

Crossing Church Divides

(Acts 6:1-7)

Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Background: [Acts 5] In opposition, we experience the unstoppable life of Jesus' Kingdom gospel in us & through us.
 - a. Today: What happens when the obstacle is internal, within the church?
3. Satan's operating strategies against Jesus' followers:
 - a. Deception, distraction, discouragement, destruction, and division.
 - b. Goal: Get us to focus on frustrations with each other, & take our eyes off Jesus & His mission/ways.

Growing families discuss unmet needs safely together [Acts 6:1-2a]

1. [1] A complaint arises.
 - a. Report: The number of disciples is growing.
 - i. With rapid growth, new faces, & organization still forming, mistakes/differences can lead to friction.
 - b. 2 groups of people
 - i. Hebraic Jews: Native to Palestine; speak Aramaic; like 1st generation OBCs in our church.
 - ii. Hellenistic Jews: Diaspora throughout Roman Empire; speak Greek; like 2nd generation ABCs or non-Asian people at The Crossing as we grow to become a cross-generational/cross-cultural church.
 - c. Issue: Widows of the growing Hellenist minority group are overlooked in the daily distribution.
 - i. As people sold property, much went to the feeding/care of the entire community (cf. Acts 4:32-37).
 - ii. This includes obeying God's command to care for the needy/vulnerable in their community: widows & orphans (cf. Exo 22:22-24; Isa 1:17; Jas 1:27).
 - iii. Hellenist widows were overlooked in the communal care, feeling neglected, left out, uncared for.
 - d. When there's growth/change, potential conflicts/division can arise from unmet needs (real or perceived).
2. [2a] Growing church families discuss unmet needs openly & safely together.
 - a. Jesus' followers had been obedient in caring for each other previously (cf. John 13:34-35; Acts 2:45; 4:34).
 - i. Blind spots in the current ways of doing things may fail to adjust to changing people/situations.
 - ii. Just because they were good at caring for needs yesterday doesn't mean they do it well today.
 - b. The 12 apostles gather "the full number" of all of Jesus' followers (the whole Church) to talk it out.
 - i. They do not ignore, hide from or cover up problems. They do not blame each other, make excuses, get defensive, or lash out in anger.
 - c. Anger is a secondary emotion; the primary underlying emotion is a feeling of hurt.
 - i. We need to deal with the root: the hurt caused by unmet needs.
 - ii. We must create a safe space to discover the hurt & not let anger distract or destroy (cf. Eph 4:26-27).
 - d. The family of Christ made it safe to discuss unmet needs together by valuing each other, hearing each other out, and involving each other in the conversation.
3. Application: In your family (at home/church), are you a safe person?
 - a. Are people able to discuss divisive issues & unmet needs in a safe way?
 - b. Do you tend to blow up or bottle up? Or are you quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger (cf. Jas 1:19)?
 - c. Do people feel heard & valued by you? Or are you attacking or defensive?

Growing families don't neglect the important for the urgent [Acts 6:2b,4]

1. [2b] "It is not pleasing [to God] to give up preaching the Word for serving tables."

- a. People's request: God's appointed leaders fix the problem by handling the distribution themselves.
 - b. Apostles' response: That's not what Jesus called us to do; we need to stay focused on what's important:
 - i. Preaching the good news about Jesus, making disciples through teaching of His Word.
 - ii. Compassion ministry is valuable/necessary, but we can't compromise the teaching of God's Word.
 - iii. [4] They reiterate the need to stay focused on what's important: Prayer & ministry of God's Word.
 - c. Issue at stake: As the Holy Spirit grows/changes our church, what will we become? When issues, unmet needs & conflicts arise, which direction will we go? What is primary & most important?
2. Growing families don't neglect what's important for what's urgent.
 - a. The family of Christ can't compromise the ministry of teaching Jesus & His Word for other ministries/needs.
 - b. Godly faith lived out includes care of the needy; faith without works is dead (cf. Jas 1-2). Here, we're reminded that works without faith (the central message of Jesus as Lord/Savior in His Word) is also dead.
 - i. It will become empty religion, a cause, or social services without the priority of God's truth, life & mission from His Word.
 - ii. You can't just address the urgent (symptoms/consequences of sin) without addressing the root (solution to sin): Eternal rescue, healing, hope & life through Jesus, gained from His Word.
 - iii. The best way to discover God's will to solve conflicts/meet needs is through Jesus & His Word.
 - c. The truth about Jesus found in His Word is our primary identity, unity (cf. Eph 4:4-5), focus, purpose, mission.
 - i. If we lose focus on Jesus & His gospel, nothing we do matters; it just become "religious" activity.
 3. Application: When potentially divisive issues arise, don't lose focus: Even as we deal with differences, we can't neglect the ongoing work of the Word of truth/life in us & through us.

Growing families involve hurt people in the solution [Acts 6:3-6]

1. Crossing divides from the offending side
 - a. [3] Solution: "Pick out 7 from among you..." to be appointed as servant-leaders in this ministry of the table.
 - i. Those who were hurt were empowered to to select and/or serve as servant-leaders.
 - b. [5] Happy with the suggestion, they choose 7 men with Greek (not Hebrew) names; they're all Hellenists!
 - i. Nicolaus is even a non-Jewish convert to faith in the God of the Bible & Jesus.
 - c. As the Church family goes through growing pains, they involve those who are hurt in the solution to needs.
 - i. Instead of being allowed to sit back & blame, they were empowered to help in the solution.
 - ii. Blame could lead to shedding responsibility for a solution, expecting others to fix the problem.
 - iii. Instead of assigning blame, we accept we all have blame, are sinful, need Jesus to save/change us.
 - d. Application: Do you empower those who've been hurt by you to discover a solution together?
2. Crossing divides from the hurt side
 - a. [3] In order to be helpful in resolving the conflict, we need to fit these qualifications:
 - i. Good repute: Recognized as living out a good testimony of following Jesus, godly character/integrity.
 - ii. Full of God's Spirit: Exhibit the truth/power of the Holy Spirit in how we speak & live for Jesus; exhibit fruit of the Spirit in how we interact with others, even in conflicts (cf. Gal 5:22-23).
 - iii. Full of God's wisdom: Able to regularly make discerning choices in/through God's will & Word.
 - b. God's qualification to help isn't based on your ability.
 - i. You don't have to be good at counting tables, distributing food quickly, trained in counseling, etc.
 - ii. God makes us able through His spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12; Rom 12).
 - iii. You don't have to be able; you just have to be available & genuinely filled with Jesus.
 - c. [6] These 7 from the wounded group love Jesus, to the glory of God & good of others, so their servant-leadership is affirmed by the apostles.
 - i. "Lay hands on": Prayer act of blessing, to commission someone into ministry (13:30), in healing (9:17), or to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (8:18; 9:17; 19:6).
3. Application: As God opens your eyes to see genuine blind spots/needs in your family (at church/home), it's not just the servant-leaders' job to fix; God has gifted you to be part of the solution.
 - a. If God called you to help leaders to solve conflicts/needs, would you be recognized as full of God's character, Spirit & wisdom? Not just on the stage of ministry, but in your personal life?

Conclusion [Acts 6:7]

1. The passage begins & ends with a note of celebration regarding overcoming the conflict & ongoing growth.
 - a. [7] Summary statement (cf. 2:46-47; 5:14): The result was increased impact & growth of this church family.

- b. Increased preaching/teaching of God's Word.
 - c. Increased growth in new believers/disciples.
 - d. Even many Jewish priests (once hostile to Jesus/His Word) became obedient believers & followers.
2. When God's people look past anger to safely talk about hurts, keep Jesus/His Word central, & work together in godly character/wisdom to serve as part of the solution, He does amazing things to cross seemingly insurmountable divides.
- a. Are you willing to follow Jesus? Then you will have differences of opinion with others in His family.
 - b. We can work through this process together.
 - c. Prayer Application: Bring your unreconciled differences & unmet needs from your family (at church or home) to the cross.