

September 15 2021 Acts 6 The family Widens:

Prepared by Graeme Dixon.

Breakout group Sharing time: 15 minutes:

Introduction:

The fledgling and quickly expanding Christian church we find in Acts has already faced great persecution and corruption. The apostles now face a new challenge of distraction, of taking their eye off the ball. From the beginning the new church had shared their resources, a sign that they were called to live as a single family as the body of Christ. And yet the church family, the body has almost double in size and the apostles need to find a way to sort something out, to keep up. The issue surrounded widows and whether two distinct groupings were being given enough food. There were widows of both Hebrew and Greek origin and tensions were building around favouritism to one group. The Jewish arm were complaining about favouritism towards the Greek arm.

To oversimplify, Hebrews of Jewish descent tended to regard Hellenists of Greek descent as unspiritual compromisers with Greek culture, and Hellenists regarded Hebrews as holier-than-thou traditionalists.

The issue was a little more than cultural tension. The apostles discerned a deeper problem. Namely that all of this organisation and intervention was threatening to consume all of their time and prevent them from the core task of preaching and teaching.

Read passage together twice:

Seven Leaders Are Chosen

In those days the number of believers was growing. The Greek Jews complained about the non-Greek Jews. They said that the widows of the Greek Jews were not being taken care of. They weren't getting their fair share of food each day. 2 So the 12 apostles gathered all the believers together. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to give up teaching God's word. And we'd have to stop teaching to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven of your men. They must be known as men who are wise and full of the Holy Spirit. We will turn this important work over to them. 4 Then we can give our attention to prayer and to teaching God's word."

5 This plan pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen. He was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon and Parmenas were chosen too. The group also chose Nicolas from Antioch. He had accepted the Jewish faith. 6 The group brought them to the apostles. Then the apostles prayed and placed their hands on them.

7 So God's word spread. The number of believers in Jerusalem grew quickly. Also, a large number of priests began to obey Jesus' teachings.

Stephen Is Arrested

8 Stephen was full of God's grace and power. He did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But members of the group called the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to oppose him. Some of them were Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria. Others were Jews from Cilicia and Asia Minor. They all began to argue with Stephen. 10 But he was too wise for them. That's because the Holy Spirit gave Stephen wisdom whenever he spoke.

11 Then in secret they talked some men into lying about Stephen. They said, "We heard Stephen speak evil things against Moses and against God."

12 So the people were stirred up. The elders and the teachers of the law were stirred up too. They arrested Stephen and brought him to the Sanhedrin. 13 They found witnesses who were willing to tell lies. These liars said, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place. He also speaks against the law. 14 We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. He says Jesus will change the practices that Moses handed down to us."

15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked right at Stephen. They saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Group questions:

- What differences have you appreciated about Christians from a different background or tradition from your own? Why do you appreciate them?
- What is the dispute between the believers about? (1,2)
- What was the result of their "distributing the administration work"? Acts 6:6-7.
- In our churches there are many tasks to undertake. How can we the body help to make sure the important tasks or jobs are done. What happens if we don't get involved?
- How can we help our church leaders to be more effective, what can we contribute personally?
- Divisions can occasionally become a feature of churches. In our own church we have people who hold on to tradition whilst others are wishing to be more contemporary by reaching out in new ways. What can we learn from our passage about holding the tension between these two positions. What are the challenges here?
- What were the apostle's main priorities? (Acts 6:4) What do you think our priorities should be in our churches?
- What can we learn from the qualities and humility of Stephen?

- How do you think our churches responds to newcomers, people who are different or people who are very new to faith?
- Share some things you have learnt from this session.

Praying for each other 15 minutes:

Close breakout groups:

Closing prayer: