

Office of Deacon (#4 - THE Qualification) – Acts 6:1-7

I. Introduction:

- A. As we have seen, the Jerusalem Church was having problems.
1. Like a teenager growing too quickly, its bones and muscles weren't keep pace with one another.
 2. There were so many new converts – many of whom were extremely poor – that some were being missed in the daily ministrations of food and support.
 3. So the twelve Apostles recommended that the church seek out men – *“of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”*
 4. The church then went to work, and in some way which is not explained, they came up with the recommended number of candidates.
 5. *“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, & Philip, & Prochorus, & Nicanor, & Timon, & Parmenas, & Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.”*
 6. The twelve told the church to look for men who were thoroughly honest and particularly sagacious and judicious – wise in a practical sense.
 7. But the most important qualification for office was more spiritual – they must be *“filled with the Holy Spirit.”*
- B. There are two purposes for this message today.
1. One, we are in the midst of a short study on the office of Deacon and to be *“filled with the Holy Ghost”* was one of the criteria by which candidates were to be considered.
 2. And then second, Deacons are not the only Christians who are supposed to be *“filled with the Spirit.”*
 3. You and I are also to be so filled. This is a condition which is supposed to be true of all of us.
 4. So I emphasize right now before we move on – you and I – elders, deacons, widow and orphans and every other Christian and church member – we are all exhorted to be filled with the Spirit.
 5. *“Be filled with the Spirit” – Ephesians 5:18.*
 6. Even if you are not qualified to ever become a Deacon, God expects you to be filled with His Spirit.
- C. But, getting back our more general theme, of the seven men chosen by the congregation for this office, five are mentioned in only this one verse.
1. We know nothing about the past – or the future – of **Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas & Nicolas.**
 2. But I am going to surmise that if we had their stories, they would be similar to that of the two we do have.
 3. This morning, I would like to look at Stephen and Philip, as representatives of the others, looking for ways in which they were filled with the Holy Ghost.
 4. I'm also looking for ways in which they might be examples to us – all of us, whether we are Deacons or not.
- D. But first, those who know such things better than I, tell us that **all seven** of these **names** are **Grecian**.
1. That is – the church may have become predominantly *“Hellenist”* after the influx of all the all new members.
 2. And the problem which called for these deacon/servants was an apparent conflict between the Grecian majority and the *“Hebrews”* who had been the founding members of the church.
 3. In other words, the foreign-born Jews now outweighed the native, local Jews in the membership.
 4. It appears that the majority found seven godly men – of their own kind – to present to the twelve.
 5. And remember the twelve Apostles were themselves native-born *“Hebrews.”*
 6. But they didn't bat an eyelash, keeping their word, *“and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them,”* in some sort of ordination.
 7. *“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.”*
 8. Apparently the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, was pleased with all of these decisions and actions and continued to pour out His blessings.

II. Now let's return to the question of *“the filling of the Holy Ghost”* – the *“filling of the Spirit.”*

- A. First, we need to use **Ephesians 5:18** to help us understand the meaning of the term.
1. Paul told that Asian church, *“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”*
 2. Notice that the filling of the Holy Spirit is contrasted with drunkenness.

3. Drunkenness is being under the control of the mind and body-changing influence of alcohol.
4. In the same way that alcohol controls the drunken person, the Holy Spirit should control the believer.
5. Simply put, when we speak of being filled with the Holy Spirit, we are speaking of being directed by the Spirit of God.

B. And in the original Greek, the tense of the verb, “*be filled*” is **present imperative**.

1. That means, as I am told, that it could be translated “*keep being filled*.”
2. In other words, the Lord wants His saint to **constantly** be **filled** with the Spirit by **constantly surrendering** himself to God’s leadership.
3. And submission to the Lord is something about which you and I have some choice.

C. There are fourteen Biblical references to being filled with the Spirit; I wish I had time to read them all to you.

1. We’ve read and studied them before, so I hope you could find them again, if you’d like to.
2. Let me just say that the people described as being “*filled*,” **behaved** in **extraordinary ways**.
 - a. Beginning with, **the Lord Jesus**, of course.
 - b. And then we could look at **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth**, the parents of John the Baptist.
 - c. Specific members of the Jerusalem church were filled with the Spirit and were blessed with special gifts, such as speaking in languages they had not ever spoken before.
 - d. And **Barnabas** “*was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of FAITH: and much people was added unto the Lord*” – Acts 11:24
3. Many of those people did miraculous things – like **Stephen**.
 - a. **Verse 8** – “*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*”
4. Those people, like **Philip**, became channels of the Spirit and of God’s blessings to others.
 - a. **Acts 8** – “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*”
5. The various people described as “*filled with the Spirit*” were not all alike in their service, but they were all **extraordinary** “*diakonia*” – servants of God.

III. Now, let’s briefly consider Deacon Stephen and how he displayed the “*filling of the Spirit*.”

A. He had an unusual ability to trust God – he could trust divine love and will even in the midst of the most trying circumstances.

1. And he could trust the Lord to do unusual things – miraculous things.
2. **Verse 5** – “*Stephen (was) a man full of FAITH and of the Holy Ghost...*”
3. **Verse 8** – he was “*full of FAITH and POWER, (doing) great wonders and miracles among the people.*”
4. Have we, today, moved beyond the day of miracles? Has God lost His ability to accomplish the unusual?
5. Certainly the Lord has not changed in His power or authority.
6. The question is – are we sufficiently filled with the Spirit to trust Him for those miracles?

B. This “*God-filled man*” was also so unique & Heavenly that, like His Saviour, he drew the attention of enemy.

1. “*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.*”
2. But with the power of the invincible Spirit filling him, “*they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*”
3. And of what did he speak? The Holy Spirit does not usually glorify Himself; He focuses on the Saviour.
4. So Stephen, surrendered to the Spirit, spoke to his assailants of Jesus.
5. And as he did, his appearance became as heavenly as his words.
6. “*And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*”
7. I’m not going to tell you that people filled with the Spirit today, will have beautiful complexions.
8. But I will say that as Stephen became more and more filled with the Lord, his face began to radiate like the face of Moses when he came down the mount after speaking with the pre-incarnate Christ.

- C. You, who have been children of God for a few years, have likely come to know a great many professing Christians.
1. I have to admit that I have met some who reminded me of snakes – serpents – like the one in Eden.
 2. Others are even worse – mean, diabolical, filled with hatred.
 3. Most Christians are simply good, positive people.
 4. But then a very few have suggested themselves to me as angelic – whatever that is.
 5. Spirit-filled Stephen was definitely one of those.
 6. Did Stephen's face become angelic face because he was filled with the Spirit?
 7. That's an assumption I am willing to make.
 8. If you were to be described as some one of God's creatures, what would it be?
- D. In **Acts 7** we see that this **Spirit-filled** man was also filled with the **Word of God** and the **history of Israel**.
1. He had the ability to **recall, recount, share** and **declare** the Word of the Lord.
 2. And with the Spirit within him and behind him, his audience came under the conviction of their sins.
 3. Remember, Stephen is by office a Deacon not an elder or bishop, but that didn't keep him from openly declaring God's Word.
 4. He wasn't usurping any other Christian's office; he was simply doing what spirit-filled Christians do.
- E. As he was speaking, he could see that the attitude of the enemy was changing.
1. Sometimes the preacher can see that in the face of his audience, but once in a while it is something the Spirit reveals to his soul.
 2. *"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth."*
 3. Notice **Acts 7:55** – *"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."*
 4. There is a sense in which **anyone filled** with the **Spirit**, will be able to **see the glory of God**.
 - a. He will see it in the sunrise and the sunset; he will see it in the billowing thunder cloud.
 - b. He will see it in the death of the saint and in the birth of a baby.
 - c. The glory of God will jump out at him from the pages of the Word of God.
 - d. The Spirit-filled Christian will see the glory of God everywhere he looks.
 5. Admittedly, what Stephen saw that day was an extra-special blessing.
 6. But remember, the verse in this case tells us, it was directly related to his *"being full of the Holy Ghost."*
- F. And then Stephen died.
1. Based upon his surrender to the Lord, Stephen easily made that last and ultimate surrender.
 2. *"And they stoned Stephen, (while he was) calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*
- G. Would you say that it was more necessary in the early days of the church to be surrendered and filled with the Spirit, than it is necessary today?
1. I would say that it was important to have a church of Stephens, Philips, Prochorus, Nicanors and Timons.
 - a. It was essential that **Peter** be willing to listen to the Holy Spirit when he was sent to visit Cornelius.
 - b. And of course, **Paul** was filled with God's spirit as he tramped across Mediterranean world.
 2. But don't you think the martyrs we find in Revelation will need that same filling when it comes to the time of their painful deaths?
 3. And don't be surprised if the hatred of today's world will come crashing down on us soon, demanding of us the same surrender and filling that was required of Stephen.
- H. *"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."*
1. It was the Holy Spirit who enabled that dying man to forgive his murderers.
 2. It wasn't spiritual logic – *"Oh, I am going to a better place, so this murder isn't important."*

3. Those words weren't driven by his pain or anything physical.
4. *"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, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.... Lord Jesus, receive my spirit....Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."*

- I. Earlier, the twelve Apostles said to the church, *"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.*
 1. *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*
 2. *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, & Philip, & Prochorus, & Nicanor, & Timon, & Parmenas, & Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*
 3. *Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*
 4. *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly."*
 5. A direct part of that **increase** and **numerical multiplication** was the fact that the church had these seven and probably many others, who were *"filled with the Holy Ghost."*
- J. Please notice once again –
 1. Even though Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, began preaching the word, and even died in that preaching, he did not use his office to usurp the authority of the Apostles – the pastoral office.
 2. He lived and died as one of the seven, being the very best Christian he could be, because he was surrendered to the will of Lord.

IV. The only other member of the seven of whom we have any real history is Philip.

- A. But be careful here. Don't confuse this man with the other Christian named Philip.
 1. In fact, one Philip was an elder in the church and helped to set our Philip as one of the seven.
 2. We are introduced to the first Philip in **John 1**, when John the Baptist pointed to the Lord Jesus and said, *"Behold the Lamb of God"* two of his disciples became disciples of Christ.
 3. *"The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.*
 - a. *Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.*
 - b. *Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*
 4. That Philip comes up fairly often in the life of Jesus.
 - a. I think that he and the **Apostle John** might have been good friends, because John speaks of him more than **Matthew, Mark** or **Luke**.
 - b. This Philip introduced the little boy with the loaves and fishes.
 - c. And Philip was a part of the conversation when Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life; not man cometh unto the Father but by me."*
 5. But, obviously, he is not the Philip of the Seven.
- B. How can we differentiate between the two later on? We just read our Bibles and let it speak. **Acts 8:1**.
 1. While *"Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."*
 - a. **Verse 3** – *"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*
 - b. *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*
 - c. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them."*
 2. Since this wasn't **Philip the Roman tetrarch of Iturea**, he must be someone else.
 3. And since the Apostles were all staying in Jerusalem, despite the persecution, this must be someone else.
 4. And since we have not been introduced to any other Philip, we should assume this is the man who is one of the seven.

5. And notice **Acts 8:14** – *“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.”*
 6. **IF** the ministry in Samaria was being carried out by **Philip the Apostle**, this visit by Peter and John would have been unnecessary.
 7. This is Philip the Deacon, sharing the gospel with needy sinners in another city.
- C. Just like Stephen and the other five deacons, Philip was *“filled with the Holy Spirit.”*
1. And how did that filling express itself?
 2. **Verse 5** – *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.”*
 3. Christians filled with the Spirit find themselves filled with the **same goals** and **desires** as the Holy Spirit.
 4. Philip was concerned about the lost people of Samaria and the believers there in Sychar.
 5. So he preached unto them the same Jesus who had earlier visited them in **John 4**.
 6. Not only did the Apostles need seven men of honest report and wisdom, they were looking for people who cared about the souls as well as their bodies of people .
 7. Philip and Stephen were such men.
- D. And like Stephen, Philip was empowered by the Holy Spirit to **work miracles**.
1. *“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”*
 2. Only Spirit-filled saints will ever be surrendered sufficiently for God to work miracles through them.
 - a. Don't be confused by heretics who appear to work miracles.
 - b. Philip was known for the **things which he spake** as well as the miracles he performed.
 - c. His message was as Christlike as the miracles Christ worked through him.
 3. Christ was glorified in all he said and did, not Philip or even the Spirit Himself.
- E. You might disagree with me, but it appears that **joy was another result** of his filling and his ministry.
1. *“And there was great joy in that city.”*
 2. I go back to an earlier question and thought:
 - a. Do you know of professing Christians who seem to pervade an atmosphere like a coming winter storm?
 - b. Do you know Christians who leave you gloomy or agitated or anxious?
 3. I am convinced that Christians who are filled with the spirit, generally leave joy wherever they go – unless the Holy Spirit uses them to bring people to conviction.
- F. Now, remember my initial definition or explanation of *“to be filled with the Spirit.”*
1. It is to be lead or controlled by the Spirit, because we are surrendered to His will. We see this in Philip.
 2. *“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*
 - a. *And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.*
 - b. *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him.”*
- G. Once again, we see a man who was **willing to share** what he knew about the Saviour.
1. He was **not a bigot**, hating the Samaritans because of their questionable blood lines.
 2. *“How is it that thou, being a Jew, preachest the gospel to a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans?”*
 3. He not only preached to the Samaritans, but now he is riding with and speaking to an Ethiopian.
 4. When the Spirit controls the heart of a person, his likes and tastes, his joys and his hopes, his loves and prejudices change; they become more heavenly.
 5. This is the kind of Christian that is needed in these last days.
 6. This is the kind of Christian we need in our church.

- H. Philip, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, was able to discern that this stranger was a fellow believer in Christ.
1. There is an affinity between brethren, and Philip knew that this man with the dark skin was a brother.
 2. And he had the Spirit's leadership to step down into the water of a little desert oasis and immerse the man as a testimony of his faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.
- I. I believe that Philip was **moved** by the Spirit from **Jerusalem to Samaria** and then into the **Gaza Strip** and then to **Azotus**, where *"passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea."*
1. As a Spirit-filled man he went only to those places where the Lord had prepared a ministry for him.
 2. And as a Spirit-filled man he couldn't stop telling people about his Saviour.
 3. Whether he thought of himself as a missionary, that is what he was.
 4. Whether he thought of himself as an evangelist, that is what the Bible calls him.
 5. This Spirit-filled man became known as *"soul-minded"* – evangelistic – *"Philip, the evangelist."*
 6. His reputation followed him.
- J. In **Acts 21** as Paul with a few of his companions made their way to Jerusalem, **Luke** records –
1. *"When we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.*
 - a. *And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.*
 - b. *And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."*
 2. Years after Philip's evangelism of Samaria & the Ethiopian, we find him in Caesarea, where **Acts 8** put him.
 3. By this time he was married and has four daughters, who were as well versed in the Bible as their father.
 4. They were probably filled with the Spirit as well, loving to share God's word as best they could.
 5. Might it be proper to say that their home was blessed because the father of the family was filled with the spirit?

V. Conclusion:

- A. There may have been hundreds of people in the Jerusalem church who were completely surrendered and filled with God's Spirit.
1. How these seven were selected out of those hundreds we might never know.
 2. But this one thing I do know – the ministry still needs hundreds of spirit-filled Christians whether or not they every hold a Biblical church office.
 3. We need teachers, evangelists, worshipful musicians and prayer warriors who know the heart of God because they are surrendered to the Lord.
- B. Are you a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus? Praise the Lord. I rejoice for you.
1. But if you are not *"filled with the Spirit"* you haven't begun to enjoy the fulness of the Lord's blessings.
 2. Repent of your self-will and surrender your life to your Saviour.
 3. I can't promise that you'll become as famous as Stephen or Philip, but the Lord will know.
- C. And if you are totally unknown to God, I urge you to kneel before the cross.
1. Repent before God.
 2. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."*