

ACTS 6: 1 -7

AVOIDING THE TEMPEST WITHIN

Drama... we all want to avoid it. Most people don't seek out trouble, unless they are troubled themselves, but we must admit that it is a part of daily life. And as much as I hate to admit it, it is an issue that pastors have to deal with regularly. Theoretically, it shouldn't happen in the church because we are all "walking in the Spirit" and deferring to others in order to be as Christ-like as possible. But, in practice, that isn't always the case. And what we will see here today, is a good example of a legitimate need that had been overlooked and could have blown up in the faces of the Apostles and split the young church from the get – go. But that didn't happen because all parties involved did the right thing. The church was growing by leaps and bounds. They were experiencing growing pains! Any organization, let alone a church will experience these things as growth occurs.

A lesson in reading Biblical narrative? (The pyramid)

- The set-up.
- The main issue.
- The tipping point.
- The resolution.
- These two have to match.

Let's go back and read so as to set up things in the correct context. (Get used to reading larger chunks of scripture.)

- Acts 2: Pentecost – Jews from all over the Roman Empire

were there. This sets up the issue between the Hebrews and Hellenists. Prior to that, we had Passover. Many Jews would have stayed over from Passover to participate in Pentecost, which took place a few weeks later.

- **Acts 2: 44 -47**

44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

- **Acts 4: 32 – 37**

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- **Ananias and Sapphira...**

That is the context, which is part of the set – up. Then we get into Acts 6, which begins our periscope.

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.”

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.

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.

(Back to the pyramid)

- Church is growing in Jerusalem
- Background on Hellenists and Hebrews.
- This will continue to pop up throughout Acts and still pops up in certain ways today.
- Normally widows were taken care of by immediate families. If there was no immediate family, then a collection of food

and money was taken up by the synagogue as someone would go around the markets and houses. This was then distributed on Fridays. Those in immediate need were given enough to get them on their way. Those in more permanent need were given enough for 14 meals; enough for 2 meals/day for 7 days. This was called the kuppah – basket. Emergency needs were handled the same way by another gathering of goods and money. This was called the Tamhui – tray.

- When someone began to follow Jesus, this would generally cut family ties. We see this in the cases of Muslims becoming Christians. Their families cut off their support. And when you add in the fact that some of these people were coming to Jerusalem from elsewhere, some staying there, you now have more people to help. Add to that the cultural divide between the Hebrews and the Hellenists.
- This oversight wasn't necessarily deliberate in every case, but I can see how the factions might have drawn their lines in the sand.
- Satan loves to turn an unintentional wrong into a conflict. This is why we need to give each other the benefit of the doubt. The Hellenists did the right thing by bringing making the issue known and not just getting mad and leaving.
- Later, Paul has to address this issue in more detail. **1 Timothy 5: 3 – 16.**
- **Back to the pyramid.**

The response of the apostles:

Acts 6:2

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.

- This doesn't mean that the apostles were above collecting and serving food – doing the more practical day to day things. It simply shows that in this new family, they were to focus on prayer and the Word. (Yes, that's what we do.)

The ministry is a lot of work, even apart from administrative headaches. **A young man said to Donald Grey Barnhouse, "I'd give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you." Looking him straight in the eye, Dr. Barnhouse replied: "Good, because that's exactly what it will cost you."**

- It takes time to be able to teach.
- **Show iceberg slide here!**
- It takes time to pray and study in order to teach. This was the main job of the apostles. That is not to say they didn't ever tend to some of the day to day things.
- They brought more people into the ministry, with different duties, specialties and gifts.

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."

- The apostles saw the legitimate need and told the Hellenists who had brought up the issue, to choose 7 men who were both spiritually minded and practically minded – sometimes that is a hard combination to find. These guys had to be

qualified in this way. The apostles delegated this very important responsibility to others in the fellowship. But they didn't stop there.

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.

- Look at the names of these men. They are all Greek names. The men appointed were from the group with the issue. The Hellenists were not only being served but were also included in service. This shows how seriously they took the issue. These guys would, by nature, be closer to the widows and their culture, which means it would be closer to their hearts. They are being inclusive of others in the ministry.
- They then followed this up with a small but common ceremony where the men are “ordained” for this service. This just meant that they were recognized and approved by the apostles for this ministry. So what was the result?

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.

- The church continued to grow. Unity was kept. And unity was a big issue with Paul.
- A number of priests, (Sadducees) were saved!

Pyramid slide

The church split was avoided because everyone did the right thing.

- The problem was made known. Folks didn't just get mad and leave. They trusted the decision of the apostles.
- The Hebrews did the right thing. They recognized a legitimate need and didn't let any cultural issues cloud their judgment. And they trusted the solution of the apostles.
- The seven chosen men did the right thing by accepting the call to unglamorous service. They humbly chose to serve.
- The apostles did the right thing. They responded to the need without becoming distracted by other legitimate needs in the church. They stayed focused.
- And the Word of God spread! The church remained united in their mission and people on the outside were impressed and were willing to hear the message!
- The enemy's attempt to fragment the church was defeated. This is the way we can keep unity in the church and hold our family together. God works in mysterious way, but also in not so mysterious ways!
- And now you have a taste of how to work through Biblical narrative.