

The Acts of the Apostles

Lesson: 8

Topic: Seven Chosen to Serve

Reading: Acts 6:1-7

Review

Scripture Analysis

Verse 1

- “Now in these days”
 - See a continuation of the previous chapters.
- “disciples were multiplying”
 - Followers of Christ.
 - They had been brought to faith through the teaching and preaching of Jesus through the Apostles.
- QUESTION: Who were the Hebrews and who were the Hellenists?
 - Hebrews: Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians.
 - Hellenists: Greek-speaking Jewish Christians.
- QUESTION: What was the Hellenists’ complaint?
 - “Widows were being neglected in the daily distribution” (v.1).
 - Remember:
 - Acts 4:34-35 states, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.
 - Widows:
 - Would have benefitted from the distribution.
 - They were without a spouse, someone who would physically support them.
 - Yet, disciples were growing at such a high rate that individuals, such as widows, were being overlooked in the distribution of these proceeds.
 - The Hellenist complaint was justified as the apostles take action to fix this problem.

Verse 2

- “...serve tables.”
 - Again, this is the distribution of goods (like food) that were gathered from the sale of property.
- QUESTION: What reason did the twelve apostles give for this neglect of the widows?
 - “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God...”
 - The apostles were called specifically by God to preach the Word.
 - They were not delegating a part of their divine office to others – they couldn’t do that.
 - They were relinquishing tasks that were not a part of their office.

- To be sure, these tasks needed to be performed but not necessary to their divinely instituted office.
- “They summoned the full number of disciples...”
 - The twelve apostles functioned as the leaders of the congregation.
 - Yet, they make no decision of their own a law for the congregation.

Verse 3

- QUESTION: What do the apostles suggest?
 - “...pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.”
 - The men appointed for this task were to be men of faith who knew and believed the testimony of the Scriptures and the apostolic doctrine of the Gosple.
 - But not only that but the apostles include the word “wisdom.”
 - “Wisdom” here indicates they were to have the ability and readiness to apply Christian knowledge to the practical affairs of life.
- “...whom we will appoint to this duty.”
 - Luther indicates, “...the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts 5 [6:1–6].”¹

Verse 4

- “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
 - After this arrangement has been made, the apostles expected to devote all their time to what properly constitutes their divine office.
 - They summarize their divine office as prayer and service of the word.

Verse 5

- QUESTION: What was the congregation’s thought on this arrangement?
 - They were pleased.
- QUESTION: What were the names of the seven men?
 - Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch.
 - Proselyte – A Gentile who became a Jew by circumcision. Nicolas the proselyte Jew had become a believer of Christ.
- QUESTION: Why do St. Luke write, “full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” Weren’t all these men suppose to have this?
 - All men were to be faithful Christians.
 - It’s likely that St. Luke setting up Stephen’s confrontation with the authorities at Jerusalem.

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 116.

Verse 6

- “They prayed and laid their hands on them”
 - The Lord’s blessing was invoked upon the elected men, and the hands were laid on them in this Old Testament symbolical act, which transferred the office with its duties and privileges and pictured the bestowal of the divine blessings that were necessary for this important work (See Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9).

Verse 7

- “...the word of God continues to increase...”
 - The attack by the Sanhedrin, nor the issue with distribution in the congregation stop or slowed the growth of the early church.
 - More people continue to come to faith through the proclamation of the apostles.
- “...priests...”
 - The Word of God even brought priest to faith.
 - These were individuals who worked in the temple.
 - This reveals that the Word of God can bring to faith any heart.

Additional Thoughts

- In this instance the office of deacon is an auxiliary office, established by the Church in love, to assist and support the Office of the Holy Ministry, to assist Christians in their vocations, and to tend to the temporal affairs of the congregation.
- The deacon ministers the Word of God and prayer in the congregation only by the authority of the pastor under whose office he serves.

Terms

Catechesis Summary

Learn by Heart Catechism Connection