

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-6-16 AM NOTES
"DEALING WITH DISSENTION IN THE CHURCH"
ACTS 6:1-7
#9 in Series, "Acts: the Spirit, the Church, and the World"

Acts 5:41-42 (NASB) "41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Acts 5:10-11 (NASB) "10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things."

Acts 14:23 (NASB) "When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

Titus 1:5 (NASB) "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

I. The Reason for the Dissention (v. 1)

Acts 4:4 (NASB) "But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

A. The Root of the Problem (v. 1)

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NASB) "4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

Galatians 2:20 (NASB) "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

2 Peter 1:4 (NASB) "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

B. The Fruit of the Problem (v. 1)

"Organization is essential—you have to organize the life of the church. But the question is, to what extent? This is important because when the organization becomes more important than the message, the New Testament position is reversed, and tragedy follows."
□Martyn Lloyd-Jones

1 Corinthians 14:40 (NASB) "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

II. The Response of the Leaders (vv. 2, 4)

A. A Refusal to Be Diverted (v. 2)

“Unwittingly the church conspires to rob the preacher of his power, demanding of him such a multitude of small performances that on Sunday, he cannot preach at all. To relieve that dilemma, the book sellers supply him with a manual for the year with sermons for both morning and night. Grasping for that, he who began as a preacher ends as a [CD] player reciting mail order sermons that never breathed the breath of life.”
□Vance Havner

B. A Resolve to Focus on Prayer and the Ministry of the Word (v. 4)

1. Prayer

2. The Ministry of the Word

“Very often, the moment he [Robert Murray McCheyne] entered his pulpit on Sunday mornings, people began to weep. Why? Because he had come from the presence of God, and there was something of the radiance of God on his very face, in his whole deportment, in everything about him. Oh the seriousness, the solemnity, the majesty of it all! An emissary from God, an ambassador of Christ!...That is only obtained in prayer—continual prayer.”
□Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

III. The Requirements for the Helpers (v. 3)

A. A Good Reputation (v. 3a)

B. The Fullness of the Holy Spirit (v. 3b)

C. Wisdom (v. 3c)

IV. The Roster of the Helpers (vv. 5-6)

V. The Result of the Solution (v. 7)

First Baptist Church Powell, TN 03 06 2016 AM
Sermon 9: Dealing with Dissention in The Church
Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World
Acts 6:1-7

In the first six chapters of Acts, we find Satan using three tactics to try to destroy the infant church. First, he instigated persecution. We see that this tactic failed in Acts 5:41-42 (NASB): “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.”

Second, since persecution didn't work, the enemy tried sin in the church body – the sin of hypocrisy and lying. A couple in the church named Ananias and Sapphira sold property and gave a portion of it to the church. The problem was that they told the church leaders that had given all of it. There was swift judgment on them as God struck them dead. We read the results of Gods judgment in Acts 5:10-11 (NASB): “And immediately she [Sapphira] fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.” When persecution from the outside and hypocrisy from the inside didn't work, Satan devises a third tactic to rob the church of its effectiveness. The third tool Satan used was dissention within the church – a church fuss. We will detail the particulars of this first “church fuss” in a moment, but there was something much deeper than a church fuss that Satan sought to do through this internal dissention. His real tactic was to divert the church's leaders from their primary task.

In Acts, the leaders of the church were the apostles. The most important functions of the apostles were to provide a strong foundation for the church and to supervise the recording of the inspired (literally “God breathed”) Scriptures that we call the New Testament. Every book of the New Testament was written by one of the apostles or a close associate who recorded what the apostles told them. As time passed and the church began to grow and move out of Jerusalem, the apostles eventually died. The role of leadership fell to the elders of each church. In the Epistles of the New Testament we see that when a church was planted, elders were appointed to lead the church. Acts 14:23 (NASB): “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5 (NASB): “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint [“ordain” KJV] elders in every city as I directed you.” When referring to leaders for an individual church, “elder” is plural. In other words, the norm of Scripture seems to be a plurality of leaders in the church versus one person who leads.

Here is the point that I want you to see clearly. The temptation that Satan developed for the apostles in that first church is the same temptation he uses for elders and pastors in the church today. In 2004, after a lengthy time of much prayer and searching the Scriptures, we moved to an elder led form of church government. When the four men that spoke during Body Life are ordained, we will have four staff elders and six non-staff elders. I jokingly told these new elders that the four staff elders are paid to be good and they are expected to be good for nothing.

We as leaders must resist the temptation to be diverted from our God given task of prayer and the ministry of the Word to get involved in important, good ministries and activities that will pull us away from the primary task given us by God.

We will see that Satan not only failed to stop the church through persecution and the sin of hypocrisy, he also failed to stop the church through dissention that would pull the leaders from their God appointed tasks.

I. The Reason for the Dissention (v 1)

Strong leadership does not guarantee the absence of problems. A key phrase in verse one is “while the disciples were increasing in number.” The last number we were given is in Acts 4:4 (NASB): “But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”

There had certainly been more who were saved, but at least 5,000 men plus women and children. This was a huge number of people in this early church. Some estimate by counting children there were as many as 20,000 people in the church in Jerusalem. It seems that even at this early time the church had moved into a new level of growth. In the KJV, it says that “the number of the disciples was multiplied...” They were no longer adding to the church; the church was now multiplying. There were a lot of dissension possibilities. There were a lot of needs, and meeting those needs threatened to stop the apostles (elders) from fulfilling what God said was of ultimate importance.

What was causing this threat to the sweet fellowship of the first church?

A. The Root of the Problem (v 1)

In short, the root problem was the flesh – the self-life. To be saved, we who were dead in trespasses and sins became spiritually alive to God (Ephesians 2:4-5). The old us in Adam that was enslaved to sin is crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). In addition, we then become partakers of Christ’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). That means that deep down at the core of our being we are new creations who long to please Him. At salvation, we also receive the Holy Spirit to indwell us to empower us to obey and serve Him. However, when it comes to the flesh (the self-life), God didn’t push the “delete” key on our old programming and tendencies. He simply gave us the power to walk in victory over the old programming (the flesh or self-life). I think he left us with the flesh to enable us to grow as we choose to walk in victory as we walk in the Spirit and refuse to walk after the flesh. The root problem of every Christian is the flesh or the self-life.

B. The Fruit of the Problem (v 1)

What was the “fruit” of the flesh? Notice the word “complaint.” It means to grumble or murmur. It is translated “murmuring” in another translation (KJV). There is a long history of murmuring in the Bible. Murmuring takes us all the way back to the exodus of Israel from the land of Egypt. The murmuring of the Israelites brought forth God’s discipline. This murmuring in the first church threatened to spread through the whole body. They evidently didn’t murmur or take their complaint to those in authority. That’s the way murmuring usually works. If someone comes to you with murmuring, ask them if they have talked to one of the elders or deacons about it. If they say “no,” I would advise you to tell them you are not going to allow your ears to be used as a garbage can.

Exactly what was the reason for the complaining or murmuring? It had to do with two groups of widows and alleged unfairness in caring for them. Let’s examine what was happening. In the Jewish synagogues there was a custom of, weekly, collecting from the market and private houses, money and goods to meet the needs of the poor and especially the widows.

In that culture, there were many widows (especially aged widows) who had no means of support. It seems that this good and compassionate custom was carried over into the early church. Soon, there arose “a complaint.” There were two groups of widows in the church and there was possibly some prejudice happening. The two groups who were having the conflict were the Hellenists and the Hebrews (both were Jews). The Hebrews were the Aramaic speaking Jews (the locals). Aramaic was a dialect that was much like Hebrew and some would probably consider it a dialect of Hebrew. The Hellenists were those from the dispersion or scattering of the Jews who spoke Greek. The widows in both groups needed to be cared for. The problem was that the Hellenists were generally looked on as “foreigners.” These foreign born Jews were often termed “second-class Israelites.”

This very real and dangerous problem showed the need in the church for organization. Someone said, “Christians become very unchristian when they get organized.” That is possible, but it is not inevitable. Over the years that I have been a pastor I have seen the two extremes when it comes to organization. I have had to deal with those who wanted to do away with all organization. They say things like, “Let’s just come together and let the Lord lead us as to what we should do and scrap organization.” On the other extreme are those who over organize everything. As in most areas, God’s way is a balance between those two extremes. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has some wise words:

Organization is essential – you have to organize the life of the church. But the question is, to what extent? This is important because when the organization becomes more important than the message, the New Testament position is reversed, and tragedy follows.

[Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Victorious Christianity Volume III*, page 228]

I have heard people say, “The church is not an organization; it is a living organism, the Body of Christ.” I would agree with that 100% but I would add that it is an organized organism! God is a God of order: His creation is ordered, His inspired Word is ordered (for example, see the logic in the book of Romans), and He gives this instruction to the church, primarily referring to her worship services, in 1 Corinthians 14:40 (NASB): “But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.” This problem in the church family in Acts 6 showed the need for some organization and the apostles acted quickly and decisively to deal with the problem. The solution involved some organization to meet some legitimate needs and to restore unity in this infant church. I’m so glad that they dealt with the problem and that those offended didn’t move their membership to a church down the street; oh - there was no church down the street. They just had to work through their problems in Christian love.

II. The Response of the Leaders (v 2, 4)

Let me remind you that the role of the apostles, when it comes to leading the church, has been given to the elders (the office of leaders) or pastors (the function of leaders). It would be very easy to misunderstand what the apostles said here. It may sound like they are saying, “We are too good, too important to do menial work like serving the widows. After all, we are apostles! We are a big deal!” That was not at all what they were saying.

A. A Refusal to Be Diverted (v 2)

There are a lot of demands on church elders/pastors. Ours is a job that is never done. There is always more that can be done. The real problem is that most of us *want* to do them. Allow me to get a little personal here. I really want to do pastoral ministry, especially to the hurting. I find a great deal of fulfillment in visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and shut-ins. When the church was much smaller, I could do a lot of that. As the church grew, I could do less and less. I don’t think any elder or pastor who focuses on leading and equipping the church should totally stop pastoral ministry, but there is only so much they can do. Sermon preparation takes a lot of time. Spending time with God seeking His vision for the church takes a long time. Equipping leaders takes a long time. Vance Havner was a highly intelligent country evangelist who understood the pulls on a pastor. He said these insightful words:

Unwittingly the church conspires to rob the preacher of his power, demanding of him such a multitude of small performances that on Sunday, he cannot preach at all. To relieve that dilemma, the book sellers supply him with a manual for the year with sermons for both morning and night. Grasping for that, he who began as a preacher ends as a [CD] player reciting mail order sermons that never breathed the breath of life.

[Vance Havner, Source unknown]

I hope you can hear the heart of these apostles as they said that they could not do the very necessary, the very rewarding work of caring for the widows. They were not too good to do it nor did they see themselves as being above such tasks. I’m fairly sure that they would have enjoyed and been fulfilled in serving the widows. They realized that they had to focus on something they had been gifted for and called to.

B. A Resolve to Focus on Prayer and the Ministry of the Word (v 4)

This is the focus of the elder/pastor. We have to constantly wrestle with this. elders/pastors don’t want to give the impression that they are too good to do certain things. Sometimes it just seems easier to things

ourselves. Prayer and preparation to minister the Word of God doesn't scream for the elder's attention, but a hundred other things do scream. What is it that is so vital to the church that nothing should pull the leaders away from it?

1. Prayer

While the apostles certainly had a powerful private life, I believe that the emphasis of *prayer* here is leading in public or corporate prayer. Prayer is talked about in Acts over and over, but almost every reference to prayer is speaking of corporate prayer – the church praying together. This is so important that it is to be the ultimate responsibility of an elder/pastor to see that it regularly happens. As we go through Acts you will be blessed to see over and over that there was a culture of prayer, so much so that the church never saw prayer as their last resort, but as their first response. Oh may God deliver us from becoming a church that seeks to do all that we can and then flings up a prayer or two asking God to bless our mess! Oh that we had more of a culture of prayer. That will never happen if the elders don't take responsibility for it.

2. The Ministry of the Word

The ministry of the Word was primarily preaching and teaching, but it was more than that. It also included giving vision to the church about where they needed to go and how to get there. It would have included discipling, teaching small and large groups, counseling, confrontations with the Word for those who were in sin, and comforting those who were hurting through grief or turmoil in their life with the Word. Prayer and the ministry of the Word usually go hand in hand as the pastor prays as he prepares the content of his preaching/teaching, and then he prays for the Word to do its work in the hearers after they have heard. One of my heroes is Robert Murray McCheyne, a Scottish preacher of the 1840's. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this of McCheyne:

Very often, the moment he entered his pulpit on Sunday mornings, people began to weep. Why? Because he had come from the presence of God, and there was something of the radiance of God on his very face, in his whole deportment, in everything about him. Oh the seriousness, the solemnity, the majesty of it all! An emissary from God, an ambassador of Christ! ...That is only obtained in prayer – continual prayer.

[Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Victorious Christianity*, page 280]

III. The Requirements for the Helpers (v 3)

Many, if not most Bible scholars, believe that this is the roots of the office of deacon in the church. The Greek word translated “deacon” is used more than a hundred times in the New Testament, but is only translated “deacon,” referring to an office in the church in two passages (1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1). The other times this Greek word is used, it is usually translated “minister” or “servant.” The most common translation is “servant.” In other words, a deacon is a servant. In the general sense of the word (not referring to the office), all Christians are to be deacons. Those called to the office of Deacon are simply the models for the rest of the church when it comes to serving. To put it another way, all Christians are deacons, but a few are set apart to the office of Deacon to be lead servers and to set an example and give a model for the rest of the church in serving. The deacons give oversight to all that is necessary to serve the physical and unity needs of the Body of Christ. We have reorganized our Deacon Ministry to reflect this.

You get an idea of how important the office of Deacon is when you see the requirements to be placed in this office. Look with me at the three requirements of being a Deacon.

A. A Good Reputation

The emphasis here is their character and integrity that is observable to those inside and outside the church. Since these Deacons would be handling money and administering goods, there must not be any question about their character.

B. The Fullness of the Holy Spirit

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we are surrendered to His control in every area of our life and live moment by moment in complete dependency on Him. They were not just serving food. They were dealing with prejudices and hurt feelings, and setting up a program of distribution that would be equitable and just. This required the fullness of the Holy Spirit. One of the functions of the office of Deacon today is to deal with misunderstandings and dissension within the body of Christ. That requires the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

C. Wisdom

Wisdom is the supernatural ability to see a situation from God's perspective and then make practical application to everyday life. It is not *common sense*; it is *uncommon sense*. To effectively serve, one must see each need as God sees it, and then act appropriately in the power of the Holy Spirit. None of these qualifications have to do with a person's position in the world or their financial standing. It is men with a good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit, and full of Godly wisdom. What God expects of the members; He demands of the leaders.

IV. The Roster of the Helpers (v 5-6)

Let me share something interesting about these names. They are all Greek names. This was an amazing thing. There could have been a severe rift right here at the beginning of the church, but the gracious Hebrew speaking people (who were very much in the majority) humbly selected all of the servants out of the Greek speaking minority.

After these men, who were the chief servants of the church, were prayed for, the apostles gathered round them and laid hands on them. This laying on of hands was, and is, a sign of identification with another. The apostles were saying to the seven, "You are a part of our ministry as even we are of yours." The apostles and deacons were interdependent as opposed to independent.

V. The Result of the Solution (v 7)

When the elders/pastors are prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the Word, and the deacons set the example and led the way for a church to have a servant mindset, the unity is restored and the church gets about the task that God put the church here to do – to make disciples. Notice that they are continuing to "increase greatly." That is translated "multiply" in several other translations. That means that they were making disciples who were then making disciples. Also, some of the Jewish Priests (the hard cases) were being saved.

Conclusion

How do we deal with dissension? We find its source, deal with it decisively, and then get about the business that God has called us to – making and multiplying disciples.