

## Growing pains

1. Opening questions
2. Observation and exposition of Acts 6:1-7
3. The take-away for us?

## Opening questions

1. Are all Christians disciples?
2. Is it ever okay or legitimate to complain about church?
3. Can conflict in a (or the) church hamper the word of God and the Holy Spirit?
4. What should be the primary focus for church leaders?

## Observation and exposition of Acts 6:1-7

### 1. Acts 6:1-7

### 2. (6:1)

- a. "these days"
  - i. What is Luke referring to?
    1. **5:42**
- b. "disciples"
  - i. First occurrence in Acts
  - ii. Are all Christians disciples?
  - iii. Development of terms?
    1. Believers (**2:44; 4:32**)
    2. Brothers (**1:15-16**; rest of **Acts**)
    3. Disciples
    4. Christians (**11:26**)
- c. "increasing in number"
  - i. This growth is a direct result of what?
    1. "Teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" in **5:42**
  - ii. Do you think it's possible to see this kind of church growth today?
- d. "a complaint arose"
  - i. Was this a legitimate complaint?
  - ii. See **4:34-35**
- e. A clash of cultures
  - i. Who are the "Hellenists?"
    1. The importance of context
      - a. This passage
        - i. Believing Greek-speaking Jews
      - b. **9:29**

- i. Non-believing Greek-speaking Jews
  - c. **11:19-20**
    - i. Greek-speaking non-Jews
    - ii. Also see the link here back to our passage.
- 2. The Hellenists in this passage probably only spoke Greek, and not Aramaic (or Hebrew)
  - a. They were either from the Diaspora (dispersion) or descendants of dispersed Jews
  - b. Other, perhaps most, Jews spoke both Aramaic and Greek; for example, Peter and Paul
    - i. Peter interacted with Cornelius and his family and friends
    - ii. Paul interacted with everyone!
      - 1. Examples?
        - a. Addressing the Areopagus in Athens (**17:16-34**)
        - b. **21:37-22:2**
- ii. Who are the Hebrews?
    - 1. Aramaic-speaking Jews
- f. “their widows were being neglected”
  - i. Intentionally?

### 3. (6:2-4)

- a. “the twelve”
  - i. Only used here in **Acts**
  - ii. Possibly reinforces the idea that Matthias was a legitimate replacement for Judas.
- b. The apostles declared the importance or priority of prayer and preaching, BUT they did not downplay or minimize the importance of caring for physical needs.
- c. So were the apostles the ones who were handling the “daily distribution” mentioned in **verse 1**?
  - i. Possibly, and if so, perhaps they realized at this point that prayer and preaching (the ministry of the word) was important enough that they couldn’t afford to be distracted by other tasks or responsibilities.
    - 1. After this, they were **free** to focus on the ministry of the word
    - 2. Cf. **2:42**, where the church/community is a model of devotion to the apostles’ teaching
    - 3. The apostles in this passage are a model of devotion to their task
    - 4. Lesson for us today?
- d. “the full number of disciples”
  - i. The apostles brought this issue before the whole church for resolution.
- e. Qualifications of these seven men?

- i. Of good repute (reputation)
    - 1. Thus the importance of involving the entire church.
  - ii. Full of the Spirit
  - iii. Full of wisdom
- f. Why didn't the apostles do the choosing?

#### 4. (6:5-6)

- a. The church agreed!
- b. The church chose seven men, who all happen to have Greek names
  - i. Were these men Hellenists?
    - 1. We don't know for sure, but it's likely
- c. Stephen listed first, and his story takes up the rest of **chapters 6 and 7**, and is pivotal to the next step in the expansion of the gospel
- d. Philip listed second, who played a major role in spreading the gospel in **chapter 8**
  - i. See **21:8-10**
  - ii. Was Philip Luke's source for **chapters 6-8**?
- e. Nicanor, a proselyte of Antioch
  - i. Not even a Jew!
- f. Some think that these men were the first "deacons," but that doesn't seem to be Luke's purpose here, and they are not labeled as such.
  - i. Besides that, Stephen and Philip took on major roles as evangelists and preachers

#### 5. (6:7)

- a. Passage begins and ends with a record of the remarkable growth of the church
- b. Luke is developing a theology of "the word of God" and key moments of growth
  - i. **6:7**, after internal conflict is resolved
  - ii. **12:24**, after Herod's persecution of James, Peter (and others?) comes to an end with Herod's death
  - iii. **19:20**, after the "sons of Sceva" incident and internal cleansing or purifying of **19:18-19**
  - iv. How was the Holy Spirit working in these events?
  - v. Principle for us?
    - 1. Deal with conflict to "free" the word of God
- c. "the word of God continued to increase"
  - i. What does this mean?
  - ii. See **Luke 8:4-15**, the parable of the soils (especially **8:8**)
    - 1. "Luke coined an expression which means that the church which is the creature of the word grew." Peterson, 236
- d. "a great many of the priests"

- i. Connection with Stephen's ministry, message, and eventual martyring?
  - 1. "It must have made Stephen's position more difficult, as he sought to explore the implications of the gospel for Christian attitudes towards the law and the temple (6:11-14)." Peterson, 236
- e. "obedient to the faith"
  - i. Obedience to the apostolic pattern of belief and lifestyle

### **The take-away for us**

- 1.

### **Resources**

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III