

December 9/10, 2023  
"Conflict in the Early Church"  
Pastor Aaron Buer



## SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

### 2023 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Intentional activities to deepen our relationship with God and mold us to be more like Jesus.

#### DECEMBER PRACTICE Celebration

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## Day 1 Acts 6:1-7 | Conflict in the Early Church

**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 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.** Acts 6:3

The early church is growing—bringing more people and problems. The Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish widows are being left out of the daily distribution of food. This brings the complaints and concerns of many. How would the leadership of this growing movement respond? Rather than dismiss such complaints as trivial, the early church appoints seven qualified men to be responsible for the daily food distribution to widows. Such oversight frees the Apostles to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. In so doing, the early church shows a deep devotion to both word and deed.

We have much to learn from the example of the early church. Their responses to this conflict unleash the power of the Gospel in their community. They maintain unity and remain faithful (though imperfect) in their commitment to both word and deed through teaching Scripture AND serving those in need. They also obey Jesus's commands and recognize how following him changes everything in our lives. Such priorities were pivotal to the early church's growth—and should be for us as well.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Pray and ask God to guide you as you consider the core themes of our passage for this week. If you are unsure how to begin such a prayer, consider using the model prayer in [Psalm 139:23-24](#): "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

## Day 2 John 17:20-26 | Jesus's Prayer

**"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."** John 17:20-21

Jesus prays right before he is about to be arrested and crucified. His simple yet profound prayer reveals his deep desire for unity. It's what he desires for his followers after his departure. Jesus longs for his people to be one as he and the Father are one. Jesus's prayer reveals that true unity begins with God—who is three in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it was and is this unity that Jesus wants his people—the church—to experience and showcase to the world.

Jesus's passion for unity should be ours as well. To be godly is to reflect Christ's character. And there is no greater unity than that found in God himself. Therefore, as God's people, we should hear Jesus's prayer for believers (which includes us today!) and recognize the vital importance of love for one another and unity among his people. Rather than dividing over trivial matters, we should remember that there is far more that unites us in Christ than could ever divide us. This unity shines a spotlight to a lost and hurting world about the greatness of God.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Spend time memorizing [John 17:20-21](#). As you work to learn Jesus's prayer, use these words to pray that you and the believers in your life remain unified in Christ, reflecting the love and oneness found in God himself.

## Day 3 Colossians 3:11 | Unity

**Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.** Colossians 3:11

Jesus prays for unity among his believers (see [John 17:20-21](#)). Later, the Apostle Paul, reminds the early church that Christ unites Jew and Gentile, slave and free. In Christ, all are one. This does not mean that all people are saved (for salvation is only found through faith in Jesus) or that there is no distinction between people. It does mean, however, that all those who have come to Jesus as Savior are unified as one big family. The most important thing is not what marks people as different—financial, political, or racial—but God who makes people one.

If we believe all believers are one in Christ—we should live like it. None of us is better than any other. We are all in equal need of Jesus and should treat one another accordingly. Though we might gravitate toward the people most like us, a Christ-like posture implies expressing humility and love toward others in the family of God, even when uncomfortable differences exist. Rather than walling ourselves off from people with different looks, personalities, preferences, or even political leanings—we are to be people who convey the irresistible warmth of Christ himself.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Consider the sort of people—especially in the church—who you are not as naturally drawn to. What would it look like this week to take a step of humble love in their direction? Think about this and commit to taking one intentional step in their direction.

## Day 4 Acts 6:2-4 | Word and Deed

**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 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.** Acts 6:3-4

The Apostles are presented with a problem. The Hellenistic Jewish widows are being neglected in the daily distribution of food. There were options for how the Apostles could respond. They could ignore the problem and continue preaching the word, or they could give up preaching the word to “wait on tables” in service to these widows. Instead, they appoint seven qualified men to oversee the care of the widows and then continued in the ministry of word and prayer. This emphasizes their priority of both word AND deed.

We often have a propensity toward either word or deed. Some may lean toward “word” by diving deep into Bible study, listening to engaging sermons or even debating others on politics or theology. Or others may gravitate toward “deed” by serving people experiencing poverty, caring for people in need, or raising funds for service projects of various kinds. Identifying our tendencies can help us recognize where we need to grow. If we are most comfortable with “word” then we likely have growing to do in “deed” or the other way around. But the power of the Gospel is seen more clearly when we balance both in our lives.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Identify where you are on the word and deed spectrum. If you gravitate toward deed, then focus on one thing to do to grow in a word-based practice (study Scripture, memorize Bible passages, read a good book etc.). If you gravitate toward word, then identify one thing you are going to do to grow in good deeds (serve a neighbor, give to charity, visit a nursing home etc.). Identify one action step to take in the coming week.

## Day 5 Acts 6:5-7 | Obedience

**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.** Acts 6:7

The Apostles appoint seven men to oversee the distribution of food to widows. The Apostles then continue to preach and pray, and the Church grows rapidly. Many priests join the early converts and become “obedient to the faith.” This expression highlights the importance of obedience in the Christian life. Becoming a Christian is not simply about getting one’s ticket punched for heaven. It is about surrendering the entirety of one’s life to the Lordship of Jesus. It is seeing Jesus as both Savior and Lord.

Genuine faith in Jesus always leads to obedience. This was true for the early church and is true for us today. If we say “yes” to Jesus, then there are many things that we are to say “no” to—such as sexual immorality, pornography, drunkenness, lying, or cheating, to name a few. But saying “yes” to Jesus also means saying “yes” to a new and better way of life—a life marked by love, joy and peace (see [Galatians 5:22-23](#)). It is a “yes” that is worth our life’s devotion.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** We cannot expect to live like the rest of the world if we are going to follow Jesus. Ask God to reveal where you have not surrendered to his authority. Ask for his grace to make any hard decision about a habit to give up (or one to begin) to align your life more fully with following Jesus as Lord.