

Introduction: Organized Religion?

At this point in the Book of Acts the Church is this irresistible and unstoppable, “Let’s invade hell with squirt guns kind” of movement which was growing faster than an over “sterioded” body builder. Despite intense persecution, around 20,000 people were getting saved, getting healed, and inviting others to join them on the Jesus journey. However, and this is a rule of nature, movements don’t mature, don’t sustain, and don’t last, unless they organize. Today we continue our Supernatural Church series by looking at the Supernatural Structure of the early church. We do so that we can grow and meets needs much like they did. Come with me now to Acts 6:1

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Needs, All Kinds of Needs

Wherever you have a person you have a need. Wherever you have a large group of people you have many needs. A phenomenon occurs whereas the food distribution system of the early church had not yet been implemented. Where organization is weak, needs get neglected. Remember the early church consisted of ton of people that came from all over the world to celebrate the ancient feast of Pentecost. Because the Holy Spirit showed up and transformed folks so amazingly and powerfully, the people just stayed. Awesome in one sense, a logistical nightmare on the other.

We saw previously that folks were donating funds from land deals and other sources to help meet these needs, but the church lacked a robust protocol to meet every need. And what happens when our basic needs are neglected? We instantaneously transform into our spiritual predecessors, the Israelites, i.e., professional complainers. Although God despises chronic complaining, a group of Greek speaking widows go the apostles and complain about getting gipped when it comes to daily food rations. They are hangry and they want the apostles to know it, “You’re taking care of the Hebrew widows far better than us.” “We’re not being fed so we’re going to a different church.” However, because there was no other church at this time they must stay and do some conflict management, a skill that is necessary for a healthy church.

The Apostles Respond

The apostles respond to this complaint in a way we least expect, i.e., seemingly insensitively (v2):

It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God to wait on tables.

Wait! What? Sounds a little insensitive, hey? Were they lazy or uncaring? No, They were properly prioritizing the accurate and full preaching and teaching of Word as the foundational ministry of the church. Why? Because Jesus said, “Man cannot live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Because without the Word properly prioritized there is no spiritual life in the church. Why? Because the Word is a supernatural book which has been breathed out by the Spirit of God. Listen to Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active.

And II Timothy 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Without the Word properly prioritized there is no spiritual life and therefore, no salvation, discipleship, fellowship, no God-glorifying worship, nor any other supernatural experiences. Without the Word, the church is reduced to helping organization. Show me a church weak on God's Word and I will show you a church that's just plain weak. Show me a Christian that's weak on God's Word and I will show you a Christian that's just plain weak. Remember the old saying, "One week without the Bible makes one week." I would amend it to say, "One day without the Bible makes one weak." Therefore, the apostles declare they will not "neglect" (cease concern) the Word of God for another ministry. If they did, the church would die a slow and agonizing spiritual death.

However, to say they will not neglect the ministry of the Word does not mean they will neglect other ministries. Although they won't personally handle the food distribution problem, they will structure the church in such a way to meet the needs of the Greek widows and others.

The Jethro Principle

Like all great leaders, Moses was a tremendous visionary but a horrible administrator (I'm in good company lol). Like the provisions problem in Acts 6, the needs of the Israelites were getting so vast that no Moses could handle it. In Exodus 18 Moses, not unlike 38% of pastors last year, was in full burn-out mode and his people were frustrated. Not only were their needs not getting met, their voice weren't being heard. In steps Jethro, after me, the greatest father-in-law in history. He sees how a lack of organizational structure is causing Moses to neglect his primary ministry of seeking God's Word for his people. He, as father-in-law are prone to do, offers some unsolicited advice (v21-23):

17 "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you... 21 Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

Moses smartly implements Jethro's advice and the people's needs were satisfied. The apostles call a congregational meeting to structure the newly minted church on the Jethro principle (v3-6)

3 Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Likewise, Paul structured his dozen or so churches on the Jethro principle. Listen to Ephesians 4:11-12 :

11 Jesus gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

Jesus designed his church to be an organized synergy between those who are called to the five "Word" ministries with those called to the general ministry of the church. Catch the division of labor here. Apostles, prophets, evangelist, teachers, and pastors equip Christ followers to do the ministry. Who

does the equipping? Who does the ministry? Why do I equip and you minister? “So that” (result clause) the “Body of Christ might be built up” (needs met). How long do I equip and you minister? Paul tells us in v13:

**Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God
and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

In other words, until I die, you die, we are all fully Christ-like, or when he comes back. Listen to the results which occurred after the early church implemented the Jethro principle (v7):

The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly...

Not only were needs being systematically met, but the church grew at a rapid rate. If we want to enjoy similar results, we must reverse the decades mindset that clergy and staff do all the ministry and implement the Jethro organizational principle. Practically speaking, this means every member a minister, every minister in a ministry. Ironically, serving in ministry is the greatest spiritual need of every Christ follower.

So, who's ready to go all Jethro and take our church to the next level?