

Improving Your Serve Acts 6:1-7

Intro: Fight, fight! These words always draw a crowd. Though we often personally hate conflict, when we know that it is happening our curiosity is aroused and we want to know the details. Sadly, conflict can, and does, happen in churches. Consider these statistics from the book "Winning the Real Battle at Church"

- More than 19,000 congregations experience major conflict every year.
- 98% of church conflict involves interpersonal issues.
- Control issues ranked as the most common cause of conflict (85%)
- About 40% of church members who leave their churches do so because of conflict.

I am sure that these stats change from year to year, but they do show the gravity of this issue of conflict and how it can affect the church and our spiritual lives. Churches have conflict because they have people who are not perfect. Both you and I live in that reality.

Today's message, as we continue through the book of Acts, is about a conflict that was centered around the area of service and the steps taken to resolve the problem and tension. Let's look at it together from Acts 6:1-7.

I want you to go away from this message today with a dominant thought: Spirit filled servants seek godly solutions to conflict.

Factors of the conflict - there are often more than one factor in most conflicts. Let's see what they were with this one.

- Some things are right, but not all
 - Disciples were increasing – what a wonderful thing!
 - The gospel is being proclaimed – people are accepting the good news that their sins can be forgiven; they can be right with God.
 - But just because things are going well does not mean there will be no problems. This is true in church, business, homes, and personal lives.
 - While we live here in a world of sin, there will be problems that need the right solutions. When things are going right in our lives, please be aware that evil, spiritual forces set up camp to thwart what God is doing. It's true in our personal lives, and true in the church.
- Rapid change
 - These people who were now focused on Christ were experiencing what some would call growing pains. There were a lot more people around.
 - Change seems more acceptable if we are the ones creating it. But if we are the recipient, sometimes it causes stress and conflict.
 - With uninitiated change comes a feeling that things aren't stable. We often are bombarded by new information that can feel overwhelming.
 - But notice the text described these people as disciples – people who were following Christ by diligent learning and a commitment to personal change.
- Grumbling
 - Complaint by the Hellenists. These were Jews who had grown up outside of Judea – they were Greek speaking Jews.
 - Widows were being neglected – it was customary to have daily distribution to poor widows who had no means to support themselves.
 - Murmuring, grumbling and complaining is often the undercurrent of conflict; there is often ill feeling, hurt and a sense that fairness is not the norm.
- Perceived or real discrimination
 - There was a form of cultural discrimination happening or it was perceived to be happening.
 - The tribe effect - we notice those like us and sometimes tend to gravitate to them; inadvertently we can make decisions that do not show a full awareness of situations or acceptance of others.
 - Differences can cause difficulties unless we respond to God in giving value to all people.
- Blind spots
 - Car drivers know what a blind spot is.

- We all have blind spots. Our training and experiences can have holes in them that cause us to not truly see all that is there.
- There must be extra effort given if we truly see all we need to see, or the result is often conflict. One of the greatest ways to begin to dissolve conflict is to put yourself in the shoes of the other person and seek to understand their issue.
- Unmet needs
 - This was the bottom line in this story.
 - It is often the bottom line in personal conflict. Needs often create expectations of others and when they are not met, there can be anger, frustration and pain.
 - The great commandment is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. Your neighbor can be the unsaved living in your community or your neighbor sitting in the pew beside you – both are important.
 - Unmet needs are an opportunity to show God's love, of which we all need.
 - Are there any of these factors that are a part of your current conflicts?

Let's refresh ourselves with the main point we are learning today.
 Spirit filled servants seek godly solutions to conflict.

Process of Resolving the conflict: the apostles called a meeting of those involved and came up with a process for resolving the conflict. Notice the decisions that were made

- Keep godly priorities
 - The apostles said it is not right to give up preaching and praying to serve tables – God is using us; the Word of God is extremely important. This is the essence of the Great Commission and why Jesus came – to seek and save the lost and make disciples.
 - To serve tables – This word describes both tables that we would eat on and tables that were used in banks to disperse funds.
 - Where the apostles saying they were too good or important to do this type of serving? No, it is a matter of calling, gifts and priority.
 - There are only so many hours in a day. We must make choices about what we will give our time to.
 - During our Grow Time initiative we learned that no one can do everything but everyone can do something. Everyone's contribution of service is important. We just need to be obedient to what God wants us to do and make sure we are not using comparison to judge others and ourselves.
 - Sometimes we make a mistake in giving up what God wants us to continue to do in order to have less conflict. This is neither good nor godly.
 - With God's will we can make adjustments but should not abandon it.
- Enlist the help of others
 - David Moore in Vital Speeches of the Day tells a humorous story of two men who lived in a small village and got into a terrible dispute that they could not resolve. So, they decided to talk to the town sage. The first man went to the sage's home and told his version of what happened. When he finished, the sage said, "You're absolutely right." The next night, the second man called on the sage and told his side of the story. The sage responded, "You're absolutely right." Afterward, the sage's wife scolded her husband. "Those men told you two different stories and you told them they were absolutely right. That's impossible -- they can't both be absolutely right." The sage turned to his wife and said, "You're absolutely right."
 - The apostles called a meeting and said, "Brothers..." Do you know what a privilege it is to be a part of the family of God? As Pastor Dan is fond of saying, it is a forever family.
 - Pick out – decision making was spread out too many people. Use discernment, notice actions and pick seven men.
 - Seven men – a team to meet the needs and resolve the conflict. This was still a pretty big job for seven men, but I am sure they too enlisted help as they oversaw this responsibility.
 - Many Jewish communities were in the habit of selecting 7 men to take care of civic issues and this may have reflected this cultural practice.
- Choose a spiritual servanthood mentality

- Choose spiritual character over ability.
- Choose men of good repute, reputable. Our lifestyle creates our spiritual reputation. These men were already serving, they had a reputation for helping.
- I am privileged to be a part of a church that has a servanthood mentality. From church leaders to many who do countless unseen acts of service – Edgewood has many people who fit this description. But can we continue to grow in this area? Absolutely!
- Philippians 2:5 reminds us that Jesus had this servanthood mentality. What kind of reputation do you and I have? What we do creates our reputation.
- Full of the Spirit – spiritual knowledge and relationship with God was dominant and evident. To be full of the Spirit is to be submissive to spiritual truth and admonitions.
- Full of wisdom – practically make decisions consistent with God’s will and ways.
- What wasn’t said: choose those who are good looking, popular, young, old, rich, and successful.
- Appoint to this duty: choose people who will be responsible and faithful to the task they are given.
- Create a workable godly solution
 - The Apostles were to keep serving by being devoted to the ministry of prayer and the Word.
 - Both are important: one is vertical showing dependence on God, the other horizontal showing that change in the spiritual world is all about applying Biblical concepts and truths to our daily lives.
 - Someone has said, if we are to be spiritually influential, we must speak to God about men before we speak to men about God.
 - Plan was acceptable: God loves unity and harmony. These do not happen in a void, they happen when people face their own selfish behavior and choose to be godly and make decisions that reflect God’s ways rather than man’s ways.
 - Most were likely Greek speaking Hebrews – a gracious concession – all had Greek names.
 - Stephen – well known, the first Christian martyr, described as full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.
 - Philip – well known, evangelist, later in Acts shared with the Ethiopian eunuch how to become a believer in Christ and follow the Lord in believer’s baptism.
 - Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, and Parmenas – we know nothing else of these men. But what an honor to be listed in God’s holy Word as spirit filled servants, chosen to quench a church conflict.
 - The last man mentioned was Nicolaus, a proselyte, not even a Jew.
 - All had reputations of being servants that we should want to emulate.

Are you beginning to remember our big idea today?
 Spirit filled servants seek godly solutions to conflict.

The results of Servanthood Solutions - when we do things God’s way, there are often great blessings. We must be careful in demanding what those blessings are, but things done God’s way will ultimately have a great reward.

- Servants are empowered
 - These men were set before the apostles, prayed for, laid hands on them. This is a beautiful picture of the body of Christ working together for a higher purpose.
 - These men were being commissioned by the apostles to act as their representatives.
 - This signified affirmation, identification and support. We all crave these characteristics.
- The Word of God is elevated and effective
 - Because of this resolved conflict, there was great forward momentum for the gospel.
 - The word of God increased. This is done by word of mouth. People giving testimony to the truth and to God’s work through His word. It is so important to give testimony to God for what He is doing in your life. Your story can influence others, but it must be told.
 - Conflict often vies for the same attention as should be given to the Word of God. It is often either or.
 - There is something supernatural about God’s Word. It reveals His mind, it is alive, and the Holy Spirit uses it to create conviction and change.
- Discipleship is increased
 - The number of disciples multiplied greatly. People were accepting the truth about Jesus Christ and repenting of their sins. What a blessing to know that you are right with God and are a part of the family of God.

- Many Jewish religious leaders (priests) became obedient to the faith. Do you realize how monumental this statement is? These priests made the courageous decision to be a follower of Christ and incur the possible rejection of the Jewish priesthood and religious system.
- Notice how Luke described discipleship – obedience to the faith. True saving faith produces obedience and a submissive spirit to the Lord and His word.
- We have been given words supernaturally handed down to us through the Bible that form the basis of our beliefs and behavior.
- This is the essence of our sanctification, to set us apart in our thoughts, attitudes and actions so that we are identifying with the Lord as Ambassadors.
- What criteria do you think God will use at the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers? What criteria will he use at the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers? It will be the precepts of the Word of God.
- It is imperative to allow God's word to form our beliefs and behaviors as well as our worldview. For if we go our own way, living by our own thoughts rather than Gods, Proverbs 16:25 will come to pass: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."
- Obedience is so important that Jesus declared in John 14:15, "If you love me keep my commandments."

So, we must remember,
Spirit filled servants seek godly solutions to conflict.

Next Steps

1. Evaluate your heart – is it servant oriented or selfish? One is good and beneficial, the other is harmful and creates conflict.
2. Look beyond your conflicts to unmet needs. In a conflict, opposition clouds our ability to see the underlying needs. We must focus not on the opposition but rather on serving to meet needs.
3. Find godly solutions for conflict resolution and get help if needed. Be solution oriented rather than being stuck on the problem.
4. Seek to emulate Jesus as a servant-leader. Jesus said, I did not come to be ministered to but rather to minister. We are being like Christ when we choose to serve and not make everything about self. A. W. Tozer in his book The Pursuit of God said, "Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow." Jesus Christ is that standard for us.
5. Grow your spiritual servanthood by submission to God and His Word. The Bible gives us direction and help. We so desperately need it like we need food. We need to read it and heed it! Our obedience starts when we accept what God says about our sin and accept Jesus as Savior. Then baptism and daily learning how to follow him.

So one last time: Spirit filled servants seek godly solutions to conflict.