

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Not only did the early believers generously meet the material needs of the poor among them, but they also provided daily food for a good number of Jewish widows who were apparently not part of the church. In the early church, the poor were given greater priority than they seem to be in the modern church. Doubtless one of the reasons for this is that in developed nations, we don't regularly see undernourished widows begging in our streets. Our standard of living is so high that most widows are living well by the world's standards, and those who aren't have a host of social programs to assist them. But it was not that way in Jerusalem in A.D. 35. And it is not that way in much of the world today. For that reason, the ministry of Heaven's Family has a widows' fund that assists very poor Christian widows in developing nations. In my opinion, there should be thousands of such ministries in light of what Scripture teaches us. James wrote: "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress" (Jas. 1:27). This is Christianity 101!

One problem always arises out of benevolence: More needy people start showing up for the handouts. Those who are overlooked start complaining, as if they have a right to free food. We see that phenomena in today's reading. Paul later addressed these kinds of problems in a few of his letters, telling the churches, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (1 Thes. 3:10), and laying out detailed instructions regarding which widows should and should not be supported (see 1 Tim. 5:3-16).

There are always more opportunities to do good than any one of us have time for, and so we each should focus on those particular opportunities that, for us, have the most potential for fruitfulness. The apostles recognized that, although it was good to serve widows, it was not right to serve widows at the neglect of their higher calling of the ministry of the Word of God. By releasing what was a lesser opportunity for them, they opened a greater opportunity for some others, and the Kingdom advanced. Had the apostles not delegated their responsibility in order to focus on prayer and preaching, Luke may never have penned Acts 6:7: "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

One of those men who was given a greater opportunity to serve Christ by being selected to oversee the widows' food distribution was named Stephen. It wasn't long, however, before he, too, had to walk away from serving tables, as God anointed him to be a powerful evangelist. Take note that Stephen was faithful to serve in whatever way he could, and God promoted him. That is just how God works. He tests us in small responsibilities to see if we can be trusted with larger responsibilities. When we are only willing to do "great things" for God that earn us money or make us famous, then we disqualify ourselves. We must be willing to serve God in any capacity, and for no reward. Only then are we qualified to do anything in His kingdom. God only promotes those whom He can trust. If we are unfaithful in small things, God knows He can't trust us with more.

Incidentally, those seven men who were selected to serve widows are often considered to be the church's first deacons, a word that in the original Greek simply means "servant" not "one who sits on a deacon board to run the church and make the pastor's life miserable!" (Couldn't resist!)

The signs and wonders performed by Stephen are today's mention of miracles in the book of Acts! Every chapter we've read so far has contained a record of the manifestation of God's supernatural power. We pray again today, "Lord, less of us, and more of You!"