

Ch. 6: The Selection of the First “Deacons”

- Satan continued to disrupt the church by attacking two of its strengths:
 - It’s spectacular growth
 - Terms like: added daily, multiplied, multiplied again, increasing still more,
 - The Jerusalem church could have had as many as 20,000 to 30,000 members
 - It’s loving care for every member
 - The Christians would soon be scattered from Jerusalem (8: 1-4).
 - Approx. 3 to 5 years had gone by since the church was established
- Complaint: Hellenistic (Greek speaking) Jews said that the native Hebrews were neglecting their widows in the daily serving of food and necessities.
 - Each member shared what they had (2.44, 4.32-35).
 - A concern for the early church was the care for elderly widows (1Tim.5.3-16; Jas.1.27)
 - The Hebrew Jews looked down on the Hellenistic Jews because they were viewed as having moved away, cast aside the customs and traditions of their forefathers, and generally kept their distance from one another.
 - Murmuring/Grumbling/complaining: an undercurrent of unhappiness that can tear a church apart.
- Good leaders handle problems immediately
 - (Apostles) Called the congregation together (involved the church in the solution).
 - “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God to serve tables.”
 - We all have different abilities (See Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12).
 - We want you to pick 7 men to take care of this pressing need.
 - 7 the number needed to do the job
 - Specific people should be put in charge of specific tasks
 - Select 7 men (not women); God’s plan for His church has always been for men to occupy the positions of leadership.
 - They were to serve tables (must have servant hearts)
 - Diakonos: Greek word translated servant or deacon.”
 - Word can refer specifically refer to the office of deacon and it can also sometimes refer in a generic sense of any servant
 - There is no other passage in the N.T. that tells any specifics on what deacons do.
 - “Of good reputation:” respected by all segments of the community. Their lives were as they should be when representing Christ.
 - “Full of the Spirit:” under the control of the Spirit; had gained a level of spiritual maturity.
 - “Wisdom:” good judgment and common sense; men who could be trusted.
- The statement found approval with the whole congregation.
 - All the 7 names were Greek names!
 - They brought them before the Apostles
 - Prayed and laid on hands (seriousness of the task at hand)
 - Acts 6.8; 8.6-8; Stephen and Philip had miraculous gifts

- V.7: “And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith.”
 - Obedience was an essential part of their response.
 - In the original Greek it meant “obeyed the faith.”
 - Some priests were honest enough to accept the truth in spite of probably losing their jobs.
- V.8: One of the 7, Stephen, was full of grace and did great wonders and miracles among the people.
 - The 1st Christian martyr
 - Up until this time, only the Apostles work signs and miracles but after the laying on of their hands in V.6. We will later see Philip doing the same thing (8.6).
- V.9-10: Some arose and disputed with Stephen; they were not able to resist the Spirit through whom he spoke.
- Synagogue of the Freedmen: Synagogues began during the Babylonian captivity when the Jews could not worship in the temple; Freedmen—men who had been freed from slavery.
 - Capital of Cilicia is Tarsus: Home of Saul/Paul;
 - Alexandria: Apollos was from here;
 - Cyrenians: Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus’ cross;
 - Charge: That Stephen was preaching blasphemy against God and Moses.
 - Stephen did not back down but stood his ground.
 - Blasphemy: “to speak contemptuously of things divine; words that defame God;
 - “They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes.”
 - They took him before the Council.
 - They put forth false witnesses (lied against Stephen);
- Lessons For Us:
 - Accepting Criticism: Don’t take personally; their complaints were against the native Jews; but the apostles were in charge.
 - Leaders need to lead while also getting the congregation involved in the solutions.
 - Good leaders also trust them to get the job done!
 - Make sure none “fall through the cracks” in the congregation.
 - People get their feelings hurt; poor attendance; perceived needs not met;
 - Growth through difficulties: Success brings problems just as failure does.
 - There are no “unimportant” jobs in the cause of Christ; Jesus said, “Whoever gives even a cup of cold water shall not lose his reward.” (Matt.10.42).