

**Spiritual Organization**

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Code: 1720

1972

This morning we come in our study to the sixth chapter of Acts. And the message that I think is important as a basis for understanding proper organization within the church. Somebody once said Christians become very unchristian when they get organized. And I think in great measure that statement can be true. I suppose it has to do with who the Christians are and how well organized they get, but there's been a long running kind of debate about whether the church is to be organized or not and I think it's kind of reached a focus in our current age. There seems to be not only the super church well organized, well staffed and run like a very efficient corporation, but there seems to be the kind of underground operation that we read about today with little home Bible studies and emphasizing the life of the body, etc. etc. and these basically are the two poles to which people go in determining the degree of church organization.

Some would contend that the church should have absolutely no formal organization. It should not own a building, it should not have a piece of property, it should not have anybody who is responsible for any particular functions. Everyone just kind of moves around freely within the body of Christ connected corporately to themselves and to Christ who is the head. And I heard one say that anything that is organized is not of God. Anything that is a system is not of God, which is a little difficult to support. God is so organized that the sun keeps coming up all the time, or however you want to express it. The earth keeps revolving, if you're a scientist. That everything goes on all the time like it ought to. We shoot men up into space and we figure they'll land somewhere in the ocean, and guess what, they do because everything is the way it ought to be. God is extremely well organized.

So organized is God that your body actually operates year after year without you pushing any particular sides or making anything do what it ought to do. You are very well organized. The microcosm, the macrocosm, every dimension of God's world is organized. And so to say that anything that is a system is not of God is to misconstrue the very nature of God, which is the absolute epitome of being organized. Not only that, if you read anything about the Old Testament you'll find out that the Old Testament was ordained by God and it's a system from beginning to end.

On the other hand there are some people who say that the church is totally an organization, that it must be run like a business, that it must develop complex organizational charts with all kinds of boards and committees and sub committees and branches and little boxes of this and that all over

everywhere and some that I've seen need a scientist to decipher. That everybody should have a job description of three or four pages of portfolio of functions and operations that everybody should fit into all of the programs that are prescribed and ordained by the executive committees of that church. That everything should be a detailed structure and then the Holy Spirit should be told to operate within the frames and boxes created by the system. And as you can see that's just as bad as the other extreme.

To create an organization and then tell the Holy Spirit what to do is just as foolish as to tell the Holy Spirit what to do and not give Him any structure to help Him to do it through people in a smooth functioning way. Now both extremes are wrong. I believe the New Testament church is an organism. Don't have a question about that. You know I believe that. And I believe that the life of the body is its connection to Christ and its organic unity to itself. I believe that. But I also believe that the church has to be organized. I also believe that we must be here at 8:30 and 10:10 or we're not going to be able to function rightly within the framework of the body because this is the time we get taught, you see. There are certain things that must occur organizationally.

So both extremes are wrong. To say that the church is only an organism and cannot be organized is wrong. To say that the church is strictly an organization and shouldn't be a functioning flowing kind of living thing is wrong. And both extremes get into great trouble.

Now the early church was an organism but it was an organized organism. All organisms that do what they ought to do are organized. To be organized simply means that something functions in an ordered sequence, and the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians said this: "Let all things be done decently and," what, "and in order." It's obvious that we can't do everything at the whim of everybody that wants to do it. There's got to be an organization within the organism. It's a good thing your body functions in that way. It's a good thing that the organism is organized.

Now the early church as we come in Chapter six needs to get a little bit better organized. They are a functioning organism. Man they are the most functioning organism that history has ever seen. They are one body absolutely devastating the world. Their effect is unbelievable. They have had a colossal effect upon the Jewish community in Jerusalem. They have astounded people with the miracles and the wonders and the signs that have been going on. Multitudes have been coming to Jesus Christ. Fantastic love exists. The community of believers is sharing in all things. And there's a beautiful kind of relationship is everywhere. It's a beautifully functioning organism. But you know what? The Spirit of God knows that it needs to get organized and the crisis comes in Chapter six and we find the beginnings of the organization of the church here.

Now let me give you a little idea here to start off with that will be kind of a pervading thought and I want you to get it. Biblical church organization always accommodates ministries that the Spirit has already begun. Now if we follow this through the Scripture we find this. Biblical church organization accommodates what the Spirit is doing. Biblical church organization doesn't say let's organize this

and now Holy Spirit that's what we've developed You go do it. That's making the Spirit of God fit your box and your mold and that isn't the way it is in Scripture. In Scripture the flow of the church takes place. The church begins to live and breathe and move and develop ministries and then the church moves in and puts a frame around it so that it can function smoothly.

But all biblical church organization appears to be accommodating what the Spirit of God is already doing. And we believe that here at Grace Church, don't we? We believe that it's not up to us to stand up here and organize all kinds of things and push everybody into it, but rather to see what it is the saints are doing and then to put a frame around it to help them do it effectively.

Now the early church had begun to evangelize and they were really moving in evangelism. Exciting things were happening, but they came to a point where they needed to get a little bit better structure in order to make their evangelism more effective.

Now in our church we've been teaching on evangelism and some of you have become excited and many of you have come to me or to one of our other pastors and you've said, "You know this emphasis on evangelism has really gotten me excited boy. When are we going to get going on this thing?" Well, we've been preaching it and now we've got a couple dozen people who are ringing the phone saying, "When are we going to get this thing going?" And so now what we're doing is praying and asking God to show us what kind of frame to put around that which the Spirit of God has already set in motion. That's biblical church organization. It's accommodating the Spirit of God in a smooth flowing kind of structure so that what people want to do in the energy of the Spirit can be done smoothly and to the best benefit. That's what I see as the correct organization.

Now keep that in your mind. That in itself is a great principle and you ought not to forget it. The church must accommodate what the Spirit is doing, not make the Spirit accommodate what the committee decided ought to be done.

Now this early church, we can see this pattern in the early church because they have begun to get organized. Little by little they weren't just a freewheeling crew roaming around doing nothing and nobody had any responsibility and nothing in terms of organization. Let me show you why I know they were beginning to get organized. First of all a couple of times it tells us how many believers there were. Three thousand and five thousand, which meant somebody was taking count. Somebody must have been responsible to know who was in the believer's fellowship in order that they might know their membership and meet the needs of their membership. That was important.

It is also important that they had certain places and certain times to meet together for public worship, prayer, and the study of the Word. And apparently they had such times and somebody was setting those times and somebody was having a place where they all came together. All of that was basic organization. A person said to me one time, "You have a church and you have all those buildings.

Why do you have all those buildings? It's a terrible waste of money, all those buildings." Well I said, "The Lord keeps sending us these people and we just keep putting walls around them. And we have all these chairs because people when they sit down they're much more able to listen." He said, "Why do you have all that carpet?" Well because it's cheaper than having linoleum because if you have linoleum you have to pick up the chairs and wax the floor.

You see there's some simple things. Somebody said, "Boy, churches spend millions of dollars." Well this building as you see it now seats about 1,200 people, cost about \$170,000. That's about as cheaply as it can possibly be done. Four walls and that's about it, but we accommodate what we feel God is doing. And I feel this is what church organization, church structure is all about.

Now this early church began to accommodate the Spirit of God. They met the first day of every week. It says in Act 2, they broke bread from house to house. They must have had some organized way of going around to the various houses and the people were telling where they were going to be at what time. Money and goods were being collected and distributed. Things were held in common. Everybody's need was being met. Somebody was organizing this whole thing.

So little by little as the Spirit of God began to flow through the life of the body, the body accommodated what the Spirit of God was doing by framing it within some structures. Now that's biblical church organization and you see that way you're never imposing on the Spirit of God. That's why I don't believe for a minute that my job is to develop programs, invent all kinds of schemes and then go find people to do them. My commitment is to just keep teaching the Word and when a bunch of people want to do something, give them a frame to do it in.

All right so it's obvious then that the church had begun to get organized. Now organization is never an end in itself. When you can't come and say, "Well we've got our program boy we're rolling." That isn't, your program isn't the issue.

Now the early organization was pretty simple. The apostles taught, the apostles ruled and everybody else carried out what they said. But the church began to grow and grow and grow and grow and grow and they began to face some real problems organizationally. And we come to the first organizational crisis in Chapter six of Acts. And necessity again becomes the mother of invention. Now this is important. The church always added to its organization only as its life and growth demanded it, only to frame the ministries going on, and watch this, to eliminate problems existing. And I think that's what organization is all about. If you've got a problem maybe you need to organize to eliminate the problem.

Some people said about a year ago here that we had, that our whole adult area was kind of a problem, so we moved in and tried to set up a structure that would meet the problem, to organize what God wanted to do in that area. And as I say the recent evangelistic emphasis in the book of Acts

has gotten people excited is giving birth right now in my mind and in the mind of the other pastors to a structure that's going to be exciting and we'll be sharing it with you pretty soon. But it's already begun to be developed by the Spirit of God as people are getting excited about sharing Christ and saying how do I do it. Show me which way to do, to go, what's the pattern? And we would not impose some dreamed up structure on the body unless we sensed that the body is moving in that way under the energy of the Spirit.

Now necessity then prevails and organization results. Let's look at this text, verses 1 through 7 as the Spirit gives us time this morning, considering four things that appear here in the first spiritual organizational meeting. First of all, the reason, and that is the basis, which they needed to get organized. What was the reason for organization?

Secondly, the requirements. If you've got an organization all that means is that you have certain people doing certain things. And what were the requirements for the people? That's the next thing.

The third thing is the roster. Who were the people chosen? Fourthly, the results. What happens when the church begins to get organized to accommodate the Spirit? Does it help? We'll see those four things.

First of all let's look at the reason. Why did they need to get organized? Why couldn't they just flow like they'd been flowing? Well watch, verse one and you'll see several aspects.

"And in those days when the number of disciples was multiplied." Stop there. Now there's your first problem. You've got too many people for the apostles to handle all the work. You say how many? Well I don't really know, but I would venture a conservative guess at 30,000 at least, between 20 and 30 thousand. Now that's a large congregation. I wouldn't begin to try to unload on you the administrative problems and responsibilities of just 2,000 like this.

But you can imagine trying to handle a congregation that large, not only when you were handling their spiritual needs, but disseminating all their physical needs and caring for the poor and the widows and everybody else. Talk about a monstrosity. And here were the twelve apostles stuck with most of that. It was large. It was terrifically large. It had grown so fast and you know one of the problems with fast growth, as we have discovered, is that you never get time to adjust to anything. You wake up one morning and you've got all of this huge thing and you haven't been able to grow with it, you know?

And here they are a couple of months old with 20,000 - 30,000 people and they haven't adjusted to the growth at all and now they're faced slam bang against a fantastic problem. Too many people in the church and what makes the problem worse is they're not done yet. They're going to add them as fast as they can add them.

And just handling the care of the believers is a great problem, making sure that the poor people get the food they need, and making sure somebody's collecting all that, which is placed in the hands of those apostles and distributed, making sure that somebody provides elements for the Lord's table, and somebody figures out how many people are going to be there so nobody comes and there are not elements enough for them, making sure that the baptism is cared for, the details of having towels to dry the people off, and making sure the ponds got water in 'em, or whatever is going on they had to organize it.

And so many people! They had to be sure that when a meeting was going on over here the people knew about it and somebody was responsible to be the teacher at that meeting. And if they were having a street meeting or if they were going to be preaching down at the courtyard of the temple who was going to be doing the preaching and who was going to be there to do the follow up? They had all of that to take care of.

And you can imagine that the apostles, all twelve of them, were running around like chickens with their heads cut off trying to keep this thing together. In addition to that, which makes it all the more exciting was, they had accomplished number one of the four-fold goal that Christ had given them when He said, "You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the world." They had already filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, right, Chapter 5:28? They had already done that. They were ready to move out now to Judea, Samaria, and the world. They were on the threshold of Gentile evangelism.

Now in order to get that thing going they had to get some kind of organization, some kind of structure as a basis from which they could move out. And their evangelism had already been going. They're such a picture of our church, it's unbelievable to me. Our church all along many of you have been reproducing and many of you are new Christians and been won to Christ by other friends and we've been doing evangelism and moving along and all of a sudden we're right now on the threshold, I believe, of a great evangelism explosion. We're saying now that before we can really do that we need to frame some things so that we can really begin to function in smooth fashion and accomplish what God would have us to accomplish in an orderly way.

But they were on the verge of such an evangelistic explosion, in fact Chapter six introduces Stephen to us. Stephen appears in the next chapter and following on Stephen's heels is Paul and Paul began evangelization of the Gentiles. So we're right on the threshold of that whole movement. And before the church can really be effective in the world it's got to make sure that it's handling itself properly. And I've said this to you many times and continue to say it and will continue to say it, the church that is effective in evangelism is the church that is one, that is united. And this is what they had to deal with. So the very fact of their size and the fact that they were on the threshold of Gentile evangelism, I think was very important in the forming of this basic structure.

And it's also interesting, I think, that as soon as you get on the threshold of something big Satan begins to work. Believe me, this is so. I'm not telling you that out of a textbook. I'm telling you that out of every day experience in my life. As soon as you begin to do something for God Satan moves in to mess up.

Now Satan approaches the church from one of three ways, two of three ways, or all three ways. Let me give you the three tactics Satan uses. They're general but they're the same. They've been the same ever since the early church. Number one persecution. Satan uses the attack against the church of persecuting the saints. You know whether it's the emotional persecution of being ostracized from your society, or whether you're looked down on as some kind of a religious nut, or whatever it is, the mental and emotional persecution or even physical abuse, Satan attempts to get the Christians to lose their nerve, you see, in the world and chicken out of the battle. And so much of the ministry is spent trying to get the saints excited and committed and bold and get 'em back out in the world with nerve enough to communicate Christ. And brother that battle never ends. You've always got some saints lingering in the shadows who never get into the battle. You've always got a whole gob of them sitting on the bench. You know the traveling squad, but none of them ever play. And you're always trying to pump those Christians into the system so that they get going. Get in with this deal. We're reaching the world. Get going and they're sort of out there and every time a little resistance they crawl in a little hole. So Satan uses that. We tried that in the early church and it didn't work. He persecuted the early church and the message flew faster and gave God the opportunity to do more miracles to more abundantly prove that Jesus was Messiah, and every time he persecuted the church God overruled it and the church grew faster.

So then he has a second approach. The second approach was sin in the body. If he can get some individuals within the body to begin to sin then he can pollute the body. And he tried that with Ananias and Sapphira and God moved in and just killed Ananias and Sapphira dead on the spot right in front of the whole church. And you know what that did to the church? It purified the church just that fast. And Christians began to say to themselves, "Listen people, we'd better make sure our lives are right. You know what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Don't mess around." And not only did it purify the existing church, but it made sure that those who were added to the church were pure because nobody wanted to join a church like that unless they really were sincere, 'cause the word was out. You get into that deal as a hypocrite and you're liable to die. So Satan attempted to use sin in the body but it failed too. God dealt with the sin and the result was the church got purified and the gospel went faster yet. The purer the church the faster the gospel.

Satan has a third tactic. This is the tactic that he uses here in Chapter six to precipitate really a negative effect upon the church and bring about a loss of power and that is dissension in the body. Dissension. Get the church so busy fighting within it itself that its message is lost in hypocrisy and its energy is dissipated in internal struggle. How many churches have you known that are just sitting

around fighting each other? That's going on all over the place. Bickering back and forth, little petty pride issues, discontent, gossip, power struggles, all kinds of piddley little stuff, to split the thing all up so everybody's energy is sapped in just trying to keep the thing together, let alone every fulfill the commission of the Lord.

Listen, before really effective evangelism can begin the dissention has got to get out. And here in the beginning in Chapter six there's a potential dissention that Satan wants to create. And this thing has to be dealt with. And this is what really precipitates the spiritual organization that takes place here.

Now may I hasten to say that Satan still uses the same three things. Nothing is ever different. He's always got the same, it's amazing how we know what he's going to do and yet we let him do it, isn't it? I used to think to myself if the other football team only had three plays I don't think they could be too effective. You could know what they're going to do every time and just stack your defense against it. Yet we know what Satan's going to do every time and we let him do it. We know exactly what he wants to do and we let him do it. Satan's trying to wipe the testimony of the church out by shutting up the saints by making them afraid. And what do we do? We get afraid and we shut up.

Satan's trying to mess the church up by sin in the life of the believer. What do we do? We sin. Satan's trying to create dissention. What do we do? We get into little hassles, little bickerings and little dissentions. We do like this and we don't like that and so forth and so on. This group is against this group and so and this person is against that person. You know what he's going to do and we let him do it anyway. I can say honestly that never, since I've been here at this church, there has been a time when we haven't been fighting one, two, or all three of those things, all the time. It never ends. You just claim victory and the next morning you wake up and it's battle all over again.

You say does it get discouraging? Of course it gets discouraging. It's endlessly repetitious. But let me tell you something else, it's also fun. You say, "What do you mean it's fun?" The only time you win a victory is when you're in a battle. And so the struggle is good because you see God is vindicated. And what are we trying to do always in the church, always in the church trying to get the persecuted saints who have lost their nerve to get on the stick, trying to get the sinning Christians who are polluting the fellowship shaped up, and trying to get those who may be divisive threatening to split the church to get together and love each other. It's constant, absolutely constant. And that's the third thing is what pops up here.

Now let's look at verse one. "And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring." Ah here it is, dissention. Murmur, murmur, which is being translated as somebody was griping. Now this is a problem. Somebody's griping. What are they griping about? Well listen to this: "The murmuring of the Grecians." The Greek Jews.



Now there were two kinds of Jews in the church. The church is made up all of Jews here because they hadn't moved out to the Gentiles yet. That doesn't come until Paul. So it's all Jews, but they're not just one kind of Jew, there are two kind of Jews. There were the native born Palestine Jews, the Hebrews as the word is here, and there were Grecian Jews or the Hellenist Jews. They were Jews who lived outside. They lived in Asia Minor, North Africa and all those areas. They had moved out, some of them three, four generations from living in Palestine, but they had maintained Jewish heritage and always came back to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost and everything. Many of them were saved at Peter's preaching, right? So the church is made up of Jews from Israel and Jews from outside the land. Now it was only natural that there would be an immediate kind of break there because the Jews from outside spoke Greek; the Jews from Israel spoke Aramaic.

So they spoke two different languages; therefore, they would tend to group into the language groups where they could communicate. Not only that, the native Jews looked down somewhat on the Grecian Jews in a little bit of a snobbishness because they felt they had probably been polluted by alien culture and they weren't true Jews, loyal to the land.

And so, there was this little friction here. So the Grecian Jews have a complaint. The murmuring, "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." You say, "Oh petty, petty, petty. Somebody's mother-in-law didn't get her goodies." That's what it all boiled down to. I mean why would they ever let something like that, listen it's always those little things that mess up. It's always somebody's little thing that's blown into a huge thing and so what was happening was the Grecian Jews thought that in the dispensing and the money to the widows the Grecian Jew widows were coming out on the short end of the stick.

Now they were in the minority number wise, so maybe there was a tendency on the part of the native Jews to overlook that responsibility somewhat, and especially since they perhaps tended to divide themselves a little bit. But anyway the complaint came up. Now you see the care of widows was always a part of Jewish custom as was all the care of the poor. In fact, in the synagogue there was a routine kind of procedure. There were officials known as receivers of alms or people who took donations. There were two of those collectors set out every Friday morning and they mingled through the marketplace and they went from house to house and they collected an offering. That offering later in the day, during the early afternoon on Friday, was passed out to the poor and the widows. If somebody was in temporary poverty they received enough to tide them over, if somebody was a permanent case they received enough for 14 meals, which meant two meals a day for seven days. Next Friday they'd come back again.

So this was a common custom for the Jews to care for the poor, the needy and the widows. This is specifically defined by the apostle Paul in I Timothy 5, as a responsibility of the church. I believe the church's responsibility is to meet the needs of the widows of believers. I believe, as a church, we have the responsibility to meet the need of any of you who are widows who find yourself in a position

where you are not able to have that which you need to live. I believe it is our wonderful privilege to meet that need for you and I trust and pray God that You'll bring that need to our attention if so be the need.

These widows should have been getting what the Lord really designed the church to provide but for some reason they were not getting it, and so griping began. Well already with that kind of natural dichotomy existing this griping could have really driven a wedge between these two groups and if the church gets split it gets ineffective, right? Can't you imagine if that early church had had a rift like that what kind of blackness that would have splattered all over the face of Christianity? And so the griping began and, of course, like anything it sooner or later got to the apostles. Just like when the children of Israel in the wilderness wanted to gripe they griped to Moses and Aaron, so the people griped to the apostles. But that's good. If you have a complaint you want to go to the people that can do something about it. You don't want to talk to everybody else about it.

So they went to the apostles. Well the apostles wanted to meet this grievance so let's take it a step further and see further reason why they needed to get organized. Incidentally the second factor in this is some of the people weren't getting their needs met. The thing was too big, the apostles were overlooking certain Grecian widows; they don't deny this. Apparently this actually was happening. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, 'It is not fitting that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables.'"

Now the first thing they say is look okay guys we recognize the problem, but we can't handle it. We can't run around making sure everybody gets everything. It's too big. It's too much for us if we do that then we must leave the Word of God. Now watch that one. We must leave the Word of God and we don't want to do that. They knew what their calling was; their calling was to the word and the preaching of the Word and they didn't want to leave that. "We will not leave that to serve tables." The word tables here refers to, it's used to refer to meals, it's also the word used in Matthew 21:12 to refer to the table of the moneychangers.

So it's very broad, whether it's talking about serving dinner, serving the Lord's table, I shouldn't say the Lord's table because they probably did involve themselves in communion, but whether to serve the table of believers when they were coming together to eat, or whether to serve money and to dole out that which needed to be doled out for necessity to those people who were in need, or whether it was collecting funds, all of that business of food and money and all the detail work was too much for them.

Now I may hasten to say there's nothing wrong with doing that. All that is good. It's good to serve tables. It's wonderful to dish out the money and the food, whatever it is. It's wonderful to care for the business, the transactions that must be taken care of within the fellowship of the church. It's wonderful, but if God has called these men to the ministry of the Word then that must take priority.

Now the work of the service had grown to such proportions that the twelve in order to do it had to leave the Word of God. There needed to be somebody else who could look over that work and get the people mobilized to carry it out. Now this is the real crisis. Now that statement that sticks out in that verse to me is "It is not fitting that we should leave the Word of God." I'll tell you I would hate even to think of how many men, who in the ministry today, have done just that. They are busy, busy, busy doing everything but what God has given them as the priority, and that is the ministry of the Word of God.

Now this is a real crisis. It's so easy for pastors and teachers and missionaries and evangelists to become involved in ministering to widows and serving tables and all these other things that they leave the Word and congregations languish in spiritual infancy year after year, after year, after year. They never get anything. The fellows are wonderful people. Maybe in many cases they've been pushed into those things by a congregation that expects the wrong things and not the right things. And I'm not trying to shirk my responsibility. I want to do my responsibility before God. Those apostles knew what they'd been given to another church for, and that was the teaching of the Word of God and they were starting to have to turn that over or just leave it undone because of time and other necessity.

So the apostles had a problem. Their great calling was to teach and to preach and to study and they were losing time in that because of these other tasks. So they give a statement of their priorities.

Now look at verse four and this continues the reason. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word." In other words, we can't be doing this. We must concentrate on the duality of our ministry, prayer and preaching, prayer and preaching. They're saying in effect, you serve tables; we'll serve the Word. The same word in the Greek, diakonia, serve tables and minister the word. Serve and minister are both the same word. We'll serve the Word; you serve the tables. And that's the way it is, isn't it? Remember in Ephesians Chapter 4, the apostle Paul says that the Lord has given to the church apostles, prophets, teaching pastors, and evangelists to do, what, perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry. We'll bring you to maturity; you do the work of the ministry. That's the point.

And so they were determined not to let any service take precedence over the ministry of the Word and prayer. This is the priority. This is the primary task of the church to teach the Word of God and I mean to teach it as it ought to be taught, not platitudes about the Bible, not stories about spiritual truth, but to unfold the text. That's the obligation and to preach the gospel, prayer and teaching.

But you know preaching without prayer is shallow and dry. Preaching must involve constant prayer for those to whom you preach, and that God would make of us the right vessel. You know the great joys that we have, although we cannot, I cannot at least, be about all the time visiting people and so forth and so on, in order that I might spend my time in the Word and study and preaching, but I do have the

great joy of being able to pray. And every week I have a list that we put together on Wednesday with all of our pastors as we meet for prayer and we share all of the various needs that come from all the congregation. And we pray very specifically about many of you, most of you and your particular needs as they arise. And this is a joy. We pray through the week and we come back on Wednesday and share how God has answered and start a new list. This is prayer and this bathes that preaching in a very personal relationship, you see. And it's an exciting thing. And our elders all meet together Sunday morning before any of you are here and we spend that time in prayer for you as well.

And so the ministry must be prayer, but it must be prayer and preaching. This is our priority. I feel so strongly that the Bible teaches that the man of God called to shepherd the flock must give himself wholly to prayer and preaching. He cannot forsake the Word to do other things.

Now these early men set the pattern. And I want to show you how this thing demands total commitment. Look at verse 4. It says, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." Now notice the word continually. Never letting up. There's no substitute for this. Now notice just that first phrase, we will give ourselves. Do you know the kind of ministry that I'm talking about in the Word demands everything you are? It demands saturation. It's to wake up in the morning and begin in the Word of God and go through the whole day just saturating yourself in the Word of God so that when you stand up you're saying, "Thus saith the Lord," and you're saying it legitimately. It's a total commitment.

One time a great Bible teacher taught and a young man came and said, "I'd give the world if I could teach the Bible like you do." And the man looked him in the eye and said, "Yes, and that's exactly what it will cost you. It's a total commitment."

The apostle Paul knew something about that kind of commitment. He gave himself to the Word absolutely and incessantly. He never let up. In Acts 20:17, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, 'Ye know that from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many trials and tears, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.'" Do you know that at the end of the book it says that when he was in Rome he taught the Bible from morning to night every day for two years? You say, "When did he do visitation?" In the first place he was chained to a Roman soldier. Visitation came to him. And yet there was never a more personal warm heart than the apostle Paul. He loved people. He said to Timothy, "Come to me Timothy."

And then later on in the same book he said, "Could you come before winter I need you. Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." He had a personal relationship with people. He had a ministry on a personal basis, but his commitment to the life of the church was the teaching of the

Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God, and he had to give himself to that. It's a total commitment. There's no other way to do it. You can't do it unless you commit yourself entirely to it. It can't be done. There's no way it can be done.

In looking at the ministry today I don't think we can see it any differently, frankly. I think that the apostles have set the pattern and I think we must be obedient. And you know it's not an easy thing. It's a commitment. It's diligent, difficult study, and sometimes there are many other things you'd rather do than to just study and teach and preach. You know I've often thought to myself, "MacArthur, you probably preach too much. You're always talking somewhere. You're always going somewhere to talk, or teach, or preach and you're always studying the Bible. Why don't you rest?"

You know I feel like Paul, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." It's a compelling thing. If I could get off the hook I would. My depravity tells me that constantly. We who have the responsibility of teaching find that if we ever yield ourselves to it it becomes a consuming thing. I'll tell you very honestly there are many days when I don't even want to go out of the house. And I say, "Oh, I don't know if my mind can take another day of study. I don't know if I can dare go there. I'm so tired of preaching I'm sick of hearing myself talk and I'm tired of it all." And yet there's something in you that sends you and you go and you preach or you teach and God blesses and you're off and running again.

But we're just human enough to recognize the fact that this kind of diligence and this kind of commitment involves a lot of pain and a lot of self discipline, and sometimes you don't always do it in the right frame of heart and God has to chastise you a little bit by showing me His wonderful grace as He uses you again even against your own abilities and your own will very often.

And so it's a total commitment. We will give ourselves continually. You can't do anything but that if you're going to do it right. Apostle Paul told Timothy, "Timothy, here's how your ministry ought to go." Boy is it simple. Chapter 4:11, "These things command and teach." You command and you teach, Timothy, that's your ministry. Verse 13, "Till I come give attendance to three things, reading, exhortation, and doctrine." Now that's how to preach. You want to know how to preach? That's how to preach. Reading, read the text. Doctrine, explain the text. Exhortation, apply the text. That's expository preaching. Read the text, explain the text, apply the text. And he says to him, "Neglect not the gift that is in me." That's his gift. His gift was as a teacher, a preacher. Don't neglect it. 15, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself w-h-o-l-l-y completely to them." That's your whole thing. "Take heed unto two things, Timothy, yourself and teaching." Make sure your life is right and then teach, because if you don't teach out of a pure life you haven't got anything to say. You haven't anything to say.

Verse 12, "Let no man despise thy youth, but be an example of the believer in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith and purity." And that's your teaching with your life. And so he simply says later on in II

Timothy, he says, "Timothy do this: preach," what? "The Word." Now that's a total commitment. In fact, the Bible says that a minister of the Word of God is to not have to be encumbered by earning a living apart from that.

In I Corinthians, and I just share this with you because I think it's important. In I Corinthians 9, and some other time we'll study this in detail, but in I Corinthians 9:14 it says this: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Now that does not mean that our life ought to match our message. That's not the context. The context here is making sure that you pay the preacher. Now watch this, verse 11, you say, "Oh MacArthur, you're blowing your own horn there." Verse 11, just a minute; give me a chance here. I'm only teaching the Scripture at this point. I'll apply it in a minute. "If we have sown unto you spiritual things is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" Why it's only the natural thing. If we teach you the word of God then you should care for our physical needs. And that's what he's saying. Pay the preacher. Don't muzzle the ox while he treads.

Galatians 6:6, he takes it a step further and he says, "He that has taught should share all good things with him that teacheth him." You see the Bible recognizes the total commitment. Now please understand, I do not want a raise. I absolutely would refuse it if you gave it to me. I am so over paid now it's ridiculous. God provides way more than I could ever use so we have the opportunity of giving it to Him and seeing it used other places. God is so good and you people are so gracious and so loving and so well take care of this ox that I ask nothing, I ask nothing and I want nothing and would refuse it if it were offered. You have been so gracious so I'm only saying this kind of ministry is such a total commitment that the man should never be encumbered with having to earn his own living. That shows how greatly he is to saturate himself in the preoccupation of study and preaching. And if people say to me, "Why do you preach so much?" I say to them, "I can't help it. That's what God has called me to do. I can't stop myself whoa is unto me if I preach not the gospel."

I endeavor to find a balance between ministering to your needs and loving you and sharing with you and also in hearing the call of God to go elsewhere from time to time and teach and preach, and I have to find in my own life how I feel the Spirit of God leads me and shows me what obligations I should fulfill. So I ask that you would even pray for me that God might give me wisdom in knowing how to balance this out with the time I meet with you and with my own family.

So it's a total commitment. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Alright to summarize this first point, simply this. The church was very large. There were a basis of a natural friction between the two kinds of Jews. The ministry was so detailed the apostles needed to teach and preach and therefore, they needed to get organized. Somebody had to take over this responsibility.

Now very quickly and we're going to take the next three points in five minutes. But I think we've emphasized what we wanted to emphasize anyway. The Lord knows. What are the requirements? If you're going to have men take over some of these ministries what are their requirements? Now here are the basic requirements for church ministry. Verse 3, "Wherefore brethren because we have this need, look among you," that means select, "seven men." Now watch. Here are five requirements for leaders in the church. Number one, men. They are to be men.

Now nothing against women. Women are wonderful. In the body of Christ there's neither male nor female. Been some wonderful women throughout history. There were some wonderful women in the early church, Dorcus, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla. God has used women. God still uses them. Titus 2:3-5 says that women are to be instructing the younger women, teaching them how to stay home, not gossip, and love their husbands, be chaste and all that. They have a great responsibility. Tremendous. And God knows they are so much the warmth and the depth of the church in many ways. But in terms of God's basic instruction that man is in authority and woman is in submission the leadership of the church belongs to men.

Requirement number one, men. Two, that they be from among you. Isn't it wonderful that God expects the church to find its own leadership from within its own ranks. And this is what I believe has become such a wonderful part of Grace Church, the fact that the leadership of Grace Church has come from Grace Church. I so many times see men so frustrated looking around to find leadership from other churches and taking pastors and assistants and finding people when all they need to do is look within them and see what they have there as God is maturing saints and raising them up to be used within the church, among you. I think the leadership of the church comes from within the church. It goes without saying that they be believers, right?

Third thing they be of honest report. You know what that means? Good reputation, men whose integrity and reputation is blameless. Next, fourthly, spiritual men, full of the Holy Spirit, filled with the Spirit. What does that mean controlled by the Holy Spirit? Whose lives are not their own, but lost in the will of the Spirit. Fifth, that they be wise, full of wisdom. And when you find men like that you appoint them this business. Now you say, "Is this the role of a deacon?" I'm not convinced that these are deacons here. You say, "Oh, I thought these were the first deacons." Well, it doesn't call them deacons. I think this is just the basic organization that the Spirit of God used to accommodate the church at that time.

Later on Paul splits it up and defines three different categories: elders, deacons and deaconesses. But for this point why do we have to call them deacons anymore than elders? Certainly Stephen and Phillip were more than just the function of a deacon, as we know it later on in Paul. They were out preaching. Phillip became an evangelist. Stephen must have been an evangelist. They look more to me like elders than they do deacons and they're not called deacons at all. So let's just say this is how God accommodated that need in the early church by these seven men.

Why were there seven? Because the Mishna said in Jewish towns anybody conducting business would have to have seven men and so there were seven very likely in order that they might conduct the business within the Jewish town. And so the requirements were laid out. This is the kind of leadership the church needs. Oh I thank God for men like this in our church and I pray God He'll raise up more men like that to lead as elders and deacons.

Now let's take it a step further. We've seen the requirements in addition to the reason. Let's look at the roster. Who was chosen? Verse 5, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude." Now that in itself is wonderful, isn't it? The two were beginning to split and here they are back together united again. God has accomplished His purpose. The devil's been defeated. The whole multitude was pleased. Is that good? They're back together. No more split. They got together. Praise God. Whenever Satan tries to divide and God has His way things get back together tighter than they've even been before.

You know something? If this little issue had come up maybe those two groups would have stayed a little bit apart, but they welded back together. And they chose. Look what it says. They chose. I think the church should choose its leadership. I don't think they should be appointed by me or appointed by any leadership. I believe that the church, the people in a democratic way should select from among them those full of the Spirit, wise, of honest report, men who can lead them. I believe that's your responsibility and that's why we always offer to you the opportunity of suggesting to us and sharing with us who you feel who should be deacons and elders and deaconesses and people who serve in the church. This is your responsibility to choose those among you who have given evidence of this kind of life.

And then having chosen them they were presented in verse six before the apostles. But let's back up. Who were they? Stephen, and we'll see more about him, much more, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, what a commendation. Phillip, and we'll see much more about him. And then the next five we've never heard of before and never will again, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch. Nicolas had been proselyted to be a Jew and now became a Christian. I want you to notice something wonderful about the roster. All seven names are Greek. Now watch that thought. All seven are Greek. You know what happened? The church got together and unanimously chose seven Grecian Jews to lead them. You say, what does that prove? That proves the loving unity of the church. If it had been the church today we would say, "All right. Let's have three Palestine Jews, three Grecian Jews, one proselyte. Right? Now we'll have an equal say in that deal." Not them. They said, "Hey, if the Grecian Jews feel like they've been slighted oh God forbid, let's choose deacons and the whole church chose all seven of them from the Grecian Jews.

Can you imagine what Satan thought? Shot down again. What he tried to sow as discord turned out to be beautiful unity. Can't you imagine the love that those Grecian Jews then had for those



Palestinian Jews when they saw that kind of humility and that kind of condescension? When they as much as said they were in the majority they could have voted in whoever they wanted. They voted in all seven of them from the Grecian Jews. Boy that thing just came like that. It was a beautiful little simple organization and then those seven men began to function and to carry out the menial business, the secular business of the church. And you know what? The apostles were freed for the Word.

And so we see the reason, the requirements, and the roster. What are the results? Quickly look at them. Verse 6. They took these men, set them before the apostles, they prayed and laid hands on them. This is their commissioning service. The laying on of hands simply means an identification of the solidarity and oneness of the whole church with them in their ministry. And elders, deacons, and everybody who ever served in the early church was ordained this way. It's a very beautiful ordination. It just simplifies that we're one by laying hands on. They ordained them. The church got organized and you know what happened when the church gets spiritually organized as the Spirit directs it, the results are fantastic.

Verse 7, "The Word of God increased." Why? Number one the apostles had more time. Number two, the church was in love with itself again and it was effective. And as a result of the Word of God increasing look what happened. "The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." More people got saved. They just got saved faster and faster. And not only that, look at this shock, "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Now those aren't the chief priests. Those are the ordinary priests looking for their Messiah. They found Him in Jesus Christ and they had a revival among the priests. Does the church need organization? Listen, my friend, the church needs to accommodate what the Spirit of God is doing by putting enough structure around it to make it effective and that's what they did and look what happened. God blessed. Boy I pray God that we should be what we need to be and let the Spirit do what He wants to do.

Let's pray. Father thank you this morning again for this clear lesson of instruction from your word. We thank you that the early church gives us a pattern. We see what it is that is required of leaders. We know that later on Paul more clearly defines them as deacons and elders and even divides the elders into two kinds, those that are ruling elders and then those that labor in the Word and doctrine. But Father, we see here the accommodation of organization to the work of the Spirit.

God help us to really see this working and functioning here and help us to have the kind of leaders that are from among us full of the Holy Spirit, good reputation, wise in terms of spiritual things that we might begin to care for each other in a kind of loving unity that will indeed make us effective as we stand on the threshold of evangelism in this world. We commit ourselves to You, Lord, for this purpose and to this end that Christ might be lifted up and exalted. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).