

## Set Apart for Service

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

### Introduction

Picture for yourself a perfect church. What would it look like? Some of you might say, “I would picture a church that has the music I like.” Others might say, “The perfect church has a lot of activities going on.” And some of you might say, “A perfect church has a lot of loving people who really care about one another.” Whatever your idea of the perfect church is, do you ever see it as one that is free of conflict? Does the perfect church community never have problems? Well, if there ever was a perfect church, you better not join it, otherwise you would ruin it. Once people get involved in something, there are going to be problems. That is the nature of people.

I ask those questions because I think we all desire to be part of a community that really has its act together. We want to be a part of something that is going well and is doing things right. When problems arise or conflicts emerge among the people, it might cause us to question what is happening — a fair question, mind you. We are not able to control every problem in a community, but we can often control how we respond to problems. How we respond to these issues can largely impact a community’s future. We see that in this passage. We see a church that for the most part is doing well. We see a church growing and making disciples. And then, along comes a hiccup. Trouble occurs in the community, and the church now has the *opportunity* to address the issue.

### The Need for Help

What was the situation in the early church mentioned in this passage? In those days, the church was increasing in number. They were growing. People were coming to Christ. People were joining the church. For the most part, things were going very well. Having growth and getting more people, however, does not necessarily mean all things are going well. In the midst of this great church growth, several problems arose. There were *three* problems mentioned in the text.

#### 1) *An Unmet Physical Need*

In the midst of exploding growth in the church, there was a group of people whose needs were not being met, namely helping the widows in the church. Earlier in chapter four of Acts, Luke told us about a ministry of the church where people were bringing their possessions *to the Apostles* and it was distributed to any who were in need.

**Acts 4:34–35** <sup>34</sup> *There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold* <sup>35</sup> *and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

So, the church was taking care of its own people, but somewhere along the way, a group of people, some widows in the church, was being neglected. It would be like a

church today having a ministry to serve the community and some who we should be helping are being overlooked. In fairness, this neglect may have arisen simply because of the rapid addition of people in the church. It could be that the church was unable to meet the growing demands of the community.

## 2) *An Unhealthy Division Within the Church*

Another problem was that the issue of not meeting everyone's needs prompted some to complain about it. There is proof right there that they were Baptists. Something was not going as planned and someone in the church complained about it. In this case, there were two groups Luke mentioned. There were the Hellenists — Jews whose primary language was Greek and who most likely lived outside of Palestine. The other group was known as the Hebrews — Jews who were native to the land and who spoke Aramaic as their primary language. Remember, the church had experienced phenomenal growth and had seen many people from the surrounding lands join it.

As mentioned earlier, the neglect of the Greek-speaking widows may have been completely unintentional due to the rapid growth of the church. It could have been a language barrier between the two groups that led to the neglect of some needy widows. What is interesting, is who made the complaint and how the church leaders responded to that complaint. There are three kinds of people in any problem: 1) Those who *ignore* it, 2) Those who *complain* about it, and 3) Those who try to *resolve* it. Ignorers. Complainers. Resolvers. What type of person are you? When a problem occurs in your life, do you ignore it, hoping it will go away? Do you complain about it, expecting someone else to fix it? Or, are you the type of person who accepts the challenge and looks for a solution to resolve the issue?

## 3) *An Unrealistic Expectation*

Well, we see what the Greek-speaking Jews did in this situation — they complained about it. The unmet need of the widows raised the question as to who should resolve this issue. Who should be doing this ministry or at least making sure it is getting done? Apparently, someone said it was the Apostles' responsibility to do this. We know this from the statement the Apostles made in this passage.

**Acts 6:2** <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."*

Notice, that the Apostles, which were the Twelve Disciples, said, "It was not right for them to give up *preaching the Word of God* to wait on tables. Literally, it reads, "It is not desirable that we leave the Word of God to wait on tables." What were the Apostles saying? They were saying that they had a more important responsibility to do in the church and that they should focus on that. Does this happen in church today? Well, yes. You might hear people say, "Pastor, something is not getting done and you need to take care of it. Pastor, you need to call this person. Pastor, you need to do this or that." If something is not getting done in the church, some will point their finger at the pastor and

say, “Why are you not taking care of this?” Maybe a better question is, “What are you going to do about whatever issue there is?”

What the Apostles were saying is that they needed to focus on the task of preaching God’s Word and praying and someone else in the church should be responsible for taking care of the widows. The Apostles were *not* saying this ministry or any other ministry in the church was unimportant. In fact, how they dealt with this particular issue, such as the high requirements for those responsible for it, tells us that they thought this ministry was very important, indeed. A point of application is that whatever God has called you to do, that is your primary responsibility. Good activities can easily consume our time and actually become an enemy to what God desires for us. We must stay focused on what He has called each of us to do.

### **The Call to Service**

So, we see the problems in the early church mentioned in this passage. There was a need that was not being met, there was conflict in the church as a result of the need not being met, and there was an unrealistic expectation on the current leaders of the church. What was the solution? How did the Apostles respond to this challenge? They basically told the church, “You resolve this issue by selecting someone else to do it.”

**Acts 6:3–4** <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.*

The Apostles told the church that they should select seven men from among themselves who would make sure the needs of the widows would be met. The church was not to select just anyone, either. These men had to have certain qualifications. They should have a good reputation. They should be wise and full of the Spirit. Why are these things necessary to wait on tables? Surely, anyone physically capable of serving tables can do it. Given the conflict that had arisen and the possibility of real trouble between groups in the church, those charged with this ministry should be well thought of in the community and be wise in dealing with distributing food to those in need.

What may be interesting is that the church selected men who were most likely Greek-speaking Jews, given that they had Greek names. These men would have been of the group that initially complained about the problem. Thus, the church was saying, “Since this group was being neglected and they were the ones who complained about it, let them make sure the ministry gets done. This probably shows wisdom and helped relieve the tensions between the two groups. The Apostles confirmed the congregation’s selection by praying for these men and laying their hands on them. This was a common way to appoint people to service. The Apostles had called upon the church to choose these leaders to meet a need in the church and they confirmed the church’s selections.

### **The Result of Servanthood**

What we see in this episode of the early church is that in spite of suffering and persecution, in spite of sin in the church, and in spite of conflict between groups in the church, the church *continued* to grow. It grew with remarkable love among the members of the church and it grew with the bold proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God continued to increase in spite of widespread opposition. Look at the result of the problems mentioned in this passage.

**Acts 6:7** <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.*

Even when we face problems, those problems do not necessarily determine our future as much as how we respond to them. This passage started with the number of disciples increasing and it ended with both the Word of God continuing to increase and the number of disciples also increasing. What we see is that the church was growing, met a challenge, resolved those challenges, and then continued to grow. We face all sorts of things in our lives and we have little to no control about much of them; but, how we respond to those challenges can impact our future. What trouble are you facing today? Are you letting that trouble determine your future? Do not! Resolve to act and face your problems and be determined to overcome it. Though we might be powerless to prevent certain things happening in our lives, we have the promise of God's Word, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

## Conclusion

In closing, what is your idea of the perfect church? Is it one free of problems? Is it one that is growing? I challenge you to think of church as a group of people who love Jesus and are growing in love of Him and each other. That does not mean we will have a smooth ride through life together. In fact, we should expect problems. How we deal with those challenges matters? Do you trust God to see you through whatever happens? Do you trust God to grow His Church and take it where He desires it to go? Are you willing to step up and serve this church and this community and help us meet the needs of the community? What is God calling you to do today? Are you being obedient to that call?

Do not let problems and trouble in life discourage you. Do not let life's troubles define you. Face those challenges by turning to God in prayer and ask Him how you ought to respond to them. In the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," it says,

*Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Whatever is troubling you, whatever problems are in your life, whatever issues you are facing, turn to Jesus Christ. Take it to Him in prayer. He is the Good Shepherd Who takes care of His Sheep. This is Good News. Thanks be to God. Amen!