

16—Acts 6.1-7—Serving the Soul and the Serving the Body

- I. Introduction
 - a. Sports often make an easy analogy. In particular, the understanding of a team functioning together with all the different athletes and positions doing their job with an end result of winning the game.
 - b. Each person has a role to play. In some positions, there can be some overlap. I can imagine a wide-receiver playing cornerback. However, you do not want a big offensive lineman playing cornerback. Nor do you want a small wide-receiver playing as a lineman.
 - c. The quarterback has a lot to navigate but his job is less difficult when everyone on the team knows the playbook and they line up in the correct places when a particular play is called. If the running back lines up at wide-receiver then it will be impossible to hand him the ball in a normal running play up the middle.
 - d. Each person needs to be doing their distinct job together and when they do, the result is usually a victory.
 - e. In our text this morning, we have all the disciples but not everyone is being taken care of. The growth contributes to the problem. They have yet to organize themselves to handle all the different people and service. But all of them are important and need to be fixed or the growth may not continue. There are new roles for the disciples to now fill.
- II. Main Point
 - a. While more and more people are believing in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and are now disciples—learners—of Christ’s commands and how to walk in them, a complaint arose among them. The issue is solved and the word continues to spread and more and more people become disciples of Christ.
- III. Outline
 - a. The Problem
 - b. The Solution
 - c. The Result
- IV. Exposition
 - a. As Luke takes us on this journey through Acts, we see patterns forming. We see consistently an enemy seeking to destroy the church that Jesus purchased with his blood and is now ruling from heaven as the risen Lord. The attacks happen on the inside and on the outside. Last week the threat was from the Jewish leaders—on the outside. This week, the threat is from within. The problem could seem small and insignificant or it could be taken seriously and solved. The warning may be that when problems arise—and they will—(it’s not a matter of if but when), they need attention. Let’s discover the problem.
 - i. As Luke writes, he does not give us a precise timeframe. He begins v.1 with “Now in these days” which is vague. It could have been a few days after they were released that this event occurred while teaching in the temple and from house to house or it could be a few years.
 - ii. Though Luke is not tracing the specific time and date, he is following the many challenges the early church faced.
 1. We rightly understand that this book is about the Acts of the Risen Christ from heaven. Acts of the Holy Spirit. Acts of the Apostles.
 2. We rightly understand that these people have the Holy Spirit within them.
 3. We affirm they believe the truth of Bible and teach it faithfully.
 4. But...problems still come. The church, past and present, and every local church that has been in a covenant community of believers has had problems. Every one of them!
 - iii. The only description we get about when it happened is “when the disciples were increasing in number.”
 1. We can still rightly say this is all still new. The church is still forming. It doesn’t have everything worked out—if ever the church does this side of heaven.

2. New organizations and old organizations have organizational problems. Things change and therefore the way you've been doing it must change.
 - a. You might think of it this way. Our family and your family had various problems arise as your family grew in number and in age. The oldest child doesn't get as much attention as the new born. So, the older child does something to get that attention. And there you have it—more problems.
 - b. Imagine the difference of adopting teenagers into your family. The new, growing family has difficulties but even a seasoned family would find it hard to adjust to teenagers that you did not know.
 - i. There could be all kinds of issues they are dealing with. Things have to move slow because adjustments are hard to make. And both the family and the teenagers have to make changes. Patience is necessary.
 - ii. When it seems you have adopted a square peg for your family that is a round hole, things take some time to fit. It will be painful.
- iv. Now let's notice the complaint in the midst of growth.
 1. A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews.
 - a. The word "complaint" can mean murmur which is the same word used in Exodus 16:8 where the people murmured about not having any meat or bread to eat. That is the negative nuance of the word. I think complaint is the right choice.
 - i. Something isn't going right and a united group has made it known.
 - b. Now the Hellenists group which are the Greek Jews direct their complaint against the Hebrew Jews.
 - i. Both of these groups are Jews that have become Christians. However, some of them have grown up outside of Israel and they are probably from the Diaspora.
 - ii. Diaspora describes those Jews who had been scattered or dispersed throughout others nations during the exiles. Other nations like Assyria and Babylon came and defeated Israel and carried the people away to their lands.
 - iii. So, there is some level of differences here that it will be hard to detect. Whether it's cultural or language, it's difficult to know. It does seem to be some tension that is related to some differences. The Greek Jews could easily be considered outsiders. There was a similar feeling towards Samaritans.
 - c. But why do they bring a complaint against the Hebrews? It says there in v. 1 "...because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."
 - i. We are not told why the Greek Jews were being neglected. It seems like it could have something to do with their differences.
 - ii. As you recall, some were selling off their property and bringing the money to the apostles to distribute to those who had need.
 - iii. Widows in that day had an obvious need to be provided for. They would have been first on the list. Their husband, who had been their provider, had died. This left the wife in a very difficult spot. And these Greek widows had moved back to Jerusalem with probably no family around.
 1. 1 Tim. 5 has much more to say about how the church was to serve the widows among them. At this moment in Acts, that had not developed.

2. But God has instructed his people to take care of widows among the covenant community since Deut. 14.
 3. "One of the reasons God judged Israel during the exile was for not caring well for their widows (Isa 1:23; Jer 5:28; Zech 7:10f; Mal 3:5). One of the reasons Jesus rebukes the Scribes was for devouring widows' houses, while they walked around in their nice long robes and chose the best seats in the house (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). The question within [Acts 6] is whether the church would prove to be different, whether they'd prove to be the true Israel, or not. Would they care for their widows? Would they reflect the glory of God's concern for widows?" (Bret Rogers)
 4. God's care for widows and the poor among them is clearly seen in the story of Ruth in how the law was meant to provide for those in need by leaving the edges of the fields or not returning to get a sheave that was left behind. Will this new covenant community BE LIKE GOD in this way?
 5. Let's see.
- b. That question will be answered in how the apostles respond in the following verses. Let's see what the solution will be.
- i. In verse 2, the Twelve summon the full number of the disciples because of this complaint. They had been the ones doing the distributing of funds. Who was doing it or not doing it now isn't readily clear. It seems the Hebrew Jews had some involvement since the complaint is against them.
 1. Whoever it was, it falls to the Twelve Apostles and that causes another problem. Notice what they say to them: (Acts 6:2) "It is not right (better, "pleasing") that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.
 - a. Right is not the best word here. It's not a moral issue but one of priority. Both are right.
 - b. The apostles are not saying they are too good for this.
 - i. Let me try to help with understanding this. Have any of you been a part of a new church plant? And I mean that new converts have come to faith in Christ and now they are going to covenant together as a church.
 - ii. Imagine what it's like to teach new disciples how to follow Jesus. They have a lot to learn and unlearn. Sure, some of these probably had a good background to work with. But even these Twelve had been walking with Jesus for three years.
 1. They had been taught and corrected by Christ. Now this group is doing the same for all these new believers.
 - iii. New disciples are often not ready to serve. It takes time. That's why the apostles had taken care of it. Even distributing food to widows must be done by godly people as we will see.
 1. If I can appeal back to the family analogy earlier. New babies take time to train but the new adopted teenagers have to be trained as well or they have to prove they are capable of certain tasks.
 - iv. The apostles know they have mature, godly disciples in the group who can handle this task.

2. Therefore, they tell the congregation in (Acts 6:3) Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint (put in charge) to this need.
 - a. If they had not been making disciples as Jesus commanded, these men would not have been ready. They would not have been of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.
 - b. That comes from teaching and walking with each other like Jesus did with these Twelve apostles.
 - c. Furthermore, the full number of disciples would not have known what to look for had they not been taught as well.
 - d. I mean, I'm certain this group had been taught to care for the widows. If they hadn't already been doing that then where does the complaint come from?
3. As urgent as the complaint is, the apostles cannot set aside their responsibility to teach. I hope you see how important it is. That's why the solution involves choosing seven men who are qualified to represent Christ and take charge of his need.
 - a. For the express purpose that they can remain devoted to prayer and teaching.
 - b. I want to make a connection here. At the end of v. 1 it says distribution which is the word for service.
 - c. At the end of v. 3 it says serve tables.
 - d. And at the end of v. 4, teaching is literally called the service of the word.
 - e. In other words, all of these things are ways to serve the Lord and his church. All of them need to be done. But the work must be delegated to those who will represent Christ in that service.
 - i. "Just because they're serving tables, doesn't mean that Christian character makes no difference. Sometimes churches work hard to appoint qualified pastors, but they have hardly any qualifications when it comes to other ministries. "Just try to fill the slots, keep the programs running," without any attention to character. Not good." (Bret Rogers)
4. How will the full number of disciples respond? (Acts 6:5) And what they said pleased the whole gathering.
 - a. It wasn't pleasing for the apostles to set aside preaching the word to serve tables daily but putting seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom was pleasing the crowd. Maybe both acts of service will be pleasing.
 - b. That makes the role of these seven men all the more important. They are not only serving these widows in the daily distribution but they are making it possible for the word to continue to be taught and shared. That's an important task.
5. It was a matter of priority. Both serving the word and serving the physical needs of the body are very important. But the apostles cannot do both.
 - a. This is what Paul says about this in (Eph. 4:11-16) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together

- by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
- b. When every part of the body is working properly that makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
6. Many have seen the beginnings of the pastors and deacons' roles here. I think it's fair to make that comparison.
 - a. Both are serving. Pastors are to be devoted to prayer and the service of the word. Deacons are serving various physical needs. All ministries are important. Each should be fulfilling their part so that all can be done properly.
 - b. It will not be pleasing for any of those things to be lacking. It's going to happen. Adjustments will need to be made.
 7. One final thing in this section about the solution before we see the result.
 - a. The men are chosen by the full number of the disciples.
 - b. The group is somewhat diverse. Most of the names reflect that they are Greek. One is a Gentile who had become a Jew (a proselyte) and is now a Christian.
 - c. They are men full of faith and Holy Spirit...yes, even to serve tables.
 - d. What the apostles instructed them to do was to select seven men of godly character. It happened to be these men.
 - e. What do the apostles think? They prayed for them and laid their hands on them. This is a clear sign of approval and appointment. They are responsible to take care of this problem.
 - f. I may plant a vine but if I do not also build a trellis—a structure for it to grow on—the vine might not grow very well. Cucumbers.
- c. Now the amazing result! The problem—the solution—the result.
 - i. Did the solution work? Notice (Acts 6:7) And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
 1. The word was growing...the number of disciples were being multiplied...and a great many priests were being obedient to the faith. All of these were
 2. Obedience almost always results in growth.
 3. Obedience describes faith's living, responsive, and submissive nature.
 4. When you see the priests turning to Christ, that's an amazing witness to the godly character of the church and the ongoing preaching and teaching in the temple.
 - ii. "If you are a Christian, you are a player, not a fan, so participate in the mission." (Tony Merida)

V. Response

- a. If you want to become a follower of Jesus, you must be born again. You must repent—turn from your sin—and trust Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and be counted righteous by faith.
- b. Some are already disciples but they need to grow in godliness so that they can be used by the Lord in their specific gifts.
- c. Others are ready or already serving. Keep doing your part to serve the body. All of it is important.
- d. What is our widow service today? Widows do not have the same needs as those in our text. This was life or death. They still need to be cared for. Giving money is often the easiest thing to do. Let's do the harder work.