

## Acts 6:1-6

Paul wrote Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:1). The first two recorded problems in the early church had to do with money: Ananais and Sapphira had a love for it and because of that love, lied to the Holy Spirit and lost their lives (Acts 5:1-10). In Acts 6 another problem arose that also had to do with money and thus threatened the unity of God's people in Jerusalem. Money creates many problems in congregations. Too much of it may make a congregation either involved in unscriptural practices or waste it; too little of it may make brethren afraid and unwilling to step out and act upon the Truth. The love and pursuit of money may involve some congregations in unscriptural practices, garage sales, day care, etc. We must all "take heed and keep ourselves from covetousness" which is "idolatry" (Luke 12:15; Col. 3:5).

The problem in Jerusalem in Acts 6 did involve money, but did not seem to be a willful wrong doing on the part of one group of disciples against another. Often times through insensitive action one may injure the feelings of another and while the wrong may be real, there was no conscious attempt to wrong the offended person. Such appears to be the case in Acts 6: the Grecians complained because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. I believe the speedy and equitable way in which the problem was resolved indicates that the neglect was just an oversight. Once the problem was called to the attention of brethren, all seemed "to bend over backward" to correct the ill.

The problem was partially an ethnic one: the "Grecians" murmured against the "Hebrews" because their widows were neglected. Both "Grecians" and "Hebrews" were Jews, but the Grecians were those of Grecian culture and most often were influenced by that culture because they were of the "dispersion": Jews not residing in Judaea, Galatia or Syria. The Hebrews were more "conservative" in culture and both shunned and scorned anything that might indicate they were surrendering their past culture and history. It is possible that the Grecians were ones who were among the number of those who had come "from every nation under heaven" to be in Jerusalem for that memorial Pentecost of Acts two. Perhaps they were also among the 3,000 who were baptized that day (Acts 2:41). Whatever their circumstances, they were a part of the church and it was for their widows that provision had been made through disciples selling their possessions and laying the

money at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34f).

We are urged to "let love of the brethren continue" (Heb. 13:1) and this means that when our brethren are in need, we help supply those needs. The scriptures teach that Christians both individually and collectively have an obligation to relieve saints' needs (Gal. 6:10; 1 Cor. 16:1f). Help for needy brethren was of two varieties in the first century. First, there was temporary relief that was given to fill the needs of an emergency (Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1f). Second, there was relief given on a permanent basis and for which certain qualifications were given that had to be met by those who would be enrolled in such a number (1 Tim. 5:9f). As to which category the "widows" of Acts 6 fit into the record does not reveal.

Problems in congregations do not need to be left unattended, that only aggravates and causes them to worsen. Minor problems can become major ones if brethren do not speedily act to resolve them. But of course, the apostles did not delay. Immediately they set about to correct the ill that troubled the brethren.

Calling the multitude of disciples to them they said: "It is not fit that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (Acts 6:2). Sometimes spiritual matters are neglected because material concerns are allowed to take precedence. The apostles had their priorities right: others could serve tables as well as they. But, they were the Lord's witnesses to His Resurrection and His apostles to bear His gospel into all the world and not everyone could do this work. This latter responsibility far outweighed the former one.

Still, the former need was genuine and the apostles made provisions to see that it was met. "Look ye out from among yourselves seven men of good report and who are full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3f). The whole multitude was pleased with the solution offered by the apostles and chose seven men: all whose names indicate they were from the complaining party! My, what confidence the Hebrews intrusted in the Grecians and what an awesome responsibility was imposed upon the Grecians. They would have to be doubly careful that the Hebrews' widows were as carefully attended to as the Grecians or the complaints would be reversed!

When the seven were chosen by the multitude they were set before the apostles, who prayed and then laid their hands upon them (Acts 6:6). Apostles had power to confer spiritual gifts to others by laying their

hands on them (Acts 8:14-18; 19:6), but since the apostles had said that they would "appoint" the seven whom the multitude select to be over "this business," and since appointment was made through laying on of hands to those designated to a special task (Acts 13:2f); the context indicates that the purpose for which the apostles laid hands on the seven was to do what they said they would do, "appoint (them) over this business."

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