



**Serving and Persevering
Just Another Day of Confronting the Schemes of the Devil
Acts 6**

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Acts 6:1

“Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.” (NASB 2020)



Satan attacks internally as well as externally and both of those attack vectors will be seen clearly in Acts 6 and following. Satan has not changed his tactics either.

1 Peter 5:8

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (ESV)

Here at the outset of Acts 6, we are introduced to the term that the followers of Jesus were calling each other, disciples. “This is literally “learners” from *manthanō*. It is important to realize that the NT emphasizes “becoming disciples” (cf. Matthew 28:19), not merely making a decision. This designation for believers is unique to the Gospels and Acts. In the Letters, the terms “brothers” and “saints” are used to designate the followers of Jesus.” (Utley 2003, 91)

That means for us, here in the 21st century, even though we have other terms we banter about such as Christian, follower, saint, brother or sister, or believer; at the very heart of the matter, we are all disciples of Jesus Christ. When we come in faith to Him relying on His completed work on the cross for us, we begin not just a life here on this planet of learning, but an eternity of learning more about Him and discovering everyday what it means to have the great privilege to be called a disciple of Jesus Christ. What we see taking place are growing pains. As the church grows, internal dynamics begin appearing faster than teaching can be arrayed against it.

Here at Calvary Chapel, we endeavor to teach the whole council of God, the Bible, but as the Lord adds to us, there will be those who did hear a particular teaching. That is not unusual and is one of the reasons why we are moving to obtain a place to meet in to do church and add groups to what it is we are doing to do more discipling, as well as add possibly one more service on Sunday evenings to teach those things we all need to hear every now and then. Plus, it would be nice to have a venue to have an afterglow or believers meeting in and wait on the Holy Spirit to minister to us.

The apostles were meeting in homes, and they are teaching and praying constantly.

As the church grows though, the needs of the community also tend to change as well. The job of the apostles is trying to keep up with what the Holy Spirit is doing. The need to be flexible to His leading is exhibited here in Acts 6 and as we move in Acts 7, will become job one for a short while. But this is actually a good thing, but folks all react differently to growth.

Remember all of those folks from out of town who got saved? Most of them spoke Greek and are culturally, more Greek than Hebrew. How about all those locals who are now saved, they speak Aramaic and are culturally, Hebrew.

Let me see if I can clarify what is taking place in the church.

The Hellenistic Jews who are now disciples tend to dress like and sound like Gentiles. They are more “non-traditional” in attire, speech and actions. The locals, they are more conservative in their attire dressing and acting like Hebrews, not like Gentiles, not like Greeks or Romans.

In other words, you now have a group of folks being saved who into traditional attire added to a group who were not into that, and they spoke differently too. They did not speak Aramaic, both groups knew Hebrew, but one group would be using heavily accented Hebrew.

I have seen this before. Suits verses casual attire for Sunday morning.



Not much of an issue here at Calvary Chapel, but I do remember visiting a church years ago wearing blue jeans and a dress shirt, but every other male, including the children, were wearing suits and ties. My hair was a bit longer than everyone else's and I had facial hair, a big bushy mustache.

I was asked to sit in the back of the building and no one, I mean no one, even stopped to say hello. It was very distracting for me, and I never did go back to that church. The culture was changing and there were those not wanting to get on board with that. Welcome to Jerusalem post Pentecost.

There was already pre-existing friction between Hellenistic and non-Hellenistic Jews, and it was carried into the church as they were saved. That is not unusual, as we come to Christ, we do indeed come with the baggage we carry and then the Holy Spirit begins the process of changing us.

But this existing friction was now showing up in the church and it showed up in allegations concerning the ministry to widows and food distribution.

It appears that some of the widowed Hellenistic Jewish converts, were possibly being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Whether this is intentional or not is not stated.

Satan loves to use an unintentional wrong to begin a conflict. The Hebrews were right in their hearts, and the Hellenists were right in their facts. These were perfect conditions for a church-splitting conflict. (Guzik 2013, Ac 6:1)

As the church, this is one of those things we must always be on the lookout for, especially as we grow, and that is the perception of missing someone. This was not intentional, we see that from the reaction of the apostles, but it is also something they did not have the time to deal with. So, this sounds like the opportunity for a new ministry and for new staff to come alongside and hold up their arms.

Of course, we look at this and scratch our heads, so let's look at this from a cultural perspective of the day. Women at this time had very few legal rights and many were not allowed to work. Their husbands "protected" them while they were alive, but now that they are gone, there is no protection. This is a cultural vulnerability for all the disciples there in Jerusalem.

Here we have the first time that ministry priorities come into play in the church. The church has grown and ministry with it, but some of the direction the ministry went was also due to where they lived and the surrounding culture. This is not unusual, there will indeed come a time where we will need to assess priorities and make decisions regarding who, how and so on. No matter how much you plan, there will always be things that pop up that you did not consider, and decisions must be made.

We will see the decision of "what is a priority for the apostles" right at the beginning.

Acts 6:2–4

"So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, **"It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**

 (NASB 2020)

The Apostles call for a general meeting of all the disciples. They are allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and direct them and this is the result. The first thing they make clear to all in the church, it is not their primary job to serve food, waiting on tables and do administration.

They are not called to deal with the day-to-day financials or the benevolence ministry which has turned into a sizeable feeding ministry. The church is unified and the apostles, who have concentrated on the



teaching of the word and prayer, have determined that is their priority. But what has been brought up is indeed important.

Stop and think about this for a moment, this is an organized group. We are not provided an organizational chart, but we do get hints that they are indeed, well organized. They know how many are saved and they know that down to each day. There are multiple locations they are meeting in.

There appears to be coordination between each of these locations as funds are being brought in as well as various goods. These are consolidated and then distributed to those who have need.

Sin was confronted and dealt with as well, we saw that with Ananias and his wife. The growth though has hit the point that there is now a need for others to come alongside the apostles. So, the apostles charge the church with the task of determining who should lead this new effort.

Acts 6:3

“Instead, brothers and sisters, **select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom**, whom we may put in charge of this task.” (NASB 2020)

There are certain tasks I like doing, but I have discovered that I no longer have the time to do some of those tasks. There are some tasks I do each week currently that need to be done, and ideally, someone else should be the one doing them, not me.

When I was in the Air Force, we made assignments this way, find the busiest person you can, and give them the task to do. They will figure out how to get it done with the people they have. You never assigned anything important to someone who had nothing else going on. Work will expand to fill the available time. A busy person, even if they can't do it themselves, will find someone to get it done to their satisfaction.

The apostles know what they have been called to do and not to do. “They do not impose a solution. Rather, they make a proposal and invite the congregation to be part of the solution by selecting capable candidates who will be responsible for the food distribution.” (Schnabel 2012, 332)

In other words, let those of you who have been concerned with this, resolve the issue. Here are the requirements you have to deal with in the selection process. There will be seven men, who are μαρτυρουμένους (martyroumenous).

The word they use is in the passive implying this is their manner of life, in all they do, they are witnesses. The word “means to confirm or attest something on the basis of personal knowledge or belief, bear witness, be a witness...to offer testimony.” (Arndt, et al. 2000, 617) Their life testifies to what has taken place inside of them. The sense is to have a life that affirmed by the testimony of others, and yes, a good reputation would be one way of expressing this.

These men were also to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Full, πλήρεις (plereis) of the Holy Spirit. The word means to be “full; complete; full-grown.” (Newman Jr. 1993, 144)

The apostles left it up to the church to complete this task, and they did. Essentially, the new staff, were to be financial administrators and waiters. But, as we will see, the Holy Spirit would indeed mightily use them.

Acts 6:5–6

“The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte



from Antioch. And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.” (NASB 2020)

Don't get hung up on why seven of them. It isn't clear from the text about the number. Notice, all of those selected have Greek names. The need was in the Hellenistic side of the church and the workers selected were all Hellenistic. And Nicolas, was a proselyte meaning, he was not born Jewish but converted to it as a Greek.

- Stephen - Wreath; crown.
- Philip - Lover of horses; warrior.
- Prochorus - He that presides over the choir
- Nicanor - Conqueror; victorious; I conquer. Untimely victory.
- Timon - Honorable; deemed worthy.
- Parmenas - Standing firm; faithful; I abide.
- Nicolas - Conqueror of the people (Smith and Cornwall 1998)

I will give you all a warning about how I have operated as a manager in the past. Many times, folks would bring a problem to me that they had identified. They would indeed prove the case to me expecting me to do something about what they identified. I did the same thing the apostles did, you identified this need, what do you recommend and how would you fix it. That would always make for some interesting conversations, but it was also how I found potential new managers and leaders.

Everyone determined who met the qualifications, and then they submitted those men to the Apostles for approval.

Acts 6:6

“And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.” (NASB 2020)

“This was an important act of validating, not only these seven men as leaders, but also the Hellenistic community within the church. In the next several chapters, it becomes clear that the seven new leaders were more than just leaders of a ministry to widows. Stephen and Philip were preachers, prophets, and evangelists. Appointing the seven was God's first move toward taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

However, the apostles were not jealous of these new leaders like the High Priest and Sanhedrin were of them. They gave up control and shared power easily so that God's mission could succeed. Like all true followers of Jesus, their views of leadership were different from that of the culture (cf. Luke 22:24–30). Christian leaders are those who serve tables as Jesus did. (Bouchelle 2005, 65)

Having spent a few years as a management consultant, I had the opportunity to see how others in the C Suite managed. Those that shared with others usually had very little we could help them with. But then there were the control freaks. In some organizations, the CEO insisted on being in the loop on everything and they did not trust their own people to do the job. Lots of opportunity for improvement since the CEO, (Emperor) had no clothes on.

This is not just a problem in business, it also exists in churches around the world. God calls men and women to start a work, others come alongside to help, and you can either empower them, or squash them.

Yes, there are also control freaks with the title “Pastor.” The Apostles though are teaching us here that they were those who would prayerfully layout the criteria, and they trusted their brothers and sisters to do what was needed and pray over and find those men who were required for the job. The question I have



for control freak Christian leaders, “how big is your God?” He is the one who is in control, you aren’t. It is His ministry after all; it is His church.

How did all of this leadership from the Apostles play out in the ministry there in Jerusalem?

Acts 6:7

“The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” (NASB 2020)

There are still many being saved every day, and now we get another indicator of the impact the gospel is having, many of the priests who lived in and around Jerusalem were also coming to Christ.

There is something else that we see here as well, with the addition of others to lead aspects of the ministry, the freeing up of the Apostles to concentrate on teaching and prayer, what happened? Did the word of God increase because of this action?

Someone else was now handling the administrative duties and yes, those are time consuming jobs at times. But there are seven new deacons now for that. We do not know if there is a connection between what took place and the freeing up of time for the apostles with the increase in salvations and outreach to the priests. But it does make you sit and pray about it.

Doctor Luke also now follows up for us as he focuses in on one of the men recently appointed to this new role. We find out some about Stephen’s ministry and with an expansion of leadership, we also now see others exhibiting the giftings of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 6:8–11

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”” (NASB 2020)

Now we are seeing others, not just the apostles, performing signs and wonders. Stephen pursued his own ministry among the Hellenistic Jews.

This synagogue consisted of Cyrenians, Alexandrians and people from Cilicia and the province of Asia. These too were Hellenistic Jews from the diaspora who’d heard Stephen’s message of Yeshua as Messiah. The synagogue members argued with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom. He was not only performing powerful signs but also articulating Yeshua’s message in a way that connected with his Jewish brothers. (Kasdan 2022, 52)

Stephen was not smarter or better educated than those in the synagogue, but he was filled with the Holy Spirit. A side note, there are some who believe that this was the synagogue of Saul of Tarsus but that would be conjecture based on a place reference in the text, Cilicia.

So, what do you do when you are unable to reason with someone fair and square? You cheat and these folks did use the same card that the Temple leadership used to find testimony against Jesus. They paid for it inducing others to provide very specific testimony with the intent of having Stephen arrested and taken to court.

This is no different than what we see take place in some states here in our nation today. You want to challenge that photographer over there for their faith, ask them to shoot pictures of an event they will



never agree to take pictures of, then sue them. That is not a new strategy, it is what Satan does every day when he lies about us before the throne. Jesus is there at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

Hebrews 7:24–25

“but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, **since he always lives to make intercession for them.**” (ESV)

The exact subject of the debate is not stated; the messiahship of Jesus was no doubt the central issue, but Stephen expounded the implications of this messiahship more radically than his fellow-believers had hitherto done, with reference to the abiding validity of the law of Moses and especially of the temple order. The nature of his arguments may be inferred from the charges brought against him (vv. 13–14) and from his reply (7:2–53). The strength of his case was such that his opponents in the debate found themselves worsted. They accepted his premises (for like him they acknowledged the authority of Old Testament scripture), but they could not accept his conclusions, so scandalous and revolutionary did they appear. (Bruce 1988, 125)

Satan’s continuing tactic involves one of his basic attributes, deception and lying. Satan is a liar, he is a deceiver, and he is a murderer, and we need to remember that.

We also need to remember something else too.

1 John 4:4

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (NASB 2020)

Other than the fact that Jesus has already defeated Satan on the cross, why does he and all of his minions hate us so much? I like how Adrian Rogers puts it: “Because God has set His affection on you. Satan’s war is not really with you; Satan’s war is with God. The only reason Satan wishes to harm you is to get at the heart of God. Do you know people have known for a long time that when there’s someone, and you cannot hurt that one, the best way to get to them is to hurt someone they love? Isn’t that true? And so, Satan wants to harm you, because God has set His affection on you and God loves you.” (Rogers 2017, Eph 6:10-20)

Why is there so much antisemitism today? Same reason. They are God’s people and per Paul, God is not done with His people yet (Romans 11). When they all as one ask for Messiah to return (Zechariah 13:9), He does. Satan knows that so what better way to prevent that than to try and destroy the Jews as a people. Those who try though discover that Geneses 12:3 is still in effect.

Genesis 12:3

“I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (CJB)

And then in the Hebrew are small tidbits that we read and discover the applicability even today. For example, God hates those who hate violence.

Psalms 11:5 “The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.” (ESV)

In Hebrew, the word violence is **חָמָס** (hāmās) I find it incredibly intriguing to read here in Psalms 11 that God hates those who love violence. He hates those who love hamas. Knowing that, you would think that those at war with Israel would come up with another name.



But the reality is this is just one more round of Satan trying to destroy God's people and thus, God hates those who practice what Hamas espouses, violence.

Acts 6:12–15

“And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop speaking against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us.” And all who were sitting in the Council stared at him, and they saw his face, which was like the face of an angel.” (NASB 2020)

Stirring up the people means that those who were doing this, were publicly defaming and slandering Stephen. This is not a new tactic either.

It always seems to be new when we see this take place today, but Satan has been using the same deception routines for thousands of years. Spreading false news around is not new either as we see here the group that Satan was using in the synagogue were using the same play book.

What this does tell us is that those in the synagogue could not do anything until they had marshalled the popular support for what they wanted to do. Popular opinion is a fickle thing if that is what you rely on for guidance. The culture around us is all in the control of the enemy, we must remember that.

Let's do a quick survey of how well popular support works for us as believers.

In Luke 19:35-40, the crowds were all praising Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. In less than a week, those same crowds were screaming, crucify Him (Luke 23:18-23). Jesus Himself told us that if the crowd hated Him, they will also hate us. Not a might hates us, but an affirmative will.

Here is a serious clue for us, forget having popular support for the ministry of the church...ever.

John 15:20–25

“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” (ESV)

If you are going to lie about someone, you have to know your audience and know what will get them emotionally bugged and join with you no matter how irrational it all is. They do this by attacking Stephen and by the way, he did indeed teach these things, but they were all twisted to create a straw man that those who are lying can point to. Spoilers, this is still done today as well.

Take a look at the truth and their perspective.

Jesus was greater than Moses (blasphemous words against Moses). Jesus was God (blasphemous words against ... God). Jesus was greater than the temple (blasphemous words against this holy place). Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (blasphemous words against ... the law). Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions (Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change customs). Of course, Stephen never taught against Moses and God, but his glorification of Jesus was twisted. Stephen never spoke blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple), but he would not make it



an idol as many Jewish people in that day did. Stephen had his words twisted, and false accusations were brought against him. (Guzik 2013, Ac 6:11-14)

The straw man has been completed. Unlike today where this is all done on Facebook and Twitter, to get the culture to believe in the wrongdoing of someone, who in most cases has done nothing. That can be done today in hours, but this took talking and visiting and maintaining the story for weeks until the level of anger has reached the appropriate point. Now, let's see if we can get this man canceled.

Once they have that line reached, then it is time for the show there at the Temple. Stephen is brought in to answer for himself, all of the false allegations that have been made. But first, more witnesses who are not witnesses. The Temple is corrupt, we already know that, so it is not terribly surprising to read this.

Acts 6:13–15

"They put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man does not stop speaking against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us.' And all who were sitting in the Council stared at him, and they saw his face, which was like the face of an angel." (NASB 2020)

The tactic of the enemy then and now is the same, get the decision makers emotionally invested in the allegations against the condemned. David confronted this multiple times in his life, so did the prophets, Moses was as well. Yet here we are, having Moses, who some worship more than God, being held up as an example by those who ignored Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of a prophecy of Moses.

Just as they killed all the prophets before Jesus, they also murdered Him as well. It is not about faith; it is about tradition now.

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

"Moses continued, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.' 'Then the LORD said to me, 'What they have said is right. I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.'" (NLT)

The charges being brought against Stephen about the Temple are dangerous. Stephen, had an understanding of the words of Jesus that brought him to this place. In other words, those Jews who came from another culture, were not coloring the teachings of the apostles and the words of Christ with the same brush of tradition that those who are from Jerusalem would.

Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the accusation that he said Jesus would destroy the temple, he certainly grasped and expounded the inner meaning of Jesus' own words...Stephen held that the gospel meant the end of the sacrificial cultus and all the ceremonial law. As he and his fellow-Hellenists saw the situation, those things were the outward and visible sign of Jewish particularism, and could not be reconciled with the wider scope of the salvation accomplished by Jesus. Jesus himself had said that with his message of the kingdom "something greater than the temple" had come (Matt. 12:6). (Bruce 1988, 127-128)

We read the accusations and tend to go, yep. He did and yep, fulfilled in 70 AD. But those who were in religious leadership at that time would not know of what was coming in less than 40 years, some of whom who would witness and die in those events.



Accusations made, emotions fully charge up, and they give Stephen the good old fashioned scary stare. The “how dare you” look from those who are righteously indignant for no good reason. And as they stare at him, they are not even getting the physical response they wanted, they want remorse, instead, they get the confidence and calm of an angel. No worries with Stephen, none at all. He knows what Jesus said.

Luke 12:11–12

““And when you are brought to trial in the synagogues and before rulers and authorities, don’t worry about how to defend yourself or what to say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what needs to be said.”” (NLT)

In our culture today, followers of Jesus Christ are still being actively canceled by those who believe they are right to do so. After all, we do not accept the things our culture wants us to accept. The division is really very clear. The only new thing added, is now it is not the Temple leadership condemning us for our intolerance, it is “progressive” Christians as well as others who have rejected the word in favor of the world.

What we see today is also, because we insist on following the Bible, all of it. The culture reviles us for “opposing some of the values most cherished by culture, we’re increasingly hated as a group. The gatekeepers would love nothing more than for us to just keep serving soup while being silent about the issues on which we’re at odds with culture—and that’s a tempting proposition for many Christians. After all, if we did that, culture would like us (or at least like us more). Who wants to be hated? But being hated is exactly what Jesus told us to expect if we’re going to follow His commands. Silence in exchange for cultural respect is a deal with the devil.” (Crain 2025, 22)

It is shocking to understand what is happening to Stephen is what has also happened to many followers of Jesus Christ over the centuries and is still happening today. What would cause someone to be willing to be subjected to this kind of treatment? Salvation. A relationship with the God of the universe and knowing that all the sin you ever did has been forgiven and you will live forever with Him. Having God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, living inside of us seals the deal. Yes, we are not citizens of this world anymore, and the locals sometimes get a bit restless with us due to that. Why not join us?

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

ABC’s of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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