

“Threats From All Sides”

Acts 6:1-15

Acts: The Unstoppable Gospel

Introduction: In Acts chapter 6, the shortest chapter in the book, we see more threats from inside and outside the church and how the church responds to these destructive situations.

I. **The Threat From the Inside: The Growing Pains of the Church (vv. 1-7)**

1. The Problem

Acts 6:1 – “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.”

This problem between the Hellenistic Jews who spoke Greek and the native Hebrews who spoke Hebrew had the potential to divide the church along ethnic lines.

No one experiences loneliness like a widow or widower and care for them is both:

- A characteristic of God’s people (Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 24:19; 26:12-15; 27:19)
- A feature of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 18:1-8; 20:45-47; 21:1-6)

2. The Proposal

Acts 6:2 – “So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.”

It should not be the priority of ministers called by God to teach and preach, to leave behind the call to serve tables.

The Apostles prioritized response reflects their leadership, stewardship, and the church’s need for organization.

Acts 6:3-4 – “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

There were two major qualifications for “the seven”. They had to: 1) have a good reputation and 2) be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

Mark 11:17 – “And he was teaching them and saying to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.’”

“No man should stand before an audience who has not first stood before God. Many hours of communion should precede one hour in the pulpit. The prayer chamber should be more familiar than the public platform. Prayer should be continuous, preaching but intermittent...That it is the one religious work which gets done with the least enthusiasm, cannot but be one of the tragedies of our times.” – A.W. Tozer

3. The Response

Acts 6:5-6 – “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.”

4. The Result

Acts 6:7 – “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

The 6:4 Fellowship’s hope: to catalyze Acts 6:3 disciples through Acts 6:4 leaders in the hope of an Acts 6:7 awakening.

II. The Threat From the Outside: The Arrest of Stephen (vv. 8-15)

1. Stephen’s Ministry

Acts 6:8 – “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”

“Stephen Ministry” has often become synonymous with care ministry. However, Stephen was not only providing care, but he was also doing marvelous things amid the people in the name of the Lord.

2. Stephen’s Opposition

Acts 6:9-10 – “But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”

The range of the opposition’s geographic scope show that this was not just an ethnic issue, it was Stephen’s embrace of Jesus Christ and the gospel that leads to his rejection.

Those who stood against Stephen came from the Greek-speaking community and began to debate with him. Yet, they were not able to oppose Stephen’s wisdom and Spirit enablement just as Jesus promised (Luke 21:12-15).

3. Stephen’s Arrest

Acts 6:11-14 – “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. ¹³ They put forward false witnesses who said, ‘This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.’”

What started out as an honest debate quickly became corrupt as those who were against Stephen were unable to stand against his arguments.

Stephen finds himself in front of the Sanhedrin (The Twelve - Acts 5:27. Jesus - Luke 22:47-71).

4. Stephen’s Countenance

Acts 6:15 – “And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.”

Amid the ugliness of his situation and his accusers, Stephen reflects the glory, grace, and love of God.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. What are the common complaints that we have today that have the potential to divide the church? How might Acts 6 be applied to address those concerns?
2. Can Campus Bible Church truly consider itself a house of prayer? Why or why not?
3. Describe a time when you were in an “ugly” situation and needed to reflect God’s glory. How did you do?