



SERMON NOTES

US N°. 101

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Title: Ora et Labora

#9 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. The intrinsic problems of growth.
 - a. There wouldn't have been this problem if they hadn't been living as a family.
 - b. Racial and cultural problems have been around for a very long time; people are people. People from California or New York find Wyoming a whole other culture.
 - c. Hebrews & Hellenists
 - i. "Hebrews" were those Jews of Palestinian descent living in and around Jerusalem. Consequently they were most likely to be more conservative and orthodox in their habits of thought and culture.
 - ii. "Hellenists" were those Jews of the Diaspora living abroad under Gentile influence. Thus they were most likely to be liberal and lax in their habits of thought and culture, sharing more of the general notions of the Empire abroad.
 1. Sovereign planning: Alexander the Great, Koine Greek and the Roman Empire
 2. The Septuagint (LXX) translated in 285BC
 - d. Service of the widows and the importance of Christian charity.
2. The solution.
 - a. The apostles recognize that a good, legitimate work would be a distraction from their primary function and called for help.
 - i. The primary importance of preaching and praying; the apostles recognized that their ministry depended upon the strength and regularity of their prayer life.
 - ii. One class of members cannot do all things; there is a diversity of functions. Mistaken view of church leadership; there must be shared ownership.
 - iii. Prayer and preaching go hand in hand; need both in a right balance.
 - b. Division in the church is dealt with by ministries committed to unity.
 - c. The office of deacon was then created by the apostles to solve the problem. *"Diakanos," "one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, attendant, minister; the servant of a king, a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use, and a waiter, one who serves food and drink."*
 - i. The office of deacon is often misunderstood in the modern church. However, based on the New Testament, the role of the deacon is mainly to be a servant. The church needs deacons to provide logistical and material support so that the elders can focus on the Word of God and prayer. They are to care for the physical or temporal concerns of the church. By handling such matters, deacons free up the elders to focus on shepherding the spiritual

needs of the congregation. Yet even though deacons are not the congregation's spiritual leaders, their character is of utmost importance, which is why deacons should be examined and held to the biblical qualifications laid down in 1 Timothy 3.

- ii. Qualifications of a deacon: good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. 1 Tim. 3:8-13, *"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."*
 - 1. Dignified;
 - 2. Not double-tongued
 - 3. Not addicted to wine
 - 4. Not greedy
 - 5. Sound in faith and in life
 - 6. Blameless
 - 7. Godly wife
 - 8. Husband of one wife
 - 9. Manage children and household well
- iii. The elders are to delegate certain responsibilities to the deacons so that they can focus their efforts elsewhere. As a result, each local church is free to define the tasks of deacons based on their particular needs which in has grown to include,
 - 1. Facilities
 - 2. Benevolence
 - 3. Finances
 - 4. Hospitality
 - 5. Ushers
 - 6. Logistics
 - 7. Respective ministry oversight (Sunday schools, Gate Keepers, etc.)
- iv. Distinctions from the elders who are called to shepherd and teach the church.
 - 1. Elders are required to *"be able to teach"* (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2) whereas Deacons are called to *"hold to the faith."*
 - 2. Elders also must manage their households well, but Paul compares managing one's household to taking care of God's church. (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5) The reason for this omission is most likely due to the fact that deacons are not given a ruling or leading position in the church—that function belongs to the elders.
 - 3. The instructions that an Elder not be a *"new convert"* are not included for a deacon, but they are to be tested before being appointed.

- d. The list of the seven deacons appointed reveals many Greek names, suggesting that the elders (*i.e. the Apostles*) included the Hellenists in the solution of the problem. Nicholas is the first Gentile believer named.
 - e. The deacons are named and then appointed & anointed to their role through prayer.
 - i. Sacred & Secular divide; there cannot be a division between these two, if God is to be all in all, then He must be an intrinsic part of all things and not excluded.
 - ii. The laying on of hands seen in the consecration of the Levites (Num. 8:10), appointment of Joshua (Num. 27:23), & the ordination of ministers (1 Tim. 4:14)
 - f. Stephen and Philip are examples that Deacons are much more than just “waiters.”
3. The church grows even more
- a. Told many times that the church grows through the teaching the apostles.
 - b. As the church structures itself, overcoming this cultural problem, it grows even more. The preaching of the Word along with the living of the Word; the old ax “*you may be the only Bible some people read.*”
 - c. Priests are now being added to their number. Large numbers of priests converting (Acts 6:7) and it is understandable that the Chief Priest & the Sanhedrin would become upset to see such a large number of their leaders converting to a new faith.
4. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church.
- a. First told that he did signs and wonders among the people; he was much more than a waiter.
 - b. In defending the faith, Stephen comes cross purposes with the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They were unable to resist his wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.
 - i. Freedmen - men who had been slaves during the time of Pompey's expedition in 53BC. They had been released in Rome and many had traveled back to Jerusalem.
 - ii. There were probably several synagogues in Jerusalem structured around respective cultures and languages.
 - 1. Cyrenians belonged to the city of Cyrene in Libya (whose population was 1/4 Jew - Josephus Antiquities); Simon the Cyrenian (Luke 23:26) with his two sons, Alexander & Rufus (Mark 15:21). Cyrenians attended Pentecost (2:10) and preached to the Greek-speaking Jews in Antioch (11:20); Lucius the Cyrene is listed as a prophet in Antioch.
 - 2. Alexandrians came from Alexandria, Egypt, which was a principal seat of learning in the Hellenic world; Archimedes studied there. The Septuagint was translated there.
 - 3. Cilicians, south-east of Asia Minor (Turkey). Tarsus was its capital city; Paul. Did Paul contend with Stephen??
 - c. Patriotism threatened; passing away of the OT Temple-worship through the teaching of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is a hard thing because these Jews were being faithful to the Temple but had grown more faithful to the oral tradition that seemingly supported the Laws of Moses (613 oral laws added). They should have seen and understood the Truth, but **their affection was more on the laws than the Giver of Law.**

- d. The duplicity of his enemies; because they could not contend with him, they lied and secretly instructed false witnesses to subtly twist his words about the Temple. The old charge that Jesus said He would destroy the Temple in 3 days was revived. Nonetheless, Stephen did see that the whole Temple order was to fade away with Christianity and that a new Temple (the Body of Christ) would arise to replace it. Stephen's words become the basis for the prosecution.
 - i. Queen Jezebel secretly induced witnesses against Naboth and Jesus was accused by false witnesses. Enflaming the mob is easy.
 - e. His face was like that of an angel; a person close to God reflecting some of His glory; Moses (ex. 34:29-35)
5. Take-aways
- a. Charity is in the DNA of the Church
 - b. Priority of teaching and praying
 - c. Not one class of members can do all the work
 - d. The responsibility of deacons
 - e. Historic growth of the church
 - f. The Spirit-given wisdom that defeats our enemies.
 - g. The conflict with faith and patriotism.
 - h. The unscrupulous behavior of our enemies.