

Selecting Church Officers

by Wayne Goff

Acts 6 is the only place in the New Testament that shows **how (method)** the local church is to select its leadership or officers – which would be either **elders or deacons** (Phil. 1:1). Keep in mind that a **gospel preacher** is not an officer in the local church. He is a “*minister*” (servant) of the Lord who may preach for a local congregation as did Philip (**Acts 8:40; 21:8**). Notice the ingredients we find in Acts 6 in the selection of certain men:

Apostolic Oversight

“*Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;*” **Acts 6:3**. Even though the instructions from the inspired apostles was for the members of the local church to “*seek out*” from among them seven men, the apostles did the appointing, and thus, we conclude had the final voice in the matter.

How do we exercise apostolic oversight in the selection of men today? By looking at the qualifications for elders (**1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**) or deacons (**1 Tim. 3:8-13**). By following the instructions given by the apostles, we are, in effect, doing the same thing as we find in **Acts 6**.

Congregational Selection

In the matter of selecting *qualified* men, the **second step** is for the members of the local congregation to “*seek out*” from among them the men they judge are qualified to serve. This is not a **popularity contest**, but an honest “*judgment call*” of the entire congregation of those whom they believe are qualified. Notice in **Acts 6** the members were admonished to choose men “*of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.*” The idea here is that the congregation will have confidence in the men whom they have chosen, and in the best judgment of all concerned, they meet the qualifications generally.

Local elders, as “*overseers*” (**Acts 20:28**) have the duty and responsibility to preside over the selection of men. In this case, they are to certify that the men chosen by the congregation truly are qualified to a reasonable degree. Hopefully the local members would not pick a bachelor or a woman to serve as elder or deacon, but if they were to do so, then the overseeing elders would have to step in and point out the obvious lack of qualifications of the ones chosen.

Notice that this aspect of the matter is not found in **Acts 6** inasmuch as “*elders*” had not yet been appointed in the church in Jerusalem. The apostles were the current overseers, and it would not be until some time later that “*elders*” (bishops, overseers, shepherds) would be selected and perform their duties. But in **Acts 11:30** we read that the disciples in Antioch who sent financial relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea sent it to “*the elders.*” Here we see elders in the local churches of Judea, but we have no historical record of their appointment. Just the same, it is easy to conclude that the process of selecting qualified men to serve as elders was done as efficiently as the men we read about in **Acts 6**. **Acts 14:23** teaches us that a plurality of elders were selected in each local church. And so it is today.

The Results?

The “*whole multitude*” in the local church selected seven men whom they set before the apostles. The apostles prayed for these men, “*laid hands on them*” we believe as a gesture of transferring their needed portion of authority to do their work, and as a result “*the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*” (**Acts 6:5-7**). The point is that when God’s pattern is followed, then peace results among those who are God-fearing, humble and obedient disciples.

We have no precedent for existing elders to select the next elder(s), nor for elders to select deacons without the church’s input and approval. Let’s always follow the New Testament pattern. 372102