

“The Holy Team Spirit”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 8/2/2020
Text: Acts 6:1-7 at FBC of Newport, NH

//In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews^[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”//

—Acts 6:1-4 (NIV)

There’s more to the church than a preacher preaching the Gospel. Just as there’s more to a football team than a quarterback, more to a hockey team than a goalie or center. Even a NASCAR driver would find it impossible to drive anywhere if it were not for a team of mechanics, pit crew and sponsors behind him. I think we may know this more today than the early church did in these earliest days. Remember, they started out as just a bunch of people following Jesus. The Twelve Apostles weren’t hardly even called “apostles” in the whole book of Mark. It’s only done once. And it didn’t carry the capital “A” kind of prestige it later was given for leadership and authority. They were followers of Jesus, just like all the others. Though they got to spend more time with him.

But things changed when Jesus ascended to his throne in the heavens. Those Apostles found themselves uniquely gifted and positioned to be the ones who would bring the Gospel to the public around them. And human beings being the way we are, those Apostles were probably also looked to for all kinds of decisions and directions for the newborn Church.

But things changed again as that newborn Church started to grow by huge leaps and bounds in the thousands. Three thousand on the first day. Another two thousand by the time Peter healed the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate. Maybe a little slow down with the rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira, but still there was growth. And by chapter 6 here, Luke records this growth as causing a problem within the membership. These Twelve Apostles can no longer do the job they were called to do and take on the additional work naturally expected of them, such as overseeing the distribution of the food to members in need.

It makes me think of Moses, when he had to admit he needed help in overseeing the needs of the Israelites. Only in his case he had a whole *nation* of people to deal with! So it’s interesting the difference there is with the Apostles. There were twelve of them and a few thousand member of the church. You’d think they would handle it even better than Moses did alone.

But this brings out a fundamental difference between Moses and the Apostles.

Moses was God's instrument for the giving of the Law to the people of God. The Law was the general means by which God led his people. Moses delivered it to them and then they were to follow it. He also helped them understand the laws and situations that needed specific judgments, as any judge does with any laws. And so at first, and for a long time, Moses alone handled the number of individual cases. (And hey, God himself took care of a lot of the food and water needs!) But after a while more and more people had more and more situations which needed a judgement. So Moses appointed an array of leaders. Then he only needed to deal with the big picture of the Law and the most difficult individual cases.

That looks similar to the role of the Twelve Apostles, until you realize they had a different calling. Not only did they have the Gospel of grace instead of the law, but the foundation of the 'house' they were establishing was going to be far bigger than the whole nation of Israel. As it looked like they were only bringing the Good News to the Jewish people, they were in fact bringing it to the whole world—to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles. And though the number of God's people was presently small, compared to what Moses had dealt with, the Apostles preaching and teaching was to be a foundational—with Christ as the cornerstone—able to carry a whole world of people, from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and ultimately to the ends of the earth—from day one until the Day of the Lord's return.

Even here at this early stage, the Church was starting to deal with going beyond the expected borders of Israel of old. For we have two groups of Jews: the traditional Hebraic Jews, whose homeland was Judea, and the Hellenistic, greek-speaking Jews, who had homelands scattered all over the Roman world. Though Jews, they spoke greek, would have read their OT Bible in greek (the Septuagint) and had other cultural influences. They would only be able to worship at the temple on special occasions, as opposed to the Hebraic Jews who had the temple right in their midst. Consequently the Hellenistic Jews were made to feel like second class members—even in the church.

But here is a practical demonstration of the superiority of this New Covenant of Grace over the Old Covenant of the Law. Instead of having to address this problem strictly by the Law, the Apostles could address it by the Holy Spirit with a human touch. This is why the seven people chosen to oversee the matter were measured as they were to qualify for the appointment. There's no word about their skill in math, proper nutrition or serving at tables. The essential qualification needed were that they be found full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. In this way they were able to get to the heart of the problem instead of putting a band aid over the surface of it. And so the preaching of the Apostles could continue without being undermined. The problems were solved and the ministry

of the Word continued full steam ahead. The number of disciples continued to increase and did so rapidly. There's even a note that a large number of priests became "obedient to the faith." This would be new ground of fruitfulness for the Gospel. Those most involved in the working of the Old Covenant would be embracing the New Covenant in Christ Jesus.

And a good thing too. Right now the Hebraic Jews could feel superior and slight the Hellenistic Jews. But the day would come when the Jewish believers would be persecuted terribly in Jerusalem and it would be the believers outside of Judah, both Jew and Greek, who would come to Christ in great numbers and flourish. Yet, instead of there being a jealousy between these two groups, there would be a common identity in Christ and a cooperation of love and support. The gentile Christians would end up helping the Jewish Christians during a time of scarce food and resources. (1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

Right now our country and world are being rocked by more than one problem no one seems to know how to solve. But I'm afraid the biggest problem of all is being overlooked. There's a deeper matter that really needs to be addressed: prejudice, politics, history and current events ... they all ultimately boil down to the condition of our hearts. As important as laws and lawmakers are, they can only scratch the surface of what ails us. We need to start looking at our problems in terms of their deepest solution: sin and the need of salvation. That can only come through faith in Christ and obedience to that faith through the Holy Spirit.

There's a lot of fear in our country right now. People are afraid of what is in the air, what is presently happening in our streets and in our highest offices. People are also afraid of what is going to happen in November if the "other" party were to win. For some this is their greatest fear, because of thinking only in terms of the law, political solutions, or even violent 'gospels,' false gospels really.

Only the grace of Christ, not any law, has the real power to heal and solve and save. What law can do any of that? What grace is greater than that found in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God? But even we who have received that grace need to remain faithful to it. We need to face our own problems with grace.

Instead of being afraid of who will, or will not, get into the White House this election year, we should be afraid of whether or not our lives, our houses and our churches are "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." This was the only concern of the Apostles when they faced the problems before them. They didn't let everything hinge on who was the high priest in Jerusalem or who was the emperor of Rome. They asked for seven local believers who had faith in Christ and are yielded to his Holy Spirit. In this way they solved their own problems, addressing even their deepest problems, while simultaneously carrying on with the mission of the Church—bringing Good News to even the worst news of the world—to the glory of God.