

**"Internal Problems"**

**Part 1**

**Acts 6:1-7**

**Introduction:** In our study tonight we have come to a passage in which we shall see that there were problems not only from the outside of the church but also within the early church. When Nehemiah went back to Jerusalem to build the wall, he not only had to deal with problems outside of the Jewish people but there were also internal problems which had to be addressed.

Here was some of the external problems which he had to deal with.

**Nehemiah 4:1-3**

*But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?*

<sup>3</sup> *Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.*

Then there were the internal problems.

**Nehemiah 5:1-7**

*And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.*

<sup>2</sup> *For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.*

<sup>3</sup> *Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.*

<sup>4</sup> *There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.*

<sup>5</sup> *Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our*

*daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.*

<sup>6</sup> *And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.*

As we make our way through the book of Acts, we see that the early church also had exterior problems as well as interior problems. The apostles were persecuted by the Sanhedrin and in Acts 5 there was the deception of Annias and Sapphira. Now as we come to Acts 6, we shall see a division between two groups of believers.

## I. The Problem

### Notice Acts 6:1

The first things we see is that the problem arises when the church is growing. The number of the disciples was multiplied meaning that there were more people getting saved. Anytime there is growth in the church it can be expected that there is going to be problems which arise. Satan despises growth in the church, whether it be numerical or spiritual. He does not want to see the church grow because that means there will be more believers to be used by God or it means those who are saved are growing and therefore, they will be active soldiers in the spiritual battle. Satan would much rather see believers who are caught up in the world so that they are too busy to get involved for the Lord.

### Notice Acts 6:1 again.

The end of this verse gives us the problem. There were two groups of Jews in the church and one group was being neglected. We need to understand who these two groups are.

Notice the words of Whitcomb:

*"Because of the Assyrian captivity and the Babylonian captivity there were Jews scattered throughout numerous countries. Because of Alexander the Great's conquests the entire empire spoke Greek, and this continued into the Roman period. Although Latin was the official government language, Greek was still the common language of commerce and culture and education. About 330 years before Christ our Lord was born, Alexander the Great, a Macedonian Greek-speaking general, came down to the Holy Land and was received and welcomed by the Jewish High Priest according to Josephus, the Jewish historian. In fact, Josephus tells us that Alexander was shown in the book of Daniel who he was and what he was to accomplish. The Greek general was so impressed by this information that he showed tremendous favor to the Jews, and he brought many Jews to Alexandria, the*

city in Egypt which was called by his name. By the time of Christ there were over one million Jews in Alexandria. These Jews, of course, spoke Greek. Since they were not as familiar with the Hebrew language, they desired a Bible that they could more easily understand. It was in Alexandria that the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek, the version now known as the Septuagint. No doubt some of these Alexandrian Jews came to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, heard Peter's powerful message, and some of them were probably among the 3,000 who were saved on that day. At Pentecost, Jews came also from other Greek-speaking nations throughout the Roman Empire. The Greek-speaking Jews were often looked down upon by the native Hebrew-speaking Jews of the Holy Land. These local Jews were able to read the Old Testament in their own language and they spoke Hebrew, or at least a form of Hebrew called Aramaic. So there was a division between these two groups of Jews based on their cultural distinctions. The Holy Land Jews felt that the foreign Jews had in some ways been contaminated by their Gentile environment and culture, and they considered themselves more of a pure Hebrew stock. They harbored a sad attitude of arrogance and pride. In the Jerusalem church these distinctions became points of tension and friction because the Grecian Jewish Christians were marginalized and neglected, especially when it came to meeting the needs of their widows. The poverty of the Hebrew or Aramaic Christians was severe due to the fact that they were excommunicated and dispossessed of what they owned simply because of their identification with Jesus of Nazareth. This made them objects of hatred from unsaved Jews. To solve this dire situation, some of the Hebrew believers sold their homes and property and put the funds into a common pot which was administered by the Apostles to help meet the needs of the believers. The widows were especially vulnerable to evil people taking advantage of them."

So, this problem within the church had come about because there was favoritism. The Grecian Jews were seen as "second class" so they were neglected.

## II. Facing the Problem

There are people who do not want to deal with problems. They do not want to face situations which can be difficult. They would much rather ignore the situation or let someone else deal with it. To ignore problems and to let them go thinking they will resolve themselves is not wise. This was a problem that needed to be faced because it had the potential to split the church.

### Application:

There are always going to be problems within our lives and some of them are very difficult to deal with, but they must be addressed. We cannot allow things in our own personal lives

to go without addressing them. Problems must be met head on. We must also understand that when we face the problems we are not alone.

**Psalm 46:1-3**

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

<sup>2</sup> *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;*

<sup>3</sup> *Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.*

**Psalm 9:9-10**

*The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.*

<sup>10</sup> *And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.*

**Psalm 34:17-21**

<sup>17</sup> *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

<sup>18</sup> *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

<sup>20</sup> *He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.*

<sup>21</sup> *Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.*

Getting back to Acts 6 we see that the apostles met the problem head on.

**Notice Acts 6:2**

The apostles knew the problem had to be faced so they called all the disciples together. The first thing they determined was that it was not good for them to leave the study of God's Word to serve tables. They recognized this problem for what it was. It was certainly something that needed to be dealt with because of the need of the widows, but it also had the possibility of being a distraction for them and taking them away from what they were called to do.

The verb used in the expression "serve tables" means "to serve, to minister." In its noun form, it means "servant" and the plural is translated "deacons" in 1 Timothy 3:8. The office of deacon had its beginning here in Acts 6. "Tables" as used here, refers to more than providing meals, but also involved the handling of money

### **Matthew 21:12**

<sup>12</sup> *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,*

Money was received in the early church and had to be handled carefully and distributed wisely for the benefit of those in need, the widows being an especially needy group.

### **Notice Acts 6:3**

Here is how the problem would be resolved. The disciples would choose a group who would be appointed over this matter. This would be the very first deacon board and there were certain qualifications that needed to be met by each one picked.

#### **1. Each member had to be a believer.**

They were to choose each person from **AMONG** them. This means they were not to go outside the church, but they were to choose people they knew from the church.

#### **2. Each member had to be a man.**

Women were not chosen for this ministry. There were no "deaconesses" chosen for this ministry. This is a point of contention in many churches, but the Bible is very clear that women are not to hold the office of deacon.

### **1 Timothy 3:8-12**

<sup>8</sup> *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;*

<sup>9</sup> *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*

<sup>10</sup> *And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.*

<sup>11</sup> *Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*

<sup>12</sup> *Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Women are not to hold any position in the church where they have authority over the men. This would go completely against the order which God has established for the church. Now let me make something very clear. Women are not second-class believers in the church. Believing men and women are equal possessors of all the riches in Christ.

**Galatians 3:27-28**

<sup>27</sup> For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

**Ephesians 1:3**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

3. They each had to be men of honest report.

This means they had to be men of a good reputation.

**1 Timothy 3:10**

<sup>10</sup> And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

4. They each had to be full of the Holy Spirit.

These deacons had to be men that were not walking under the control of the flesh, but they had to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. This meant they would not be men who were easily offended, and they were not men who were argumentative, and they were not men who were impatient. These men would have manifested the fruit of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

<sup>23</sup> Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

5. They each had to be full of wisdom.

This speaks of the ability to make proper decisions and follow a sound course of action by way of knowledge and experience, the ability to apply God's Word to life's specific

situations and problems. These men would need to handle money matters and the distribution to the poor in a wise and fair manner.

**6. They had to be able to do the work that needed to be done.**

The men who were chosen had to be willing and able to carry out the work thus meeting the needs of the widows.

**Conclusion:**

These qualifications for deacons are the same today. The establishment of the board of deacons was done to help the pastor as we shall see next week.