

10/4/15

Acts 6:1-7

## Fight the Distraction

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup> And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Sometimes it feels like just when you have everything worked out, something else goes wrong. You pay off the car and the transmission goes out. You replace the dishwasher and the refrigerator goes out. You get a bonus and the kids need braces. You get a great job and the boss is a jerk. There is a whole alphabet of trouble you could come up with. It's not really Murphy's Law. Murphy's Law is, "If something can go wrong, it will and usually at the worst time."

This is more like the adage that says "into every life a little rain must fall." Now, *right* now, I would be glad for it to quit raining. It feels like I need to build an Ark.

This seems to be what's going on as we are introduced to a new stage in the life of the church. All throughout the Book of Acts, Luke gives us updates on the growth of the church. In Acts 2:41, Luke tells us that 3,000 people came to Christ; in Acts 2:47, the Lord added day by day to their number. In Acts 4:11, Luke says about 5,000 people have become Christians. Finally in Acts 5:14, Luke stops using numbers and just says "multitudes." But then we start hearing about problems.

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira have a stewardship problem. They are not faithful in giving to the Lord. And here in Chapter 6 there is a pressing need that clamored for the leader's attention. On the surface this feels like a minor issue, but minor issues have the potential to derail great movements. And minor character flaws have the potential to topple strong men. Even Jesus said in *Luke 16:10*, "One who is faithful in a very little is

*also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”*

It's the little foxes, Solomon said, that ruin the vineyard. Satan will do all he can to get you and your family and this church neutralized. Satan doesn't have to *destroy* you, he just needs to *distract* you. For a church, conflict on the inside or entertainment on the outside, either way it has the same effect. It takes the focus off the Gospel mission.

The same is true for you personally. Satan doesn't care if it is anguish or amusement as long as it keeps you distracted. You can Facebook, Instagram and Tweet yourself all the way to selfie-stick perdition and miss the whole point of your existence! You've got to fight those things that distract the church from her mission and distract you from your purpose because...

## **A Gospel Driven Church Always Fights Distractions**

How we do it as a church, I think, will affect how you fight distractions as a believer, personally.

### **We Focus on Converts and Not Crowds**

We focus on seeing individual people come through conversion to Christ and not necessarily building a crowd. Here's what I mean by that. When you look at v. 1, Luke gives us another one of his updates and he uses a word that's so very important. V. 1 *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number*, The key word there is the word Disciple. It's the main word used in all 4 Gospels and also in Acts to describe someone that is a Christian. And it is important that we get this right. The word literally means someone who is a "learner". It's important to note that the New Testament emphasizes making disciples and not merely making decisions. As a church, this conviction dictates how we call people to come to church. We don't use silly methods of manipulation. It takes Three P's. Preach the Gospel, Pray for the Spirit and Provide the opportunity. That's how it works for the church but what about an individual? How does it play out for an individual? How do I test myself and see if I am in the faith? I think there are some diagnostic questions you can ask. Do I have a distinct testimony? Do I live an obedient life? Do I have sincere worship? Do I view money biblically? Do I hate my own sin? Do I love God's word? Look, if you don't like to read the Bible, go to church, be around Christian people, worship, and if you are not convicted of your sin, why would you think you are a Christian? It's why we focus on conversion and not just crowds.

### **We Deal With Issues Without Demeaning People**

See if you can see that in v. 1. Let's read it again and see the problem.

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.*

There are two groups of people in the church: Jewish converts who spoke Hebrew but there is another group called Hellenists. They were part of the Diaspora Jews. They

were scattered out in the Greek world and their first language was Greek. So the widows of the Diaspora were not getting their fair share and the Greek-speaking Jews started complaining.

"Complaint" is a negative word. It's used to describe the murmuring of the ungrateful Israelites. It's the grumbling or muttering and it sort of felt like discontentedness. But just because there is someone complaining doesn't mean there is not an issue. It's the first time we see Christians complaining and it turns out it is legitimate. Notice the disciples didn't dismiss or say "those Hellenists, they're just a bunch of complainers." The problem wasn't just food, the problem was cultural and maybe even racial. And they dealt with the issue without demeaning the person.

That's what the Gospel demands. The fact that people are made in the image of God means that every person is to be respected as an image-bearer. And the fact that every person is a sinner separated from God means that we are obligated to bring the Gospel of Hope in to deal with sin. It's why believers are in such trouble in this sexual revolution. When we talk about homosexuality, it will be received as you condemning homosexuals. When in fact, we believe that the most loving thing we can do is offer the Hope of Christ and say "Christ is better than that." Whatever "that" is, Christ is better. Taste and see that the Lord is good. We deal with the issue, whatever the issue is, without demeaning people.

A Gospel-centered church with Gospel-centered people always fights distractions. We focus on converts and not crowds. We deal with issues without demeaning people.

### **We Clarify Priorities and Run Quickly to Problems**

As soon as they heard the problem in v. 1, look what they did in v. 2.

*<sup>2</sup>And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."*

All of the leaders get together and then call the church together and come up with a plan, but as they do they make sure the church was clear in its priority.

In verses 2, 4, & 7, See the centrality of God's word? It's important to note that the Apostles weren't taking away the legitimacy of the ministry to the widows. By all means, it had to be done but not at the expense of hearing from God's word, corporately and personally.

All too often we let *good* things get in the way of the *best* things for a church. That can be disastrous. So the Apostles did what we must do: they clarified their priorities. In V. 2 – We must realize that the Word of God must be centered. V. 4 – Then we devote ourselves to prayer and studying God's word. V. 7 – And ultimately, The Word of God continues to increase.

If we don't bring God's word to bear on people's lives, then all the programs and mission trips and mercy ministries amount to nothing. And the prevailing theme of God's word

is a Holy and loving God, pursuing sinful man with the redeeming grace of forgiveness found at the cross.

So they set their priorities and run to the problem. But to solve problems, you need leaders, and that brings me to my next point.

### **Leaders are Servants and Servants are Solid**

In v. 3, the solution is set.

*<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.*

Notice the criteria:

1. Good Reputation
2. Full of the Spirit
3. Full of Wisdom.

It's what servant leadership looks like in the church:

1. Connected to church
2. Converted to Christ
3. Called by God
4. Committed to Mission.

Leaders are servants and servants are solid. In the text, the church set aside seven men. And Luke describes the first two of them who will become famous.

In v. 5, Stephen – His name means "victory crown" - full of Faith, feet in a stable stance. He was trustworthy, faithful, dependable and loyal. He will end up giving his life for the Gospel.

Philip – lover of horses – becomes a mouthpiece for the Gospel. In Acts 8 he is an evangelist and in Acts 21, his daughters take up his ministry. What you have here is a shared approach to doing the ministry of the Gospel in the church. The solution to the problem in Acts 6 was a new kind of teamwork in the church, and once we do that we end up with the last point.

### **We Focus on the Mission and Trust God to Move**

Look how Luke describes the mission in v. 7: Three things happened when everybody found their place.

1. The church stayed focused. In v. 7 The world of God continued to increase
2. The church reached its neighbors. In v. 7 the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem
3. The church saw the miracle of conversion In v. 7 a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. The Priests were hostile to Christ. In Acts 5, they wanted to kill the Christians.

This tells us that the love of God found at the cross of Christ has the power to melt the coldest, hardest heart. When you see the holiness of God and the need in your life for forgiveness, come to the cross of Jesus and leave it all here.

*(Pastor prays and delivers the Gospel invitation)*