



Leaders Note

Acts 6:1-15 Chosen to Serve

Thought

N.T. Wright was once asked to write a book entitled Jesus at Sixty — a book with the premise that if Jesus had lived another 20 or 30 years longer, his movement would have grown and he would have had to get into administration. He would have had to organize things, to delegate, to have rules and systems, and to do all the other things that middle-aged people do, theoretically taking the shine off his early vision and enthusiasm (Wright declined to write it). Acts 6 shows clearly that Jesus wouldn't have had to wait 20-30 years to face the challenge. The apostles are already there in a big way. The problem with growing things is that so often the growth hits us unexpectedly (ironic, I know, but it seems to take us by surprise nonetheless); somewhat like preparing for one baby and then discovering at delivery there are two — or more. That seems to be about where the church in Jerusalem was, with the labour pains of racial/cultural tension thrown in for good measure. The apostles make one crucial decision: they don't take matters into their own hands. They delegate. And in so doing they stay focused on what matters most. Not a bad idea...

Context

Hellenists & Hebraists: The first cultural barrier the early church faced was within the Jewish race — the barrier between Hellenists and Hebraists. Hellenes is the Greek word for Greece, and Hellenistic or Grecian Jews were those who embraced Greek culture, language and ways, while trying to maintain their Jewish identity at the same time. Typically they were born outside of the Holy Land in the Diaspora (the scattering of the Jews around the world). Hebraists were the “purists” of the day — refusing all aspects of Greek thought and culture, refusing to attend the theatre, the games, etc. They were typically born and raised in the Holy Land and spoke Palestinian Aramaic, speaking Greek only when necessary. Paul identifies himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” — he was an ultimate purist on the Hebraist side of the equation. You don't have to strain too hard to see parallels between this division and the division that exists in our culture between religious and political “liberals” and “conservatives.” Such a cultural barrier would go a long way towards explaining the “grumbling” we find in Acts 6. Adding fuel to this first century culture war was the fact that the war for Jewish independence 200 years previous was over the forcing of Greek culture on Jewish society.

Widows were being overlooked: In Jewish culture, widows and orphans represented the most vulnerable class of society. The fact is that without a husband, a widow had little voice. Even though she had the right to support from her husband's heirs in Jewish culture, it didn't always work out that way. This was made worse in the fact that when older couples from the Diaspora moved to Israel to live out their days and be buried in the Holy Land, the husband would typically die first leaving the Grecian widow to fend for herself among Hebraists who would scorn her.

A proselyte from Antioch: Nicolas was a gentile who had fully converted to Judaism by being circumcised (=proselyte). In the second half of Acts, Antioch of Syria would become the centre of Christian missionary outreach. Its mention here is a significant telegraphing of what is ahead.

Wait on tables: Our word “deacon” comes from this Greek word that is usually translated “minister” or servant.

Laying on of hands: Biblically, the laying on of hands was a method used to convey blessing, to transfer guilt, or to commission someone to an office or work. Hopefully it's the first and third meanings that are intended by the apostles here!

Synagogue of the Freedmen: Most likely composed of descendants of captive Jews originally freed by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC and resettled in Israel. Paul may have belonged to this group (his home town Cilicia is mentioned here).



Learning Session

Read the passage. Share the context (or even just mention context information as questions arise) of the passage outlined above and then split into smaller groups for discussion of the following questions:

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?

Gather together for feedback and stress the following points:

- Where there are people there will always be problems, but these can always be dealt with when we submit to God's wisdom.
- God is concerned first with our character, not our gifting.
- We need to challenge ourselves to be servant hearted.

Move to Ministry

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you identify with most, the overlooked or the ones that are overlooking?
2. How do you tend to handle “discrimination” — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected?
3. What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
4. What can this passage teach us about problem solving?