

## THE CHOOSING OF THE SEVEN

Acts 6:1-7

Key Verse 6:3-4 <sup>3</sup> *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*  
<sup>4</sup> *and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

Before we get into today's passage, I want to share a couple of personal experiences. In the early days of our ministry in Venezuela, we shared food together on Sundays and often during the week. A middle-aged woman named Teresa was usually in charge of cooking and distributing the food. She loved to make chicken soup, and when she would distribute the food, she would put chicken legs or breasts in front of the people she liked and say, "Jorge, I love you!" In contrast, the people she didn't have much of a relationship with or didn't like would get mainly broth with a little chicken meat. I noticed that because of Teresa's unequal distribution, some brothers and sisters would whisper behind her back, "I think she only likes Jorge." It was a very small matter, but it became an incident that caused grumbling and division within the church because of personal preference. Another story is something I experienced while ministering at Chicago UBF. One day, a white woman leader called me and shared with me about a conflict she was having with an elder who was Korean. She finally broke down in tears because of the hurt she was feeling. My heart broke as I listened to her story. I am deeply grateful that God has blessed our UBF church to be a beautiful multicultural community. During the last ISBC, people of different ethnicities from different countries gathered to worship God. It reminded me of the image of God's kingdom in the book of Revelation. However, we cannot deny that there are subtle conflicts between different races among us. We need to pray, seek God's wisdom, and make practical efforts to become a genuine multicultural community. From the story recorded in Acts 6:1-7, we can learn God's wisdom for building a united and fruitful community.

Verse 1 begins with *"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing."* This gives us the context of the early church at that time. The early church had grown by the power of the Holy Spirit to nearly 10,000 believers, which was an amazing work of God in a short period of time. It was no longer a small community of 120 disciples. The church demographics showed that the vast majority were Hebrew-speaking Jews born in Palestine who held strongly to Jewish tradition and culture. However, there were also Greek-speaking Jews born in Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor who had migrated to the Jerusalem area. The Greek-speaking Jews retained Hellenistic culture and language. So, what was once a small church community with a single culture and language grew to become a multicultural community with different cultures and languages. This created some unexpected problems.

*"The Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food"* (1b). At the time, the early church was actually helping members in need with the money that many members voluntarily gave from selling their possessions. Orphans and widows were especially in need of attention and help. So the Apostle James, a brother of Jesus, wrote a letter to encourage the church to help orphans and widows, saying, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world"* (James 1:27). But there was a situation in the early Jerusalem church where widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Worse, they were widows of Hellenistic Jews. In other words, the widows of Hebraic Jews were treated properly in the daily distribution of food, while the widows of Hellenistic Jews were either omitted from the food distribution or were treated differently. This problem had probably been repeated several times, so the Hellenistic Jews complained. While it is possible to view this incident as a simple mistake on the part of the food distributors, it can also be seen as an example of the conflict between Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews growing within the early Jerusalem church at the time. In fact, Hebraic Jews were committed to preserving Jewish culture, traditions, and language, while Hellenistic Jews had embraced Hellenistic culture and were more comfortable speaking Greek than Hebrew. There was a cultural and linguistic barrier between them. The Hebrew-speaking Jews had a strong sense of pride in their Jewish culture and looked down on the Greek-speaking Jews, so when the Hebraic Jews, who were the majority group, were distributing food, their disdain for the Hellenistic Jews may have been subtly expressed, causing them to overlook the Hellenistic widows.

If left unattended, this could have led to a split in the church later. What did the apostles do in response? Verses 2-4 say, *"<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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 <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'"* The apostles recognized the seriousness of the matter. They gathered all the disciples together and told them to choose seven men. What were the qualifications of the seven men to be chosen?

**First, they had to be men of good reputation.** The NIV Bible does not translate this clearly, but other translations, such as the NASB, clearly state "seven men of good reputation." Reputation is the general belief or opinion that other people have about someone. If you are considered trustworthy and kind, you have a good reputation. This reputation comes from other believers in the church community. Some people say, "I don't care what people think of me as long as I live before God." But if we strive to live faithfully before God, our actions will show love to our neighbors, and our words will be kind to them. And in this way, we will naturally have a good reputation.

**Second, they had to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.** A person full of the Spirit is one who can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, know God's will, and obey it. Wisdom can be defined as knowledge of what is true or right. It also includes doing what is right. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will naturally be filled with wisdom because true wisdom comes from God. Wisdom is very important when it comes to serving God. Even if we serve God with zeal, without wisdom, we cannot produce the fruit that pleases God. If people who are enthusiastic but not wise become leaders, God's community can be in great danger. That is why God looks for faithful and wise servants.

The primary job of these seven elected servants was to be in charge of the daily distribution of food. That job involved budgeting from the church's offering, buying food, cooking it, and distributing it. It was, therefore, very important that they were trustworthy, and full of the Spirit and wisdom. The word for distribution in verse 1 is the original Greek term διακονία (diakonia), which means service. In verse 4, this word is translated into 'ministry.' And in verse 2, διακονέω (diakoneō), the verb form of διακονία (diakonia), was translated into 'serve' tables. So, these seven men were chosen to serve God and the community of believers. Have you heard the word 'deacon'? The term 'deacon' (1 Timothy 3:8) is derived from the Greek word διάκονος (diakonos), which means servant. The word 'deacon' is not used in this text, but it would be reasonable to understand that these seven chosen men were at least prototypes of the first deacons.

So, what motivated the apostles to ask the congregation to elect seven deacons? Verse 2 says, ***"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables,"*** and verse 4 says, ***"(We) will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*** From this, we can see that the apostles recognized their limitations to all issues of the church and decided to humbly ask the church members for help. They were determined to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the word of God. This doesn't mean that they downplayed or didn't value the work of distributing food. They knew that serving the poor and providing practical help was obedient to God's will. However, as the church grew, there were more people to serve and more work to do. In the face of these time constraints, they decided to devote themselves to their primary calling from God: to pray and study the word of God for the preaching of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit so that more people would believe in Jesus and be saved. To do this, they decided to leave another important task of distributing food to those who were elected from among the disciples of the church. This doesn't mean that they didn't need to pray and study the word of God. In fact, if we look at the seven deacons, we'll see that they were powerful in the word of God and preaching the gospel of salvation. Stephen's sermon, as we'll study next week, is one of the best sermons in the book of Acts. Philip is a powerful evangelist and Bible teacher who opened the door to Samaria and helped the Ethiopian eunuch to accept Jesus. There is no more important or less important task in serving God, and there is no high or low in vocations from God. Each of us has received divine callings and spiritual gifts from God by grace. So whether it's teaching the Bible to CBF children,

teaching the Bible to college students, preaching a sermon, cleaning a church, or whatever, being faithful to our calling and vocation from God is the way to please God. All of us need to be full of the Holy Spirit through prayer and the word of God.

The apostles' proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. We will study Stephen and Philip more in the future. An interesting fact about these names is that they were all Greek-speaking people. Six were Greek-speaking Jews, and Nicolas from Antioch was a gentile who converted to Judaism. He became a Christian from a Judaist. Common sense tells us that in a community where Hebrew-speaking Jews are the majority, five of the seven should be Hebrew-speaking Jews. Two Greek-speaking Jews would seem to be enough. But out of the seven, there was not a single Hebrew-speaking Jew. What does this tell us? One of the most important virtues of the Christian community is unity. Racial reconciliation and unity were of paramount importance, especially as the early church was transforming into a multicultural community. In response, the Hebraic Jews, who were in the majority, gave up their rights and relinquished the important job of distributing food to the Hellenistic Jews in order to comfort and heal the minority group who had been hurt by discrimination. What a beautiful picture of a community of faith. This is the essence of the gospel that Jesus showed us. Jesus, being in very nature God, made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant (Phil 2:6-7).

The congregation presented the seven deacons to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. What was the result of the Jerusalem church solving the problem that arose in such a wise way? Verse 7 says, "*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*" God was pleased with the decision of the church in Jerusalem and blessed it even more. Even a large number of priests who had been persecutors became obedient to the faith in Jesus. God's wisdom solved the problem that arose as the early church in Jerusalem grew, and God healed the wounds of the saints with love and service. As a result, God's church became a more mature, harmonious, and unified community.

I want to share with you three important things I learned from this passage.

***First, unity among believers.*** Given that even the Spirit-filled early church had problems among the believers, it seems natural that any church would have problems. The important thing is to quickly identify the causes of disunity among the saints and to follow the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit to resolve the problems and restore unity. In our church, there may be conflicts among us. Some are hurt, and some have complaints about the church. The great majority of ethnic groups in our church are Korean, and there may be difficulties among non-Korean members. We need to have sincere dialogues to understand, forgive, and reconcile with each other in the love of Christ. I believe that New York UBF should be a truly multicultural and multigenerational community. New York is one of the most diverse cities in the world. It is a beautiful thing to see people of different languages and cultures come together to

praise God and build a community of unity. My prayer is that we will be more concerned for one another, especially our brothers and sisters who are hurt and in need. I pray that we will demonstrate God's love by caring for each other so that we can build a community of love.

**Second, working together for God's mission.** It is essential that we share responsibilities in God's work so that we can bear more fruit for the glory of God. In our church, many precious servants work together. There are teachers who serve BBF, CBF, and HBF every week. We have servants who clean and maintain the church. We have Sunday worship service servants, such as the band team, tech team, orchestra team, prayer servants, lunch servants, and others. We have finance committee members who manage important church finances. And we have elders who oversee the church as a whole. We have fellowship leaders and members who meet weekly to study the Bible and fellowship together. Our church runs well because of the dedicated service of these precious servants. I pray that we can fulfill God's mission even more fruitfully. To do this, we are currently reorganizing our fellowship groups and restructuring our ministry activities. I am praying that our members will have loving fellowship in the word of God, receive comfort and strength, pray together for each other, and grow together as disciples of Jesus through fellowship meetings. I am also praying that our fellowship leaders will discuss God's work together and care for our members as good shepherds. The fellowship groups will be the backbone of our church. The fellowship formation is still in the draft stage. I'll make a final decision after I've talked to each of our members, so please don't worry too much about it and support us in prayer. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or suggestions.

I am also praying that we can revitalize and develop our college ministry, BBF, CBF, HBF ministries, and young people's groups. We need to support the praise & worship band team and the IT team to reach out to young people effectively. We have a lot of things to do and need to work together in harmony for God's mission. But our ministry will be Christ-centered, not task-centered, and it will happen step by step. Therefore, I humbly ask for your help. I pray that the gospel of Jesus will be preached through us so that many people, including many college students, will come to faith in Jesus and be made disciples.

**Third, prayer and the ministry of the word.** It is said that long ago, pastors used the title V.D.M.. V.D.M. is an acronym for the Latin phrase *Verbi Domini Minister*, which means "**Minister of the word of God.**" As the minister of the word of God at New York UBF, I will devote myself to prayer and the ministry of God's word. That doesn't mean I will not do other things - I'll meet and have fellowship with our brothers and sisters; I will clean the church; I will do administrative things and others. But I will prioritize prayer and the ministry of God's word. I will serve Bible studies for fellowship leaders and others and provide necessary Bible study resources so that our New York UBF members can be filled with the word of God. I pray that we all seek God through prayer and His word so that we can be a Spirit-filled community. Amen.