

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

SERVING (ACTS 6:1-2)

MORE PEOPLE MEANS MORE COMPLEXITY

The church was growing at rapid speed, but in the growth, one group called Hellenistic Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were not being looked after.

- **Hellenists** were Jews that lived among Gentiles, adopted Greek culture and used the Septuagint.

AN ACCUSATION OF DISCRIMINATION

Hellenistic Jews would've been the minority, and they felt like their elderly weren't getting the same benefits as the Hebraic Jews' elderly.

- This was not a racial problem (they were all Jews), but a **prejudice towards others that didn't look or talk like the majority, even though they all worshipped Christ.**

HELPING THE WIDOW, ORPHAN, AND INCAPABLE

In this time, there was no Medicare, welfare, or non-profits to aid those that could not help themselves.

The responsibility of social well-being fell on the church.

- Gov't and non-profits should help relieve the effects of poverty, but **it is the church that will ultimately be held accountable for ministering to people in need.**

INTENTIONAL ABOUT DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM

The 12 disciples gathered all the Believers together and they came up with a plan to appoint some men to serve the poor while the original 12 focused on teaching.

- **Ministry is not just teaching the Word, but also serving those around us. We must be careful not to take "small" tasks for granted.**

THIS GOES BEYOND JUST FEEDING PEOPLE

Notice that v2 talks about "financial matters," not just rationing out food. We see here that funds should be given to the church in order to distribute resources to those who need help.

- **Unfortunately modern churches use almost all their funds for hefty salaries and elaborate buildings, not helping the helpless.**

QUALITY (ACTS 6:3-4)

SELECTING THE 7

The 12 disciples asked the other believers to choose 7 men to handle the benevolence side of the ministry.

- Jewish courts commonly consisted of 7 people, and at this time, Jewish culture would only allow men to lead. This was not a Christian standard, but them having to work within cultural confines.

HIERARCHY WAS NOT THE INTENTION

Many believe this was the beginning of deacons in the church, but the point here wasn't to create officers, but to serve people.

- **If we are not careful, we can care more about the position and the prestige than the people we are to be helping.** We must remember we are a body, and **every part is vitally important.**

THERE IS A STANDARD FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

There were 3 core characteristics that they looked for in choosing leaders: a good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom.

- If we are to advance the Kingdom, we must have **good ethics in business, be honest, display the Fruit of the Spirit** (Galatians 5), and **display the gift of wisdom.**

SELECTION (ACTS 6:5-7)

LAYING HANDS AND COMMISSIONING

After the selected men were agreed upon, the apostles laid hands on them, prayed, and empowered them to go minister.

- Luke mentions "laying of hands" in regards to healing, giving the Spirit, and in commissioning others to serve.

THE CHURCH ADVANCED. HOW?

They not only taught the gospel, but they got involved in **social issues** and recognized that people needed **practical help.**

- They **adapted** in order to meet the needs of the culture around them
- They **treated all people equally.** They didn't place blame or show favoritism.

THE POINT IS MINISTRY

"The one who rows the boat seldom has time to rock it." The early Christians didn't have time to sit and complain; they wanted to minister to people in need.

- This doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about problems or inefficiencies, but **if our hands are busy serving, our mouths have little time to grumble.**

SOME UNLIKELY CONVERTS

Luke records that the church continued to grow and that many of the priests had also started to follow Jesus.

- These were the workers of the temple, not the Sanhedrin level rabbis. There were roughly 18,000 poor and devoted men that helped with temple duties.

OPPOSITION (ACTS 6:8-11)

A YOUNG MAN NAMED STEPHEN

Luke says he was "full of grace and power" and that he was "performing great wonders and signs among the people."

- As Stephen was making an impact, the Greek speaking Freedmen's Synagogue became angry and opposed Stephen. We start to see **Christian opposition will come from all kinds of people.**

ISN'T IT IRONIC?

The same group of people that complained about not being treated fairly are now criticizing Stephen, who was once a "benevolence distributor."

- The disagreement was theological, but as they tried to argue with Steve, his wisdom and power effectively shut them down. **God will give us the words.**

CRITICISM AND ACCUSATION

Isn't it interesting that all of the opposition up to this point in the NT is from the very people that should know better? **Though we receive opposition from all corners, isn't it fascinating how often Christians tear down other Believers?**

ACCUSATION (ACTS 6:12-15)

"THEY STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE"

Rumors and slander about Stephen had affected the majority of the community as false witnesses rose up to testify against an innocent man.

- This is the first time besides Jesus that we see the general population come against a Christian, but this is the beginning of the third trial for Christians.

FALSE ACCUSATIONS

The Greek speaking Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy, threatening the temple, and contradicting Jewish law.

- They claimed that he said Jesus would destroy the temple and the law, but Jesus only affirmed/ consummated the law and only spoke of His body as a temple to be destroyed.

THIS SCENARIO SEEMS ODDLY FAMILIAR...

As the slanderous and violent religious leaders "looked intently at him and saw his face was like the face of an angel," we are reminded of how Christ **confidently and graciously stood in front of His accusers.**

- Here we see that a **follower of Christ is to emulate and act like Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

LOOKING INTO HIS EYES

- When the accusers looked into the eyes of Stephen they must have been shocked at what they saw: not anger, fear, bitterness, or hatred, but gentle confidence, peace, security, courage, and compassion.
- We can only display this fruit if the seed of the Holy Spirit has been planted and fostered in us.

WHAT ABOUT OUR EYES?

- What do people see when they gaze into the depths of our souls?
- In the face of hatred how do we respond?
- Do we love or even care to engage the darkest corners of humanity? What about the darkest corners of ourselves?
- Do we understand how desperately we need God's Spirit?