

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-12 A Spirit-Guided Decision

Someone once said, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” He was emphasizing the importance of not allowing side issues to distract us from our primary mission. Our story today from the Book of Acts is about how the early church refused to allow internal issues to distract them from their primary mission of preaching the gospel to the lost people of their city.

The church in Jerusalem continued to prosper, and each day their numbers increased. They were, however, about to face a third great challenge.

As you will remember, their first challenge was persecution from the outside. This persecution came primarily from the Jewish religious authorities. Their second challenge came from within their own ranks. It was the conspiracy of Ananias and Sapphira. Now, a third challenge arose within the community of believers—disagreement among the saints. Like the first two challenges, this challenge held the potential of diverting the church from its primary mission of reaching the lost with the gospel. Just as the Holy Spirit had helped them to overcome the first two challenges, he was present to help them resolve this new one.

The dispute arose along ethnic lines. Some of the Greek-speaking Jews, known as Hellenists, complained that their widows were not being treated fairly in the daily distribution of food. They charged that the natural-born Jewish widows, who spoke Aramaic or Hebrew, were being fed first before Greek widows. Their complaining became so loud that the apostles had to step in.

At this early stage, the apostles cared for the needy, as well as preaching and teaching. Directed by the Holy Spirit, the apostles developed a plan to address the issue. They said to the people, “It is not right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God to deal with this dispute. We must remain focused on prayer and the proclamation of the gospel.” So they instructed the church to choose seven men “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” whom they would put in charge of the matter. The people liked their plan, so they chose seven Spirit-filled men. The apostles appointed them to the task. As a result of this Spirit-directed action, the apostles were freed to tend to their work. The word of God continued to spread and the church continued to grow.

Satan will use anything he can to hinder the progress of the church. Just as the devil worked in the early church to slow the progress of evangelism and missions, he works in the church today. However, as Paul wrote, “We are not ignorant of [Satan’s] schemes” (2Cor 2:11). From this story, and from the way the apostles handled the situation, we learn three important ministry principles.

First, we learn to stay focused on our God-given mission. We must not allow anything to cause us to turn from it. In the Jerusalem church, rapid growth brought with it misunderstanding and conflict. Luke tells us that “the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic

Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” This problem became a distraction to the apostles, causing them to neglect ministry to which Jesus had called them. They were determined, however, to remain focused on their primary task of preaching the gospel. They said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. We must give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

Like the apostles, our primary calling as ministers of the gospel is to seek God’s face and to proclaim the message of Christ to the lost. No matter what other responsibilities we may have, it is never right for us to neglect the ministry of the word. When this happens, we must take immediate steps to delegate the work to others so that we can remain focused on prayer and on preaching and teaching the word of God.

A second principle we learn from this story is that pastors should choose only spiritually qualified leaders to help them carry out the work of the church. The apostles told the church to choose seven men “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” The Twelve then prayed and laid their hands on the seven, commissioning them to take care of the widows. All seven of them had Greek names and would handle the matter fairly. One was a Gentile convert from Antioch.

It is the responsibility of the pastor to put his or her church to work to effectively carry out its mission of reaching the lost and discipling the saints. When he or she does this, they must ensure that they appoint only those people who are spiritually qualified. Those they appoint must be true followers of Jesus Christ. They must be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom like the ones the apostles appointed in our story. If a pastor will follow these guidelines, the church will be blessed. If not, the church will be harmed.

The third principle we learn from this story in Acts is that we must be led by the Spirit when we make decisions. The Spirit of the Lord not only empowers us to preach the gospel to the lost, he also directs us in administrating the work of the church. Church leaders must be filled with the Spirit and follow the Spirit’s leadership. Then the church will be effective in its mission of taking the gospel to the lost and planting other Spirit-empowered missionary churches. Pastors should not try to hold their lay people back from ministry. They should rather ensure that they are filled with the Spirit, and then release them to be used by God in whatever way he may choose.

As a result of the apostles’ Spirit-directed decision to appoint seven ‘deacons’ to help them in the work, the word of the Lord continued to spread in Jerusalem. Luke says that “the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us that we must never allow church matters to distract us from our primary task of being Christ’s witnesses to the lost. When we do encounter church problems, we should allow the Spirit to direct us in solving the problems. Then, we must get back to our primary job of reaching the lost.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we must follow the leadership of the Spirit in all that we do, and we must remain focused on Christ's command to preach the gospel to all people.

Now, let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What should we do when we face conflict within the church?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We should allow the Holy Spirit to help us resolve the conflict, and we should never allow problems to distract us from our primary task of preaching the gospel," you are right.
2. When we choose leaders to help us in the church, what qualifications should we look for?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We should look for people who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," you are correct.
3. What role should the Holy Spirit play in our decision-making in the church?
A. [PAUSE] If you said, "We must seek for the Spirit's guidance in all that we do," you answered correctly.
4. What can we expect to happen if we will follow the Spirit's direction and remain committed to God's mission?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We can expect our churches to grow and prosper," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it 2-3 times, then go out and share the story and the three lessons you have learned with others. To help you in your work in the church, ask the Lord to show you some members who are Spirit-filled and wise. Then invite them to serve the congregation.