

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 372
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 6:1-6
Topic: The First Deacons
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Correspondence can be sent to John Edmiston at johned@aibi.ph
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Acts 6:1-6 MKJV And in those days, the disciples having multiplied, a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews occurred, because their widows were overlooked in the daily serving. (2) And the Twelve called near the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not pleasing to us, leaving the Word of God, to serve tables. (3) Therefore, brothers, look out among you seven men being witnessed to, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this duty. (4) But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. (5) And the saying pleased all the multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch. (6) They set these before the apostles. And having prayed, they laid hands on them.

This list is similar to the list of the twelve apostles in that the hero is put first and the villain last. Stephen does many miracles and is martyred. Nicholas however, according to church historians, fell into immorality with the Greek widows he was sent to help, and eventually founded the immoral sect of the Nicolaitans (followers of Nicholas) which is roundly condemned in Revelation.

The dispute came about because of a racial and cultural divide between Greek speaking Jews from the Dispersion and the Hebrew speaking Jews of Jerusalem. The Hellenist (Greek-speaking) widows were being neglected in the daily food serving. There must have been quite a number because seven supervisors (“whom we may appoint over this duty”) were needed to ensure the work was done properly! This confirms the opening statement “And in those days, the disciples having multiplied...”. The number seven may indicate a different supervisor for each day of the week as it was a “daily serving”.

The apostolic criteria for such practical leadership was interesting, the deacons were to be, “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”. These are foundational qualities for anyone in Christian ministry. Wise judgment in practical matters, and the leading of the Holy Spirit are basic. If a person cannot make correct judgment calls or hear the voice of God, they should not be in His work.

Wisdom brings balance to the filling with the Holy Spirit and tempers the excessive “religiosity” that sometimes accompanies powerful spiritual experiences. On the other hand being full of the Holy Spirit brings depth and power to the ministry and a courage and zeal that overcomes the timidity and over-cautiousness that sometimes accompanies wisdom.

The apostles displayed a proper understanding of ministry priorities: "And the Twelve called near the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not pleasing to us, leaving the Word of God, to serve tables....But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." The senior pastor should be devoted to the word of God and prayer. There are many distractions – bulletins to be typed up, people to be given lifts, worship songs to be practiced etc. These can be delegated to a volunteer church secretary, volunteer transport coordinator and a volunteer worship leader. Since I sing like a bullfrog I am very grateful for worship leaders!

Senior pastors should attend to the needs of the people by teaching, praying and counselling (if they have a gift for counselling). A survey I read some time ago found that where there is revival pastors pray for 90 minutes a day or more, and where there is spiritual apathy the pastors pray 20 minutes a day or less! Prayer is the power of the church and pastors must be students of it and its most fervent practitioners.

Pastors should also be life-long students of the word of God. I cannot bear it when pastors use sermon outlines from books! They must find their own fire! They must hear from God for their people! With the abundance of bible study aids available today there is no excuse, even for someone who has not been to bible college. I find the free E-Sword bible software invaluable and often use it when preparing Eternity-DBS (e.g. the information on Nicolas) you can get it from <http://www.e-sword.net/>

The deacons were chosen by consulting the congregation to avoid charges of nepotism and in line with Jewish customs for selecting such officers:

[Gill writes in his commentry: Or "choose out among you", as the Syriac version adds, and as the Arabic and Ethiopic versions render it; which shows that this sort of officers, deacons, must be members of the church, and of the same church to which they are ordained deacons; and that they must be chosen to that office by the whole community, or by the common suffrages and votes of the people. So the (b) Jews "did not appoint $\delta\pi\omega\tau\alpha$, (which may be rendered) "an overseer of the poor", in a congregation, without consulting the congregation;" which officer seems pretty much to answer to a deacon.]

This does give some justification for voting in church matters, though it may have been in the manner of a consultation rather than an election.

Finally we return to Nicolas, a man full of the Holy Spirit, a good leader who seems to have gone astray. Firstly he was a proselyte, perhaps a new convert and he was sent to minister to widows. This corrupted him, as many of the widows in those days of plagues and pestilences were quite young and sexually active which is why Paul commanded them to marry (1 Timothy 5:3-16) lest they fall into the snare of Satan (1 Timothy 5:6,11,15). Nicolas ended up teaching that sex was the path to salvation. This example teaches us that good people can go badly wrong. Interestingly Nicholas's name and Balaam's name have the similar meanings – conqueror of the people/destruction of the people. Both were very spiritual men who went bad. We need to be on our guard against temptation and to always remember that no spiritual experience makes us immune from the ability to sin.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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