

Acts 6

1 The church is continually growing, saturating Jerusalem with the Good News just as Jesus had commanded. Persecution only fanned the flame of zeal and caused them to increase in boldness. The next threat was hypocrisy and God dealt swiftly with Ananias and Saphira, nipping that in the bud. This next challenge is perhaps the most insidious and destructive. It was internal strife. Hellenistic Jews, those born outside of Palestine and speaking Greek, were thought of as second-class Jews. The prejudice seems to have carried over into the early church. The Greek-speaking widows weren't getting a fair share of the food distribution. (Deut. 14:29) The word for "complain" is reminiscent of the murmuring of the Children of Israel in the wilderness. If it wasn't that, it could have been any number of issues that threatened to divide the church into contentious factions. It was a very practical, organizational problem that may have had its roots in a spiritual problem. Most practical issues do go back to some kind of spiritual problem. The complaint refers to "their widows". Whenever we have two camps, us and them, we aren't seeing the church as we should. Galatians 3:28

2 There are only 12 apostles ministering to 20,000 or more converts. You can see how a problem like this would pull them away from the more needed tasks of prayer and teaching about Jesus' life and words. Busyness threatens to do the same in our lives. The apostles knew what they were called to do and that if they went about solving this problem, they would be leaving their call. *It may be helpful to note that the word for tables, trapeza, can mean "a table or counter of a money changer," or "money matters," as well as an eating table*—MacArthur The New Testament Commentary With all that responsibility, imagine what a temptation it was to cut back on prayer time. They knew that the more there was to do, the more they needed to pray. Colossians 4:2

3 The solution was to appoint godly men to oversee the situation. There is no blame placed or effort mentioned to accuse, just a solution. Some see this as the creation of the office of deacon, though the term is not used. The official office probably started years later. (1Timothy 3:8-13). The qualifications the people were to look for were men that were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. "Known" comes from the word "martyreo" – to have a good testimony. They were to be from their midst. The church today often goes outside of the body to look for leadership instead of seeing God raise them up from among them. That gives the impression that we must find professionals instead of being what God has called us to be.

This is the only place in Scripture where the congregation chose someone to a position of authority in the church. The apostles would then approve the

selection and appoint them to the task. Apostles were all appointed by Jesus and elders by the apostles or their representative.

4 This is the call of an elder, attention/devotion to prayer (Romans 1:9-10) and ministering/serving (*diakonia*) the word of God. In other words, apostles serve up the spiritual food; let others serve the physical food. It is important for the spiritual health of the congregation that its elders are men of prayer and the Word of God. This why one of the qualifications of an elder is "apt to teach". Ephesians 4:12; 1Timothy 3:2

5-6 All of those chosen had Greek names. That may give us an indication that the believers wanted to make sure the problem was dealt with fairly. It must be the Holy Spirit when those who complain are given full authority to deal with the complaint. The early church wasn't dealing with problems by the "give and take" method. They just gave!

Philip and Steven were later referred to as evangelists. None of the others were ever mentioned again. Tradition has Proculus as John's amanuensis and dying a martyr's death in Antioch.

The laying on of hands was the way the early church ordained deacons and elders, and sent out missionaries. Acts 13:3 It is the same as the Old Testament tradition of passing on authority.

Because the crisis was dealt with practically and in love, the church continued to grow. Organization is not a negative thing. It certainly can be abused and has been, but God ordained organization keeps order and deals with the weaknesses of the congregation. 1 Corinthians 14:33

The priests finally start coming around. This movement is not going away. Perhaps they took Gamaliel's speech to heart and saw that it was of God. We don't know if any of the converts were part of the Sanhedrin, though 2 of them already were committed followers of Jesus. They most assuredly had to give up their positions. Josephus estimates that there were 18,000 priests in that time serving in rotational shifts. Some may have been Essenes who already saw the Temple system as corrupted and were awaiting a Messiah. Some of the original Qumran core were priests. The problem with the priests joining was that they had difficulty letting go of their legalistic ways. Some of Paul's letters address the efforts of some trying to enforce Jewish legalism on Gentile believers in Jesus. The positive affect was that they knew the Old Testament scriptures and could teach Jesus as the foretold Messiah with credibility.