



1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: . . . 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. (Acts 6:1-5, 8-9)

I do not usually make reference to modern media in my writings since it is often quite corrupt, but I will make an exception in this case by referring to an incident in *Fiddler on the Roof*. In the movie, the local commissars had worked the people up for the purpose of conducting yet another pogrom against the Jewish people living in that area of Russia. Having been warned of the coming turmoil by a local police official who was his friend, the old Jewish father, Teyve lamented in his barnyard, "Lord, I know we are your chosen people - and I am grateful for that; but sometimes, just sometimes, couldn't you choose someone else?" We often believe that when God chooses us for a particular purpose, that all will be roses and cream from thenceforth in the performance of our purpose - but not always! Stephen has been chosen as the first Deacon, and little does he know that he has been chosen, as well, as the first martyr of the Christian Church. But God knows the heart of those he calls, and He knew Stephen was made of the kind of metal needed for the purpose. When we read of Stephen, we should be mindful of the thousands of martyrs who are dying, as did Stephen, today, by stonings and beheadings, in the name of our Lord and at the hands of fanatical muslims.

First consider the manner and mode of calling and appointing Stephen as a Deacon. *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men.* (Acts 6:3) who are¹:

1. **Men of honest report.** Their conduct must be such as to command respect. The public seldom err in their judgment of men. They may dislike their piety and persecute them, but secretly they will honor them, especially if they are, as they ought to be, useful and amiable as well.
2. **Full of the Holy Ghost.** Not only should they be men of piety, but eminently so.
3. **Men of wisdom.** Piety, although the first requisite, is not the only one. There are men of whose godliness we may be persuaded, but in whose ability for the direction of affairs we have not confidence.
4. **Full of faith.**

You will observe that none of these qualities include wealth or power, though these are not a bar to the calling of a Deacon. When these four primary qualities are combined in a man called as Deacon, there is great influence for good inherent in his calling, and the power, as well, to execute the duties to which called. Two additional points: those called out as Deacons were MEN only; and there was no mention made of 'benefits' offered.

Every work in the Church is a calling, even if not to a formal office in the Church. Bible teachers, organists, treasurers, secretaries, janitors - all are called to their particular vocation in Christ, and should be honored for the same; and beyond the actual walls of the church, every Christian of whatever profession is also called by God to serve and exemplify the merits of Christ in that profession.

Prior to his calling by the Church to the Office of Deacon, there is no mention made of Stephen's zeal; but, once called, his spirit was energized to action. *Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* (Acts 6:6) Herein is demonstrated the spiritual essence of the Apostolic Faith, for we read next after his being set apart: *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* God calls a man to ministry, but after that calling, the church ordains and approves. The man, too, must recognize God's call on his life.

Just as with the case of Christ, great controversy and disputation followed the works of God by Stephen's ministry. The same happens today when for example, our church insists on the Bible readings to come from the King James Bible; and that hymns be sung from those classical hymns of the Church; and order be respected in our services in reverence to the One being worshipped. We are accused of being quaint and out of touch with the modern 'worship scene' - even peculiar - and THAT we surely are! We stand apart from those men who would dilute the Word of God with the Alexandrian text and other modern critics of God's pure Word. *9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. 11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. 12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, 13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law* (Acts 6:9-13) If the argument cannot be won from a simple resort to Holy Scripture, then the preacher of truth will be attacked by accusations and lies. They dragged Stephen to the Council with lying accusations since they could not win on the face of truth.

¹ The four points are taken from the [Biblical Illustrator](#) and our text passage

Stephen believed that God was the maker and Author of history, and to this argument he appealed in his revelation of the Man of History - Jesus Christ! ² *And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, ³ And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. ⁴ Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. ⁵ And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. ⁶ And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. ⁷ And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. ⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. ⁹ And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, ¹⁰ And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. ¹¹ Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. ¹³ And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. ¹⁴ Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. ¹⁵ So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, ¹⁶ And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. (Acts 7:2-16)*

Stephen continues throughout Acts Chapter 7 to lay out the historical works of God leading to the coming of Christ. (please read that account). He concluded his teaching of the council with these words: ⁵¹ *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. ⁵² Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: ⁵³ Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. (Acts 7:51-53)* This enrages his accusers who rise up to stone Stephen. Please read the account of Stephen's martyrdom:

⁵⁴ *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, ⁵⁸ And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. ⁶⁰ And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60)*

Please note the majestic manner in which our brother, Stephen, passed into Glory: Stephen peered intently into Heaven as his mortal fate was decided, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on His right hand. When he expressed this vision, the blood of these cowardly scoundrels boiled, and they pounced upon Stephen to stone him to death. Notice that they also stopped their ears, for the devil then, as now, cannot hear mention made of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. There was one young man there who was complicit in the murder of Stephen - his name was Saul (later, Paul the Apostle). Stephen surrendered his spirit to the Lord Jesus Christ as the last vicious stone landed; but, first, he petitioned the Lord to lay not this sin to the charge of those present - this included Saul (Paul) and it was so.

So Stephen departed this life in a spirit of love and compassion for those wicked men who stoned him. A very important point is made at the last of this account: *And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* (Acts 7:60) The Elect of God never die, they simply fall asleep to awaken with the Lord.

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26)