

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 14TH–15TH, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

A COMPLAINT (ACTS 6:1)

“THE DISCIPLES WERE INCREASING IN NUMBER...”

At this point, the church in Jerusalem was expanding and growing rapidly.

- 5:14 tells us that multitudes of Believers were being added to their number, and miracles of healing and deliverance were commonplace.
- Satan had attacked this church through direct opposition and intimidation from the Jewish leaders. Now, attacks will come from within.

“THERE AROSE A COMPLAINT...”

The first attack of Satan from within the church was the incident with Ananias and Sapphira.

- If Satan can't divide and destroy a church through scandal and misconduct, he'll take a different approach—he'll stir up amongst the people an attitude of strife, criticism, discontentment, murmuring, and complaining.
- This is usually why people leave churches.

“THE HELLENISTIC JEWS AGAINST THE HEBRAIC JEWS”

Within this church were two distinct groups of Jewish people that often clashed with one another culturally.

- One group (the Hellenistic Jews) were Greek-speaking Jews who embraced a Greek education and lifestyle. They lived primarily outside Palestine but would have moved to Jerusalem because of the church.

The other group (the Hebraic Jews) were Aramaic- or Hebrew-speaking Jews who represented the traditionalist sect of Judaism.

- They were mostly from Jerusalem/Judea and would have maintained a traditional Jewish identity and shunned foreign/Greek influence as worldly and compromising.
- These two groups were often at odds.

ISOLATION OR INTEGRATION? TRADITION OR INNOVATION?

A lot of the division and disagreements still felt in churches today have to do with the same tension we're reading in Acts 6.

- Modern music (worship band) or traditional music (hymns/acapella)? Casual dress or church clothes? Videos/screens or bulletins/hymnals?
- This is mainly preference/personal conviction.

WHOSE CHURCH WAS IT? HELLENISTS OR HEBREWS?

The Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews were both Christians before anything else.

- The gospel is what unites us; the great temptation is to create a church for one group that centers around cultural preferences.
- In an unspoken (but very real) way, that is a church that excludes other groups.
- That prevents/stunts the church's mission.

“THEIR WIDOWS WERE BEING OVERLOOKED...”

The complaint was that a certain group within the church was being catered to and given preferential treatment—the widows of the “Hebrews” were being fed and cared for, while the widows of the “Hellenists” were not.

- This might have been the easiest and most obvious answer for why this was happening, but it wasn't accurate.

As we'll see in a moment, this wasn't an issue of deliberate discrimination or favoritism but an issue of administration (the senior leaders were trying to do much and were missing some stuff).

- When there's a deeper issue of resentment or unresolved conflict against others in the church, we will jump to conclusions and read into situations with a kind of critical, fault-finding attitude whenever things go wrong.

TWO TACTICS TO DIVIDE/DESTROY FROM WITHIN:

An idolatry of personal and cultural preferences with a hyper-judgmental attitude towards others who don't share those same preferences or convictions.

- A critical, fault-finding attitude that complains, gossips, and stirs up drama whenever mistakes are made within the church.

A PROPOSAL (ACTS 6:2–7)

NOT EVERYTHING THAT GOES WRONG IN CHURCH IS A JUICY SCANDAL CAUSED BY BAD ACTORS WHO HAVE A VENDETTA AGAINST YOU AND OTHERS LIKE YOU.

Sometimes, mistakes get made not because of deliberate ill will but because of a lack of planning, programming, and people.

- Sometimes, it's an issue related to a poor and ineffective administrative structure.
- Do we assume the best or the worst of others?

The apostles gathered the “whole company of the disciples” together for a vision service (v. 2).

- If a church's impact hinges SOLELY on the work, effort, personality, and ministry of only one person or one group of people (the pastors, staff, elders), that church can only go so far. Eventually, they'll hit a ceiling.
- The church in Jerusalem had hit that ceiling, and restructuring was needed.

The apostles told the church, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching the Word of God to wait on tables” (v. 2b).

- It's not that the apostles were too good to wait tables; it's that they had to prioritize and remain faithful to their central calling—preaching the Word of God
- There had to be active participation from more than just the senior leaders.

So, the apostles told the people to choose seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, who could be appointed to this duty of distributing food to the widows in Jerusalem (v. 3).

- Preaching the Word and praying (v. 4) were huge parts of the apostles' calling, while serving tables was something other people could do.
- Giving away tasks is not always easy.

Delegating responsibilities to others takes a tremendous amount of humility (because they're going to do it differently and maybe not perfectly), but it's always a sign of great leadership.

- If any of us try to do everything, we will end up doing most things poorly and nothing well.
- This proposal pleased the church, and seven men who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom were appointed to this task (vs. 5–6).

Change isn't always easy—church leadership restructuring and ministry delegation can certainly feel daunting.

- What was the fruit of this change? “The word of God spread, the disciples...increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests” came to faith in Jerusalem (v. 7).
- Change isn't always fun, but to stay on mission a church can never grow stagnant.

Unity within the Church, a family, or any organization never comes about through avoiding or simply talking about the situation.

- Unity, peace, and resolution only come when we walk towards the mess and talk through it in a mature, humble, and Christlike way.
- Are we truly seeking God-glorifying resolutions to conflict that show honor, love, and Christ to others? Or are we just trying to make a point?

Criticizing and complaining is easy. Stepping up to the plate and taking action to minister to others takes courage, faith, sacrifice, and work.

- The church will only succeed when the people who make it up choose to actively participate.
- We can sit back and consume, critique, and complain, or we can roll up our sleeves, speak words of life, and join in to advance the mission of the gospel. *Which one are you doing?*

STEPHEN (ACTS 6:8–15)

Stephen was named first in v. 5 because later in the story he develops as a true Christian hero.

- He's now described as being “full of grace and power,” so much so that “wonders and signs” were occurring in his ministry (v. 8).
- Remember, he's a volunteer leader serving in a food program!
- But his ministry is not depicted as somehow less spiritual than the apostles' ministry.

“OPPOSITION AROSE...” (VS. 9–10)

As Stephen was ministering in Jerusalem, opposition came against him from “members of the Freedmen's Synagogue.”

- Whoever these people were, they opposed Stephen's message and attempted to shut him down via a theological debate.
- But they were no match for the Holy Spirit within Stephen.

Since his opponents couldn't beat him in a debate, they falsely charged him with blasphemy (v. 11).

- Soon, the rumor was spread all over Jerusalem as these false witnesses stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes.
- So, a third arrest takes place, and a third trial before the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin) begins to unfold (v. 12).

As Stephen's trial began, false witnesses claimed that he attacked the temple and the law.

- More precisely, they claimed they had heard him say that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the traditions of Moses (vs. 13–14).
- Sound familiar? This is almost the exact same thing that happened at Jesus' trial.
- If we want to minister in the name of Jesus, we must be prepared to suffer like Him as well.

As Stephen stands before the council, we get a brief picture of the drama of the scene—the seated council stares at him and he, unintimidated, stares right back at them.

- We can almost picture Stephen making eye contact with the high priest and other members of the council.
- What they see must have startled them—they're not seeing anger, fear, or bitterness.

Instead, Stephen displays quiet confidence, peace, security, and courage, obviously brought about by the Holy Spirit—so much so that his face was “like the face of an angel” (v. 15).

- What makes Stephen such a remarkable figure?
- He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit, humble, sacrificial, and willing to do what needed to be done to serve his church and community.

Not only was Stephen willing to serve and give his life away to meet the needs of others; he was also willing to stand boldly for the truth and speak as the Spirit gave him words (see v. 10).

- When he was attacked, criticized, misrepresented, and even lied about, he stood firm and let God fight his battles for him.
- This is what true courage and godliness look like—not sitting on the sidelines with an opinion.

PEOPLE OF COURAGEOUS ACTION

- Every Christian belongs to the Church (the body of Christ; 1 Cor. 12:12–27) and therefore has a unique calling and responsibility to use their God-given spiritual gifts within their local church to advance the gospel.
- This isn't just the job of a pastor; it's the job of a Christian. It is a life of courageous action that's involved in the work God is doing.

CONSUMING, CRITIQUING, COMPLAINING

- It doesn't make you an intellectual or theological genius to have an opinion about how a church isn't measuring up to your standards and then broadcast that opinion to the world.
- If you have an attitude of strife, criticism, discontentment, murmuring, and complaining when you're not lifting a finger to advance the gospel, you're dividing and destroying.

THE MISSION

- Jesus commands us to make disciples of ALL NATIONS (all kinds/types of people) and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- His command was not to build an agreeable lifestyle enclave that keeps me comfortable, caters to my personal preferences, and only welcomes people who are just like me.
- Do we know our mission? Are we living it?

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S PLAN A FOR ADVANCING THE GOSPEL, AND THERE IS NO PLAN B.

- God's plan for achieving His mission involves disciples of Jesus who:
 - 1) Take responsibility to serve, act, and live on mission.
 - 2) Turn their criticism and complaints into contributions.
 - 3) Reorder their lives around Jesus' mission.