How Do We Handle Church Problems?

Acts 6:1-6

Introduction:

1. As long as we have people, we will have problems.
   1. Eden - even in paradise, people had problems.
      1. Eve believed a lie.
      2. Adam followed her.
      3. Both tried to cover rather than correct.
      4. Both made excuses and blamed.
   2. Apostles – even among those whom Jesus selected, people had problems.
      1. Lack of faith. Matthew 8:26; Matthew 14:31
      2. Contradiction of the Lord. Matthew 16:21-23
      3. Competition about who should be the greatest.
         1. Examples.
            1. Indignation. Matthew 20:24
            2. Disputing. Mark 9:34
            3. Reasoning. Luke 9:46
            4. Strife. (philoneikia - “a love of contention”) Luke 22:24
         2. Observations.
            1. Each record of strife, disputing, followed Jesus’ discussion of His betrayal and death. Matthew 20: 17-19; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45; Luke 22:21-23
            2. One instance was immediately after the Lord’s Supper. Luke 22:19, 20
2. It is not surprising that there were problems in the church.
   1. All problems do not disappear when people become Christians.
      1. Jesus invited the troubled. Matthew 11:28-30
      2. Rank sinners were more attracted to Jesus than the religious people of His day. Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 7:29,30
         1. He treated them as important people. Matthew 16:26
            1. He selected a tax collector as one of His apostles. Mark 2:13,14
            2. He ate with them. Mark 2:15-17
         2. He accepted their company, admiration, and gifts, and He forgave them. Luke 7:36-50; John 8:3-11
      3. Old attitudes and habits do not disappear instantly.
         1. Some of the Jews wanted to continue to observe and bind their old laws. Acts 15:1,5
         2. Gentiles had things to change and the battle was not over after conversion. Ephesians 4:25-32
         3. Peter had difficulty changing previous beliefs.
            1. He preached that the gospel was for all. Acts 2: 38, 39
            2. The Lord revealed this principle to him in a vision and he preached it again at Cornelius’ house. Acts 10:9-16, 28, 34, 35
            3. Paul rebuked him for failing to practice what he had preached twenty years before. Galatians 2:11-14
            4. Peter did not hold a grudge against Paul for correcting him but called him a “beloved brother.” 2 Peter 3:15
      4. People have burdens. Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15
   2. Notice the events leading up to Acts 6.
      1. The church started unexpectedly for the people. Acts 2:1-8
      2. There were people from different backgrounds and cultures. Acts 2:9-11 4.
      3. The change was radical.
         1. From crucifying Jesus. Matthew 27:19-26
         2. To following Jesus. Acts 2:36-41
      4. The number of people staying in Jerusalem brought other needs. Acts 2:44-46
      5. Rapid growth brings change and change is difficult. Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 4:4; Acts 5:14; Acts 6:1
         1. A member was upset because a visitor had taken four parking spaces.
         2. Our big fusses (1981, 1984) came after periods of rapid growth.
         3. Saul Alinsky (not a noted theologian, I admit) has a line that intrigues me: “Change means movement, and movement means friction, and friction means heat, and heat means conflict. You just can’t get the rocket off the ground discreetly and quietly” (*Leadership*), Summer 1983.
      6. There was opposition and pressure from those outside the church. Acts 4:1-3, 18-20; Acts 5:27-29,40
      7. There was sin within. Acts 5:1-14
      8. Conflict arose within the congregation. Acts 6:1
3. How should problems be handled?
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE HEARD, EVALUATED, AND AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE GIVEN.
   1. There was a problem of neglect in the distribution of food in the Jerusalem congregation. Acts 6:1
      1. A conflict developed between the Grecian group and the Hebrew group.
         1. There will be different groups in a congregation.
            1. Rich - poor.
            2. Young - old.
            3. Black, white, yellow.
            4. Country - city.
         2. These differences are sometimes the bases for conflict.
      2. This problem was communicated by murmuring. Acts 6:1
         1. *murmuring* : “muttering, low and suppressed discourse; the expression of secret and sullen discontent, complaint.”
         2. We are warned not to practice this sin. 1 Corinthians 10:10
   2. Even though a person does not know how to communicate a problem adequately and peacefully, there may in fact be a problem that needs attention.
      1. We do not require an infant to say “Please” and Thank you” to receive dry clothes and food.
      2. Steve’s mother dashed into the nursery when she heard him screaming. His baby sister was pulling his hair.

She comforted him and said, “Your baby sister doesn’t know that it hurts when she pulls your hair.”

A couple of minutes later, she heard the baby screaming. She ran back into the room and said, “What’s wrong with the baby?” “Nothing much,” replied Steve. “Only now she knows.” *Jokes, Jokes, Jokes*, by Jeannette Fidell

* + 1. Murmuring, complaining is not an ideal way to communicate; however, the widows were being neglected and needed attention.
  1. Good leaders are interested in truth; they will pursue it and learn it wherever it is available. John 8:32

1. PROBLEMS SHOULD BE GIVEN QUICK ATTENTION.
   1. God set the example with Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:1-11
   2. The apostles responded quickly to this complaint. Acts 6:1, 2
   3. The question of circumcision was addressed quickly, forcefully, and successfully. Acts 15:1, 2, 5-7, 22-25
   4. Principles:
      1. A small irritation or scratch will disappear; an infection or cancer will spread with time and will destroy.
      2. When a serious difference exists, those involved should be brought together, encouraged to express their differences, and a solution be found.
         1. Oakland A’s manager Billy Martin has a formula for managerial success which he expressed in a recent issue of Sports Illustrated. “You’ll have fifteen guys who will run through a wall for you, five who hate you, and five who are undecided. The trick is keeping the five who hate you away from the five who are undecided (*Leadership*, Spring, 1980).
         2. This does not bring about unity in that group.
      3. Everybody should be allowed to have his say, but not everybody will always be able to have his way. Acts 15:5,10,24,28,29
      4. The presence of different ideas does not mean that there is discord in the congregation. Acts 15: 25, 2, 7
         1. Discord does not just mean that different notes are being played - different notes can produce harmony.
         2. Discord comes when the different notes are not played in a proper relationship to each other or at a time when they are not coordinated.
      5. When the appointed leaders make a decision, the group is to follow and cooperate. Acts 15:22, 23
      6. The ignoring of small problems sows the seed for major problems later.
         1. Many use the “green stamp” approach.
         2. Save a lot of little problems and you will get something big.
2. EVEN THE BEST LEADERS HAVE LIMITATIONS AND BLIND SPOTS.
   1. The apostles were good leaders; Jesus selected and trained them. Luke 6:12, 13; Acts 1:21-26
   2. However, even with these good leaders, men appointed by the Lord Himself, the widows were neglected. Acts 6:1
   3. Good followers communicate with their leaders. 1 Corinthians 2:11; James 5:14
3. EVEN THE BEST LEADERS CANNOT DO EVERYTHING THAT MUST BE DONE IN A GROWING CONGREGATION. Acts 6:2
   1. Moses exhibited good leadership when he recognized this principle. Exodus 18:13-26
      1. He listened to a different opinion.
      2. He selected qualified leaders to work with him. Exodus 18:21, 25
      3. He trained them for their task. Exodus 18:20
      4. He described their responsibilities, specifying what they were and were not to do. Exodus 18:25, 26
      5. This arrangement helped Moses and all the people.
         1. They were not responsible for Moses or instead of Moses, but *with* Moses. Exodus 18:22
         2. Moses was able to endure. Exodus 18:23
         3. All the people were at peace. Exodus 18:23
   2. Good leaders will set priorities. Acts 6:2, 4
   3. Good leaders will not be pressured into doing a thousand other tasks because of guilt or fear of losing leadership.
      1. He doesn’t have to feel guilty because he isn’t. 1 Timothy 3: 2, 10; Philippians 2:14, 15; 1 John 1:7
      2. He doesn’t fear losing his leadership because he is a servant. Matthew 20:25-28
         1. A servant doesn’t have to be a leader; he wants to serve where he is most useful.
         2. If that means losing leadership in a certain area, he still serves; if that means being a leader, he serves as a leader.
4. GOOD LEADERS DO NOT ASSUME THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT BELONGS TO THE GROUP IN SOLVING PROBLEMS BUT THEY HELP AND LEAD THE GROUP IN THE SOLUTION.
   1. We will not neglect our responsibility in the ministry of the word and prayer to put out brush fires. Acts 6:4
   2. You (the multitude) select your leaders in this work. Acts 6:2, 3
   3. Your leaders must have certain qualities. Acts 6:3
   4. When you select seven men with these qualities, bring them to us and we will appoint them. Acts 6:3
   5. Steps In Delegation.
      1. Select the people who have the ability to do the job.
      2. See that they clearly understand what you expect. One of the more effective ways to do this is to discuss it, write it down, have the person being assigned to repeat back to you what their understanding of the job is.
      3. Let them know you sincerely believe in their ability to carry out the task. Explain the importance of the task. Relate to them the faith that you have in them and their dedication.
      4. Secure commitment that they will follow through. Ask how they feel about the job and in being responsible in carrying it out.
      5. Negotiate a deadline. A deadline has been established when you have a day, date, year, and time. The deadline may designate the time the task is completed or when evaluation will be conducted.
      6. Provide latitude for them to use their own imagination and initiative.
      7. Let them know in the beginning you’re going to follow up and do it. At the initial meeting, it is usually good to set up a time of follow-up and evaluation.
      8. Don’t do the job for them.
      9. Reward them commensurately with the results they produce. People need encouragement and recognition. Part of your job as a leader is to provide that.
   6. Observations on delegation.
      1. Delegation is part of leadership, training, growth, discipleship, evangelism.
         1. We are to teach others by word and example to follow the Lord as we have. Matthew 28: 19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11: 1; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2
         2. He who leads without leading others to lead is no leader. *That Reminds Me*, by Wm. F. Weiherman. Ephesians 4:11-16
      2. Delegation involves accountability.
         1. Delegation without investigation is devastation.
         2. Responsibility without accountability is irresponsibility on the part of leaders.
         3. Fred Smith once told us, “A leader can give up anything except final responsibility.”

Which may be another way of saying a leader is a person with the willingness to cast the vision and then call for it to be manifested in behavior. Who will cast the ideal? The leader. That is the one thing he has going over everyone else: he knows where the group is headed (*Leadership*, Winter, 1984).

* + 1. Agreement For The Counting Ministry
       1. These agreements are to last from August 25, 1985 until March 2, 1986.
       2. Two people are to count at the Sunday morning and Sunday evening worship.
       3. Follow the procedure described on the counting form for worship:
          1. Counter number one counts left side, counter number two counts right side.
          2. They then switch and count opposite sides.
          3. If there Is a variance of more than five (5) in count, a third count Is required to harmonize counts, otherwise use the highest number for totals.
          4. Counting Is IMPORTANT...do it with DILIGENCE!
       4. Post attendance immediately after counting:
          1. On the board in the auditorium.
          2. On the chart in the printing room.
       5. Put a copy of the counting form in mail boxes.
          1. Sunday School – Cordell.
          2. A.M. Worship – Jerrie.
          3. P.M. Worship – Jerrie.
          4. Wednesday Bible Study – Cordell.
          5. Special Events – Jerrie and Cordell.
       6. In counting for the Bible school, check every room; if attendance is not posted, look in the room and count.
       7. Count.
          1. Sunday School at 10:30.
          2. Wednesday Bible School at 8:00.
          3. Worship services after the opening prayer.
       8. The person doing the counting will be in a Bible class until counting time – see number 7.
       9. Counters will ring bell for Bible School; (according to time number 278-1213).
          1. Sunday: 10:00 - 10:43 - 10:45.
          2. Wednesday: 7:30 - 8:13 - 8:15.
          3. Gene Threet, Mike Claiborne, Cordell Holloway, and Jerrie Barber will meet for the next evaluation March 2, 1986, 7:115 P.M.

1. WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRUSTED TO BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION INSTEAD OF A BURDEN AND A PROBLEM, THEY WILL BE HAPPY.
   1. The multitude was pleased. Acts 6:5
   2. Greeks were neglected, Greeks were chosen to see that the problem was corrected. Acts 6:5
      1. The seven men had Greek names.
   3. Those selected were appointed. Acts 6:6
   4. This promotes trust between leaders and followers.
      1. Sometimes the congregation does not trust the elders, and elders do not trust the congregation.
      2. What can help?
         1. Communication.
            1. Talking.
            2. Listening.
         2. Group selection of leaders. Acts 6:2-5; Exodus 18:25; Deuteronomy 1:9-15
            1. Some elders say, “If you let the congregation appoint, no telling who they might come up with.”
            2. Who appointed you?
            3. You have the same right as any other member of the congregation to voice a scriptural objection to any person proposed.
         3. Delegating those with a problem to participate in the solution.
2. THE CHURCH GREW.
   1. The word of God increased. Acts 6:7
   2. Those responsible for this purpose of the church did not leave their chief responsibility to do other things.
      1. If the apostles had left their task to serve tables, the word could not have spread as it did.
      2. When elders (parents) do the work of deacons (children) and deacons (children) make policy decisions that elders (parents) should be making, there will be unnecessary conflict and stagnation instead of growth.
      3. Each member of the body is to function in his or her place.
   3. The church will grow. Acts 6:7; Ephesians 4:16

Conclusion:

1. Why do we have problems in the church? – because we have people in the church.
2. How long will we have problems in the church? – as long as we have people in the church!
3. However, problems do not bring defeat – but victory when we face them courageously and handle them biblically.
   1. Persecution from without. Acts 4:4
   2. Sin within. Acts 5:14
   3. Conflict in the congregation. Acts 6:7
4. The sin problem is handled with the blood of Jesus. Revelation 1:5; Acts 22:16; Acts 3:19, 20