Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 6

Introduction
Acts 6 is a brief chapter preceding a very lengthy chapter 7. Even though chapter 6 is brief, there is much to be learned and much applicable directly to the local church today. In addition, we see the continuance of God’s ordained will and plan being carried out.

For me, chapter 6 is an opportunity to catch my breath from all that chapters 1-5 encompassed. The chapters that follow will once again take us on a journey that will challenge our beliefs and traditions. They will cause us to question the depth of our own commitment to our Lord. Chapter 6 gives a brief moment to stop before moving forward into the challenges faced by the early professing Christians.

Once again, we see God himself well in control at the helm of building His church. From minor logistical problems to major arrests, God is working His determined plan. God is using the good of some and the sinful nature of others to facilitate that which He has ordained to take place.

1. The Potential in Every Problem (vs. 1-7)

By now, the band of believers in Jesus Christ was in the thousands. There was no Southern Baptist Convention or Catholic Church headquarters to which the disciples could turn for organizational guidance. Everything had to be solved by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When a problem arose, He (the Holy Spirit) would guide them to the correct solution.

Sometimes problems can be considered small and nagging. It is easy to discount them and just hope they will go away. But when the Holy Spirit is involved, there is always a solution and that solution will usually lead to something wonderful and much bigger than we imagine.

What was the problem that existed among the early believers? (vs. 1)

Hebraic Jews were also known as Palestinian Jews. They were typically those who lived in and around Jerusalem. They were intensely nationalistic and vigilant in observance of the law. They spoke either Hebrew or a form of ancient Aramaic. The Hellenistic Jews were those who typically lived in Greek speaking areas of the world and maintained their religion through synagogues in their cities. There was always a bit of dissension between the two groups of Jews.

There was a saying among the Hellenistic Jews; “This year in Jerusalem.” This expressed their longing to be in Jerusalem during the Passover. But this Passover, Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews alike were treated to the witnessing of Pentecost which brought thousands together as new believers in Christ.

But tension arose between the two groups as the Hellenistic Jews felt the needs of their people were being overlooked. They believed what they had put into the common offering was not being equally distributed among their widows and people in need.

What was the solution offered by the apostles? (vs. 2-4)

One can’t help but think the apostles were already seeing the burden of trying to preach and tend to the needs of the multitude of people. I suspect they were already feeling the enormous pressure. I am impressed with their lack of defensiveness when the problem was brought to their attention. It would have been easy to get defensive but the Holy Spirit lead them otherwise.

Their solution was to have the Hellenistic Jews choose 7 men among themselves to handle this task. The idea seems brilliant, but more than that it reflects the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
What were the requirements of the first deacons? (vs. 3)

a) From among you - they needed to choose someone from within their ranks to represent them. Don’t tell me our constitution wasn’t inspired by the Bible.

b) Good reputation – The word is also translated “witness.” In other words, someone whose life witness is one of integrity and reflective of their faith in Christ.

c) Full of the Spirit – This was the ultimate qualification. Being full of the Spirit would obviously bring the other qualifications in line. The indwelling of the Spirit would gift the persons with the ability to allow God to lead them in their responsibilities.

d) Wisdom – They needed to be someone who possessed wisdom which is actually a fruit of the Spirit. Someone who would be careful to think things through and be fair.

Without the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit, a person / deacon can actually stand in the way of the spiritual leadership of the church. It is perilous to lead a church on human training alone. A church has a budget, checking accounts, power bills, payrolls and other obligations just like any business. However, a church is not a business; it is a ministry with a much higher purpose than simply turning a profit. The church’s very core is its purpose which is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. We function not under the direction of a CEO but the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, every aspect of church leadership requires these basic attributes discussed. The qualifications for leadership in the church have not changed since the first century. We can do church without them but not the real work of the church without them.

What was the end result of this problem / solution? (vs. 5-7)

In addition to providing requirements for good church leadership, this text teaches us that every problem has the potential to provide solutions that extend far beyond the issue at hand. The apostles were hindered by trying to do everything and these new deacons were the solution to several problems. The Holy Spirit provided a solution which not only addressed the complaint of the Hellenistic Jews but actually opened the door for more preaching and thus more converts.

Not only did the solution open the door for more preaching by the apostles but we find the deacons themselves became great witnesses. We will soon read that God opens new frontiers through two deacons in particular; Stephen and Philip.

Summary - Luke allows us an honest look at an age-old problem. Too often our prejudices enter into our new life in Christ and thus into the church. It is a bit disappointing but also refreshing to know that what often happens in our churches today happened in the first church as well.

We often speak of solving our church problems by getting back to being more like the early church. Luke helps us understand that our task is to live in our time with the Lord of all time. The way to do that is to seek the Holy Spirit for solutions to the problems we face. Retreating is never a viable solution.

One doesn’t have to look far to see similar factions within the body of believers today. Some denominations claim to have the right theology while others claim to have the gifts of the spirit, etc. Some people want to emphasize the importance of local missions over world missions. We must never compromise or move away from the teachings of the Bible and the truth of the gospel. However, there are many practical and procedural matters of which Christians can easily find solutions through the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Ex. Emersion vs. Sprinkling). We need to avoid the mentality of wanting it all our way and look for God’s solutions that will satisfy our differences.
2. The Real Power of Grace (vs. 8-15)

Next week we will study chapter 7 which is completely dedicated to sermon and fate of deacon Stephen. However, we should note a few things about Stephen from chapter 6.

**How does Luke describe Stephen as a person? (vs. 5, 8)**

Our church recently nominated two men to serve as deacons for the coming year. Once these men have met with the existing deacons, they will be presented to the church for election. Soon I will preach a sermon on the qualification of a deacon as found in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3.

Luke exhibits great admiration for Stephen and rightfully so as we will see in chapter 7. He describes Stephen as full of faith, grace and the Holy Spirit. In verse 8, he describes Stephen as full of grace and power, performing many signs and wonders.

Stephen was not just a man in Christ; but a man in whom Christ lived. He had genuinely experienced God’s grace and atonement in his life and thus had the gift of faith and love for others. This was a man who was experiencing the full power of Christ’s death, resurrection and filling on a daily basis. It inspired in him a daring commitment to tell others of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every man selected to serve as a deacon should compare his faith to that of Stephen. **Stephen serves as a model mentor to every deacon candidate and every Christian in his example of faith and zeal.**

It is important for us to understand that a deacon is to be one who is willing to serve the church by way of serving God. **The foremost qualification of a deacon is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

Illus: Our church is currently looking for a custodian/ maintenance person to handle facility cleaning and maintenance. The building and grounds committee decided that their members along with the deacons would handle the responsibility in the interim. Last week a letter along with a rotational list went out to the committee members and deacons. You will not believe the number of phone calls I received complaining about this assignment. Zero!

That is the spirit of a deacon.

**Conclusion**

Acts chapter 6 teaches us problems large or small can be solved by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We must view every problem as an opportunity not only to solve the problem at hand but to expand our ministry by opening more doors of opportunity and windows of ideas.

We should be inspired by leadership of the Holy Spirit in the early church and know that same Spirit guides our body of believers today. **The source of inspiration, solutions, resources and ideas that equipped the 1st century church equips us today.**

May our hearts be filled as we anticipate the opportunities of ministry for our church and rejoice in every new believer in our Savior.