

Church's Growing Pains

Acts 6:1-7

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We've been away from Acts for several weeks, so I need to catch you up on what is happening. We found in Acts 5 that the Church has finally come under persecution, and it says at the end of Acts 5 (I want you to back up into Acts 5:41), "And they departed from the presence of the council," that is, the apostles. It involved Peter, James, and John, who had been preaching, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they," notice this, "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." They were being persecuted but continued to do what God had called them to do, teach and preach Jesus Christ. That's what we as a church need to be about. We need to continue to preach and teach Jesus Christ even though there may be opposition and we may face persecution.

Now, as we go into Acts 6, it starts in verse 1, "And in those days," which is why I wanted to read the end of chapter 5. What days? The days of persecution and the days of continued preaching. "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." There's a lot that needs to be said and explained about this text and the setting; and I want to do that, but it's interesting that in the book of Acts, Luke makes mention several times about the numerical growth of the Church. It starts in Acts 2, when they have 120 in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, then Peter stands up and begins to preach. The Bible tells us then, Luke records, that three thousand souls were saved—Peter's first sermon on Pentecost—so we have 3,120. Then, we have the reference to that number grew and increased; and there's a second reference to number, and that number is that the Church now grew to 5,000. In only a matter of months the Church went from 120 to 5,000. Isn't it amazing when God is moving by His Spirit how as Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." They saw rapid growth. They saw amazing growth at the beginning of the Church age.

In Acts 6:1, "And in those days, when the number of the disciples," and by the way, this is the first time that term "disciples" appears in the book of Acts referring to the Christians. It's used in the gospels. The disciples became apostles as Christ sent them out, disciple meaning learner and apostle meaning one who is sent out; but now Luke uses that term to describe the Christians. They were the disciples, and they were multiplied. Here we have an interesting reference to God's mathematics or God's growth in adding to the Church. It's interesting that you find the phrase, "the Lord added to the church." In Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira sinned, He subtracted from the Church. Now, He's multiplying the Church and we find that the murmuring comes into the Church. Then, there is division in the Church. God's arithmetic—God first adds, God subtracts, He then multiplies; and then satan comes in and tries to divide.

This growing Church is going to face a problem—the problem of division, murmuring, and of

factions. That happens often when a church is growing. Wherever the light shines brightest, it attracts the bugs. Did you ever notice that? Flip the porch light on at night and what happens? The bugs show up. So when there is a church that is preaching the Word and the light is shining, bugs will come; and they do bug you when they come, by the way. There is now going to be division.

It's interesting too that satan attacked them with persecution. Then, satan attacked them with hypocrisy inside the Church, and now satan will attack them by Christians actually arguing and dividing with Christians. The Bible actually says in Proverbs 6 that one of the seven things that God hates is, "he that soweth discord among brethren." That's what is going to happen in Acts 6. There is going to be some discord, some difficulty in the family. Actually, I would title Acts 6, verses 1-7: The Family Difficulty. In verses 8-15, we have a picture of the faithful deacon. We're going to see Stephen, who would be full of the Holy Ghost and power, preach and end up being the first martyr of the Church in Acts 7, which is a transition into the next area or segment of the book of Acts.

We see first the problem—there was murmuring of the disciples. That word "murmur" is an interesting word. From the Greek word, it actually is a word that's written to sound like when you murmur. When you murmur you go, "Murmurmurmurmurmur." It sounds like "murmur." You're murmuring. You're complaining, so they actually invented a word that sounded like what you're doing. They came up with the word "murmur." They were murmuring and complaining, verse 1. They were murmuring.

Now, what groups were doing the murmuring? Those murmuring were the Grecians against the Hebrews. Who are they? Very simply, they were both Jews, but the Grecians were Jews who followed Greek culture. They were what is called Hellenist Jews. They were hellenized, so they were most likely Jews who were born outside of the land of Israel. They were known as Jews of the diaspora or the dispersion. They were scattered like seed, and they adopted Greek culture. They spoke Greek instead of Aramaic. For their Bible, they used what was called the Septuagint. It was written during the intertestamental period, the two Testament periods. It was a Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. They didn't read from the Hebrew Scriptures, they read from the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures known as the Septuagint. They wore Greek clothing. They had Greek culture, but they were Jews. They were called Grecians.

Then there were the Hebrews. Those were Jews who followed Hebrew culture. They read the Old Testament in Hebrew but spoke the Aramaic language, and they basically followed Hebrew culture. They were born, raised, and lived in the land of promise. A lot of commentaries you read on this will mention and call it the land of Palestine. I don't like to use the term "Palestine." The origin of that term comes from the concept of the Philistines who lived there, and there really isn't any such (and anytime I say this...I told myself I wouldn't say this today but I'm going to say it, and somebody gets mad at me) race of Palestinians. There is no Palestinian race of people. There are Arabs who were born and have lived for generations in that land, but the name itself "Palestine" comes from the ancient Philistines who lived in the land and they are

long gone. They were taken over, of course, by the Israelis when they came out of the Exodus in Egypt and took over the land under King David and conquered the city of Jerusalem. Basically, you have these two categories. Culturally, they were completely different but they were both Christian and they were part of the Church.

There is diversity in the Church, and that's a wonderful thing. Even represented here tonight, so many of us come from different backgrounds and different cultures, different social strata, different education, maybe different places around the United States and around the world for that matter, but we're all brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen? The Bible says, in the Church there is neither Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free. There is not...and it mentions the word barbarian or Scythian. Scythians were really bad barbarians. They were like the lowest of the low on the social ladder, but these distinctions don't exist in our relationship to God. They certainly do exist; and when you become a Christian, it doesn't mean that you lose all of your culture. In the Church we're not relating to one another culturally like that, we're relating as brothers and sisters in the family of God and in the body of Christ.

There was an issue going on that these Grecians felt that they were being neglected when the food was being distributed to their widows. Notice the mention of widows in verse 1. The problem revolves around the fact that the early Church supported and took care of widows. Now, that's not a problem. That's a good thing, and that's a blessing. The Bible actually has some very specific instructions for the Church that technically do still apply to us today. If in the Church there is a widow and she is a certain age, she's of a certain character, and she is without any family support or anyone to take care of her or any other means to help her, that we as the Church should actually step in and take care of that person. Now, there's a lot of qualifications that widow has to meet. She's referred to as "a widow indeed," so there are widows and there are widows indeed.

A widow indeed was, as I said, a certain age, she had been married, she's faithful, she prays, she's serving the Lord, and she has no family to support her—no children, no grandchildren—and it's the job and responsibility of the Church to step in. In that culture it was even more important because they didn't have Social Security or government funds. The Church stepped in and took care of them. So, they were doing their job. They were taking care of the widows; but it felt like, it doesn't say in the text, and this is interesting, you sometimes miss this, it doesn't say that this actually happened but, most likely, it was. For sure, at least, the Grecians felt neglected. They expressed their concern to the apostles, and they felt like it was, no doubt, intentional. You know, "You're slighting our widows that are of the Grecian background or Greek culture. You're favoring these Hebrew widows, and our widows are being neglected." There was this murmuring going on.

There's nothing wrong with going to the church leadership when you see a problem, but there is something wrong when you begin to go to the rest of the congregation. You murmur and complain causing division and strife, and you go with an attitude that is critical and fault-finding. You need to be careful that you're not sowing discord among the brethren. You pray and do what you can to relieve the problem; but if need be, you go to the leadership as they did here

and express your concern. This “daily ministration” is where we get our word deacon, derived from this word “ministration” or service. It seems that they were collecting money, buying food, and distributing it to these widows. This is basically church growth growing pains. This is what happens when a church grows (and that’s a good thing), but when a church grows there are sometimes problems. There’s a need for people to work in the Sunday school or to be ushers or to teach classes. There are issues of accommodating people and dealing with issues that happen when a church grows. The Church quite often faces problems when they have these growing pains which are often referred to as good problems, but they are problems none the less.

What happens in verse 2 is the twelve called the multitude of the disciples. The “twelve” is a reference to the apostles, and they called the church together, “...the disciples unto them, and said,” notice what they said. They recognized the need now to organize and to deal with the problem. Rather than saying, “Quit your griping and go away,” they actually did something about it. They called “the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason,” or right, “that we should leave the word of God, and serve,” we get our word “deacon” again from that, “tables. 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. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

Whenever I read that, I rejoice. I rejoice that the apostles have grown and matured to understand the purpose of their ministry and the priority of the church—that the church and its leadership are to be given to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. They weren’t going to leave their priority of prayer and preaching the Word to begin to serve tables. Serving tables is a beautiful thing. It’s a wonderful thing. It needs to be done, and there is nothing wrong with a minister doing that; but it’s so important that the ministry keep the priorities straight. This, again, is another problem that faces the church when it’s growing because you have problems and issues and we need more parking and we need this and we need that and sometimes the leadership will...they’re not praying anymore. They’re not preaching the Word anymore. They’re just running around trying to accommodate the growth or the problems that are happening.

The apostles say to the believers, “It’s not right. It’s not reason. It’s not the right thing to do, that we should leave the Word of God and begin to serve tables.” That word “tables” was used for a table that would be used to count money or also to eat off of, so it’s believed that the job that they were doing was taking in funds and money and then distributing it. It also involved feeding those that were there in the church, so it’s the danger of losing the proper priorities.

One of the problems I see so often in churches today is that the leadership doesn’t understand the purpose or the priorities of the church. What they do is get the cart before the horse. They start thinking that the church exists for itself and just for growth. It’s a wonderful thing to grow, but they forget that they’re there to win the lost and to disciple believers, to equip them for service and to glorify God. You do all that in, by, and through the Word of God. That’s the number one calling of a pastor. I’m going to make some distinctions here between the laity, the

clergy, and between deacons and what would be called elders or pastors by us today.

The apostles say, "We want to keep our priorities. We don't want to leave the word of God and roll up our sleeves and begin to serve tables—quit teaching the Bible, quit having discipleship classes, quit preaching, quit having evangelism—just so that we could make sure that these widows are taken care of." A lot of churches have abandoned the preaching of the Word for a social gospel. They're all about feeding the poor. It's fine to feed the poor, but you can feed and clothe people, but if they die in their sins and go to hell what does it profit you? You can gain the whole world but if you lose your soul it profits you nothing, so we never want to abandon the preaching of the Word for a purely social gospel.

Here's the solution, verse 3. He says, "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." This is a classic passage that Bible students kind of debate over whether or not this is the beginning of the office of what we call deacons. Deacons are those who serve in the church. In the New Testament there are only two offices, that of the deacon and elder. The word "elder" is also sometimes called a bishop, which means an overseer or a pastor; so the words "elder," "bishop," and "pastor" are three terms that are used interchangeably for one position that we call pastor. There's another descriptive term which is the word "shepherd," by the way, which indicates that the pastor is to shepherd the flock of God. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and pastors are undershepherds.

The Church belongs to God. The Church is God's people, God's sheep. Sheep need to be fed, protected, and led, not driven or beat. Jesus didn't say, "Beat my sheep." He said, "Feed my sheep." He didn't say, "Entertain my sheep." He said, "Feed my sheep." Again, the food that you use to feed the sheep is the Word of God. The only way the shepherd can feed the sheep is to give them God's Word, nothing more, nothing less. Paul told Timothy, a young pastor, to preach the Word. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering," or patience, "and doctrine." He told them why he should preach the Word because, "...the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers," or preachers, "having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." I believe that's what we are witnessing in so many circles of the Church today. It's sad that the Word of God is being neglected, the sheep are not being fed, and the Church is anemic because of its lack of good teaching.

In verse 3, we have the selection of seven men. Whether these are officially deacons or not isn't that important. They were going to deacon.; they were going to serve. In the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus you have the qualifications listed for deacons. You can look them up and understand them; but a deacon basically is involved in doing the physical, menial, servant tasks of the church so that the elder or pastor or bishop can be freed to focus on prayer, the Word of God, and the teaching of God's Word. I want you to notice and just a few quick comments on verse 3 about the qualities they were to look for and the character of these that were chosen. First of all, they were to be from among you, verse 3. It's always best for a

church to raise up its own leadership and the leaders know the philosophy and the priorities of that ministry. There are times when there is rapid growth that a church has to go outside to bring people in to do ministry, but the priority of the church is to teach the people the Word of God so that they grow and mature. As they grow and mature, they begin to use and exercise their gifts and callings. God raises up from within the church those who become elders, deacons, pastors and preach the Word. Those who serve are being built up and they're growing up in their relationship with God from among them. It also indicates or conveys the idea that they were to be believers.

A big mistake that some churches make—I don't know how, but they do—they get people involved in ministry that aren't even saved. They're not even born again. Some churches go so far that they get a pastor that's not even born again. You can be in the middle of a Sunday morning service and the guy is up in the pulpit preaching when the rapture happens and nothing happens in the church when the rapture happens. No one goes up. Everybody and the preacher is still there, and they miss out. It's so important. I don't care if you're an usher, a Sunday school teacher, a security guy or gal, a greeter, a seater, worship leader, or watching the children in the nursery, you must be born again. I believe that is so very, very important. If you're going to serve the Lord, you need to know the Lord. That's kind of a, "Duh." How important it is for the leadership to be believers.

Just a little footnote, (again, I'm kind of hesitant to even point it out but it is in the text. I'm opening up a can of worms, but) they were to be men. Your Bibles say it, my Bible says men. It doesn't say, "Wait on tables? Pass out food? Get the women to do that. Women can do that much better than men," and the truth is yes they can. I know by experience. No offense, but sometimes when we do food around here and the guys are in charge of it, I shudder. I go, "Lord, have mercy on us." They just throw the food at people. Women do it right, but I only mention that because I think it's time to, Rise up, O man of God, Be done with lesser things; Give heart and soul and mind and strength, To serve the King of kings! Come on, Guys, let's get going, okay? What a great New Year's resolution.

So often in a church, and it happens here at Revival, that the majority of the work is being done by the women—shame on us, Guys! I believe that God wants men to take leadership in the church, and that should be reflected in the home as well. Men should be leaders in the home; men should be leaders in the church. It doesn't mean women can't serve. No, women can serve, and we need women to serve. It's important for women to serve. Some believe that there is the office of a deaconess, and I don't argue with that. We have a lot of women that are deaconing. They are serving the Lord; but in the New Testament, it is in the masculine. "If a man desire the office of a bishop," or that a deacon be "the husband of one wife," but does that mean women don't serve and can't serve? Absolutely not.

The second qualification was, as I pointed out, that they were men. Thirdly, they were to be reputable, "men of honest report." So, they were believers from among you. They were men, and they were of honest report. What does that mean? It means that they were reputable. You know, if you're serving the Lord in the church, you ought not to be ripping people off in society.

People shouldn't come to church and, if you're a greeter at the front door, say, "Oh, that's that guy that owes me money. That's that guy that didn't pay his bills. That's the guy that I painted his house and he never paid me for it." Especially, that is so true with the pastor. The Bible says he has to be of good reputation. "Oh, yeah! I know that John Miller. He owes me money!" By the way, if you know anyone that I owe money, let me know because I don't want that reputation. I pay my bills, and I treat people fair and right. If you go and interview people that I do business with, I hope they don't say anything bad about me as far as I know. I mean, he has to have a good reputation in the community. He can't have a reputation of, "Oh, that guy ripped me off," or "That guy is this," or "That gal is that." We need to be reputable in our character.

I want you to notice number 4, spiritual. I said that they were believers among you and that they had to have a good reputation, but now they specify when you pick these men out...and by the way, the apostles didn't pick them out, the believers picked them out. They were given the qualifications by the apostles, and it was ratified or approved by the apostles. The congregation actually picked them out, but this is perhaps the most important. Notice verse 3, "...full of the Holy Ghost," King James has "Ghost" because it's old English, but it's the Holy Spirit—full of the Holy Spirit. They are to be spiritual. Do you know it's possible for you to be a believer and not be full of the Holy Spirit? Why would they make this a qualification if it was something all Christians had? If all Christians were spirit-filled, it wouldn't be a qualification. The fact that not all Christians are spirit-filled is why it's put in there. Not only are they to be from among you as believers, but they are to be spirit-filled. What does that mean? It means that they are to be animated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. It means the Holy Spirit is to have control of their thoughts and their attitudes and their actions. When someone was full of something, it meant that they were under its control. When even an unbeliever was full of wrath or anger, it means that it had just taken over them.

When Paul said to the believers in Ephesus in Ephesians 5:18, "...but be filled with the Spirit," he was actually telling them to let the Holy Spirit control, empower, and fill you. It's an ongoing appropriation. A spirit-filled life isn't something that happens to you once in a holy-ghost meeting. It's something that every day, throughout the day, you must yield to the Holy Spirit's control. Moment by moment, day by day, asking the Holy Spirit to take over your thoughts and your attitude and your heart. It's not just one experience. It's a continual appropriation. When in Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, "...be filled with the Spirit," it's a command or an imperative. It's all-inclusive which means it's every one of you, and it's in the passive voice which means let the Holy Spirit fill you—you yield to His control—and it's in the present tense. Continually, ongoingly let the Spirit fill your life. If there's anything we need, and I'm preaching to my own heart right now, if there's anything we need in this church and the Church at large, we need spirit-filled leadership. Amen? We need spirit-filled leaders. We need men and women who are yielded to, empowered by, and filled with the Holy Spirit. We don't want men and women who are carnal or in the flesh; so get these men, full of the Holy Spirit and of honest report.

There's one more qualification, the fifth in verse 3, wisdom. They had to be wise, "whom we may appoint over this business." It's so important to get wise leadership, spiritually wise. The

Bible says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Again, you need men and women who fear God. They need to have wisdom from above. People will often ask me, "How can we pray for you, Pastor John?" This is one specific thing that you can pray, that God gives me wisdom. Not just knowledge but actually wisdom as Solomon prayed for that he might properly govern the people of God. So, they had to have wisdom and be able to take care of this problem that would take care of this issue.

Now, here's the conclusion (verse 4). It says, "But we will give ourselves," we being the apostles, "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." In just these first four verses there are a lot of important lessons. We want to do two things: We want to spend our time in prayer, and we want to spend our time preaching and teaching and studying the Word of God. This is the pastor's priorities, and take note of the fact that prayer comes before the Word. You know me, that I am committed to the Word of God. I'm committed to teaching and preaching the Word of God. There's no compromising that, but it doesn't do any good to preach and to teach the Word if we don't spend time on our knees. I call this the dynamic duo. That's been my expression for years. The dynamic duo in a church: Prayer and God's Word. There is no substitute for those two things in the Church today—prayer and the Word of God. The two are vitally linked together. It's interesting when you read about the armor of God, which we studied on Wednesday night. We're to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is what? The Word of God. What's the very next thing he says? Praying always with all prayer and supplication and watching thereunto. So, it's the Word of God and prayer. Remember when Nehemiah was building the walls? It says, "...we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them," they actually had a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other—they're building and battling. They have a sword and a trowel and they're praying to God. They're laying mortar and brick putting up the walls and fighting with the sword, praying and talking to God. What a picture of ministry that is! It takes wisdom. It takes prayer. It takes the Word of God, but I want you to notice the priorities there—Word of God and prayer.

In Acts 20:32, when Paul was meeting with pastors around the city of Ephesus, they came down to the seacoast there and knelt on the beach. Paul prayed with them, and when he left them he says, "I commend you to...the word of his grace, which is able to build you up." He prayed with them and commended them to God's Word. It's so very important. In the Old Testament, the prophet Samuel, when he came to the end of his ministry and the people asked Samuel to pray for them, Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you." It's so very important. Paul was a man of prayer as well as a man who preached the Word, and Jesus spent so much time in prayer and preaching. These are the priorities of the pastor. The priority of the pastor is not counseling, it's not visitation, it's not potlucks, it's not parties, it's not business meetings; it's prayer and the Word of God. Now, does the pastor do those things? Yes, but if he's doing those things to the neglecting of the Word of God, then he's got his priorities wrong. There are a lot of pastors that aren't preaching the Word because they're doing too much counseling; which, by the way, if more people would come (and you're to be commended) to Wednesday night and submit themselves to the teaching of the Word and got involved in small groups, prayer meetings, and in the church, then they wouldn't be coming to counseling with their problems.

Nine times out of ten, when somebody says, "Well, can I come to talk to you? I've got a real problem." "Uh, do you come to church?" "Well, I try to. I come once in a while." "You want me to take my time to talk to you, but you don't have the time to come and hear the Word of God? You've got the cart before the horse." Now, I'm not saying that we won't take time for you and we won't counsel you; but what I'm saying is, why don't you invest some time? Why don't you put forth some effort? Why don't you come? You say, "I am. I'm here tonight, Pastor Miller." I'm talking to all of those who are at home right now watching on the internet. I run into so many people, "We just stay home and watch online. We're in our pajamas." So, God bless you for watching in your pjs right now, but you should come to church and be invested in the lives of other people. One of the points I'm going to make in conclusion tonight is we need one another. The apostles needed these seven deacons, and the seven deacons needed the apostles. We need one another. We all work together to make the church strong, healthy, and to help the church grow. It's so very important, but a pastor must never, ever, ever, ever compromise the priority of prayer and the Word of God. It's so very important. That's another thing you can pray, that God will help me to make that the continued priority of my life and ministry—studying, preaching, and teaching God's Word.

I want you to notice what happens in verses 5-7. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude," everybody goes, "Man, that's an awesome idea!" "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," and we're going to hear a lot more about Stephen at the end of this section tonight and into chapter 7, and there was also "Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch." What most Bible students point out, and I think it's significant, is that each one of these men who were chosen, (there are seven of them, we don't know why seven but they're just kind of functioning with that Jewish concept of seven) all have Greek names; and Nicolas, at the end of verse 5, is a proselyte of Antioch. That means he was a Gentile. He was a Gentile who proselyted into Judaism. What an awesome thing that the Holy Spirit, when He picks these seven men out to meet the need of the Grecian believers who felt like they were being neglected in the distribution of the food...that's one of the problems of church growth, people begin to feel neglected and they don't have personal attention. The names that are listed here are all Greek names. It's possible, we can't be sure about it, they might have been hellenistic Jews that would actually fit the bill perfectly to minister to their need.

They picked these seven men out, "Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them," why? Just as a sign of unity and their commissioning. There wasn't anything imparted to them, they were already full of the Holy Spirit. They were just giving their blessing to them. "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 have the results. Here we have the byproduct. Here we have the benefit of what happens when the Church keeps its priorities and stays focused on what it's called to do. It doesn't get distracted. It doesn't go away from the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and prayer, then God adds to the Church such as should be saved. "And the Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied...and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." Three things took place: 1) God's Word increased, 2) the number of

disciples was multiplied, and 3) God was beginning to save priests. They became obedient to the faith.

Now, rather than continue in this section, (I was set out to go to the end of chapter 6) we're going to stop here tonight. Let me wrap this up because beginning in verse 8 actually begins the second main division of the book of Acts. Remember in Acts 1 Luke gave the outline of the book of Acts and said, "...and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." We're going to see a transition from the gospel going from Jerusalem to Judaea, Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. When Stephen, one of these men of the seven, begins to preach and eventually is stoned or martyred or put to death, (he's the first Christian to die a martyr's death) fittingly his name, Stephen or Stephanos, means victor's crown—he's the first to wear the crown. Consenting unto his death and part of what was going on was a man by the name of Saul. He was from Tarsus. It's interesting that those who came against Stephen were from a synagogue of Silicia, which is actually where Saul was from. It's possible that Saul was actually there debating with Stephen as well as consenting to his death and watched him being martyred.

I want you to notice here, at the end of verse 7, that "a great company of priests were obedient." This is what would bring the Church into persecution with the Jews of Jerusalem, but the results (this is what is called the summary statement by Luke. In several places throughout the book of Acts he gives us what is called the summary statement), "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied," God is adding and multiplying, "in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." So, God adds, subtracts, and multiplies. Even though Satan came and tried to bring persecution, tried to bring sin into the Church through Ananias and Sapphira, and he also tried to bring in division and strife, the Word of God grew and multiplied. This is what we want. Amen? We don't want to divide. We don't want to fight. We don't want hypocrisy. We want the Word of God to grow and to multiply among us.

There are some dangers in a growing church. The danger of discrimination. People say, "Well, the church is so big that nobody knows me and I'm lost in the shuffle," and "You discriminate against certain people." Sometimes, in our church, and I've always warned congregations against this, we get very comfortable. We have our little...a lot of people have their spot where they sit in the pews. Some of you, that's your spot, and when you come in and somebody is sitting there you almost get freaked out, you know. "Excuse me. You're in my spot." We've actually had people say that. "Excuse me. This is where I sit." We get this us four, no more, shut the door mentality. We're here. We know the church, we know the people, and it's great to see new people come, but, you know, they cause problems. They park in my spot. They take my pew, and we're not open and welcoming to people. Shame on us.

Every member of this congregation should have a passion for new people that come to this church. The service is over, you beeline your friends. Don't do that, look around. If someone looks like they're lonely, new, or doesn't know anybody, go over to them. Reach out to them.

Welcome them. Get to know them. Maybe they need encouragement. Maybe they're not a believer. Maybe you need to share the gospel with them. Maybe just that one point of contact could solidify them in coming and getting grounded and growing in the Word of God. Invite them to go out to prayer with you or fellowship or over to your house, whatever it might be. As the church grows, we need to be careful that we're not neglecting the "widows" so to speak, that we're not showing discrimination between, you know, "It's our church. We've been here a long time. We don't want anyone to rock the boat." We get that mentality and we're not reaching out. We're not welcoming people, and it's a danger.

When a church grows, there's always the danger of professionalism too, that the work of the ministry can only be done by the ordained clergy. You see, the apostles turned over the distribution to the widows to what we would call laymen. They weren't ordained. They weren't professionals. They weren't getting paid. You know, this church could not function if it were only those who were getting paid to do the ministry. One of our goals at Revival Christian Fellowship, is why we have the equip class—The Foundations Class and the equip class—so you can go and be equipped to serve. We need servants. We need people in Sunday school and in the nursery. We need ushers and greeters. We need people to do all kinds of things. People come by the church and clean during the week. We have people doing all kinds of stuff. People who pray, I thank God for those that just pray for the work of the ministry here at Revival. We need people who give and people who serve in other ways. It's important to find out what your gift is and use it for the building up of the body of Christ. We must all work together in seeking to build the Church.

Thirdly, the danger of priorities and purpose. We need to pray that God keeps us, as a church, hungry for His Word and hungry to pray, that we don't ever lose that as a congregation. That's the lifeblood and health of this church—the Word of God and prayer. That's what a church is about. We're not a social club, we're a church. We should come to the church and be able to do and get what you can't get in a social club. I wish we had a fellowship hall where we could have more potlucks and more time to eat together, but that's not our calling—come ye out of the world and eat together—that's not our calling. Our calling is to pray, to go out with God's Word, to share the gospel with other people who need to hear the good news, and to keep praying that God brings people in to be saved, sanctified, and equipped for service. Amen? Let's pray that God keeps us with our priorities of prayer and the Word of God.