

# CHAPTER 6

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The discontent that was among the disciples about the distribution of the public charity (v. 1).
- II.** The election and ordination of seven men, who should take care of that matter, and ease the apostles of the burden (v. 2-6).
- III.** The increase of the church, by the addition of many to it (v. 7).
- IV.** A particular account of Stephen, one of the seven.
  - 1.** His great activity for Christ (v. 8).
  - 2.** The opposition he met with from the enemies of Christianity, and his disputes with them (v. 9, 10).
  - 3.** The convening of him before the great sanhedrim, and the crimes laid to his charge (v. 11-14).
  - 4.** God's owning him upon his trial (v. 15).

## ACTS 6:1-7

### THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS

Having seen the church's struggles with her enemies, and triumphed with her in her victories, we now come to take a view of the administration of her affairs at home; and here we have,

**I.** An unhappy disagreement among some of the church-members, which might have been of ill consequence, but was prudently accommodated and taken up in time (v. 1): *When the number of the disciples* (for so Christians were at first called, learners of Christ) *was multiplied* to many thousands in Jerusalem, *there arose a murmuring.*

**1.** It does our hearts good to find *that the number of the disciples is multiplied*, as, no doubt, it vexed *the priests and Sadducees* to the heart to see it. The opposition that the preaching of the gospel met with, instead of checking its progress, contributed to the success of it; and this infant Christian church, like the infant Jewish church in Egypt, *the more it was*

*afflicted, the more it multiplied.* The preachers were beaten, threatened, and abused, and yet the people received their doctrine, invited, no doubt, thereto by their wonderful patience and cheerfulness under their trials, which convinced men that they were borne up and carried on by a better spirit than their own.

2. Yet it casts a damp upon us to find that the multiplying of the disciples proves an occasion of discord. Hitherto *they were all with one accord.* This had been often taken notice of to their honour; but now that they were multiplied, they began to murmur; as in the old world, *when men began to multiply, they corrupted themselves. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased their joy,* <sup>290B</sup> Isaiah 9:3. When Abraham and Lot increased their families, *there was a strife between their herdsmen;* so it was here: *There arose a murmuring,* not an open falling out, but a secret heart-burning.

(1.) The complainants were *the Grecians*, or Hellenists, *against the Hebrews* — the Jews that were scattered in Greece, and other parts, who ordinarily spoke the Greek tongue, and read the Old Testament in the Greek version, and not the original Hebrew, many of whom being at Jerusalem at the feast embraced the faith of Christ, and were added to the church, and so continued there. These complained against the Hebrews, the native Jews, that used the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. Some of each of these became Christians, and, it seems, their joint-embracing of the faith of Christ did not prevail, as it ought to have done, to extinguish the little jealousies they had one of another before their conversion, but they retained somewhat of that old leaven; not understanding, or not remembering, *that in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew*, no distinction of Hebrew and Hellenist, but all are alike welcome to Christ, and should be, for his sake, dear to one another.

(2.) The complaint of these Grecians was *that their widows were neglected in the daily administration*, that is in the distribution of the public charity, and the Hebrew widows had more care taken of them. Observe, The first contention in the Christian church was about a money-matter; but it is a pity *that the little things of this world* should be makebates among those that profess to be taken up with *the great things of another world.* A great deal of money was gathered for the relief of the poor, but, as often happens in such cases, it was impossible to please every body in the laying of it out. *The apostles, at whose feet it was laid,* did their best to dispose of it

so as to answer the intentions of the donors, and no doubt designed to do it with the utmost impartiality, and were far from respecting the Hebrews more than the Grecians; and yet here they are complained to, and tacitly complained of, *that the Grecian widows were neglected*; though they were as real objects of charity, yet they had not so much allowed them, or not to so many, or not so duly paid them, as the Hebrews. Now,

[1.] Perhaps this complaint was groundless and unjust, and there was no cause for it; but those who, upon any account, lie under disadvantages (as the Grecian Jews did, in comparison with those that were Hebrews of the Hebrews) are apt to be jealous that they are slighted when really they are not so; and it is the common fault of poor people that, instead of being thankful for what is given them, they are querulous and clamorous, and apt to find fault that more is not given them, or that more is given to others than to them; and there are envy and covetousness, those roots of bitterness, to be found among the poor as well as among the rich, notwithstanding the humbling providences they are under, and should accommodate themselves to. But,

[2.] We will suppose there might be some occasion for their complaint. *First*, Some suggest that though their other poor were well provided for, yet their widows were neglected, because the managers governed themselves by an ancient rule which the Hebrews observed, *that a widow was to be maintained by her husband's children*. See ~~5:4~~ 1 Timothy 5:4. But, *Secondly*, I take it that the widows are here put for all the poor, because many of those that were in the church-book, and received alms, were widows, who were well provided for by the industry of their husbands while they lived, but were reduced to straits when they were gone. As those that have the administration of public justice ought in a particular manner to protect widows from injury (~~2:17~~ Isaiah 1:17; ~~4:3~~ Luke 18:3); so those that have the administration of public charity ought in a particular manner to provide for widows what is necessary. See ~~5:3~~ 1 Timothy 5:3. And observe, The widows here, and the other poor, had a daily ministrations; perhaps they wanted forecast, and could not save for hereafter, and therefore the managers of the fund, in kindness to them, gave them day by day their daily bread; they lived from hand to mouth. Now, it seems, the Grecian widows were, comparatively, neglected. Perhaps those that disposed of the money considered that there was more brought into the fund by the rich Hebrews than by the rich Grecians, who had not estates to sell, as the Hebrews had, and therefore the poor

Grecians should have less out of the fund; this, though there was some tolerant reason for it, they thought hard and unfair. Note, In the best-ordered church in the world there will be something amiss, some mal-administration or other, some grievances, or at least some complaints; those are the best that have the least and the fewest.

**II.** The happy accommodating of this matter, and the expedient pitched upon for the taking away of the cause of this murmuring. The apostles had hitherto the directing of the matter. Applications were made to them, and appeals in cases of grievances. They were obliged to employ persons under them, who did not take all the care they might have taken, nor were so well fortified as they should have been against temptations to partiality; and therefore some persons must be chosen to manage this matter who have more leisure to attend to it than the apostles had, and were better qualified for the trust than those whom the apostles employed were. Now observe,

**1.** How the method was proposed by the apostles: They *called the multitude of the disciples unto them*, the heads of the congregations of Christians in Jerusalem, the principal leading men. The twelve themselves would not determine any thing without them, for *in multitude of counsellors there is safety*; and in an affair of this nature those might be best able to advise who were more conversant in the affairs of this life than the apostles were.

**(1.)** The apostles urge that they could by no means admit so great a diversion, as this would be, from their great work (v. 2): *It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables*. The receiving and paying of money was serving tables, too like *the tables of the money-changers in the temple*. This was foreign to the business which the apostles were called to. They were *to preach the word of God*; and though they had not such occasion to study for what they preached as we have (it being *given in that same hour what they should speak*), yet they thought that was work enough for a whole man, and to employ all their thoughts, and cares, and time, though one man of them was more than ten of us, *than ten thousand*. If they serve tables, they must, in some measure, *leave the word of God*; they could not attend their preaching work so closely as they ought. *Pectora nostra duas non admittentia curas — These minds of ours admit not of two distinct anxious employments*. Though this serving of tables was for pious uses, and serving the charity of rich

Christians and the necessity of poor Christians, and in both serving Christ, yet the apostles would not take so much time from their preaching as this would require. They will no more be drawn from their preaching by the money laid at their feet than they will be driven from it by the stripes laid on their backs. While the number of the disciples was small, the apostles might manage this matter without making it any considerable interruption to their main business; but, now that their number was increased, they could not do it. *It is not reason, ouk areston estin* — *it is not fit, or commendable, that we should neglect the business of feeding souls with the bread of life, to attend the business of relieving the bodies of the poor.* Note, Preaching the gospel is the best work, and the most proper and needful that a minister can be employed in, and that which he must give himself wholly to (<sup><3045></sup>1 Timothy 4:15), which that he may do, he must not entangle himself in the affairs of this life (<sup><3046></sup>2 Timothy 2:4), no, not in the outward business of the house of God, <sup><3116></sup>Nehemiah 11:16.

(2.) They therefore desire *that seven men* might be chosen, well qualified for the purpose, whose business it should be *to serve tables, diakonein trapezais* — *to be deacons to the tables*, v. 2. The business must be minded, must be better minded than it had been, and than the apostles could mind it; and therefore proper persons must be occasionally employed in the word, and prayer, were not so entirely devoted to it as the apostles were; and these must take care of the church's stock — must review, and pay, and keep accounts — must *buy those things which they had need of against the feast* (<sup><3129></sup>John 13:29), and attend to all those things which are necessary *in ordine ad spiritualia* — *in order to spiritual exercises*, that every thing might be done decently and in order, and no person nor thing neglected. Now,

[1.] The persons must be duly qualified. The people are to choose, and the apostles to ordain; but the people have no authority to choose, nor the apostles to ordain, men utterly unfit for the office: *Look out seven men*; so many they thought might suffice for the present, more might be added afterwards if there were occasion. These must be, *First, Of honest report*, men free from scandal, that were looked upon by their neighbours as men of integrity, and faithful men, well attested, as men that might be trusted, not under a blemish for any vice, but, on the contrary, well spoken of for every thing that is virtuous and praiseworthy; *martyroumenous* — *men that can produce good testimonials* concerning their conversation. Note, Those that are employed in any office in the church ought to be men of

honest report, of a blameless, nay, of an admirable character, which is requisite not only to the credit of their office, but to the due discharge of it. *Secondly*, They must be *full of the Holy Ghost*, must be filled with those gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost which were necessary to the right management of this trust. They must not only be honest men, but they must be men of ability and men of courage; such as were to be made judges in Israel (<sup>DISC</sup>Exodus 18:21), *able men, fearing God; men of truth, and hating covetousness*; and hereby appearing to be *full of the Holy Ghost*. *Thirdly*, They must be *full of wisdom*. It was not enough that they were honest, good men, but they must be discreet, judicious men, that could not be imposed upon, and would order things for the best, and with consideration: *full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom*, that is, of the Holy Ghost as a Spirit of wisdom. We find the word of wisdom given by the Spirit, as distinct from the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, <sup>418</sup>1 Corinthians 12:8. Those must be full of wisdom who are entrusted with public money, that it may be disposed of, not only with fidelity, but with frugality.

[2.] The people must nominate the persons: “*Look you out among yourselves seven men; consider among yourselves who are the fittest for such a trust, and whom you can with the most satisfaction confide in.*” They might be presumed to know better, or at least were fitter to enquire, what character men had, than the apostles; and therefore they are entrusted with the choice.

[3.] They apostles will ordain them to the service, will give them their charge, that they may know what they have to do and make conscience of doing it, and give them their authority, that the persons concerned may know whom they are to apply to, and submit to, in affairs of that nature: *Men, whom we may appoint*. In many editions of our English Bibles there has been an error of the press here; for they have read it, *whom ye may appoint*, as if the power were in the people; whereas it was certainly in the apostles: *whom we may appoint over this business*, to take care of it, and to see that there be neither waste nor want.

(3.) The apostles engage to addict themselves wholly to their work as ministers, and the more closely if they can but get fairly quit of this troublesome office (v. 4): *We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*. See here,

[1.] What are the two great gospel ordinances — *the word, and prayer*; by these two communion between God and his people is kept up and maintained; by the word he speaks to them, and by prayer they speak to him; and these have a mutual reference to each other. By these two the kingdom of Christ must be advanced, and additions made to it; we must *prophesy upon the dry bones, and then pray for a spirit of life from God to enter into them*. By the word and prayer other ordinances are sanctified to us, and sacraments have their efficacy.

[2.] What is the great business of gospel ministers — to give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; they must still be either fitting and furnishing themselves for those services, or employing themselves in them; either publicly or privately; in the stated times, or out of them. They must be God's mouth to the people in the ministry of the word, and the people's mouth to God in prayer. In order to the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the edification and consolation of saints, we must not only offer up our prayers for them, but we must minister the word to them, seconding our prayers with our endeavours, in the use of appointed means. Nor must we only minister the word to them, but we must pray for them, that it may be effectual; for God's grace can do all without our preaching, but our preaching can do nothing without God's grace. The apostles were endued with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, tongues and miracles; and yet that to which they gave themselves continually was preaching and praying, by which they might edify the church: and those ministers, without doubt, are the successors of the apostles (not in the plenitude of the apostolical power — those are daring usurpers who pretend to this, but in the best and most excellent of the apostolical works) who give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; and such Christ will always be with, *even to the end of the world*.

2. How this proposal was agreed to, and presently put in execution, by the disciples. It was not imposed upon them by an absolute power, though they might have been bold in Christ to do this (<sup>508</sup>Philemon 1:8), but proposed, as that which was highly convenient, and *then the saying pleased the whole multitude*, v. 5. It pleased them to see the apostles so willing to have themselves discharged from intermeddling in secular affairs, and to transmit them to others; it pleased them to hear that they would give themselves to the word and prayer; and therefore they neither disputed the matter nor deferred the execution of it.

(1.) They pitched upon the persons. It is not probable that they all cast their eye upon the same men. Everyone had his friend, whom he thought well of. But the majority of votes fell upon the persons here named; and the rest both of the candidates and the electors acquiesced, and made no disturbance, as the members of societies in such cases ought to do. An apostle, who was an extraordinary officer, was chosen by lot, which is more immediately the act of God; but the overseers of the poor were chosen by the suffrage of the people, in which yet a regard is to be had to the providence of God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand. We have a list of the persons chosen. Some think they were such as were before of the seventy disciples; but this is not likely, for they were ordained by Christ himself, long since, *to preach the gospel*; and there was not more reason that they should leave the word of God to serve tables than that the apostles should. It is therefore more probable that they were of those that were converted since the pouring out of the Spirit; for it was promised to all that would be baptized that they should *receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*; and the gift, according to that promise, is that fulness of the Holy Ghost which was required in those that were to be chosen to this service. We may further conjecture, concerning these seven,

[1.] That they were such as had sold their estates, and brought the money into the common stock; for *caeteris paribus — other things being equal*, those were fittest to be entrusted with the distribution of it who had been most generous in the contribution to it.

[2.] That these seven were all of the Grecian or Hellenist Jews, for they have all Greek names, and this would be most likely *to silence the murmurings of the Grecians* (which occasioned this institution), to have the trust lodged in those that were foreigners, like themselves, who would be sure not to neglect them. *Nicolas*, it is plain, was one of them, for he was a *proselyte of Antioch*; and some think the manner of expression intimates that they were all proselytes of Jerusalem, as he was of Antioch. The first named is *Stephen*, the glory of these *septemviri*, *a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*; he had a strong faith in the doctrine of Christ, and was full of it above most; *full of fidelity, full of courage* (so some), for he was *full of the Holy Ghost*, of his gifts and graces. He was an extraordinary man, and excelled in every thing that was good; his name signifies *a crown*. *Phillip* is put next, because he, having *used this office of a deacon well, thereby obtained a good degree*, and was afterwards ordained to the office of an evangelist, a companion and assistant to the



apostles, for so he is expressly called, <sup><4018></sup>Acts 21:8. Compare <sup><40011></sup>Ephesians 4:11. And his preaching and baptizing (which we read of <sup><4082></sup>Acts 8:12) were certainly not as a deacon (for it is plain that that office was *serving tables*, in opposition to the ministry of the word), but as an evangelist; and, when he was preferred to that office, we have reason to think he quitted this office, as incompatible with that. As for *Stephen*, nothing we find done by him proves him to be a preacher of the gospel; for he only disputes in the schools, and pleads for his life at the bar, v. 9, and <sup><4072></sup>Acts 7:2. The last named is *Nicolas*, who, some say, afterwards degenerated (as the Judas among these seven) and was the founder of the *sect of the Nicolaitans* which we read of (<sup><4006></sup>Revelation 2:6, 15), and which Christ there says, once and again, was a thing he hated. But some of the ancients clear him from this charge, and tell us that, though that vile impure sect denominated themselves from him, yet it was unjustly, and because he only insisted much upon it *that those that had wives should be as though they had none*, thence they wickedly inferred *that those that had wives should have them in common*, which therefore Tertullian, when he speaks of the community of goods, particularly excepts: *Omnia indiscreta apud nos, praeter uxores* — *All things are common among us, except our wives*. — Apol. cap, 39.

(2.) The apostles appointed them to this work of serving tables for the present, v. 6. The people presented them to the apostles, who approved their choice, and ordained them.

[1.] They prayed with them, and for them, that God would give them more and more of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom — that he would qualify them for the service to which they were called, and own them in it, and make them thereby a blessing to the church, and particularly to the poor of the flock. All that are employed in the service of the church ought to be committed to the conduct of the divine grace by the prayers of the church.

[2.] *They laid their hands on them*, that is, *they blessed them in the name of the Lord*, for laying on hands was used in blessing; so *Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph*; and, without controversy, *the less is blessed of the greater* (<sup><3007></sup>Hebrews 7:7); the deacons are blessed by the apostles, and the overseers of the poor by the pastors of the congregation. Having by prayer implored a blessing upon them, they did by the laying on of hands assure them that the blessing was conferred in answer to the prayer; and this was

giving them authority to execute that office, and laying an obligation upon the people to be observant of them therein.

**III.** The advancement of the church hereupon. When things were thus put into good order in the church (grievances were redressed and discontents silenced) then religion got ground, v. 7. 1. *The word of God increased.* Now that the apostles resolved to stick more closely than ever to their preaching, it spread the gospel further, and brought it home with the more power. Ministers disentangling themselves from secular employments, and addicting themselves entirely and vigorously to their work, will contribute very much, as a means, to the success of the gospel. The word of God is said to increase as the seed sown increases when it comes up again thirty, sixty, a hundred fold.

**2.** Christians became numerous: *The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.* When Christ was upon earth, his ministry had least success in Jerusalem; yet now that city affords most converts. God has his remnant even in the worst of places.

**3.** *A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.* Then is the word and grace of God greatly magnified when those are wrought upon by it that were least likely, as the priests here, who either had opposed it, or at least were linked in with those that had. The priests, whose preferments arose from the law of Moses, were yet willing to let them go for the gospel of Christ; and, it should seem, they came *in a body*; many of them agreed together, for the keeping up of one another's credit, and the strengthening of one another's hands, to join at once in giving up their names to Christ: *polis ochlos* — *a great crowd of priests* were, by the grace of God helped over their prejudices, and *were obedient to the faith*, so their conversion is described.

**(1.)** They embraced the doctrine of the gospel; their understandings were captivated to the power of the truths of Christ, and every opposing object thought brought into obedience to him, <sup><4710></sup>2 Corinthians 10:4, 5. The gospel is said to be *made known for the obedience of faith*, <sup><4566></sup>Romans 16:26. Faith is an act of obedience, for this is God's commandment, *that we believe*, <sup><4123></sup>1 John 3:23.

**(2.)** They evinced the sincerity of their believing the gospel of Christ by a cheerful compliance with all the rules and precepts of the gospel. The

design of the gospel is to refine and reform our hearts and lives; faith gives law to us, and we must be obedient to it.

## ~~4468~~ ACTS 6:8-15

### STEPHEN'S ADDRESS

Stephen, no doubt was diligent and faithful in the discharge of his office as distributor of the church's charity, and laid out himself to put that affair in a good method, which he did to universal satisfaction; and though it appears here that he was a man of uncommon gifts, and fitted for a higher station, yet, being called to that office, he did not think it below him to do the duty of it. And, being faithful in a little, he was entrusted with more; and, though we do not find him propagating the gospel by preaching and baptizing, yet we find him here called out to very honourable services, and owned in them.

**I.** He proved the truth of the gospel, by working miracles in Christ's name, v. 8.

**1.** He was *full of faith and power*, that is, of a strong faith, by which he was enabled to do great things. Those that are full of faith are full of power, because by faith the power of God is engaged for us. His faith did so fill him that it left no room for unbelief and made room for the influences of divine grace, so that, as the prophet speaks, he was *full of power by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, ~~3008~~ Micah 3:8. By faith we are emptied of self, and so are filled with Christ, who is the *wisdom of God and the power of God*.

**2.** Being so *he did great wonders and miracles among the people*, openly, and in the sight of all; for Christ's miracles feared not the strictest scrutiny. It is not strange that Stephen, though he was not a preacher by office, did these great wonders, for we find that these were distinct gifts of the Spirit, and divided severally, for *to one was given the working of miracles, and to another prophecy*, ~~620~~ 1 Corinthians 12:10, 11. And *these signs followed* not only those that preached, but those that believed. ~~4147~~ Mark 16:17

**II.** He pleaded the cause of Christianity against those that opposed it, and argued against it (v. 9, 10); he served the interests of religion as a

disputant, in the high places of the field, while others were serving them as vinedressers and husbandmen.

**1.** We are here told who were his opponents, v. 9. They were Jews, but Hellenist Jews, Jews of the dispersion, who seem to have been more zealous for their religion than the native Jews; it was with difficulty that they retained the practice and profession of it in the country where they lived, where they were as speckled birds, and not without great expense and toil that they kept up their attendance at Jerusalem, and this made them more active sticklers for Judaism than those were whose profession of their religion was cheap and easy. They were *of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines*; the Romans called those *Liberti*, or *Libertini*, who either, being foreigners, were naturalized, or, being slaves by birth, were manumitted, or made freemen. Some think that these Libertines were such of the Jews as had obtained the Roman freedom, as Paul had (~~4027~~ Acts 22:27, 28); and it is probable that he was the most forward man of this synagogue of the Libertines in disputing with Stephen, and engaged others in the dispute, for we find him busy in the stoning of Stephen, and consenting to his death. There were others that belonged to the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, of which synagogue the Jewish writers speak; and others that belonged to their synagogue who were of Cilicia and Asia; and if Paul, as a freeman of Rome, did not belong to the synagogue of the Libertines, he belonged to this, as a native of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia: it is probable that he might be a member of both. The Jews that were born in other countries, and had concerns in them, had frequent occasion, not only to resort to, but to reside in, Jerusalem. Each nation had its synagogue, as in London there are French, and Dutch, and Danish churches: and those synagogues were the schools to which the Jews of those nations sent their youth to be educated in the Jewish learning. Now those that were tutors and professors in these synagogues, seeing the gospel grow, and the rulers conniving at the growth of it, and fearing what would be the consequence of it to the Jewish religion, which they were jealous for, being confident of the goodness of their cause, and their own sufficiency to manage it, would undertake to run down Christianity by force of argument. It was a fair and rational way of dealing with it, and what religion is always ready to admit. *Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons,* ~~2342~~ Isaiah 41:21. But why did they dispute with Stephen? And why not with the apostles themselves?

(1.) Some think because they despised the apostles as *unlearned and ignorant men*, whom they thought it below them to engage with; but Stephen was bred a scholar, and they thought it their honour to meddle with their match.

(2.) Others think it was because they stood in awe of the apostles, and could not be so free and familiar with them as they could be with Stephen, who was in an inferior office.

(3.) Perhaps, they having given a public challenge, Stephen was chosen and appointed by the disciples to be their champion; for it was not meet that the apostles should leave the preaching of the word of God to engage in controversy. Stephen, who was only a deacon in the church, and a very sharp young man, of bright parts, and better qualified to deal with wrangling disputants than the apostles themselves, was appointed to this service. Some historians say that Stephen had been bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, and that Saul and the rest of them set upon him as a deserter, and with a particular fury made him their mark.

(4.) It is probable that they disputed with Stephen because he was zealous to argue with them and convince them, and this was the service to which God had called him.

2. We are here told how he carried the point in this dispute (v. 10): *They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke*. They could neither support their own arguments nor answer his. He proved by such irresistible arguments that Jesus is the Christ, and delivered himself with so much clearness and fulness that they had nothing to object against what he said; though they were not convinced, yet they were confounded. It is not said, They were not able to resist him, but, They were not able to resist the *wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke*, that Spirit of wisdom which spoke by him. Now was fulfilled that promise, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist*, <sup><2115></sup>Luke 21:15. They thought they had only disputed with Stephen, and could make their part good with him; but they were disputing with the Spirit of God in him, for whom they were an unequal match.

III. At length, he sealed it with his blood; so we shall find he did in the next chapter; here we have some steps taken by his enemies towards it. When they could not answer his arguments as a disputant, they prosecuted him as a criminal, and suborned witnesses against him, to swear

blasphemy upon him. “On such terms (saith Mr. Baxter here) do we dispute with malignant men. And it is next to a miracle of providence that no greater number of religious persons have been murdered in the world, by the way of perjury and pretence of law, when so many thousands hate them who make no conscience of false oaths.” They suborned men, that is, instructed them what to say, and then hired them to swear it. They were the more enraged against him because he had proved them to be in the wrong, and shown them the right way; for which they ought to have given him their best thanks. *Was he therefore become their enemy, because he told them the truth, and proved it to be so?* Now let us observe here,

- 1.** How with all possible art and industry they incensed both the government and the mob against him, that, if they could not prevail by the one, they might by the other (v. 12): *They stirred up the people* against him, that, if the sanhedrim should still think fit (according to Gamaliel's advice) to let him alone, yet they might run him down by a popular rage and tumult; they also found means to stir up the elders and scribes against him, that, if the people should countenance and protect him, they might prevail by authority. Thus they doubted not but to gain their point, when then had two strings to their bow.
- 2.** How they got him to the bar: *They came upon him*, when he little thought of it, *and caught him and brought him to the council*. They came upon him in a body, and flew upon him as a lion upon his prey; so the word signifies. By their rude and violent treatment of him, they would represent him, both to the people, and to the government, as a dangerous man, that would either flee from justice if he were not watched, or fight with it if he were not put under a force. Having caught him, they brought him triumphantly into the council, and, as it should seem, so hastily that he had none of his friends with him. They had found, when they brought many together, that they emboldened one another, and strengthened one another's hands; and therefore they will try how to deal with them singly.
- 3.** How they were prepared with evidence ready to produce against him. They were resolved that they would not be run a-ground, as they were when they brought our Saviour upon his trial, and then had to seek for witnesses. These were got ready beforehand, and were instructed to make oath that they had *heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God* (v. 11) — against this *holy place and the law* (v. 13); for they heard him say what Jesus would do to their place and their customs, v. 14.

It is probable that he had said something to that purport; and yet those who swore it against him are called *false witnesses*, because, though there was something of truth in their testimony, yet they put a wrong and malicious construction upon what he had said, and perverted it. Observe,

(1.) What was the general charge exhibited against him — that he *spoke blasphemous words*; and, to aggravate the matter, “He *ceases not to speak blasphemous words*; it is his common talk, his discourse in all companies; wheresoever he comes, he makes it his business to instil his notions into all he converses with.” It intimates likewise something of contumacy and contempt of admonition. “He has been warned against it, and yet ceases not to talk at this rate.” Blasphemy is justly reckoned a heinous crime (to speak contemptibly and reproachfully of God our Maker), and therefore Stephen's persecutors would be thought to have a deep concern upon them for the honour of God's name, and to do this in a jealousy for that. As it was with the confessors and martyrs of the Old Testament, so it was with those of the New — their brethren that hated them, and cast them out, said, *Let the Lord be glorified*; and pretended they did him service in it. He is said to have spoken blasphemous words *against Moses and against God*. Thus far they were right, that those who blaspheme Moses (if they meant the writings of Moses, which were given by inspiration of God) blaspheme God himself. Those that speak reproachfully of the scriptures, and ridicule them, reflect upon God himself, and do despite to him. His great intention is to *magnify the law and make it honourable*; those therefore that vilify the law, and make it contemptible, blaspheme his name; for he has *magnified his word above all his name*. But did Stephen blaspheme Moses? By no means, he was far from it. Christ, and the preachers of his gospel, never said any thing that looked like blaspheming Moses; they always quoted his writings with respect, appealed to them, and said no other things than what Moses said should come; very unjustly therefore is Stephen indicted for blaspheming Moses. But,

(2.) Let us see how this charge is supported and made out; why, truly, when the thing was to be proved, all they can charge him with is that *he hath spoken blasphemous words against this holy place and the law*; and this must be deemed and taken as blasphemy against Moses and against God himself. Thus does the charge dwindle when it comes to the evidence.

[1.] He is charged with blaspheming *this holy place*. Some understand this of the city of Jerusalem, which was the holy city, and which they had a

mighty jealousy for. But it is rather meant of the temple, that holy house. Christ was condemned as a blasphemer for words which were thought to reflect upon the temple, which they seemed concerned for the honour of, even when they by their wickedness had profaned it.

[2.] He is charged with blaspheming *the law*, of which they *made their boast*, and in which they put their trust, when through *breaking the law they dishonoured God*, <sup><4023></sup>Romans 2:23. Well, but how can they make this out? Why, here the charge dwindles again; for all they can accuse him of is that *they had themselves heard him say* (but how it came in, or what explication he gave to it, they think not themselves bound to give account) that this *Jesus of Nazareth*, who was so much talked of, *shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered to us*. He could not be charged with having said any thing to the disparagement either of the temple or of the law. The priests had themselves profaned the temple, by making it not only a house of merchandise, but a den of thieves; yet they would be thought zealous for the honour of it, against one that had never said any thing amiss of it, but had attended it more as a house of prayer, according to the true intention of it, than they had. Nor had he ever reproached the law as they had. But, *First*, He had said, *Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place*, destroy the temple, destroy Jerusalem. It is probable that he might say so; and what blasphemy was it against the holy place to say that it should not be perpetual any more than Shiloh was, and that the just and holy God would not continue the privileges of his sanctuary to those that abused them? Had not the prophets given the same warning to their fathers of the destruction of that holy place by the Chaldeans? Nay, when the temple was first built, had not God himself given the same warning: *This house, which is high, shall be an astonishment*, <sup><4472></sup>2 Chronicles 7:21. And is he a blasphemer, then, who tells them that Jesus of Nazareth, if they continue their opposition to him, will bring a just destruction upon their place and nation, and they may thank themselves? Those wickedly abuse their profession of religion who, under colour of that, call the reproofs given them for their disagreeable conversations blasphemous reflections upon their religion. *Secondly*, He had said, *This Jesus shall change the customs which Moses delivered to us*. And it was expected that in the days of the Messiah they should be changed, and that the shadows should be done away when the substance was come; yet this was no essential change of the law, but the perfecting of it. *Christ came, not to destroy*, but to fulfil, the law; and, if he changed



some customs that Moses delivered, it was to introduce and establish those that were much better; and if the Jewish church had not obstinately refused to come into this new establishment, and adhered to the ceremonial law, for aught I know *their place* had not been destroyed; so that for putting them into a certain way to prevent their destruction, and for giving them certain notice of their destruction if they did not take that way, he is accused as a blasphemer.

**IV.** We are here told how God owned him when he was brought before the council, and made it to appear that he stood by him (v. 15): *All that sat in the council, the priests, scribes, and elders, looking stedfastly on him, being a stranger, and one they had not yet had before them, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.* It is usual for judges to observe the countenance of the prisoner, which sometimes is an indication either of guilt or innocence. Now Stephen appeared at the bar with the countenance *as of an angel.*

**1.** Perhaps it intimates no more than that he had an extraordinarily pleasant, cheerful countenance, and there was not in it the least sign either of fear for himself or anger at his persecutors. He looked as if he had never been better pleased in his life than he was now when he was called out to bear his testimony to the gospel of Christ, thus publicly, and stood fair for the crown of martyrdom. Such an undisturbed serenity, such an undaunted courage, and such an unaccountable mixture of mildness and majesty, there was in his countenance, that every one said he looked like an angel; enough surely to convince the Sadducees that there are angels, when they saw before their eyes an incarnate angel.

**2.** It should rather seem that there was a miraculous splendour and brightness upon his countenance, like that of our Saviour when he was transfigured — or, at least, that of Moses when he came down from the mount — God designing thereby to put honour upon his faithful witness and confusion upon his persecutors and judges, whose sin would be highly aggravated, and would be indeed a rebellion against the light, if, notwithstanding this, they proceeded against him. Whether he himself knew that the skin of his face shone or no we are not told; but *all that sat in the council saw it*, and probably took notice of it to one another, and an arrant shame it was that when they saw, and could not but see by it that he was owned of God, they did not call him from standing at the bar to sit in the chief seat upon the bench. Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to

shine, and yet these will not secure men from the greatest indignities; and no wonder, when the shining of Stephen's face could not be his protection; though it had been easy to prove that if he had been guilty of putting any dishonour upon Moses God would not thus have put Moses's honour upon him.