

## ***A Complaint Arose***

"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (Acts 6:1).

Complaints at church are nothing new. They have been around as long as the church has because the church is people, and people tend to complain. Some complaints are legitimate and constructive: they point out real problems and lead to resolutions and better performance. Others can only be described as petty gripes. It would be instructive for all of us to look at how this first complaint was handled.

### **What Was Not Done**

Before we examine what was done, consider what was not.

No one quit. That sometimes happens. Brethren become disenchanting over some circumstance and quit. We call it quitting the church, but it is really quitting the Lord. What does that say about one's commitment, his discipleship? A friend of mine calls it getting mad at your brother and taking it out on your Father.

No one went to another congregation. In this case they couldn't because there was no other congregation. This was not just the only one in Jerusalem, it was the only one anywhere! And I can't help but wonder if that wasn't in one regard a blessing. While there is much to be said for having several churches in an area, one drawback is that it gives folks an option they would not otherwise have: to run away from problems instead of working them out. That solves nothing.

No one started a move to fire the preacher or oust the elders. It is uncertain whether Jerusalem had elders at this time. The apostles were in the lead. The brethren duly respected them. They did not attribute sinister motives. There were none of those privately circulated surveys or petitions, no secret meetings, nor a so-called "vote of confidence." No one tried to use irrelevant matters such as Peter's personal weaknesses or Matthew's former occupation as means to discredit them.

No one quit, no one split, no one pitched a fit! If only brethren today would abandon these unfruitful practices.

### **What Was Done**

Actually, the solution to this complaint was quite simple. First, the apostles gave it an objective hearing and found it valid. Leaders must be listeners. As is usually the case, no purposeful wrong had been intended, it was just a simple oversight.

The apostles responded promptly, not allowing the problem to fester. They instructed the congregation to select some qualified men whom they could put in charge of the task. Seven were appointed. They must have done their jobs because this problem is never mentioned again. How easy. How productive. How worthy of our imitation.

**- by Frank Himmel**

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## ***Church Issues and Love***

Throughout church history, divisive issues have arisen among Christians, even to this present day. While this should concern us, it should not cause excessive alarm. They are to be expected. After all, the apostle Paul wrote in the First Century: "For, in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized." (1 Corinthians 11:18-19 RSV). Just a causal reading of the New Testament shows that a large part of it deals with early schisms.

During my own lifetime, I have seen a goodly number of church rifts. After the dust settled and dividing lines were drawn, many Monday morning quarterbacks, who were either nowhere near or had chosen to remain aloof during the gut-wrenching struggle, freely alleged that had there been more love by all parties it would not have happened.

It is simply amazing how many people think that all church problems, no matter their nature, can be completely solved with more love. That would be true if they were all hate based.

However, in more cases than not, problems spring from deeper disagreements over fundamental Bible teaching. It is possible to love one another dearly while still divided over vital moral and spiritual convictions. While love can HELP repair any breach of fellowship, it is not the "magic bullet" for completely solving all differences.

These folks see doctrinal differences as being no obstacle to unity if all have the right attitude. These minimize the seriousness of issues caused by doctrinal error and moral turpitude. They do not see why the parties cannot meet and work together, united by love for each other. They look for ways to reduce fundamental Bible-based convictions to the level of insignificance. Love is everything to them.

About 45 years ago, three other preachers and I met with four preachers of different persuasion to discuss some of the differences between us. The prayer at the beginning of the session signaled how little would be accomplished by the discussions. Among other things, the man prayed, "Lord, we thank you for LOVE. We know that love is everything. We know that LOVE is MORE IMPORTANT than being RIGHT."

- by **Edward O. Bragwell Sr.**

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### ***Satan Has A Plan, Too!***

One of the best known of Jesus' parables is the parable of the sower. In it we learn of God's plan for reaching good and honest hearts with the gospel. The seed is the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and we are the sowers. The parable teaches us to be sowing the seed anywhere and everywhere - with the hope that it will reach the good ground where it will bear fruit.

It is interesting that Matthew's account of the parable of the sower is followed immediately by the lesser-known parable of the tares. This close connection is not by accident. Jesus would have us to know that, just as God has a plan, so also does Satan. In the parable of the tares, we learn of Satan's plan to hinder God's purpose by sowing false teaching in the world.

The parable of the tares tells of a man who planted good seed in his field, "but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (Mt. 13:25). Tares are plants that closely resemble wheat in appearance, yet their mature seeds are noxious to man. Thus, you can see the awful damage caused by this clandestine activity. It is not difficult to see the parallel to Satan's work in the spiritual realm:

1. He always tries to defeat the purposes of God (2 Pet. 2:1-3).
2. False teachers and evil workers do their work secretly, often doing their damage while others "sleep", unaware of the danger.
3. Sinful activities do not always appear evil until the fruit has reached maturity. That's why we must constantly stress basic truths and essential principles from God's Word.
4. Our responsibility is to watch, and "try the spirits" (1 Jn. 4:1), so that we will not fall victim to Satan's plan.

Yes, Satan has a plan, too! Be careful!

- by **Greg Gwin**