

The Church Calls the Seven

Lesson Scope: Acts 6: 1-8

References in brackets refer to Acts 6 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Since the birth of the church, much had happened. Multitudes believed and joined the apostles, including Hebrew and Grecian (Greek speaking) Jews. The believers practiced brotherhood assistance by sharing their goods. While some of this sharing likely happened on a one-to-one basis, the apostles had given some oversight, as seen in 4:34-35.

With the increased size of the church came increased needs and likely increased funds for disbursement. Undoubtedly, the time spent in teaching and preaching also significantly increased. The apostles realized their limitations; and not wanting to neglect the spiritual ministry, they moved to provide more leaders.

The church needs faithful leaders to carry out her calling. The brotherhood seeks out those who meet the Scriptural qualifications, but God Himself sets the leaders in the body as it pleases Him.

This lesson does not only apply to those who are ordained. All of us have a place to fill in praying for and supporting our leaders. Bring out the fact that all believers should have the spiritual qualities that were required of the seven deacons.

The details recorded about ordaining leaders give us a pattern to follow today. God's will is for the ordained to be servants, not salaried professionals.

Lesson Aim: To present God's plan for calling church leaders.

Theme Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:18. But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Lesson Text

The Need Presented

Acts 6:1-4

¹ (KJV) and in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. ² Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³ Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴ But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The Need Filled

Acts 6:5-8

⁵ (KJV) And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ⁶ Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. ⁸ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Questions for Study

The Need Presented

1. What needs accompanied the rapid church growth?
2. Discuss the qualifications for new leaders.
3. Since God can mould fallen humanity into a useful vessel, why are qualifications necessary?
4. How has a plural ministry been a blessing to the church?

The Need Filled

5. What is the significance of laying on of hands?
6. What is meant by the phrase “the word of God increased”?
7. What are the responsibilities of the brotherhood in the ordination process?

8. Discuss the connection between sufficient leadership and church growth.

Analysing the Passage

“There arose a murmuring” (6:1), a marked change from the harmony of the group, implies that there was a neglect or overlooking in the distribution to the needy. The Grecians were Jews who had adopted the language and perhaps some of the customs of the Greeks. They were not natives of Israel; yet, as believers, they had taken up residence in Jerusalem. The Grecian widows probably had even less means of supporting themselves in a strange country. As foreigners, they were more dependent on the local believers and less able to help others. The apostles recognized that the time had come to delegate this responsibility to others.

“It is not reason” (6:2) means “it is not fit or proper.”

To “serve tables” (6:2) refers to serving food. It is also used to refer to money and banking.

Appoint (6:3) is translated ordain in other Scriptures.

The Greek words translated serve (6:2) and ministry (6:4) are forms of the same word from which we get our word “deacon.” This word, meaning “servant,” became the title to which these seven were ordained.

Principles and Applications

The Need Presented

1. The blessing of church expansion requires additional leaders (6:1-2). As leaders answer God’s call to move to the mission field or to a new congregation, others must be willing to fill these vacant seats. Sometimes we resist change, but when a leader is asked to move, we should be willing to consider releasing him. When a brother is ordained who was not our preference, do we share our opinions or gladly show our support of God’s choice?

2. Leaders are called to serve the brotherhood (6:1). In the congregation of believers, some men need to set aside their own interests and look after the needs of others. An ordained office is not an elevated position where no one gets his hands dirty, but rather is a life of serving others and sacrificing personal interests for God’s work. As Jesus called Peter,

He still calls His followers to feed His sheep. This includes providing spiritual food and drink, and seeing that the needy are well cared for.

3. The plural ministry enables the church to function efficiently (6:2).

With three roles in the leadership, God's work gets done. Each ordained man has a specific work to do and can focus on his responsibility. The bishop is called to be an overseer and an elder. He keeps discipline, and people can look to him for sound advice. The minister's calling is to preach the Word, carefully shepherd the flock, and warn the sinner of coming judgment. The deacon visits the sick, looks after the financial aspects of the congregation, and assists the other ordained brethren.

4. The spiritual discernment of the brotherhood is employed in calling leaders (6:3). The apostles called on the brethren to "look ye out," which means "to select, examine, or inspect." They were to find men of godly character who would be suited for the task at hand. When God calls leaders today, the Holy Spirit moves, directing men's choices to nominate spiritually qualified brethren from among themselves. By receiving input from the congregation, leaders can sense the Spirit's leading.

5. Spiritual life and testimony are essential qualifications for leadership (6:3). To have spiritual life, one must be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Men who are full of the Holy Ghost are humble enough to be used by God. They must be blameless and have a good reputation in the community.

Can someone who hides the truth about a piece of equipment he is selling make a good leader?

Honesty is a necessity when handling the Lord's money in the financial affairs of the church. Wisdom enables a leader to be fair and consistent thus maintaining the respect of his people.

The Need Filled

6. The solemn charge of ordination is conveyed from God through the church (6:6). Each ordained leader is responsible to God through the church, rather than being self-appointed. At an ordination, leaders give a charge to the new leader by the laying on of hands. This delegation includes the authority, responsibility, and accountability associated with the calling. Along with authority comes accountability for its use. The laying on of hands signifies power from God to fulfill the assigned task.

7. Earnest prayer must accompany the work of ordination (6:6). God knows the hearts of all men and can see things (positive and negative) that man cannot. He sees the future and places whom He will into the leadership. Prayer prepares our hearts to accept the one He chooses. Then comes the lifelong work of praying for and supporting the leaders God calls.

8. God's work of calling leaders brings glory to Him and growth to the church (6:7). God's purpose in calling men to leadership responsibilities is to prosper the work of God. This involves starting new congregations in areas where a Christian witness is lacking. Growth in the church also comes when the younger generation carries on the torch of faith that has been handed down. The ordination call is not an opportunity for a new leader to chart his own course, leading others on a different path from those who have gone before, but is a call to enter the work already in progress and strive to bring glory to God.

9. Each one who is faithful to his calling can demonstrate God's power (6:8). No matter who we are or where we are, God has given us work to do. Maybe it is helping an elderly neighbour, caring for young children, or simply doing our best at our daily occupation. Through our labours, we can show others what Christ means to us. "Great wonders and miracles" today may be the salvation of a soul whom we have been witnessing to for years, or the influence of a faithful saint that encourages a youth to give up self and serve God.

Important Teachings

1. The blessing of church expansion requires additional leaders (6:1-2).
2. Leaders are called to serve the brotherhood (6:1).
3. The plural ministry enables the church to function efficiently (6:2).
4. The spiritual discernment of the brotherhood is employed in calling leaders (6:3).
5. Spiritual life and testimony are essential qualifications for leadership (6:3).
6. The solemn charge of ordination is conveyed from God through the church (6:6).
7. Earnest prayer must accompany the work of ordination (6:6).
8. God's Work of calling leaders brings glory to Him and growth to the church (6:7).

9. Each one who is faithful to his calling can demonstrate God's power (6:8).

Answers to Questions

1. What needs accompanied the rapid church growth?

A multiplied membership created a need for more leaders. Some complained that the Grecian Widows were being neglected. The apostles became overtaxed and recognized the need for more leaders so they could focus on their spiritual ministry.

2. Discuss the qualifications for new leaders.

To be "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (6:3) requires a blameless life, free from hypocrisy. Being full of the Holy Ghost includes displaying the fruit of the Spirit. A man full of wisdom will humbly fill his place, using good judgment in determining the needs of his congregation.

3. Since God can mould fallen humanity into a useful vessel, why are qualifications necessary?

Gifts among the brotherhood vary and not every member can make a good ordained leader. Basic character does not change with ordination. Although God does enable the one He calls to the work, the basic spiritual and moral qualities must be evident in the nominee before the ordination. The qualities in 1 Timothy 3 rule out a novice (one new in the faith), so a nominee does need to be a stable, proven Christian in his daily life.

4. How has a plural ministry been a blessing to the church?

It provides balance and a stabilizing effect when the bishops, ministers, and deacons can work through issues together. The three-office ministry provides leaders with a team to which they are accountable and from which they can draw counsel and support. One ordained brother in a congregation could never meet all the needs in the long term. With a plural ministry, no one minister bears the full preaching load, which frees him to serve elsewhere at times. Because we avoid insurance if possible, there is plenty of work for the deacon in seeing that financial needs are met.

5. What is the significance of laying on of hands?

It symbolizes God's power being given to the individual to fulfill the assigned task. It also shows that now the newly ordained has a new au-

thority and accountability. It ties the new leader into the team of those already ordained.

6. What is meant by the phrase “the word of God increased”?

The effects of preaching the Word increased. More people responded to the Gospel call and were obedient to the faith.

7. What are the responsibilities of the brotherhood in the ordination process?

They must give their counsel as to whether to have an ordination and give names of qualified brethren (6:5). All should be praying that God would give direction and prepare their hearts to accept and support the one chosen. Someone among the laity must be willing to be the chosen leader.

8. Discuss the connection between sufficient leadership and church growth.

An excessive workload creates overstressed leaders who can lose their effectiveness. A lack of solid ordained leaders creates an unstable church that hinders growth. How can a church staff a mission field if there are not enough ordained leaders to help establish a new work?

Summarizing the Lesson

God does not call every man to be an ordained leader, but everyone has a place to fill in His plan. God calls those who are humbly serving Him now. Let us give ourselves fully to God’s kingdom work of serving others and diligently studying and spreading His Word.

Research Guide

1. For other qualifications of ordained leaders, study 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1: 1-9.
2. Read the chapter “The Ministry” in *Doctrines of the Bible*.