

The Book of Acts

Lesson 10: The Seven Chosen and Stephen's Witness -- Acts 6:1-15

Growing churches have growing pains. The number of disciples is multiplying, and with the growth comes a problem that threatens the precious unity of the body. A complaint arises: the Greek-speaking widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, while the Hebrew-speaking widows are cared for. It is the kind of practical, painful issue that can quietly split a church if it is mishandled, hurt feelings, perceived favoritism, real needs going unmet.

The apostles respond with wisdom. They will not abandon their first calling, prayer and the ministry of the word, to manage the food line themselves, but neither will they ignore the widows. So they ask the church to choose seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, to take charge of this service. The congregation chooses, the apostles pray and lay hands on them, and the problem is solved in a way that protects both the needy and the priority of the word.

And then Luke tells us the result, almost like a refrain that runs through the whole book: the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly, and even a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. When God's people handle conflict with humility, care for the vulnerable, and keep the word central, the gospel runs.

One of the seven, a man named Stephen, full of grace and power, begins doing great wonders among the people. His opponents argue with him and cannot withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he speaks, so they resort to lies. They stir up false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy against the temple and the law of Moses, and they drag him before the council. But as the lies fly, the members of the council look at Stephen and see his face shining like the face of an angel. The stage is set for one of the great moments of witness in all of Scripture.

Group Discussion: When a real conflict threatened the church's unity, the apostles addressed it directly and wisely rather than ignoring it or letting it fester (vv. 1-6). What can we learn from how they handled this problem, and why is it dangerous to leave conflicts and unmet needs unaddressed in a church?

Personal Reflection: The seven were chosen to do humble, practical service, caring for widows and food, yet this work was vital to the church (vv. 2-4). Are you willing to serve in unseen, ordinary ways for the good of the body? Where could you quietly meet a need this week?

Read Acts 6:1-15

Study Questions

1. When the widows were being neglected, the apostles refused to abandon prayer and the ministry of the word, but appointed seven qualified men to handle the need (vv. 2-4). What does this teach us about priorities in the church and about how God's people should organize to meet real needs?
2. The seven were chosen for humble, practical service, work that was unseen but essential (vv. 2-4). Are you willing to serve the body in ordinary, behind-the-scenes ways without recognition? Where might God be calling you to quietly meet a need?
3. The church was told to choose seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom (v. 3). Why did even this practical task require people of proven character, and what does this teach about the qualifications for those who serve in the church?
4. The seven were chosen because they were known for good character and spiritual maturity (v. 3). If your congregation were looking for people of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, would your life qualify? What area of character is God calling you to grow in?
5. The apostles said they would devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (v. 4). Why did they treat these two things as their highest priority, and what does this teach us about the central place of the word and prayer in the life of the church?
6. The apostles refused to let even good and urgent tasks crowd out prayer and the word (vv. 2-4). In your own busy life, do urgent demands tend to crowd out time with God? What would it take to give the word and prayer a more central place this week?
7. After the conflict was resolved well, Luke reports that the word of God continued to increase and the disciples multiplied greatly (v. 7). What is the connection between how the church handled this problem and the growth that followed, and what does this teach about guarding the unity of the body?
8. The church's loving, fair handling of a tense situation protected its unity and witness (vv. 1-7). When you sense tension, division, or unmet needs in your church or relationships, do you tend to help heal it or unintentionally add to it? What is one way you could be a peacemaker?
9. Stephen, full of grace and power, spoke with such wisdom and the Spirit that his opponents could not withstand him, so they resorted to false accusations about the temple and the law (vv. 8-15). What does Stephen's witness teach us about Spirit-empowered boldness and the world's opposition to the truth, and why were the charges about the temple and the law so significant?
10. Looking back over this whole passage, the wise handling of conflict, the call to humble service and good character, the priority of the word, and Stephen's courageous witness, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to grow, and what is one step you will take this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the qualifications for those who serve as deacons in the church; John 13:1-17, Jesus washing feet and teaching greatness through servanthood; 1 Peter 2:2, longing for the pure milk of the word in order to grow; Matthew 5:9, the blessing on the peacemakers who are called children of God; Luke 21:12-15, Jesus' promise of wisdom no opponent can withstand