“The Perfect Church”

Matthew 28:11-20

January 15, 2017

Have you ever thought that you’d like to be part of the perfect Church? Well, I’ve titled today’s sermon “The Perfect Church.” Shall we pray?

Please find your way to the Book of Acts chapter six in your Bible. Pastor James Montgomery Boice was Pastor of the 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for thirty-two years. Before his death in the year 2000, Dr. Boice had written over fifty books and Bible Commentaries. He was a man who read the Bible carefully, believed exactly what it said, and preached and taught it as the truth of God.

On Acts, you will find this. “Dr. Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts follows a pattern that alternates between two things. One is the picture of the Church alone and the other is the Church in relation to the world (James Boice on Acts [Baker], see pp. 103-104).

Acts 1 – The Church alone. Here we see the Christians gathered for prayer in the upper room.

Acts 2 – 4 (2:1-4:22) – The Church in the world. The Church reaches out with the Gospel. Peter preaches and 3,000 souls are saved and the Church experiences persecution.

Acts 5 – 6 (4:23 – 6:7) – The Church alone again. She’s gathered for prayer and shows the care and concern Christians had for each other. Here we also find the sins and hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira and the way to solve problems inside the Church.

As you can see from Dr. Boice, when you read Acts, you see that the Church in both its inward times and its outward ministry as it proceeded to accomplish the LORD’s will.

Let me begin with my title “The Perfect Church.” Do you think you’d like to be part of the perfect Church? Those of you who took the time to read through Acts six this past week found that there is no such thing as the perfect Church. The reality is that from the very beginning, the Church had problems.

But, think with me about this. Problems are a part of life. But, here’s the Bible approach to problems. Problems almost always reflect needs. Problems, to a Believer, are rooted in Romans 8:28. We believe that all things, i.e. problems, work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. So, as you read the Book of Acts, you’ll learn that we should not waste our problems. Instead, we should solve them according to the LORD’s methods.

So, yes, there have always been problems in the Church of Christ. But, let’s be as practical as we know how. Who here has had no problems in his home or in his relationship with his spouse or children? Who here lives in a problem-free environment?

By the way, it’s been wisely said that if the Church *was* perfect, they wouldn’t let you in. Then, even if you did get in, you might be a hindrance rather than a help. But since the Church is made up of people who all make mistakes, you can be a help and encouragement to those who also help and encourage you.

So, from the very beginning, there were problems in the Church of Christ. Do you remember Acts five? What do you find there? You find the story of two hypocrites; Ananias and Sapphira. This couple sold some property. They then lied about the sale to the Apostles. That certainly was a problem.

In Acts 6, you’ll find murmurers. Acts 6:1 *“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”*

To “murmur” simply means “to grumble and complain.” There had been a daily service done to and for the widows. And we find in the Early Church both Jewish and Gentile widows. The Gentile widows did receive their daily supply of food. But, not until the Jewish widows had been first served.

For lack of a better term, there was a problem in the Church at Jerusalem.

And Acts 6 shows to us the way the Church faced and dealt with problems. Look again with me at Acts 6:1.

Acts 6:1 *“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*

*(2) Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. (3) 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.*

*(4) But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (5) And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*

*(6) Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (7) And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”*

Here we see both the problem and the solution to a problem. What I’d like you to note is that this is likely the best way to solve problems inside the Church.

So, let’s see what the solutions are.

First, to solve problems, a Church needs spiritual leaders.

Now, did you notice that the problem was obvious to everyone? And the problem is address by men who have the quality of spiritual leadership.

One of the things I’ve notice over the years as a Pastor is that Christians tend to leave spiritual solutions to problems to the end. We, Christians, are most prone to apply the world’s methods first and go to Scripture last. Then, as one man puts it “then we wonder why we can’t solve our problems.

First, we all need spiritual leadership. And the spiritual leaders of the Early Church were the Apostles. Notice verse two *(2) “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.”*

 You could say, the twelve called a meeting. And at the meeting the twelve simply stated what was needed.

So, how did the Church face its problems?

First, a Church needs spiritual leaders.

Second, a Church needs the Bible and prayer. Or we could say the Church needs people to teach and people to pray.

Verse two again *(2) “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables… (4) But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

As you can see, the twelve had been involved in the daily food serving for the widows. Yet, somehow the Gentile widows were being served after the Jewish widows; or at least it appeared that way to them.

But please notice the way that the leaders proceeded to solve the problem. They decided on behalf of everyone that they would focus on teaching the Word and on praying.

Now, folks, can you see where the solution to problems really can be found? It’s found in the Bible and in prayer.

So, when a Church neglects either of these two things, we can be quite sure we will not be able to solve our problems. It may sound simplistic to some. But that’s where we all fall short.

Every family, every Church, every business, every government needs good counsel, Biblical counsel and dependence on the LORD; in other words, prayer.

Can you go day by day for any length of time while neglecting the reading and study of your Bible? How long can you go without memorization and meditation? It’s true; you need food and water to nourish you. It’s true that you need to work hard and be active and keep busy. But listen to the LORD speaking here. You and I need a steady diet of Scripture study and prayer. And what I’ve found over the years is this. Neither a study of the Bible or prayer are easy disciplines.

And why is that? Why is it that God wants us to learn His word and to pray? For one main reason; to teach us to wholly submit our hearts and minds and lives to Him. And how else will you find and follow the LORD’s will if you’ve left off Bible study and prayer?

To this very day, I am grateful for what I learned about Bible reading and a quiet time when I was first saved. In my early college days I had a roommate. So, I felt I needed my space. I found a mop closet down the hall from my room. And inside that closet each morning I didn’t oversleep I was there in the mop room with my Bible and a Bible study book.

And yes, it’s a habit today to have a quiet time and read God’s word. But sometime look up and read the times the term “custom” is used in relation to Jesus and you will see that it was the LORD’s habit to do certain things each week.

How does the Church solve its problems?

First, a Church needs spiritual leaders.

Second, a Church needs the Bible and prayer.

Third, a Church needs spiritual workers.

Look at the solution to the problem of the widows; verse three. *(3) “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.”*

And what type of men were responsible to carry out the quote “business” of feeding the widows each day? They were to have three main qualities: an honest report, filled with the Holy Spirit, and filled with wisdom.

An honest report is actually a reputation for honesty. Honesty has to do with your dealings and transactions with others in society. An honest person is someone whose life conforms to good moral principles.

If there’s a quality that is needed in both the Church and the world today more than ever, it’s honesty.

What do you think would happen if it was standard procedure for schools to teach by example and precept these words “Thou shalt not lie”?

Do you think it would benefit both the school and the society? How about is your boss held everyone accountable to maintain truthfulness towards each other and those you sold your products to?

And doesn’t this simple word “honest” here in Acts 6 imply that Christ’s Church should hold to this highest of standards when it comes to truthfulness?

What type of men were to be put in charge of the daily ministration? Honest men and men filled with the Holy Spirit. Folks, this term “the fullness of the Spirit” has certainly gotten a very bad name over the centuries inside the Church. And most often, Christians today have little or no sense that we need the filling of the Spirit.

Let me simply remind you of this. The term “fill” means “controlled” like when you are “filled with anger” you are actually saying you are “controlled by anger.” When you are “filled with envy” you are actually saying you are “controlled by anger.”

The strength of the Christian is not the Christian, is it? You strength is the strength of Someone Else Who lives within you.

Ephesians 3:16 *“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;…”*

Whenever you read about the power in the NT Christian, remember this. It’s the Strength of the Spirit living within you that enables you to do anything in your life.

Honest report; filled with the Spirit; and filled with wisdom. Wisdom is what you find in Scripture as to the LORD’s way of doing things. Wisdom is good judgment. Wisdom usually comes with experience. Wisdom is the ability to see things from an eternal perspective; from God’s viewpoint.

And we all need it. So, please notice that the Apostles didn’t say “Just find seven willing workers and let them serve the tables.” Instead, God’s plan for the solution to problems in the Early Church is found in

First, spiritual leaders.

Second, the Bible and prayer.

Third, spiritual workers.

Then, fourth, the Church solves its problems with harmonious diversity.

Look with me at Acts 6:4*“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (5) And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:..”*

Seven men were chosen by the Church that day to oversee the work of serving the widows in the Church. Did you ever notice the diversity in this group?

Stephen was a Gentile; one of the many Gentiles who were saved and became part of the first NT Church. And isn’t it interesting that the first man chosen to care for the widows was a Gentile, just like many of the Gentile widows in the Church at that time?

Then comes Philip. Here’s another Gentile Believer. Philip. Like others in this group, Philip is and was a Greek.

Then comes Prochorus. Here’s a third Gentile Believer. His name means “Leader of the dance.” We get our English word “choreograph” from Prochorus. Prochorus would later die as a martyr in the city of Antioch.

Then comes Nicanor. Another Greek; a Gentile. His name means “Man of Victory.”

Then there’s Timon; another Greek.

Then there’s Parmenas; a sixth Greek deacon. Parmenas was later to be martyred at the city of Philippi.

Next comes Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch. And Nicolas is another Greek Believer in the Early Church.

So, seven out of seven of the men chosen to oversee the daily distribution of food to the Church widows were Gentiles; no Jews.

So, why have I said that the Church solved its problem with harmonious diversity? Here’s why. All of the Apostles were Jewish. Maybe, just maybe that’s part of the reason why the Jewish widows were fed first. But when it came to the continuing of that work in the Church, all seven men chosen were Greeks.

The Apostles wisely saw that the LORD’s Church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. So, a group of seven Gentile Christians were selected to handle the food distribution. It wasn’t just one man who did it.

During the life of Christ, those who handled the food distribution on the hills of Galilee were Jewish, the twelve Apostles.

So, here we find diversity in the Church as part of the solution to their problem.

How then does the Church solve its problems?

First, spiritual leaders.

Second, the Bible and prayer.

Third, spiritual workers.

Fourth, harmonious diversity.

Last, shared decision making.

The Apostles didn’t quote decide and just get everyone else on board that day. Instead, they included the Church membership in their choices. Note verse three.

Acts 6:3 *“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.”*

And verse six *(6) “Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (7) And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”*

The congregation selected the men and brought them before the Apostles, who then prayed and laid their hands on them in a formal sessions indicating their agreement with these seven and their blessing upon them.

Church problems are simply reminders that there are Church needs. And Acts 6 shows us how the Early Church worked.

Now, are we any different today?

Don’t we need spiritual leaders?

Don’t we need the Bible and prayer?

Don’t we need spiritual workers?

Don’t we need harmonious diversity?

Don’t we need shared decision making?

Yes, we do.

The Church in the NT, as you can see, was a moving, growing body of Believers in Christ. But, the norm in the Church was this. When there was a problem; that simply meant there was a need. And the Church met that need with spiritual answers; God’s Word and prayer; understanding of truth and dependence upon God.

EBC is the LORD’s Church. Our goal is to please Him and to honor Him in what we say and do. Next month we will be holding a Church business meeting. Shouldn’t we apply the truths of Acts 6 to our Church and its problems? I believe we should.

Shall we pray? If you are here today and ready to believe and obey what the Bible says about the perfect Church, here’s a prayer to begin with. “LORD, I surrender myself completely to you right now. Thank you for sending Your Son to be my Savior and LORD and giving me Your life. By your Holy Spirit, I intend to apply these words to my life. Thy will be done; In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

Shall we pray?

Please find with me hymn number # 401 “The Church’s One Foundation”