

The Apostles were arrested again; they were threatened, beaten and released:

Acts 5:41: *'And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.'*

The next day... they're back at it again.

The Church now numbers in the thousands, many of whom were Jews who'd come from all around the Mediterranean for the Feast of Pentecost; every Jewish male was required to come to Jerusalem, to the Temple for Pentecost which is exactly why God sent His Holy Spirit to birth the Church on that very day. Thousands had come to faith upon hearing Peter's first sermon and now, they remained in Jerusalem; there was nothing for them to return to except Rabbinic Judaism but they were all, now, being taught the truth that all the Law, since Moses, found its complete fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ; none would want to go back to where no one at all understood and believed the Truth of the Gospel; they would, naturally, want to stay right next to the Apostles and to all those who were becoming strong in the Faith.

But just imagine: you are a staff of twelve pastors trying to corral, protect, teach and shepherd a huge congregation which was growing larger by the day... what a nightmare! And then imagine being one of the many 1000's; they'd think: 'All that the Apostles want to do is study Scripture, pray and teach! Who's leading us!?' This is ripe for a complete breakdown of any organizational structure which is exactly what was desperately needed but that is what separates the true Church from every false group, whether they be false religions or a false version of *so-called christianity*: mormon, JW's, catholic, 7thDA's, christian science, etc...

Every manmade organization is just that: an organization with nothing holding it together beyond strong and forceful leadership; but the true Church is something completely different; we are the living, breathing, moving, growing, Spirit led New Creation Body of the Lord Jesus Christ! ... our leadership comes from the Holy Spirit within every true believer with some being specially gifted as pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.

'... if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature...' 2Cor 5:17

'For in him we live, and move, and have our being... For we are also his offspring.' Acts 17:28

'And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell' Col 1:17

*'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. ¹² No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ Hereby know we that **we dwell in him, and he in us**, because he hath given us of his Spirit... ¹⁵ Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and **he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**'* 1 John 4:11

There is the difference: we love each other because He first loved us but even here, in this supposed all to be emulated 'New Testament Church,' we see people's sin natures begin to rise up: first, we saw it in the duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira and now, we'll see it rise up in selfishness:

Acts 6:1 *'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.'*

The Grecians are the Hellenist Jews: Jews in the Diaspora, scattered around the Mediterranean who spoke Greek. These are the ones who'd come to Jerusalem for Pentecost and were saved through the Apostles' teaching. Certainly, many would have returned home to collect their families, to bring them back to Jerusalem where the only true Christians in the entire World were gathered.

Imagine; all these many thousands... where do they eat? where do they sleep? Those living in Jerusalem would have opened their homes to as many as possible but there were just so many!

Their main meeting area was Solomon's Porch in the Temple complex; they would meet every Sunday for communion, together. And, yes, their main meeting day was Sunday, the Lord's Day; the first day of the week.

Jesus was resurrected on Sunday Morning. **The Sabbath, the seventh day, was given for Israel only:**

'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever...' Ex 31:16

The seventh day, the Sabbath day has no connection to the true Church, whatsoever! Only those who wish to place themselves under the Law, observe the Sabbath and it is that adherence to the Law which will, ultimately, be their downfall:

'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' James 2:10

Either the Lord Jesus Christ kept and fulfilled the whole Law for a man or He kept none of it for that man!

Salvation is not a pick and choose cafeteria ... it's all or nothing! It's Grace through Faith or Law unto death.

The Apostles continued to keep the Law, it's all they knew but it took the special revelations of Paul to finally bring the full understanding that our Salvation is only by God's Grace through our faith and not the result of any works of the Law, at all; the Apostles didn't yet understand that this was to go out to all the Gentile World.

At the beginning, the only understanding which the Apostles were teaching is how the entire Old Testament points to and is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ; to them, it wasn't the Old Testament, it was simply: 'all the Scriptures: Moses, the Law and Prophets .

Remember, just after His Resurrection, He walked with two disciples toward Emmaus; they didn't recognize Him, initially; He explained: *'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? ²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... ³⁰ And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. ³² And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? ³³ And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them...'* Luke 24:26

Back to Acts 6, we find selfishness and thoughtlessness creeping in; most of the New Believers were Hebrew speaking Jews who were giving preferential treatment to their own widows while overlooking the Hellenist widows in the daily distribution of necessities and, so, the Hellenist Jews murmured.

Verse 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.'*

'It's not good for us to be weighed down with all the details of so many people!' One of the signs of good leadership is the willingness and ability to delegate responsibility and authority. Poor leadership seeks to micromanage everything.

The Apostles summoned the disciples; the Greek word for disciple, here, is mathetes/math-ay-tes' it means: a learner, a student, a pupil. This was not the many thousands; these were the ones who were studying and learning from the Apostles and from each other under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit; in modern times, these would have been the associate pastors, the staff. Perhaps each Apostle oversaw 1000 new believers but they would have taken on the task of discipling only a few, maybe as many as 12 students, each, who showed promise in discipleship, wisdom, spirituality, scholarship and leadership; each Apostle would have delegated to those 12, the care of their 1000. And... then those 12 students would gather around themselves another 2 or 4 or 12 and so on... so that everyone was being disciplined while discipling others.

We see this with Paul, toward Titus, Silas, Timothy, Barnabas and others.

By the way... that's the way it should have been happening for the past nearly 2000 years: every person being disciplined while being trained to, themselves, disciple others and so on and so on... until the Rapture!

Verse 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.'*

You, our students and disciples, you decide who, among you, has shown Spirit-led honesty and wisdom, skilled in organizing with leadership abilities; choose seven to be appointed over the care of all the widows. The Holy Spirit will guide you; you choose them; we will appoint them.

Not only are the Apostles discipling the next generation of Church leaders but they are, even this quickly, giving them the responsibility of deciding, among themselves, those who would best exhibit the qualifications outlined by the Apostles: *'... seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,'* and not only is this a planned responsibility, it's also an exercise in humility; each member of this 'next tier' leadership must humbly put forth the names of others but it would be left to Paul to, later, write it out clearly:

'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.' Phpp 2:3

This is Holy Spirit led organization; this is the beginning of the True Church becoming organized for ministry: **ministering to the needs of each other while taking the Gospel to the World.**

'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' John 13:35

'And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.' 1 John 4:21

This has already exploded into the many thousands; everyone has needs; everyone looks to the Apostles since they are the ones who'd been with Jesus throughout His Earthly ministry; they are the ones who hear directly from God; they are the ones who perform miracles; if they had given in to the crush of people, their every day would have been swallowed up in people's needs; they'd've never had the time for prayer, studying God's Word: the Old Testament, or for discussing among themselves all that God was revealing to each of them; they had to allow God's Spirit to lead them into the art of organization and it began with those whom the Apostles were personally discipling. *'... so that we can spend our time in prayer, in studying God's Word and in training up those whom God has put directly before us.'*

This is important: to meet whose needs were they organizing? For whom were the ladies baking? In whose homes were they meeting for meals and teaching? We are seeing the Church's main function in operation: to identify and to meet the needs of only one group: fellow believers!!! They are not creating soup kitchens for Jerusalem's poor; they are not going out under the bridges giving socks to the homeless. We were never commanded to invent all manner of clever 'ministry' ideas; ministry has one function: ministering to the needs of the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. For all the rest, we have one command: 'Go into all the World and preach the Gospel!' and, 'Love your neighbor,' but never enable your neighbor to stay in his hell-bound lostness by simply being a nice guy, waiting for him to ask the magic question... never!

'Our relationship to every believer should be in the knowledge that God chose them for His Son and that we will know and live with them forever... our relationship to every non-believer should always be in the knowledge that they could die tonight to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire!'

Verse 4: *'But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.'*

The Apostles spent every day in two things: praying individually and together and in studying the Old Testament Scriptures to better understand their complete fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ and in ministering that understanding to those whom they were discipling. Remember: Jesus had modeled two specific things: loving others in presenting God's Word and in teaching, training and discipling a small group of men to take over the leadership after He was gone; that's exactly what each of the 12 are now doing; they are busy readying those who will eventually take their place. And we all have the same kind of responsibility in readying our families to take our place: husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren... those should be our first priorities in whom we disciple. After that, it's friends, neighbors and coworkers.

Verse 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: ⁶ Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.'*

These are the seven whom the second tier leadership selected from among themselves as having proven themselves to be honest, wise and followers of the Holy Spirit's leading in their lives. Five of them do not appear again in Scripture but what an honor, nonetheless, to have been known and remembered in God's Word... forever! Two of them, on the other hand, Stephen and Philip, will prove themselves faithful to the point of being further remembered in God's Word in the next few chapters of Acts.

All seven of these men are Hellenist, Grecian Jewish believers except Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch; he was a Gentile who converted to Judaism and then to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wisdom in this decision pleased everyone all the way down to, and including the Hellenist widows and what did James, one of the 12, later write... 'feed the unsaved poor?' No... but the brother of Jesus wrote:

'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' James 1:27

This is the very first responsibility given to the Church: every good and legitimate pastor and leader is to be focused on two specific things: training those under him to live loving, circumspect and holy lives while meeting the needs of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, from the lowliest to the highest; all are of equal importance in the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church does not have a special responsibility 'to the least of these...' no more so than to any others! When Jesus spoke of 'caring for the least of these, My brethren,' He was simply making the statement that no matter what we do in ministry unto God... large or small, He will never fail to reward us when we stand before Him.

Verse 7: *'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.'*

What a verse! Three huge 'events' as the Lord Jesus Christ continues to build His Church while the gates of Hell are unable to stand against His great work.

The Word of God increased! This episode began with innerchurch conflict. The Apostles delegated responsibility, instructing the Church to resolve it internally; the reason the Apostles refused to be drawn into the problem was: '*...so that we can give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*' That is a pastor's main responsibility: prayerfully studying, learning, preaching and teaching God's Word. Because they understood the importance of prayer-supported, Spirit-led Church governance and the delegation of responsibility, the Church was exploding in numbers with all caring for each other while being taught, trained and disciplined to continue the growth of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a few years, all 13 Apostles will be dead and gone to Heaven (including Paul); then, after not many years, the next level of leadership: Stephen, Philip, all these seven, Timothy and Titus, Silas and Barnabas... they will all be dead and gone to Heaven and so on... the True Church does not depend upon a national or international hierarchy; It is a living, breathing, growing body, the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ; He causes the growth; He sustains and keeps every individual until the soon coming moment when He comes down into the clouds to call, up to Himself, all who remain and to then take us back to His Father's House to the very special living areas He has created and prepared for each and every member of His beloved Bride who will rule and reign with Him for 1000 years, then forever!

The final portion of that verse: '*... a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*'

These would be the many priests who have studied and understood the true meaning behind the Mosaic Law and sacrificial system; the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to the underlying Truth of the Scriptures; they recognized that it pointed to God's coming Messiah and that their own Jesus of Nazareth was really the One. Perhaps many of these later became leaders and pastors once they understood the full Truth through the teaching of the Apostles.

Verse 8: *'And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.'*

So... we see that miracles and wonders were done by some, other than the Apostles. Here is Stephen, simply appointed to the job of overseeing the daily rations to widows. He could have been jealous and envious of the Apostles' power and authority, how everyone looked up to them... but he wasn't; he did his job honestly and wisely while depending on the Holy Spirit's leading, Who then began to work miracles through him. Perhaps he performed miracles of healing or of causing bread to be multiplied or of supernatural knowledge and casting out of demons... but never 'showing off' and always to the Glory of God.

Soon, Stephen will become the True Church's first martyr, murdered, simply, for the Faith.