

With Growth Comes Problems

Do not let conflict inside or outside the church discourage you

Acts 6

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Billy Henshall – Acts 4.32–35

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – Songs on good works

Prelude:

I. The Book of Acts shows a pattern of conflict and triumph.

- A. Sometimes the conflict was a problem within the church,
- B. at other times the conflict was persecution against the church.
 - 1. While conflict can be a low time,
 - 2. it did not happen that way for the early church.
 - a) Luke shows how they dealt with the conflict, and
 - b) he also showed how it caused growth in the church later.

II. Conflict and Triumph in the Book of Acts

- A. Chapter 4.1–31 showed the Jewish authorities
 - 1. arresting two of the preachers, and
 - a) ordering them to quit speaking in the name of Jesus.
 - 2. How did the church deal with it?
 - a) v. 4 | People kept believing the message.
 - b) vv. 8–12, 19–20 | The preachers continued bold preaching.
 - c) vv. 23–31 | They went to church and prayed for more boldness.
- B. Chapter 5.17–42 showed the Jewish authorities
 - 1. arresting the preachers again.
 - a) The Jewish authorities beat the apostles and
 - b) commanded them to stop preaching.
 - 2. How did the church deal with it?
 - a) v. 21 | They went right back to teaching.

- b) vv. 29–32 | Peter boldly denounced the murderous leaders.
 - c) v. 41 | The apostles rejoiced for their suffering, and
 - d) v. 42 | shows they continued teaching.
- C. In this sermon, I want to show you more conflict.
- 1. Chapter 6.1–7 shows one group complaining against another.
 - 2. However, the apostles found a way to resolve the issue.
- D. Then, beginning at verse 8
- 1. persecution arises against the church, and
 - 2. it goes all way to 8.4, and
 - a) in 11.19–20 a reference is made to it.
 - b) What we will begin to see tonight is this:
 - (1) vv. 8–10 Public debate
 - (2) v. 11 False witness
 - (3) v. 12 Arrest and trial
 - (4) vv. 13–14 False witness
 - (5) 6.15–7.1 Trial
 - (6) 7.54, 57–59 Murder
 - (7) 8.1, 3–4 Scattered, havoc, home invasions, arrest
 - c) We will also begin to see how the church handled this persecution:
 - (1) 6.10 A deacon spoke with wisdom and the Spirit
 - (2) 7.2–53 The deacons spoke biblical history, rebuked persecutors
 - (3) 7.55–56 He looked into heaven
 - (4) 7.59 He asked Jesus to receive his spirit
 - (5) 7.60 He prayed for his executioners forgiveness
 - (6) 8.4; 11.19–20 The church continued preaching

Persuasion:

I. Acts 6.1–4 | Serving Tables

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

A. Uh oh, a problem in the church!

1. Some people look for a church without problems, and
2. if they become members at a congregation
 - a) where problems do occur,
 - b) the people disappear, not wanting to be part of conflict.
 - (1) Show me a church without problems and
 - (2) I will show you a dead church.

B. The numbers in the church grew, and

1. that brought on problems,
 - a) *internally* because someone will think his wishes are neglected, and
 - b) *externally* because our enemies will feel threatened by our work.
2. The local members of the church in Jerusalem
 - a) gave generously to those in need among them, but
 - (1) Greek converts to Judaism
 - (2) had been separate from the disciples of Jewish background.
 - (a) Did the Hebrews keep the Hellenists separate, or
 - (b) did the Hellenists keep themselves separate from the Hebrews?
 - b) This led to the neglect of the Greek widows.
 - (1) Was this intentional or

(2) was it simply a problem that comes with a large number of people.

- (a) When an organization, such as the church, grows,
- (b) someone will get neglected.

C. Notice what the apostles/preachers did.

1. They knew that they could not handle the problem
2. without neglecting their primary duties.
 - a) They were distributing the *word* for the *soul*.
 - b) They needed someone to distribute *food* for the *body*.
3. They instructed the church
 - a) to look for seven men
 - b) who could oversee this business.
4. However, the people over this work had to be
 - a) men of good reputation,
 - b) men full of the Holy Spirit, and
 - c) men full of wisdom.

D. That way the preachers could devote themselves

1. to prayer and
2. to the ministry of the word.

II. Acts 6.5–6 | Spiritual Men

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

A. Everyone agreed to the plan of the apostles. Wow!

B. They chose seven men.

C. Luke noted a couple of things in regards to the first man:

1. Stephen was a man full of faith.
2. He was also a man full of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) However, all of these men had to be full of the Holy Spirit.
 - b) We would think that they would all have fullness of faith.
 - (1) Since Luke added those notes about Stephen,
 - (2) there must have been something
 - (a) different or special
 - (b) about his faith and his filling of the Holy Spirit.

D. The church placed these seven men before the apostles,

1. who prayed for the seven, and
2. laid their hands on them.
 - a) Part of the ministry of the preacher/apostles was that of prayer, and
 - b) here we see them doing that very thing.

III. Acts 6.7 | The Word of God Spreads

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

A. The preachers also continued in the ministry of the word,

1. just like they said that they had to do.
2. Preachers also need to hear this message, for
 - a) we often let ourselves get distracted, or
 - b) we, like Martha, distract ourselves and fail to fulfill our mission.

B. The result from the preacher's actions

1. was another increase in the number of disciples,
2. including many of the priests obeying the faith.

IV. Acts 6.8–10 | Wisdom and the Spirit

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

A. Again Luke noted two things about Stephen.

1. He was a man full of faith.
2. He was a man full of power.
 - a) Everyone saw Stephen's power
 - b) when he did great wonders and signs among the people.
 - (1) Perhaps this was the way in which he was full of the Holy Spirit,
 - (2) which does not inherently mean ability to work miracles.
 - (a) However, Luke showed us another way
 - (b) that Stephen showed his fullness of the Spirit.

B. He so spoke that his enemies

1. could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.
2. He was full of the Holy Spirit to the extent that he could do two things:
 - a) He could work miracles.
 - b) He could speak without anyone being able to refute him.

C. Another conflict arose, but

1. this time it came from outside the church in the form of persecution.
2. A certain Synagogue of the Jews wanted to silence Stephen.
 - a) Therefore, they began disputing with him.
 - b) However, they could not succeed.
 - (1) Next, Luke shows what they did to silence Stephen.
 - (2) His enemies could not silence him

- (a) by words and argumentation,
- (b) so they sought to silence him by violence.

V. Acts 6.11–14 | **Conspiring to Bear False Witness**

11 Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”

A. Another word for this today is Fake News, or

- 1. I like the biblical phrase,
- 2. bearing false witness,
 - a) which under the Law of Moses was punishable by death, and
 - b) under the Law of Christ is punishable by hell.

B. It is hard to believe

- 1. that someone would come right out and lie, but
- 2. it happens.
 - a) It happened here in Acts 6 among religious people.
 - b) It happens in political debate today and sometimes in the church.
 - (1) The difficulty in believing that someone would lie
 - (2) means that many people *will* believe the lie,
 - (a) just like in politics in America today, and
 - (b) anywhere else that debate rages.

C. These men do what liars do,

- 1. they dreamed up something
- 2. that did not even come close to resembling truth.

- a) It was not that they twisted what Stephen said, but
- b) they claimed that he said something that he never would have said.
 - (1) Because people disagreed with Stephen, and
 - (2) because people could not imagine these Jews lying to them,
 - (a) they believed the lie.

D. Stephen never blasphemed Moses or God.

- 1. In fact, in the next chapter you will hear Stephen speaking before
 - a) the Jewish Council or Sanhedrin and
 - b) praising Moses.
- 2. Truly, Stephen will speak more on Moses than on any other subject.

VI. Acts 6.15 | The Face of an Angel

15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

A. Two different people referred to David as being like an angel,

1Sa 29.9 Then Achish answered and said to David, "I know that you are as good in my sight as an angel of God..."

2Sa 14.17 Your maidservant said, "The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so is my lord the king in discerning good and evil."

B. Stephen's accusers made serious charges against him.

- 1. The Council wanted to hear how Stephen would answer such charges, but
- 2. what they saw was a man who had no fear of them, because
 - a) he knew the truth, and
 - b) he placed his life in the hands of the Lord Jesus,
 - (1) even as an angel would.
 - (2) As angels speak, so spoke Stephen.