

Acts 6.1-7

The Church that Works

Christian Brother in 80's active GIDEON for Decades > Active, Growing

Dwindling last few Years – Members Older – Commitment Waning

“Mark, most Christians today not interested in what not benefit THEM!”

Few hours later – Salvation Army Captain in Waimea “where U been?”

Pastor & Wife “why should we ring your bell? Not benefit OUR church!”

Surely those who Witnessed the RISEN LORD were Better Christians!

Early Church same Potential for Difficulty as Modern Church: People!

1. Problem 2. Possibilities 3. Proposal 4. Principle 5. Progress

1. Problem

v. 1 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.

a. Background

1) Diaspora > JEWS OUTSIDE of Palestine v. 1 ...the Hellenists

High Estimate 7 million Jews throughout Roman Empire

JEWISH PILGRIMS to JERUSALEM for FEAST of PENTECOST...

...Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome...Cretans and Arabs... Acts 2.8-11

v. 1 Hellenists = Greek-Speaking & Culture Jews: Both IN Jerusalem

Capital City of their Faith > HOME of TEMPLE, PRIESTS, FEASTS

Synagogues SEPARATED by LANGUAGE // Early CHURCHES

2) Distribution > Jewish Law Required Community Support WIDOWS

Admin by Jewish Temple Authorities > Relations NOW STRAINED

Revenge on Apostles by REFUSAL of Xtian Widows, esp Gk/Hellenists

MANY ELDERLY JEWS > Come to Jerusalem for BURIAL

One Palestinian RABBI > Dead will Rise ONLY in ISRAEL

Righteous DEAD Buried in OTHER LANDS > Unpleasant FUTURE

Rabbi: Will ROLL UNDERGROUND all the way BACK to Jerusalem

b. Physical > WIDOWS were HUNGRY > Creates Sense of URGENCY

All the believers were together and had *everything in common*. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone *as he had need*. 2.44-45

Now APOSTLES – Must DROP what they’re DOING and HELP NOW!

c. Organizational > TOO Much WORK > TOO Few LABORERS

MINISTRY Leadership ALL in HANDS OF APOSTLES

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching... Acts 2.42

Name PETER Occurs 24 times in first FIVE Chapters of ACTS

120 in Ch 1 > Now 5000 & Growing + Preaching, Persecution, Prison

d. Spiritual > FRICTION of Cultures, Traditions, Nationalities

v. 1 a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews

FRUSTRATION and MISUNDERSTANDING > Very COMMON

DIFFERENT Kinds of People LIVE and WORK Together

Easiest Way to AVOID Misunderstanding > SEPARATE & Isolate

Very Likely NO Doctrinal Difference – Believed Same Gospel TRUTHS

Differences > Tastes in FOODS / MUSICAL Styles / LITERATURE

If Devil can’t get us Unconverted, he’ll try to get us DIVERTED

2. Possibilities

a. Throw Out Complainers > Churches of Diff. Languages would Form

2nd Apostolic Church of Jerusalem > OPEN Across Street from 1st

Sunday @ 11 is Most SEGREGATED hour of the American week > Blacks, Whites, Browns,

Yellows, and Reds in CHURCHES

b. Shunning > Let them STAY – but make them MISERABLE

“Let them SIT BY THEMSELVES and SEE HOW they LIKE IT”

Let them Find they’re OWN Food – We Will NOT have to BOTHER!

c. Outvote the Dissenters > DEMOCRATIC Churches

OPERATING MANUAL > Roberts Rules of Order

“Holy Spirit speaks thru vote of 51%” > 49% Disgruntled, Dragging

d. Separate > “We will start a PURE Church > Pure Get SMALLER”

e. Form Committee > Discussion, Delay, & Problem may Dissolve

SAD EXAMPLES > SEEN ALL!! Often Taken in Churches Today

3. Proposal

a. Walk in the Light

v. 2 the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples

v. 3 seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom

v. 5 what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose

v. 6 they set before the apostles

NO Back Room POLITICAL DEALS > NO SECRET MEETINGS

WORST ENEMIES in Church > Are UNSEEN COMPLAINERS ‘They’

‘They’ Don’t Like.... Ministry, Preaching, Family, FACE

Any Chance could MEET ‘They’ & TALK > Oh, No! They’re Afraid!

Lingering Doubts – Who is THEY? – 2 people or 200?? Here or Gone?

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.1 John 1.7

Luke > No HINT who is WRONG/RIGHT either GREEK or HEBREW

b. Empowering v. 3 we will appoint to this duty

Response: Prompt, Patient, Non-Defensive > Apostles Not Cling to Job

Not NEED to CONTROL EVERY AREA of Church Life

Some churches cannot TIE Shoes w/out PERMISSION from PASTOR!

Gave TASK & LEADERSHIP OVER the Details of the TASK

More Aramaic Speakers in Church than GREEK > Church wanted BEST

NOT Power Game to Maintain MAJORITY or CONTROL Outcome

ALL SEVEN > Grecian Jews > HELLENISTS Not HEBREWS

Stephen... Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolaus

Stephen & Philip See LATER > Other 5 NEVER Again Mentioned in NT

Usually POLITICAL POWERS Repress COMPLAINING MINORITIES

Here Whole System handed OVER to OFFENDED MINORITY

1st Recorded Example of AFFIRMATIVE ACTION in HISTORY

c. Character First > Priority on SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS

Anyone Can Pass out Food: > Boring, Undignified, Monotonous WORK

PICK Some Guys sitting in BACK ROWS and PUT them to WORK ?

v. 3 pick out from among you 7 men of good repute, full of Spirit/wisdom

v. 5 Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit

Church BORN by Spirit / GUIDED by Spirit / Leaders FILLED w/ Spirit

Only God can FORM Character > Man can Acquire & Refine SKILLS

4. Principles

a. Ministry is Duty of All v. 2 12 summoned full number of the disciples

APOSTLES admit they were Added to PROBLEM > Did TOO Much

LACK of Perspective ? Of Trust? Delegating Skill? Willing Workers?

Church LEADERS to MULTIPLY – Not MONOPOLIZE – MINISTRY

...he ...gave...apostles...prophets...evangelists...pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up Ephesians 4.11-12

Church BEGAN w 12 Leaders > Why NOT 7 Servants from Beginning?

BORN out of MINISTRY NEED > ALL COULD SEE and RESPONDED

Early Days > Some May ACCUSE 12 of Laziness or BUREAUCRACY

CONFLICT between CHURCH STRUCTURE and MINISTRY NEEDS

Ministry DESTROYED when CHURCHES Refuse to CHANGE

b. All Ministry has Dignity

v. 6 set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them

OT Symbol > Solemn CONSECRATION > Public Dedication TO GOD

Serving NOT DEMEANING > DIGNITY Seen in High Qualifications

SAME Word used for MINISTRY of WORD and SERVING of TABLES

v2 'serve tables' (*diakonein*) / v 4 'service of the word' (Gk – *diakonia*)

Director @ KECS > Began with SERVING > 1 Month WORKING

Head Knowledge > NOT Heart for Humility / Service

Accepted 1 Month – Residential Discipleship Course > Practical Min.

>Teaching – More Working: Painting, Clearing, Cleaning, Washing, etc.
 Can't Touch HUMBLE BROOM, Not ready to teach HOLY BOOK

c. Every Member Ministry > PRIESTHOOD of ALL BELIEVERS

TEAM Ministry, ALL Play > Find & Focus Unique MINISTRY

Plurality of Leadership > Balance, Accountability, Creativity

Find Area of CALLING and GIFTING > SERVE in that AREA Faithfully

v. 2“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Both VITAL and NEEDED Ministries > Eternal and Immediate NEEDS

d. Ministry Demands Dilligence Whether in WORD or DEED

Balance: Urgent MATERIAL Needs, Eternal SPIRITUAL Needs Hard!

v. 4 we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word”

PREACHING Ministry > Hard Work, Not Just ONE HOUR a Week JOB!

Church belongs to Jesus: He is Head of Church/Chief Shepherd of Flock

e. Ministries defeated by Despair

Increasing Numbers: More Difficulty > Distribute Food to WIDOWS

Diversity Blessing & Curse > Misunderstandings Language, Culture

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4.8

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13.35

5. Progress

FOUNDATION Book of ACTS > Jesus is ALIVE!

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. Acts 1.3

DOMINANT THEME of PREACHING > Jesus is ALIVE!

God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Acts 2.24

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. Acts 4.33

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. Acts 5.30

RISEN Jesus is NOW LORD and CHRIST!

ENEMY Hurls THREE ATTACKS on EARLY CHURCH

1. FORCE – Threats & Beatings from Religious/Government Authorities
2. HYPOCRISY – Ananias and Saphira > from OWN Members
3. GRUMBLING – Accusation of Unfairness > from Church WIDOWS

LORD who Died to PURCHASE Church Lives to PROTECT His Church

WIDOWS Fed, APOSTLES Preaching, Praying > CHURCH GROWS

v. 1 In those days when the disciples were increasing in number ...

AFTER God-Honoring, People-Pleasing SOLUTION to Problem...

v. 7 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.

Est 18,000 Priests & Levites > ROTATED for 2 Week Duties in TEMPLE

SPREAD of Word > GROWTH of Church > SERVICE of ALL Members

Acts 6:1-7 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. ²And 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. ³Therefore, 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. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵And 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. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷And 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.

Heavenly Father, we rejoice that you are Sovereign over all of life. You spoke the world into existence by the power of your Word. Yet we thought we knew more, and we chose our own ways. Out of our fallen world you have called a people to be yours in Christ. With us as living stones, Jesus is building His church. Thank you for the gifts and calling you give to all who are baptized into Christ. Help each of us find our place of service. May your voice be clearer, and more convincing, than the fading claims of this world. May we find our joy in things that give you pleasure. May we know that your glory is our greatest good.

Prayer to Find and Be Faithful in God's Call for our Lives

You have not treated us as our sins deserve. How amazing is your love! As far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us! Thank you, Jesus for being our perfection and enduring our punishment – our doing Savior and a dying Savior. We praise you our Risen Lord, your grave is empty and our sins are gone. Equip us with your gifts and empower us with your Spirit, until your Kingdom come.