies are expended, then what do you do? There has been some advocating of the church community in these days. There are certain churches that are attempting to reinstitute this practice in the original church. A famous vicar in London has recommended the church community concept.

Dr. John Stott. And he encouraged those of his congregation who had Mercedes and all to sell them. They had the large castles or whatever to sell them to get a smaller economical car and to create a common kind of a purse for the church and for the church community.

And they called it the church community concept. Not communal, but community. You each have your own houses and all, but yet there is this sharing of the wealth within the church.

I don't believe that that is necessarily a pattern that God intended. And though they did it in the church in Jerusalem, there's absolutely no mention of it being done by any of the other churches that were established. And as we pointed out, the results in Jerusalem were financial chaos.

And there were other problems with it. And we will get to those other problems as we move into the fifth chapter. But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife, sold the possession.

But they kept back part of the price. His wife also being a party to it. And they brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? For you have not lied to men, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost. And a great fear came on all those that heard these things.

And the young men arose and bound him and carried him out and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after. Now, it's interesting.

They took him out and buried him and didn't even notify his wife. And about the space of three hours after this, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in, Peter asked her, Tell me, whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, that's how much. And Peter said unto her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.

And then she fell down immediately at his feet and yielded up the ghost. And the young men came in and found her dead and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And it doesn't really need to say this, but it does.

And great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things. A couple of things that are important to note. Number one is Peter is talking to Ananias.

He said, in effect, Were you forced to sell your property? The answer is no. As long as you had it, wasn't it yours? Yes, it was. After you sold it, no one required you to bring the money in.

That was a purely voluntary thing on the part of those in the early church who wanted to do it. It wasn't a requirement of the church. And I think that this is important to note when there are those liberals today who try to point out that the early church practiced a form of communism and thus are seeking to advocate communism as a good way to go.

The communism of the early church was far different from that communism that we see today where people are forced at gunpoint to relinquish their personal possessions, their private properties, and confiscated them by the government. The church was not confiscating property. It was purely a voluntary, free will expression of the gratitude and the love that the people had for God.

No one was forcing that issue. And thus, there can be no comparison with the communism today which is a forced issue. The second thing, of course, to note is the sin for which they gave their lives.

It was not the sin of holding back. Not the sin of failure of giving everything. Because God did not require them to give everything.

Their sin was that of hypocrisy. Pretending to give everything to God when in reality, they were holding something back from God. And so we get an interesting view of God's opinion of the hypocrite which would indeed cause fear and trembling to come upon all the church.

I am interested and attracted by the power in the early church. There was such a purity in the hearts of these people. There was such a power within the church that the hypocrites could not abide.

The hypocrites coming into that environment were exposed and destroyed by the power of God. And that to me is extremely awesome. I have wondered if that same kind of power and purity existed in the church today, how many members would we still possess after singing the third verse of take my life and let it be.

For that third verse we sing, take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. And we sing it very dutifully, but yet all of us are withholding our mites and more. The curse of the church has been hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy can manifest itself in many forms, but as a general rule, there is a desire in our flesh to be thought of by people to be more spiritual or more righteous than we truly are. I am so disgusted with my own flesh because I love to have people think that I am a deeply spiritual person, a very godly man. And isn't it horrible that your flesh would delight in such a connotation? Now, because I want people to believe that I am a deeply spiritual, godly man in close communion with God, I often allow little subtle innuendos to slip from my lips that reveal how deeply spiritual I really am.

For this morning when I was waiting upon God, oh, doesn't that sound good? My, I heard the roosters crowing and I knew that it would be getting light pretty soon. Oh, he prays, you know, before the sun comes up. My, what a godly man.

Wanting to appear good in the eyes of men. Wanting to appear holy so that people might look up to me with awe and wonder that they might say, oh, you're Chuck Smith, aren't you? Well, yes, I am. God help us.

Hypocrisy. In the early church, God did not allow it. Evidently, we see here the gift of discerning of spirits in operation once again.

We will see it again in a couple of chapters as Simon the sorcerer comes to Peter and seeks to buy the power to lay hands on people that they might receive the Holy Spirit. And Peter begins to discern what's in the man's heart. But here when Ananias came in, Peter just flatly asked him why he was making a pretense of giving all when he was really holding something back.

That he was lying to the Holy Spirit. And then he said, for you have not lied to man but to God, making the Holy Spirit God. Why is it that you have conceived in your heart to the light, to the Holy Spirit? And then while it remained, wasn't it yours when you sold it, wasn't it yours? To do with, why is it then that you've conceived this thing in your heart for you have not lied to men, but you have lied to God.

And so equating the two together, lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God. And this is one of the proof texts to show the deity of the Holy Spirit, that He is God. And it's a very strong and powerful argument.

When Sapphira came in, Peter cross-examined her, asked her straightly to see if she was a party to her husband's lie. Did you sell your house for so much? Oh yes, that's the price we got. And then he accused her of conspiracy with her husband in this attempt to deceive the early church.

And her fate was the same as her husband's. Now, from this purity, there proceeded power. For the church now being purged of that hypocrisy, and Jesus said, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Paul told the Corinthian church to purge out the leaven therefore. Get rid of that hypocrisy within the church. And the effect of the purifying of the church was power.

I do believe that the book of Acts is a pattern, not a once in the history of the church, unique experience of the power of God, the initial thrust to get the church in orbit, and then that the church was to exist devoid of the power of God in the subsequent generations. I do not believe that the lack of power in the church is really God's fault. We are so often ready to blame God for our own failings.

It's a common trait of man. When God accosted Adam in the garden and said, what have you done? He said, it's the woman that you gave to me to be my wife. It's your fault.

You're the one that put her here. And he was trying to blame God for his sin. The woman that you gave to me to be my wife.

She did entice me and I did eat. And so man, it seems is always ready to blame God for his own failures. And so we look at the church in its weak anemic state and we want to blame God.

We say, well, God has withdrawn the power of the spirit. It was only given to the church initially to give the church that first thrust. But once the church was capable of developing its own programs, establishing its own seminaries, and creating its own organizational structures, we no longer needed the power of the spirit, but were now able by the genius of man to carry the gospel into all the world.

History itself would testify to the folly of that concept. For the early church did carry the gospel into all the world. As Paul wrote to the Colossians 30 years later, and the gospel as it has come to you as it is in all the world.

And here we are in our modern day church seeing the gospel reaching a less proportionate area of the world every year. In 1935, some 32% of the world knew of Jesus Christ. By 1945, it was only 27% of the world knew of Jesus Christ.

By 1955, it was only 22% of the world had heard of Jesus Christ. Today they estimate that only 17% of the world has heard of Jesus Christ. And of the 50 million people being added to the earth's population every year, less than 5% of them are being reached, or will be reached at our present rate with the gospel.

We are in a population explosion, but it's happening in the areas where the church is not effective. In fact, in many areas where the church has been ruled out. And much of the reason why the church has been put out of areas is the hypocrisy in the church.

When the church was purged and purified, it became powerful. And so we read that by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. And they were all was one accord in Solomon's porch.

This is the area where the lame man was healed. So the church continued to meet without a building, but just meeting on the public territory of the temple. There on Solomon's porch.

Now of the rest, there's no man to join himself to them, but the people magnified them. So this was the end of the people selling their possessions and bringing them in. After that, Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the power of God.

No one dared after that to become a part of that tight community that was sharing everything in common. That ended that particular little experiment. But though they did not become a part of that tight community, they magnified them and the believers were the more added to the Lord.

Multitudes, both of men and women. So there were many, many people believing, becoming Christians, but not becoming a part of that tight church community who were sharing everything in common. In so much that they brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches that at the least, the shadow of Peter passing might overshadow some of them.

Now, it doesn't say that Peter's shadow brought any healing benefits. In that culture, there was quite an interesting superstition about shadows and they would be very careful not to get in the shadow of an evil man. Because they had some kind of a superstition that if the shadow of an evil man fell on you, that some curse was going to happen to you.

And thus, in turning that around, the shadow of a good man, they probably thought would bring benefits. Now, I do believe, though it is not recorded, that many of them were healed as the shadow of Peter fell on them. Else the practice would have ceased in a hurry.

But I'm certain that many of them were healed, not because of any power in the shadow of Peter, but because of the principle of the releasing of faith. A point of contact where I am going to believe God to do a particular thing. When this happens, as the woman who had said, I know that if I can just touch the hem of his garment, I will be made whole.

And the moment she touched the hem of the garment, she released her faith. Oh woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as you wish.

The moment she touched his garment, she released her faith because in her heart she had said, I know that the moment that happens, I'm going to be healed. And as she released her faith, she was healed. So the value of that point of contact to release my faith, I know that God is going to do it when? So this developed and I know that when Peter's shadow falls on me, the Lord's going to heal me or the Lord's going to heal my father or he's going to heal my brother.

And so you'd carry your brother out in the street and put him on the side that the shadow would fall. You look at the sun and, you know, you put them on that side and wait for the shadow to fall. And the moment it fell, you say, all right, faith released.

And God responds to our faith. And so I'm certain that many were no doubt healed, though it does not say that they were, as the result of releasing their faith because they had established that point where they

would. And there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks and them that were vexed with unclean spirits.

And they were healed every one. So the purifying of the church by the purging of the hypocrisy and the resultant power that is manifested by the church as multitudes are brought out of the cities and the villages round about Jerusalem and they were being healed as the result of the power that was there in the early church. Sometimes my heart yearns for that kind of power to exist in the church today.

However, I seriously question whether the church has the capability of handling that kind of power. It seems that in the church, we're so ready to exploit anything. And I feel that it is indeed tragic to those who have had healing ministries and who have had that emphasis in their ministries.

For the most part, as far as I can think in my mind, they've exploited it for their own personal benefit and gain. And I think that that is indeed tragic. But I don't know my own heart.

I don't know what I would do. I really don't trust myself. If suddenly you had all of the notoriety and the fame and the acclaim that would come from having that kind of power, I really don't know my own heart.

If I would be capable of maintaining in my own spiritual walk. So, I can't really judge these men for what they have done because I don't know what I would do if in that same position. My father used to always pray, Lord, do not bless me with more than what I can contain my love for you.

Give me neither poverty nor riches. Poverty that I would steal or riches that I would say, who is God? I don't need Him. Several years ago, four or five, I was standing here right where I am now.

And we were in prayer together in an afterglow. Just waiting upon God. And there had been in that particular service a beautiful move of God's Spirit through the teaching of the Word.

Many people had come to respond to the message and to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. And then as we were all just waiting upon the Lord, suddenly it was just as though it was the Lord and I here alone together and no one else was here. And I began to talk to him about how thrilled I was with Calvary Chapel and with what God had done.

And all of the blessings that God had bestowed upon us, just super abundant blessings of God. And I said, Lord, there seems to be only one thing lacking. As I think of the church in Acts, and that is that dynamic power to minister to the needs of the people in a physical sense, the healing and the miracles that happened in Acts.

And if you would raise up someone, Lord, perhaps within the fellowship with a gift of miracles or healing, then it would seem that we would have the church of Acts complete. And the Lord spoke to my heart in a very powerful way. And he said, I have given to you the more excellent way.

And of course, my mind immediately flashed on 1 Corinthians chapter 12, where Paul speaking of the gifts of healings and miracles and all said, yet I will show you a more excellent way than even miracles, healings, whatever. For though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not love, I'm become as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And God said, I have given you the love within the fellowship.

I said, thank you, Lord, for the more excellent way. Help us to walk in it. And I've never asked God again for those gifts of miracles or healing as far as my own personal life is concerned.

Now, there are miracles and healings that are happening here daily, but not to the extent as we find in the book of Acts, nor do we wish to capitalize or to emphasize those healings and miracles that are taking place, lest people would be drawn only for the physical benefits and not really drawn to Jesus Christ. So, I do feel that we do lack from the early church in this area. But God knows that.

And why the lack exists, I'm certain is in part or whole on our side. God's hand is not short that he cannot save. His ear is not heavy that he cannot hear.

I'm certain that that environment in which these gifts should properly be exercised just does not yet exist. I'm not interested in hyped up experiences. I'm not interested in the circus environment that I observe so often within the healing meetings.

I don't read these things happening in the book of Acts, and I don't feel that they are edifying or drawing attention to Jesus, but have a greater tendency to draw the attention to the man, to the instrument, God's man of the hour, the star of the fifth magnitude. Now, as a result of the popularity, there came a jealousy among the priesthood and the high priest rose up and all that were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were filled with jealousy. The word indignation there is properly translated jealousy.

Notice that the high priest was himself a part of the sect of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the materialist. They were the humanist.

They did not believe in spirits. They did not believe in angels. They did not believe in resurrection.

And they were into the religious scene just for the bucks. And now the popularity of the disciples was a threat to them and they were jealous. And so they laid hands on the apostles and they put them in the common prison.

But the angel of the Lord that night opened the prison doors and brought them forth and said, go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. Go share with them this glorious life that you have in the risen Christ. Go right back where you were arrested.

Go right back and do the very things you were doing when you were arrested. Rather than just a now that you're free, escape, get out of Jerusalem, head for Caesarea, get a boat and take off for Greece, you know, escape the persecution. No, go right back into the temple and there speak to the people the words of this life.

So when they heard that. They entered into the temple early in the morning and they began to teach. But the high priest and those that were with him called the council together and all the Senate of the Children of Israel and they sent to the prison to have them brought forth.

But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and so they reported back to them saying the prison truly we found secure. It was shut with all security, safety, and the guards were standing outside before the doors. But when we opened the doors, there was no one there.

They've disappeared. Now, the guards were still standing there. The place was still locked.

And yet, when they opened the door to the inner prison, the their rooms, they were empty. Now, when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these things. They began to wonder, boy, how, you know, what's going to come of this story now.

Then one came in and told them saying the men that you are that you put in prison are standing in the temple and they're teaching the people. What a God's got to have a sense of humor. Here is this, you know, the joint meeting of the Senate and the House of Representatives called by the president got to deal with this problem.

And so you send down to Leavenworth, you have the prisoners brought, you know, and they get inside and their cells are empty. And then, you know, here's this whole August assembly of the leaders, you know, ready to try these men. And and here someone says, well, they're right back in the temple.

They're over there teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers and they brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. They're excitable people over there.

And as Don was sharing with you, things haven't changed much. Don stayed out of that cave or that digging in order that he would not be stoned. And when they have brought them, they set them before the council and the high priest asked them saying, did we not strictly command you that you should not teach in this name? And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood on us.

You remember in the last chapter when they were standing before the council with the lame man, they were strictly charged not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. And Peter responded, we cannot speak that we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So they threatened them further and let them go.

Now he brings up this, he said, didn't we strictly charge you not to speak anymore in this name? And then he makes an interesting admission. You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. Now, that is a interesting testimony, not by the evangelist.

You have to watch the testimonies of evangelists. Sometimes they are exaggerated. We used to have a term evangelistically speaking, and it means that you blow up the figures significantly.

Well, how many were there? Oh, I suppose there were several hundred, at least twenty five. But evangelistically speaking, you know, so this was not their own report. This is the report of their enemy.

You have filled Jerusalem with this man's doctrine. Would to God that our enemies could testify against us and make that charge. Would to God they could say you filled Orange County with this man's doctrine.

Wouldn't that be glorious if we could fill Orange County with the doctrine of Jesus Christ, that we could see such a move of God that everyone in the county would be cognizant of what God was doing? Instead, unfortunately, the church is gaining great notoriety in the county for other things than proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's rather tragic, isn't it? The church is gaining notoriety for the wrong things. Secondly, you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Now, if you remember when Pilate was trying Jesus and these men were manipulating the crowd to seek his crucifixion. Finally, when Pilate saw that he couldn't prevail, he ordered a basin brought and he began

to wash his hands in the basin in a symbolic gesture. He said, I am innocent of this man's blood.

See ye to it. And what did they respond? His blood be upon us and on our children. Now they're upset, saying to Peter, you're seeking to bring this man's blood on us.

And for certain, when Peter was standing before them, he said unto them, if you want to know by what power and all this lame man was healed, be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified. And so he puts the blame right where it belongs. And yet now they don't want to receive the accusation or the blame.

Yet it was their responsibility. Peter made mention of the fact that Pilate was wanting to let him go, but they insisted on his death. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men.

That word ought there is a again, not a totally accurate translation. The Greek word is must. We must obey God rather than men.

Didn't we strictly charge you not to speak anymore in this man's name? Their answer is we must obey God rather than men. We must obey God. Oh, that we would experience and feel in our own hearts that divine imperative.

I must obey God. Unfortunately, we take so oftentimes a careless attitude in this area of obedience. Well, yes, I should be obeying.

Oh, I ought to obey God. Yes, I know that I should. But these men felt it much deeper.

They said we must obey God rather than men. And I think that this is the rule. Should ever the time come, should we be living under the laws or jurisdictions created by man that would infringe upon my responsibilities to God and the law of the land would be contrary to the law of God.

That I would have to take that very same position. I must obey God rather than man. And then they went on to testify the God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree.

They just said, you're trying to bring his blood on us. And Peter just throws a bucket on them. I mean, he just lays it out whom you slew and hanged on a tree.

But notice he's preaching again, the resurrection. God has raised Jesus. Secondly, God has exalted him to his right hand to be the prince and a savior to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins.

Paul said he was raised for our justification. At the right hand of God to be the prince, the savior. And we are his witnesses of these things.

And so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey him. And here we find the Holy Spirit is given in obedience to those that obey. And that is believing on Jesus Christ, repenting from your sins, believing on Jesus Christ, obedient to the command of God.

And we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, when they heard that they were cut to the heart, talk about conviction. And they took counsel to slay them.

Then there stood up one in the council who was a Pharisee. His name was Gamaliel. He was a doctor of the law.

He had a very high reputation among the people. And he asked that they put the apostles out of the room. And he said unto them, you men of Israel, now you be careful what you intend to do in regards to these men.

For in days before this, there rose up Thutis who was boasting himself to be somebody to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves. And when he was slain, all of those that were following him were scattered, and the whole issue was brought to nothing. And after this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing.

And he drew away many people after him. And he also perished, and all, even as many as were following him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, refrain from these men and let them alone.

For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will come to nothing. But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it. Because you'll find yourself in the position of fighting against God.

So, this wise counsel by Gamaliel to these men who were plotting to kill the disciples. Look, we got rid of the leader. And these kind of things have arisen before.

Others have risen up, gathered followers around them. But it always just dissipated once the leader was killed. So, let's just let it go.

Now, this is the argument from a position of weakness, not a position of strength. You usually just don't let things go to see how they are going to turn out. But it was the counsel of Gamaliel, and they accepted this counsel.

Interestingly enough, this is the Gamaliel of which Paul was a prize student. In some of the early writings that were discovered, Gamaliel said of Paul that he had only one difficulty with Paul as a student. He said he was an extremely zealous student.

His only difficulty was providing him with enough books. He was a real bookworm. And Gamaliel had difficulty just providing him with sufficient number of books because of his tremendous thirst for knowledge.

Now, they agreed to Gamaliel's counsel partly. He said, just let them alone. But they called the apostles back in and they beat them.

They didn't just let them alone. They beat them and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and they let them go. Well, that's probably the end of it.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. How do you stop men like that? The answer is you don't. They're unstoppable.

And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Notice both teaching and preaching. Preaching is the proclaiming of God's good news.

And should basically be done to the unconverted. But once a man has received Jesus Christ, his real need then is that of being taught. And this is where the church has made a grave mistake.

Because the church continues to produce great preachers, but is not really producing teachers. And thus, the sheep are not getting strong because they're being preached at Sunday after Sunday rather than being taught. Our preaching should be done on the street corners and our teaching should be done within the church.

Preaching is a great Saturday night ministry when the young people are attracted by the groups that are playing and singing. But once they have received Christ, then the great need of being taught in the way of righteousness and truth. Now, in those days when the number of disciples was multiplied, we found the church, the Lord adding to the church and now he's multiplying.

I love the Lord's mathematics. There arose a murmuring. Now another problem with this community living that was practiced by the early church, sharing everything.

Another problem arises here in chapter six. There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Now, daily, the people would come to receive their dole from the church.

They had everything in common, and so they had a commissary and each day they would give out according to the needs of the people, give them their food and all. Now, the Grecians do not imply that they were Greeks, but they were Jews who had followed the Hellenistic culture. Many of the Jews had taken Greek names and had become totally acculturated to the Grecian culture, which was spread throughout the world by Alexander the Great.

Greece brought culture to the ancient world, and even after Rome conquered over Greece, these pockets of Grecian culture remained and were strong in the ancient world. And there were those who had adapted the Greek culture. There were those who were still living by a strict Hebrew culture.

So when it speaks of the Grecians and the Hebrews, they were all of them Jews, but there were those who were of the Greek culture, the Hellenistic culture, those of the Hebrew culture. Now, those who had adopted the Hellenistic culture felt that there was favoritism when they were doling out the supplies and all, that there was favoritism being shown towards those who were of the Hebrew culture. The little old women who would come up in their Hebrew garb would get an extra dole, where these ladies that would come in their Grecian fashions, their sharp Grecian fashions, they would give them less.

And they said, hey, wait a minute. This isn't right that these widows who are of the Hebrew culture are getting more than those of the Grecian culture. So they came to the disciples with this problem, to the apostles.

And so the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them. They had a big gathering of the people. And they said, it is not reasonable that we should leave the Word of God and serve at these tables.

In other words, we have more important things to do than to stand at the tables and to dole out the church's welfare. It isn't right. It isn't reasonable that we should have to take the responsibility of doling out the church's goods.

Wherefore, brethren, look out from among yourself seven men, and these are the traits or the characteristics they are to possess. One, they are to be men of honest report. Two, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

So it isn't right that we should leave the ministry God has given to us to take care of the table. So let's appoint seven men, good reputations, who are filled with the Holy Spirit and who have wisdom and let them take charge over the church's commissary. And we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Now, you remember when we were talking last Sunday about the men that God uses. They are men of prayer and they are men of the Word. They are men who put this as the top priority in their lives.

They do not allow other things to interfere with their prayer or their study of the Word. They are men of the Word and men of prayer. And so here, this pressure to take an active role, to settle this dispute, they backed away from it.

They said, let's just pick out seven men to do this in order that we might be able to give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

Now, an interesting thing appears here, and that is when they chose these seven men, look at their names. Nicholas, Parmenas, Nicanor. These are Greek names.

So those of the Grecian culture felt that their women were getting a lesser dole. And so in wisdom, they chose men who obviously had come from a Grecian culture themselves to take charge of overseeing. The church's welfare.

It's a wise way to solve a difficult problem. When we were growing up, I had two other brothers or two brothers, and my mom was an outstanding pie baker, among other things. And there was always that problem of the last piece of pie.

And so often my brother and I would be vying for that last piece of pie. And that's a polite way of saying fighting. I fought over more than one piece of pie.

It was an advantage of being the older brother too. But when we would bring our dispute to my mom, and we would both be claiming that piece of pie or desiring our portion of that piece of pie, she would always let one of us cut it in half and the other one got the first choice. Well, I mean, we got out the micrometers.

It was just a good solution to a difficult problem. And so it is interesting to me that in picking these men, they picked men with Greek names. Indicating that they probably had themselves a Hellenist cultural background.

Now, it would be easy for anyone with any kind of ambition to be going up the ladder in the church to say, wait a minute, why do you want me to wait on tables? I want to preach the gospel. The qualifications by which they chose these men, they would have all been qualified ministers of the gospel for sure. Yet these were the men that were chosen.

But to me, it is interesting that as we move on in the book of Acts, the activities of the next person we get to are none other than Stephen, who was one of those chosen who was spoken of as a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit. And we will see Stephen being used by God in things other than waiting on tables. But that's where he went to begin his ministry.

There are a lot of people who feel called to the ministry when they attend Calvary Chapel and see the marvelous work that God is doing here. It has a way of inspiring men to go into the ministry. It is interesting that during the first 20 years or so of my life, when we were scraping the bottom all the time to get enough money to buy food and the necessities and pastoring little churches, 50, 60, 70 people, at that time I seemed not to inspire anybody to go into the ministry.

But the interesting thing about those today who are being inspired towards the ministry is that they want to begin with a full time pastorate of a church of 500 or so. A church that is able to provide them with a nice parsonage and an adequate salary. And they seem to forget that the first 20 years of my ministry, I worked in secular jobs to keep the family in food and clothes and shoes.

Oh, but I feel God's calling me to the full time ministry. Romaine has a good way of dealing with these people. He gives them a mop and he says, all right, you want to start your full time ministry? The men's room is back there.

And you might as well learn what the ministry is about. But it is important that we start somewhere. But rarely does a person start at the top.

God usually brings us through the ranks. Stephen started on waiting tables. And I'm certain that he was faithful in that area.

And then God moved him up. So many times people come and say, I feel called to the ministry. I say, do you teach a Sunday school class? No.

I said, well, that's where you start. Go over and volunteer to teach a Sunday school class. Are you in the prayer watch? No.

Then volunteer to take a prayer time. That's where you really start in the ministry. You start in those more insignificant places.

And when you are faithful in the little things, the Lord will then raise you up and give you bigger things. So it is interesting to me that the next two people that we come across now in the record are not apostles, but are two of these men who were chosen to wait table. Stephen and Philip.

And we see the marvelous work that God raises them to having begun waiting tables. It isn't long before God takes them from there. So they chose these seven men, verse six, whom they set before the apostles.

And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Now we have, it seems, developed a custom of laying hands on people and then praying. But from the book of Acts, it would seem that their pattern was praying and then laying their hands on people.

We find this in a couple of places where they prayed and then laid hands on them. I think we find that pattern also in about the 13th chapter when Paul and Barnabas were sent forth in their ministry. Verse three of chapter 13.

And when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So the pattern was to pray and then lay hands on them. Now, I don't know that there's anything to that, but it's just interesting to me that, you know, we have that other tendency of just laying hands on people and then praying, where

they did it the other way around.

And the Word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. Again, we see the work of God adding to the church, a powerful community, and a great company, even of the priests were obedient to the faith. Now, one of these seven men, and Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines and the Cyrenians and the Alexandrians and those of Cilicia and Asia. And they were arguing, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist or to counteract the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Here they got into these arguments, but Stephen was just walking all over them. He spoke with such wisdom and such a spirit that he was just putting them down. So they suborned men or paid off men, which said, we've heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.

And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes came upon him and they caught him and brought him to the council. And they set up the false witnesses, which said, this man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place in the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. Beautiful, isn't it? And so, because they could not overcome his arguments, the wisdom, the spirit by which he spoke, they went to devious methods to stop his witness, hiring these men to make these false accusations against him, accusing him of blasphemy, accusing him of speaking against the temple and against the law of God. Now, there probably was a certain element of truth.

For it is quite possible that Stephen did tell them that this temple is going to be destroyed because Jesus had told the disciples that not one stone was going to be left standing upon another of that temple when they asked him of the signs of his coming at the end of the age. They were there in the temple and they were looking at these huge stones and Jesus said not one stone is going to be left standing on another. So, Stephen could have been telling them that, hey, this temple is going to be destroyed.

And also, he could have been telling them that having the law of Moses is not enough for salvation. You must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. That salvation cannot come by the law of Moses.

That salvation comes through a living faith in Jesus Christ. And it could very possibly be that Stephen was saying these things and they just twisted them slightly or reported only half of what he said. And, of course, that's one of the dangers of talking to any reporter is that they usually just quote only half or less than half of what you say and then often quote it out of context so it sounds like you said something entirely different from what you said, which almost amounts to a misquotation because they take it out of the context in which it was quoted.

So, you begin to get very leery of interviews with reporters or TV commentators or whatever. And we have a case right now where one of the famous commentators is being sued for the editing of a interview and all and seeking to bring an impression that was perhaps not a reality. But though he is a very smooth man, they are not at all innocent of the charges that are being made because when they interviewed those scientists down at Creation Research Institute, they did the same thing.

Sixteen Minutes did a hatchet job on Dr. Gish and Dr. Morris and all in their editing and all. And so it's possible to take the statements that a person makes out of context and and to use them against the person. And this is no doubt what was being done to Stephen.

There was a certain element of truth in what they were declaring and yet putting it in a different context and making it sound like something other than what he had actually said. So, as we move into chapter seven, we find here the story of the young man, Stephen, whose face, shining like an angel's, stands up to make his defense before these people. And then on into chapter eight, as the second of these, Philip, takes off for Samaria and later on down to Gaza and then to Exodus and did his marvelous work for God.

Two men chosen to wait tables, promoted by God to powerful ministries within the early church, faithful in the little things, being promoted to greater things. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you again for the privilege of studying your Word, for the joy, the blessing, the strength that your Word brings to our lives. Help us, Lord, that we might grow through the knowledge of your Word into a better understanding of your plan and your will for our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. May the Lord be with you.

Keep his hand upon you. Watch over and use you, whatever it is that God has called you to do. Be faithful.

Give it your best. And then God will raise you to another task, bring you through the ranks. And so may you be used of God in a very special way.

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