

PROBLEMS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Text: Acts 6:1

INTRO: In this lesson we shall take note of some of the problems faced by the early church, how they were successfully handled, & the ultimate outcome of such action. Illustrate: dead church.

I. LUKE DOES US A SERVICE BY LETTING US KNOW THAT EVEN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE INSPIRED APOSTLES, THE CHURCH FACED PROBLEMS.

A. It should be somewhat encouraging to us to know that problems are nothing new & that our generation is not being discriminated against by having to face church problems.

B. I also find it encouraging to know that the early church was made up of people who make mistakes.

1. If everyone in the church was sinlessly perfect, they wouldn't let me in.
2. And, even if I got in, I would be a hindrance instead of a help.
3. But since the church is made up of others who make mistakes, I can be of help & encouragement to others even as they help & encourage me.

C. The early church faced problems from without & within.

1. Without--persecution. READ ACTS 4:1-3; 5:17-18
Acts 8:1
2. Problems from within.
 - a. hypocrisy. READ ACTS 5:1-3
 - b. Murmuring. READ ACTS 6:1
 - c. doctrinal questions, Acts 15:1

II. BUT IF LUKE DID US A SERVICE BY TELLING US THAT THE EARLY CHURCH FACED NUMEROUS PROBLEMS,

HE DID US AN EVEN GREATER SERVICE BY SHOWING THAT ALL SUCH PROBLEMS HAVE SOLUTIONS.

A. Persecution: They prayed--not for the persecution to stop, but for the courage to stand in the face of it.
READ ACTS 4:23-30.

1. They *could* have quit preaching.
2. They *could* have compromised.
3. But they prayed for courage & kept preaching.

B. Hypocrisy. read acts 5:3-10.

1. Peter could have swept it under the rug to spare Ananias' feelings--but that would have been to join in the hypocrisy.
2. The sin was exposed. And disciplined by God Himself.

C. Murmuring. READ ACTS 6:1-6

1. The apostles could have reminded the murmurers that they were quite experienced in serving crowds from when Jesus fed the multitudes.
2. They could have said, "If you don't like the way we're doing this you can just get out."
3. They could have wallowed in self-pity & talked about how hard they were working & how little they were being appreciated.
4. But they chose the wise course of self-examination & saw that the complaints were based on a real problem.
5. They solved that problem by delegating responsibility to others & by encouraging the whole church to be involved.

- D. The doctrinal problem of binding Moses' law. In the absence of a written N.T., they assembled all the men to whom & thru whom God had revealed matters that pertained to the subject to get their in-put.
- E. Their method of learning God's truth from the things revealed can help us also learn from God's revelation.
 - 1. Approved example, Cornelius. Acts 15:7-11
 - 2. Necessary inference, 15:12
 - 3. Direct statement or command, 15:13-19

III. NOW, LET US LOOK AT THE RESULTS OF PROPERLY DEALING WITH THE PROBLEMS THAT AROSE.

- A. Persecution, Acts 8:1, 4
- B. Hypocrisy, Acts 5:11-14
- C. Murmuring, Acts 6:7
- D. Doctrinal disputes, Acts 16:5

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Problems will arise from time to time.
- 2. When they do, they must be dealt with according to Bible examples & commands.
- 3. When the proper solution is found & applied, the church will be stronger than it was before the problem arose.

La Porte, TX, April 8, 1979

Highway 29, Liberty Hill, TX, August 12, 1980 (meeting)

Exton, PA, July 8, 1984

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, June 6, 1999