

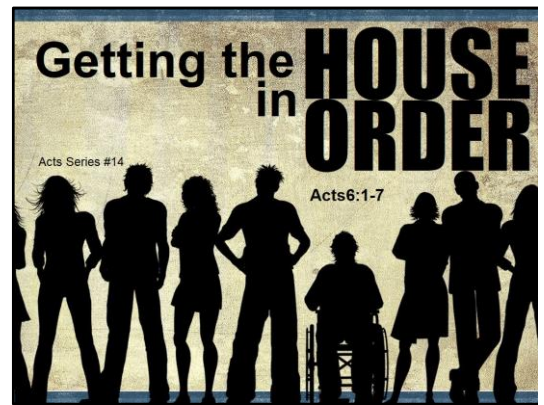
ACTSFACTS

C@G Supplementary Study Notes for ACTS

Message #14

“GETTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER”

Acts 6:1-7



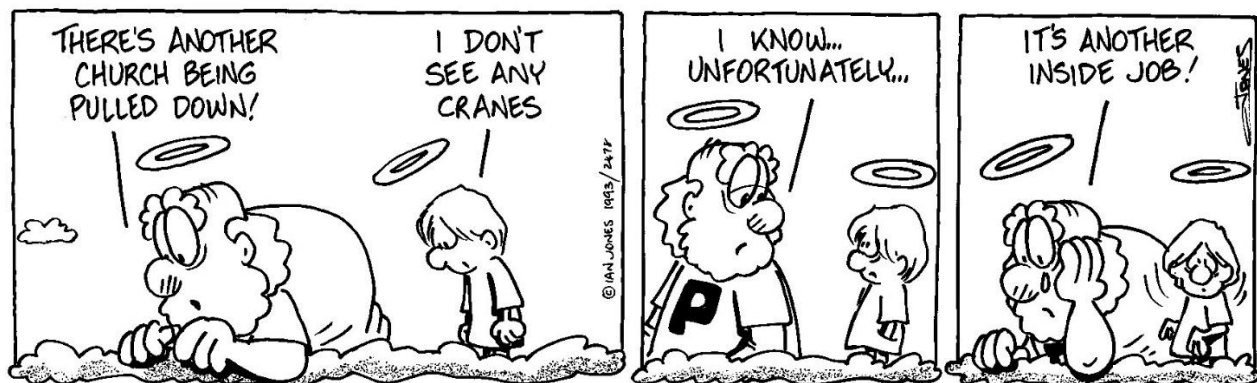
The Christian church (though not called that at this stage) is growing, and growing fast. Growth and change always brings challenges. Already in these early days of the church, there has been external pressure (early persecution) and internal problems (deceit of Ananias and Sapphira), but now an even greater threat looms large. Internal division.

It is as though the devil, having failed to overcome the church by either persecution or corruption, was going to try a very sneaky approach...division and distraction. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration which, though essential, was not their calling, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and preach and so would leave the church rudderless and defenseless.

The church at that time was made up of two groupings...the Hellenists (from the Jews of the diaspora/dispersion) who spoke Greek, and the Hebraic Jews (from Palestine) who spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew.

The main issue raised here was from the Hellenists who claimed that the widows from their group were not getting their fair share of the daily distribution of food. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that their group was being deliberately neglected, and this claim had the potential to divide the church.

Have you ever been in a church at a time of division? What caused this? What happened?



Sadly, so many churches have split over relatively insignificant matters. This must surely grieve God. Whilst the issue in the early church was not so much an insignificant one, it still needed to be handled with wisdom and prayerful discernment as so much was at stake. There always is.

Read 6:2-6. Summarize how the apostles handled the situation and responded to the needs.

What was the most important thing that the apostles needed to consider?

Their response demonstrates that the apostles recognized that the most crucial aspects of any church are the faithful teaching and preaching of God's word, and the ministry of prayer. Once again, we see Luke emphasizing that the church is built and sustained by God's Word and by God's Spirit.

Does this mean that the apostles were indifferent to the plight of the Hellenistic widows? Of course not!

What might happen when a church does not maintain a correct balance between its primary call (to share the gospel with the world) and its social and mercy obligations?

In this modern day and society where governments provide welfare and so many other organizations are set up to help the poor and needy, do you think the church should be involved in this sort of mercy/social work/needs-based activity? Why/Why not?

The seven men ultimately chosen by the church were, in effect, the first "deacons" elected. The word "diakonos" (which means "one who serves") is not used directly in this passage, but it is certainly consistent with later teaching (see 1 Timothy 3:8-13) on the role and function of deacons.

The men to be selected were to be:

- proven men (not to be spiritually immature, or unfit for office)
- consecrated men ("full of the Holy Spirit")
- spiritual men (sound in Scriptural principles)
- wise men (not just full of knowledge)
- loyal men (loyal to Christ, their convictions, their church and their leaders).

Note that they were to have a mix of practical and spiritual qualities.

Acts 6:6 says that the church presented these men to the apostles who "prayed and laid hands on them". This "commissioning" was a visual aid in the process of giving the group authority to serve (see Numbers 27:23).

And it was a position of service, not a position to which they aspired because of the potential for glory and recognition! Of the 7, only Stephen and Philip are ever heard of again.

But the heart of this group was simply to serve God and His church, not themselves.

After this example of the church "getting its house in order", Acts 6:7 then describes the results....the word of God spread and more and more people came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Yes, the church is an ORGANISM...but the organism needs to be ORGANIZED to function effectively.

This passage not only informs us of how the early church became more organized...it also gives us important principles for how we need to approach ministry today.

What things do you take from this passage (Acts 6:1-7) that are important for our church today?

Ephesians 4:12 says that pastors are to do the work of equipping the saints for the work of service and to the building up of the body of Christ. How does that apply/effect you?

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God's handiwork...created in Christ Jesus to do good works. How are you using your gifts and abilities to help serve and to build up the body of Christ?

TO DO:

Praise God for the faithfulness of the apostles in preaching the word and prayer.

Thank God for the church that God has placed you in.

Pray for the pastors, deacons and leaders God has blessed your church with.

Ask God to help you grow and to use your gifts and abilities to help build up the body of Christ, His church (1 Corinthians 12:4-7,12; 1 Peter 4:10).