

## Dealing With Internal Conflict

It is a glorious picture. The apostles standing on the temple steps at Pentecost and proclaiming the Word of God, at which 3,000 respond. Not long after, 2,000 more at Peter's second great sermon, bringing the total number of Christians to an impressive total in Jerusalem. The church is growing, everyone is abiding in the apostles doctrine, and it seems like not even prison can get them down. But with more people can come problems, and it's not long before complaints about how things are being ran appear. In Acts 6, the Hellenists rise up and complain that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution, more than likely a by-product of the enmity that still existed between native Jews and those who had adopted much of the Greek culture. Nevertheless, there was an issue at hand that needed to be settled, and how the apostles handled it is a good illustration for our own issues today.

The real shame of this debacle is that it was a physical matter the believers were concerned about, people who were supposed to be consumed with the things of the next (1 John 2:15). But in their defense, in the early stages of the church, love needed to be at its strongest; strife and enmity had no place among God's people, which has the power to turn off otherwise well-meaning Christians by itself. Priorities had to be set in place. Which was more important: showing my superiority, or sustaining the kingdom? Keep in mind that the kingdom of God is not about bread or food (John 6:26), but the distribution of food was a way in which previously estranged brethren could display their love under Christ. If one can't handle a physical matter well, what does that say about the spiritual?

The apostles recognized the matter at hand quickly, but instead of overseeing it themselves, seized the opportunity to then hand it over to others who could handle it. This is perhaps the most important lesson to take away from this passage: the delegation of tasks to others who are able to handle it just as well. The apostles were given a special position of authority as Jesus' chosen messengers on earth, and bigger matters lay ahead of them than to oversee food distribution, as they themselves said, "*It is not desirable that we should neglect the Word of God to serve tables.*" Sticking around to oversee a simple task such as this is the exact kind of device that Satan would use to strip people of their potential. How many people would not have been saved had the apostles handled every matter themselves! This is not to say by any means that the task was unimportant, but simply that there were others capable of handling it themselves.

In matters of church order, there are several duties that a lot of people can perform, whether it is leading singing, serving the Lord's supper, or delivering the invitation, that all men are able to do. Isolating these tasks to a single man or men places a burden on their backs that is unfair for them to carry. Remember the words of Moses' father-in-law in Exodus 18:17-18, when he observed Moses spending all day judging the people: "*The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it all by yourself.*" He would then advise Moses to do the same thing that the apostles instructed the people to do in Acts 6 -- pick able men from among themselves to perform the task.

But there is another similarity between these two accounts that we must take into account as well. Both accounts stress the importance of finding able-bodied men. In Exodus, Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) said these men must be "*able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.*" The apostles instructed the people to look for men of "*good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.*" These both claim the necessity of our leaders, righteous and holy men who will perform the tasks of God. Since the duties of a local church's operation are shared among all the men, should we not all strive to fit the qualifications of these passages?

The apostles not only handled the situation at hand with the right perspective, but they also handled it quickly before it was able to get out of hand. Over time, this minor problem could have built up into a real issue, possibly causing more strife and anger, until eventually no one had any idea what it was about in the first place.

Brady Cook