**The Grecian Formula**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A young priest decided to enter a monastery where he would be required to take a vow of silence. The head monk explained that he would only be able to speak *two words* every *ten years.* After ten years of total silence, he reported to the head monk and said to him: “Food *bad.”* The head monk nodded, and the young priest went back to work. After ten more years of total silence, he checked in with the head monk and said to him, “Bed *hard.”* The head monk nodded again, and the priest returned to his duties. Finally, ten years later, he reported the head monk and said, “I *quit.”* The head monk shook his head and said, “I knew this was coming. You’ve done nothing but complain *for the past 30 years.”*

Well, speaking of *complaining,* here in the early chapters of Acts, the Lord’s disciples are being given a taste of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and have been living together in perfect harmony—the way the Jews will live someday in the kingdom. But as we come to our text here in Acts 6, some people known as “Grecians” are *complaining,* and the apostles have to come up with a formula for dealing with their complaint:

**“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration” (Acts 6:1).**

Now to begin with, we have to ask a question: If the disciples were experiencing a taste of heaven on earth, as we’ve seen in these studies, how come somebody’s complaining*—and,* does that mean there will be complaining when we get to the kingdom of heaven *in heaven?* Well, believe it or not, the answer is *yes!*

Don’t forget, Paul says that “we shall judge angels” (I Cor. 6:3), and the reason angels will *need* judging is that there is going to be *murmuring* among them. Remember, Paul’s not talking about judging angels *guilty* or *innocent.* Only God can do that, and by that time, all *fallen* angels are judged and in the lake of fire. No, Paul’s saying that we’ll be judging *holy* angels.

As I’m sure you know, there are different *kinds* of judges. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, for instance, believers won’t be judged guilty or innocent. The Lord will rather judge how you served Him after you were saved. Then there’s the kind of judge you see in the Super Bowl. Some of those referees in the striped shirts are called *line judges.* They watch the line of scrimmage to see if any of the players jump off sides before the ball is snapped. It’s called *encroachment,* and it’s against the rules!

You may ask, “Is that the kind of judging that angels will need? Won’t they all play by the rules?” But that’s just it. Football players don’t *mean* to break the rules. They don’t jump off sides *deliberately* on purpose. They know they will cost their team yardage if they do. It’s just that they are *so eager to help their team* that sometimes that eagerness crosses the line and encroaches on the rights of the opposing players. And when that happens, it’s the line judge’s job to *judge them.*

And that’s how we are going to judge angels. Angels are *sinless,* but they are not *perfect.* And in their eagerness *to serve God,* they will sometimes encroach on the rights of *other* angels. And when that happens, the one who got encroached upon is going to *murmur and complain.* And then he is going to look to *you* as a member of the Body of Christ to decide the dispute!

Meanwhile, down here on earth, the twelve apostles will be judging the twelve tribes of Israel, as the Lord told them in Matthew 19:28:

**“And Jesus said unto them…ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, *judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”***

Once again, that’s not talking about judging the twelve tribes guilty or innocent. The only people who will sin in the kingdom and need to be judged guilty will be unbelievers, and *God* will judge them by carrying them over to the open pit of hill and casting them into it. No, the Lord was talking about judging the twelve tribes in the same way that we’ll be judging angels, by settling disputes among those saved Jews. They’ll be sinless, but they won’t be perfect either. They’ll need the twelve to settle their disputes. And we’re seeing that pictured here in our text in Acts 6.

Now what this means is that many Bible commentaries are wrong with they say that the kingdom program is starting to break down here. They point out to the verses that describe how the disciples were living here…

**“These all continued *with one accord*…they were all *with one accord…*And they, continuing daily *with one accord*…And the multitude of them that believed *were of one heart and of one soul”* (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 2:46; 4:32).**

…and then insist that the perfect harmony they were enjoying was beginning to unravel here in Acts 6. What they fail to see is that this is a picture of how that harmony is going to be *maintained* by the twelve apostles in the kingdom of heaven on earth, and by us in the kingdom of heaven in heaven.

Now if all this messes with your idea of what heaven is going to be like, and I’ve got you thinking that heaven won’t be as heavenly as you thought it would be, do you remember that old television show The Twilight Zone? In one episode, a criminal gets shot and killed by police and wakes up in heaven, where everything is *perfect.* I mean, he wins every poker game he playes, women are throwing themselves at him, so there’s no challenge there either. And just as he starts to get bored, he sees a pool table. He chalks up a cue, breaks—and every ball found a pocket on the break! Finally he blurts out to his spirit guide, “Heaven is *boring!* I want to go to the other place!” To which his guide replied, “Heaven? Whatever made you think you were in heaven? This *is* the other place!” Evidently you couldn’t say “hell” on TV in 1960!

Well, I would submit to you that if heaven were perfect in the way that most people think it will be, you’d soon be *bored out of your gourd,* as we used to say when I was a kid. By the way, the title of that particular episode of the Twilight Zone was called, “A Nice Place To Visit”—and you know why! It is because the rest of that old saying says, “but you wouldn’t want to live there!”

And you know what? If heaven were “perfect” in the way that most people think of it, it would be a nice place to visit. That criminal was enjoying himself in the beginning of the show. But you wouldn’t want to live there any more than that criminal, for you’d be bored beyond belief.

Heaven is going to be a lot like earth—just without the sin! Most people think that in heaven, they won’t have to go to work. And you have to admit that on some days, it sounds pretty heavenly to think about not having to go to work! But I’m sure you’d agree that things were perfect in the Garden of Eden, and yet we read,

**“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden *to dress it and to keep it”* (Genesis 2:15).**

I think it is safe to extrapolate from this verse that heaven is going to be perfect, but you’ll still have to go to work! Being a judge is a *job,* and to do our job we’ll have to go to work, and not lay back in a recliner while some angel dangles grapes above our mouths for us to munch on at will!

But now that you know why someone is complaining in this taste of heaven, let’s talk about the details of this dispute. And to do that, we have to talk about what a “Grecian” is. You see, Grecians weren’t just people who spoke Greek. And you know that because the Bible has *another* name for people who spoke Greek, one we read about in Mark 7:26:

**“The woman was *a Greek*, a Syrophenician by nation”**

People of other nations who spoke Greek were called *Greeks* in the Bible, like that Syrophenician woman. That’s because Greece conquered all other nations just prior to the opening of the New Testament. But Jews of the *Jewish* nation who spoke Greek were called *Grecians.* They were Jews who were raised in other countries, and who grew up speaking Greek instead of Hebrew, like the Jews in Israel did.

And the Grecian widows were being neglected in something called “the daily ministration” (Acts 6:1). What’s that? Well, remember, they were living with all things common, when

**“…all that believed…sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, *as every man had need”* (Acts 2:44,45).**

But for some reason, the needs of the Grecian widows were being neglected as they parted their goods to the needy.

Now the question is, how did that happen? Well, the Bible doesn’t say for sure. You’d think that it might have been because Jews in Israel who spoke Hebrew looked down on Jews who spoke Greek in those days. But you know that can’t be what was happening here, for purposely neglecting a widow was a *sin* (Ex.22:22), and these disciples were “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4) in such a way that they literally *could not sin* (I Jo. 3:9; 5:18). But if that’s not why these widows were being neglected, then what could have been the reason?

Well, the answer is, once again, those disciples may have been *sinless,* but that doesn’t mean they were *perfect* in the way that most people think of perfection. Perhaps the Grecians were the latest additions to the church, and the ministration system they had in place hadn’t yet caught up to them. Any time you get *multitudes* of people together, it multiplies the chances that something can go wrong, and that things may not work as efficiently as they would with fewer people to minister to. We just don’t know why the Grecian widows were being neglected, for the Bible doesn’t say.

But as we read on, we see how the apostles responded to their complaint:

**“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2).**

Now here it sounds like the apostles didn’t *care* about this problem. But that’s not what they meant when they said that it wasn’t “reason” that they should get involved. A man’s *reason* is his ability to *think.* When we tell someone to “listen to reason,” we’re saying that we’ve thought something through, and we want someone else to listen so *they* can think it through too! And the apostles reasoned that they shouldn’t stop studying and teaching the Word of God in order to investigate the cause of this neglect and correct it.

Now that’s not because they thought that serving tables was beneath them. *Berean Bible Society* founder Pastor C. R. Stam was one of the best Bible teachers of his day, but one year at the *Berean Bible Fellowship* Bible conference at Cedar Lake, Indiana, he volunteered to be one of the men who helped distribute the communion elements. I will never forget the moment when this legend in the grace movement served *me* communion.

And I’m sure that serving the Grecian widows food on their “tables” wasn’t something that the apostles thought was beneath them. It’s just that they were *apostles,* and apostles had all the gifts of the Spirit, including the one we read about in Romans 12:6,7:

**“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: *or he that teacheth, on teaching.”***

As apostles, they had the gift of *teaching,* and they were supposed to wait on it the way a waiter waits on your order for food at a restaurant. So to look into the neglecting of the widows, the apostles would have had to do some neglecting of their own, the kind Paul cautioned Timothy not to be guilty of in I Timothy 4:14:

**“*Neglect not the gift that is in thee,* which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.”**

The twelve apostles would have to neglect *their* gift of teaching to look into the problem of the neglect of the Grecian widows.

If you want to know how important it is for spiritual leaders not to neglect the teaching of the Word, the apostles felt it was more important than even the feeding of hungry widows! If your church teaches the Word, don’t let anyone convince you that you’re not doing anything important because you’re not feeding the homeless, or doing other things like that. Teaching the Word *feeds the souls of men,* and God says that it isn’t reasonable to stop doing that to start feeding people physically. If you can do both, great! But if you can only do one, *teach the Word.*

Pastors and other spiritual leaders who teach the Word can’t let *anything* stop them from teaching the Word. Not the stripes they might lay on their backs, as happened to the apostles in Acts 5, nor the problems that are always rising within the church, as we see here in Acts 6. For the study and preparation of Bible messages takes a significant amount of time. Recently Dave Stewart, the Bible teacher at the church I pastor, did a series on the typical significance of *wind* and *water* in the Bible. He mentioned that the word “water” appears over 600 times in the Bible, and said that he had read them all, and not just once. Then he looked at all the references to streams and rivers and fountains and pools.

And that’s the kind of dedication to the Word that the apostles are choosing to do as well. So, rather than neglect their gift of teaching, let’s read on to see what they proposed to do about this legitimate complaint on the part of the Grecian widows:

**“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3).**

So this is the formula that the apostles chose to deal with the murmuring of the Grecian widows. I entitled this article “The Grecian Formula” because there’s a hair coloring product for men that goes by that name. And just as it solves the problem of gray hair in men, this formula solved *this* problem here at Pentecost, as we’ll see in a moment.

But if this solution sounds familiar, it’s because the world has a name for it. It’s called “delegating authority,” and it’s something that every smart boss does. At *Berean Bible Society,* if BBS president Pastor Kevin Sadler had to do all of our jobs, in addition to studying the Word to prepare for our *Transformed By Grace* television broadcast, and all the other speaking and writing that he does, he’d be dead in a week! Instead, he wisely delegates authority to all of us.

And we know that *God* knows this principle, for we see Moses adopt this solution back when God multiplied the people of Israel in his day, just as the disciples are multiplied here:

**“*The Lord your God hath multiplied you*…How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?...So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, *and made them heads over you*…And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren…and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it” (Deuteronomy 1:10-17).**

As you can see, Moses realized that judging all of Israel all the time would have sent him to an early grave. So he picked men to help him judge them.

And when the disciples did that here in Acts 6, that freed the apostles up to do what they declared they would do instead of neglecting their gift:

**“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).**

Now incidentally, this answers a question that people frequently contact us at *Berean Bible Society*  to ask. We are often asked if we will know the Bible perfect the moment we get t heaven, backward and forward. The reason we’re asked this, of course, is that this is the perception of the perfection of heaven held by many believers. But if these disciples here at Pentecost were being given a taste of the kingdom, and the apostles gave themselves to the teaching of the Word, that must mean that the disciples needed to *learn* the Word in that taste of the kingdom, right?

Hey, if you want to talk about being bored in heaven, how boring would it be to know the Bible perfectly, backwards and forwards, the moment you get to heaven, with nothing else to learn *for all eternity?* Compare that to how *interesting* and *exciting* heaven will be as we continue to *learn* God’s Word for all eternity! The Bible is an *eternal* Book, and we are going to spend eternity learning it, as we’re seeing in this picture of the kingdom of heaven on earth here in Acts 6.

But now, what we’re seeing in this chapter is an example of something that often happens in churches, even today. These disciples survived the *attacks* raised against them by their religious leaders in Chapter 5, they weathered that storm of resistance raised against them from *without,* only to have problems from *within* rise in their midst, threatening to dismantle the church just as surely as any attack from without. But unlike some churches today, this church knew what to do about it. They let their leaders give themselves to the Word of God and prayer!

By the way, that’s how *we all* should study the Word—*prayerfully!* When I study the Scriptures, I’m always asking God, “What’s that mean?”, and saying, “Please help me understand what You are trying to say in this passage?” And when I study the Word like that, *it’s heaven on earth—*just like the apostles were experiencing here!

And *you too* can experience this kind of heaven on earth, you too you will study the Word prayerfully. And not just asking God to help you understand His Word, but also asking Him how to *apply* what you’re learning to your life.

Well, let’s see how the church liked the Grecian Formula that the apostles were proposing:

**“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch” (Acts 6:5).**

Now we’re not going to talk about each of these men individually, for we’ll talk plenty about Stephen in Chapter 7, and we’ll be looking at more about Philip in Chapter 8. And the rest of these men are only mentioned here, so there’s nothing more we can know about them for certain.

But there is one thing we can know about *all* of these men, and that is that *they were all Grecians.* We know this because those are Grecian names, those are not Hebrew names. That means the disciples picked *Grecian men* to look into the problem of the neglect of *Grecian widows.* That’s kind of the opposite of that old expression, “the fox is guarding the hen house.” You wouldn’t pick a fox to guard a house that he himself is most likely to rob. But the disciples here picked Grecian leaders, who were most likely to side with Grecian widows!

Now compare that to how those Jewish disciples *could* have settled the matter. They could have said, “You know what, this is a Jewish church, so we’re going to pick seven *Jewish* men to solve the problem, and if you don’t like it, you can pack your dirty duds and hit the four-lane.”

Of course, if they did, any unbelievers seeing that would rightly criticize them, saying, “What you *should* have done was pick three Hebrews, three Grecians, and one proselyte.” In the eyes of unsaved men, that would be the fairest way on earth to settle things. The world would surely think that *nobody on the planet* could possibly come up with a better solution—but God did! He thought of a solution that unsaved men would never *dream* of, for He inspired these Spirit-filled disciples to come up with a solution of *grace.*

You see, grace goes above and beyond the call of duty in every area of life. After speaking about “the dispensation of the grace of God,” Paul broke out into a doxology that began,

**“Now unto Him that is able to do *exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20).**

The power of grace that works in us today—or at least *should* work in us today—was working in these disciples here in Acts 6. When those Grecians complained about the neglect of their widows, the church answered *exceeding abundantly* above all that they could have asked, or even *thought* to ask!

And today, when someone encroaches on *you,* instead of getting upset about it, if you can respond with *grace,* you’ll be responding like these dear saints here—and like God Himself, for that matter, when we grieve His Spirit. And you’ll experience the heaven on earth that they were experiencing as well.

Recently I saw some grace believers *ungraciously* do what Paul tells us not to do when he wrote that charitable love “thinketh no evil” of other members of the Body of Christ. When these dear ones also failed to believe all things about their brethren—i.e., believe the best about them instead of thinking evil of them—it caused the life of one struggling believer to become exceedingly more difficult.

But now, before we read on, I will say one thing about “Nicolas” (Acts 6:5). And that is, he might be one of the ones that John talked about in I John 2:18,19:

**“…there are many antichrists…*They went out from us…”***

Not long after the events recorded here in Acts 6, there was a group of men who left the church and became *antichrists,* and it is possible that Nicolas was one of them. If you’re wondering what would make anyone think that, it is because of what the Lord said when He was congratulating a church in Revelation 2:6:

**“But this thou hast, *that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans*, which I also hate”**

Can you see how a cult called the Nicolaitans might have been founded by a man named Nicolas?

Now we’re not told what the “deeds” of the Nicolaitans were, but the Lord gives us a clue when He went on to tell a *different* church,

**“I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that…commit fornication. *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:14,15).**

Whatever the deeds and doctrine of the Nicolaitans were, they seemed to have something to do with *fornication.* And if Nicolas was one of the ones we read about in Acts 4:32, where

**“…neither said any of them *that ought of the things which he possessed* *was his own;* but they had all things *common,”***

then it is possible that Nicolas might have gotten carried away with this communal style of living. Church history even suggests that he did so, saying that men souldn’t say that their *wives* were their own, but that they should have *all* things common, *even their wives.* Can you see how that might lead to fornication? So it does seem to fit the verses.

Of course, I firmly believe that church history can’t be trusted, for pastors and teachers tend to make things up if it fits the Scriptures, and well-meaning pastors and teachers hear them repeat the things they made up and pick up these examples of creative history themselves. But I have to say, I’ve heard worse theories, theories based on little or no Scripture at all compare to this example. I hate to denigrate a man of God who is no longer here and able to defend himself, but I am more than happy to apologize to Nicolas once we get to heaven if what history says about him is wrong.

Well, now that the disciples have chosen these men to look into the problem at hand, all that was left was to ordain them:

**“Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6).**

Now when they laid their hands on those men, they were able to miraculously convey a spiritual gift, probably like the one we read about earlier in Romans 12:6,7:

**“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; *Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering”***

Doesn’t the gift of “ministry” sound like a gift that would help in “the daily ministration”? That’s doubtless the gift that those hands imparted to those men that day.

Now in the last verse of our text, we see the kind of effect that showing grace like this can have in the hearts of men:

**“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).**

As you can see, we are again told that the number of the disciples was *multiplied,* as was said of them just a few verses ago in Acts 6:1. Up until this point, we see that “there were *added* unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41), then “the Lord *added* to the church daily such as should be saved” (v. 47). And just last chapter we read,

**“And believers were *the more added* to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)” (Acts 5:14).**

But after adding to the church those several times, here the number of disciples begins to *multiply.* You know the difference between *addition* and *multiplication,* don’t you? As you can see, once the number of the disciples began to *multiply,* Luke stops giving us numbers like 3,000 or 5,000, for the company of believers was getting so large it was no doubt difficult to estimate their size. Such was the effect of grace at Pentecost!

And you’ll notice that even “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Up until now, Israel’s priests have been staunchly *against* what the apostles have been doing and teaching. But when they saw how *graciously* the disciples solved the problem of the Grecian widows, it caused “a great company” of them to *join* the disciples!

Is there anything you can learn from that? If you can learn to be as gracious when solving the disputes that you have with other believers, do you think that might show unbelievers that you have something they don’t, and cause them to want to join you? Hey, just two chapters ago, these priests were some of the ones we read about in the wake of one of Peter’s messages:

**“And as they spake unto the people, *the priests,* and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, *Being grieved that they taught the people,* and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold…” (Acts 4:1-3).**

Just a short time earlier, these same priests were *grieved* with the preaching of Christ. Now they’ve *joined* the ones preaching Christ! Maybe showing grace in *your* life will turn around some who up til now have been grieved with *your* preaching of Christ. You never know until you try!

Finally, when it says that the priests were “obedient to the faith,” that means they got saved! Remember, if God says to do something to be saved, your faith has to obey what He says to do. That’s the obedience of faith! And the thing that Peter told them to do was,

**“*Repent, and be baptized every* one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins…”* (Acts 2:38).**

That was the faith that had to be obeyed to be saved back then. Of course, to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” means they *also* had to do something *else,* something Israel’s rulers didn’t *want* to do, something we read about in John 12:42:

**“…among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; *but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”**

You’re not going to get publicly baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” unless you are willing to publicly confess that Jesus is your Christ! That wasn’t something the chief rulers in Israel were willing to do, but that was something they *had* to do to be saved, as the Lord made clear when He said,

**“Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, *him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven.*  But whosoever shall deny Me before men, *him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 10:32,33).**

Now if *you’re* not saved, you need to be obedient to the faith as well. Only the faith that you need to believe and obey is *different* than the one that Peter proclaimed at Pentecost. Water baptism is what they had to do to be obedient to the faith *in the Jewish nation,* but our apostle Paul said that he was made an apostle for a different reason. He said that he had

**“…received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among *all* nations, for His name” (Romans 1:5).**

Paul was made an apostle to offer *all* nations a chance to be obedient to the faith, not just the Jewish nation! And we know that he was given a different gospel for the nations to obey when he talked about,

**“…*my gospel*, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to the revelation of the mystery*…now is…made known to *all* nations for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25,26).**

As you can see, Paul’s new gospel involved the preaching of Christ, just as Peter’s gospel had. But it involved the preaching of Christ “according to the revelation of the mystery.” It’s the gospel he gives us in I Corinthians 15:1-4:

**“I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received…*by which also ye are saved…*how that Christ died for our sins…And that He was buried, and that He rose again…”**

And he never adds water baptism or any other work to his gospel. That’s important for you to know if you’re not saved, for that’s the gospel you have to believe and obey to be obedient to the faith in the dispensation of grace. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).