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OUR GROWING FAMILY

ACTS 6



Even in the early days, Jesus' followers faced problems about how to run things. From the beginning they'd shared their resources. They knew they were called to live as a family. But how is that going to work when the family is suddenly double the size you expect it to be? The pressure in the early church came to a head along the fault line which would continue to be a problem for years to come: the distinction¹ between people from different ethnic and linguistic groups and the question of their relative status within the new movement. Whenever a small number of people try to live together, let alone share resources, sometimes lesser distinctions of background and culture can loom very large and have serious consequences.

APPOINTED SERVANTS (6:1-7)

1. Read Acts 6:1-7. What is the dispute among the believers (6:1-2)? How do the apostles handle the dispute (6:2-6)?

2. The seven men chosen to serve all had certain characteristics that qualified them for the work. What were they? Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Why are these qualities needed for ministry to people of varied backgrounds where tension and jealousy often arise?

DEACONS

If "deacon" were simply a synonym for "servant," then every church member would one. Every member of the church is *called and gifted* to serve one another (Eph 4:1-16; 1 Cor 12:4-27). Deacons serve, but as they do so they equip the rest of the body to serve with them.

¹The Bible teaches that God makes no **DISTINCTION** between persons on the basis of race, class, stature, or anything else. Rather, the issue that divides one person from another before God is faith in Jesus Christ. All men share the same perilous condition before a holy God for sin and the same glorious future with a loving God by faith in his Son. (See: Acts 15:7-9; Rom 3:22; 10:12)

3. Jerusalem was both a deeply traditional culture and a cosmopolitan mixture of Jews from all over the world. Native-born Palestinian Jews, who spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue, would feel they had more in common with one another than with the Greek speaking Hellenists² who had come from the wider world. Where are the dividing lines of tension among Christians in our fellowship? Using Acts 6:1-6 as our example, what are some ways to bridge divisions?

A MAN FULL OF GRACE AND POWER (6:8-15)

Through chapter 5, the spotlight was on Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Luke introduced the other segment of the church – Greek-speaking Jews – in 6:1-7. The foremost among them was Stephen. While the apostles, who faithfully attended temple services and followed Jewish customs were highly regarded by the people (5:13), Stephen and his Hellenistic Christian brethren were taking heat.

4. Read Acts 6:8-15. List five things we learn about Stephen in these verses. What were the accusations made against him?
5. The accusations against Stephen were serious. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than their temple and their Law. The temple was the sanctuary of God's presence. The Law was the revelation of God's mind and will. To speak against either was to speak against God – to blaspheme. How did Stephen's qualifications as a deacon equip him to face his accusers?
6. How do you respond to people who accuse you of wrongdoing without cause or to conflict in general? How does the gospel help you in those moments?

BLASPHEMY

The charges against Stephen mirrored those leveled against Jesus during his three-year ministry (Mark 13:2; John 2:18-21). Since the Jewish leaders considered their interpretations to be the same as the Law itself, they judged that Jesus spoke against God's Law.

²The **HELLENISTS** were Jews who immigrated to Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman empire, for whom Greek was their first and, perhaps, only language. As such, when wives lost their husbands they would likely not have had a kinship network close at hand to care for them.