

Introduction:

One of the most intriguing things to me about the ministry of Jesus is that the only person in all of history who had the ability to do it all chose not to. He delegated. Jesus trained the twelve to do a great deal of the work. However, an interesting thing occurred as the church in Jerusalem grew. According to **Acts 6:1-6**, while the disciples were increasing in number, there began to be so much work needed that the apostles couldn't accomplish it all. They delegated some of the work to others, dividing the labor up between them. You may remember when we looked closely at Jerusalem's success, one of their keys to triumph was that they knew no one could do everything. A congregation is no different from any other corporate body. As it grows, the workload increases. Eventually, the church has to realize they must divide the labor. If not, they will limit themselves to a size wherein a handful of people can do everything. But, at that point, souls are no longer being saved. Based on this occurrence in **Acts 6**, we should examine what delegation and division of labor implies for a congregation.

Discussion:

- I. What do delegation and division of labor imply for the practical working of a church?
 - A. Different Christians will have specialized work. In **Acts 6**, the apostles had a specialized work they were called to do: devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This does not mean they alone prayed or ministered the Word (**cf. Acts 2:42; 8:4**). It simply means the apostles had a greater responsibility. The seven servants were then appointed to oversee the specialized work of caring for the widows. This one illustration provides a practical example of Paul's teaching in **I Corinthians 12:14-21**. God Himself has put us together in this body to perform differing functions (**Romans 12:4**). Despite this fact, most churches continue to preach **I Corinthians 12**, but then expect all the members to be involved in all the work.
 - B. In order to accomplish the specialized work we each have, we must have specialized training. In **Acts 6:1-6**, these seven men, having never been widows themselves, would have had to be taught and trained regarding the needs of the widows. Don't forget the apostles had to have special training in order to fulfill their specialized task. Jesus spent three years training them to be His witnesses in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." The issue of development and training is highlighted in **Ephesians 4:11-12**. God gave some specialized offices within the church for the express purpose of equipping the rest of us to work. To be perfectly honest, this is one area in which most churches of Christ fall very short. Very little training is done for any work. Churches typically just make announcements, trying to shame everybody into doing all the work or any of the work. Rarely do churches strive to develop, equip, and train their members to do much of anything.
 - C. Specialized work should be assigned based on the abilities God has given us (**Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:14-21**). He has bestowed His grace upon us so we can individually perform part of the work necessary in this church (**Romans 12:6**). Additionally, He has put this particular group of differing people together in this body as He desired so the church could grow effectively (**I Corinthians 12:18**). That means God has given you certain strengths and has purposely placed you here to use those strengths so this body will build itself up in love (**Ephesians 4:16**). We must work where we are strong. Eyes don't try to do the hearing because they cannot. Ears don't try to do the seeing because they do not have any strength in that area. What kind of havoc would we create in our own bodies if we tried to make our body parts do jobs other than the ones for which God designed them? Yet, in churches we often assign people tasks without any consideration for their personalities, talents, abilities, and strengths. If someone cannot sing, would we assign him to lead singing? If someone could not communicate, would we assign him to preach? If someone could not lead, would we appoint him to be an elder? Why then, when someone is introverted and shy, do we expect him or her to be a greeter? Why then do we often try to push anybody and everybody into teaching a Bible class? Why then do we constantly try to get everyone to lead a public prayer even if they are terrified to stand before a crowd? We need to delegate and divide the labor to people's strengths. A good rule of thumb is the 80/20 principle. Each member should spend 80% of his time working in the top 20% of his greatest strengths and 20% of his time trying to improve the lower 80%.

D. Some tasks will be limited to the number of people necessary to perform them. In churches we typically have the mindset that anyone who wants to perform a certain task gets to. However, remember how the apostles approached the needy widows in **Acts 6**. They didn't assign everyone who wanted the task. They didn't assign everyone who had ability. Surely, there were more than seven men who met the qualifications listed in **Acts 6:3**. After all, by **Acts 4:4**, the church had 5000 men. But the apostles recognized that only seven men were needed to oversee this work. That means not everyone who was qualified and not everyone who wanted the job was appointed to be in charge of ministering to the widows.

II. What do delegation and division of labor imply about the attitudes you must have?

- A. You must recognize you are a working part of this congregation. You have a strength and a talent that can be used to serve God within this group. According to **I Peter 4:10**, we have all received special gifts from God (non-miraculous) that we are to use to glorify Him by serving others. According to **I Corinthians 12:15-17**, you may not say, "Because I am not what _____ is, I am not a part of this body." Paul's point is, if everyone here did what Mike McDonald can do, who would do what you can do? Remember **Ephesians 4:16**, the body is held together by that which every joint brings to the table based on its special equipping. The body is only as strong as the combined strengths of its individual members. For this body to be as strong as it can be, you must do your part. When you are not, this body is weaker for it. Allow me to also point out this is not just about church growth. This is about your own eternal destiny. **Matthew 25:14-30** is a parable of judgment. It describes three different people with greater or lesser ability. If you say to yourself, "I am not the five-talent or even the two-talent man. I have nothing to offer this congregation," then even what you do have will be taken from you, and you will be cast into outer darkness. On the other hand, if you do what you can, then God will give you more ability. Eventually you will be the five-talent man. And, there will be a home reserved in heaven for you.
- B. You must recognize everyone else is a working part of this congregation. They may not be able to do what you can do, but they provide something you do not. Read again **I Corinthians 12:21**. You may not say of anyone else, "They are not what I am, therefore we don't need them." We must never say or even think to ourselves, "Well old sister _____ never has taught a Bible class, she sure isn't much help around here." "I sure wish brother _____ would lead a public prayer. But he won't and I imagine we could do without him if we had to." Everyone in this room is needed and even those who are not here are needed to bring greater strength to this body. In **I Corinthians 12:22-25**, Paul provides a pragmatic way to help overcome this problem. If there is anyone you believe is not very seemly, who doesn't add much to the congregation, take it upon yourself to catch them doing something right and honor them for it. It doesn't have to be a fanfare or an awards ceremony. It doesn't have to be announced from the pulpit. Simply say a word of kindness, praise and encouragement to them about the work they have done. Start catching people doing things right and watch the work improve. Remember **Romans 12:10**, we are to give preference to one another in honor. When we are all honoring those around us, everyone is honored and everyone will strive to improve. When we are all improving, guess what will happen in the congregation ... It will grow.
- C. You must be willing to specialize and not be involved in every aspect of the work about which you have an interest. This doesn't mean when you have been given a specialized assignment you never do anything else. Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons in **Acts 6**, also worked as evangelists (cf. **Acts 7** and **8**). However, it does mean you may have a desire to work in several areas, but you simply do not have the time or ability to work in all of those areas to maximum effectiveness. You have to specialize.
- D. You must recognize nobody will know every detail of every work within this congregation. Not even the elders! Everything will be accomplished under the elders' oversight. If problems arise that the leaders over particular specialized works cannot resolve, they will no doubt go to the elders for advice and help. But even the elders will not know everything about the work that is being done. Did the apostles know all the details about the ministration to the widows in **Acts 6**? If they did, that defeated the purpose of not having time to do the work themselves. If they had to keep up with all the ins and outs and all the details, they might as well have done it themselves. This is perhaps one of the hardest aspects of being able to grow. Because delegating and dividing the labor means we have to learn to trust one another. Our biggest fear in dividing the labor is that someone may decide to do something unscriptural. Wouldn't it be better if we just let the elders, who we know want to do it right, do everything to make sure we stay on the straight and narrow? On the surface, that sounds noble. But it is not. First, it doesn't follow the scriptural pattern of **Acts 6**. Second, it neglects the fact that the work is still done under the elders' oversight. The leaders of every work are still answerable to them and accountable to them, even though the elders are not involved in every detail. Third, it will limit the

number of souls we can save. Anything that limits the souls we can save is wrong. Fourth, it forgets that we all have responsibility to watch for sin in the congregation (**Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1**). That is not just the elders' responsibility. Fifth, such a mindset denies the Savior's teaching on love through Paul, that love believes and hopes all things (**I Corinthians 13:7**). We must learn to love and trust each other.

III. What work is available?

- A. I am appalled at the common thought among Christians today. How many times have you heard someone say, "I like to be a member of a smaller church, there is more work to do."? This betrays one of two things: ignorance or sin. Sin, because some people claim this simply because they want to be seen by men. Therefore, their concept of work in the church is whatever is done in front of the audience. I hope however, it is simply ignorance. That is, they haven't reached a spiritual maturity yet from which they have learned that what is done on the stage in the worship assembly is really a very minor part of the work. Do you remember how this whole lesson started? In **Acts 6:1**, because the number of disciples was increasing, a problem arose leading to the appointment of seven new leaders who then would have to train numerous workers to serve the hundreds of widows they must have had. In a small church of fifty members, with only one or two widows, the preacher could have done that and everything else. Do you realize, that no matter the size of the church, there are essentially the same number of assignments in any given assembly, with the possible exception of more people waiting at the Lord's table for a larger congregation. Typically, no matter the size of the congregation there is only one preacher per service, one song leader, two prayers, maybe one scripture reader. But all the other more important work increases as the church increases.
- B. Consider all the work that must be divided among the members of the congregation.
1. There is the work in the assembly: Preaching, leading prayer, leading singing, serving at the Lord's table, scripture reading and making announcements. In addition to that, someone must plan the order. Someone must assign men to fill the roles, spending the majority of his time getting substitutes when people don't show up and don't call ahead of time. Someone has to make sure the necessary tools are ready for use in worship.
 2. There is work in the Bible class program: As a church grows so does its need for teachers and assistants. Someone will have to train teachers. Someone has to plan and develop the curriculum. Someone must produce the materials. Someone must prepare the rooms. As a church grows, it will become even more specialized as certain people will have to focus on teaching certain age groups. That is, if we continue the tradition of age segregated classes. In a small church, one teacher teaches grades 1-8. As the church grows, the classes are larger and people have to be trained how to meet the teaching needs of different ages.
 3. There is record keeping: Someone has to take roll, keeping attendance records. Someone needs to chart the trends the records demonstrate. Someone needs to file Connection Cards.
 4. There is work on the building: Someone must clean the building. Someone must cut the grass. Someone must do the everyday maintenance, fixing leaky faucets and changing light bulbs. Someone must water the lawn. Someone must run the heating and air conditioning. Someone must know how the lighting works, inside and out. Someone must know how to run any timers that are used for any of the equipment in the building.
 5. There is work to be done involving guests: Someone must greet them, welcoming them, and enfolding them. Someone must get them a guest card. Someone must write them or call them. Someone must follow up on them. Someone must show hospitality to them. Someone must answer any questions they have.
 6. There is work to be done teaching the gospel to the lost: Someone has to lead Bible studies. Someone has to train people to teach the lost. Someone has to invite others to assemblies and classes. Someone has to be able to give rides. Someone has to answer questions. Someone has to be able to perform baptisms at all hours of the night.
 7. There is work to be done grounding new converts: Someone has to develop plans for grounding converts. Someone has to teach classes in groups and one-on-one. Someone has to develop the materials to use in teaching new converts. Someone has to train and equip people to teach new converts. Someone has to know how to help new converts who have special problems because of where they were in the world.
 8. There is work to be done in edifying the weak: Someone must keep up with who is here and who is not. Someone must call and encourage folks. Someone must learn how to admonish and encourage. Someone must learn how to lead the weak to maturity. Someone must administer discipline when necessary.

9. There is benevolent work: Someone must be able to ascertain existing needs. Someone must determine what is a need and what is a want. Someone must be able to manage the available funds. Someone must be able to make the important but confidential decisions.
 10. There is work regarding technology: As we progress further into the technological age, someone has to know how to use all the gadgets to help us spread the gospel and serve the Lord. Someone must know how to service printers, copiers, computers, fax machines. Someone must know how to use projectors in all facets of the work, not just preaching.
 11. There is work in communication: Information has to be passed along and the larger you get the more unwieldy announcements become even in announcing those in the hospital. Can you imagine announcing the nearly hundred people who would be in the hospital out of a church like Jerusalem? Someone has to print bulletins. Someone has to do mail-outs. Someone has to maintain update lines. Someone has to know how to use web sites and e-mails to inform people of news. Someone has to plan and run informational meetings.
 12. There is work to be done serving others: People need meals cooked. Some need grass cut. Some have problems around the house that need fixing. Some just need a shoulder to cry on. Some need financial advice, marital advice, parenting advice, etc.
 13. There is work to be done involving leadership: Someone has to lead the congregation. Someone has to set the vision. Someone has to communicate the vision. Someone has to do the work of developing other leaders. Someone has to train others in their work.
 14. And much, much more: I could list more but I think you get the picture.
- C. In a small church, the preacher and one or two others can accomplish everything; but in a larger church, this work has to be done by somebody and it will only be accomplished when people are delegated these tasks and the labor is divided among them. All of this reminds me of a story I once heard about four men named Anybody, Everybody, Somebody and Nobody. *“There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Anybody could have done it. Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody blamed Somebody. But still, Nobody did it. Consequently, it wound up that Nobody told Anybody, so Everybody blamed Somebody. But still, Nobody did it.”*

Conclusion:

Allow me to conclude by clearing up some misunderstandings about my views of church growth. I do not believe we have to have 10,000 members in order to be right with God. We may effectively evangelize our local area and only convert 5,000 or maybe only 500. What I do believe, though, is there are more than 350 people in our area who will serve God. And if we work in this congregation in such a way that we cannot reach out to those other people, bring them in, develop them, and send them out to teach, then we are not right with God. If we work in such a way that we can never get larger than 350 even though there are more who would submit, we are not being good stewards of God’s blessings. What that means is there is work for you to do so we can maintain and develop those who are already here. There is work for you to do so we can reach out and bring new people in. Examine yourself, see where you fit, and perform your job based on your God-given strengths and abilities and grow thereby.