

Challenges in Ministry Acts 6:1-7
By: Ysrael De la Cruz

You and I face challenges in every area of our lives. As long as you live, you will have to battle against things in order to accomplish your goals. You will come against obstacles, barriers on your way to accomplishing your goals. In the Christian race you are running, you will be challenged to quit. Growing in Christ is no walk in the park, it requires determination and hard work. The church of Christ will face a great many challenges in her attempts to fulfill Christ's mission.

It doesn't matter the ministry or service you may be involved in, you will face big challenges. Anything you do for the Lord won't be without difficulties. The Bible gives us insight and guidance to navigate through the challenges we encounter in our service to God.

When the church began by the preaching of the apostles; It began with the Jews but it didn't take long for it to become more diverse. **Satan began to attack the church through severe persecution.** However, this didn't stop the gospel; the believers continued to be strong in their faith and their number continued to increase. Satan could not stop the growth of the church through outside influence. **Then Satan's strategy changed; he began to attack the church from the inside.** *Growth is great, but with much growth comes great challenges as well.* In chapter 6 Satan tried to distract the apostles from their main mission.

Acts 6:1-7

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing. More growth was taking place. This was a great thing happening. But the enemy doesn't like this, so he would use anything to stop you. **(More people to deal with, more personality issues, cultural issues and so on).**

It's not coincidental that the text says when more people were becoming disciples a problem arose. An issue developed.

The problem: a complaint from the Grecian Jews (Hellenistic Jews). ***Their widows were being overlooked or neglected in the daily distribution of food.***

Picture this scenario: people complaining that others were being shown special favor in the distribution. This ministry functioned well before, as we are informed in chapter 4 that there was also distribution of funds (there was no needy people

among them); the first Christians cared for their needs by sharing and distributing goods. (**Acts 4:34**). So this distribution of goods took place before and there wasn't a problem. But it was a problem now. It was a big issue for it could have become racial and had the potential to split the church. **This issue needed the attention of the apostles before it would escalate.**

The apostles were the shepherds of this church. They were responsible for the spiritual health of this new community. As church leaders, they needed to move into action to resolve this conflict.

Handling the problem: (v.2)

The apostles called the church (the disciples) together to deal with this issue.

The apostles recognized the severity of the issue. It would also distract them from the main mission.

"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. (It is not right that we give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." (ESV) "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. (NLT)

First, the apostles identified their main priority. The preaching and teaching of God's word. They told the church they had no desire to abandon the preaching in order to take on another ministry.

This was their main priority: In a Christ-centered church the preaching and teaching of God's word has to be the main priority. Everything else comes after that.

Without the proclamation and teaching of God's words disciples are not developed.

The suggestion to handle this challenge: (v.3)

Choose seven men from among you: men of good reputation (Good testimony) (known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. Being full of the Spirit and being wise are evident qualities in a person.

These men were to handle or to manage this task (We will turn this responsibility over to them (v.3)). **These seven men will oversee the ministry of distribution of food. (Food pantry ministry).**

The apostles would give their attention to prayer and the preaching of the word. (v.4) We will attend constantly or persist in prayer and the preaching of the gospel.

This was approved by everyone and they selected seven men to take care of the ministry of food distribution. **Stephen:** (a man full of the Holy Spirit), **Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas** and **Nicolas** from Antioch a convert to Judaism.

These men were presented to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. (v.6)

The apostles prayed for these ministry leaders and their ministry. Everyone in the church knew who was in charge of the food distribution ministry. Any complaint would arise, and they will go to any of the seven selected to handle this ministry.

The outcome of the apostles' decision? (7)

The word of God continued to spread (to be taught and preached); more people were becoming disciples, even some Jewish priests received the gospel of Jesus. More growth and new challenges would come ahead.

God rewarded their faithfulness to their main task.

When it comes to facing challenges as a church we must learn like the first Christians did.

Any problem that rises must be dealt with in manner that brings glory to God.

Leaders must not neglect the main mission of the church. The church mission is the main priority, the reason the church exists. No matter how many ministries a church may have, if the preaching and teaching of God's word is not the main priority then I doubt that true disciples are being developed.

Leaders should empower others to serve and not overwhelm themselves with every ministry. The apostles handed the food distribution to seven men selected by the church. They were responsible for that.

God rewards faithfulness. The apostles were faithful in handling this problem; they were not distracted by the complaint, they empowered others to serve. They remained faithful to their task of preaching the word of God. God continued to bless them by bringing more people into the community.

Jesus has said, when you are faithful in a few things, God puts you in charge of many more things. If you handle the small things, God brings you big things to handle. If you don't know how to manage the small, then you won't be able to manage the big

Some ministries exist only for a time.

The ministry of food distribution lasted until the severe persecution broke out and people had to be mobilized. *Stephen was murdered, Philip and the rest had to leave.* Those who stayed in Jerusalem were arrested (**Acts 8**). **God allowed this to happen to mobilize the church from becoming inwardly focused.** Those who were scattered preached everywhere they went. If this had not happened, everyone would stay in Jerusalem taking care of their own needs. ***But Jesus had given specific instructions to the disciples, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*** You see, regardless of the challenges we may face in life in our ministries, Jesus expects us to be faithful to his call of making disciples, his call to reaching those who don't know him. God would use any thing to mobilize his people when they get inwardly focused and neglect the main mission.

