

Sunday, August 3, 2025 | Filled

Week 18 | Acts 6:1-2 | "Growing Pains, Pt. 1"

**READ:** Acts 6:1-7 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup> 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.

Growing pains are a part of life. At a certain point in a person's development, their legs start to ache as they get longer. Pimples start appearing on one's face. Clothes, which once fit comfortably, are now woefully ill-equipped to the task. This is a part of life, and everyone goes through this process.

Interestingly, what is true for the body is true for the church. As it grows, properties that were once sufficient to hold all their members become overtaxed and crowded as they become bigger, a sign of the church's flourishing. Programs and budgets that comfortably met the needs of the small faith community can no longer function properly due to the influx of needs, a testament to the church's expanding reach. Growth, while a blessing, invites new challenges, but also new opportunities for service and ministry.

As the early church grew, it had to confront challenges, and it did so head-on. First, they had to remain faithful despite persecution from the Sanhedrin. Then, with Ananias and Sapphira, the church had to deal with sin within its own camp. In today's passage, the Bride of Christ will have to address how it cares for its most vulnerable members.

A growing church is not without its challenges. And as we see, an *unhealthy* church views such difficulties as *disadvantages* while a *healthy* church views them as *opportunities*. For every problem, there is a solution for the church that follows Jesus Christ.

There are **five** takeaways in this passage:

**Vs. 1** – Once again, Luke mentions that the “disciples were increasing in number.” Despite opposition from the Sanhedrin, the early church continued to grow. However, as mentioned in the introduction, when any institution experiences growth, it is bound to go through growing pains, and the church is no exception.

The early church hit a snag. Luke says, “A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews.” “Hellenists” was a general term that referred to someone who followed Greek customs and/or mainly spoke the Greek language.<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, this word could refer to Gentiles. However, given the context, it likely refers to Jews who, in some way, had adopted or been influenced by Greek culture. As such, the Hellenists would be distinct from the “Hebrews” who primarily spoke a Semitic language—i.e., Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>2</sup> This difference was best seen in their worship. As Osborne explains, “Hellenistic Jews differed sufficiently in their background and worship habits (especially in the use of Greek in the service) that there would be separate synagogues for them (there were seven such in Jerusalem alone).”<sup>3</sup> Due to this, the Hellenists weren’t as tied to Jerusalem as the Hebrews. And this meant they didn’t participate in Temple worship as frequently as their Hebrew brothers and sisters. In the absence of the Hellenistic Christians, the Hebrew Christians were left to run the daily affairs of the early church.<sup>4</sup>

Naturally, a gap emerged between the two groups, and because of that, the Hellenists’ “widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.” The phrase “daily distribution” likely refers to the provision of essential goods and services, including food, clothing, and financial resources, to those in need. Notice, this was more than mere favoritism. Luke says the Hellenist widows were “being neglected,” that is, ignored. The Hebrews prioritized those who spoke/acted the same way they did while overlooking those who spoke/acted differently. Such action is terrible as it deprives the most vulnerable of their “daily” necessities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Hellenists,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 961.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG (2000), p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Hellenists,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 961.

<sup>4</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 256, 258.

**Two takeaways** can be drawn at this point:

- 1.) **Takeaway #1** – Christ is the foundation upon which we build our identity and the framework by which we build our community. It is natural for people to gravitate towards those with whom they have similarities. We are tribalistic by nature. The Hebrew Christians, whether intentionally or unintentionally, had imported their prejudices from their old life into their new one. And, surprise, surprise, this caused division and disunity. Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ is one thing; learning to live with other followers of Jesus is something else entirely.

When a believer does not prioritize Christ in their relationships, problems are bound to arise. This is why believers shouldn't marry unbelievers (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). It is also why, when Paul came to the church in Corinth, he "decided to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). A person's attachment to Christ is by far and away the most important factor to consider about someone.

To be clear, factors such as gender, ethnicity, or heritage have value. So long as they are not sinful, a person's cultural or personal characteristics do not disappear when they become a Christian. When Paul was with a bunch of Jews, he acted Jewish. When he was with a group of Gentiles, he acted in a manner befitting a Gentile. He said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). And someday, praises to Jesus will be heard coming, not from one nation, tribe, and people, language, but "from every [emphasis added] nation, from all [emphasis added] tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9). There is beauty in diversity, and the worldwide church is an excellent example of this. However, while someone's personal identity has significance, it is secondary to their identity in Christ. Before I am a white male born in the United States of America, I'm a Christian. Christ first, and everything else ought to be second. Christ is the foundation upon which we build our identity and the framework by which we build our community.

- 2.) **Takeaway #2** – A church's health is not measured by its capacity—i.e., size, theological depth, or programs—but by its care—i.e., poor, orphaned, and widowed. In fact, this issue mattered so much to Paul that he addressed it in great detail in 1 Tim. 5:9-16. And James says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Ja. 1:27). The early church had a glaring flaw that they hastened to correct. They knew that such injustice could not be tolerated by those who claim to follow Jesus Christ.

The early church needed to address this difficulty now, as the circle of faith was about to expand significantly and become more diverse. Soon (cf. Ac. 10), Christians wouldn't have to deal with one group that was more Jewish than another, but one group that was Jewish and another that wasn't Jewish at all: **the Gentiles!** Jewish widows were going without their daily ration of food simply because they weren't Jewish enough. If the church didn't fix this problem, it would only get worse when a bunch of needy people—people totally foreign to the concepts, principles, and practices within Judaism—joined the community of faith.

**Vs. 2, 4** – Together, all “twelve” apostles gathered all “the disciples” together to resolve this complaint. Church unity is such a serious matter that the whole church ought to be included. However, before reaching a solution, the apostles had to lay some groundwork. They said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” No doubt, people in the early church believed that the obvious solution to their problem was to have the apostles oversee the benevolence ministry. And while this might've solved the problem, it would've created an even greater problem: the apostles could not preach to the church and also provide for its needs.

To be clear, this was not a matter of **pride** but a matter of **priorities**. The apostles were not above getting their hands dirty (Jn. 13:14). However, they were not commissioned by Christ to, as they put it, “serve tables,” but to witness (cf. Ac. 1:8). The apostles were ministers of the **word**, not ministers of **food**. Though the term is not used here, this aligns well with the NT understanding of the office of “elder/overseer.” One of the functions of an elder/overseer was the teaching/preaching of God's word. This is why they later say, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Aside from preaching, a pastor ought to devote himself to prayer.

**Takeaway #3** – **Praying** to God and **preaching** for God are the tentpoles of a perfect **pulpit**.

### **Video Description:**

#### **Filled | Week 18 | “Growing Pains, Pt. 1” (Acts 6:1-2)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Growing pains are a part of life. At a certain point in a person's development, their legs start to ache as they get longer. Pimples start appearing on one's face. Clothes, which once fit comfortably, are now woefully ill-equipped to the task. This is a part of life, and everyone goes through this process.

Interestingly, what is true for the body is true for the church. As it grows, properties that were once sufficient to hold all their members become overtaxed and crowded as they become bigger, a sign of the church's flourishing. Programs and budgets that comfortably met the needs of the small faith community can no longer function properly due to the influx of needs, a testament to the church's expanding reach. Growth, while a blessing, invites new challenges, but also new opportunities for service and ministry.

As the early church grew, it had to confront challenges, and it did so head-on. First, they had to remain faithful despite persecution from the Sanhedrin. Then, with Ananias and Sapphira, the church had to deal with sin within its own camp. In today's passage, the Bride of Christ will have to address how it cares for its most vulnerable members.

A growing church is not without its challenges. And as we see, an *unhealthy* church views such difficulties as *disadvantages* while a *healthy* church views them as *opportunities*. For every problem, there is a solution for the church that follows Jesus Christ.

**Sermon Manuscript:** <https://bit.ly/4mxng6j>

---

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: [info@GracePointeLife.com](mailto:info@GracePointeLife.com)

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give here: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>

**Podcast Details:**

Season 40 | 18