

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ACTS 6

BY ALEXANDER STRAUCH

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Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution [*diakonia*].

And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables [*diakoneō*]. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [*diakonia*] of the word.”

And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1–7)

I. The New Age of the Spirit and of Charitable Generosity

Acts 6:1–7 is one of the most instructive passages in the book of Acts in terms of church life and leadership. It should be ranked alongside Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 for its importance to church leaders.

For those called of God to lead his people, Acts 6 emphasizes the priority of prayer and the preaching of the Word of God. It tells of the financial generosity of the first Christians towards others in need. It addresses issues of conflict, problem solving, church expansion, leadership qualifications, evangelism, love, humility, and community. Under the directing influence of the Holy Spirit of God, Luke has recorded this account to guide the ministry priorities of all churches and their leaders.

All Christians will agree that Acts 6:1–7 is a treasure chest of sacred history, apostolic ecclesiology and missiology, and exemplary pastoral practices.

Sharing with Any Who Had Need — Acts 2:44–45

Beginning on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out from heaven upon the believers. A distinguishing mark of the new Spirit-filled community was its generosity to the poor among them.

Shining a spotlight on the first believing community, Luke highlights their generosity:

All who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were *selling* their possessions and belongings and *distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need*. (Acts 2:44–45; italics added)

“The gospel,” writes Darrell Bock, “has transformed [the new believers] into a giving people, generous with their possessions.”¹ In many practical ways, the gospel affects our use of money and possessions, our wallets and our checkbooks; it connects faith and finances.

Money, Possessions, and Generosity

Selling personal “possessions and belongings” and sharing the proceeds with those who “had need” was

a literal fulfillment of Christ's teaching on eternal treasures in heaven, hoarding earthly possessions, and generous giving:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. *Sell your possessions, and give [alms] to the needy.* Provide *yourselves* with moneybags that do not grow old, with *a treasure in the heavens* that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:32–34; italics added; also read Luke 18:22)

Jesus Christ provides his “little flock” with the smartest financial advice ever given by anyone upon this earth: “Provide yourselves . . . with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.”

As a result of Peter's Spirit-empowered preaching on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand new disciples were added to the church. In obedience to Christ's Great Commission, the twelve apostles immediately began to teach the new believers “to observe all” that Jesus had “commanded” them (Matt. 28:19–20). Specifically, the apostles taught the new believers to obey Christ's solemn warnings on greed and perverse love for earthly possessions:

Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. (Luke 12:15; read also Luke 11:39; 12:16–21)

The apostles also taught the new disciples Jesus' principles of financial investment: Invest one's money in eternal treasures in heaven, not in earthly treasures—which are not secure or eternal.

Jesus also taught that where one's treasure is, there one's true heart affections would reside. Moreover, Jesus taught that one needs to be financially generous to needy people *here and now* so that in the *future* “they may receive you into the eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9).

The apostles warned, as Jesus had sternly warned them, that it is impossible to serve two masters – “God and money” – at the same time (Luke 16:13). They instructed the new believers not to be overly anxious about the material matters of life, but,

Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:31; read also Luke 18:29–30)

In glaring contrast to many of the religious leaders in Jesus' day, who were “full of greed,” “lovers of money,” and “robbers,”² the apostles exemplified selfless living and heart-felt care for those among them who were most needy.

It is Christ's warning regarding the corrupting power of greed, hoarding wealth, obsession with material possessions, and his admonition to give to those in need that explain the extravagant display of generosity of the first Christians. The apostles and early Christians were true imitators of Christ and faithful followers of his new teachings. May by God's grace the same be said of us today!

There Was Not a Needy Person Among Them — Acts 4:32, 34–35

Giving generously to fellow members in need became so extensive that money had to be brought directly to the twelve apostles for effective, orderly distribution:

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common . . . *There was not a needy person among them*, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and *laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.* (Acts 4:32, 34–35; emphasis added)

The apostles didn't have to beg or manipulate the people with guilt techniques to give financially. The new believers were enthusiastic givers.³ As a result of the believers' new attitude toward their material possessions, “there was not a needy person among them.” Some believers voluntarily sold land or houses and gave the proceeds to the apostles for them to distribute to the “needy” (Acts 4:34). The “needy” were *not just the widows* described in Acts 6:1, but included all who were impoverished, disabled, orphaned, or elderly.

Laying Gifts at the Apostles' Feet

The phrase, "the apostles' feet," signifies the apostles' authority over what was placed at their feet. The apostles were officially responsible for the church's charitable gifts. They decided who would receive aid and how much, and who would not receive aid. *This was the founding of the first organized church benevolence fund.* And, it was administered by the twelve apostles. They were the church's first benevolence committee, showing mercy and compassion to those suffering poverty.

Observe that the believers placed their offerings at the apostles' feet; they didn't fall down at their feet as if they were their patrons or benefactors. Moreover, they didn't place their donations at Peter's feet only. They placed their donations at the "apostles' feet," plural. To protect the new movement from financial scandal the whole body of apostles was responsible for the church's charitable offerings. All this implies the people's full trust in the apostles' integrity to manage their sacrificial gifts. The apostles were not peddlers of the gospel, enriching themselves on the people's offerings. They were not known as the richest men in Jerusalem with the fanciest homes in town, but they were known for denying self and generously providing for the needs of others.

Pure Motives Versus Evil Motives — Acts 4:36–5:4

Luke concludes this section on charitable giving with both a positive and negative example. First, he mentions Barnabas, one of the most prominent leaders and teachers of the first church. The apostles had already nicknamed him "son of encouragement." Luke records that

Barnabas . . . sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36–37)

Luke presents Barnabas as an exemplary role model of a leader displaying selfless generosity and compassionate care for the poor.

In contrast, following the inspiring story of Barnabas is the tragic episode of Ananias and Sapphira:

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." (Acts 5:1–4)

Like Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira sold property and brought the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. The problem, however, was that, unlike Barnabas, their motives were corrupt. They tried to deceive the apostles into thinking they were big-time givers and concerned about the poor; in reality they were greedy, lying, self-promoting glory seekers. They were not guided by the Holy Spirit in what they did, but by Satan's voice. Consequently, God (through Peter) judged them for lying and put them to death.

These awe-inspiring accounts of generosity and compassionate care for the poor would have *echoed loudly throughout the churches of the first three decades*. All the above accounts form the historical context for understanding the Acts 6 account to which we now turn.

II. Widows . . . Neglected in the Daily Distribution (Acts 6:1–2)

Luke skillfully brings the theme of generosity to the poor and the first section of the book of Acts (Acts 1:1–6:7) to an unforgettable, climactic conclusion with the founding of a new body of officials to oversee the church's ministry to the poor. Here is another first in the organizational structure of the earliest church.

The Problem

In the previous chapters of Acts, we saw the church's inspiring display of care for its poor. But now we see this

ministry threatened by administrative ineffectiveness and/or discriminatory practices along ethnic lines. Luke records:

Now in these days when disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution [*diakonia*]. (Acts 6:1)

Luke connects the fact that the “disciples were increasing in number” with the problem that arose between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. From the earliest beginnings, the church in Jerusalem experienced rapid growth. The Spirit of God was mightily at work through the preaching of the gospel, and as a result many people were converted. Luke records that “more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” (Acts 5:14). By the time of the events of Acts 6, there were approximately 5,000 to 10,000 (possibly more) new believers in Jerusalem. As the church rapidly increased in size, so did the complexities of its problems. A major problem was poverty.

The Daily Distribution [*Diakonia*]

Acts 6:1 reveals that one way the apostles used the contributions laid at their feet was by providing some kind of daily material assistance to those lacking life necessities.

Disagreement exists over how to understand the phrase “the daily distribution,” that is, “the daily *diakonia*” (Acts 6:1). One view argues that Luke uses *diakonia* in verse 1 to designate the activity of meal service. The NASB translates the phrase “the daily distribution” as “the daily serving *of food*.” The NIV and the NRSV also add the phrase “of food,” although this phrase is not a part of the Greek text. This rendering of the noun, *diakonia*, has strong lexical support. The *diakon*-word group, especially in Luke’s Gospel, most often designates table attendance and meal service.⁴ The idea of sharing meals appears in Acts 2:46 where the new believers eat together daily:

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

Furthermore, the phrase in verse 2, “to serve tables,” most likely refers to all that is involved in providing food. Food is certainly the first and greatest need of the poor, and it is a daily need. This understanding of serving tables would confirm the notion that *diakonia* in verse 1 means food service.

A second view prefers the translation “the daily distribution,”⁵ which could include food or funds or both. Some who hold this rendering of *diakonia* take the verbal phrase “to serve tables” in verse 2 to mean money tables, a place where money is placed and distributed.⁶ J. B. Phillips, for example, translates the phrase as, “to look after accounts.”⁷

Overall, the first view that emphasizes the idea of meal service in all its aspects (from purchasing food to organizing its distribution) is best. However we understand the phrase “the daily distribution,” it is clear that the administration of the church’s charitable aid to the poor is in view. In the next chapter we will look at daily service in more detail.

Unfair Distribution

Among the “needy” of the believing community were destitute widows. Widows represented one of the most needy and vulnerable groups of people in society.

The specific incident that sparked the complaints from “the Hellenists” was that their widows were being neglected in the daily service of food and/or funds. Luke states the problem this way:

a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. (Acts 6:1)

You can imagine how very hurtful and demeaning this was to these helpless widows who were already in desperate need.

In contrast, the Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking widows received preferential treatment. The Hellenists were the Greek-speaking, Diaspora Jews. Thus, they were bicultural Jews and first-or second-generation immigrants. By means of this account, Luke introduces the Hellenistic Jewish believers who became a major force in the expansion of the gospel.

Why the Greek-speaking widows were neglected in the daily food service we can only guess. From experience, we know that whenever charitable assistance is made available, complex problems of effectiveness and fairness in distribution arise.

Whatever the reasons for the neglect of the Greek-speaking widows, a solution was needed and needed quickly. The Greek word used for “complaint” [*gongysmos*] implies a toxic form of grumbling or murmuring destructive to the community.⁸ The situation was creating a “them” versus “us” or “insider” versus “outsider” mentality that was potentially divisive to the church. Rightly sensing the explosiveness of the situation, the apostles promptly acted; they “summoned the full number of the disciples” and proposed an innovative plan for resolving the problem. They wasted no time defending themselves or placing the blame on others. They were decisive leaders, not passive ones.

III. New Leaders for the Church’s Table-Serving Ministry (Acts 6:2–4)

Up until this time, the twelve apostles had been responsible for both the teaching ministry and benevolence ministry of the church. The work of administering the church’s charitable welfare, however, *soon grew to be a distraction from their primary ministry*: their Christ-given commission to preach the gospel and teach Christ’s commands. The apostles knew that something had to be done to free themselves of what they termed the table-serving ministry.

Stated Priorities

Calling together “the full number of the disciples” for a public meeting, the twelve apostles first explained their own ministry crisis:

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. (Acts 6:2)

The apostles express themselves emphatically on this matter. They categorically state that it is not “right” before God and the congregation for them to “give up preaching the word of God” to spend time dispensing charitable aid. Their primary Christ-given commission is to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

Acts 6:2–4 is a speech by the twelve apostles to the first church. Nearly one-third of the book of Acts is comprised of speeches. As a master historian and teacher, Luke employs these speeches to clarify major themes of the gospel and to teach Christian doctrine as well as to provide the Christian community with an historical “narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1).

In this brief speech, the apostles declare in concise language their ministry priorities:

We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4)

This speech needs to be repeated, memorized, and studied by all elders and deacons. The apostles’ words are as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago. Their statements agree one-hundred percent with the rest of the New Testament’s extraordinary emphasis on preaching and teaching “the word of God” and all that Christ had commanded his disciples.⁹

Putting a New Structure in Place to Serve Tables

To solve the problem, the apostles saw the need *to put a formal structure in place* in order to more effectively administer the church’s charitable aid and to relieve themselves of this obligatory ministry. It is very possible that the apostles looked to Exodus 18:17–23 and Deuteronomy 1:9–18 for an Old Testament precedent to guide them in constructing their plan.

The Acts 6 account does not report a miraculous intervention by the Holy Spirit. There is no record of a prophet giving divine guidance. No angel appears to change the course of events. There was no miraculous feeding

of the widows. Instead, the account records the ordinary process of decision making and planning within a church—wise leadership, prayer, effective group planning, thoughtful problem solving, and participation by all who were involved.

The apostles' proposed plan called for the congregation to choose seven qualified men. The apostles would appoint these men "to serve tables."

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." (Acts 6:3)

As wise leaders, the apostles knew the necessity of involving the congregation in solving this problem. The money and the widows belonged to the people (all of whom were now close-knit brothers and sisters indwelt by the Holy Spirit), so the people needed to participate in choosing who among them would be most qualified to oversee their charitable gifts and properly care for the widows and needy members of the family. This is the first example of a church body participating in the choice of its own officers.

The process described is of decisive significance in the history of Christian organization, since here for the first time we have an appointment, not through a call of the incarnate or risen Lord, nor through self-attestation of the charismatic Spirit in a Christian, but by the election of the members of the congregation.¹⁰

The apostles' plan appears to be a fresh new plan to meet their specific situation. There is no similar group of officials or comparable model found in the Old Testament that the apostles could adopt. Nor is there any convincing reason to claim that the apostles' plan was drawn from the charitable structures of the first-century Jewish synagogue or Essene communities. Empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, the twelve apostles were capable of creating for the new community a new structure to supervise its charitable service.

To Serve Tables

The apostles refer to the ministry they will delegate to the Seven as *serving tables*. But what exactly did the apostles mean by this phrase?

Some commentators contend that serving tables is an idiomatic phrase that means "to handle finances."¹¹ Thus, tables represent the place where funds are collected and distributed.¹² The best evidence for this interpretation is Luke's account in Acts 4:34–37 and 5:1–2 that the believers sold their possessions and placed the proceeds at the apostles' feet to be distributed. Thus serving tables could mean collecting and distributing money for helping those in need.

However, both *diakonia* in verse 1 and the verbal phrase "to serve tables" in verse 2 can designate serving food.¹³ Luke has already used the verb *diakoneō* at least six times in his Gospel in reference to food service or table attendance. This second view seems to represent best the meaning of the phrase "to serve tables."

Despite differences of opinion over the exact meaning of the phrase "to serve tables," the general idea is clear: To serve tables is to administer charitable relief whether in the form of food or money, or both. *Luke does not specifically use the terms food or funds, but certainly both would be involved in the ministry of serving tables, that is, of providing basic human necessities in whatever form is needed.*

Food and Finances

Note that serving tables is set in contrast to ministering the Word. There is the ministry (*diakonia*) of daily bodily assistance for the poor (v. 1), and there is the ministry (*diakonia*) of the Word for all who will hear (v. 4). The ministry of the Word meets people's eternal, spiritual needs. It is serving the bread from heaven. The ministry of tables meets people's temporal, bodily, and material needs.¹⁴ It is serving literal bread provided by fellow believers.

Providing food on a daily schedule would require a significant operation, of which financial activity would be a major part. "To serve tables" involves much more than handing out sandwiches and bottled water or serving as a waiter to people sitting at a table. "To serve tables" includes the entire ministry of providing for the poor. It involves collecting donations, keeping accounts, buying food, organizing and mobilizing others to help with this service, enrolling widows, visiting homes, assessing people's needs, deciding who receives aid and who does not, and finding and stopping abuses of the system.

And while feeding the poor would be the predominant need that had to be met regularly, other needs such as shelter, clothing, and medical would be included in the general work of helping “the needy” (Acts 4:34).

In a large church like Jerusalem, the daily service of life provisions would be a relentless organizational task needing many helpers. Since only seven men, not hundreds of men and women, were appointed to serve tables, *the Seven comprised an administrative team that would organize and supervise the many volunteers who would help acquire and distribute food/funds to a large congregation of needy individuals.*

Luke does not provide specific details of how the distribution of food or funds was originally administered by the apostles and later the Seven. The account is stated in simplified form and in general terms with all unnecessary details omitted. But the account is specific in defining the qualifications of those who will direct the church’s benevolent services.

Choosing Only Qualified Men to Administer Charitable Aid

Because the work of serving tables includes collecting and spending church donations, only qualified, approved men were to supervise the church’s table-serving ministry.

Such a highly responsible and specialized task explains why the apostles required the congregation to choose a team of men who were each of “good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” and why the apostles had to lay their hands upon these chosen men.

If the Seven were only handing out sandwiches and bottled water, such qualifications or the laying on of hands would not be necessary. Any believer can hand out food. But the fact that the Seven had to be chosen by the congregation, meet specific qualifications, and have hands laid on them demonstrates that *they supervised a specialized ministry requiring a high level of public trust.*

The key to the success of the apostles’ plan was finding the right men for the job. The wrong men could create worse problems and frustrate the apostles even more than the existing situation. To make sure that the right men were selected by the congregation, the apostles spelled out for the congregation the necessary qualifications for those whom they would choose to serve tables: “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (v. 3).

Seven: The fact that potentially large sums of money or goods had to be collected and distributed required that the apostles appoint a body of officials to provide financial accountability and to protect the church from public scandal.

The apostles specify that there needs to be seven men. But why seven? Luke doesn’t explain. The answer may be that this was the number of men the apostles knew was necessary in order to do the job effectively. Or perhaps the number seven is related to “the daily distribution.” Although the Seven as a group supervised the overall distribution of aid, each one of the Seven may have had his day of the week to supervise the daily distribution.¹⁵ Whatever the case may be, no biblical or theological truth is stated for this particular number.

Seven Men

The apostles also specified that the Seven are to be men. Such a practice accords with the rest of Acts. Women were involved from the very beginning of Acts in prayer, prophecy, mercy ministries, gospel mission, and Christian service.¹⁶ In both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, Luke highlights the presence of women in the life of Christ and in the ministries of the early church. However, the official leadership of the new communities and the forward expansion of the gospel to the nations were male-led throughout the narrative in Acts.

Seven Men Known and Respected by the Community

The apostles specified that the Seven be “men of good repute.” This means they had to be known and respected by the congregation as men of good character.

Collecting and distributing church funds is a specialized ministry that requires trusted people. Furthermore, widows, whether old or young, are especially vulnerable to unethical people. The Old Testament prophets criticized Israel’s leaders for robbing the poor and betraying their trust.¹⁷ Jesus also rebuked the religious leaders of his day who exploited “widows’ houses” (Luke 20:47). Religious swindlers abounded, preying on widows and the elderly. Jesus warned that such people “will receive the greater condemnation” (Luke 20:47). No church should ever expose its most vulnerable members to unknown or questionable people.

The Seven held a position of public trust involving church funds, and where there is money or free goods available, there is the temptation to steal. We know from second-century writers about elders and deacons who stole money from the church and even from widows and orphans.¹⁸ In the popular, second-century visionary book *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the author complains of,

Deacons [*diakonoi*] who carried out their ministry [*diakoneō*] badly and plundered the livelihood of widows and orphans, and profited themselves from the ministry [*diakonia*] that they received to carry out [*diakoneō*] . If, therefore, they persist in the same evil desire, they are dead and there is no hope of life for them. But if they turn about and fulfill their ministry [*diakonia*] purely, they will be able to live.¹⁹

Knowing the sinfulness of human nature and the ever-present temptation to pilfer charitable funds, the apostles insisted that those chosen to serve tables be men of “good repute.” In short, the people must have full confidence in those who manage the church’s benevolent funds and provide for their destitute members.

Seven Men Full of the Spirit and Wisdom

Candidates for selection did not have to be rich patrons or wealthy benefactors. But they did have to be “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” To be “full of the Spirit” means that the Holy Spirit is clearly evident in the candidate’s life. The candidate must display a life controlled by the Spirit and full of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23). Men who are full of the Spirit don’t lie to or steal from their brothers and sisters. They are not greedy or lovers of money. They are people of integrity. They are just and fair. They love and serve others. They are godly men.

Not only were the candidates to be “full of the Spirit,” but full “of wisdom.” These two traits usually go together—people who are full of the Spirit are people characterized by wisdom.

Distributing aid requires godly wisdom in order to make wise judgments and assess properly people’s needs and requests. Those who assist the poor need to be able to distinguish genuinely needy people who must be given assistance from those who want a free handout or who do not want to work. They need wisdom to be able to balance people’s endless needs with available financial resources. They need to know how much aid to give to the different people who request aid. Dealing with people and their many problems demands an individual “full of wisdom.”

IV. The Congregation’s Response

The congregation in Jerusalem resoundingly approved the apostles’ proposal:

And what they said pleased the whole gathering. (Acts 6:5)

The gathered assembly agreed that God had called the twelve apostles to preach “the word of God,” and not to “serve tables.” Seeing the wisdom of the apostles’ plan, the congregation immediately proceeded to carefully “pick out,” or “select” (NIV),²⁰ seven qualified men from the congregation (v. 3). How the congregation went about selecting the Seven is not explained. But certainly there would be mature, competent leaders among the people who could take the lead in organizing a careful selection process. Luke records that,

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch. (Acts 6:5)

The passage is clear that the congregation (“they”) “chose”²¹ the Seven, not the apostles. The congregation did the selecting/choosing, and the twelve apostles did the official appointing²² of the Seven by means of the public act of laying on of hands.

The Apostles Chosen by Christ; The Seven Chosen by the Congregation

It is important to note that the twelve apostles were directly chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ²³ and not by the people. The Twelve are the apostles of Christ, not the apostles of the church. As Christ’s apostles, they represent

Christ and teach his Word. The Seven were chosen to be supervisors of the church's charitable ministry; they were not chosen by the church to be its teachers. The Seven were not on the same level of authority and position as the twelve apostles. The Seven could not establish their own theology or church. They were not junior apostles. Nor were they an autonomous group of leaders comparable to the twelve apostles. Like everyone else, the Seven had to devote "themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). What the Seven were appointed to do, the apostles could do and did do. But the Seven could not do all that the apostles could do; they could not be the living links between Jesus Christ and his Church.²⁴

The Names of Those Chosen

Luke lists the names of all seven men chosen by the congregation: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The names are all Greek names. But we should not assume that all seven men were Hellenistic Jewish Christians. Greek names were sometimes used by native Hebrew Jews. Greek names also appear among the twelve apostles: Philip, Andrew, and Bartholomew. We can assume, however, that at least some of the Seven were Hellenist Jewish Christians, like Stephen. When listing the qualifications for the Seven, the apostles did not require that they be Hellenistic Jews. But by choosing at least some Hellenistic Jews, the church assured the Hellenistic widows of fairness in "the daily distribution."

Misunderstanding the Duty of the Seven

Many Bible students have concluded that since Philip and Stephen were gifted preachers and teachers, that deacons (if the Seven were the first deacons, which is doubtful) are to preach and teach. Commentators do not seem to know how to explain the facts that Stephen and Philip were gifted teachers, and yet church almoners.

There is, however, no incongruity between being administrators of charitable relief and being competent teachers of the Word. The fact that they were appointed to serve tables does not bar them from doing other ministries for which they are gifted such as teaching or defending the faith.

If Stephen and Philip seem to us to be overqualified for serving tables, remember that the twelve apostles themselves were both servants of the Word and servants of tables. The congregation's choice of these highly gifted men *demonstrates how important the task of administering the church's benevolence ministry was to the thinking of the first Christians*. It is revealing of the church's Spirit-filled love that the congregation chose its best to care for its least.

Because Stephen and Philip preached, performed miracles, baptized and confronted adversaries of the faith, we must not conclude that these are duties assigned to the table-serving Seven (or to the later deacons). Philip baptized people (Acts 8), but did *not* do so in his capacity as one of the Seven administering the church's charitable aid. Philip's baptizing of new converts was related to his evangelistic efforts, which he carried out after leaving Jerusalem.

The plain fact is this: *The Seven were not chosen by the congregation and appointed by the apostles to teach the Word, preach the gospel, baptize new converts, perform miracles, or defend the faith. Rather, the Seven were commissioned as an official group for the specific "duty" of collecting and distributing the church's funds/goods to provide relief for the poor.*

Spirit-Gifted Men Serving Tables

When the apostles list the qualifications to guide the congregation in its choice of table servers, they do not specify having an evangelistic gift or teaching gift. By virtue of their Spirit-given gifts, Stephen and Philip preached the Word and performed "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). They, like many other unnamed disciples, shared with the apostles the task of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 8:4; 11:19–21).

Stephen and Philip's roles as preachers, teachers, and miracle workers was not the result of congregational choosing or apostolic appointment, but of the gifting and leading of the Holy Spirit. *Stephen and Philip were both administrators of charity relief by choice of the congregation and gifted teachers of the Word by choice of the Holy Spirit*. They were multi-gifted men who held more than one set of responsibilities; they functioned in different capacities at the same time. As the saying goes, they wore two hats. The Seven were not barred from doing other things besides administering the church's benevolence.

V. A New Division of Labor: Word and Tables

Take a moment to reflect on this dramatic scene at the beginning of the Christian era: Before the gathered congregation in Jerusalem, the twelve apostles have presented their proposed plan for resolving the church's ministry crisis. The congregation has responded positively to the apostles' plan. The selection process has been completed. It is now time for the congregation to present their seven candidates to the twelve apostles for formal, public appointment to "the duty" of serving tables.

In the presence of hundreds, or even thousands of believers, the Seven stand or kneel before the twelve apostles. Before "the whole gathering," the twelve apostles place their hands on the Seven and pray:

And what [the apostles] said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

This entire scene demonstrates how seriously the twelve apostles and the first Christians took the responsibility of supplying the needs of their dependent widows and other impoverished members.

The Laying On of the Apostles' Hands

By the laying on of hands, the apostles publicly transferred to the Seven their responsibility and authority to supervise the church's charitable ministry.²⁵ The laying on of hands also signifies the apostles' approval of and blessing upon those chosen by the congregation.

The apostles did not create a new ministry for the poor. This ministry already existed and had been supervised by the apostles. But now, for the first time, a new body of church officials assumes the apostles' ministry of dispensing aid to the poor.

To be precise in our understanding of the passage, the laying on of hands in Acts 6 did not ordain the Seven to clerical orders. Nor did the laying on of hands make the Seven successors to the apostles or even assistants of the apostles. The apostles' hands did not convey the Holy Spirit; they were already filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather, the laying on of hands signified the formal, public appointment of the Seven to take charge of the church's charitable ministry to the poor.

From the moment the apostles laid their hands on the Seven, the new appointees became officially responsible for receiving the church's gifts and distributing charitable aid. The Seven formed a new distinct body of officials separate from the apostles, yet still under the apostles' overall supervision of the whole church.

Take note: *The Seven were not commissioned to preach the gospel or to administer baptism or to assist the apostles with all sorts of administrative and leadership responsibilities.* The task assigned to the Seven was narrowly defined by the apostles as "to serve tables." This was no incidental task. It was a scripturally mandated ministry, and a distinctive mark of the new Spirit-filled community of the Risen Christ.

The Seven

It is especially noteworthy that in Acts 6 Luke provides no official title or name for these newly appointed officials, such as *deacons* or *almoners*. When Luke refers to Philip in Acts 21:8, he identifies him as "the evangelist, who was one of the seven." Luke does not say that Philip was "one of the deacons." Luke refers to the original group as "the seven." In the next chapter we will explore this point in more detail.

The apostles' plan does not appear to be a temporary, quick fix to the long-term, chronic problem of providing relief for the church's poor. Rather the laying on of the twelve apostles' hands before the entire congregation and Luke's naming of all seven men *stresses the intended permanence of the apostles' plan and a significant first time event in the church of Jesus Christ.*

The *Diakonia* of the Word and of Charitable Relief

The apostles' plan divided up two biblically-mandated ministries – the ministry of the Word and the ministry of tables. Luke sets up an important linguistic contrast in order to present two contrasting but necessary ministries: the *diakonia* of food and/or funds (v. 1) and the *diakonia* of the Word preached (v. 4). Both preaching the Word and serving tables are designated as ministry or service (*diakonia*):

- Their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution [noun, *diakonia*]. (Acts 6:1)
- But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [noun, *diakonia*] of the word. (Acts 6:4)
- It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve [the verb, *diakoneō*] tables. (Acts 6:2)

The Ministry [*Diakonia*] of the Word

In Acts 6:4 *diakonia* signify the ministry of gospel proclamation as commissioned by Christ. Luke uses *diakonia* with this same sense also in Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19. Paul also uses the term *diakonia* similarly of his Christ-given commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry [*diakonia*]. (Rom. 11:13)²⁶

The Ministry [*Diakonia*] of Charitable Relief

In Acts 6:1, however, Luke uses *diakonia* for the ministry of charitable relief (see also Acts 11:29). Paul too uses *diakonia* for ministry of charitable relief. Writing to the Corinthians concerning the financial generosity of the churches of Macedonia, Paul states:

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief [*diakonia*] of the saints. (2 Cor. 8:3-4)

The apostles make perfectly clear to the church that they must give their undivided attention to “the ministry [*diakonia*] of the word.” In their special role as Christ’s apostles, prayer and preaching the universal message of salvation takes precedence over “the daily distribution [*diakonia*]” of food—a ministry also mandated by the Scriptures.

In order to keep their priorities straight, the apostles publicly placed the Seven in charge of the ministry of charitable relief so that they can concentrate on “the ministry of the word.” Both ministries are essential to the church, but for the apostles, the ministry of prayer and the Word are primary.

Praying and Preaching Are Obligatory Ministries

As men trained for three years in the presence of Christ, the apostles become, like their Master, men of prayer. Thus they say to the gathered congregation, “we will devote ourselves to prayer.”

They know that God has ordained an inseparable relationship between prayer and preaching the Word. They understand that everything they do is dependent on prevailing prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles also state that they must devote themselves “to the ministry of the word.” The “word” is the gospel message. In verse 2 the message is called “the word of God.”

The importance of preaching “the word of God” is revealed by the phrase “of God” (v. 2). It is God’s Word they preach, not their own clever, religious philosophy of life. Its origin is divine; it is “of God.” Its authority is absolute. The “word of God” is God’s own good news of salvation. The speeches recorded in Acts clarify this “word of God,” the universal good news of salvation through Jesus Christ for all nations.

The critical point is this: The Christian movement was and still is dependent upon persistent prayer and the preaching of the Word of God. Proclaiming the universal news of salvation through Jesus Christ was not to be hindered by anything, even the biblically mandated ministry of caring for destitute widows and other

impoverished members. The apostles recognized this and accordingly delegated the church's benevolent ministry, that is, the table-serving ministry, to other trustworthy men.

Serving Tables Is an Obligatory Ministry

Luke's other chief concern is the church's care for its own impoverished members. As a result of the preaching of the gospel, many poor people were converted. Our Lord declared of himself that the Spirit "has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). The early church was comprised of many poor people.²⁷

Supplying the needs of helpless widows and other distressed members of the new community was not an optional ministry. It was a divine obligation. Care for the poor is an important theme that the Law and the prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly addressed. The prophets Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, and Zechariah cried out against Israel and its leaders for neglecting and oppressing the poor.²⁸

Care for widows, orphans, and other suffering members is of great concern to God. Speaking of God's fatherly care of widows, the Psalmist declares,

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. (Ps. 68:5)

The best-known Old Testament figure exemplifying God's compassion for the afflicted was Job. What he reveals of himself should rebuke and inspire us all to greater compassion for those who suffer poverty and physical affliction:

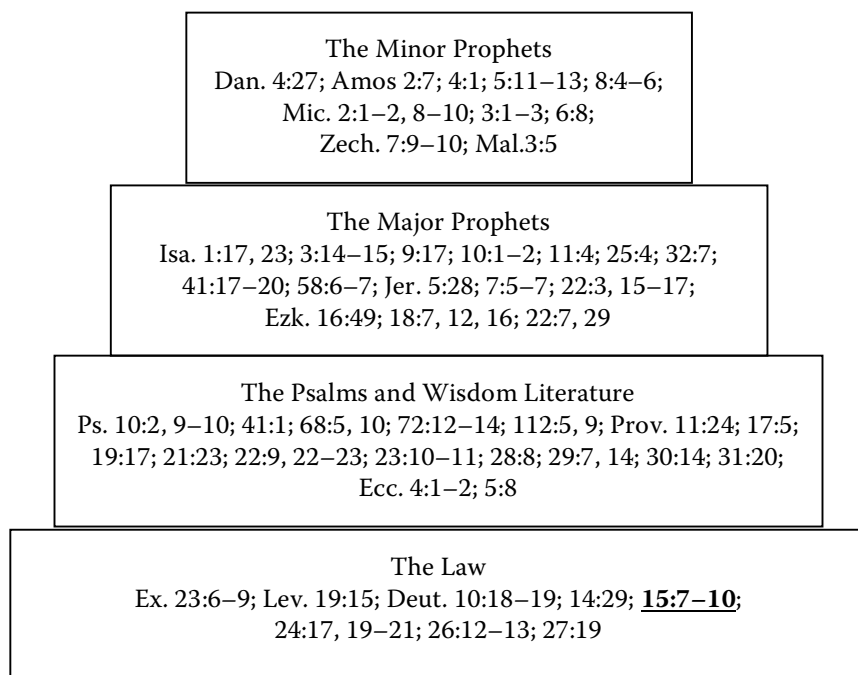
I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. . . . I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy . . . I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy. (Job 29:12–13, 15–16)

The first Christians, all of whom were Jews, knew the Old Testament passages above. Their minds were deeply saturated in Holy Scripture. Indeed, these new believers now proved themselves the true "sons of the prophets" (Acts 3:25). They fulfilled the prophets' vision for God's people to be generous and compassionate to the poor.

They would also know, from the apostles' teaching, the unforgettable words of the greatest Prophet of all, Jesus Christ:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matt. 25:34–40)

Old Testament References Regarding the Obligation of God's People to Care for the Poor



The Specific “Duty” of the Table-Serving Seven

By the laying on of hands, the twelve apostles commissioned the Seven to a specific *duty* (v. 3). The word “duty” is used almost like the Greek term *diakonia* (“distribution,” or “service”) in verse one.²⁹ This duty was not general Christian service; it was not any and all administrative tasks that the apostles might delegate to the Seven. This duty was “to serve tables,” that is, to supervise the church’s charitable ministry. It is the nature of the task that is central to Luke’s account.

It is important to understand that the Seven were assigned a specific task. The Acts 6 account is not about the art of delegation. Of course, that is a great lesson for all leaders to learn and relearn. And it is true that the apostles did delegate the ministry of benevolence to the Seven in order to make sure that the widows were properly cared for so that the apostles themselves could focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. However, that is not Luke’s main point. Luke is recording the first appointment of a body of church officials, outside of the apostles, to supervise the church’s benevolence ministry—a biblically mandated ministry. Luke’s dominant concern is with the church’s care of its suffering members. The church’s care for its needy members is a powerful witness to the reality of the gospel and the new Spirit-indwelt community of believers.

Acts 6 is not an isolated account about the need for leaders to delegate work. The theme of caring for the needy goes back to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:44–45), and it continues in Acts 4 and 5 where the believers sold possessions and placed the proceeds “at the apostles’ feet” to be “distributed to each as any had need” (Acts 4:35). The gospel had to go forth, and the believing poor had to be cared for in an honorable manner. Thus Act 6 is a part of Luke’s developing theme of ministry to the poor. Acts 6 is the climax to this theme and the final account of the first section of the Book of Acts (Acts 1:1–6:7).

At this climactic point in the book, the twelve apostles, with the full participation of the church in Jerusalem, *established the first official organizational body outside of their own apostolic office, specifically to serve the church’s poor and needy members*. This is a significant historical moment in Luke’s record of early Christianity.

Serving All Needy Members of the Church

Serving the church’s poor and needy members was not limited to serving only the widows or the Hellenistic community. Although the Acts 6 account addresses the Hellenistic widows specifically, the previous chapters

demonstrate that anyone in the believing community who was “needy” was to be helped (Acts 4:34). The Seven would serve anyone in the congregation who had true needs, men or women, Hellenists or Hebrews, children or elderly. The conflict over unfair distribution of aid to the Hellenistic widows was the spark that ignited the need for change and a new organizational structure to focus fully on the church’s distribution of aid.

Also, the ministry of the Seven was not to all the poor of Jerusalem. The Seven’s assigned duty was specifically to manage relief efforts for the church’s suffering members. The church could have no credible witness to its unbelieving Jewish neighbors if its widows were on the street holding up a sign begging for food.

The Word of God Goes Forward

For Luke, the gospel’s advancement was intimately tied to the church’s care for its own poor, especially its helpless widows. The good news of salvation had to go forward to the ends of the earth. At the same time needy members of the believing community had to be cared for, or the gospel message would lose credibility, especially in the context of a highly traditional, Jewish society as in the city of Jerusalem.

After the implementation of apostles’ new plan, Luke records that,

the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

The church’s display of generosity towards its widows and other destitute members gave powerful proof of the transforming power of the gospel. The significant importance of this theme to Luke is expressed well by Darrell Bock:

Luke’s portrait of the poor is an important part of his gospel and theology. Few things show the change the gospel brings more than how people in the community are to view the poor.³⁰

Thus the apostles’ new plan and renewed priorities puts the church and its leaders back on the right track with Luke noting that, “a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

The Inevitable Influence of Acts 6

The apostles’ speech regarding their ministry priorities and their newly formed organizational structure to provide for the poor would naturally have a profound influence on the new expanding Christian movement.

What Happened to the Seven?

After recording the stirring account of the appointment of the table-waiting Seven to administer the church’s charitable aid, Luke does not mention their charitable work again. Instead, Luke immediately goes on to describe Stephen defending the faith and Philip evangelizing the Samaritan. Their teaching and preaching activities have no apparent connection to their newly appointed “duty” of serving tables. Their ministry to the poor is abruptly dropped from Luke’s developing narrative. What is the reader to think?

Are we to assume that the new institution existed for a few months and then disappeared at the scattering of believers because of “great persecution” (Acts 8:1)? Did the apostles reassume the work of caring for the poor? Did the Seven pass on their ministry to others? Did the Seven fail in performing their duty? Luke does not answer any of these questions, and obviously that is not his intended purpose.

The fact that Luke says nothing more about the new organizational structure is not surprising. Such information gaps are the norm throughout the book of Acts. For example, Luke never again mentions the communal sharing of possessions or helpless widows of Jerusalem. Certainly the widows didn’t disappear from the church, and the problem of poverty persisted long after Acts 6.

Luke’s grand purpose for the book of Acts is not to follow the church’s benevolence ministry or the success of the Seven in serving to the poor, but to document the message of the gospel and its advancement “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

2000 Years Later

The lessons of Acts 6 must be repeatedly rehearsed by every new generation of leaders. Let me encourage you to thoughtfully consider the wise counsel of John Stott regarding the lessons of Acts 6:

The Church of every generation has to relearn the lesson of Acts 6. There was nothing wrong with the apostles' zeal for God and his Church. They were busily engaged in a Christlike, compassionate ministry to needy widows. But it was not the ministry to which they, as apostles, had been called. Their vocation was "the ministry of the Word and prayer"; the social care of the widows was the responsibility of others.⁸

Stott goes on to encourage preachers by saying,

If today's pastors were to take seriously the New Testament emphasis on the priority of preaching and teaching, not only would they find it extremely fulfilling themselves, but also it would undoubtedly have a very wholesome effect on the Church. Instead, tragic to relate, many are essentially administrators, whose symbols of ministry are the office rather than the study, and the telephone rather than the Bible.⁹

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, once minister of Westminster Chapel in London, summarizes the importance of the apostles' declaration in Acts 6:4 this way:

Now there the priorities are laid down once and for ever. This is the primary task of the Church, the primary task of the leaders of the Church, the people who are set in this position of authority; and we must not allow anything to deflect us from this, however good the cause, however great the need.¹⁰

Eric Alexander's words ring true:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this brief passage in Acts 6. Someone has described it as "The first definitive reformation in the Apostolic Church." Its relevance for us is quite simple. It is that amongst our greatest needs in the contemporary church is a similar reformation, and a comparable re-assessment of our priorities. The establishing of priorities is always a vital issue, simply because we all suffer from limitations, whether of energy, time, money or other resources . . . To fail to establish clear priorities means that we become the servant of whatever pressure group is strongest or most persuasive.¹¹

¹Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 357.

²Luke 11:39; 16:14, 19:46.

³See 1 Chron. 29:3-9, 14-17; also Ex. 25:1-9; 35:20-29; 36:2.

⁴*Diakonia*” – Luke 10:40. “*Diakoneo*” – Luke 4:39, 8:3, 10:40, 12:37, 17:8, 22:26, 27

⁵ESV, CSB, NKJV.

⁶J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1: 571; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 182; Luke 19:23: “Why then did you not put my money in the bank [literally, table], and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?” Also see Mark 11:15; Matt. 21:12; 25:27.

⁸NTME

⁹John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., trans. J. W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald, ed. D. W. and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:130.

¹⁰A. W. Tozer, “The Transmutation of Wealth,” *Born After Midnight* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1959), 107.

¹¹Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2001), 93.

⁸Ex. 16:7–12; Num. 11:1; 17:5; Phil. 2:14–16; 1 Peter 4:9–10.

⁹Matt. 28:19–20.

¹⁰Hermann W. Beyer, “επισκεπτομαι κτλ” TDNT, 2: 605.

¹¹J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1: 571; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 182; J. B. Phillips translates the phrase as, “to look after accounts” (*The New Testament in Modern English*).

¹²Luke 19:23: “Why then did you not put my money in the bank [literally, table], and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?” Also see Mark 11:15; Matt. 21:12; 25:27.

¹³In Acts 16:34 “table” is used as a metonymy for the food on it: “Then he [the jailer] brought them up into his house and set food [literally, a table] before them.” *The Epistle to Diognetus* 5:7 also reads: “They share their food [literally, table] but not their wives.” And in *The Didache* we read: “Furthermore, any prophet who orders a meal [literally, table] in the spirit shall not partake of it; if he does, he is a false prophet” (Did. 11:9). Also see Luke 16:21; 22:21, 30.

¹⁴John Collins argues that *diakonia* in Acts 6:1 is the ministry of the word. Thus, he asserts that the Hellenistic widows were being neglected in the daily ministry of the Word (*Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New* [Harrisburg: PA, Morehouse, 2002], 57–58); John Collins, *DIAKONIA: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 231; Contra: Clarence Agan III, “Like the One Who Serves: Jesus, Servant-Likeness, and Self-Humiliation in the Gospel of Luke,” 141–143.

¹⁵1 Kings 4:7, 27:

Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household. Each man had to make provision for one month in the year . . . And those officers supplied provisions for King Solomon, and for all who came to King Solomon’s table, each one in his month. They let nothing be lacking.

¹⁶Acts 1:14; 2:17–18; 9:36–39; 12:12–15; 16:14–15, 40; 18:1–3, 18, 26.

¹⁷Isa. 1:23; 3:14–15; 10:1–2; Jer. 5:28; Ezek. 18:12; 22:6–7; Amos 2:7; 5:11–13; Mic. 3:1–3; Mal. 3:5.

¹⁸Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 11.1, 4.

¹⁹*Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes* 9.26.2 [103.2] in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3d ed., ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 667.

²⁰BDAG, s.v. *episkeptomai*, “**to make a careful inspection, look at, examine, inspect** . . . look for with interest in selection, select w. acc.,” 378. See Num. 1:3; 1 Clem. 25:5.

²¹BDAG, s.v. *eklegomai*, “**to make a choice in accordance with significant preference, select someone/something, for oneself**,” 305. See Acts 6:5; 15:22, 25 (by the church), and Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24 (by Christ).

²²BDAG, s.v. *kathistēmi*, “**to assign someone a position of authority, appoint, put in charge**,” 492. See Luke 12:42, 44; Titus 1:5.

²³BDAG, s.v. *eklegomai*, Luke 6:13 (Acts 1:2, 24).

²⁴See Acts 1:15–26.

¹⁸Jeannine E. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse Francaise* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University, 1989), 75.

²⁵Num. 27:20–23; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22.

²⁶*Diakonia* used of Paul’s apostolic ministry of the Word: 2 Cor. 3:6–8; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; Col. 4:17.

²⁷Gal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 11:21–22; 2 Cor. 8:2; James 2:2–7.

²⁸Jer. 22:15–17; Amos 2:6–7; 5:11–12; 8:4–8; Mic. 2:1–2; 6:8; Zech. 7:9–10.

²⁹BADG, s.v. *chreia*, “**an activity that is needed, office, duty, service**,” 1088. Other translations: “task” (NRSV; NASB), “responsibility” (NIV).

³⁰Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 357.

⁸John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 206.

⁹Ibid., 124.

¹⁰D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 23.

¹¹Eric J. Alexander, *Prayer: A Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2012), 37.

¹²*Ibid.*, 28.