

ADMINISTRATION IN THE CHURCH
Acts 6:1-6

I. The Complaint of the Disciples. Acts 6:1.

When the church began to grow, its problems began to multiply. While the numbers were few its organization was simple, and the demands made on it were limited. The cause grew with tremendous rapidity. The church received members faster than it could assimilate them. A sweeping revival is always a trying experience for a church. There is danger that too much green wood piled on the fire when it is weak may smother it entirely.

In the first church at Jerusalem there was a group of widows who were maintained at the expense of the church. The Greek-speaking Jews complained against the Aramaic-speaking Jews, declaring that the fund was not being administered fairly. What a lot of murmurings there has been in churches over the way money has been collected and distributed down through the centuries!

II. The Conference of the Church. Acts 6:2-4.

It was proposed by the apostles and authorized by the church that a new office be created to handle the "temporalities" of the church, so that the apostles might continue to care for the "spiritualities."

An emergency always finds a way out. We are told that "necessity is the mother of invention." That is doubtless true. The new demands developed new expediences. The increased task demanded increased machinery.

Somebody had to take the lead in solving the problems that arose. If it had been laid upon the pastor, he would not have had sufficient time for his main task, which was that of administering to the spiritual needs of the people, and his work would have been deflected by side issues. Hence, it was necessary that a group of noble, trustworthy laymen be chosen to take this work out of the hands of the pastor. Cooperation by distribution of labor is a fundamental principle of success, in the church, and out of it. The supreme work of the minister is defined in verse 4: supplication in private and ministration in public, and always in that order. To these tasks the minister must give himself.

The whole church was called into conference. The difficulty was clearly stated and the solution of it was left entirely in the hands of the membership. The entire church grappled with it in prayer and in sincerity of purpose and effort.

III. The Choice of Deacons. Acts 6:5-6.

1. The Reason for the Selection.

(1) The multiplying of the disciples. Verse 1.

The Christian group had grown from a small to a large body, a number into the thousands, all this apparently, as it were, overnight. With this great ingathering of people came new problems. Seemingly their problem was not the collection of money, but rather the management of the money which they had collected. Through these nineteen centuries many church problems have arisen over the securing of money and the spending of money.

(2) The murmurings of the Grecians. Verse 1.

Whether this criticism was justified or not, we shall never know this side of heaven. We do, however, know that it brought prompt action on the part of the leaders of the church. Verse 2. "It is not desirable that we should drop preaching the Word of God and attend to meals."--Moffatt.

2. The Requirements of the Selected.

(1) Men of good reputation.

"Look ye out among you seven men of honest report." This had to do with their relation toward men. A deacon must have an unblemished reputation among church members and others. He must have reputation as well as character. Reputation is what you are supposed to be, and character is what you are. A deacon must have a reputation for honesty. He should be noted for a keen sense of honor and a promptness for meeting his obligations. His conduct must be such as to command the respect of his fellows. If he will not pay his debts, he will thereby bring dishonor upon his church and a reproach upon Christ.

(2) Men of genuine piety.

"Full of the Holy Spirit." This is indispensable to a deacon. He must be a man of prayer--in secret, at home, at church. He should avail himself of the spiritual enrichment afforded by the mid-week prayer service. It is his duty to be present. If he is a man of prayer and consecration, he will have a stronger and more wholesome influence with the members of his church.

(3) Men of wisdom.

"Full of wisdom." Many practical problems are thrust upon deacons and they need to be filled with that Divine wisdom which gives a peculiar insight or understanding. Wisdom is the ability to both "know" and "do" that which is good and right. Knowledge is to know; wisdom is to do. The deacons were chosen to settle problems, not create problems. That is why one of their main qualifications had to be wisdom, as it requires wisdom to settle problems. Dealing with people is no simple matter.

The proposal of the apostles that certain men be selected to have charge of the ministration of the affairs of the church was well received -- "the saying pleased the whole multitude." The minister had the full cooperation of all the members. This incident teaches us various things about the wisdom of the leadership of the minister and of the spirit of cooperation of the members.

The minister is more than a preacher. His duty is not done when the sermon is ended. The sermon is but a small fraction of his responsibility. He is a counselor. He is a shock absorber among the people. He is a leader and not a dictator. He may indicate the way out of difficulties, but he does not attempt to force the people to obey his suggestions.

The suggestion of these ministers pleased the people. It was a compliment to the people as well as to the ministers. The people manifested a spirit of cooperation. They gave their fullest support to what seemed to be the leadership of God's Spirit. Unfortunately, in some churches, some few always feel that they have been appointed to object to every suggestion. They are always opposed to the proposals of others, and seem to feel that they would be regarded as weaklings unless they expressed their opposition.

The deacons were chosen to assist the apostles. Deacons should be the pastor's main helpers. It is not their business to sit in judgment of the pastor, nor to hire him, nor to fire him; but to help him. There needs to be the closest fellowship between the pastor and his deacons.

Shepherds in the orient always carry the rod and the staff with them wherever they journey. The rod served as a stick or club, being straight. The staff was crooked at one end, and was used to free sheep from the thickets, to rescue them from danger, etc. The rod has many uses--to bruise, to beat, to bluff (carrying a big stick), to break, to block, to brand, and to burn.

All of these could be applied to some deacons, in their relation to their pastors. On the other hand, the staff is used to support, to sustain, to strengthen, to salvage, and to shield. Under the first classification, every word is capable of a bad

connotation. In like manner, every deacon is a help, an inspiration, and an encouragement to the pastor, or he is a detriment. A deacon can be a rod to bruise or a staff to bless.

Years ago, it was the practice of the deacons of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, to run off pastor after pastor. The result was that the church was getting nowhere for the Lord. Just before the new pastor, a young man just out of school, was to arrive, the chairman called the deacons for a meeting. He reminded them of their foolish and sinful practice of the past, and then said: "When this young fellow comes, let us get behind him and help him in every way we can. Who knows but what we can make him a great pastor and preacher?" They agreed. The result was that preacher remained with them for forty-seven years. His name was George W. Truett. No pastor is ever helped appreciably by censure or criticism, especially behind his back. Practically every pastor can be strengthened and encouraged by the staff of prayer and loving acts.

Here is the kind of deacon any pastor would be delighted to have:--

1. Dependable in dealings.

A dependable person is one for whom you can have the highest regard, in whom you can have implicit faith, and upon whom you can rely. He is dependable in his deportment, and reliable in all his relations. A dependable deacon is one who faithfully attends all the church services, and in every way proves himself a source of strength and encouragement to pastor and people.

2. Earnest in endeavor.

Every good deacon takes his task seriously: not simply regarding his office from the standpoint of an honor, but as a possibility of servin his Lord.

3. Aggressive in action.

Like any enterprise, the church needs the best brains in the community. If a man is not aggressive in business today, he is a goner. The real deacon is not slothful in his business or that of the Lord. He not only "Expects great things from God", but "Attempts great things for God."

4. Cooperative in conduct.

This has special reference to his ability to work congenially with others. He wants only what is best for the church, and regardless of who proposes new measure, he wisely approves, provided it is the wish of the majority. Unfortunately there have been deacons who could be counted upon to oppose whatever the church sought to do.

5. Optimistic in outlook.

The true deacon, like the faithful pastor, believes "the future is as bright as the promises of God." His faith is in a merciful and mighty God, Who has promised to be with him and bless him all the days of his life as he walks in the will and way of the Lord.

6. Noble in nature.

A noble man is too big to be little and too good to be mean.