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Is Managed by Spirit-Filled Followers of Christ Acts Chapter 6

We are looking at the Book of Acts Chapter Six as we study what the church is. Scripture gives us the definition by virtue of the word itself which is “*ekklesia*”. It is the Greek word that gives us the word church, which means “called out” ones. More specifically, it is an assemblage, but an assemblage of those that are called out to be different, to be unique. We are called to be, as Peter would say, “a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” God has called us to be His people, His own possession, that we might display the character and nature of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are to be separate and unique from the world, are we not?

(II Corinthians 6:17) “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate...”

God has called us to be different. How should we be acting? How should we respond? The answer - like Christ, like the One we follow. We are the disciples of Christ. We are carrying out the great commission by going all over the world and making disciples, making learners of Christ. That is the great commission that we have been given. It should not surprise us that the church is composed of a group of disciples. As we read a little bit further in the Book of Acts, we will find out that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. Prior to that, they were called disciples. We sometimes reverse it. But the fact of the matter is that God has called us all to be disciples or to be learners and followers of Christ. Therefore, the very name Christian literally means to follow Christ. The Book of Acts, once again, refers to the acts of the apostles. I would define that word to be the business of the apostles. What is the business of the apostles? The Book of Acts will tell us what the business of those who were sent out by Christ is. What is that business? We know that the business is to establish the foundation of the church. It follows, then,

that the Book of Acts is about the foundation of the church. As we review the purpose of each chapter, we cannot cover a lot of detail because we are taking a chapter in each meeting. As we look in Chapter One, what is clear is that He called those apostles to be sent out. The word apostle means to be sent out. He called them to be sent out for the purpose of being witnesses of Christ. The declaration in Chapter One is that Christ is the hope of the church. What we see in Chapter One is that there is a foundation of the church. What is that foundation? Christ, our hope. We are looking forward to Him coming again. John will even say:

(1 John 3:3) “And every man who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

It is the hope of every saint. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Scripture tells us that hope is not sitting there crossing your fingers. It is actually a confident expectation. We know He is coming again. There is a dogma about this;

it is what lays our foundation. We are looking for His coming. Paul will even say to Timothy:

(II Timothy 4: “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”)

It is this expectation that causes us to actually merit a crown in heaven. I know that some people believe that you will get a crown if you lead people to Christ, and I would encourage you to lead people to Christ but there is no text that says that. It does say you get a crown if you are looking forward to the coming of Christ. Christ. What is one of the ways that we look forward to the coming of Christ? We are busy about His business. When we are about His business, our motive rewards the heart rather than performing the deeds. Otherwise, it would be really easy to look at people as notches on your belt. If you look at the prophet Jeremiah, he would be the biggest loser in all the Scriptures. If you look at Jonah, he would be the

most successful. However, it really is the opposite. Jonah preaches, and everybody is saved in Nineveh. Jeremiah, on the other hand, goes forty years, and nobody changes. Who is the greater prophet? Jeremiah. God is demonstrating to us that we are in His hands. He wants those who will be faithful, who will obey, who will do what He tells them, who are looking forward to His coming. That is the great faith. In fact, Hebrews 6:9 tells us that this hope is the anchor for our soul. This hope that we have in Christ is the anchor for our soul. Chapter One of the Book of Acts is about looking towards Jesus. The angels said:

(Acts 1:11) “...’Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”

He commanded us to go and be His witnesses and tell the world that He is coming again. The first foundation at the establishment of the church is the hope of Christ. In

Chapter Two, we see that the church is empowered by the Spirit of Christ. Jesus tells them in Chapter One to wait until the Spirit comes upon them. Chapter Two relates how the Spirit comes upon them. It is the power of the Spirit of God within them that emboldens Peter to boldly speak God's words. He causes people to fall on their faces and ask what they must do to be saved. The result is that about 3,000 were added on that day. Why? Because the Spirit of God is moving. And without the Spirit of God, there is no life. There is no church. The church does not exist without the Spirit of Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ was given. When you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life, the Bible tells us according to Ephesians Chapter One that the Spirit of God dwells within you. When the Spirit of God dwells within you, guess what? You are the church. You become the church. You are a living, breathing organism and a part of the body of Christ.

Chapter Two really demonstrates the great power of the Spirit of God. First Thessalonians is an interesting proof text. If you look with me in First Thessalonians Chapter One, Paul declares this great truth. It says:

(I Thessalonians 1:5) “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”

I like that phrase. The power came because the Spirit of God and the Spirit of truth that dwells within you is the Spirit of full conviction because He is the Spirit of sincerity. He is the Spirit of genuineness. He is the Spirit of true and real. What happened when you received Jesus? You breathed in “real” because up to that point, you were a big fake. You were a big phony. But when you breathe in the Spirit of God, you become real. “Today,” you said, “you know what? I am a sinner. I have no merit of my own.” Up to that point, maybe you were trying to impress people. Maybe you had convinced yourself that you are a really

good person. But on this day, you know what? You stop being a phony. You said, “You know what? If it were not for Jesus, I would have no hope.” You got real with yourself. Plus, the Spirit of real began to breathe in you. Then you said, “I have great expectations for tomorrow because Christ lives within me. It is His righteousness, not mine.” And, wow, everything changed. So, the Spirit of Christ empowers us. We now have full conviction in our hearts. As Paul will go on to say in First Thessalonians 1:5, “...you know what kind of people we proved to be.” In other words, you saw the sincerity in our lives. There is a change that takes place and transpires. Then Acts Chapter Two reveals to us that the change is because of the Spirit of God that comes within our life.

Chapter Three talks about how the church serves. What is clear in Chapter Three is that the church serves in the name of Christ. You can put the word worship in there as well because serving and worship are often in combination. It is actually where we get the word liturgy,

by the way. Liturgical is that which is often referred to as service as well as worship. You are serving as an act of worship. Unfortunately, it has become a memorization of words; but that is not actually what the word refers to. It means that you are serving out of a heart of worship to God. What we see in chapter 3 is that the church is serving in the name of Jesus. The disciples are making it clear that what is happening is done in the name of Jesus. We are pointing to Him. That is what makes the church unique. One of the saddest things that I have often seen is that a church often does things in the name of themselves. They will bring personalities up. “Look what a great and wonderful person this is.” Conferences will host a speaker with a well-known name; and, of course, you have to pay a little bit more for those conferences. But what we believe is that it is the power of Christ; therefore, we always point to Him. The disciples say, “Look, do not think that this man was healed by the anything we did. It was the name of Jesus that did this.” The purpose of the church always is to point to the name of Jesus. If any

service is done, it is in the name of Jesus. If you give a glass of water in my name, it means nothing. That does not always mean that you throw out the name Jesus, but what it does mean is that you are doing it for Him. You are doing it in such a way that you are pleasing Him.

Ultimately, your goal is to point people to Him. That is the whole reason you are doing it. That is what makes the church unique, and that is what we see in chapter 3.

In Chapter Four, what we see is the confidence the church has. The reason that the church is confident is that its authority is from Christ. You say, “Well, big deal.” Yes, it is! Our authority is from Christ. What is the big deal?

Because as Jesus says at the end of Matthew,

(Matthew 28:18) “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.’”

The authority that the church follows is not the authority of man, but the authority of Christ. That means that sometimes the church will take a stand that could be

against the laws of the land. The church does not try to go be rebellious. We should always try to submit because we believe that all authority is ordained by God, including that of our government. What is clear within the Scripture is that,

(Acts 4:19) “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;’”

(Acts 4:20) “for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

We cannot stop proclaiming the name of Jesus. I see the day coming when the church is going to be tormented because of this even in America. I never thought that I would actually admit that I think I may live to see it. You know, I grew up at a time where it was popular to be a Christian. And if you were PK (preacher’s kid), it was like rolling out the red carpet. Your dad is the pastor. Everybody says, “Yes, sir” and “Pastor, sir.” Today, that is not the case. Who wants to be around a pastor?

Everybody is trying to avoid him. Things have changed. More than that, you can see the acrimony and the hatred that people have towards the church. It is escalating. Even so, we rejoice over this because, according to 2nd Timothy 3, that just shows that we are getting closer to the end times. I am cool with that. What we see in Chapter 4 is that the church's confidence is in the authority of Christ. Christ. That is where the church gets its confidence. Let me just reiterate this without getting too detailed. Our confidence is not in lawyers. Our confidence is not in insurance. Our confidence is not in health care. Our confidence is in Jesus. He is our authority and the authority on which we stand. We are going to act according to the word of God, and we are going to be confident in that. They look at the disciples and go, "Wow! These men were just common people. How do they have so much confidence?"

(Acts 4:13) "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were

uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

That is our authority. Why are you so confident? I trust that your confidence is because you have been with Jesus today. I trust that, should you talk with anybody today, you confidently share with them about Christ. Do not be apologetic about this. Do not be afraid to tell people that they need Jesus. He is the answer. How can you be so confident? That is a good question. It is the Spirit of God within you. Therefore, I believe. As Paul would say,

(2 Timothy 1:12) “For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

There is even a song with those words. As we study chapter 4, what we see is the great confidence in the authority of Christ. The confidence of the church is the authority of Christ.

In Chapter Five, we realize that the church is the guardian of the truth. We are the guardian of the truth. We begin with the scene of Ananias and Sapphira; we see a couple who lied to the Spirit of God. Next, they die. They die instantly. In this, we see the role of the church. What is interesting is Peter's approach. He says, (to Sapphira) "I am going to give you an opportunity to come clean because one thing is not allowed in the church of God." (verse 8) You say, "What is that?" God says, "Liars, fakes, hypocrites." Such people were part of the Jewish synagogue. They were part of the temple of Judaism. They are part of religion, but they cannot be a part of God's church. The reason why is because the Spirit of truth dwells in you. No fakes allowed. This is being established within this passage. No fakes are allowed in the household of God. What we see is that the church is really there for the purpose of, I would say, protecting from those who would try to be deceivers. The church is there to take a stand. We often look at church discipline as a church system which shows where the church stands on things.

“Oh, that is terrible.” The reason why a church takes a stand is to protect you. If in fact you are lying against God and going against God, then the next person to deal with is God. The church is the buffer. This is why Paul says:

(I Corinthians 5:5) “I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

It is like he is saying, “You know, this one continues to sin. I am going to turn him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his soul may be saved.” You respond, “What are you talking about, Paul?” Paul says, “As long as he is in the church, he has a buffer of protection. But once he is cast out of the church, then he is under the judgment of God as a believer. That is what we are talking about for those who profess to know the name of Christ. God is really serious about this. I know that sometimes we do not perceive it as an issue, but God is genuinely serious about it. As you read in 1 Corinthians 11, it says, “Look, do not come to the communion of God and think that you

could destroy the church of God in so doing. You have got to be sincere with your brothers. And when you come to this time of communion, be sincere because if you are not, many are going to be sick and many will die because you are not.” (verse 30) I have seen this happen. I do not want to get specific because I do not like to mention names. But I literally know of cases, one in particular, in which a person came to me and said, “You know, I am going to leave the church.” Then they began to say that they were going to do destructive things. I responded, “Well, you do whatever you feel you need to do. But the Lord will hold you accountable.” Within a month, the person was dead. I have seen these things take place but will not go into more detail about that. The point of the matter is that God is establishing an authority. He is establishing what is probably the most important thing in the body of Christ, and that is sincerity and truth. The reason that the person is taken out is for the destruction of their flesh so that their soul will be safe. They are going to heaven. But so that they cannot do any more damage

to the church, they are taken out. One of the things we are talking about today is that the world already hates the church. God would have to destroy almost the whole world in order to prevent all attacks on the church. What Scripture tells us is that it is now time for judgment to begin within the household of God. God is not going to allow a child of His to destroy the family. He is just not going to allow anyone to do that. If there is a child who is being destructive, He will take him out. It is not that I believe He will take them out. That is what Paul is talking about. In 1Corinthians 3, he tells us, “If you destroy the church, I will destroy you.” I think it is pretty clear. What we were talking about is there in

(1 John 5:16) “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.”

The sin leading to death is the destruction of the body of Christ. But here again, it is rooted in the disingenuous. If you remember in the text here in Acts, what was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? They lied against the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth. See? You were deceitful to the body of Christ, and that deception will not be allowed. This is telling us something very powerful. That is: do not be a hypocrite. God really hates that. If you do not believe that is true, just read Matthew 23 where Jesus says over and over again woe, woe, woe, woe. I mean, how many times? Hypocrites. He is talking about those where there is evidence that you are Christian but you are taken out because you are destroying the body of Christ. I think there is evidence that you are Christian if you do not desire to destroy the body of Christ. But if a person is destroying the body of Christ and getting away with it, I think that is pretty strong evidence that he is not a believer. Here again, I think what you are asking me to do is what a lot of people want me to do, and that is you need me to tell you who is a Christian and who is not.

What Scripture will not allow you to do is to get comfortable in either field. In other words, it will not let you think, “Well, I can be a Christian and really be nasty.” God answers, “I do not think you are Christian.” You say, “Really?” He goes, “You need to think about it.” But He will not tell you. The reason is found in 1 John as quoted earlier. He says that confidence can only come from obeying the Lord. Is it possible that you are a Christian, and He takes you out? Yes. But do you want to live in that “iffy” zone? I do not. Therefore, I am not going to affirm one way or the other. However, I will say that, as we were talking about today, the most miserable people on the face of the earth are Christians who are not walking with Christ. In many respects, I perceive that there is evidence that you are a Christian if you are really miserable. Because if you are sinning and you are really miserable, good. You know? However, if you are miserable and you are okay with it, then there is a problem. That is why many times you will come upon Christians and think, “What a miserable person. He could not be a Christian.” It

might be true. So in Acts chapter 5, the church is the guardian of truth. Let me just say this; there is that wonderful passage in:

(I Timothy 3:15) “...I write so that you can know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

This is not dogma here. It is talking about your living your life in sincerity and truth. The church and everyone in it have to be genuine. As a body of Christ, we support real. Real should be a part of our lives. Genuine should be a part of our lives. A number of years ago, someone came to me and said that I talk just like I preach. Yes! I do not understand why people would preach differently than they are. Is this not about being real? This is about being the way that we are. We are the guardians of the truth. If you think about John 15:26, it tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. I simply cannot overemphasize that point. That is so clearly what the church does. It guards and protects the truth. Paul will tell Timothy, “You must protect the church. You cannot veer from this.” Once

again, he is not just talking about the word of God itself. He is also talking about the way that it is exemplified in the lives of those in the body. That is why those that are put in positions need to be men who are exemplifying in reality what they are saying. We are guardians of the truth.

That brings us to the Book of Acts Chapter Six. It really describes to us that the church must be managed by Spirit-filled leaders. The church is to be managed by Spirit-filled leaders. This is, in particular, what he will be describing. It is presented in the setting of an issue that arises. The issue that arises is amongst the Hellenists, which is another word for Greeks. The Hellenistic Jews were Jews who spoke Greek. Much of their life was influenced by the Greek lifestyle. Nevertheless, they were Jews. It says that their widows were being neglected. What it is telling us is that the Hebrew widows were not being neglected, but the Greek Jewish widows were. There was a concern. In fact, the text seems to convey that people were getting upset about it to the point that they were complaining. Scripture tells us not to complain. This setting then begins to help in the establishment of

the church, and it is through this complaint or this particular issue that the platform of leadership within the church comes into question. It is a key text. What it is talking about is the style of management. There are issues that are coming up. There are issues that happen in the church. Who is going to manage these things? Who is going to be the one in charge of these things in the church? The answer is given in the passage. They need to be men who are filled with the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, the Spirit of God; and they need to be men who have a good reputation. Wow! These are the ones who should be leading. It does not get more complicated than that. It begins this way:

(Acts 6:1) “Now at this time, while the disciples were increasing in number...”

Who is increasing in number? The disciples. That is interesting. “Who are you? You should be a disciple.” “I do not think I am a disciple. I do not want to be a disciple.” “I do not know. I mean, you said you want to follow Christ. That is what disciples do.”

(Acts 6:1) “Now at this time, while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the

Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.”

They were still in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem and Judea, the social security of widows was rooted in the temple. That is why people gave alms in the temple. This is the place where the widows were taken care of in this vicinity of Judea. That was their form of social security. These people are Christians. They have stepped away from Judaism when they became Christians. The Pharisees are going, “We are not going to help you.” So now we have widows who are not being taken care of. The church begins to now do what it is supposed to do, *i.e.*, take care of their widows. That said, there is a problem. The problem is that we have those that are not--we are going to use the phrase—“not like the rest of us”, not like our family. What we are going to see within the passages is that we have our biases. Often, our biases bring a lot of pain and hurt to people. The church is no place to bring in biases, not only when it comes to different nationalities, but also when it comes to the sense of families. I have often reflected on my years growing up as a pastor's kid. I saw

where there were times in which people in the ministry were given special privileges. There was a man named Jim Tatum, who was a servant of the Lord and who owned suit stores in the city and in other places. He started a ministry called Suits for Servants. He would take suits to pastors all over the world and “suit them up”, so to speak. I remember one time when my father went with him on one of the excursions. They went to some Haitian pastors, most of whom were basically unclothed. When you saw them all with suits, it was quite a change. It was Mr. Tatum’s heart to do that. As a side note, his wife just passed away this week. In his desire to give suits to pastors, what I saw was that he would also open his warehouse on the other side of town. I think it was on Cassat Avenue. He would ask pastors to come because he wanted to give them some suits. The pastors could walk up and down the aisles and take as many as each could carry away. I remember when he invited me to come. I told him, “Jim, I just do not feel right about it.” I knew how he felt. He said, “Let me just pick out a few.” I said, “Really? There are other people who need them far more than I do.” He said, “I really appreciate your attitude.” Then he said this to me, “I cannot tell you how refreshing

that is because most pastors who walk in here begin to criticize the suits that I am giving them. They do not like the selection that they are given. I try to order more and give them a broader selection. But most of the time I get complaints.” You begin to realize that often there is a sense of, “Yep, I deserve this.” That attitude can permeate families. So one of the things that I purposely have tried to do within this church is to never take advantage of my position. Paul will even say to those in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, “You know, I worked when I did not need to.” For instance, we have moved. Our family has moved. I purposely made sure none of you knew the day I was moving. It was not because I did not want you to help me, but it is because we have felt like there should never be a platform for us to be given things. Many of you have always been very gracious to us. In many cases, we hardly even have to ask you to help us. Yet I do not feel like this is a position for me to abuse. There were times when my family, especially my kids, could have used things. I purposely did not give their names when I knew they needed perhaps more than somebody else. I purposely put the other person first, the reason being that you do not want nepotism to come in. You want to do what you

do because you trust in the Lord. You want to establish that. What we look at in this passage is that there were people being taken advantage of because they were not, we will just say, in the “in crowd”. Because of that, it was causing a division. What is going to happen? What we are going to find is that godly men are going to come in and make the right decisions for everybody. This is why it is so important to have godly men who are not thinking in terms of their own needs or what they can get out of it. Godly men are thinking about what is right and what is best and what is fair and what is just for the body of Christ. They are thinking in terms of righteousness. They are not thinking in terms of selfish advantage. As we look at the passage, it is for this reason that they summon the congregation of disciples.

(Acts 6:2) “So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.’”

It does not even make reference to a congregation of a church. The best description I can give you was that they summoned a bunch of the disciples. I think sometimes we think it was men, women, children--the whole church. I do

not think that is true. I think they were summoning the men. They were summoning those who were disciples. Why do I say that? If you go back to

(Acts 5:14) “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly being added to the number.”

So it is actually defining (who made up the congregation), but here it is not. The only thing it is saying is, “Let's call the bunch together, the disciples; and let's figure this thing out.” The twelve said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” The foundation of what is most important in the management of the church is being established. The leadership of the church has the responsibility to preserve the integrity of Scripture and guard the word of God. Every now and then, people question what I do on a daily basis. They are checking on me, you know? Okay. There was a time when I remember feeling guilty for spending time studying and preparing messages. They would ask, “Is that all you are doing, just studying? Really? You do not have anything else to do? You couldn't mow the lawn at the church? You

do realize that this is what you are called to do. Amen.”

The passage says,

(Acts 6:2b) “...It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.”

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Among whom? The disciples who have been following the Lord. Brethren, seven men of good reputation. I want you to underline that whole phrase. I am not sure how it is worded in whatever translation you are using, but it literally is the phrase or the word from which we get the word witness or martyr. He is a good witness. What it is telling us is that you are looking for somebody who is a viable witness. Somebody who is known for his veracity or his truth. Somebody who is known to live so that what he says is how he lives. That is what you are looking for. What he says is what he does. You are looking for that. In order to be a good witness, you had to be somebody who was not drunk. You had to be somebody who was not abusive. You had to be somebody who was trustworthy. You had to be somebody who was credible. You are looking for a

credible witness. The person who is saying that he is Christian needs to be credible in the way he lives his life. It is one of the reasons why, when we are looking for a deacon or elder, we go to their place of business. We are looking to see if the people at their place of business are going to be telling us the same thing about them that we see in the church. Now I have actually had people at the place of business say, "We do not like that guy." I say, "Well, why do you not like him?" "He is always talking about Jesus." I go, "Thank you. That is what I am looking for." They think that they are undercutting him. I had one individual say, "Yeah, I do not like this guy at all." I asked, "What is he doing wrong?" He said, "Well, he thinks that we should come to work on time; and he thinks that we should put in a full day's work. He is always expecting us to really work hard." I am going, "Okay. We are all good. So thank you for that. Thank you for that testimonial." If you look in the passage again:

(Acts 6:3) "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."

We know that Galatians says,

(Galatians 5:22) “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

How does that begin? The fruit of the Spirit is love. Let's just stop with the word “love” because love pretty well covers all the rest. Love is kind. Right? Love is patient. So it pretty much covers the gamut. Now, if you look at the word love and then turn to First Corinthians 13, it tells us that love is all those things.

(I Corinthians 13:4) “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,”

(I Corinthians 13:5) “does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,”

(I Corinthians 13:6) “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;”

(I Corinthians 13:7) “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

What it is saying is that, if this person is filled with the Spirit, he is simply wanting to do what is right. The Spirit-

filled person actually believes that, if you do what is right, God will take care of everything else. This is why the Scripture will tell us to choose men full of the Spirit and of wisdom. It will go on to describe Stephen in Acts 6:5 as “a man full of faith...” There is a similar list in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that is given to those who are elders or deacons in the church. Fundamentally, you can see that this man is being directed by the Spirit of God. He looks like Jesus. He longs for righteousness rather than for accomplishing his agenda or gaining some sort of advantage. A number of months ago, James came to me about Summer. It was time for her graduation. The parents are not allowed to say this, but I am going to say it because I am not her parent. She is a bright girl. Of course, every parent's kids are bright. But she is the brightest kid I have ever seen. Maybe she is a genius, you know. Her reasoning skills were exceeding what the class was doing. Therefore, the suggestion was to move her on. I remember sitting down with her dad and saying, “Let me talk to you about this. What will it do to Summer if we move her with a higher age group? If we move her up, then how is that going to make the other kids feel? Moreover, if she remains in that class, she could help the

other kids. One reason for this is because we want to encourage her to be like Christ. We are not trying to test her IQ. We are trying to help her be like Christ. James, what do you think about that?" He replies, "I hear where you are coming from." I said, "Now, James, you are in charge of Christian Education in our church. So whatever you decide, I will agree with you. You decide. Just let me know what you decide. James came back after some time and said, "We decided to put Summer back." I said, "Well, how did she respond?" He said she was excited. She was glad to go back. "James told me that the Lord was already using this in her life. He said, "Our desire is that she loves the Lord." I am saying to myself, "This is why I chose James. He is not thinking in terms of putting his kid forward. But He is thinking in terms of how we can minister to the body of Christ." There will be times when you are going to call on your family to sacrifice with you to minister to the body. That is the job of the church. And you are going to make decisions based on what is best for the church rather than your own opportunistic ideas; in some cases, this is nepotism, trying to take advantage or gain advantage through your position. You need to lay down your position and say, "We are going to do what is

right. We are going to do what is righteous, and we are going to do that which builds the church.” The goal of the instruction to these children is to teach them how to love, which means that they are going to have to give up stuff. They are going to have to sacrifice. The greatest thing you as a parent can do is to take that smart child and teach him to serve others. The reason that they are smarter is so that they can help. The reason we used to tell Jeremiah that he is taller and bigger is so that he could protect others. We said, “God has called you to protect and to guard and to help. God has not given you height for any reason than that you can help.” So whatever we are given, whatever advantage that you might have or whatever advantage these children have, it is not to gloat about it. It is to help others. It is to build up the body of Christ. The point is that you want the sort of men who think this way. They think righteously, are led by the Spirit of God, and then follow the Spirit. Paul says in the passage, if you look at the list, they chose

(Acts 6:5) “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full faith

and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.”

I actually see Sonny's name in here. Prochorus means leader of the course. In every case, the names themselves reflect leaders. The only name that I would probably say does not totally reflect leadership would be Philip. Philip means lover of horses. Even so, it has the connotation of an equestrian leader. This is one of the reasons why the name would be used with the meaning of a leader.

Stephen, of course, means crowned, the crown of victory. If you look at each of the names, the word victor is in the name. Nicanor and Nicolas mean victor. Nick means victor over the people. Parmenas means abiding. Timon is honorable. Every one of these names has an honorable connotation which makes it pretty interesting to me. They even interjected the phrase at the end of verse 5, “Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch.” That is telling us that he was an outsider, but they wanted him in. Because of his reputation, he would be a good man to include here. The point is that you might be saying, “Well, they are just waiting on tables. They are just serving widows.” But what God is saying is that He wants men who are going to be

fair. He wants men who are going to think of what is right. I often think about a passage found in Leviticus,

(Leviticus 19:13) “You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.”

When we make a decision, it needs to be done with justice. We are not to stack the odds in our favor, so to speak.

(Leviticus 19:14) “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.”

You go, “He is a deaf man. He cannot hear.” You cannot do that. You shall not be partial to the poor. I will bet you did not see that one coming, did you? “Oh, he is poor.” Let it go. He did something wrong. No, do not let it go.

(Leviticus 19:15) “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor, nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.”

If you let it go, it is not good for him. You could not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great. Do what is right. The man of God has to be principle-based. He cannot

allow other things to wrongly influence him. Most people feel the pressure from their wives, and they buckle. They feel the pressure from their kids, and they buckle. They feel the pressure from their relatives, and they buckle. What would you do if you had to stand before the Sanhedrin? Therefore, they had to be principled men and make decisions based on what is right. There is a great passage in Deuteronomy. It talks about the influence of the family.

(Deuteronomy 13: 6) “If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying ‘Let us go and serve other gods (whom neither you nor your fathers have known,)’”

The verse is mentioning all of our close relationships, isn't it? Everyone whom you cherish. Your friend who is as your own soul; they entice you by secretly suggesting that you serve other gods.

(Deuteronomy 13:7) “of gods of the peoples around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end),”

(Deuteronomy 13:8) “you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him.”

Decisions need to be made based on principles. Decisions must not be based on friendship. They must not be based on race. It does not matter if they are Hellenistic Jews or Israeli Jews. What is the right thing to do? That is why it was so important to choose this kind of men. This chapter ends with what? It ends with Stephen coming before the Sanhedrin. Chapter Seven is really going to be him defending the faith. Stephen is one of the seven, is he not? He is one of the chosen. He is a man full of Spirit. He is a principled man. He is a man of good reputation. He is full of faith, and He is full of wisdom. He is going to do what is right. You just know that Stephen is going to do what is right. It is almost as if God goes, “Now, let's test him all the way. Let's see if you chose a good guy.” He is now placed before men who are throwing false accusations. You have at the end of this chapter a stark contrast between a good witness who will not veer from what he knows to be true no matter what the pressure is.

He is a good witness because of what he says. Let us return to verse 3:

(Acts 6:3) “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Once again, the word translated reputation is where we get our word martyr, “*martyreo*.” He is somebody willing to die for his standards. He has to be a good one. Stephen is one such man, so let us now look in verse 11:

(Acts 6:11) “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’”

The ungodly are secretly inducing men to say things about him that are not true. Now look in verse 13:

(Acts 6:13) “They put forward false witnesses who said, ‘This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;’”

Here is the same word, *martys*”. False witnesses. The way of the world is false, but the way of the church is true. We are going to do what is right whether it is advantageous to us or not. We are going to do the right thing. The church

needs to be the bulwark that does the right thing, and the men whom God calls out should do this. Now a quick word about the whole concept of widows. If you look with me in First Timothy chapter 5, let's look at the issue in the Acts passage. I think it is important to understand who a widow is and is not.

(I Timothy 5:3) “Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn the practice of piety in return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.”

Do you see the passage? It continues to describe those who are widows. Let's just say this. One of the first responsibilities of a church if they see a need for a widow is to get that person in contact with their family because that is the way God has ordained it. In fact, why is the church doing that? The reason the church is doing that is to protect the members of the family from displaying themselves as worse than an unbeliever. Unbelievers might not help their relatives. The church is really correcting a wrong that is being done. You are neglecting your mother. Call your mother. Honor widows who are widows indeed. But if any widow has children or

grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety. I think it is interesting to put grandchildren in there. First, learn to practice piety in regard to one's own family and to make some return to their parents. This is acceptable in the sight of God. Then the passage emphasizes when the church steps in to fully take care of somebody.

(Acts 6:5) “Now she who is a widow indeed and has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.”

(Acts 6:6) “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even when she lives.”

(Acts 6:7) “Prescribe these things as well so that they may be above reproach.”

(Acts 6:8) “But if anyone does not provide for his own, especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

(Acts 6:9) “A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than 60 years old, having been the wife of one man,”

I think this is interesting; it means I could be put on the list. I am not a widow, though. I have often told my dad,

“Don’t you think it is interesting? It does not say anything about widowers.” There is nothing in Scripture that says to take care of a widower. He takes care of himself. Indeed, God will take care of him, I believe.

(Acts 6:10) “having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.”

Put her on. That is quite a list of requirements. It goes on and says,

(Acts 6:11) “But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married,”

(audience question) She was not put on the list. She was visited, but she was not put on the list. She was saved, but she was not put on the list. It goes on and says,

(Acts 6:14) “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;”

“I hear what you are saying. She was not a widow. She left them.”

(Acts 6:16) “If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

In other words, if she is younger and she has a mother, then let her serve her mother at this time even though she is a widow. She is young, and she can help her mother. It also says to not burden the church so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. In other words, do not let the woman who has lived a godly life be neglected. You make sure she is taken care of because she has lived a godly life. Nowhere in this Scripture does it say that you neglect all the other widows. What it is saying is that the church has an obligation to take care of those who are widows indeed. When widows have families, you want to make sure that all relationships are healthy. If not, then the church works to heal that relationship. You ultimately want that family to be healed, if in fact, it can be. Sometimes they cannot be. In that case, the church is to minister to those who are in need; that would be from

Titus chapter 2 and 3. It emphasizes that people should be engaged in good deeds and to be involved in pressing needs. There will be people in your church who are going to have pressing needs. They are going to have real needs. Should the church step in at that point? Yes. The church should step in. Does the church necessarily support every widow who is out there? No. (audience speaking) She has looked for opportunities to serve the church and the body of Christ. The word saint is used for every believer in Scripture. When you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you become a holy one. Why? Because you have the Holy Spirit in you. You become a “holy one.” Being a saint is not something that you earn. You do not earn sainthood. No. You do not decide down the road. No. Holiness does not come from good deeds. Holiness comes from the Spirit of holiness. Right. (No sense of beating a dead horse.) Here again, the emphasis is going to be that you want to minister to the widows. A great example of this is found in Luke. Luke talks about Anna, and it says that

(Luke 2:37) “...She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.”

Luke says that she had been married. Her husband died after seven years of marriage, and now she is in her eighties. She has been a widow for many years; she had ministered in prayer night and day for the saints. I think that sometimes people perceive that some people “just pray”. Just pray. Prayer is pretty powerful. It is one of the great things that I think older women can do in the name of Christ. Probably the most valuable resource that a church has are the prayers of godly women. The passage demonstrates that the church must be managed by those who are filled by the Spirit. Why is that true? Because they will make decisions based on what is right, based on integrity, based on righteousness, not based on advantage to themselves or to anybody that they like.

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for defining for us what this church is all about. What a wonderful way to define it as we begin to see these godly men step forward. We see You begin to establish the very foundations of the church and even the local bodies as we begin to see them come into play. We give You thanks for these men who desire to

follow you and actually live what they say and do what they say. How wonderful it is to see this. In Your name. Amen.