

Acts Week 17

Gaining Ground

The church was growing rapidly and it came to the disciples telling them that not all things are right, there are some who are not being looked after and we must take care of this situation. Since Greek Romans had such an influence in the world at this time there were changes going on from the early Hellenic

Verse 1, Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists,¹ because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit 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.

I think it is important that we focus on the title, Hellenist for a moment and look at the differences of culture and language. John Stott writes his definition in short,

"What exactly was the identity of these two groups? It has usually been supposed that they were distinguished from each other by the mixture of geography and language. That is, the *Hellenistai* were those who had come from overseas, settled in Palestine and spoke Greek, while the *Hebraios* spoke Aramaic."

While Stott addresses this in short form, as he says, there is much more history in how we come to the use of both Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew going all the way back to the 800s B.C. These people and languages have meant something different from what we know of them today and new findings, artifacts and literature are still presenting fresh means of evaluating the history. Since the Greek/Christians were called Hellenist, not Hellenic nor Hellenism which are of earlier days and are the same, and the two need be divided from the Hellenist we read of here in Acts today. Still the ways of the Greeks have played an important part in the evolution of the Hebrews especially in writing and language, philosophies and customs.

There is nothing that indicates the Hellenist were being discriminated against in the serving of the widows, it is believed to have been mis-management and not intentional. However this may have been in part the reason they knew they had to appoint people to handle the daily chores.

What would be the reason this verse is even in our bibles has two possibilities, that we are to be without prejudice, and that we find we are to be about the worship of our mighty Lord and

¹ Hellenist: (Grecian) the term applied in the New Testament to Greek-speaking or "Grecian" Jews. The Hellenists as a body included not only the proselytes of Greek (or foreign) parentage, but also those Jews who, by settling in foreign countries, had adopted the prevalent form of the current Greek civilization, and with it the use of the common Greek dialect (Acts 6:1; 9:29).

constantly in prayer. **“but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”**

The Faith and obedience of Stephen,

Verse 5-7; And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. Can we say in our day and time that we could ever please the whole multitude, even as small as a congregation? Do we and are we willing to forgo our own appetites to feed others in real food and the Word? Has our society not adopted a me first mannerism? I'll add it here again, which came out of the sixties, “how can I take care of others if I don't take care of myself first?”

We need to re-evaluate the thought of “I have to” and focus on the blessing, “I get to” the understanding that everything that happens in our lives God uses and then blesses. There are many days I use to leave the house to go to the mission, the hospital, out to play music, things I felt God calling me to do when I realized the best days end up being the most difficult. When there were so many issues on my mind I felt like I can't cope with others right now, but at the end of the day it was as though I heard God say thank you. Walking in the Christian life can and will be filled with difficulties but as we grow more in our faith and our walk God gives us His desires in our hearts and He never fails to give the strength and words to minister.

I can't help but believe that what we are reading right now must have at some point gone through the minds of the disciples, that I have too. We find it in Moses when he told God he was not of good speech, Oh God I don't think this is a good idea. He was looking at the I don't want too, the out of my comfort zone, and not who was speaking to him to do, that he gets too, God chooses man to exercise the faith He bestows upon all of us.

Stephen is persecuted and becomes Christianity's first Martyr

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, (koo-ray-nah'-yos, a native of Cyrene, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth

will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

We see that Stephen has been granted the ability to perform healings and wonders so those convicting him had to be knowledgeable of Jesus in him. What is it that is driving them with so much hate? Why are they not willing to believe those things that were done in good? Why? Can we not ask of ourselves the same things, not that we murder or hate, but still there is a reluctance in our world to step forward and trust, trust as Peter demonstrated when he walked on water.

I cannot think of how much more any person would go through to convince another to trust in them, especially after witnessing the miracles they have performed.