

THE FIRST DEACONS CHOSEN

TEXT: ACTS 6:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

1. We saw in chapter 5 the problem with Ananias and Sapphira. And we saw last week the persecution from the Sadducees. Tonight we will look at another problem that arose -- "murmuring" in the church (6:1).
2. Sometimes some new Christian (or immature Christian, etc.) will come to me and say, "Why are there problems in the church?"
3. I tell them, "Read your Bible. There were problems in the apostolic church, and there have been problems in the churches ever since."
4. In the Old Testament, widows received special attention, and this was carried over into the New Testament church. First Timothy 5:3 says, "Honour widows that are widows indeed" (cf. I Tim. 5:3-16).
5. The "Grecians" referred to here in Acts 6:1 were Grecian Jews who had gotten saved and joined the church in Jerusalem. The *Scofield Study Bible* margin refers to them as "Hellenists, i.e., Grecian Jews."
6. These Grecian Jews had originally come from countries outside of Palestine, and they had moved to Jerusalem. They spoke Greek.
7. "The Hebrews" (6:1) were Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic, and observed all the customs and traditions of Judaism.
8. This dispute led to the first recorded church business meeting, and at this meeting seven deacons were chosen (6:2, 3).

I. THE REASONS

1. The Grecian Jews were complaining that their widows were being "neglected in the daily ministrations" (6:1), i.e., the daily distribution of food and/or relief money. They claimed the daily ministrations were not being fairly divided.
2. Unfortunately, many church conflicts have been over money (cf. 5:3).
3. Church funds should be used properly, and it is possible that these widows were being neglected. However, the Bible does not say whether or not their complaint was legitimate.
4. Another reason for the election of deacons was the fact that the church was growing rapidly and the apostles needed help. J. Vernon McGee estimated that there were about 25,000 church members at this time (*Thru the Bible*). The apostles were unable to handle the work all by themselves (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14).

5. Acts 6:4 says prayer must come first. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." This must be the pastor's priority! Administrative work should be delegated so that pastors can give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.
6. J. Vernon McGee said this, "It is important for every church to recognize that the minister should have time to study the Word of God and should have time for prayer. Unfortunately, the average church today is looking for a pastor who is an organizer and a promoter, a sort of vice-president to run the church, a manager of some sort. That is unfortunate. As a result the church is suffering today. When I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, I had to move my study to my home. I built a special room over the garage for my study. I found out that all I had in the church was an office, not a study. They didn't intend for me to study there" (*Thru the Bible*).
7. This is the first church business meeting on record (6:2). At this meeting deacons were chosen so that the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and Bible study (6:3, 4).
8. W. Graham Scroggie said, "It was 'proposed and carried' that a new office be created to handle the 'temporalities' of the Church, so that the apostles might continue to care for the 'spiritualities' (6:2, 4)" (*The Acts of the Apostles*).

II. THE REQUIREMENTS

1. The "temporalities of the church" are not as important as "the spiritualities," nevertheless only Spirit-filled men were qualified, and only Spirit-filled men were chosen (6:3-7).
2. Sadly, today in many churches, leaders are not "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (6:3). They are not "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (6:5). And they are not "full of faith and power" (6:8).
3. But these are the Biblical qualifications. Today these requirements are set aside and ignored. Churches often choose men because they are popular, or have good jobs, or wealth, or are prominent in society, etc. Some deacons are carnal and worldly. Consequently these churches are very weak. Eventually they die.
4. Verse 3 says deacons must be men. First Timothy 3:11 refers to the deacons' wives.
5. (We see more qualifications for a deacon in I Timothy 3:8-13.)
6. Some churches have deaconesses. There is no mention of this in Scripture. Those who defend this unscriptural office cite Romans

- 16:1, which refers to "Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."
7. They argue that the Greek word translated "servant" is *diakonos*, which is usually translated as "minister," or "servant," but is translated (or transliterated) as "deacon" in Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8, 12.
 8. To create an office over this one verse in Romans 16 seems rather strange, but unfortunately many churches have strange and unscriptural officers, boards, committees, and so on.
 9. I have heard people say "deacon boards" should govern the church, make all decisions, etc. This is contrary to Scripture. The term "board" is not even found in the Bible and should be avoided.
 10. God never uses a board or a committee to get things done. He didn't do it with Abraham or with Moses or the apostle Paul or anybody else in either the Old Testament or the New Testament.
 11. Someone said, A committee is a "group of the unwilling, picked from the unfit, to do the unnecessary" -- Richard Harkness, *New York Times*, 1960.
 12. Here are some more qualifications for a deacon. Acts 6:3 says, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men..." They had to be members of the church. Some churches allow non-members to serve in leadership positions. That is unwise and unscriptural.
 13. They had to be "men of honest report" (6:3), i.e. reputable.
 14. First Timothy 3:7 says, "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."
 15. Deacons must be Spirit-filled men (Acts 6:3). Ephesians 5:18 says, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." We see this emphasized all throughout the book of Acts (cf. 4:31).
 16. A.T. Pierson said, "Men of a worldly type of character and a secular spirit have no place in the church of Christ; above all, no *official* place, though it be only in administering 'secular' affairs, and though they be men of both honest report and of wisdom."
 17. Pierson went on to say that when churches put worldly men into places of leadership they "consent to an administration which is unscriptural in character, which is an offense to the Spirit, a virtual disputing of His headship, and we hesitate not to add, in so far an ACTUAL UNSEATING OF THE SPIRIT from His throne of control! ...So far as...the church gives position and authority to ungodly or

unspiritual men, the result is to hinder and hamper the ministry of the Spirit" (*The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, emphasis in original).

III. THE RESULTS

1. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude..." (6:5), and they chose seven men.
2. The names of all seven were Greek. Some Bible teachers think this was intentional, an effort to please the offended Grecian Jews. This could be true but the Bible does not say.
3. The first two deacons are well-known to students of Scripture. Stephen was the first martyr (Acts 7:54-60); and Philip was the church's first evangelist.
4. Acts 8:5, 6 says, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."
5. Devils were cast out and many sick folk were healed. "And there was great joy in that city" (8:7, 8).
6. Then the Holy Spirit led Philip to "the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert" (8:26). There Philip led the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord and baptized him.
7. The next time we hear of Philip is in Acts 21:8 and 9, where we read, that Paul's company came unto Caesarea and "entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."
8. Acts 6:6 describes a simple ordination service. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven deacons. The laying on of hands is symbolic. It does not convey anything. The laying on of hands shows support and partnership.
9. Leviticus 3:2 says the priest was to "lay his hand upon the head of his offering." This means he identified with it. The apostles identified themselves with the work of the seven deacons by laying their hands on them.
10. Acts 6:7 says, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." When a church has members that are filled with the Holy Spirit, it has the blessing of God upon it -- people get saved and baptized, members go out soulwinning, the attendance and offerings go up, etc.

11. "The word of God increased..." (Acts 6:7). A.T. Pierson said, "Hitherto the word was '*added*,' but now the progression is no longer arithmetical, but geometrical; not by additions, but multiplications! And it is a great company of *priests* that became obedient to the faith! The church gave Holy Ghost *deacons* and got converted *priests*" (*The Acts of the Holy Spirit*).
12. God blessed this new ministry of the deacons, and now the apostles had more time to devote to praying and studying.
13. In the beginning of Acts 6, we see the devil trying to hinder the work of God by inward dissension. Now we see the devil attacking by outward persecution.
14. Stephen, the first deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5, was such a vibrant servant of God that the Jewish leaders had him arrested (6:8-15).
15. The religious leaders "set up false witnesses" (6:13). What a contrast we have here -- truth vs. lies; the power of the Holy Spirit vs. the power of Satan; the Gospel vs. man-made traditions; etc.

CONCLUSION:

1. A.T. Pierson said deacons "must be of honest repute, to be trusted for their *integrity*, and of wisdom, to be trusted for their *sagacity*; but they must above all be full of the Holy Ghost, to be trusted for their *spirituality*" (*The Acts of the Holy Spirit*).
2. There is a tremendous harvest right here in this community but our church needs strong leaders and good workers!
3. Our Lord said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37, 38).
4. Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest!