

NEW TESTAMENT



GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Lesson 29: "The Number of the Disciples Was Multiplied" (Acts 6-9)

- Seven men are ordained to supervise the temporal work of the Church.
- Stephen testifies before the Sanhedrin and is stoned to death.
- Philip preaches and performs miracles in Samaria.
- Saul is converted and baptized and begins to preach the gospel.

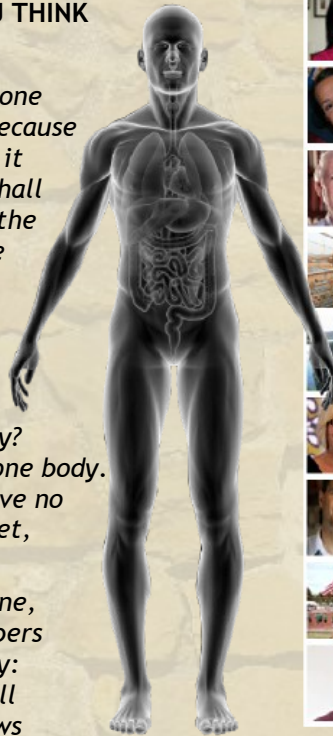
A study of this lesson will help us recognize that the work of the Church is done by many people, all of whom contribute their talents and testimonies to strengthen the Church.

Introduction

- WHICH PART OF YOUR BODY DO YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT?
- WHICH MEMBER OF THE CHURCH DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?

1 Corinthians 12:14-21: *For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13: *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*



in these verses the Apostle Paul compares the members of the Church to the parts of the body. Just as the foot, the hand, the ear, and the eye are important in their different functions, so are all members of the Church important with their different skills and talents.

Seven men are ordained to supervise the temporal work of the Church. (Acts 6:1-7)

Under the Apostles' direction the Church grew rapidly, making converts in many nations. This was cause for great rejoicing, but it also created some challenges. As the

Church grew, the Apostles needed other members to help direct the Church and build up the kingdom of God. As the Church grew, groups within it sometimes had disagree-

NEXT WEEK:
#30 "God Is No Respector of Persons" (Acts 10-14; Acts 15: 1-35)

ments with each other.

Acts 6:1 Some of the Greek members murmured against the Hebrew members because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. We as Church members need to overcome disagreements and divisions among us, whether they are based on ethnic, economic, cultural, or other differences.

2 Nephi 26:33; D&C 38:26-27 It is important that we overcome such divisions because “all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile”; and if we are not one, we are not Christ’s.

President Howard W. Hunter said: *“It is in understanding and accepting [the] universal fatherhood of God that all human beings can best appreciate God’s concern*

for them and their relationship to each other. This is a message of life and love that strikes squarely against all stifling traditions based on race, language, economic or political standing, educational rank, or cultural background, for we are all of the same spiritual descent. We have a divine pedigree; every person is a spiritual child of

God” (Ensign, Nov. 1991, 18).

Diversity among members enriches and strengthens the Church, so consider how we can differ from each other and still be unified.

Acts 6:2 The Apostles felt they should not take time from teaching the gospel to settle disputes and take care of other temporal business.

Acts 6:3-6 They resolved this problem by having seven faithful men selected to be responsible for the temporal work of the Church. It is important for the work of the Church to be shared among many people so that an overwhelming burden is not borne by a small group and so that all saints may have the opportunity to bless the lives of others through their service.

Some organizational changes the Lord has inspired latter-day Church leaders to make as the Church has grown include the addition of Quorums of the Seventy or the organization of the Church into areas presided over by Area Presidencies. These inspired changes have helped meet the needs of Church members throughout the world.

Stephen testifies before the Sanhedrin and is stoned to death. (Acts 6:8-7:60)

Acts 6:11-15 Stephen, one of the seven men called to help the Twelve Apostles, was arrested on false charges of blasphemy (blasphemy is being irreverent toward God or sacred things) and he was brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council.

Acts 7:1-53 As Stephen faced the Sanhedrin; he recited part of the history of the Israelites, emphasizing the mighty deeds of the Lord in Israel’s history. Stephen made sure that they could not forget the Lord’s workings in the House of Israel. He knew that remembering past blessings from the Lord helps us remain faithful in the present. Stephen also emphasized Israel’s frequent forgetfulness and disobedience to God.

In **Acts 7:51-53**, Stephen made a comparison between his listeners and the earlier disobedient Israelites.

Acts 7:54 records the people’s reaction to his comparison as they were cut to the heart and gnashed on Stephen with their teeth.

Acts 7:55-56 Stephen received a vision after he finished speaking.

Acts 7:57-58 The people, when he told them of his vision, stopped up their ears, cried out in a loud voice, ran upon Stephen, cast him out of the city, and stoned him to death.

Acts 7:59-60 Stephen’s last words of mercy reveal that his discipleship was sincere and complete.



Philip preaches and performs miracles in Samaria. (Acts 8:4-40)

Acts 8:6-8, 12 Philip, another of the seven men chosen to help the Apostles, preached and performed miracles in Samaria; and the people of Samaria responded to Philip’s message with joy. They believed his words and accepted baptism.

Acts 8:14-17 These people received

the gift of the Holy Ghost at the hands of Peter and John.

Acts 8:9-11 One of the Samaritan converts was a sorcerer named Simon who gave himself credit for the acts he performed through sorcery.

Acts 4:7-10 The Apostles gave cred-

it for the miracles they performed to Jesus Christ. This difference is significant because many people who compete for our attention and loyalty do so to glorify themselves. By contrast, God’s servants give him the glory. Understanding this difference may help us evaluate the many

influences in our lives.

Acts 8:18-19 Simon offered money for such a power when he saw the Apostles bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:20-23 Peter answered Simon's request with justified condemnation of such an evil offer.

Heb. 5:4 and D&C 121:36 tell us how a person becomes qualified to receive priesthood power—by obeying God and being called of God.

President James E. Faust said:

"This greatest of all powers, the priesthood power, is not accessed the way power is used in the world. It cannot be bought or

sold. ... Worldly power often is employed ruthlessly. However, priesthood power is invoked only through those principles of righteousness by which the priesthood is governed"

(Ensign, May 1997, 43).

Acts 8:25-29 Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch because he followed the direction of the Spirit.

Acts 8:30-38 Blessings came to Philip and to the Ethiopian because Philip followed the Spirit—so Philip was able to baptize this faithful man. As you consider this, ponder the blessings that have come to you (or to someone you know) because you have followed the Spirit.

Acts 8:30-39 The Ethiopian demonstrated humility as he asked for someone to help him understand



the scriptures and again as he asked to be baptized. Humility helps each of us understand and accept the word of God.

Saul is converted and baptized and begins to preach the gospel. (Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9:1-31)

Saul was a Pharisee who actively persecuted the early Saints. He was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and had been responsible for the imprisonment and death of many members of the Church (Acts 8:3 and Acts 22:4). However, he experienced a miraculous conversion and became a great missionary.



Acts 9:1-9, 17 Saul changed from a persecutor of the Saints to a great servant of the Lord and became converted when he heard the voice of the Lord.

D&C 1:38; D&C 6:23; D&C 8:2; and D&C 18:34-36 teach us how we can hear the voice of the Lord.

Conversion is often a quiet, gradual experience, not a sudden, miraculous experience like Saul's. **Elder Robert D. Hales** said, *"On occasion individuals can have [experiences like Saul's], but for the most part, conversion happens over a period of time as study, prayer, experience, and faith help us to grow in our testimony and conversion"* (Ensign, May 1997, 80).

Elder Ezra Taft Benson said that Paul's question, *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* is the most important question we can ask in this life (Ensign, Jan. 1973, 57).

Acts 9:10-16 records that Ananias was hesitant to go meet Saul, but went despite his reservations because the Lord instructed him to go. We should learn from Ananias' actions that God can give us courage to do whatever he asks of us and that we should never give up on a person, even if he or she appears to be beyond spiritual help.

Acts 9:17-18 Ananias blessed Saul with his sight and a command to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:19-22 Saul began to be a missionary for Christ immediately after he was baptized and then joined the apostles in Jerusalem. Our responsibilities, once we have been converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, are to strengthen others, continue in his word, live our baptismal covenants, and to warn our neighbors. (See Luke 22:32; John 8:31; Mosiah 18:8-10; D&C

Conclusion

We, like Stephen, Philip, and Saul, are living in a time when the Church is growing rapidly. The Lord wants each of us to serve in his kingdom as it grows. Recognize and appreciate the different qualities, talents, and experiences that each ward or branch member brings to the Lord's service.

