

## **Acts 6:1-7**

### ***Seven Chosen to Serve***

6 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. NKJV

**Big Idea:** Those who will be witnesses among the cultures of the world (1:18) must learn to negotiate cultural differences and conflicts as they go

**Group Goal:** Try to get your group to a place where members of the group share their personal experiences in cross-cultural conflict? Was the situation resolved well, badly or not resolved at all? What did they learn?

#### **Additional Help from Pastor George Hinman's Notes:**

- The history of Greek/Hebrew frictions shows up in the church today.
- So does the Pentecost power of the HS to bring the unity and reconciliation of Jesus among language/cultures (2:6)
- The practices that bring healing to cross-cultural conflict reflect (and require) people who have a common bond and the model of service that Jesus offers us

- When the Hebrew priests see the ministry of Stephen unfolding in unexpected unity among Greek and Hebrew Jews, the priests recognize the presence of God and his faithfulness to the covenant promises made (Dt 15:4, etc.)

### **Additional Background on the Scripture Text (Acts 6:1-7):**

The dispute that arose in the church in Acts 6 was more than an argument about who was served at the tables as the community gathered. In play was a conflict that went back at least four centuries to the time when Alexander the Great conquered the known world (Mediterranean Europe, Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa) spreading Greek language and culture wherever his armies conquered. Many Jews were attracted to the ideas and culture of the Greeks and adopted their patterns of behavior and thought. Citing God's repeated commands to His chosen people to remain culturally distinct from their neighbors, this battle for culture spilled into the synagogues, the temple and – after Pentecost – the early Church. Where last week's text highlighted God's opening of the good news to the Gentiles (non-Jews), the conflict in this text is between Hellenistic (Greek culture adopting) and Hebraic (Jewish traditionalist) Jewish Christians. Before you dismiss the importance of this today, think about the points of disagreement within your church. Chances are, you will find the disagreement is between those who advocate for adhering to Scripture and those who advocate for change to conform with the values of the culture.

In a multi-ethnic setting, the divisions may be amplified because of miscommunication due to different cultural norms around power distance.

### **Notable from Beyond Colorblind (Shin) Chapter 8 – “Responding to Cross-Cultural Conflict in Community”**

- “Many of our colleges, organizations & even churches have a multicultural space celebrating cultural diversity, but very few have spaces that are able to endure together racial & cross-cultural conflict, bot internal and external to the community... A multiethnic community is defined by relationships that are marked by trust and commitment able to persevere through conflict” (p 142)
- “In multiethnic missional community, everyone ends up being a little uncomfortable for the sake of making room for the other... if you have concerns about how people will get along, remember that you can and should teach them. You can't just throw them into a room together and hope for the best.” (p 145)
- “...a number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7) Priests were a part of the temple system and they understood Hebrew culture and traditions. As the leaders of the Hebraic Jews, they knew the kind of community that Yahweh had taught the Israelites to be: united as one, feeding widows, caring for orphans, and quick to resolve differences. Could they have seen the solution with the widows as an example of united witness, trust, correction, and partnership in feeding the poor, and thought ‘These Christians are able to do what living by Torah alone could not... they saw a community of God persevere through cultural tension and conflict that separated so many Jews.’” (p 146)

- “If you are bringing up the conflict, the following general principles are helpful. A general rule of thumb in conflict is to use “I” language instead of “you” language... Avoid globalizing... Describe the situation... Describe the specific behavior that was hurtful or offensive... Describe the impact it had on you or others... Offer an alternative.” (p 151)
- “The secular world does not expect leaders to ever admit to being wrong. When they do, it is often revealed by force and they are made to step down... But the leader that is quick to admit shortcomings and seek reconciliation even in the smaller things exhibits a responsiveness and humility that is actually quite attractive... When we confess our failures and gaps, we give space for the Holy Spirit to come into those formerly secret parts to begin healing. We give space for repentance, forgiveness, grace, and deeper partnership.” (p 152)
- “Acts 6 shows that in the kingdom of God, power is not a zero-sum game. The apostles made space for more leaders, and they trust those new leaders with an important task. Make room for more leaders in your context, be it a new position or in making sure that the next elected leaders represent a broader range of people you are trying to reach with the gospel.” (p 153)
- “It is hard work to be a reconciling, ethnicity aware community! It involves growing a larger set of skills, being aware of what’s at stake, and having the humility to admit wrongdoing.” (p 154)