



The Threat of Division Acts 6:1-7

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Acts 6:1-7

1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists[a] arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers,[b] pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Acts 6:1-7

4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach..." Acts 1:1

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." - Acts 1:8

The Internal & External Pressures/Threats to the Church

Acts 3 & 4 - The lame beggar is healed, and Peter and John are arrested and threatened by the Jewish council (External)
Acts 5 - Hypocrisy (Internal)
Acts 6 - Apostles Arrested and Beaten (External)
Acts 6 - Division (Internal)

Acts 6:1-7

- I. The Depth of the Problem
- II. The Solution
- III. The Result and Implications

I. The Depth of the Problem

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the **Hellenists** arose against the **Hebrews** because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should **give up preaching the word of God to serve tables**.'" - Acts 6:1-2

Definitions:

Hellenists: Greek-speaking Jews from the dispersed group of Jews living outside of Palestine

Hebrews: Native Jews who spoke Aramaic and Hebrew

Not just language, but cultural influences, preferences, and ways of living were under the surface.

"Christ's church is no stranger to the heat of culture friction. Although the Spirit of Jesus is creating a holy community in which believers readily part with their property to relieve each other's need, the renovation of our attitudes and behavior is far from complete... Even genuine believers grumbled about each other when some widows' daily needs were overlooked, so that a practice that should have displayed Christian unity threaten to disrupt that unity (Acts 6:1). The cultural boundary between two kinds of people, 'Grecian Jews' and 'Hebraic Jews,' was the crack that could have become a chasm." - Dennis Johnson

We all have pain from our own lives and stories that provide context in cases of conflict, and cultures also have their own stories and pain that provide context.

Thought the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is binding the church together in unity and in mission, without sacrificing one for the other.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, **so that** the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." - John 17:20-23

I. The Depth of the Problem

2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is **not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables**. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will **devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word**." - Acts 6:2-4

"To tell the story of the gospel is to invite people to find their place in it... the story the apostles tell is a powerful, energizing force. In Western culture we have a tendency to focus on the intellectual aspect of teaching—and, to be sure, that is important... But we sometimes neglect that the gospel carries the power of God unto salvation because Christ himself is present in the Word in all his saving power. In Acts 4:33 we are told that "with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Later Paul will describe the gospel as "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" and "a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (Rom. 1:16 NIV; 1 Cor. 2:4; see also 1 Cor. 1:18). The power of God's word transforms the early Christian community. It is not wonder that when difficulties of a practical nature arise in the church, seven men are appointed to take care of the problem—so that the ministry of the word might not be neglected (Acts 6:4)." - Michael Goheen

II. The Solution

"2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them." - Acts 6:2-6

II. The Solution

"Service/Ministry"

vs 1 ... "being neglected in the daily distribution [diakonia] " (NASB "in the daily serving of food")

vs 2 ... "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve [diakoneō] tables."

vs 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [diakonia] of the word."

II. The Solution

To call it the "ministry/service" of the word and the "ministry/service" of the serving of tables, highlights that the apostles didn't think that serving tables was below them, unimportant, or that the conflict was trivial, but that their own capacity, limits, and calling meant that others were needed to participate and lead in this vital "ministry/service."

"Although these two aspects of God's salvation and the church's ministry cannot be separated from each other, the apostles recognized that they had to be distinguished from each other. Therefore, each ministry of God's grace was entrusted to leaders who could give it their undivided attention." - Dennis Johnson

III. The Result and Implications

"And **the word of God continued to increase**, and the number of **the disciples multiplied greatly** in Jerusalem, and a **great many** of the priests became obedient to the faith." - Acts 6:7

"A vital principle is illustrated in this incident, which is of urgent importance to the church today. It is that God calls all his people to ministry, that he calls different people to different ministries... All Christians without exception, being followers of him who came 'not to be served but to serve', are are themselves called to ministry, indeed to give their lives in ministry." - John Stott

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served [diakoneō] but to serve [diakoneō], and to give his life as a ransom for many." - Mark 10:45

It is the gospel that must go out, and it is the gospel that must bind us together.

God
CANNOT BE
STOPPED