
Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Acts 6:1-15

Lesson 13 – Handle Problems Right before they Handle you.

Acts 6:1-15 (NIV)

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." ⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. ⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, ¹⁰but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

¹¹Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." ¹²So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

1. Explain and discuss each of the following key points from the sermon and how it applies to you individually and the church collectively.
 - a. God will never receive your shout over what you're called to serve.
 - b. Difference between reaction and discernment as we deal with problems
 - c. How does individual pressure hurt the church, but shared responsibility grows it.
 - d. Serving is sacred, not secondary
 - e. Growth hides disorder until pressure exposes it.
2. In what ways can you help free your church leaders to focus on their mission of prayer, evangelism, and teaching?
3. Those who have been called to our ministry thus far are what is considered foundational. Foundational in the sense that we are the first called to set the stage for those whom God will send. In order for God to send the abundance it is imperative that we all do our part in preparing ourselves to lead those who come.... what are you doing or need to do personally to prepare to lead or be an example for those whom God will send?
4. Share your takeaways from the lesson/sermon for this week.

The First Administrative Problem: The First Deacons, 6:1-7

(6:1-7) Introduction: this passage is about the birth of the deacons, a whole new level of ministry in the church. Note the office of the deacons was set up to meet a need in the church for day to day ministry. The head ministers had to have help in order to fulfill their preaching mission.

1. (6:1) Division— Grumbling— Criticism: a problem arose in the church. Some widows were being neglected. Two groups or cliques were seen in the church, and one was complaining and grumbling about the actions of the other. One group felt its needs were not being met; it was not getting a due share of the attention and care it deserved. There were five reasons for the division.

1. The church had grown rapidly. When any organization grows rapidly, all kinds of problems arise, and most of the problems center around how to handle the growth. The church needed to minister to the new members, but it was having difficulty handling and reaching out to everyone. The head ministers, that is, the apostles, could not get to everyone.

2. There were different groups or cliques coming into the church.

⇒ There were the Hebrews, the Jews who were born and reared in Palestine. They spoke Aramaic, the language that had come down from their ancient Hebrew language. They rejected all Gentile and Greek culture completely, and used only the Hebrew Bible in its original Hebrew language. The significant point to note is this: the Hebrew or Palestinian Jews were so inclusive and closely-knit, they despised all Gentiles and Gentile culture. They actually despised and cursed the Gentiles, believing that the Gentiles were cursed eternally by God. This hatred even included the Grecian Jews who had been relocated to other lands by the Romans.

⇒ There were the Grecian Jews who were known as the Hellenists. These were Jews who had been scattered, deported, and dispersed all over the world by the Romans. Many of them would return for the great Feasts of Pentecost and the Passover. Apparently some had been converted on the day of Pentecost or thereafter, and had either delayed their return home or decided to move back to Jerusalem.

The Grecian or Hellenist Jews had adopted Greek culture, spoke the Greek language, and used and read the Greek Bible (the Septuagint). It is probably this that lay at the root of the problem mentioned here. The Hebrew Jews, having always been taught to reject and despise anything Grecian, were probably having difficulty getting rid of all their prejudice. No doubt, God had worked in their hearts to cleanse them of prejudice, but they apparently were still hanging on to some feelings against the Hellenists. Perhaps they felt that the Hellenists or Grecian Jews were not due as much attention or as many rights as they were.

Thought 1. People do and will form groups and cliques. But we must always be open and accepting, outgoing and friendly, giving and helping, humble and undeserving before each other, ministering and receiving ministry from all.

Thought 2. Cliques and groups are dangerous. There are sins common to cliques that must be guarded against, the sins of...

- being exclusive and shutting others out.
- feeling superior and above others.
- believing one has more rights than others.
- thinking one is due more attention than others.

3. The leaders of the church did not have enough help to look after every member. Note two things that are essential when this problem arises.

- a. The church must secure more help. It must seek out people who sense the hand of God upon them, calling them to minister and care for others.
- b. The members must be willing to quit demanding so much of the head minister, to accept the ministry of other men who are called to minister to the flock of God.

Now note a critical point: there was division in the church—grumbling and complaining and griping. Why? The lack of enough leaders to meet *all the needs*. The lack of enough leadership, of enough workers will always cause division. Some will always feel they are neglected.

4. The church was not adequately organized to minister to all. The leadership centered only upon the apostles. There was the need for another whole level of ministers, ministers who could reach out to every single member.

5. There was apparently some favoritism being shown. Most if not all of the food being distributed to the needy was being handled by the Hebrew Jews. The Grecian Jews felt that their needy were being neglected and that favoritism was being shown to those who had need among the Hebrew or Palestinian Jews.

2. (6:2) Church— Leaders: the democratic recommendation.

1. The leaders (apostles) called the whole church together. Note: they did not deny the problem, but they graciously acknowledged that the problem might (or did) exist. The leaders knew how easily people, in particular cliques when they feel neglected, can become suspicious and cause even more problems within the church. The point to see is that the whole church was involved in the decision. The leaders *wisely* sought everyone's...

- thoughts
- advice
- counsel
- understanding
- cooperation
- involvement
- love

2. The leaders declared their primary call and mission. They had to concentrate on the Word of God, its study and proclamation. Note:

- ⇒ their unmistakable sense of call and mission.
- ⇒ their unwillingness to be distracted from their primary mission.
- ⇒ the church's understanding and acceptance of their mission. (How desperately this understanding and acceptance is needed by churches today!)

The apostles could have been easily sidetracked, caught up in day to day ministry—the ministry of sitting and listening, serving and meeting the needs of the needy. Such needs must be met; it is the church's duty to minister and meet them. If the church had been smaller, the apostles could have met the needs themselves. But when the church became large, there were just too many people.

Thought 1. There is a breaking point at which ministers must put up a guard and protect their primary call to proclaim the Word of God. They *must* above all else have time to *prepare* and *preach* and *teach* the Word.

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matthew 10:27).

"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephes. 3:7-8).

3. The leaders suggested others be appointed to minister to the needy. Note: this was a suggestion for a whole new level of ministers. Up to this point, the leaders of the church were the apostles. Now a new office was being created to help in the work of the ministry.

"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

DEEPER STUDY #1 (6:2) Deacons

3. (6:3) Deacons, Qualifications: the required qualifications. (See outline—' 1 Tim. 3:8-13, notes—' 1 Tim 3:8-13 and Deeper Study #1—1 Tim. 3:8-13 for more discussion.) Note: the apostles had a recommendation. Very wisely, they had met and discussed the division and complaint among themselves. The committee work among the leaders of the church had taken place. Now the recommendation was ready for the whole congregation to consider. Seven men needed to be appointed to handle this ministry. (As mentioned, a whole new level of ministry was being created in the church.)

The qualifications are listed. Note: they all center upon spiritual qualities, upon the spiritual maturity of the men.

1. An honest report (*marturomenous*^{PWS: 1991}): well attested; well reported of; bearing a good witness; having a good reputation. The deacon's character was to be proven and beyond reproach. They were to be men of integrity, faithful and trustworthy; moral and upright, men trusted by all.

"And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise [testimony, reputation] is in the gospel throughout all the churches" (2 Cor. 8:18).

2. Full of the Holy Spirit. The deacon was to be conscious of Christ dwelling within him, aware of being filled with the fruit of the Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"Be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephes. 3:19).

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephes. 5:18-19).

3. Full of wisdom: able to discern, see through, make judgments. This was especially needed now in handling the division that had arisen in the church. Improper handling by unwise men could only add fuel to the fire, causing further friction and tension.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9).

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John 2:20).

4. (6:4) Ministers— Prayer— Word of God: the basic purpose of the deacon is to relieve the head minister(s) for prayer and the ministry of the Word. Note two significant points.

1. The great ministries of the church are twofold: prayer and the ministry of the Word. All else, as needful as some of them may be, must be secondary to these two great ministries. Therefore, the head minister must give his life to these two ministries and not be distracted or diverted from them.

⇒ It is in prayer that the believer reaches up and talks to God. Above all others the leader must live on his face before God, sharing with God and pleading with Him in behalf of the dear flock of God.

"What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41).

⇒ It is in the Word that God speaks to the minister, to the flock, and to the world. The minister must spend hours and days seeking God, finding out what God wants to say to him, the church and the world.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries [gospel, Word] of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

Thought 1. Imagine what a difference there would be if ministers so lived in prayer and in the Word of God! May the lay believers of the world *allow* and *insist* that the ministers of God get on their faces before God in prayer and in His Word.

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim. 1:12).

2. Note the word "continually" (*proskarterēsomen*^{PWS: 1678}). It means to continue steadfastly; to persevere; to continue on and on, sticking to it. The minister is to pray and pray and study and study and share and share, preaching and teaching the Word—*without letting up*. He is to be steadfast, persevering, continuing on and on in both prayer and in the Word.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"[Christ] whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28).

"But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day" (Joshua 23:8).

5. (6:5) Unity— Love— Humility: the chosen deacons. Note four significant points.

1. The church acted in love and humility. Neither the apostles nor anyone else had ruffled feelings. The apostles and Hebrew believers (thousands of them) responded in love and humility. Everyone of the seven men chosen were *Grecian Jews*. Their names were Greek, not Jewish. The *largest* segment of the church had humbled itself to the minority. What an example!

2. "The whole multitude" of believers was pleased. The body had been reunited as one in spirit and purpose, worship and ministry.

3. The fact that they were all Grecian believers points toward God moving the church out into the whole world. Christ had commissioned the first disciples to go into the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Now, He was providentially preparing the church for the day that was soon to come, the day of persecution that would scatter the believers all over the world (Acts 8:1-4). These seven men, being Grecian ministers, could touch the Gentile world wherever they went—by language, by training, and by culture. God was preparing the church without their knowing it for the day when they were to be scattered all over the world.

Thought 1. Believers must be rooted in *love and humility* so that God may use them in His eternal plan to reach the world for His dear Son.

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

4. The men chosen were unknown except for Stephen and Philip (see note—Acts 6:8-15; note—Acts 8:5-25). The point to note is that they were men who had the qualities given in Acts 8:3.

Note the name Nicolas, a Jewish proselyte. He was a Gentile who had been converted to Judaism and then to Christ. Some try to connect him with the Nicolaitians who went off on a doctrinal error and created a sect. There is no basis for this. In fact, the likelihood is that he was instrumental in starting the church at Antioch, one of the greatest churches of all time (cp. Acts 11:19-30).

6. (6:6) Ordination: the official ordination. This was a definite service, a specific moment when the newly elected men were set apart for their ministry. Before this moment they were not serving in the capacity with which they were now being charged. Hereafter, after the ordaining service, they were to minister to the flock of God and meet the flock's day to day needs. Note three steps in the service.

1. The church "set" the men apart, set them before the apostles.
2. The church went to prayer; the ministers (apostles) led all in prayer.
3. The ministers (apostles) laid their hands upon the newly appointed deacons. (See Deeper Study #2—Acts 6:6 for discussion.)

DEEPER STUDY #2 (6:6) Laying On Of Hands

7. (6:7) Ministers— Church: the glorious results were threefold.

1. The Word of God increased as never before. The apostles were freed to concentrate on prayer and the Word. There was a new power in their witnessing and teaching.
2. The church grew. Many more people were reached with the glorious gospel.
3. Some priests, a great number, were being reached for Christ. Note the words, they "were obedient to the faith." They were obedient in both *receiving* Christ and in *following* Christ. They *embraced* the gospel and *lived* the gospel.

"By whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name" (Romans 1:5).

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6).

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6).

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

DEEPER STUDY #1

(6:2) **Deacons**: note the words "serve tables" (*diakonein trapezais*). The word "serve" (*diakonein*^{PWS: 3468}) means to minister, to serve, to wait upon. The men were being chosen to minister, to look after the needy (widows) of the church. They, of course, would not be running to those in need and spending just a few minutes and then turning right around and running out. They would be visiting and taking time to share and minister to those who had need.

The word *diakonein*^{PWS: 3468} is used of ministers throughout the New Testament, both preachers of the Word and deacons who serve as ministers in meeting the day to day needs of the flock (cp. Acts 6:4; Acts 12:25; Acts 21:19; Romans 11:13). The deacons were being chosen to minister as much as the apostles, but in a different area of concentration.

This does not mean the apostles never met day to day needs of the flock nor that the deacons never shared the Word. Both apostles and deacons served in both areas, but each *concentrated* upon their primary call and mission. (See Deeper Study #1, Deacon—1 Tim. 3:8-13 for more discussion.)

DEEPER STUDY #2

(6:6) **Laying On Of Hands**: this was a significant symbol for blessing (Matthew 19:13-15); for healing (Mark 5:23; Mark 6:5); for imparting the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; Acts 9:6, 17); and for ordaining and commissioning men to the ministry.

"Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14).

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6).

O. The First Martyr, Stephen (Scene I): A Model Man, 6:8-15

(6:8-15) **Introduction— Stephen the Deacon, the First Martyr**: Stephen was a layman, an extraordinary layman, a great servant of God. His name means a *crown*. Note these facts about him. He was...

- full of faith (Acts 6:8).
- full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5, 10).
- full of grace (Acts 6:8).
- full of power (Acts 6:8).
- full of wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10).
- a man of great reputation or testimony (Acts 6:3).
- a man of great works (Acts 6:8).
- a great defender of the faith (Acts 6:10).
- the first deacon of the church (Acts 6:5).
- the first martyr of the church (Acts 7:59-60; Acts 22:20).

1. A man full of faith and power, doing great works for God (v.8).

2. A man who defended the faith (v.9-10).

3. A man fiercely resisted, falsely so (v.11-14).

4. A man of great communion—surrounded by the Lord's presence (v.15).

1. (6:8) Stephen: Stephen was a man full of faith (grace) and power, doing great works for God. The word "faith" is *grace* in the best Greek manuscripts, and is probably accurate since Stephen's great faith has already been mentioned (Acts 6:5).

1. He was full of grace (*chartos*) (see Deeper Study #1, Grace—Titus 2:11-15). By grace is meant...
 - God's love, favor, gifts, and blessings.
 - a godly, gracious character and behavior.

"I thank my God always on our behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:4-5).

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation [behavior] in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2 Cor. 1:12).

2. He was full of power. (See Deeper Study #1, Power—Acts 6:8).
3. He did great wonders and miracles. God's grace and power were upon him. Both grace and power (the Holy Spirit) are necessary before a person can serve God effectively. Note that Stephen was a deacon and a layman: a dynamic example that should challenge all!

"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matthew 10:1).

DEEPER STUDY #1 (6:8) Power (*dunameos*)

2. (6:9-10) Faith, Defending: Stephen was a man who defended the faith. Note three points.

1. Stephen preached in several of the synagogues throughout Jerusalem (see Deeper Study #2, Synagogue—Matthew 4:23). All of the synagogues listed are Grecian names. Sometime around A.D. 19 the Roman emperor, Tiberius, had expelled all Jews from Rome. Many of them had returned to their homeland, some settling in Jerusalem. When they returned, because of their common language and culture, they clung together, starting their worship centers or synagogues.

The point to see is that this dynamic layman grasped every opportunity he could to preach. At every opportunity Stephen was travelling all over the city, preaching Christ to the Grecian Jews.

2. Note the word "arose" (*anestēsan*^{PWS: 198}, Acts 6:9), which means *stood up*. Five synagogues in particular stood up against Stephen. They opposed what he was preaching. There was a strong reason for the opposition of the Grecian Jews. They and their forefathers had been forcibly deported out of their homeland and scattered across the world by the Romans. While living in the foreign lands of the world, they had remained faithful to their Jewish religion. The message of Jesus Christ was a threat to them and their religion. For example, Stephen was preaching that...

- Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of the world. Animal sacrifices, therefore, were no longer needed.
- Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and man, and man was now to worship God in spirit and truth through Christ and Him alone. Earthly priests, therefore, were no longer mediators who stood between God and man. They were the ministers and servants of God to the flock of God, but not mediators.

The Grecian Jews saw that the preaching of Jesus as the supreme sacrifice and mediator went against everything they had been taught and stood for. They did not see Jesus as the fulfillment of the law nor as the Liberator of man, but they saw Him as the destroyer of the law and of everything they held precious. (See Deeper Study #1—Matthew 12:10 for discussion of why the Jews opposed Jesus so greatly.) Therefore, they *stood up* and argued against Stephen. Note the picture: they *stood up* right in the middle of Stephen's preaching and began to dispute him. The picture is that they did this several times (Acts 6:10).

3. Stephen was filled with wisdom and with the Spirit of God in defending the faith. Note the exact words of the Scripture.

⇒ "They disputed with Stephen": they were able to resist and argue with him.

⇒ "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke."

They could stand against Stephen, but they could not stand against the Holy Spirit who was in him and speaking through him. The Holy Spirit was supplying the answers, the thoughts and the words to say.

"For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay [refute, answer] nor resist" (Luke 21:15).

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

4. Saul of Tarsus, who was to become the great apostle Paul, was probably a member of the Libertine or Cilician synagogue. Saul was from Tarsus of Cilicia and was now in Jerusalem. He was certainly attending some synagogue, so he was probably attending the one of his own countrymen. However, he had also been born of a *freed man*, so he could have been a member of the Libertine (Latin word meaning a freed man or the son of a freed man). Most likely he was one of those who suffered defeat in arguing with Stephen and became so hostile against him. Paul was certainly aware of the message Stephen preached. He was the one who took charge of Stephen's murder (Acts 7:58; Acts 8:1).

Thought 1. Men often do stand against believers, but the man who opposes and argues against the believer's witness is resisting the Holy Spirit, not the believer.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).

"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about" (Psalms 32:9-10).

Thought 2. The Holy Spirit gives the genuine believer the thoughts and words to say in bearing witness to the world. But note: not every witness is of the Spirit. A person must be under the control of the Spirit just as Stephen was. (See note, Stephen—Acts 6:8-15.)

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

3. (6:11-14) Persecution: Stephen was a man fiercely resisted, falsely so. The synagogues were so angered at Stephen they bribed men to lie against him, stirring up the people and the leaders against him. They arrested and dragged him to court before the Sanhedrin, putting him on trial for his life. Note these points.

1. The word "stirred up" (*sunekinēsan*^{PWS: 3775}) means to shake as a volcano; to move and rock together as with a violent shaking. This was the first time the people themselves were aroused against the disciples.

2. The words "came upon him" (*epistantes*^{PWS: 485}) mean they rushed at him in fury, anger, and violence.

3. The word "caught" (*sunērpasan*^{PWS: 525}) means to seize with much violence. The picture is that they seized and literally dragged him to court (cp. Luke 8:29; Acts 19:29; Acts 27:15).

4. The charges against Stephen were threefold.

a. Blasphemy against the temple. The Jews had always taught that God dwelt in the temple. The temple was the very center of His presence. Stephen was preaching that God *now* dwelt in the hearts and lives

of people, and not just in the temple. The hearts of God's people were now the very special place where God's presence dwelt. God does fill the temple; in fact, He fills the whole earth with His presence. But now, Jesus Christ has made it possible for God to fill the hearts of men with the presence of His Spirit, and His presence is permanent. The believer's body can now become the temple of the Holy Spirit. (See outline—' [John 14:15-26](#) and notes—' [John 14:15-26](#); [Deeper Study #1—Acts 2:1-4](#). Cp. [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#).)

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" ([1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)).

Note this. Stephen was not saying that God no longer dwells in the temple. God does dwell *in* His church, the place sanctified, *set apart* for Him (see note—' [1 Cor. 3:16-17](#) for discussion).

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" ([1 Cor. 3:16-17](#)).

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" ([2 Cor. 6:16](#)).

"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" ([Ephes. 2:21-22](#)).

- b. Blasphemy against the law. By law the Jews meant the Scribal Law, all the commentaries and interpretations of the Scripture. (See [Deeper Study #1, Scribes—Luke 6:2](#); [Deeper Study #4—Luke 6:7](#) for discussion.) Stephen was preaching that Christ fulfills the law. God's law is not destroyed; contrariwise, it is fulfilled in Christ. Christ is now the Ideal, the Pattern, the Standard which we are to follow. The law is not erased, not annulled. The law is now found embraced in the life of Christ. Man's standard is the law and much more; it is the Living Lord Himself. He fulfills and embraces the law and much more. Man's standard is no longer just prohibitions and commandments, no longer just writing and words. Man's standard is now the Life of God Himself, the embodiment of love and liberty as well as of law and demands.

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" ([Romans 3:21-22](#)).

c. Preaching the destruction of the temple and of Jewish customs. This is a repeat of the above. The emphasis is that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was to destroy the temple and customs of the people. The point to note is that the charges were false. Stephen was preaching that Christ fulfills man's need for God and for salvation.

- ⇒ Man's need for God's presence is now abundantly fulfilled in Christ. Through Christ, God now lives in the very hearts and lives of believers.
- ⇒ Man's need to know how to live is now abundantly fulfilled in Christ. He embraces all the law and much more, and by such He is now the standard of God for all men. (See Deeper Study #2—Matthew 5:17; note—' Romans 5:1.)

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

4. (6:15) Stephen: Stephen was a man of great communion; he was surrounded by God's presence. Note: all the council members saw God's presence upon Stephen's face. The words "face of an angel" refers to some splendor, glow, shining radiance—some glory that was present. Apparently, God gave Stephen some special glory (presence) of Himself that had been experienced...

- by Moses.

"And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him" (Exodus 34:30).

- by Christ.

"And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2).