

ACTS

Part 15 – “So the Word of God Spread”

Acts 6:1-7

In this passage, Luke narrates a second threat to the church's unity. Interestingly, or perhaps not surprisingly, both threats are related to money and generosity the first account being that of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). The first problem was dealt with rather swiftly and directly by God himself. The second threat to the church's unity was addressed no less by God but this time He chose to work through the means of the church leadership. And the response of the apostles, with the approval of the congregation was the creation of the office of Deacon.

Main Idea: Despite problems and persecution, God continued to advance His Word and gain converts through the single-minded leadership of the apostles.

The Problem:

The particular problem that Luke identifies is division and unrest over the fact that certain groups in this young and massive church were being intentionally neglected in the distribution of charitable assistance. It was an ugly accusation. The Greek speaking Jewish Christians claimed that their widows were being neglected by the Hebrew speaking Jewish Christians. It was an accusation akin to racism. A particular group of widows were being neglected because of their cultural distinctives. And the charge was probably accurate.

1. The church includes a diversity of cultures and needs.

- Vs. 1
- From the beginning the church in Jerusalem consisted of Jews living in Jerusalem (Hebraic) and those from outside Jerusalem (Hellenistic). The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and were influenced, not by Hebrew culture, but that of the regions from which they came. So, from the church's birth she faced the blessing and challenge of diverse languages and cultures all united in Christ.
- This is simply a foretaste of that which will be known in eternity when men and women from every language, tribe, and nation will be gathered around the throne of the Lamb.

2. The church includes a diversity of ministries.

- Vs. 2-4
- It became clear to the apostles that the Greek speaking Christians were not malcontents but had a legitimate grievance. So they swung into action rather quickly and directed the congregation to appoint seven men who will faithfully lead the church's ministry of meeting physical needs.
- The appointment of Deacons is proof that the elders of the church have a specific ministry which must not be sacrificed for any other ministry priorities. However, that in no way diminishes the necessity of those other ministries.
- In 1 Corinthians Paul appeals to the human body as a metaphor for how the church functions. Each part of the body has a specific function, a particular way of making the whole healthy and complete (**1 Cor 12:12-31**). In the same way, the church has no superfluous members. Each has been given a way in which to serve.

3. The church is led and served by spiritually qualified officers.

- Vs. 3-6

- God has given to his church a structure of leadership and service. This is an act of kindness on God's part knowing that a formal structure helps to deflect the effects of our sinfulness. There are two offices of ministry given to the church: Elder and Deacon. While the New Testament has more to say to and about elders, the office of Deacon is also addressed specifically both here and elsewhere (**Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13**).
- The men appointed to oversee the meeting of physical needs within the church must have the trust of the congregation so the apostles delegate to the congregation the task of selecting the men to fill that role. However there is a strict criteria for the character of these men. The deacons must be "men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (vs. 3).
- **1 Timothy 3:1-13** records the spiritual qualifications for both elders and deacons.
- While all ministries within the church have an inherent dignity, we may infer that the offices of elder and deacon are given in part to oversee the leading and serving ministries of the church.

4. The church exists to spread God's Word.

- Vs. 7
- This is the first time but not the last that Luke will equate the growth of the church with the advance of God's Word. It is a theme that will be repeated. The apostles were given to the ministry of the Word and prayer and nothing, not even feeding the hungry members of the church would be allowed to curtail that commitment.
- The text indicates that God's Word was not only advancing widely but also deeply. That is, disciples were being made even from among the Hebrew priesthood. This is once again clear evidence of the central importance of God's Word both in the church's evangelism and making of disciples.

Theology in Application:

1. Problems and blessing will always coexist within the church.

- That God was continuing grow his church and bless their mission did not mean that they faced no problems. Indeed, the problems they were facing (persecution without and division within) were directly related to the very ways God was blessing them.

2. God builds his church through the ministry of the Word.

- There are many good things that the spiritual leaders of the church may do. But the ministry of God's Word and prayer are the only indispensable tasks for those who lead the church.

3. God cares for his people through his people.

- God has appointed officers for his church whose ministry is to care for the charitable needs within the church. Members of a church must make it their business to be aware of the various needs present within the church so that they may be ready to help meet those needs. We must avoid the common temptation to expect someone else to do the giving and serving. The members of the church are God's chief means of meeting needs within the church.

4. Success for the church is the advance of God's Word.

- The Word of God was spreading further (going beyond Jerusalem) and going deeper (even priests were becoming disciples). This is success for the church. And we must remind ourselves of this reality regularly. It is far too easy for the church to adopt worldly notions of success in measuring itself. For the church, success is not making a great name for itself, political influence, wealth, or ever increasing attendance. Success must be measured in terms of the advance of God's word in both breadth and depth.
- Do our priorities reflect the necessity of the ministry of the Word? Are we working to maximize the opportunities for the Word of God to advance far and deep?