

## Acts 6:1-15 "Stephen and Deacons: Blue-Collar and Bold," May 12, 2024

### **Intro:**

Today's message will be short relative to the norm. Even though the text for today is a whole chapter, it is a very short chapter being only 15 verses. Chapter 7 by contrast is 60 verses, so it's 4 times as long.

You'll remember that up to this point, there has been an increasing amount of contrast between the response of the people and the opposition of the Sanhedrin. The Holy Spirit descended in chapter 2 and there has been a division among the hearers. Those who were appointed unto life have repented and believed the gospel, while those in power are threatened by this teaching and oppose it. This dichotomy will increase as we continue on with the story of the first century church.

As a quick point of application, this phenomenon has been repeated many times throughout history. The message of the gospel is good news to sinners but it is bad news to those in power who refuse to submit to King Jesus. The Jews knew it. The Romans knew it. The atheists in France knew it. The Bolsheviks knew it. The Chinese Communist Party knows it. The left-wing crazies of today know it.

Jesus is King and that message is hope to the lost, good news to the captives, light to those in darkness. It is equally abhorrent to those who are threatened by the gospel's requirement to repent and believe. With that in mind, let us now turn our attention to the text at hand.

### **I. Selection of the Seven (1-7)**

-followers of Jesus first called "disciples" here.

#### **1. What was the problem that initiated the appointment of men to solve(v1)?**

-practical problem of culture. Racial Jews and Hellenists were making distinctions in the distribution of food. Probably controlled by the Hebrews.

#### **2. What did the apostles say about their role in v2 & v4?**

#### **3. What were the two qualifications listed for the selection of these men in v3? How does this list get expanded by Paul in 1Tim 3:8-13? How are those qualifications similar and different from the qualifications of an elder listed above?**

-men of character, wisdom, and competency for the task at hand. It's fairly easy to see the difference in roles or responsibilities of elders and deacons in this passage especially when you compare it with 1Tim 3. It parallels nicely.

#### **4. How is Stephen described in verses 5, 8, 10, and 15?**

Concerning the 7...

-All have Greek names.

-Led by Stephen.

-Phillip will be the subject of more in the story later (8:5-40; 21:8-9). He may have also been one of Luke's sources for this information.

-Antioch mentioned (v5). According to tradition, Luke was from Antioch, so this may be why he points this out.

-This Nicolas later becomes a heretic and the father of the Nicolaitans mentioned in Rev 2:6&15 and is referenced by the early church father Irenaeus in 300AD and is called a "deacon".

5. In the summary statement of v7, what theological point is being made about the relationship between faith and repentance? What is "the faith"? Why is it important to understand both of these points?

-"obedient to the faith" implies that the faith requires obedience. What is "the faith"? Most explicitly, it is the gospel... and the gospel has a certain data set that we've reviewed many times before (see also 1Cor 15). It is the message that King Jesus has come and conquered through his death, burial and resurrection, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, he commands that all men everywhere repent.

Notice 2 things: First, it is not a request or option. The gospel demands a response. Secondly, "the faith" is not your faith as much as it is your faith in the faith. In other words, our faith is in the person and work of Christ, as explained in the gospel or "the faith". That phrase "the faith" is repeated at least 18 times in the NT and will be the subject of a short paper that I'll publish soon.

6. Compare and contrast v7 "priests" with 2:47; 4:13; & 5:13-14 (also 1Cor 1:26). What does this imply about Stephen and the others mentioned in v5?

-The wealthy high-priestly families were different than these ordinary priests. These were guys who were drawn by lot and may only have served once or a few times in their lifetime. They were everyday guys for the most part.

Like the apostles described in 2:47, they were ordinary men. It was noted that what gave them boldness, strength and ability was the fact that they had been with Jesus. Here again, we have ordinary men, coming to Jesus, becoming obedient to the faith.

-This is something that we need to see more of. Unfortunately, the American church has become effeminate, emotional, and emasculated. It has become a place where sentimental preaching and feel good music is the norm. It is focused on coalescing the culture instead of changing the culture. In some regards, it is more akin to Buddhism than historic Christianity.

I say now that we are unapologetically committed to all of God's word as communicated in the Bible. This includes the call for MEN everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. We are calling on MEN. Most churches want soft handed, overly gentle, effeminate soft spoken servant men. We want men like the seven. We want every day, blue-collar men like the disciples and priests. Sure, we want the doctors, and lawyers and engineers. But what about the majority of men who are construction guys with tough hands? What about electricians and plumbers, and pumpers, and mechanics, and lineman, and equipment operators, and rough necks, and truckers and farmers? I say now, that WE WANT THESE MEN TO JOIN US AND OBEY THE GOSPEL. We invite all smelly, rough talking, boot wearing, tobacco dippin, jean wearing, plain spoken, MEN. Take a shower, put on a clean set of clothes and get to church. Bring your wife and kids, your family, stay for lunch and partake in the ministry of smoke. Join us for hardcore Bible study on Monday mornings. Get in the mix with our Thursday night men's group.

If you strong, working class men who are tired of the world going to hell and the church looking more like the world, INVITE THEM. This church, Midland Reformed Church wants them.

## **II. Stephen Accused of Blasphemy (8-15)**

-IDK what it means that Stephen's face was like that of an angel (v15), but I can tell you based on verse 10 and what comes in the next chapter that he was extremely skilled in the gospel and a very capable man indeed "full of the Spirit." Stephen was a mighty man full of grace and truth. He was not only skilled at making sure large amounts of people got the food they needed, but he was also a formidable representative for Christ with a backbone of steel.

All too often, in our own time, we tend to discount men based on their occupation. We talk of guys just being hands or even more derogatorily, window lickers and crayon munchers. I submit to you that all of these so-called blue-collar guys know an extensive amount about their given occupation, understanding all of the acronyms and nomenclature relative to their line of work. They are familiar with operational tactics that keep them safe and efficient at their professions. These men have granular knowledge of energy, whether mechanical, chemical, potential, electrical or other. They know metallurgy, physics, while at the same time employing

interpersonal skills. We will not insult their intelligence and humanity by dumbing down the faith. We will not treat them as boys, but as men, being capable of not only understanding but also communicating the word of God.

On Monday mornings, we have gone verse by verse through Romans, Ephesians, 1 Peter, Acts, Hebrews and we are starting Proverbs soon. On Thursday nights, we have studied Biblical Manhood, Economics, The History and Development of Western Philosophy, Church History, Presbyterians and the American Revolution, and now, we are studying apologetics.

We want men like Stephen, Blue-collar and Bold.

**7. Why were Stephen's accusers unable to oppose him? What implication does this have for us with regard to Biblical fidelity and Spiritual empowerment?**

-Biblical fidelity breeds boldness. Boldness is the outcome. Remember what the apostles prayed for after having been beaten by the Sanhedrin in chapter 4:31? It was boldness. They know that God will call out His people if they are bold to proclaim the gospel. They also know that there will be opposition and derision. They still pray for boldness.

Let it be so with us. Are you praying for boldness in your witness or just that God would save people? Are you neglecting the clear pattern of prayer here for boldness, just to substitute your Christmas list of requests?

Let us be a people of prayer for boldness. That is why we want blue collar, plain spoken, bold men. They don't have time to beat around the bush. Producers don't care about tone. They have stuff to do and are busy getting it done. The gospel clearly and succinctly commands them to repent and repeat. We want boldness. For those who are shy, pray for boldness. For those who are outgoing, pray for boldness. For those who don't know what to say, pray for boldness. For those who say too much, pray that the content of your speech would be the gospel with boldness.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Our God and Father, thank you for Your Son, Your Spirit, and Your Word. Would you call out men and their families, both in this place, and in the surrounding area of Midland/Odessa, to be mighty men of the faith. We invite you to move among us as you wish to do your bidding. Empower us by your Spirit to speak your word with boldness. Glorify yourself through us and be with us now as we celebrate the meal that Jesus commanded us to take together. In his name we pray. Amen.

**Questions:**

1. What was the problem that initiated the appointment of men to solve(v1)?
2. What did the apostles say about their role in v2 & v4?
3. What were the two qualifications listed for the selection of these men in v3? How does this list get expanded by Paul in 1Tim 3:8-13? How are those qualifications similar and different from the qualifications of an elder listed above?
4. How is Stephen described in verses 5, 8, 10, and 15?
5. In the summary statement of v7, what theological point is being made about the relationship between faith and repentance? What is “the faith”? Why is it important to understand both of these points?
6. Compare and contrast v7 “priests” with 2:47; 4:13; & 5:13-14 (also 1Cor 1:26). What does this imply about Stephen and the others mentioned in v5?
7. Why were Stephen’s accusers unable to oppose him? What implication does this have for us with regard to Biblical fidelity and Spiritual empowerment?