

Acts (Quality: good)

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[0 : 00] Amen. And in the power of my soul, Amen.

With the help of God, I will venture to direct your attention to the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and verses 3 and 4.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. It was remarkable how God overruled the speech of Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin that the apostles were set at liberty.

And we see there a true testimony of how the heart of all men, the hearts of all men are in the hand of God and He turns them whithersoever He will.

[1 : 42] And my friends, we see that Gamaliel was used as a most influential personality for the liberation of these apostles from death.

Nevertheless, they were caused to suffer shame for for the for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And, as you remember, last Sunday evening we spoke and they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Now in this sixth chapter we have the introduction of a difficulty which needed great wisdom in the behalf of the apostles to resolve satisfactorily.

And we see how God is present in His Spirit to the preservation of the peace which had been a feature of the early church to her establishment and to the glory of her head in heaven, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 18] But my friends, we realize that among them there are bound to be differences of opinion on varying subjects and how the devil plays upon distinction that are of natural character in an attempt to divide, separate and scatter the church.

He does not scatter the church on the ground of her unity in the Lord Jesus Christ because there is no schism in Christ.

He has no opportunity afforded to him thus to separate the brethren. So, my friends, he uses inferior arguments and comes in upon carnal ground through which he attempts to scatter the flock, divide the church and promote dissension and confusion in the midst.

in the midst. And here, in this sixth chapter, we find that the Grecians were murmuring against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Now, you will recall from our previous meditations that the practice had been for the believers in the early church to bring their possessions and to lay them at the apostles' feet to cover the needs of the people.

[5 : 38] Barnabas figured very prominently in selling land and bringing the proceeds to the apostles and leaving that at their feet. The responsibility of distribution being, at that time, the apostles.

the apostles. So, this continued and we judge that in the opening of this chapter, the responsibility is still with the apostles to distribute that which was needful, inclusive of the needs of the widow and of their dependents.

And my friends, here we have clearly indicated to our minds that widows have been a centre of charity through the history of the Church of Christ.

And we would not neglect to apply ourselves to their peculiar and needful position even to this present moment of time.

We realise that to some degree, at least, the national scheme undertakes the responsibility of meeting the needs of those that are in special financial difficulty.

[7 : 27] Nevertheless, I do feel still the Church has a responsibility to apply itself to these particular cases and needs.

needs. But now, in Jerusalem at this time, there were Jews of two specific backgrounds.

There were the Hebrews, that is, the Jews born in Palestine, and there were the Grecians, which I believe comprehends those Jews that were born outside of the mother country, and that largely spoke in the Greek language.

Now, these constituted two bodies of people, the Jews, and there was obviously a tendency to the advantage of the Hebrews.

That is, the Jews born in Palestine, as against the Jews born outside of the borders of that particular country.

[8 : 54] the Jews and these Grecians, as they were then known, brought a grace and cause of criticism against the distribution that was being made to the widows.

That their widows were being neglected. Compared to the Hebrew widows, which obviously were receiving some pecuniary advantage.

Now, I want you to notice that the Holy Spirit speaks thus, there arose a murmuring.

There arose a murmuring. There arose a murmuring. Obviously, my friends, it was, I was going to say subversive.

It was something underneath. It wasn't something that immediately came out into the open and received an airing.

[10 : 17] It was something that was like an undercurrent. It was a dissatisfaction, a dissension that was mumbling and grumbling underneath.

But it may well be that the apostles who were responsible for the distribution at that time, were some of the last to appreciate the dissatisfaction and dissension which was niggling in the church.

You know, it is far more profitable to express one's feelings openly than to nurse a grievance and speak of it privately especially to those who are unable to alter the situation so much goes on shall I say, on the fringe which if it was brought to the center could be dealt with and settled.

And my friends, so often the great adversary of souls works in this way. He kind of spreads the spirit of dissension, discontent, and it works round the fringe and it seems to take a long time before it affects the center.

For now, beware of the spirit of the devil that operates in this way.

[12 : 25] And my friends, may the realization of the openness, frankness, sincerity and honesty of the church, that freeness, that liberty of love, may that find its expression to the stifling of these dissensions and bitternesses that can creep in even in their earliest days.

Now, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews. The Holy Spirit has not left upon record whether this was justified or otherwise.

that is, whether the imperfection of the apostles was finding expression in this unjust ministration.

It may be that to the best of their ability, they were distributing to every needy case without partiality. But my friends, remember that the abilities men are imperfect.

Therefore, if we're looking for an opportunity to engender criticism and strife, we shan't wait long for that opportunity.

[14 : 10] My friends, we must appreciate that we live in an imperfect world. and the church of Christ itself is stricken with imperfections.

So that the most honourable and the most exalted personalities in the church of Christ, such as were the apostles, are far from perfect people, with limited perceptions.

And therefore, they may from time to time calculate upon false or inadequate standards.

Thinking that one deserves help more than another. And in that, they may be criticised because if they knew the whole case, they would judge otherwise.

their knowledge is imperfect. And according to the abilities given and the knowledge assimilated, they make a decision which is at most an imperfect judgement.

[15 : 26] Because we live in an imperfect world. And we have imperfect knowledge. Therefore, my friends, how essential in the church of Christ, for the smooth running of the society and a correct approach to all considerations is charity.

A loving appreciation of our own imperfections, the imperfections of others, that we appreciate and acknowledge that such and such a person or such and such a body are doing their best according to their limited resources.

I often feel that much of the dissension in the church of Christ spreads by reason of a total lack of appreciation for the our personal imperfections and inadequacies.

we approach matters as if, if I was in that position, I would be perfect and everything would be perfect.

that stemmed from my administration, but my friends, if we only appreciated that we have never reached perfection yet, in any position we have occupied, in any matter we have approached, we have never yet reached perfection. Therefore, how can we expect our fellow men, stricken with the same inadequacies, and imperfections, to attain to perfection, to attain to perfection in the administration of their responsibilities? Surely we must appreciate that all men have their shortcomings and to charitably, to appreciate and seek to remedy those shortcomings in so far as our abilities provide.

[17 : 52] for now therefore, it may be that the Grecian Jews had a just complaint against the apostles, that their widows were indeed neglected in the daily ministration.

but it appears that such had been the increase in the church of Christ, such had been the burden of the ministry, that the apostles had not been able to discharge this twofold function.

for now through growth, was impossible. what in the early beginnings had been possible, now through growth, was impossible.

and they needed a fresh look at the situation. Now my friends, I would hear, say, that change, is at times necessary, within the administration of the church. Change.

change. But I would also insist upon this, that change must be limited to the authority of God.

[19 : 27] Now, that is, that is where we would seek to change things, that is order, administration, we must never question God's foreknowledge, with regard to the needs of the church to the end of time.

My friends, we haven't need to change to such an extent that we can set aside God's ordinances, God's mind in the administration of his church.

No. Change must ever be within the limits of the authority of God. But remember that these apostles were possessed of a special grace, wisdom and ability in the foundation of the early church.

And my friends, God gave wisdom to the apostles to appreciate that the burden was now impossible, that they couldn't sustain the ministry of the word and prayer and also continue to satisfactorily administer the funds that were available for the relief of need, both the needs of the widows and others also in the church.

So the apostles called the disciples unto them.

[21 : 18] Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Now we see the apostles in a beautiful light here, not as lords over God's heritage.

Although, my friends, they were possessed of a special authority consistent with God's will and wisdom in the establishment of the early church, nevertheless, they do not take to themselves anything more than is essential for the fulfillment of their responsibilities before God.

And at this juncture, when they see a condition has arisen rendering them incapable of satisfactorily administering the whole responsibility, they call together the multitude of the disciples.

You know, it is something that the ministry must ever seek grace to guard against.

[22 : 51] that is taking everything to itself. My friends, the more we can consult in those things necessary to the smooth running of the church, the better.

That is, we would, in temporal matters, matters that do not specifically concern the spiritual well-being of the people, we would seek to consult and consider the judgment of others.

Now, you see, the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them. They didn't make a decision among themselves, though they were twelve in number, as to what was the right course to do at such a time.

But, my friends, they called the twelve, the multitude together. And, they said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve table.

This brought to the multitude a very clear view of priorities.

[24 : 35] What is best for the well-being of the church? So much depends upon priorities, values.

And, my friends, as we look upon the general professing Church of Christ today, I would say that its disrepute is, to some great degree, a consequence of a lack of values.

We've got our priorities wrong. And, to some great degree, the ministry is responsible for this error.

Now, the apostle said, look, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

That is, our responsibility is to preach the word, to instruct the souls of men in the truth of God.

[25 : 56] Now, that surely is the transcendent concern in all our responsibilities.

And, my friends, it is to die. It is to die. It would be comparatively easy for me in my position, and I'm talking to you very intimately as my church, it would be very easy for me to lose a sense of value, and to become a social worker in your midst.

I may, thereby, attain to myself a popularity, by reason of, shall I say, constant visitations to your home, and hail fellow well met, and so on.

But, my friends, while this side is receiving priority, what about your spiritual needs? What about the food for your souls?

What about that constant need of prayer, with the ministry of the word, that you may be built up in your most holy faith, that you may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

[27 : 40] I do believe, and, my friends, I don't want to talk critically, because I find a conflict in my own heart, on this very point, again and again.

It's very easy to leave the word of God and serve tables. It's very easy to get our priorities wrong.

And, my friends, degenerate from a minister of the gospel, to a mere glorified social worker, in the professing Church of Christ.

Now, I hope you will appreciate my point there. And, I know that I have your support, in seeking to maintain a right sense of values, right priorities, to, as it were, apply myself primarily, as your pastor, to your spiritual needs.

That is, the burden and weight of the ministry of the word. But, you will appreciate with me that in Christendom, generally, there has been a terrible fall from the scriptural standards and priorities.

[29 : 09] And that many of the ministers today are speaking a mere quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, on a social kind of vein. And then, my friends, they work among the people and exercise themselves in all sorts of social interests, which leave nothing less than the spirit of carnality prevailing in the society.

Well, now, this is not to the glory of Christ. And, this, essentially, occasions a withholding of the Spirit of God, because the Spirit is grieved by the prevalence of wrong standards from pulpit down through the peal.

Oh, my friends, these apostles saw that the priority must be the preaching of the word, and that inferior considerations must essentially drop into second place.

So, they asked the question, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Look, we are becoming engrossed to a wrong extent in the distribution of funds, of monies, around the widows and the needy families and cases in this growing church.

Therefore, it is not reason. And, we read in verse 5, and the saying pleased the whole multitude.

[30 : 54] The church, when it was in a healthy and lively situation, it appreciated this priority that the apostles sought to establish as reasonable in the general view.

And, to obviate the need that had arisen, the apostles said, Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you.

Look ye out among you. Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

The apostles left the selection of deacons to the church.

Now, you see, the apostles left the selection of deacons to the church. They didn't say, I want this man and I want that man and we want the other man. No. They said, look ye out.

[32 : 16] Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men. They left the selection of the seven to the church.

Feeling and knowing that the church had probably a far greater knowledge of the true character of the multitude than the apostles possessed.

And again, my friends, it is very useful for the church to apply itself to these responsibilities.

I have often thought, with regard to the exercise of the church, the church is like a body.

And a body to be healthful must be kept in exercise. And, my friends, it is right that the church should be maintained in an exercise way.

[33 : 26] Therefore, the apostles used opportunities for promoting exercise in the hearts of the multitude.

Now, look ye out among you, seven men. This is the character that is worthy of such a position.

These are the type of men that you must seek with regard to the administration of this responsibility.

Men of honest report. Men of honest report. Full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

Now, you can just imagine the effect of this upon the multitude. If they were possessed of a right spirit, the first thing they probably would do would say, well, I'm obviously unfit for the position.

[34 : 40] Because look at the standard. Men of honest report. Full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. Full of wisdom.

Therefore, there would be, one would judge a kind of retraction from a personal standpoint.

Everybody would be kind of taking a step back. Not me. Not me. Not me. Not me. Not me. Not me.

Now, on the other hand, men and women also would essentially apply themselves to others.

But seek to think upon the standards set up by the apostle. Men of honest report. Full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

[35 : 57] And my friends, there would then be an appreciation of the suitable men.

Suitable characters to sustain the office. And the other hand, they would have a sanctifying effect upon the hearts of men.

Because they would immediately see their own insufficiencies and shortcomings. And the other hand, they would have a sanctifying effect in this way.

That according to the standards set up by the apostles, all the men concerned would come, as it were, into the area of judgment by the whole.

And my friends, it's not easy to think of the church applying itself to our suitability or unsuitability for any specific office.

[37 : 19] Oh, it's a mortifying thought that men are seeking, as it were, to, or men and women are seeking to decide whether we are suitable or unsuitable for any given function within the church of Christ.

One withers from the thought. But here the apostle said, well, look, you must do this. It's a function of the church.

And it's for the good of the whole that this should be done. Look ye out among you seven men of honest report.

We realise that the natural honesty must essentially associate with the distribution of funds.

My friends, to have men dishonest who were ready to line their own pockets while they occupied such a responsible position would indeed be unthinkable.

[38 : 36] They must be honest men. Honest men. Honest men. But, I believe this word comprehends much more.

I believe sincere, devout men. Men who are so transparent that the church has no hesitation in laying this responsibility upon them, believing that they will discharge it in the fear of God and for the well-being of the body of Christ, the church.

And my friends, in the first epistle of Paul to Timothy, we have a detailed description.

In chapter 3, let the deacons be the husbands of one wives, ruling their own children and own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Jesus Christ.

Paul shows to us, for the holy ghost, what deacons should be. And my friends, the church has a great responsibility to God in the selection of those who should sustain this office in the midst of the church.

[40 : 28] And the church, men of honest report, not within the church only, but have a good name without the church. So that as men of the world may question the administration of the finances of the church, they cannot question the honesty and sincerity of those responsible for the administration of the funds.

And then also, full of the holy ghost and wisdom. Full of the holy ghost and wisdom. All the holy ghost and wisdom.

Gracious, gracious men. Gracious men. Gracious men. Gracious men. Men who with a single eye seek the glory of Christ and the well-being of the souls of the people.

Full of the holy ghost. Not divided in their loyalties. not double-minded men, not men who are seeking, as it were, their own advancement or advantage, but men who are humble, gracious, tender, in the fear of God, men who are possessed of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

They're not to be men, they're not to be fools. They're not to be people inadequate for the responsibilities that are to devolve upon them. They're not men of low mentality.

[42 : 15] No, my friends, there are certain natural qualifications, as well as spiritual qualifications, that must be associated with the choice of officers in the church.

Therefore, the church needs to apply itself to these things. And the apostles say, well, seven men, that doesn't mean to say every church is to have seven deacons.

I feel, my friends, that that was the number which the apostles felt at that time was necessary to the discharge of this responsibility.

And the church must needs apply itself to the number of deacons necessary for its administration in these things, whom we may appoint over this business.

They didn't neglect their own authority. My friends, they didn't, as it were, lay the whole thing upon the church and divorce themselves from it.

[43 : 32] They said, no, we are involved in this. We want you to select them that we may appoint them. And so, surely, in the church of Christ today, though the church selects, the minister or pastor approves the selection made by the church in these matters, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. I love the expression, we will give ourselves.

Oh, the willingness of the apostles to shoulder the burden of the word of the Lord.

It wasn't a task, it wasn't a duty, it wasn't a way of getting a living. No, my friends, they weren't men under a yoke that was irksome, tiresome.

They were men that willingly and lovingly gave themselves to this most useful, beneficial function within the church of Christ.

[44 : 58] We will give ourselves continually to prayer. They knew by conviction that their work was useless, fruitless, without God.

that God was essential for the prosperity of everything they applied themselves unto. Therefore, we will give ourselves continually to prayer because we know if God doesn't bless, there'll be nothing wrought.

There'll be no fruit following. So we give ourselves continually to prayer. And then, my friends, how beautiful to consider these under-shepherds in the flock of God praying for the individual as well as collective blessing of God to rest upon the multitude.

Oh, to have cases, persons, matters laid upon the heart in secret prayer that the Lord will release his captive, that the Lord will sanctify his tried one, that he will comfort his mourning, that he will take his lamb onto his shoulder or into his bosom and lead it forth graciously and constructively.

My friends, there's a great work of prayer in the office of the ministry, a work for which we feel totally inadequate and oftentimes solemnly neglectful by reason of the many alternative considerations which captivate our time and thought.

[47 : 23] But then, the word of God, prayer, and the ministry of the word. Now this is not only public, is it?

This is not only public. My friends, ministers are not cold water taps that are just turned on at half past ten and turned off at twelve o'clock and turned on again at six and turned off at half past seven.

That's not the ministry of the word, is it? Oh my friends, the ministry of the word, I feel to be more than a full-time occupation.

Yes, more than a full-time occupation. It's a matter not only of day but of night. It's a burden that one is never free from.

I've often said there's not such a thing as a free mind after the Lord lays upon us the burden of his word. We may go off on a fortnight's holiday.

[48 : 27] We've no sooner started upon it than we're thinking about the service at the end of it. And my friends, the multitudes of things which come into our minds and gaze that are constantly being applied to the ministry of the word never has a minister of God a free mind after he is called of God to preach.

Well now, the ministry of the word. Don't think of the ministry of the word to be as it were.

One woman said to one of my brother ministers, she said, you know, you have got an easy job. She says, one day in seven and six off. Well now, what ignorance, what profound ignorance, my friends, I hope God will enable us each to realize the need of prayer that the ministry of the word may be fruitful for the honour and glory of God that one might be enlarged as your minister in thought and meditation as a preparation for the eventual speaking thought of the things which we've tasted, handled and felt of the word of the Lord.

Amen.