

Local Church Renewal Acts 6:1-7 (11/19/2017 AM)

There are strategic events in the life of a church which can lead to either growth or decline. The church is at its essence an organism. In fact the church of Jesus Christ is the only spiritual organism in the world. The church is an organism, but it is an organism that requires organization. All organisms go through stages or life cycles. This is true in the life of the local church. Each church will inevitably go through a series of changes.

Change is *unavoidable*, productively managing change is *optional*.

This is vividly illustrated in the life of the early church. The church began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost which was a divinely pre-ordained event. The Holy Spirit came 50 days after Christ's resurrection. God formed His church by sending the Holy Spirit to individually baptize and indwell each of the disciples. The epistles make it clear that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unique to this age, 1 Corinthians 12:13. The church began with preaching as Peter proclaimed the Gospel. Acts 2:41, "and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Peter again preached a powerful sermon after he had healed a man lame from his birth. Acts 4:4, "However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

➤ The early church experienced *phenomenal* growth.

These new Jewish believers began to meet in the temple area and also in their homes. Many had come from long distances to attend the feast of Pentecost. All of these people needed to be housed and fed. These new Christians began to share their resources with each other, Acts 2:44-45.

➤ The growth of the church created *new challenges* (1).

Some estimate that there may have been as many as 10,000 to 20,000 believers by this time. The Apostles had been taking care of these needs up to this time, Acts 4:34-35.

▪ ***Satan had already attacked the church through outward *persecution* and inward *sin*.***

The early church had already "filled Jerusalem with their doctrine", Acts 5:28. The church was on the verge of taking the Gospel to Samaria and to the world. Persecution only caused the church to grow. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was dealt with and purged. Satan now changed his tactics in discovering his most effective weapon. Disunity and dissension have destroyed more churches from within than any other issue.

This was a *relational* issue not a doctrinal issue. The Hebrews were Jews who were native to Palestine. They had been raised to believe that all Gentiles were cursed. The Hellenists were Greek cultured Jews. There was a natural tension between the two groups. Becoming a Christian does not automatically solve all of our relational issues. The word "complaint" means to say anything in a low tone, to grumble, to murmur. The early church was not a perfect church. It is not easy for any of us to put aside our own personal prejudices and preferences even for the sake of unity and the good of the church.

The Apostles dealt with the situation, they did not *ignore* it.

The Apostles understood that the spiritual is affected by the material (2). They were neither defensive nor reactionary in their response. They did not operate on the basis of expediency.

▪ ***Problems can bring *clarity* when examined prayerfully.***

The word (2) "tables" can mean either distributing money or food. This became more than the Apostles could manage at this stage in the life of the church. It was taking them away from their primary duties which were "prayer and to the ministry of the word" (4). They were not devaluing the ministry of the widows. They were not at liberty to change their God given duties of prayer and of preaching and teaching the Word of God. This would be both private and corporate prayer. The word "ministry" is *diakonia* which is the word for serve. The Apostles had served food but their primary ministry was to serve the word of God. The ministry of the word is more than just preaching but it does not mean less than preaching. This is still the primary duty of the pastors, 2 Timothy 4:2. Every area of ministry is to flow from the ministry of the Word. We must make sure that the mission of the church does not get sidetracked by secondary issues.

▪ ***Problems can create *opportunities* when managed biblically* (3).**

The Apostles solved this problem by proposing to involve new people in the ministry. The qualifications for these men were spiritual because this was a spiritual ministry of behalf of Christ, 1 Timothy 5:3. The apostles showed great wisdom in the choice of these seven men. Even though the congregation chose them the Apostles must have strongly influenced their choice as all of them have Greek names (5-6). This also anticipates the expansion of the church outside of Jerusalem. Stephen and Phillip are evangelists. If these were not the first official deacons they are the prototype of the office. The Apostles met this challenge with reorganization and

shared ministry. This illustrates what is revealed later in the Epistles, Ephesians 4:11-12. The Apostles set these men before the congregation to show their support and trust in them.

➤ The church experienced a ***renewed season*** of growth.

The church began to have a greater impact in Jerusalem (7)

▪ ***More people were impacted by the preaching and teaching of God's Word.***

Isaiah 55:11, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

God's Word always makes an eternal impact.

▪ ***The church experienced both spiritual and numerical growth.***

Even some of the Jewish priests came to faith in Christ. Luke in this verse highlights the church's ministry in Jerusalem. Satan again attacks the church with the martyrdom of Stephen. This resulted in the expansion of the church out from Jerusalem.

Strategic Evaluation and Reorganization

Inhibit *Stagnation*