

## THE FIRST ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

By Pastor Rene Lussier

<sup>1</sup> Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of *food*.

<sup>2</sup> So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

<sup>3</sup> "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. <sup>4</sup> "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

<sup>5</sup> The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. <sup>6</sup> And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

### V. 1 THERE WAS COMPLAINING IN THE MIDST OF EXPANSION...

Remember the great spiritual fellowship that followed the Pentecostal effusion...

- Yet it seems that again the fellowship was troubled by materialistic concern and social distinctions...Materialistic concern is a nice term for "Jealousy".
- **Number of disciples increasing**—2 groups mentioned in the church: Hellenistes and Hebraios
- **The Hellenists complained**... 1112 **goggusmos** A murmur, a secret displeasure not openly avowed.
- 1111 **gogguzo** - the cooing of doves; those who confer secretly together; who discontentedly complain
- The Hellenist imagined that the Hebrews were neglecting their widows in the daily distribution.

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

There are great dangers in times of expansion—When our local church began a church building program...

Election and the business aspect of a church can become perilous times. CAREFUL...

Remember who is the OWNER of His church—JC. And who is the leader/manager-HS

### HOW THE WONDERFUL HS GUIDED THE CHURCH TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM...

- The apostles spoke not a word of blame to those who murmured or those who had done the distributing.
- They simply proposed a plan of action that would eliminate anymore excuse for complaining...(Wisdom of HS)

### V. 2-5 APOSTOLIC SOLUTION—

The church in its earliest days had no formal organization and no other leaders except the apostles.

**Expansion** caused new internal problems in their fellowship. They needed to organize in order to meet this new need. So it is interesting for us to learn how they did it.

- Note the absence of detailed instructions about organization.

We don't find a full complex organization, but we find one that was simple yet, efficient to meet the immediate need— Not a rigid complex organization. (*Some churches today have big books of their rules and regulations*)

*1Cor 12:11 (NIV) All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. He is the one distributing gifts as He will.*

- The problem concerns all the assembly - they call the disciples together.

<sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

*Acts 6:2 (KJS) "...It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."*

#### **Verse 2 . It is not reason**

*it is not pleasing, proper, or fitting, that we should leave the word of God, that we should give up ourselves, or confide to others, the doctrine of salvation which God has commanded us to preach unto the people.*

**Reason:** Pleasing (appropriate) to accommodate one's self to the opinions and interests of others

**Leave:** Forsake, leave behind or abandon

**Serve:** 1247 diakoneo- to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait upon

- In the areas such as: (woman) preparing food; to relieve someone's needs (e.g. by collecting alms),
- to take care of the poor and the sick, to distribute the things necessary to sustain life
- in Christian churches to serve as deacons
- to attend to anything, that may serve another's interests

**UNDERSTAND:**

They did not say that these things were not important or less important (In the body of Christ, there are various ministries, ways to serve and they should not be looked at as more or less important or be despised

- Jesus had clearly called His apostles to the Ministry of the Word. They knew and understood the importance of their role in leading the church

*"It is not (pleasing, acceptable, appropriate in order to accommodate people's expectation about the distribution of food) for us to (abandon, forsake, cease to care for) the Word in order to serve (to relieve the needs in attending ourselves to the daily distribution of food)"*

- The central point here is **PRIORITY AND COMMITMENT TO CALLING**

In these verses, we find the greek words—1247 **diakoneo**- V.2 and – 1248 **Diakonia**- V.4

1247 **diakoneo** - to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait up

1248 **Diakonia** – the ministry and those who exercise a ministry-service

These words are translated by 3 English words: Minister, servant and deacon- **"men to serve"**,

So we find two types of deaconship

1. Deacons of the Word— **It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God**
2. Deacons of the table— **in order to wait on tables**
  - In the NT apostles are called deacons: 2 cor 6:4; Eph 3:7; col 1:23; 2 cor 11:15.

*Now in the church, there were certainly men with the ability to serve who could carry out the important task of the distribution...*

These men had not yet been found and appointed to this position. God has given His church all the potential (gifts) for various ministries. (Lighthouse Ministries)

- We have to see the church as a complete unit possessing everything needed in order to carry out its mission.

*1Cor 1:7 (NIV) Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

*If we understand the nature and purpose of the church and can recognize the presence of the Lord (HS) in the church, then we are able to organize...*

**OBSERVE:**

The need for the "New service of tables" came as a result of the powerful preaching of the Word with healings...which produced new life. **NEW BABY IN THE FAMILY**- David, Pedro, Stephen...

**When new life multiplies**, it creates needs and necessity that demand new arrangements, new care and new thoughts...

The kind of men who will be chosen should be in accord with the Spirit of the Word preached.

*"One heart and one mind"- Unity of vision and purpose...*

They should cooperate with the preachers of the Word in order to care for the new conditions brought from the preaching of the Word... *"Work together with in harmony"*

- This office of *"Serving Tables"* is not separate from the ministry of the Word but is complementary to it...

The first organization was designed to meet a double need:

1. To meet the need of food distribution and
2. To set the preachers free so that they can continue steadfast in prayer and in the ministry of the word...

**V. 4 Give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word**—4342 proskartereo carefully keep our hearts at this work. Continue steadfastly and be devoted to

- Even the apostles could not live without prayer; Christians cannot retain what they have received without an increase and for that they must depend on God continually.
- The apostles **EXPRESSED WHAT THEIR MINISTRY WAS**: continue steadfastly in prayer and be totally devoted to the proclamation of the Gospel. (as they have been—**"continue"** expresses that this is what they had been doing, which indicates that they were not doing all the distribution of goods and food to the needy as their principal activity.)

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever been involved in distribution to the poor? FLOOD VICTIMS IN WUHAN, NEW ARRIVALS, need to be very well organized...IRAQ in the south

For a powerful proclamation of the Gospel that will yield fruits (conviction), they must continue in prayer.

#### THE METHOD UNDER THE APOSTLES GUIDANCE

1. V. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together
2. V. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them
3. V. 5 This proposal pleased the whole group— V. 5, *They picked 7 men...*
4. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The apostles instructed them how to do it...

The congregation had to look (examine) among their own number for men with certain characteristics. (Again we have an absence of details as how the choosing was done and the discussions)

The presence of the HS was their guidance and safeguard. He would select the proper men for the proper work.

Notice **four things** concerning the selection of these men. (Important for us today)

1. **Seek out from among you seven men**— First principle of Christian service (the local church is where you grow, you are trained, tested and proven and acknowledged fit for ministry...)
2. **of [good] reputation, [martureo]**—witness, martyrs, men of good witness and testimony...  
**Of honest report** Persons to whose character there is authentic *testimony*, well known and accredited.
3. (2 aspects: people with good testimony, reputation and who are steadfast in the faith and who are witnessing for the Lord)
4. **full of the Holy Spirit**— These disciples were already baptized in the HS, this expression here indicates their way of life, they show evidence of the HS... (Eph 5:18... being filled with the HS) *“Anything less than the fullness of the Spirit for a Christian man is a disease of his spiritual life”*  
According to Acts, a man full of the Spirit is someone living the normal Christian life.
5. **and full of wisdom**— that kind of wisdom that comes from God and can solve this kind of problem as they may encounter within the fellowship...

*V. 5, They picked 7 men with Greek names...*

*Either some of the men were Jews having also a Greek names like in HK many have an English names or they were all Hellenists themselves... One of them was even a proselyte, that is a Greek who had become a Jew by religion. Either one indicates a desire for unity...*

- The Hellenist imagined that the Hebrews were neglecting their widows in the daily distribution.
- The Church responded with such grace. They elected men from within the group of those who thought their widows were neglected. (*not trying to protect or to hold on to power...*)
- These men would do the distribution of not only Hellenists, but the Hebrews as well. That is the Spirit of Christianity. The church raised up to the occasion and manifested wisdom.

These 7 men here were never called deacons... (Luke even called them the seven Acts 21:8)

These 7 men were not “elected”, they were nominated (proposed) and they were appointed by the apostles.

It’s an example of cooperation in the Spirit between the congregation who proposed men from among themselves and the apostles who appointed ...

This has always raised difficult questions about church government: (Egg or chicken first)

- For every Christian, there is always a triple accountability: 1<sup>st</sup>. In the area of church government, (having responsibility in the church) they were accountable to the apostles...

V.3 We will turn this responsibility over to them...

V. 6 (NIV) They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid [laying] their hands on them.

- SECOND every Christian is accountable to the body of Christ (You’re not on a remote island), and THIRD we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...

**WAS THIS LAYING OF HANDS only a ceremony of public appointment?**

In verse 3, **“We will turn this responsibility over to them”** indicates that the laying of hands serves as a public appointment to their diakoneo

Some commentators saw in this laying of hands more than a ceremony of ordination,

Being already “full of the HS”, they were imparted (anointed) with miraculous power as a result of this prayer...

*Acts 8:18 (NIV) When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money*

*Acts 6:8 (NIV) Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. (Also Philip)*

After the persecution began and they were dispersed,

1. it seems that the “deaconship of Tables”—the distribution of goods to the community either ceased at least for a time and that its original form changed...
2. It seems that a few of those who were deacons of tables became deacons of the Word...

We will see it in the next sections

### **THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL**

V.7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

We already indicated that the most influential people in Jerusalem were from the group of the Saducees. The High-priest and many priests were from this group. But also many priests were from the Pharisees.

Their conversion indicates an important breakthrough into the temple establishment...even among their fiercest opposants and persecutors...

- The conversion of a large number of Pharisees was seen like they were traitors turning to the enemy camp. This would be enough to begin the severe persecution against the church.

### **WHY DID GOD ALLOW A GREAT PERSECUTION AGAINST HIS CHURCH?**

Jesus gave His great commission to His apostles in Acts 1:8 (Judeah, Samaria, the ends of the earth).

- Up to this point, the apostles did not carry the Gospel into the world but had stayed in Jerusalem witnessing to the Jews. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem and remained there as late as 15:2.

Luke here begins to tell the story of the expansion of the church throughout Judea and Samaria.

This expansion was not the fruit of the vision of the church but through the scattering of believers when the persecution broke out.

- *The first reason why God allowed this persecution was to fulfill the great commission—To bring salvation to the nations (gentiles)*
- *Another possible reason why God in His wisdom allowed the persecution to scatter the young church outside of Jerusalem was to prevent it of being contaminated by Judaism... because “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” These priests would tend to mix the old order of the Old Covenant with the new institutions, a mix contrary to God's will*
- We see here the positive contribution of the bicultural minority within the Jerusalem church. They contributed to the expansion of the gospel among gentiles when they were scattered outside of Jerusalem...
- Luke will give us examples of two leaders from that minority (6:5), Stephen (chap. 7) Philip (chap. 8).

We will see how Stephen came into a position of importance as one of the seven, how the persecution started around Him and how the church expanded through Persecution and Dispersion. 6:1-12:25.

### **THE RESULT OF BEING FULL OF WISDOM LEADS TO THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL...**

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

1. they solved their problem...
2. It led to an increase of the Word of God.
3. The number of disciples multiplied even in the heart of opposition...
4. Good functioning in the church brings an increase of power and work...

C. H. Turner pointed out that Acts is cut into six panels covering, on an average, about five years each.

At a number of places in Acts, namely, here, Acts 9:30; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; and 28:31, Luke noted the continued success of the gospel. <sup>E16</sup>