Reexamining the First Principles of the Local Church

Week 3: Acts 6:1–7

2025 marked a new phase in the life of WPBC and something like the beginning of a time of rebuilding. In that light, the elders decided in January of 2026 that it would be good to revisit what the Bible has to say about local church: Why do we exist? What should happen in our assemblies? etc. We are now in the third week of taking the church through that 'first principles' study, and tonight we continue by looking at one of the most foundational passages in the NT, Acts 6:1–7.

01: First Principles We've Identified So Far

Preliminary Principles and Core Presuppositions

1. We want WPBC to be a lighthouse for the Lord Jesus in North County. God is working in peoples' hearts all around us, which means that we have a tremendous opportunity to be an oasis of the living water of God's Word in this community.

2. God blesses His way, not man's way. He blesses the biblical blueprint, not our skill or creativity (Acts 2:41, 47, 6:7; Eph 4:11–16).

3. The right starting point is not what people want in a church, but what Christ wants in His church, because He is the Lord of the church (Rev 1–3).

4. We can't assume on generalities—e.g., '*The Bible says do all to the glory of God, and that's what we're doing!*' Biblical faithfulness is not the result of good intentions (let alone assumptions), but of the intentional effort to tie everything we do to the Word of God.

5. The essentials can never be taken for granted. We never get to a point where we can move on from the basics. The most stable and successful institutions—whether it's a family, a business or a church—are those that are most solidly grounded in what's most important.

Principles from the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20)

1. The overwhelming bulk of Great Commission effort is found in teaching disciples (lit. "learners") the whole counsel of God, which takes place in the local church. Therefore, the local church exists to be an educational institution, designed to teach believers the Word of God.

2. Following that, the church exists solely for the truth of God's Word. Many things can be found in the church that can be found in other human organizations—like social welfare, relationships, and even entertainment. But because the church exists for the truth, all those things are incidental by default, secondary at best, and must exist in the service of the truth. In the church, they do not and must not ever exist for their own sake.

02: Learning from the First Conflict in Church History (Acts 6:1–7)

Acts 6:1–7 records crucial events that occurred at the very beginning of church history, probably within a year of the birth of the church at Pentecost which was less than two months after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension (see Acts 2). This passage tells us about the first conflict in church history in the first church in history, which was in Jerusalem. This passage is foundational for a biblical understanding of the church in two specific ways. First, it establishes the church's **priorities**, and second, it establishes its **structure**. Here is a quote from the great Welsh expositor Martyn Lloyd-Jones that perfectly captures the issue at stake:

> Here is a problem. Here are these widows of the Grecians, and they are not only widows, but they are in need, and in need of food. It was a social problem, perhaps partly a political problem, but certainly a very acute and urgent social problem. Surely the business of the Christian Church, and the leaders particularly, is to deal with the crying need. Why go on preaching when people are starving and in need and are suffering? That was the great temptation that came to the Church.… But the Apostles, under the leading and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching they had already received, and the commission they had from their Master, saw the danger and they said, "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. This is wrong. We shall be failing in our commission if we do this. We are to preach this Word; this is the first thing. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." Now there the priorities are laid down once and forever. This is the primary task of the Church, of the leaders of the Church, and we must not allow anything to deflect us from this, however good the cause, however great the need. The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God (*Preaching & Preachers*, pg. 23; quote lightly modified).

1. Describe the historical details of the conflict we see in Acts 6:1–7. What two issues are competing for the church's 'priority and primary task'?

2. In light of what biblical instruction is set in contrast to in this passage, what do we learn about its urgency and importance in the life of the church?

3. What is the apostles' role in this first local church (see 1 Peter 5:1–2a)?

4. Following that, what does this passage say about the primary responsibility of the church's pastoral leaders—that is, its elders?

5. Implicitly and explicitly, both by command and acknowledgement, several NT passages talk about aspects of the corporate gathering. What are some of those? (See Acts 2:42, 4:34–35, 1 Cor 11:17 ff., 14:26, 16:2, Eph 4:11–16, Col 3:16, 1 Tim 2:1–2, 4:13.)

6. What does Acts 6:1–7 say about the priority of all those other aspects of church life? What does it say about the purpose (or role or function) of those other aspects?

7. According to the passage, why do deacons exist? How is this reinforced when you compare the qualifications for elders with those for deacons 1 Timothy 3:1–13?

8. According to Acts 6:7, what are the results of a biblical structure and biblical priorities in a local church? How does this relate to our second preliminary consideration (pg. 1)?

9. Would you describe the growth in Acts 6 as spiritual, numerical, or both?

10. Is it right to desire or even expect this kind of growth? Explain.

11. In light of this passage, what else—besides the ministry of the Word and prayer—are the elders responsible for in the local church?

12. Along these lines, what authority do elders have and not have according to the Word of God?[1]

13. What are some practical ways that elders can fulfill their biblical responsibilities as outlined in this passage? What are some ways that they might neglect those responsibilities?

14. What are some of the practical implications of these things for us at WPBC today?

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[1] See Pastor Tony's article entitled "How to Submit to Your Pastor" at www.bit.ly/elders-authority.