

Acts 6:1-7

Wisdom - the other power of the Spirit.

(How did leaders in the early church win the respect of the people?)

See theology files #810, #811 in apptoteach.org

Spiritual wisdom in the admin. office.

Introduction

1. Thus far we have seen the dramatic growth of the church as the direct result of the signs and wonders ministry of the Apostles. In contrast to this dramatic outpouring of supernatural power we turn to an equally important element in the growth of the early church – administrative wisdom.
2. One of the great challenges of pastoral leadership is the task of winning, and keeping the respect of a congregation made up of diverse groups who may find it hard to trust those unlike themselves.
3. There are a number of practical lessons that we can learn from this text but first we need to make some observations.

Observations

“¹ Now at this time while the disciples were increasing {in number,} a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic {Jews} against the {native} Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving {of food.} ² And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

1. The challenge that is addressed here comes in the context of rapid growth. Growth brings some unique challenges. “while the disciples were increasing {in number,}”

2. The challenge has to do with a growing tension that falls along ethnic cultural lines – Jews and Greeks. “a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic {Jews} against the {native} Hebrews,”
3. The challenge has to do with justice in the use of resources. “because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving {of food.}”
4. The Apostles’ approach to the problem follows these steps:
 - a. They respect the complaint. “And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples”
 - b. They involve the congregation in its resolution. “select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”
 - c. They affirm their own responsibilities and boundaries. “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.”
 - d. They offer counsel to the congregation as to how the problem can be addressed. “select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task”
 - e. They take responsibility for ordaining (granting authority to) those who will be used to solve the problem. “after praying, they laid their hands on them.”
 - f. They won the congregation’s trust and support before they acted. “the statement found approval with the whole congregation”
5. The term for “full of the Spirit” is the same term used in contexts where “maturity of character” is implied as opposed to “charismatic power.”
6. It is interesting to note that the men ordained for this ministry had Greek names. The Greeks were bringing the complaint and it was their people who would be given responsibility to make any corrections necessary for social justice. This was important in that the Apostles were all Hebrews and therefore seen as having a potential bias. “Stephen . . . Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas”
7. Stephen and Philip would be mentioned later in Acts as men with significant ministries.

Lessons

1. Don’t underestimate the power of the Spirit working through wise administration.
2. Good leaders:
 - **Respect complaints** and do not marginalize them.
 - **Know their boundaries** and will not neglect them.
 - **Involve people** and do not try to solve problems for them.
 - **Offer counsel to aid people in problem solving.** They do not leave people on their own.
 - **Empower individuals** for ministry by recognizing them publicly.
 - **Wait for the support of the congregation** before launching a ministry.

3. One of the greatest responsibilities of spiritual leadership is the discernment of who to ordain to a task.
4. Leaders must not be afraid to limit their involvement. It would be very easy to succumb to the complaint that the leaders did not want to get their hands dirty by doing servant work.
5. Leaders need to be sensitive to the affirmative support of the people before they launch ministries.
6. Leaders who want to win the hearts of the people they lead would do well to take heed to this text.
7. Note how Jesus' ministry illustrates many of these same points. Lk.10:1-16, Matt.17:21, Jn.8:28, Matt.10:1-5

How spiritual leaders can damage their credibility.

1. **Give little attention to administration** because it is worldly. If we just preach the leading of the Spirit we won't have to resort to administrative work.
2. **Marginalize those who whine** about being treated unfairly. There will always be people who are unhappy.
3. **Take responsibility for micromanaging** the ministry. We are responsible for running everything.
4. **Make decisions for people** and then tell them what to do and how to do it. They will mess things up and it will get out of our control if we don't.
5. **Don't waste time supporting the ministry of others.** Let them sink or swim on their own. We have more important things to do.
6. **Don't empower others.** It will go to their head and they might rise up to challenge you some day.
7. Never forget – the name of the game is **keep the power in your corner.**