

Acts 6: THE GROWING PAINS

Introduction

The event recorded in Acts 6 is believed to have occurred about three years after the day of Pentecost; the church has now grown to several thousand people. As we've said, the book of Acts is God's unfolding story of the first Christians and how He worked through them to carry out the Great Commission and to be witnesses throughout their entire world. Over the last few chapters of our study, we've seen how the church in Jerusalem grew in leaps and bounds, thereby fulfilling Jesus' command in Acts 1:8. We have seen how they remained resolute and committed to the gospel in spite of many oppositions and threats to their lives. However, up until now, the threats have been from external forces. The account here in Chapter 6 is the first time we see the church threatened by internal forces, and thankfully the church overcame it.

With the growth of the church came some interpersonal and administrative struggles. There were accusations of prejudice by the Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) against the Hebrew-speaking Jews about their widows being neglected in the distribution of food aid. Luke did not tell us if the complaints were found to be true or not. So, it is possible they were, but also possible the issue was more about perception. Nevertheless, the Apostle decisively addressed the issue and seized the opportunity to restructure the church for effectiveness. They chose seven men (who are believed to be Hellenists) to be part of the leadership structure of the church. This is believed to be the origin of Deacon in the Bible. The action of the apostles pleased the people and led to even greater growth of the church.

In the second half of the chapter, Luke introduces us to the life and ministry of Stephen, one of the seven chosen. We find out that Stephen somehow evolved from just "serving tables" to becoming a powerful evangelist witnessing Jesus with power and miracles.

Study the Scriptures: Read the Passage Acts 6:1-15

Note your thoughts as you read:

Write down any questions that come to mind as you read:

Think Through the Following Questions

1. What does it say about the early church (and the apostle) that they made caring for the poor (mainly the widows) among them a major priority in their church life?
2. What does it also say about the apostles that in a church of several thousand people, it seems they were the ones doing all the food distribution along with preaching up until now?
3. What do you think of this crisis and the complaints of the Hellenistic Jews? Do you think it was a real problem or a perception issue?
4. What do you understand of this statement by the apostle, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." Could this be interpreted by some people as pride?
5. What do you make of the apostle's response to the crisis; restructuring the church and appointing new leaders?
6. What do you think we can learn from their response today as we solve problems in the church? How can we help our church leaders to be more effective?
7. From this passage, what were the apostle's main priorities? Do you think our church leader can learn from this occurrence? Acts 6:4
8. What kind of man was Stephen? What do you make of his evolution from being a Deacon (waiting tables) to a powerful evangelist? Acts 6:8-15

Lesson Learned: Are there any new things you learned from this passage today?

Application: How do you think this will impact your thinking and/or actions going forward?