

Study 5 The Book of Acts Chapter 6:1-7 Problems with favouritism in the church.

Last study we saw the first problem of the emerging church regarding the common fund with Ananias and Sapphira. In chapter 6 a new problem emerges with the neglect of Greek speaking Jews regarding the distribution of food to their widows. There is no denial or questioning of this problem by the disciples and they go about immediately addressing the problem.

After the exile in the Old Testament the Jewish nation was spread throughout the ancient world and many Jews away from Jerusalem learnt Greek in the period between the Old and New Testament. Other Jews chose to retain their Jewish heritage, not wanting to be influenced by a culture they saw as dangerous to their faith. Many of these Hebrew Jews lived in and around Jerusalem. It seems like it was a situation of locals being favoured over other Jews who were more secular and who had possibly travelled to Jerusalem for Pentecost and then were converted through the early days of the mission of the church. It is possible also that many Greek speaking widows had lost their husbands during this period due to persecution.

James as we know speaks of the problem of favouritism in the church (See chapter 2) in his letter and is something we all have to resist.

The disciples (or apostles meaning the 12) of Jesus had neglected this because they were very busy preaching the Word of God and saw this problem as a distraction to their calling by Jesus.

The resolution was to appoint 7 men (interestingly no women were chosen). Stephen is mentioned first and will appear again in the next study full of faith and the Holy Spirit and 6 others to resolve this problem. Interestingly the ones chosen all have Greek names and is possibly a sign of good relations between the various Jewish sections of the church. To wait on tables most likely means the serving of food, but could also include looking after the money being collected for this service. Unlike the 12th disciple who was elected by the church through casting lots, these 7 are chosen by the church and then presented to the 12 disciples.

The 7 were then set apart for this role through prayer and the laying on of hands, the first time this kind of action is mentioned in the church.

The disciples then continue their ministry to great effect and reference is made to the fact that a large number of Priests were coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Questions for Reflection.

1. Early on in the church's life we see identifiable Jewish groups. In what ways is this a blessing and a problem?
2. There is a clear priority to spreading the word of God through the disciples. How can we recover this priority today?
3. Share any experiences of pastoral ministry to the needy and how this helps the church.
4. What do you think about being set apart for various ministries by prayer and the laying on of hands?