

Acts 6.1-7 - Handling Congregational Problems Sunday AM 07/18/21

Introduction:

So far in Acts we read of the preaching of the Gospel, miracles by the Apostles, trials and threats, death of two Christians due to lying, and lots of growth (some estimate the church at Jerusalem being 20,000 to 30,000 members). **Acts 5:42** *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

Have you ever gone to services excited? Looking forward to worshipping God with other saints? This being the highlight of your week. Looking forward to the next time you can come together. Hopefully you are answering yes to all of these things.

Have you ever gone to services dreading it? Not looking forward to being with the brethren, the complaining, bickering, suspicion, and a sense of us versus them.

Up to this time the church at Jerusalem had been characterized by unity and togetherness.

Acts 2:46 *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,*

Acts 4:32 *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*

I) A Problem Arises

Acts 6:1 *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.*

A) Key words and their meaning

1. Complaining – same Hebrew word translated as muttering and murmuring when the children of Israel were in the wilderness.
 - a. There is a difference in pointing out a problem and complaining.

b. Complaining tends to be an attitude problem, more constant.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

2. Hebrews – there is a distinction made in Christians at Jerusalem.

a. Everyone one here was technically a “Hebrew” descendants of Abraham.

b. Here Hebrew refers to those who grew up in Palestine and primary language was Aramaic, their culture was different from the other Jews.

3. Hellenists or Grecian widows – a sub-group of Jews. Referred to in other passages as the dispersion.

a. Jews who grew up outside of Palestine, their spoke Greek as their primary language.

b. Culturally they adopted many of the Greek practices, dressed as Greeks, spoke as Greeks, etc.

4. Daily distribution – goes back to earlier passage.

Acts 4:32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

Acts 4:34-35 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

B) The problem of the Hellenist widows being neglected

1. How could this of happened?

a. Perhaps due to cultural differences – dinner/supper, ya'll/youineses(sp?), sweet tea/unsweet tea.

- b. When we don't understand the cultural differences; problems often arise. Ex. Macon, GA.
 - c. May have just been due to the large number of members, over 20,000!
2. What can happen when problems arise?
- a. The complaining, division, the important things get drowned out.
 - b. In the end the problem can take on a life of its own. Nothing else happens.

II) What Happened?

Acts 6:2 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. **3**"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; **4** "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

A) What did not happen

- 1. The Apostles did not take over the work.
 - a. Sometime between **Acts 4** and now the Apostles gave the task of distributing to the needy to someone else.
 - b. The Apostles had the task of preaching the Gospel which only they could do.

Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

- c. They kept on doing their work.
2. They did not throw out those who brought up the issue.

- a. They didn't say, you aren't really one of us and just go back home.
 - b. Some people today see the church as their possession and others can just leave.
3. They did not ignore those who brought up the issue.
- a. Perhaps someone wants to change something- time of services, color of carpet, teaching material, etc.
 - b. What happens when others disagree? Let us stay away from them, separate pews, no longer socialize with each other.
4. They did not have a vote.
- a. While voting sounds good it often does not handle the problem.
 - b. Voting does not consider the needs of the minority. How many Hellenist widows were there? Groups today like widows, young Christians, older members, etc.
5. They did not form a committee.
- a. The way to not get things done is by forming a committee.
 - b. The way to get things done is either by the elders or the congregation.
6. They did not start a new church.
- a. The Hellenists did not do this and the Hebrews did not do this.
 - b. While there are Paul/Barnabas situations those should be rare.

B) What they did

Acts 6:3 "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; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the

ministry of the word." 5 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, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

1. They determine a solution
 - a. You seek out- not we will appoint someone over this business.
 - b. Those complaining had a role as well as the rest of the congregation.
 - c. Men who will serve v. 2 “serving tables”- said these men would have to have a servant’s heart.
 - i. Don’t choose men who aren’t qualified to do a task.
 - ii. Qualifications are given so as to ensure the greatest possibility of success.
 - d. Men of good reputation- people you can trust, a lot of the problem here may have been one of distrust.
 - e. Controlled by the Holy Spirit- guided by the word of God, producing the fruit of the Spirit.
2. They appointed seven men to do this job.
 - a. Why seven? It took 7, no more and no less.
 - b. All of the names are Greek names but some Hebrews also had Greek names (Philip, Andrews two Apostles).
3. The leaders kept on doing their job, prayer and to the ministry.
 - a. Not saying “waiting tables wasn’t important but each part of the body has its own function.
 - b. What is going to be my function in this body?

4. They stopped complaining – it pleased everyone.
 - a. They did not find something else to complain about.
 - b. They got back to being unified.
5. They laid hands on them- not to impact spiritual gifts but to give them the authority to do the job.
 - a. Don't select men to do a job and then not give them that authority.
 - b. Don't take a job without having the authority.
6. They had influence in Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

Acts 6:7 *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.* They had great influence on those around them. Unfortunately a lot of congregations have lost their influence in their community due to not handling their problems in a Christ like manner. When Christians can work together and solve problems together, they are fulfilling Christ's request. ***John 17:20*** *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*