



Good Steward

Luke records for us in Acts 6:1: *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.*

Who were the Hebrews and the Hellenists; and why were they quarreling? The Hellenists were Jews who followed the Grecian culture. The Hebrews adhered more strictly to the orthodox Jewish culture.

There were no major theological differences between these two groups. They just followed different cultures. The Hellenists complained because they felt that their widows were being neglected. Remember, a major problem the Jerusalem Christians experienced was the administrative burden of distributing common funds to needy individuals in the church; and as time went on, the complexities of this endeavor grew. When the apostles realized that this problem was taking too much of their time, they called a church meeting.

An Age-Old Problem

The apostles were called by God to teach the Word of God, not to referee every little squabble in the church. Something had to be done to allow those called to be pastors, teachers, and evangelists to do their jobs unto the Lord. Their solution was the establishment of the first board of deacons.

This is a problem in the church today, especially in small churches all over the country. People in these small congregations often expect the pastor to meet their every need. When I pastored small churches, I was called upon to visit the sick, to counsel those with marital problems, and to serve as a taxi service for widows and shut-ins. While these activities are necessary, they robbed the church of a pastor who was thoroughly prepared to teach the Word of God each week.

Pastors are human beings too, and they have only 24 hours in each day. If the senior pastor fills his time with church administration, he won't have time for prayer, study, or sermon preparation.

In addition, much of the time spent in counseling is a result of people who neglect their personal prayer life—these same people generally neglect reading their Bible, fellowshiping with other believers, and paying close attention to the weekly studies from the pulpit.

The Best Counselor

Years ago, one of my assistant pastors created a list of tape numbers that correlated with various issues. Whenever a person finished relating their story, he would just say, “You need tape number 5622. Go over to the bookstore and get it. Next!”

Although on the surface, this type of approach may seem callous or uncaring, the fundamental principle here is the fact that God's Word is our best counselor. The apostle Paul made the statement to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:26-27:

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”

Here at Calvary Chapel, we teach God's Word, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, from Genesis to Revelation; the whole counsel of God. Every single issue in life is covered by the Scriptures. If you diligently study the whole Word of God, you will lack nothing.

Keeping Priorities

Through this difficulty in the first century church, the apostles recognized that the priority of their calling was twofold: prayer and the ministry of the Word. So they appointed seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to preside over the administration of the church. The apostles commissioned these first seven deacons by praying and laying hands on them. The laying on of hands for those called to undertake a church ministry is a beautiful custom that we still practice today. The man God uses is a man who is a good steward over the things that God has entrusted to him.

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Faithful Servant

Notice what happened in Acts 6:7a: ***Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem ...*** God has ordained that by feeding on His Word, His flock is strengthened; and then healthy sheep beget healthy sheep. In other words, God increases His flock by multiplication, not just by addition.

Blessed Subtraction

Also notice, however, that in this case, before God could multiply, He first had to subtract. It was absolutely necessary for the long-term health of the church that God remove Ananias and Sapphira.

Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.

Acts 5:9–10a

Then and only then could He bless the church with multiplication. God is not interested in large numbers; He wants us to be a powerful, dynamic church, which is focused solely on Him. If there are people in the ministry who are trying to divide the church, God wants to either bring them to repentance or get them out. So do not mourn when God performs a subtraction; just look for God's multiplication in the near future. ✚

Note: This article was edited by permission and taken from the book, *The Man God Uses*, by Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA.