

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon October 16, 2022
Acts 6: 1 – 7 “The Diaconate: Christ’s Compassion Displayed”

33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 "but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God." 40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So 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 did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, 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." 5 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.

8 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, 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.

- I. Introduction
 - a. Calvin “Now we see to what end deacons were made. The word itself is indeed general, yet is it properly taken for those which are stewards for the poor.”¹
 - b. Do you feel the pain of compassion inside when you observe the poor, sick and oppressed, especially those of the family of God? Or, have you learned to wall off your soul from this form of suffering? How does this world help us to insulate ourselves from the pain of others? Fragmented society? Media? Distractions? Escapism? Materialism? Why is it so unusual to see God’s people walking the life of the Good Samaritan?
- II. Acts 6: 1 – 7 “The Diaconate: Christ’s Compassion Displayed”
 - a. All that Jesus began both to do and teach
 - b. The Compassion of Christ Incarnate Displayed
 - c. We are the Body of Christ
 - d. The Diaconate: Christ’s Compassion Displayed
 - e. Questions to know, love and obey God
- III. All that Jesus began both to do and teach
 - a. Acts 1:1-3 “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”
 - i. During His Incarnation, Jesus began both to do and to teach. His doing and His teaching demonstrated that God’s Kingdom had arrived in a new and fuller way than ever before.
 - ii. When we consider what Christ did while He walked this earth, we not only see great power on display: great power over sickness, disease and demons. But, also, we see the fountain of Christ’s compassion driving His actions.
 - iii. “What began in Jerusalem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the apostles really began in Galilee where Jesus began to preach the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God and to help people in need.”²
- IV. The Compassion of Christ Incarnate Displayed
 - a. Christ’s inner compassion is often linked to His actions in the Gospels. Luke gives us a beautiful example with the widow of Nain. (Lk 7:11-17)
 - i. “Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out,

¹ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 234.

² Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 1:1.

the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. 16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." 17 And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region."

- ii. Christ's compassion moved Him to action. He spoke words of comfort to the widow who's only son had died. He came near and touched the open coffin. He spoke words of resurrection to the young man, raising him from the dead, restoring him to health so he could speak again. He presented the only son alive to his mother.
- iii. Compassion = *σπλαγχνίζομαι*
 - 1. to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)
 - 2. feel sympathy, to pity:—have (be moved with) compassion.
 - 3. KJV: have compassion (7x), moved with compassion (5x)
- iv. Other examples of Christ's compassion in the Gospels:
 - 1. Mt 9:36-38 (Compassion and prayer) "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.""
 - 2. Mk 14:14 (Compassion and healing) "And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick."
 - 3. Mt 15:32 (Compassion and feeding) "Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."
 - 4. Mk 6:34 (Compassion and teaching) "And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."
 - 5. Lk 15:20 (Compassion amidst mistreatment) "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." (The father is the model of God's compassion.)

V. We are the Body of Christ

- a. 1 Cor 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”
 - i. Our risen and reigning Lord mysteriously lives in us and through us in the earth by His Holy Spirit. We suffer and rejoice with Him as He shares His heart with us.
 - 1. Colossians 1:24 “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.”
 - a. Feeling compassion is a form of suffering. It is an aching initiated by observing the suffering of others. It is a distinctly human emotion. How can we learn to share in Christ’s compassion?
- b. Compassion - the distinguishing feature of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)
 - i. “25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading [of it]?” 27 So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ” 28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain [man] went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded [him], and departed, leaving [him] half dead. 31 “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 “Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 “So he went to [him] and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 “On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave [them] to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ 36 “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.””
 - 1. When we ache and mourn within because of the suffering of others, as Christ did, then we will be moved, as Christ is, to move, to action to try and help. Christ shares His compassion with us, so His heart for the poor, needy and downtrodden becomes our heart.
 - 2. Christ Himself is the only truly Good Samaritan. He calls us to show mercy like Him, to “go and do likewise.”
 - 3. Are you moved with pity, with an inner suffering, as you see others suffering?

- c. The compassion of the Church in Acts
 - i. Acts 2:44-47 “44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”
 - 1. “As anyone had need” – The newborn church felt Christ’s compassion, beginning with the House of God. This compassion moved them to action: they sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all. The criteria for compassion: need.
 - ii. Acts 3:1-9 “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth [hour]. 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted [him] up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.”
 - 1. While the compassion of Peter and John is not directly mentioned, we see the behavior that flow from compassion.
 - iii. Acts 4: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid [them] at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold [it], and brought the money and laid [it] at the apostles' feet.”
 - 1. “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked” – Being moved by the sight of those without food, clothing and shelter, the believers were moved to sell lands or houses and give the proceeds to the apostles, so those who lacked could be supplied. Barnabas is our great example. Note the connection between compassionate action and encouragement.

- iv. Acts 5:14-16 “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid [them] on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”
 - 1. Consider the time it takes to heal an entire multitude. And the energy necessary to cast demons out of an entire multitude of people. The compassion of Christ in His Body on display. We see what Christ “began” to do in the Gospels. Here we see what Christ continues to do in His newborn Church.

VI. The Diaconate: Christ's Compassion Displayed

- a. “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, 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." 5 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.”
 - i. So, the corporate compassion has formed into an initial system of service for the needy widows, who had daily need and received daily distributions from the church. Compassion itself does not ensure good organized service to the poor and the needy. If we are serious about stoking the fire of compassion and sending its beautiful light and heat into the world, we need the fireplace of God’s Church in the earth to guide for maximum benefit and for the sake of peace and unity.
- b. The apostles define the criteria for the brethren:
 - i. Seven
 - ii. Men
 - iii. Of good reputation
 - iv. Full of the Holy Spirit
 - v. Full of wisdom
 - vi. “They stipulate two qualifications. First, they must have a “good reputation” (μαρτυρουμένων), i.e., they should be well spoken of in the congregation¹⁵³³ so that their appointment will meet with the approval of all believers. Second, they must be “filled with the Spirit and with

wisdom” (πλήρεις πνεύματος καί σοφίας). There should be evidence that their lives have been characterized and transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them when they came to faith in Jesus (cf. 2:38). There should be evidence that they can make good judgments, an important factor in the ministry of daily food distribution, which had not been handled in a fully competent and fair manner in the past.”³

- c. The apostles define the process:
 - i. The apostles ask for seven qualified men
 - ii. The brethren select the seven qualified men
 - iii. The apostles then appoint the seven qualified men
 - 1. "Members of the congregation (1) experienced the problem of the uneven distribution of funds and food for the widows, (2) identified the problem as it pertained to the widows who belonged to the Greek-speaking part of the congregation, (3) communicated the problem to the apostles, (4) accepted the proposal of the apostles for solving the problem, and (5) nominated seven candidates who would resolve the problem. The apostles (1) provided opportunities for the congregation to voice grievances, (2) accepted the critique and protest of members of the congregation, (3) acknowledged the existence of a problem, (4) suggested a solution of the problem that would safeguard the priorities of the leadership and properly take care of all needy believers, (5) approved the nomination of the seven candidates, and (6) commissioned the new ministry leaders for their task."
- d. The diaconate solidified in the NT:
 - i. Philippians 1:1,2 “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (written early AD60s)
 - 1. The two offices are distinct from one another. The two offices comprise the church leadership of a local church.
 - ii. 1 Tim 3:8-13 “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (cAD 64)

³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:3.

1. The criteria for this office is further detailed and clarified by Paul. Note the similarity to Acts 6, with extra details.
 2. The work of overseeing the material well-being of the church with good use of funds in an organized fashion falls to the deacons. But, note the criteria are primarily spiritual, character-based criteria. Just because a man is good at organizing and caring for physical needs doesn't necessarily mean he's called to be a deacon. Note how motive is in view. What is the deacon's motivation? Is it to serve Christ? Is it the compassion of Christ?
- iii. 1 Tim 5:3-10 "Honor widows who are really widows. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. 5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. 7 And these things command, that they may be blameless. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, [and not unless] she has been the wife of one man, 10 well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work."
1. The needs of widows persists from the newborn church through to other churches in other locations. The church must make plans to care for faithful widows using wisdom as the church funds are expended to meet daily needs.

VII. Questions to know, love and obey God

- a. Have you ever experienced the pain of compassion that prompted you to sacrifice your own possessions to supply the need of others? Especially those within the household of God?
- b. Have you ever considered that we can do harm to the poor and needy if we do not respond wisely, especially in regard to helping those far away. Wisdom is difficult to obtain from a distance.
 - i. "Churches and their leaders need wisdom to know what constitutes the most effective help in the long term. Believers who do not have enough to eat obviously need immediate help. Believers who are impoverished may need to be given monies so that they can pay their rent and buy food. But they may also need advice on how to budget their income. People who are out of work may need immediate assistance, but they also need help with finding new employment."⁴

⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:1–7.

- c. What can be done to make sure that needs are identified so the resources of the church can be put to use to supply needs?
 - i. “Churches and their leaders should be informed about members who are in financial need and who are needy in other areas (marital, emotional, health, work related). In large churches, the information flow can be a problem, and people who attend services can easily hide themselves; churches must find means of effective communication concerning special needs that people have.”⁵
- d. How should the church deal with those with special needs?
 - i. “Churches and their leaders must be committed to helping believers who have special needs. In highly individualistic societies this can be a problem, because intervention in a particular situation can be unduly delayed because we let people cope for themselves for too long, or because people are too proud to admit that they need help.”⁶
- e. How can we as a church be sure to help in the best way? Short term, medium term, long term solutions will be needed for various situations.
 - i. “Churches and their leaders need wisdom to know what constitutes the most effective help in the long term. Believers who do not have enough to eat obviously need immediate help. Believers who are impoverished may need to be given monies so that they can pay their rent and buy food. But they may also need advice on how to budget their income. People who are out of work may need immediate assistance, but they also need help with finding new employment.”⁷
- f. How can you cultivate compassion in your heart? How can you learn to share in Christ’s compassion?
 - i. Be around the needy. No replacement for personal experience. Where can we go to rub shoulders with the poor and needy.
 - ii. Reading stories about our suffering siblings in Christ. Helpful if we can’t get time with the poor and needy.
- g. Suggested Reading:
 - i. George Grant – “Bringing in the Sheaves” & “In the Shadow of Plenty”

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:1–7.

⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:1–7.

⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 6:1–7.