

Acts, Sermon #15

Acts 6

I have entitled today's message: "Choosing the Right Men"

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Acts 6:1-7

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

"Choosing the Right Men"

In vs. 1, when a number of the disciples were multiplied to the point that some people were being neglected/overlooked.

That brought about a discontent, a murmuring, a grumbling and that could distract the apostles from their primary ministries of praying and the giving out of the Word.

We have an internal church problem that presented a great threat to the ministry of the Word of God. We don't often think of this to be as threatening as it is

Persecution threatens the ministry of the Word; that is plain to see. But this kind of threat is harder to see. Yet if left alone would water down/corrupt the church internally.

It is possible to distract from the ministry of the Word of God – by doing good things

The apostles responded quickly to the problem. They gathered the whole church together and explained to them the situation and then gave a solution in fixing the problem.

So they suggest a division of the ministry, delegating the responsibility, vs. 3. They were told to choose out from among them, 7 men who met 3 qualifications, whom they could appoint over this business.

The selection and ordination of these 7 men often times is referred to as the first deacons. They are not officially called deacons in this passage but the word “deacon” is used in vs. 2, to describe what these 7 men will be doing, serving tables.

So at the very least, these verses are the beginnings of church leadership.

The choice was made of 7 men. This brings up the question of how the church governs its own affairs. It is the subject of church polity, church government. What is the prescribed authority/structure in the local church? What is the governing body in any local church?

Basically, there are three kinds that have been the practice down through the ages, 3 forms:

First, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational.

Yes, all three are denominations in our country and that is where they came from by which type of church government they used.

Let us define these 3 types.

I. **Episcopal** is government by bishops (Episkopos, I Tim. 3:1 – If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work)/overseers – government by bishops.

This type says there are three types of officials, deacons, elders and bishops.

Bishops are the ones and the only ones that can ordain their successors, pastors or deacons. Leaders are by appointment. Hierarchy – Arch Bishops, Cardinals, Rectors, etc. These people have authority over the local churches.

This type of government is found in the R.C.C., Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist – government by bishops who oversee several churches under their leadership. Some of these groups claim that their bishops go all the way back to the apostles.

II. The second form of government is **Presbyterian** (Pres boos = Elders – Acts 20:17, 28). This is government by elders. In this type of government, every local church has a group, a plurality of elders, ruling elders and one primary teaching elder.

The teaching elder, along with one more elder actually sit on what is called a session, which is a representative group from the local area of churches, that then oversee all the churches.

These sessions, if large enough, will be called a synod and if large enough, the synod will be part of a general assembly. Those churches choose their own leadership. Presbyterian style chooses their own leadership but the leaders are bound with other leaders from other churches. From these meetings decisions are imposed on the individual churches.

III. The last form of church government is the **Congregational** form. Typically, the church itself is autonomous, (each church has its own leaders – Acts 14:23, 20:28) independent, self governing; a democratic approach to decision making. The people themselves vote on major decisions. These decisions are not made

by ruling elders or bishops outside of the local church. The congregation has the decision making power.

Which of these kinds of governments do we see in the N. T.?

The apostles say in Acts 6:5 – **They**; in vs. 5 – **They**; in vs. 6

In the first example of church government, who is making the selection?

They chose. The congregation

Obviously, **1.** No one outside the church; **2.** Even the apostles are not doing it. They gave the qualifications and guidelines, but who made the selection?

The congregation.

In this first example, we have the congregation choosing its leadership. In Acts 15, a church question arises. What is necessary for salvation? The apostles, elders and congregation make the final answer.

In Matt. 18:15-17 – 3 step process of discipline. One on one meeting, several meeting and then the last step being, take him before the church. I Cor. 5, when you are gathered together, official unanimous church action.

These passages teach the ultimate governing body is the congregation itself along with its leaders providing directions.

The leaders are out front setting the tone and the example to the congregation.

The congregation chooses its leaders and turns over to them the right to rule and their ruling is to such an extent that Heb. 13:17 says:

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you”.

Voluntary submission to the leadership is the same kind of thing as a wife with a husband. A wife voluntarily chooses her husband and chooses to give herself to him and once she has done that, she submits to his leadership as he follows the Lord.

This is the local church and its authority is in its leaders – good accountability.

Every person in the local church needs to take upon his shoulders the responsibility and see to it that the church stays true to God, practices the ordinance of communion, baptism, extend the gospel and plant churches to the ends of the earth and that it edifies and builds up the saints of God.

So the congregation in Jerusalem made its choice. What kind of men did they choose?

The apostles told them to look for 3 things:

1. Their testimony
2. Their spiritual life
3. Their practical ability to take care of the situation

Vs. 3

The Bible tells us what we are to look for in our leaders!

I Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 20; and I Peter 5

Vs. 5 – The suggestion of the 12 pleased the whole group!

Vs. 5 is a roster of the 7 men

- Stephen, full of faith, constancy in his profession, full of conviction – **1st martyr**. So this description is not without substance as the next chapters show us.

- Philip will be seen in the coming chapters – **1st missionary**, Acts 8:4-5.
- One of them was actually a gentile by birth – Nicolas, a proselyte to Judaism who came from Antioch.
- The rest, we know nothing about

Vs. 6 – records their ordination. The seven were placed before the apostles for official installation into their position.

They did this with prayer and the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands signified two things.

1. Setting apart of these men for special service to the Lord
2. Transference of a ministry, responsibility, and authority to take care of it

The Devil's attempt to undermine the church was squelched; to sow discord between the church people. It failed!!!

Between vs. 6 and 7 – spiritual organization – The apostles did what they were supposed to do and the 7 took care of the widows.

Look at the tremendous results from this approach to the crisis, vs. 7.

The results were immediate and positive. The Word of God was spread all over because the apostles had more time and energy to devote to its proclamation. The number of disciples experienced another remarkable increase. Among the converts were many priests.

1. The Word of God increased. The very thing that was desired. Why did it increase? Because the apostles were able to focus on it; they kept first things first.

The Word of God increased. That is, the ministry of the Word was active and abounding. It had been hindered by the problem of neglected widows and

resultant “murmuring.” When they got rid of the problem and the murmuring, the Word could take hold in their lives, and their ministry could be effective once more.

When the Word of God increases, when it saturates, when it is being shared, taught, proclaimed, people come to Christ. That is the result.

2. So numerically, there is growth. The “number of the disciples multiplied.” When the problem was resolved and unity restored, their evangelistic Outreach improved as well. When we have internal problems in the church, the soul winning ministry is affected.

If we want to win the lost to faith in Christ, then we need to resolve our petty problems and restore unity and focus in the church. We need to stop the undermining, bad-talk, the gossip, and the harmful “murmuring.”

3. Great company of priests were saved, accepted Christ

The impact of the church was great. Let us be encouraged to follow the example of what we have looked at this morning.

When the problem was recognized, analyzed, and a solution was considered and implemented, then the blessings returned to the ministry of the church.

We are certainly not perfect, and we are certainly not free from problems in our churches . . . but our problems are never solved by just ignoring them. We can hide our heads in the sand, but this does not cause the problems to go away.

We must acknowledge them. We must consider them. We must prayerfully seek a solution for them. And then we must put into operation suitable solutions.

When the church at Corinth ignored a serious problem, it only made things worse (cf. I Cor. 5:1ff). But when they confronted the problem and took care of it, the church rebounded and grew (cf. II Cor. 2:5-15; 5:10-21).

The first church under the direction of its leadership, chose qualified men, delegated authority and responsibility, so that the ministry of the Word might continue to go forward undistracted, while at the same time, the practical needs of people are met.

It is not right for the leaders to quit what they are supposed to do in order to do what people want them to do. It is more reasonable to provide some worthy helpers to assist in getting the jobs done.

But there must be a “Choosing of the Right Men”!

Let us stand for closing invitation.

How important is it that the leaders of the church know their priorities?

How important is it to have good leaders?

Have good things crowded out the most important things?

We are all responsible in helping this church stay true to God!

Blessing of God upon our local church

The Word of God increased and people were saved!

Gospel

II Chron. 6:36 says, “There is no man that sinneth not”