

**Acts 6:1-10 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup>This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup>So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. <sup>8</sup>Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. <sup>9</sup>Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, <sup>10</sup>but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

44-06-02-Jesus Works Outside the Box  
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Acts 6:1-10

Jesus is not bound by the boundaries we set for His ministry.

**INTRODUCTION: (Text as Scripture Reading)**

–During this series in Acts, I've made one thing clear: "*Jesus isn't done yet.*" Each sermon has been subordinate to that one main point.

–Jewish leaders put Jesus in a tomb, but He got out and kept working.

In this passage, Christian leaders put the work of Jesus into separate boxes, but Jesus got out of those, too. ***Jesus Works Outside the Box.***

–Humans like to be *organized*, to follow *patterns*, to *systematize*, to *categorize* things, and sometimes even people. It's our *religious nature*.

But **HOM.idea!** We will see that in today's text, *first, because...*

**I. God Is More Concerned About Attitude Than Administration–**

**v. 1-4**, *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

A. [Do you remember when racial prejudice kept certain people out of churches? Color of skin, not creedal faith, became the measure of fellowship. So-called 'great men of God' maligned God's character by teaching that the ungodly practice of segregation was His divine will.] That same *spirit of prejudice* was why "*the widows*" of Greek-speaking Jews were "*overlooked in the daily distribution of food*" by the Hebrew-speaking Jews.

B. I believe "*the Twelve*" apostles made a mistake in handling this situation as an administrative rather than a doctrinal problem.

1. If they'd sought the Lord on this issue, they might have come up with the same teaching which Paul later used to correct such a prejudiced attitude– **Gal 3:28**, There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

2. Instead they chose an attitude that *separated clergy from laity*, dividing the *spiritual* from the *secular*—an attitude that has been replicated in churches ever since– **v.2b**, "*It would not be right for us to*

*neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.”*

C. This religious attitude failed to recall Christ’s words and example:

1. He said— Mark 10:43b-44, “...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”
2. He exemplified this principle by *washing his disciples feet* and saying— John 13:13-17, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

**TRANS:** At first, Peter didn’t let Jesus wash his feet. Why? It wasn’t *religiously correct*. But *Jesus works outside religious boxes*. **He’s not bound by the boundaries we set for His ministry**. Later, Paul often did secular work alongside “*the ministry of the word*,” telling the pastors at Ephesus— Acts 20:34-35, “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” **[BTW, during my ministerial training, I made a conscientious decision not to leave my nursing job, in order to emulate Paul’s decision to see his secular job as a tent-maker as part of his total ministry, not separate from it.] But all of this is not to say that God didn’t use this administrative decision** by “*the Twelve*” nor those made by countless churches down through history. *In fact...*

**II. God Often Blesses Our Efforts— v.5-7**, *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

- A. When our administrative plans aren’t the best, God may still bless them, **if**, in filling positions of servant- leadership, we pick those “*who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom*.” (Today the big factors are *looks, popularity, educational degrees and charisma*.)
- B. Jesus was a *realist*, knowing that, when He said, “I will build my church,” He’d have to work with *saved humans who weren’t yet spiritually mature*. But, **if** those He’s building His church with are *full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*, they will have His wisdom and can be

the channels He wants for His ongoing work.

**TRANS:** Today we have the Holy Spirit for the same reason believers in Acts did: *Jesus is not done yet*. He’s still *building His church*, still  *blessing our spiritually immature efforts*, but also working outside the boxes where we sometimes try to confine Him. That’s because...

**III. Jesus Is Still in Control of His Ministry— v.8-10**, *Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.*

- A. Church leaders chose Stephen to resolve injustices in their ‘food-for-the-hungry’ program—which needed resolution by apostolic instruction—but God chose Stephen *to work outside the box*:
  1. God caused Stephen to turn his “*attention to prayer and the ministry of the word*.” (These were categories “*the Twelve*” claimed as their own domain of religious activity— a box of their own making!)
  2. But Stephen’s *prayers* brought “*great wonders and miraculous signs*.” His *preaching* confounded those opposing “*his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke*.” Why? Because, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was still at work, and He chose Stephen to be a channel of that work.)
- B. We may have good ideas about how to do *church ministry*, but the Person in charge of building the church is its Founder, Jesus.

**CONCLUSION:**

—In 1955 on an Indian reservation in Minnesota, a little Mennonite church had been praying for revival. Then, during a week of Bible school, 14 Chippewa young people got saved. But the church leaders weren’t ready for what followed. Several of them and others in the church began falling prostrate on the floor, speaking in tongues, having visions, and prophesying, sometimes calling out unconfessed sins that some in the congregation had kept hidden in their hearts. One pastor tried removing these entranced youth to another room, to regain control of the church service, but as soon as he carried one out, another fell on the ground under the power of the Holy Spirit. The church leaders didn’t know what to make of this strange behavior. But the early church would have said: “*Looks like Jesus is working outside the box again!*”]

—**What boundaries have we set for Christ’s ministry**. What if the Holy Spirit showed up here as He did at Pentecost? Do we want *revival outside the box?*... in our personal lives?... in our church life?