



ENOGERA BAPTIST CHURCH
Jesus changes lives

ACTS



Acts #9 – 6:1-7

Acts 6:2b – ...is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

NOTE FOR LEADERS

This document is intended to be used as a discussion *guide*, rather than a curriculum. As small group leaders, please feel free to lead through the topic as most appropriate for your group.

HOUSEKEEPING

Things going at the moment:

- **Tri Church Summit Weekend**
 - No Services this weekend due to Tri Church Summit! Spread the word!
- **Upcoming Sermon Series: Rhythms of Grace – Experiencing Intimacy with God through Spiritual Disciplines.**
 - Having spent 9 weeks now in the book of Acts, we are pressing pause to take a look at 5 different “Rhythms” Christians are called to walk in to experience God’s presence and power in our lives.
 - Starting June 3.



#9 ACTS 6:1-7

REFLECT

This is a time to generate some discussion by reflecting on the ideas in this week's message. Some ideas include:

- Ask the group to debrief for those who have missed the sermons on Sunday
- What stood out? Do you have any questions?
- Were there any special moments of clarity where God spoke to you clearly?

DIG INTO THE WORD

Let's dig a little deeper. Use the biblical text to discover what God reveals to us in his Word.

In this passage we see the apostles encounter an issue that threatens the health and unity of the new church itself, and yet instead of dealing with it directly, they delegate it to some trustworthy men. Why? Because the ministry of the word must be the primary focus of the apostles, and to deal with every issue that comes up in the church robs the church of its very life-giving power.

Acts 6:1-7 Seven Chosen to Serve

6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 Qualifications for Deacons

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their



children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:15-16 Speaking the Truth in Love

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scriptures apply directly to their lives. Get group members to talk about the real life implications of the study.

1. **DISCUSS:** How are we to apply these things? Are there any immediate implications?
2. **STUDY:** Read 6:1-7
 - a. What was the dispute about? Why was it so serious? [**Leaders Notes:** *This may not look like a big deal immediately, but this situation had the potential to destroy the church. Mounting accusations of racial discrimination is no small issue. Certainly, if the accusations were true, this festering racial tension could have resulted in an early split in the church.*]
 - b. NOTES: Jerusalem was both a deeply traditional culture and a cosmopolitan mixture of Jews from all over the world. Native-born Palestinian Jews, who spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue, would feel they had more in common with one another than with the Greek-speaking folk who had come from the wider world. The “Hebrews” or “Hebraic Jews” mentioned in verse 1 referred to the early Christians from this first group. The “Hellenists” or “Grecian Jews” were Christians from the second group, who had returned to Jerusalem after years or perhaps even generations away.
 - c. What was the Apostles response? What do you notice? Why is it surprising? Most importantly, why don't the apostles deal with the issue themselves? [**Leaders Notes:** *Make sure you draw out the following points: (1) it would not be right for the apostles to do that job, even immoral; (2) they are to instead focus on preaching the word of God (v.2) and devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer (v.4); and (3) this solution pleased the church!*]
3. **STUDY:** Read 1 Tim 3:8-13
 - a. What do you notice about the qualifications? [**Leaders Notes:** *They have little to do with leadership or practical abilities, and everything to do with character and evidence of the Spirit's work in their lives.*]
 - b. This list is not a bunch of extra special qualities, it really just describes a mature Christian believer. What steps do you need to take in order to see your life come into conformity with this picture of maturity?



4. **DISCUSS:** Where are the dividing lines of tension in our day and in our community? Taking this passage as our template, what are some possible ways to bridge those divisions?
5. **DISCUSS:** What does the apostles' solution show us about how the church is to function?
6. **STUDY:** Read Ephesians 4:15-16
 - a. What do you notice?
7. **APPLY:** How do you see your role in the body? Do you realise that you are vital in the flourishing of God's plan?

PRAY

Thank God for the work and power of the Holy Spirit and pray that we would understand Him more deeply and rely on Him more fully.

HELPFUL NOTES

NOTES ON KEY TEXTS

Acts 6:1–12:25 The Witness beyond Jerusalem. Beginning with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (6:1–7), the Christian gospel was proclaimed to an ever-widening circle—to Samaria (8:4–25), to an Ethiopian (8:26–40), to a Gentile God-fearer (10:1–48), and to the Gentiles of Antioch (11:19–30). Key figures in the outreach were the Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the apostle Peter, and eventually Paul and Barnabas. The stage was then set for Paul's ministry that would go to the "end of the earth" (1:8).

Acts 6:1–7 Seven Chosen to Serve the Hellenist Widows. The growth of the church created problems when a number of Hellenistic (i.e., Greek-speaking) Jews responded to the gospel. The resulting language barrier led to the neglect of some needy widows, and the apostles called upon the Greek-speaking community to choose leaders to meet the need.

Acts 6:1 The Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora ("dispersed" Jews living outside Palestine). Their primary language was Greek. The Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic as their primary language and had attended the Hebrew-speaking synagogues. Not as fluent in Greek, they seem to have overlooked the Hellenist widows unintentionally. Some scholars claim this verse is just the "tip of the iceberg" indicating serious theological frictions between these two groups in the Jerusalem church, and that they had major differences over observance of the OT law and the proper role of the Jerusalem temple. But the text itself indicates just the opposite, for several places show essential unity in doctrinal understanding among the apostles and those who followed them (see 15:1–35; Gal. 1:18–19; 2:1–10). Any differences in emphasis were not major, but it does appear the Hellenists were less drawn to the temple, as Stephen's speech in Acts 7 suggests. the daily distribution. That is, of provisions for the needy.

Acts 6:4 Essential to the work of the apostles was their devotion to prayer and to the ministry of the word. The burgeoning ministry of charity was distracting them from this calling. The Greek-speaking



Hellenists from whom the seven were selected were better equipped to serve and communicate with the widows.

Acts 6:5 Stephen and Philip will become prominent in the Acts narrative; the NT makes no further mention of the other five.

Acts 6:6 The apostles confirmed the congregational election when they prayed and laid their hands on them. Laying on of hands is done in connection with several things in Acts: healing (9:17), the gift of the Spirit (8:18; 9:17; 19:6), and commissioning to a ministry (both here and at 13:3). Interpreters differ over whether these seven men should be considered the first “deacons” in the church. On the one hand, the noun “deacon” (Gk. *diakonos*) does not occur here. On the other hand, the corresponding verb (Gk. *diakoneō*, “to serve, help, render assistance”) is used in 6:2, and this same verb is used of those who serve as deacons in 1 Tim. 3:10, 13. However, this is a common verb for “service.” It could well be these men were called to deal with this issue and any like it.

Acts 6:7 the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. In spite of suffering and persecution (5:41), in spite of sin in the church (5:1–11), and in spite of conflict (6:1), the church continued to grow. It grew in the context of remarkable love among the Christians in Jerusalem (4:32, 35), frequent miracles (5:12), and the courageous proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit (5:29–32). The word of God continued to increase in spite of widespread opposition. A great many of the priests became Christians. The lower ranks of the priesthood numbered in the thousands, of whom many were poor and may have first been attracted to Christians by their charity, under the guidance of the newly appointed deacons (6:1–6).

1 Tim. 2:1–3:13 Descriptions of Gospel-Shaped Living. Having denounced the idle speculations of the false teachers, Paul turns to expounding in specific terms what true gospel living (1:5) should look like. He calls for prayer and he addresses hindrances to prayer (2:1–15), qualifications for overseers (3:1–7), and qualifications for deacons (3:8–13).

1 Tim. 3:8–13 Qualifications for Deacons. Along with elders (vv. 1–7), deacons are officers of the NT church (cf. Phil. 1:1). “Likewise” (1 Tim. 3:8) suggests a link between the lists of qualifications, and indeed there are striking similarities. Deacons, like overseers, are to exhibit lives shaped by the gospel. One key distinction is that deacons are not required to be able to teach. This list, like the one for the overseers, focuses on character rather than duties. The NT contains little explicit discussion of the role of deacons (unless Acts 6 is understood to refer to the installation of the first deacons; see note on Acts 6:6), but the Greek word *diakonos* means “servant,” so the office probably involved being responsible for various areas of service in the church.

1 Tim. 3:9 Mystery (Gk. *mystērion*) is a common Pauline word and refers here to the entire revealed content of God’s plan to bring salvation through Christ (see 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 15:51; Eph. 3:4–13; Col. 1:26–27; 2:2; 4:3). with a clear conscience. While deacons are not required to be able to teach, they are required to have a good grasp of the gospel, and their behavior is to be consistent with the gospel.

1 Tim. 3:10 Deacons should be tested, presumably under the leadership of the overseers.



1 Tim. 3:11 As the ESV footnote indicates, the Greek word for “wives” (*gynē*, here plural) can mean either “women” or “wives.” This ambiguity results in at least three interpretations. The text could refer to (1) the wives of deacons (their wives), (2) women deacons, or (3) women who assist the deacons (in some denominations called “deaconesses”) but who are distinct from the deacons. (The word “their” is not explicit in the Greek text but, according to the first interpretation, it represents the sense of the verse in the context of vv. 8–13.) These women appear abruptly in the flow of the text. A reference to the wives of deacons would make good sense, leading into the discussion of the deacon’s family in v. 12. However, the term likewise in similar cases often introduces a new group (e.g., 2:9; 3:8; Titus 2:3, 6). Also, the discussion of overseers lacked any reference to their wives. This would support understanding these women as deacons or assistants. Romans 16:1 refers to Phoebe as a “servant” or “deacon” or “deaconess” (Gk. *diakonos*; see ESV footnote). If the office of deacon is understood as involving church-wide teaching or governing authority, then 1 Tim. 2:11–15 would not permit women to carry out these functions. The fact that teaching is not mentioned as a responsibility of the deacons would seem to indicate that this was not a role that Paul intended for deacons.

1 Tim. 3:12 The meaning of husband of one wife (Gk. *mias gynaikos andra*) is widely debated. The Greek phrase is not common, and there are few other instances for comparison. The phrase literally states, “of one woman [wife] man [husband].” (1) Many commentators understand the phrase to mean “having the character of a one-woman man,” that is, “faithful to his wife.” In support of this view is the fact that a similar phrase is used in 1 Tim. 5:9 as a qualification for widows (Gk. *henos andros gynē*; “one-man woman,” i.e., “wife of one husband”), and in that verse it seems to refer to the trait of faithfulness, for a prohibition of remarriage after the death of a spouse would be in contradiction to Paul’s advice to young widows in 5:14. Interpreters who hold this first view conclude that the wording of 3:2 is too specific to be simply a requirement of marriage and not specific enough to be simply a reference to divorce or remarriage after divorce. In the context of this passage, the phrase therefore prohibits any kind of marital unfaithfulness. (2) Another view is that “husband of one wife” means polygamists cannot be elders. Interpreters who hold this view note that there is evidence of polygamy being practiced in some Jewish circles at the time. On this view, the phrase means “at the present time the husband of one wife,” in line with other qualifications which refer to present character. On either of these views, Paul is not prohibiting all second marriages; that is, he is not prohibiting from the eldership a man whose wife has died and who has remarried, or a man who has been divorced and who has remarried (these cases should be evaluated on an individual basis). (3) A third view is that Paul is absolutely requiring that an elder be someone who has never had more than one wife. But that does not fit the context as well, with its emphasis on present character. On any of these views, Paul is speaking of the ordinary cases and is not absolutely requiring marriage or children (cf. v. 4) but is giving a picture of the typical approved overseer as a faithful husband and father.

1 Tim. 3:13 Paul highlights the value and importance of deacons by stating two results of good service in this role: (1) good standing refers to respect and appreciation from the church to one who serves in this way; and (2) great confidence probably refers to the increase in confidence that comes from seeing the power of the gospel regularly proven in ministry.



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Eph. 4:15 The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience but must always be presented in love. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up into Christ. As head, Christ leads, directs, and guides the body (see 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3.)

Eph. 4:16 joint. Paul continues the body metaphor to describe the church's maturity. Every member (i.e., every believer, viewed as a limb, or unit, in Christ's body) plays a crucial role in this growth. in love. There is no Christian maturity or true Christian ministry without love (1 Corinthians 13), and every act of love in the name of Christ is valued and remembered by him, as each part is working properly (illustrated in Eph. 4:25–32; cf. Matt. 25:31–43; 26:6–13).

REFERENCE:

Developed with the help of the following:

- ESV Study Bible, Crossway.