

*Church 1.0*  
**Acts 6:3**  
**“Leadership in the Fellowship”**

1. In 193 A.D., Rome still controlled most of the civilized world. That year, something strange happened with the leadership of the empire. The Roman Praetorian Guard, the Caesar’s personal body guards, turned on the reigning emperor, Pertinax, and killed him.
2. When it came time to decide his successor, one of the guards suggested that the leadership of the Roman Empire be auctioned off to the highest bidder.
3. On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 193, a public auction was held, and the wealthiest senator in Rome, a man named Didius Julianus, won the throne with a bid of 300 million sesterces. Not surprisingly, Julianus was not a very popular leader. His purchased reign only lasted 66 days, and he was eventually beheaded.<sup>i</sup>
4. Though auctions are certainly not the best way, every organization must in some way decide who is going to lead them.
5. Some leaders are elected, and some leaders are appointed. Some leaders rise through achievement and acclamation. Others rise through ambition and aggression.
6. In the book of Acts, as the first church increased in its number, it also increased in its needs. The apostles were unable to adequately serve the swelling congregation, and the need arose for “deacons” - or servants as meaning of the word indicates.
7. Following the instruction of the apostles, the church chose seven men to fill this important office, and oversee the specific ministry it involved.
8. Among other things, the sixth chapter of Acts provides for us an important guide for determining who should serve in the leadership and ministry roles of the church.
9. The first church reminds us that offices in the church should not be filled casually or carelessly, because not everyone in the fellowship is qualified to serve in leadership.
10. As we look at this text, specifically verse three, we find a couple of important truths that relate to the subject of those who serve in the leadership of the church. Notice first of all, we see:

**I. THE PART THE CHURCH SHOULD PLAY IN ITS LEADERSHIP**

1. On November, 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln finished his famous Gettysburg Address with the famous line, "...that government: of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."
2. In Acts chapter 6, as the first deacons were selected and ordained, we find that they too were "of the people, by the people, and for the people."
3. The apostles instructed the congregation in verse 3, saying, "*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men...*"
4. This verse serves to remind us that each body of believers must play a part in deciding who will serve in their leadership, and who will fill the offices of their particular church.
5. Notice a couple truths we find with regard to the part the church should play in its leadership. Notice first of all:

#### **A. The church should decide its leadership**

1. While the apostles were clearly the leadership of the first church, they did not act as dictators. Verse 3 gives us of evidence of this.
2. In verse 3, the apostles guided the people, saying, "*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men...*"
3. While the apostles would soon lay hands on these seven men, these first deacons were not hand-picked by the apostles. The task of deciding who should fill these offices was left to the congregation.
4. In much the same way, each individual body of believers has some responsibility in deciding who will lead it, and who will serve in its various offices.
5. We are not told exactly how the first church arrived at the seven men they chose, but they do point us to some things we should remember when it comes time for our church to decide its leaders.
6. For instance, they remind us that the decision of who will fill the offices of our church should be *a careful decision*.
7. Notice that phrase, "look ye out". It is translated from a word that literally means to inspect something, or to examine something.
8. The idea is that the congregation was to select men whom they had examined and inspected closely and carefully.

9. Too often, leadership positions in the church are given based on who is available, or who is interested, rather than on who has proven to be fit for a particular role and job.
10. This first church reminds us not only that our selection of leaders should be a careful decision, but also that it should be a *corporate decision*.
11. Notice that the apostles' instructions were to the "brethren" as a whole. The congregation was to work together to find these seven men. It was to be a corporate decision.
12. These first offices in the church were not bestowed by the Apostle Peter, as a king might bestow the job of an ambassador, or a president might name a cabinet position.
13. Instead, the congregation came together to identify, and then call these seven men to this important position within their body. It was a corporate decision.
14. Every four years, Americans go to the ballot box to elect a new president, or to keep the one we have had for the previous term. The last few elections prove that Americans are anything but united about who they want as their leader.
15. In 1992, Bill Clinton won the presidency with only 43% of the popular vote. Again, in 1996, Clinton was reelected, this time receiving 49% of the vote.
16. In 2000, George W. Bush was elected president with 47.9% of the popular vote, only defeating Al Gore through the Electoral College. In 2004, Bush was reelected, receiving 50.7% of the vote.
17. In our most recent election, one considered by most to be a landslide victory, President Barack Obama received just over 52% of the vote.
18. When our presidents barely receive over half of the votes, it tells us that our nation is divided politically, and does not agree about the kind of leadership it should have.
19. When a church faces the task of deciding who will serve in its leadership, it cannot afford to be split and divided. The church must choose carefully and corporately the people who will fill its offices.
20. When we think about the part the church should play in its leadership, we see not only that the church should decide its leadership, but implied in this text is also the fact that:

## **B. The church should develop its leadership**

1. In verse 3, the apostles' instructions to the congregation were to "look ye out *among you*" (emphasis added). In other words, the leadership the church needed was to come from within its own body.

2. It is in this particular area that many churches fail in our day. That is, they do not produce within their ranks new people who can step up and fill the needs of the congregation.

3. In many churches, the leadership roles are centralized in the hands of just a few people, most of which have held those same offices for many years.

4. Most of these leaders are faithful, dedicated workers, who have served the Lord and their church willingly for decades. In most cases, they have stayed in leadership, not out of selfishness, but out of necessity, as there were not more people willing to work.

5. Unfortunately, however, when a church relies on the same people, year after year, decade after decade, the time eventually comes when those people are no longer able to serve.

6. If a church has not prepared the next generation of leaders, that church will die from a lack of servants and workers.

7. A healthy church must be simultaneously producing for the kingdom of God today, and preparing for the kingdom of God tomorrow. She must be engaging the enemy on one front, and educating the saints on the other.

8. The older generation must invest in the one behind it, teaching them by exhortation and example how they are to serve the Lord, and contribute to the work and mission of the church.

9. I found an article this week from a newspaper in Australia. The headline read, "Retirement of baby boomers demands training of next generation." The article talked about how by 2015, upwards of 57% of Australia's workers will become eligible for retirement.

10. The concern is that there will not be enough qualified, trained workers to fill important jobs within the country. The article stressed the importance of older workers investing time to train the younger workers coming behind them.<sup>ii</sup>

11. The need for training the next generation is even more serious within the church. If we do not develop another generation of leaders, there will come a time when we will not be able to "look among ourselves" and call out qualified, godly people to serve in our churches.

12. Whether you are a leader in the church, or a layman who holds no position, each and every one of us plays a part in the leadership of this church. We must decide, and we must develop our leaders.

13. Notice a second truth we draw from this text. We see here not only *the part the church should play in its leadership*, but notice also further, this first church points us to:

## **II. THE PEOPLE THE CHURCH SHOULD PLACE IN ITS LEADERSHIP**

1. In Acts chapter 6, and verse 3, we are reminded not only that the church has a part to play in selecting its leaders, but we also see the kind of leaders they are to select.

2. Look again at the apostles' words in verse 3. It says, "*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*"

3. While the apostles did not choose these seven men themselves, they did dictate the kind of men the church was to look for when they were deciding the men who would serve as the first deacons.

4. In this verse, the Word of God gives us the kind of résumé we should look for in those who hold the offices of our church. Notice a couple of things we find here about the kind of people we should place in leadership. First of all, our leaders should be:

### **A. Those with a proven spirituality**

1. Look again at the text, and notice it says that the people were to look for seven men, "of honest report." That phrase "honest report" is translated from a word that literally means "witnessed to", or "testified of".

2. The idea is of someone about whom others could witness and testify. In this text, it is describing men of a solid reputation – men with good names.

3. Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches..." When it comes to serving in the leadership of the church, a good name is of the highest value.

4. Look again at verse 3. This first congregation was to look for men who were of honest report, and "full of the Holy Ghost."

5. In other words, the people were to select men whose reputations were good, and whose lives were godly. They were looking for men who had proven their spirituality, and were obviously controlled by the Spirit of God.

6. It is important to note here that the first qualities the people were to look for were spiritual qualities. There is a reminder here that what God is looking for is not physical abilities, and natural talents.

7. In His Church, the Lord Jesus wants to use those with whom holiness and godliness are the priority. He does not need successful people. He needs sanctified people.

8. There was quite a stir earlier this year when President Obama's nominee for treasury secretary, Tim Geithner, was found to have cheated on his taxes, to the tune of some \$50,000.

9. Though many defended the nomination, based on the fact that Mr. Geithner had a brilliant financial mind, some people questioned if the man with his hand on the government's purse strings should be someone with a dishonest tax record.

10. In Acts chapter 6, the first quality that the church was to look for in its leaders was a proven spirituality. Their abilities were second to their testimonies.

11. Notice something else we see here with regard to the people the church should place in its leadership. Notice not only that our leaders should be those with a proven spirituality, but notice also that they should be:

### **B. Those with a practical sense**

1. Look again at verse 3. The people were to look for men who were of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, "...and wisdom." The word that is translated as "wisdom" here is translated from a word that speaks of practical knowledge.

2. One writer translates it this way, "men...with broad and full intelligence."<sup>iii</sup> The old British preacher, G. Cambell Morgan, calls this, "sanctified common sense."<sup>iv</sup>

3. The idea presented here is that after the church had identified men who were spiritually qualified, then they were to choose the ones who would do the best job practically at meeting the needs of the widows.

4. While spiritual qualities are the most important factor, a church should also consider the practical abilities of those they choose to fill important offices in the church.

5. Some people have a better knowledge and understanding of what needs to be done than do others. I read a story recently about the legendary musician, Count Basie. He told a particular club owner that he would not return to his club until he fixed his piano, which was always out of tune.

6. The owner called Basie back and told him the piano had been fixed. However, when Basie sat down to play it, he found it was still out of tune. He shouted at the owner, "You said you fixed it!" The owner replied, "I did. I had it painted."

7. The apostles instructed the people to select men with the spirituality to do serve with godliness, and the sense to serve with effectiveness. Both are important qualities for a church leader to have.

1. In one verse of Scripture, the Word of God lays down some important principles for leadership in the fellowship.

2. The first church had to select some men to help meet the needs within that congregation. It was a decision that they approached carefully and considerately.

3. They chose seven men who were of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wise enough to do the job well. After their selection, the Apostles ordained those men, and the Bible says, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly (v. 7)..."

4. This verse is a challenge to anyone who presently serves as a leader in the church, and to every church that faces the challenge of selecting its leaders.

5. For those who are already in positions of leadership, this verse provides the standards against which you must measure yourself.

6. For the church who is looking for new leaders to fill needed roles, this verse is a guide for filling the positions of leadership in the fellowship.

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<sup>i</sup> Didius Julianus: Roman Auction, *anecdote.com*, accessed 5/28/09, <http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=18815>

<sup>ii</sup> Parakala, Kumar, Retirement of baby boomers demands training of next generation, 6/2/09, *AustralianIT*, accessed 6/3/09, <http://www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,24897,25570641-5013040,00.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Wuest, Kenneth, The New Testament: An Expanded Translation, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1961), p. 285

<sup>iv</sup> Morgan, G. Campbell, The Acts of the Apostles, (Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, 1924), p. 175)