

Acts 6:1-7– Dealing with an internal challenge in the church

Beloved in the Lord: After Jesus returned to heaven, **the new church leaders faced many external and internal challenges.**

Externally, there was **opposition from the old rulers of Israel** who hated Christ and Christians. There were **challenges from the Sadducees** who saw Christians as threatening the peace they had with Rome.

But the internal challenges were also notable. There were **logistical and structural concerns.** You see, the church was growing rapidly. Jews were being converted. Jews from foreign nations were being converted. Gentiles were being converted. **So the leaders had to learn to deal with people from all walks of life and from different religious and ethnic backgrounds.**

One specific area of logistical and structural challenge was how the church would properly care for the needy, especially the foreign poor. You will hear today how the leaders handled this challenge.

Our headings are:

The church's poor needed help

The church provided help through the deacons

The church prospered with the help of deacons

Our goals are: **That you will learn to serve well as deacons or serve alongside deacons so the needy will be cared for, so the church will run smoothly, and so the church will give praises to God.**

The church's poor needed help

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.

1. The church was rapidly expanding – and it was a great blessing to the church to have such increasing numbers.

But with the rapid expansion, the Apostles found themselves extremely busy with helping the needy and not having the time to focus on the Word and prayer.

With 1000's being saved, **where would they meet on Sundays** and for **prayer during the week?** They had to find homes for worship. What **records did they need?** What are the **latest charges from the Sanhedrin?** How do they **record and keep money and gifts?** How would the **minsters be paid?** Who would **cook to feed the hungry?** Who would **get the grocery?** Who **really needed financial help?** **How would they know who really needed financial help?**

They were not opposed to helping, for every pastor and elder is a deacon, but they weren't able to do what they were primarily called to do. **They had to teach new converts the**

doctrines of the faith. Many of the converts were not raised in traditional Jewish families where they heard the Gospel. **They had to teach and counsel new converts** about marriage, family, worship, and how to spend money. **They had to spend time in prayer for the saints.** All this teaching took time.

2. One notable issue was some widows were struggling for food and not getting any help from the leaders.

And these women complained about their mistreatment.

3. To understand this issue better who have to understand who these women were.

These were not regular Jewish women. The women who were being ignored were 2 types:

Jewish women born in foreign countries, and **Gentile women converted to Judaism in foreign countries.** They likely spoke different languages.

4. There was some degree of prejudice against foreign Jews or converted Gentiles even in the church of Jesus Christ.

With local Jews controlling the food distribution (which came as gifts from people in other places like Philippi) they took care of their own and ignored the foreigners.

Showing prejudice was contrary to what God said. Paul warned against this:

Galatians 3:28-29 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

All had to be treated according to need, not according to race or background.

James 1:27 - Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Remember the plight of **widows**...orphans...and **foreigners**...

Isaiah 1:17...Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

Some may have been ignored because they did not speak the local language.

2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, **"It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.**

5. The Apostles acknowledged the women needed help but they couldn't do it, considering their God-given priorities.

6. Lessons:

a. Man is both body and soul, and both parts of man need the church's attention.

b. No individual should ever feel unloved or uncared for in the church. God help us, if someone worships here and we don't talk to him or care for him. If you feel unloved, speak up!

c. Guard your hearts against prejudices against God's children. It doesn't matter where you were born...how educated you are...how wealthy or poor you are...whether male or female...young or old...the color of your skin...or if you speak English or not. You are all God's children. Start treating your brothers as your brothers. Don't let the Devil assail the church with dissension and strife. Prejudice hurt God's children.

d. When the church fails to stand up to prejudices, much harm comes. Remember how long it took the church to stand up against slavery. (Thankfully, it finally did when the church woke up, spoke, and acted!) **Some churches condoned slavery for a long time or turned a blind eye to it.** One of the fall-outs from this is organizations like BLM! Now they burn Bibles, promote perversions, deface church buildings, and promote Marxism. **The church's prejudice hurt Christ's kingdom work.**

e. Note the importance of preaching, prayer, and spiritual guidance for the elders.
Ease the pressure on the elders so they can concentrate on these tasks.

f. Foreign missionaries need to take note that their primary function is not giving food, digging wells and building hospitals and schools, but preaching the words of life.
Deacons must help with food, wells, hospitals, and schools.

The Church provided help through deacons

3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit 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."

1. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the elders had to come up with a solution, so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they decided to appoint deacons to help these neglected women and to help with other similar needs.

They could not ignore the issues of all of God's children. They could not sweep these issues under the rug.

2. So how would they pick these men and what would be the standard qualifications they had to meet?

a. **They had to be of good reputation.** (Manner of life)

b. **They had to be full of the Holy Spirit**...having the fruit of the Spirit. (Spiritual)

c. **They had to be wise.** (Knowledgeable) - the varied knowledge of things human and

divine Apostle Paul later elaborated on the qualifications of deacons to his Gentile audience.

1 Timothy 3: 8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Many Baptists have this all wrong. Their deacons work as de facto elders. **But deacons are not elders.** With no elders, their pastor gets a lot more power and more work. **Power must never rest in the hands of one man.**

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when **they had prayed, they laid hands on them.**

3. How were the deacons selected and appointed?

The elders appointed deacons with the input from the congregation.

The elders placed their hands on the heads of the deacons and prayed for them to separate them to this special office.

It was the symbolic transfer of power by someone with the power, to one who should get it. This was done in Israel's history.

Numbers 27:18-19 - And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; "set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.

An interesting point is that all of those who were elected here were Greek (Gentile) Christians...at least in name. They selected those best **able to know the needs of the Greek (Gentile) widows.**

4. Lessons:

a. Jesus did not leave his church without answers. Before he went back to heaven, he promised them his Holy Spirit to give them wisdom – wisdom to make good decisions based on the principles he taught. As the disciples, you too must use this Spirit inspired wisdom to apply the truths of the Scriptures to your daily life. So read your Bible and pray for the Holy Spirit's help.

b. Men were not elected as deacons as a result of their social positions or brilliance, or their friendships with the elders, but they were elected based on the qualifications God

set out. Anyone qualified could serve as deacons...even preachers...as Stephen and Philip.

c. Pray that we will have more deacons and elders who will care for the flock. Consider if the Lord is calling you. Prepare. Learn how to be a good elder or deacon.

The Church Prospered with the help of deacons

7 Then the **word of God spread**, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

1. As a result of the appointment of deacons and a division of labor, the Gospel spread.

Each one was playing his part. There was no longer chaos. Chaos confuses.

2. With proper organization and division of labor, the Gospel spread, and there were many conversions.

History confirms that many of the priests gave up their roles in the Sanhedrin and joined the church. Maybe they were tired of all the financial corruption of the Jewish system.

3. Lessons:

a. Regardless of what role you play in the kingdom (you have one or more), fulfill it well. You may be an organizer, a chair stacker, a cake baker, a bulletin hander-out, an elder, a deacon, a sermon-recorder, and a church wiper-downer. Do your part and do it well! This will help the church to grow and praises will be raised up to the Lord. (That's the greatest thing you can do in your life!)

b. Insist on a well-run church. The Devil would love nothing else than to cause strife within the church, maybe wear-out a few people. Don't become a circular firing-squad. Beat him!

c. And specifically to our text, my job would be impossible without the elders and deacons. Uphold them and support them in your prayers. We aren't doing this by ourselves.

Conclusion:

The elders needed help to care for the needy and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the elders appointed deacons. As a result, the church ran smoothly and many came to know, live for, and praise the Lord.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Don't let the church of Jesus struggle. Answer the challenges. Feel the call? Get training. Learn how to effectively care for the needy. Learn new ways to promoting the Gospel. Use God's Word and God's Holy Spirit as your guide. Show hospitality. Help the lonely.

2. Specifically, deacons today serve the same function as before. Yes, it is true this important function is somewhat minimized in our churches today, but let it not be so here. Deacons are

much more than for stacking chairs. They are to show the real care of the Savior. Thank God for them. Work alongside and support your deacons. (This is essential for their success.) Pray for them and their families! Give to their causes.

3. Whether it is you or your deacons, remember you are working together to build and protect the Lord's church – a church which he bought with his own blood. And he really, really loves his church.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, look how God cares for his children's supper and their souls! Do you want to come close to him and receive all these benefits? I hope you would. If you reject Jesus you will be sent to hell.