

THE DIFFERENCE YOUR SERVICE MAKES

Acts 6:1-7
October 2, 2011

INTRODUCTION: The early church set the example of living in the context of unity. Their unity and power gave them a testimony that swept Jerusalem and as a result, many came to faith in Christ. No persecution or opposition from the Jewish authorities could stop the spread of the gospel. The believers' love for each other expressed in the sharing of material goods had made a profound impact on the community. As a result, even unbelievers held the church in high regard. **(5:13)**

The church's explosive growth had brought with it the need for further organization. It was already somewhat organized. They knew the number of converts and members. They met together in specific places at specific times. The believers also met for meals in private homes. Money and goods were collected by the Apostles and distributed to those in need. Sin had to be dealt with. The church became further structured as its life and growth demanded.

An important principle is illustrated: Biblical church organization responds to needs and to what the Spirit is already doing. To organize a program and then expect the Holy Spirit to get involved in it is to put the "*cart before the horse.*" We dare not try to force the Spirit to fit our mold. Organization is never an end in itself, but only a means to facilitate what the Lord is doing in His church.

In **Acts 6**, the church is facing its first organizational crisis.

I. THE DISTRACTION IN SERVICE. 1-2,4

A. GROWTH TESTIMONY. 1a

"Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying"

Acts 1:15 - 120 disciples

Acts 2:41 - 3,000 added

Acts 4:4 - "number of men came to about 5,000"

There could have been around 20,000 men, women, boys, and girls in the Jerusalem church at this point.

FACT: The leadership and administrative problems associated with such a large congregation were enormous. Merely to meet their spiritual needs and to deal with sin would have been an unbelievable task, let alone carrying for their physical needs.

Not only did the size of the church create issues, but also its growth left little time to adjust. It was more than the Apostles could handle, they had to grow in their organizational skills, with God's wisdom.

FOUR WORDS CONCERNING THE CHURCH'S GROWTH

1. CHURCH'S COMMISSION.

Acts 1:8, the Lord gave a 4-part charge, “**You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

- **Acts 5:28** they saturated Jerusalem with the gospel message
- They influenced neighboring communities;
Acts 5:16
- They were positioned to evangelize Samaria
- Ultimately they would take the gospel to the world

B. GREAT TRIAL. 1b

“there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.”

FACT: In a congregation of this size, it was inevitable that someone's needs would be overlooked. Here was an issue that Satan could use with devastating force against the church.

Note Satan's Attacks:

1. THROUGH PERSECUTION. (OUTWARD)

Acts 4, *arresting their leaders*; taking them before the Supreme Court of their day (Sanhedrin)

RESULTS: Church grew faster

2. THROUGH CORRUPTION. (DOWNWARD)

Sin in the camp: Ananias and Sapphira; *let's corrupt the people or leaders in the church.*
Please pray for your leadership!

RESULTS: Church purified - was powerful

3. THROUGH DISSENSION. (INWARD)

A church racked by *internal conflict* finds its message lost in conflict; its energy dissipated. A church focused on itself will find it difficult to reach out to the lost world.

PROBLEM STATED:

“there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.”

“Hebrews” – native Palestinian Hebrews; they spoke Aramaic or Hebrew. Hebrews tended to be narrow and rigid with few interests outside their own small world. Hellenists were generally much more ready to recognize the better features of the great Gentile world beyond the confines of the Promised Land.

John Phillips, *“The tension between Hebrews and Hellenists went back a long time, to the very beginnings of the Hellenist period, when the brilliant world of Greek thought and culture burst upon the Jews and threatened to destroy Judaism, both with its philosophy and by its persecution.”*

Hellenists – were Greek-speaking Jews from the Dispersion. They had come to Jerusalem from other nations; probably did not speak Aramaic or Hebrew. They used the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew Scriptures. While remaining loyal to Judaism, they had absorbed some of the Greek culture that surrounded them.

According to the Jewish writings (Talmud), *“Pharisaism made little secret of its contempt for Hellenists.”* They were viewed as *“second-class Israelites.”* Some of that racial and cultural hostility carried over into the church.

HOW THIS ISSUE AROSE:

Many of the Hellenists had been in Jerusalem for the Passover and Pentecost. After hearing Peter preach, many of them were converted and decided to remain in the city under the Apostles’ teaching.

Now, the Old Testament and the New Testament teaches we are to care for our widows. **(Deut 14, 24 & 1 Tim 5:3ff).**

How the Apostles respond will have lots to do with the continued growth of the church. This is how churches split!

C. GREAT TRUTH. 2,4

1. PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE. 2

“summoned the multitude of the disciples” – let’s get together, *all of us are needed to finish the unfinished task, and let’s seek a solution.* While the Apostles recognized the problem, they did not have the time to handle it. However, they had the wisdom to recognize the legitimacy of the issue. Here we find the first hint of **apostolic authority** and **congregational activity** working towards a united decision. (WIN/WIN). *It is not about me!*

2. PRINCIPLE THAT GUARDS. 2

“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”

“tables” – a table or counter of a money changer or “*money matters,*” as well as an eating table. It speaks of things that would take them away from their **calling**. It was not that the Apostles thought it beneath their dignity to run the errands of the church; it was simply a matter of putting first things first. (*“Keeping the main thing the main thing.”*)

PRINCIPLE STATED: There was no point doing something anyone could do when they could do things no one else could do.

3. PRIORITY THAT GUIDES AND GUARDS. 4

“but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word”

Prayer and the ministry of the word are inseparably linked. Prayer must permeate a pastor’s sermon preparation.

Adrian Rogers: *“Pray that the Lord will be in your presentation as He was in your preparation.”*

Without both our sermons are superficial and dry. We must pray that the people have ears to hear and that they will apply the truth.

Paul’s passion for the word was equaled only by his devotion to prayer.

A young man once said to the gifted expository preacher of God’s word, Donald Grey Barnhouse, *“I’d give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you.”* Looking him straight in the eye Dr. Barnhouse replied, *“Good, because that’s exactly what it will cost you.”*

1 Corinthians 9:16-17, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.”

1 Timothy 4:13-15, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.”

II. THE DELEGATION FOR SERVICE. 3

The congregation was to look among its membership for men who met certain criteria and present their choices to the Apostles.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS:

1. “Among you”

Believers; church should develop their leadership from within.

2. “A good reputation”

Above reproach; integrity; servants are to be people others can follow. Remember, they would be entrusted with large sums of money; unblemished character

3. “Full of the Holy Spirit”

“full” – means to be controlled by; fully yielded in every area of life

4. “Wisdom”

Ability to apply biblical truth to the situations we face; righteous judgment

Where to get it?

James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

What is it?

James 3:17, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR SERVICES. 5-7

A. THE SOLUTION WAS PLEASING. 5a

“the saying pleased the whole multitude” – it was sensible and fair

B. THE SERVANTS WERE CHOSEN. 5b

All 7 were Hellenists, with one being a convert that was a Gentile

1. Stephen would later demonstrate his qualifications
2. Philip was later distinguished in his qualifications. (Servant and Soul-winner)
3. Other Five

“They may illustrate the general principle that much of the work is carried on by the unknown, unsung individuals who faithfully carry out the tasks entrusted to them.” (John Phillips)

C. THE SYNERGY GIVEN. 6

The *“laying on of hands”* was a common Jewish practice. When an Israelite brought a sacrifice to the altar, he was required to identify himself with his offering by laying his hands on its head. (Lev. 1:4)

This speaks of *affirmation* and *identification*, and their support

D. THE SALVATIONS WERE MULTIPLIED. 7

“Main thing stayed the main thing.” A unified, well-taught church will be a powerful witness to the lost world.