

Acts 6

A. Growing pains (6:1-6)

Illus – growing pain in kids

1. The complaint

Acts 6:1 *"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 ministrations."*

a. Church growth

Church growing shows effectiveness of the witness of the disciples and the church.

Church growth was also the cause of problems.

b. Against the Hebrews by the Hellenists:

The **Hebrews** were those Jews more inclined to embrace Jewish culture and were mostly from Judea.

The **Hellenists** were those Jews more inclined to embrace Greek culture and mostly were from the *Diaspora* (from all over the Roman Empire).

To oversimplify, **Hebrews** tended to regard **Hellenists** as unspiritual compromisers with Greek culture, **Hellenists** regarded **Hebrews** as holier-than-thou traditionalists. There was already a natural suspicion between the two groups.

- c. Existence of both synagogues and Temple in Jerusalem.

2. The resolution - Deacons

v2-4 *Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave*

the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

- a. **It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables:** The apostles explained that they should remain faithful to their central calling, which was prayer and to the ministry of the word. Does not reflect any superiority complex, but rather need for delegation of tasks for efficiency.

Serving tables: could mean serving food and also monetary matters.

- b. **Seek out from among you:** democratizing the process. Inviting more talents and people to the task and giving responsibilities.

Responsibility also inspires owning up the organization.

They didn't throw the complainers out. They didn't divide into two congregations. They didn't shun the unhappy people. They didn't form a committee and discuss the problem to death.

- c. **Of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom:** the task was for a church. not to be considered menial or insignificant.

Good reputation – good opinion among believers on their character

Full of the Holy Spirit – Holy Spirit upon not just the apostles but the whole church. these people's lives and character showed the working of the Holy Spirit.

Wisdom – maturity for the task given by God. In the Bible, wisdom comes only from God.

3. (5-6) The selection of deacons.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Stephen... Philip, Prochorus: The seven men all had Greek names, indicating that they were probably Hellenists themselves. The people (and the apostles) showed great sensitivity to the offended Hellenists by appointing Hellenists to take care of the widows' distribution.

Laying on of hands – symbol of passing of authority, blessing, Holy Spirit.

Stephen, Philip – mentioned first by Luke as a precursor to their ministry in the following chapters.

4. good result

v7 - Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

- a. One of Luke's periodic statements summarizing the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel (2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14 and in further chapters too)
- b. Priests who came to the faith as opposed to the High Priest who persecuted them
Perhaps the teaching, witnessing, signs and wonders and especially ministry to widows showed them that this was now the religion God preferred.

Emphases

1. Duty of taking care of the disadvantaged was a duty of the church, not neglected for the sake of teaching and worship. 1 timothy 5 shows Paul's instruction on providing for widows.
2. Church was taking care of its own widows. That shows that church was becoming an independent organization with proper structure and functioning.
3. Laying on of hands
4. God calls the best for ministry.
5. Ready to innovate

Question for reflection

Can we see various groups in the church today? How does the Holy Spirit equip the pastor and the people to minister to the unique needs of each group?

What can we learn from the apostles about their style of resolving a conflict that could have broken their church?