

Sermon Title: **“Unity in Christ”**

Sermon Series: Acts: Kingdom Vision 20/20

Text: **Acts 6:1-7**

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I. Introduction: Many things in life are difficult to balance; there church is no exception. In the realm of the church you have one side which is *just go with the Spirit* and the other side which *has organized every detail hoping the Spirit will fill His allotted slot*. Both extremes are in error and destine the Ministry to spiritual error, abuse, and self-destruction. ***Where is the balance?***

“And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand”.

-Mark 3:25

While the Mission of Jesus is still the banner which unites and guides these Spirit-filled believers, the Vision of how would continue to grow and develop.

Jerusalem -> All Judea -> Samaria -> the End of the Earth (Acts 1:8)

As the church continues to grow in the Acts narrative, issue continue to surface which bring both challenge and threat to the unity of this young Assembly. The enemy, Satan himself, has brought to them:

- 1) External
 - a. Threats and Imprisonment
 - b. Beatings
- 2) Internal
 - a. Sin (Deceptive Worship)
 - b. Division (Today’s Text)

Going Deeper: 1) *Have you ever thought about the way your church is structured? Or perhaps you are a part of a ministry that you struggle serving in due to either lack of or too much control or direction? What is / are the benefit(s) for the church to stay united, focused, and resilient?*

II. “Racial & Social Division Threaten Unity and Focus of Church” (Acts 6:1)

We find the young Church continuing to grow as the Gospel goes out in both Proclamation and Demonstration. This Spirit-filled community were not mere attendants but growing Disciples. The Apostles were meeting both the spiritual needs of this Assembly as well as addressing sin issues. This in and of itself was a daunting task.

For every attack Satan has brought against the Church, the result was a growing Church. Internal conflict is arising and threatens to distract and detour the Church from the Mission of Jesus. To have a complaint of this magnitude arise for the Apostles to address indicates that believers were struggling to accept beyond declaration those who have come to Christ from a background different than theirs. Racial, social, political- anything that brings a spirit of superiority or priority in the church beyond Jesus and His Mission is no small matter.

The Hellenistic Jews were those who, as a result of the Babylonian Captivity, were relocated outside of their homeland. After Seventy Years God provided opportunity for the Jews to return and rebuild their homeland. While many did, many did not.

Those who remained outside of Judea, while remaining faithful to their religion, adapted Greek culture including the Greek language. This would affect how they viewed culture, government, politics -including Temple worship. Such customs and tongue were eventually deemed secondary to those who lived in Judea and retained Hebrew as their native tongue. The Pharisees made it a point to ensure the Hellenistic Jews faced racial and cultural hostility.

This attitude, while most likely rebuked in word, manifested in the behavior of the early church in the fact that Hellenistic widows were neglected in the “all things common” and “not a needy person among them” signature of this Spirit-filled community (Acts 4:32, 34)

On a side note- the caring for widows comes from **the Law** (Deuteronomy 14:29, etc). The early church was absorbing the Law in how they exist and function. There is great value to the **Total Word of God**- a truth the NT Church needs reminded of today.

Going Deeper: 2) *There is much that we can parallel in our own contemporary church context with this text. What racial / social divisions continue to exist in our Spirit-filled community's today? While we may declare unity in Jesus, as did the early church in Acts 4:32, 34- such division continues to exist into the daily life of the church. Why is that?*

III. “Balance and Unity” (Acts 6:2-4)

A. *Balance in Vision* (Vv.2 & 4)

The Apostles (Twelve) bring the church together to address this problem. They summoned everyone. Why? Because this is not acceptable- this is not the behavior of those that are a part of the Kingdom of God. ***This is regression from the Spirit, not progression in the Spirit!***

The challenge any level of leadership faces is that of identifying the solution and seeing its implementation. The danger is allowing themselves to become involved to such a level they neglect their own duties which will have long term negative affects in this case, on the Church.

Not waiting on tables, in the Greek, can mean everything from tending food to tables to money matters / management. This is referencing the daily side of managing the resources to meet the needs of the growing Church Community.

The Apostles rightly identify their role, which is to be in Prayer and the ministry of the Word. The strength of their preaching was the fruit of their devotion in prayer and study of God's Word. Their role was to "equip the saints for the work of ministry"

See & Note -> Ephesians 4:11-16.

The role of the New Testament Pastor is one which absorbs much of this labor on behalf of saints- to be in Prayer and the Word, preaching and teaching, leading all closer to the maturity found in Christ. It is who they are in Christ.

See & Note -> 1 Corinthians 9:15-18.

For the Preacher, in this case Paul's Protégée Timothy, progress in Prayer and the Word is able to be seen and noted in Gospel preaching and demonstration of a life shaped by it.

See & Note -> 1 Timothy 4:11-16.

"A young man once said to the gifted expository preacher of God's Word, Donald Grey Barnhouse, 'I'd give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you.' Looking at him straight in the eye Dr. Barnhouse replied, 'Good, because that's exactly what it will cost you.'"

B. **Unity** in Mission (v.3)

While the Apostle's carry that mantle of leadership, they alone do not make up the Church. Remember, the Church is made up of those *called and assembled*. The entire Body is gifted by the Spirit to have a participating role in the existence and function of the local church.

Everyone assembled together, the Apostles affirm the legitimacy of the problem and call on the Church Body to select and present seven men to the Apostles for empowerment. The Greek for *select* refers to the *oversight in this selection process*.

The Five Qualifications:

- 1) **Men.** It is important to note that while many attribute this list as the first to fill the office of Deacon, that term in the Greek (diakonos) is descriptive to one who executes the command of another. It is also a term used to describe an official office later in Paul's Letter to Timothy; however the broadened list in Timothy three has a broader span of influence than the immediate service identified for these seven.

- 2) **From Among You.** The church was to hire from within, so to speak. Looking to those whose character was able to be observed by all as to their qualification.
- 3) **Of Good Reputation.** As Paul would take this Apostolic lead and apply to the actual office of Deacon later on, this embodies integrity, above reproach. To be entrusted with the funds in order to acquire and distribute for the needs of others, nothing less would be satisfactory.
- 4) **Full of the Spirit.** More than being Christians, these seven men were to have a demonstrated life of submission with the Spirit of God within them. Though we are all baptized in the Spirit, not all submit equally to the work of the Spirit. These were to be those who are consistent in their walk in Him.
 - a. See & Note
 - i. **Galatians 5:16-26**
- 5) **Wisdom.** They must have Biblical & Theological knowledge, able to apply it in both declaration and demonstration in their lives. This again demonstrates how the Old Testament is flowing into the life of the Church.
 - a. See & Note the following:
 - i. **1 Chronicles 12:32**
 - ii. **Ezekiel 7:26**

Going Deeper: 3) *What could have happened to the Church if the Apostles neglected being in prayer and study of His Word? Do you have a greater expectation of Pastors to be administrators or prayerful students of the Word? What qualifications did the Apostles put on those whom the congregation would select? How important were they and why?*

IV. “Agreement & Action” (Acts 6:5-6)

The direction of the Apostles was affirmed by the Spirit as wisdom for this need. In this we see the whole congregation:

1. ***Acknowledging*** the racial and social division existing within themselves as a Community in Christ.
2. ***Submitting*** to the Leadership Jesus appointed- Allowing them to stay faithful to their role and stepping up to serve.
3. ***Ownership*** to be a part of demonstrating change- not superficially talking about it. We see this in that the selection were all Greek names- the entire congregation most likely chose Hellenistic Jewish Believers to be empowered.

The Seven Men were then brought before the Apostles who proceeded to lay hands upon them, praying and affirming them before the congregation to serve in this unique role of meeting the needs of the Hellenistic widows. The act of “laying hands upon” would become a

benchmark forward in the Church as a means of affirming and empowering people in their gifting to serve in His calling.

Going Deeper: 4) *Change can be hard- especially when something surfaces indicating sin in our hearts. What would have happened to this church had they not acknowledged or addressed the neglect of the Hellenistic widows? What are some racial / social struggles in the church today that exist and how does ignoring them affect their congregations? What was the solution to this particular need in our text today?*

V. “A Church United” (Acts 6:7)

What tends to be reasons for congregations today to split was, for the early Church, opportunity to strengthen their Unity in Christ.

With every attack Satan brings upon the church, whether externally or internally, we have seen how faithfulness wins the day.

- **Jesus** faithfully prepared His Church for persecution.
- **The Spirit** faithfully works to transform us from citizens of the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of Heaven.
- **God (the Father)** is faithful to judge sin and keep His Son’s Bride pure.
- **The Apostles** are faithful, through Prayer and Study in the Word, to preach the full Gospel.
- **The Congregation** is faithful to submit and step up to serve.
- **The enemy** is faithful to strive against the Kingdom of God coming.

When the church is faithful to the *Mission* of Jesus and obedient to the *Vision* through the gifting of the Spirit, there will be **health, maturity, and growth**.

Those who were being added to the church were also including priests- those trained in and serving through the Temple worship. In this we see God bridging into the lives of His people, healing and united the racial and social divisions that existed among them for far too long.

Here we see the first part of Jesus’ Mission fulfilled- all of Jerusalem was hearing and responding, in either belief or disbelief, to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Soon, it will be time to move beyond Jerusalem, and in this we will see God’s Grace prove sufficient to meet all that they need in order to say YES! to Jesus!

Going Deeper: 5) How important is *faithfulness* to a Churches existence and health? We see the pivotal role of a healthy Prayer and Bible Study rhythm in the life of leadership; how important is it to you? Will you be ready to step up and say YES! to Jesus when the need for you arises? Would you be qualified to be nominated as one of the Seven (Women- assume the invitation was to you as well in this question)? Why or why not?