

"Chosen to Serve"
Pastor Wally Contreras
August 9, 2020

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:1-7)

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Discuss Pastor Wally's statement that with growth come challenges.

The name "disciples" occurs for the first time in the Book of Acts. The Greek "mathetes" literally means: "learner." In the Hebrew culture of their day, a disciple was someone who more than anything else in the world wants to be just like Jesus. It is the most common designation in the Gospels for the followers of Jesus. John MacArthur notes that mathetes is derived from "manthano" which "carries the connotation of intentional learning by inquiry and observation." How difficult (or easy) is it for me to think of myself as a "disciple" and do I consider myself to be a disciple of Jesus? Explain.

Pastor Wally pointed out that this passage describes the first church business meeting called to deal with the complaint that Hellenist widows were "being neglected in the daily distribution." Would the 21st century church handle such a complaint in the same way? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally pointed out that the Apostles had as a model Moses' solution found in Exodus 18:19:23 for handling problems like the church was facing concerning the neglected widows. The Apostles assembled the 11,000+ disciples and identified what the problem was, laid out their plan to fix the problem, and then told the disciples to select seven men that the Apostles would then appoint to "this duty". What did the Apostles not do that modern-day churches tend to do when confronted with a problem and why?

Pastor Wally asked if I could be picked by the church leadership to solve a problem, would I be "willing" to be chosen. And???

What are some excuses that I've heard (or used) to get out of doing something within the church that might be considered by some to be onerous, challenging, or is uncomfortable for me and why?

The Greek Jews brought the complaint of their neglected widows to the Apostles and the disciples selected seven Greek men to handle the problem. It should be noted that these seven men because of their qualifications (being of "good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom"), it is safe to assume that they were not in some way a part of the problem. Some might say that the lesson here is that if I raise an issue to the church leadership, there is a real good chance that I may be called on to be a part of the solution. What lesson(s), if any, do I take away from the selection of the seven men who were "appoint[ed] to this duty"?

I know that the members of this first church were "of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common." (Acts 4:32) Do I believe that this may have had anything to do with the statement that what the Apostles said "pleased the whole gathering"? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally spoke of the two buckets into which folks sometimes try to separate their lives: spiritual and non-spiritual buckets and that to some, a church business meeting falls into the latter category and is therefore "optional" and for some, because of the manner in which past meetings may have gone, are actually to be avoided at all costs. He mentioned as an example that if there are 100 members, we might be lucky to get 10 to show up to such a meeting. In other words, if a majority is needed to pass a motion, the direction of the church could be swayed by as little as 6 members. Am I OK with that possibility? Explain.

What do I believe is required of me as a member of this church when I attend a business meeting and why?

I note that in Acts 2:41, 47, 4:4 and 5:14 that numbers of disciples were "added to the Lord" while in Acts 6:7 that "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem". Spurgeon said in his message preached on July 9, 1876 that: "Multiplication is a very ancient form of blessing. The first benediction pronounced upon man was of this sort, for we read in the first chapter of Genesis, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." That same blessing was pronounced again when God accepted his servant Noah, and entered into covenant with him. We read in Genesis 9:1 that "God blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." This also constituted a main part of the blessing promised to faithful Abraham. In Genesis 22:17, and many other places, we read to this effect, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore,

and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” This was the blessing of God’s chosen people, a blessing which all the malice of Pharaoh could not turn aside, for the more the Israelites were oppressed the more they multiplied...In a spiritual sense, this is the blessing of the church of God. When the church is visited by the power of the Holy Spirit she is increased on every side. When a Church in the midst of a vast population remains stationary in numbers, or even becomes smaller, no man can see in such a condition the marks of God’s blessing.” So, what do I believe happened to this church that God quit simply adding to their numbers and started multiplying them?

I also note that the Scriptures say that followers of Jesus (disciples) were added to the Lord and not to the church. Is that a significant distinction to be made or not? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that believers are looking for ways to serve God. Does that describe the passion of my heart? If so, how so? If not, why not?

It has been said that the first time a vote is taken in a church there is by definition division inside the church because one group “wins” and the other “loses”. A.W. Tozer once said, “History will show that the church has prospered most when blessed with strong leaders and suffered the greatest decline when her leaders were weak and time serving. The sheep rarely go much farther than the Shepherd. That is why unqualified democracy is not good for a church unless every voting member is full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. To put the work of the church in the hands of the group is to exchange one leader for many; and if the group is composed of carnal professors it is to exchange one weak leader for a number of bad ones. One hundred blind men cannot see any better than one.” I don’t see in Acts 6:1-7 (or anywhere else in Scripture where a vote was taken (not to be confused with the drawing of lots which is not a vote). Why does the 21st century church seem to believe that all “decisions” of the church must be voted on and why?

Pastor Wally said in his exhortation that challenges and opportunities always come with the growth and expansion of the Gospel...don’t long for the good old days and pointed us to Luke 9:62 and Hebrews 12:1-2. In what way(s) do I at times tend to look back and rehearse in my mind past events (sins?) instead of staying focused on where God is leading me?