

The Church Calls the Seven

Lesson Scope: Acts 6:1-8

Lesson Focus

Despite persecution, multitudes believed and joined the disciples. Both Hebrew and Grecian (Greek-speaking) Jews "had all things common," sharing their possessions with those in need. These goods were distributed on a daily basis.

As the church grew, material needs among them increased also. The Grecians felt that the church leaders were not adequately meeting the needs of their widows. The apostles understood their own limitations; they could not meet both the spiritual and the material needs of the whole company. They were unwilling to compromise their spiritual ministry in order to do better in distributing aid. Instead, they moved to provide additional leaders for this purpose.

Most of us are not ordained and perhaps never will be. The emphasis is that the same qualities that make good leaders also make spiritual church members. The work of the church should be the burden of every member. Leaders are only as effective as their people allow them to be. Many people have left godly leaders. Many leaders have failed and followed the crowd. In this lesson, the church responded to the direction given by the apostles in wholehearted support. Spiritual leaders can effectively lead spiritual people. God blesses the results.

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

Lesson Aim: To see how the Lord calls 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

Acts 6:1-2 ¹ 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.

The Qualifications

Acts 6:3-5 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. ⁵ 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:

The Charge

Acts 6:6-8 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

1. What needs did the church have at this time?
2. How did the apostles respond to the Grecians' concern?
3. How does a plural ministry contribute to the growth and harmony of the church?

The Qualifications

4. What qualifications did the apostles require for ordination?
5. How does each qualification contribute to effectiveness in the work?
6. What responsibility does the brotherhood have in the ordination process?

The Charge

7. What is the responsibility of the present leadership in the work of ordination?
8. What does the laying on of hands signify?
9. How does effective leadership help the church to grow?

Analyzing the Passage

Grecians (Acts 6:1) were Greek-speaking Jews from outside the land of Israel. New Testament references to Greeks identify Greek-cultured non-Jews. Gentiles included everyone outside the Jewish faith. The seven deacons appear to have been Grecians—they had Greek names.

While murmuring (Acts 6:1) has a negative note, the apostles recognized the need as legitimate, and they moved to correct it.

The apostles moved with clear vision; they gave priority to their spiritual ministry but did not want to neglect material needs.

The word deacon comes from the word translated serve in verse 2.

Principles and Applications

The Need

1. Church leaders must be alert for indications that additional leaders are needed (Acts 6:1-2). It is best if the present leaders, rather than the membership, call for more leadership. The need for more leadership becomes evident when leaders age, when a congregation grows, when help is needed elsewhere, or when new congregations are established.

2. The plural ministry is essential for harmony and growth (Acts 6:2). The differing roles of the three-office ministry help meet the varied needs of church life. The bishop must keep discipline and order in the church. He must also administer the ordinances in the fear of God.

The minister must feed and nourish the flock with messages of Gospel truth that comfort the saints and warn sinners.

The deacon must care for the material aspects of congregational life, encouraging those in adversity and assisting the other ministry by promoting peace in the congregation.

Ephesians 4:11 lists five different offices in the early church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). God has given various gifts and personalities to individuals (I Corinthians 12). In a plural ministry overseen by the Holy Ghost, these are blended and enhanced to provide balance in church life.

The Qualifications

3. God calls Spirit-filled men to lead the church (Acts 6:3). The presence of the Holy Spirit does not make men infallible; it makes imperfect men

humble enough to admit their faults (weaknesses) and to be used by God. Men full of the Holy Ghost understand God's will and message for their time. They sacrifice their personal choices for the cause of the Lord.

4. God entrusts His work to men of honest report (Acts 6:3). The Gospel is a message of absolute truth. To handle the Word of God deceitfully discredits the message and disqualifies the messenger. Auditing of church financial records encourages honesty by requiring accountability. Those entrusted with church responsibilities must first show integrity in ordinary home and business life. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:10-12).

5. Faith and wisdom are needed to carry the responsibilities of leadership (Acts 6:3-5). Faith defeats discouragement when the battle is hard. Faith enables leaders to move with vision in difficult situations. Wisdom enables a leader to be fair and consistent, thus maintaining the respect of his people. With wisdom, Biblical truth is explained and applied.

6. The brethren are responsible to submit names of qualified brethren to the church leaders (Acts 6:-5). Selfishness, partiality, and party spirits must be crucified before the work begins. Qualification sermons help the brethren to fill this role conscientiously. By receiving the input of the congregation, leaders can utilize the good judgment of many brethren. Some brethren might recognize gifts that the leaders have overlooked.

The Charge

7. Prayer must accompany the work of ordination (6:6). God knows all that man does not. God knows the hearts of all men and their future courses. God knows all the future issues that will confront the church.

Prayer prepares our hearts for God's work. If our hearts are not perfect, God may give us a leader who will not be for our good.

8. The final responsibility for ordination lies on the present leadership (6:6). Discernment and sound judgment are essential. Paul warned Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Timothy 5:22). Because leaders must answer to God for their care of the flock, they might sometimes need to reject the wishes of the people.

9. Leaders are called and charged by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6). By the laying on of hands, leaders delegate an area of service to a new worker.

This delegation includes the authority, responsibility, and accountability associated with the calling. When God gives responsibility, He gives the authority needed to fulfill it. When God gives authority, He will require an account of its use.

The laying on of hands signifies power from God to fulfill the assigned task. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14). "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

The laying on of hands signifies a working together with those previously ordained. The new worker enters into work already in progress. How peaceful church life could be if all leaders maintained the faith and walked in the paths of those gone before! The ordination call is not an opportunity for a new leader to chart his own course and gather a following.

10. Effective church leadership brings glory to God and enlarges the church (6:7, 8). Holiness, peace, and joy—the earmarks of the kingdom—can never be acquired by man's efforts. These virtues testify to God's working in the midst of the church by His Spirit. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Important Teachings

1. Church leaders must be alert for indications that additional leaders are needed (Acts 6:1-2).
2. The plural ministry is essential for harmony and growth (Acts 6:2).
3. God calls Spirit-filled men to lead the church (Acts 6:3).
4. God entrusts His work to men of honest report (Acts 6:3).
5. Faith and wisdom are needed to carry the responsibilities of leadership (Acts 6:3-5).
6. The brethren are responsible to submit names of qualified brethren to the church leaders (Acts 6:3-5).
7. Prayer must accompany the work of ordination (Acts 6:6).
8. The final responsibility for ordination lies on the present leadership (6:6).
9. Leaders are called and charged by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6).
10. Effective church leadership brings glory to God and enlarges the

church (Acts 6:7-8).

10. Leaders are called to specific areas of responsibility (Acts 6:2-4).

Answers to Questions

1. What needs did the church have at this time?

The church was growing rapidly. It included Jews whose background had been outside of Palestine and who had adopted the Greek language. The Grecians felt that the material needs of their widows were not being met. This resulted in murmuring.

2. How did the apostles respond to the Grecians' concern?

Christ had commissioned the apostles to preach the Gospel, and they did not feel free to leave this work. They proposed calling more leaders to meet this need, thereby bringing rest to the church.

3. How does a plural ministry contribute to the growth and harmony of the church?

God has given varied gifts and personalities to individuals in the church (1 Corinthians 12). In a plural ministry overseen by the Holy Spirit, the differences are blended and enhanced to provide balance and fulfillment in church life.

4. What qualifications did the apostles require for ordination? Those selected were to be men of honest report as well as full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

5. How does each qualification contribute to effectiveness in the work?

If preaching and teaching are to be effective, they must be empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables men to think about issues from a Scriptural viewpoint, to see issues with clarity, and to lead the church as God's special possession.

For the church to have a clear testimony, the men representing her must be upright in all their business and interpersonal relationships. They must avoid anything secretive or suspicious.

Wisdom gives discernment and helps leaders rectify difficult situations impartially and restfully.

6. What responsibility does the brotherhood have in the ordination process?

It is their responsibility to consider the work (whether bishop, minister, or deacon) and the Scriptural qualification for it. With prayer, they submit their choices to the leadership.

7. What is the responsibility of the present leadership in the work of ordi-

nation?

Present leaders give direction by first of all teaching Scriptural qualifications. They bear final responsibility to examine those named so that unqualified persons are not included for selfish reasons.

8. What does the laying on of hands signify? The laying on of hands signifies that the church is delegating a special role to a new worker. This delegation includes the authority, responsibility, and accountability associated with the calling. The laying on of hands signifies power from God to fulfill the assigned task. It also signifies a working together with those already serving.

9. How does effective leadership help the church to grow?

When issues are settled for a spiritual group, rest follows. A group that is content and at rest attracts others. A Scripturally unified group convinces the world that the Father sent the Son (John 17:20-23).

Summarizing the Lesson

"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter titled "The Ministry" in Doctrines of the Bible.
2. Read the qualifications for leadership given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:6-9.