

Introduction to Acts, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

44-2

We will after the first of the year actually begin a verse by verse study of the book of Acts. I'm not sure exactly which Sunday marching into January, but we will do that. And we're all looking forward to the adventure of living through the first chapter of church history together. But in preparation for that, last Sunday night and tonight I have been sharing with you an overview of where we're going to go in the Book of Acts. So you can open your Bible to the Book of Acts, somewhere in the early chapters because we'll be touching a few things there. And I want you to get a sense of what is coming and the big picture of this incredible history.

You know, Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church. I will build My church," and He always accomplishes whatever it is that He intends to do. This is consistent with God of whom the prophet Isaiah says, "His purpose is always accomplished." "I will build My church." God's eternal purpose to glorify Himself through redeeming sinners and bringing them into His heavenly presence forever continues after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ministry of building that church continues in that first generation through the apostles and the early believers Christ is the cornerstone of the church, and the apostles provide the foundation stones for the building of God that goes on until the end of the church age. The story of the church begins in the Book of Acts. Acts is the first volume of church history, and it is history, but it is loaded with theology because everything essential to the life and growth of the church was theological. It all had to do with the truth of divine revelation. It all had to do with the truth of the gospel.

So while we say Act is history, we have to rush in to immediately say it is history based on the impact of sound doctrine and theology. Now, the Book of Acts records the story of the church from its explosive beginning on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem all the way to the final chapter, which is the imprisonment at Rome of the greatest missionary in the history of the church, the apostle Paul. So this goes from the Day of Pentecost until the first imprisonment of Paul in Rome. It sweeps over a period of about 30 years, 3 decades. And in that period of time, the church expands from one congregation on the Day of Pentecost of about 120 people to the point at the end of the Book of Acts where not only have there been tens of thousands of believers added to the church, but the church has expanded beyond Jerusalem. The church has gone into the gentile world, into Antioch, and then through the ministry particularly of the apostle Paul, it has gone through the Mediterranean world, moving west. So, by the time we come to the end of the Book of Acts, there are dozens of churches spread across the known world.

Small beginnings and glorious, glorious culmination even by the time you get through the first 30 years of the history of the church. It is an unparalleled explosive growth of the church. In just those few years, the church literally explodes across the Gentile world. It starts out with a small gathering of Jewish believers; ends up with tens of thousands of believers and Gentile churches as The Great

Commission begins to be fulfilled. The process of the Book of Acts follows the promise of the Book of Acts. The promise is in chapter 1, verse 8, “You will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the world.”

And that’s how the Book of Acts goes; the church first with the gospel in Judea and then in Samaria. And then the church expands out of Samaria to the uttermost part of the world. The main person in the Book of Acts is God Himself because it’s the story of God’s redemptive plan unfolding. He continues His salvation, His redemptive saga, saving sinners through the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the apostles and those who accompanied them.

The unanimous testimony, by the way, of the early church is that Luke is the author of the Book of Acts. That is a uniform confession by the early church, that Luke was the writer. That is to say that the earliest church, the closest to the apostolic era, affirmed Luke as the writer, and they would have known. And so down through history, there has been no question about authorship, no legitimate question. Numerous times through the Book of Acts, you will find the collective use of “we”, the collective use of “we” such as in chapter 16, 20, 21, and from 27 into 28. That’s an indication that Luke is present. Luke is a part of Paul’s ministry.

Clearly though, Luke is the writer because if you look at verse 1 of chapter 1, it begins, “The first account I composed Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach.” He doesn’t introduce himself any more than to say, “I am the one who wrote the first account to you, Theophilus.” If you go back to the gospel of Luke and chapter 1 and verse 3, you read, “It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus.”

Both of these volumes, the gospel of Luke and the first volume of church history, called the Book of Acts, were then written by the same writer and written to the same individual. And Luke is unquestionably that writer. It is likely that the Holy Spirit inspires Luke to write the Book of Acts sometime during Paul’s imprisonment. That’s how the Book of Acts ends, and it may have ended there because that’s when Luke wrote it. And so he was writing up to the very moment he was inspired to write.

The Book of Acts then gives us the history of the apostles fulfilling their calling, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the world, preaching the gospel for the building of the church. As we saw last time, these apostles seemed like an unlikely group to be able to affect the world in any dramatic way. They were amazingly weak and vacillating and hard-headed, had seemingly repeated problems understanding what Jesus was trying to tell them. He castigated them on numerous occasions for the weakness of their faith. So if they were going to literally turn the world upside down, as they would, there was going to have to be a pretty dramatic transformation in those men.

By the time you come to the account of our Lord’s death, they are weak and frightened and fearful and scattered and confused, unstable. And when you come to the end of John’s gospel, it appears that a group of them have actually gone back to their former profession and they’re back fishing. Fishing. They seem beleaguered. They seem troubled. They seem inadequate for any monumental task, but as the Book of Acts opens, they are a completely different group of men. Bold, powerful, clear-minded, effective, useful, and so last time we asked the simple question, what happened? Well,

one of the things that happened was the resurrection and that energized them out of the sorrow that they were in when they thought that their hopes had been dashed in the crucifixion.

Yes, the resurrection had a massive impact on them, of course. And we could add the coming of the Holy Spirit empowered them. The resurrection let them know that their Savior was alive, and the Holy Spirit gave them the power to fulfill their responsibility. But as I told you last time, there was one other critical element that shows up early in the Book of Acts that I think made a huge difference in these men, and it is this: they understood for the first time the unfolding plan of redemption from the Old Testament.

Up to this point, you never hear the apostles quoting the Old Testament. Read through the four gospels. They don't seem to have an understanding of the Old Testament and how it applies or how it's fulfilled in Christ. But as soon as you come into the Book of Acts, even before the Day of Pentecost in chapter 1, you find Peter quoting the fulfillment of the Old Testament, even as regards Judas. And then when you come into chapter 2, there's more quoting of the Old Testament. Come into chapter 4, more quoting of the Old Testament. The sermon preached in chapter 7 and 13, Old Testament sermons.

You come into the ministry of the apostle Paul and repeatedly and repeatedly and repeatedly like the apostles before him; he is convincing people that Jesus is the Messiah by using the Old Testament. And when you come to the end of the Book of Acts, that's exactly what the apostle Paul is doing in chapter 28 and verse 23. "They came to him at his lodging. That is, they came to Paul, and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the Kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the prophets from morning until evening." That's how the Book of Acts begins, with an understanding of the Old Testament. That's how it ends, with the proclamation of the truth of the Old Testament.

For the first time, these early apostles and, of course, Paul sees the big picture. They see that God's unfolding plan of redemption continues on schedule. Now, they were aided in their understanding of the Old Testament because Jesus taught them on the Road of Emmaus, just a small group of them. And later that night, according to Luke 24, He taught the rest of them in the upper room in the day of His resurrection from the Old Testament, explaining the meaning of the Old Testament and how it is fulfilled in Him.

And then if you look at chapter 1, verse 3, it tells us that, "He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days. And what did He do? He was speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. He was speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. This would have been instruction in the Scripture, the promises of God to bring and build and advance His Kingdom.

So, by the time they appear on the scene to fulfill their calling in the Book of Acts, they know Christ is alive. The Spirit will empower them, and they have a clear understanding of the Old Testament. They quote with alacrity and seeming almost freedom, Old Testament passages that are fulfilled in Christ and in the events surrounding Christ. So that just kind of helps us to understand how they were so totally transformed. They see the big picture. They see the big picture. They know Christ is alive. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So what do they do? They go out to be witnesses unto Christ, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the church begins to explode. It starts with 120 in chapter 1, and then there are 3,000 that are added to the church in chapter 2. And then there are thousands more that are added in chapter 4, and then there are more and more all the way through the Book of Acts. The church literally explodes as the Lord fulfills His promise to build His church through their faithful preaching of the gospel.

Now, as we approach the Book of Acts then, we want to ask this sort of transcendent question. God used them to build the church, but what were the elements that brought about that end? In other words, they were the human means, but what were the elements? What were the elements that God used them to do that produced this kind of growth? This is the greatest story of church growth in history. This is the original awakening, the original explosion of spiritual life, and by what spiritual means did these human instruments of God bring this about?

Well, I gave you two of them last time. They're very important. And I think for those of you who are here thinking about the future of your young churches, you young men that are going out with Grace Advance, some of you folks that are working with these men. Here is a formula for you. Here is the true Holy Spirit-revealed, divinely-ordained plan for church growth. The first thing we noted last time was they had a transcendent message. They had a transcendent message. Whether they were in Jerusalem or whether they were in Rome or all the stops in between throughout the entire Book of Acts, the message never changed. It never changed.

Paul summed it up. "I'm determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified." "I don't come to you with human wisdom. I don't come to you with superiority of speech," he told the Corinthians. The message never changed. The message was never informed by the culture. It was never altered by the culture. It was never accommodated to the culture. They paid no attention to form, to tradition, to custom, to expectation. They literally stepped in with an alien message calling people essentially to bow their knee to a crucified Jew rejected by His people, crucified by the Romans, but who was God in human flesh, and who provided an atonement for sinners on the cross. A stunning, startling, shocking, basically foolish message to a Gentile world and a stumbling block to the Jews.

The message never changed, whether it was Peter in chapter 2 on the Day of Pentecost, preaching about Jesus of Nazareth who is God's Son, who died for our sins, all the way to the apostle Paul in prison preaching the same message. A transcendent message.

Secondly, we saw they understood the church was a regenerate fellowship, a regenerate congregation. We saw that in chapter 2. I don't need to tell you anything more about it than to point you to verse 42 and following. "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer." Those are things believers do. They were together. They were together all the time, all 3,000 of them. They were all feeling a sense of awe. They had all things in common and they held all their possessions lightly in case somebody else needed them. They were together.

That wonderful statement in verse 44, "Day by day," verse 46, "Continuing with one mind in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, taking their meals together with gladness, sincerity of heart, praising God, having favor with the people." This is the church. They understood that it's a redeemed fellowship. They were committed to things that believers do. They listened to sound doctrine. They engage in spiritual fellowship and communion. They come to the Lord's table where

they break bread, and they're committed to prayer. Those elements were expressions of the life of the regenerate. There was nothing about it that was for spectators. There was nothing about it that was some kind of entertainment. It was all expression of regenerate life. It was designed for worship. It was designed for edification.

But you say, can the church grow that way? The church grew through the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the cross. The church grew through that transcendent message, wherever it went, and the church also grows when the church is the church. You will notice at the end of verse 47, the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. That's how you grow a church. You don't grow a church. The Lord grows a church. You are a church and the Lord adds to the church. The church understood that it gathered to worship. It gathered to be edified. It gathered to fellowship, and it scattered to proclaim the gospel, and the Lord added to the church.

So we come to a third and maybe a couple more tonight. The early church also grew because of, I guess what you'd call, a faithful perseverance, a faithful perseverance. It really never sought to be popular with the world. It didn't seek to be accepted to the world. It didn't try to figure out how to accommodate the world, how to be popular. Although there was a sense in which it was popular, and this is kind of a paradox. If you look at chapter 2, verse 46, it says that, "They were day by day continuing with one mind in the temple." So they were in a very public place. "And they were breaking bread from house to house and taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."

And as a result of that, in verse 47, "They were having favor with all the people." In chapter 3, verse 9, they healed the man, you remember at the temple, Peter and John did. "And all the people saw him walking and praising God," and verse 10, "They were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the gate called Beautiful at the temple to beg alms. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." So there was no question that people were curious about this group of people. What was going on? They found favor with people. They produced wonder. They produced amazement. It was clear that something was going on that was unique. There was a kind of power evident on the part of these people.

In chapter 4, verse 21 it even says, "They were all glorifying God for what happened for the man was more than 40 years old on whom the miracle of healing had been performed." The people saw power in this group. They were struck by that. Chapter 5, verse 13 says, "They held them in high regard. They held them in high esteem." So the early church had spiritual integrity. The early church was clearly different. It was clearly distinct. It wasn't anything like other groups and associations and guilds that were around in the ancient world. It had an integrity that generated admiration and respect and wonder.

It's kind of what Paul talks about in II Corinthians 4:2 when he talks about, "Commending ourselves to every man's conscience." It's certainly what the apostle Paul told Timothy would be a requirement for a church leader, and that would be that he would have a good reputation among those who are outside the church. This is very important, that the church be pure enough and cohesive enough to put on a single front that the world could see. But right along side this respect and right along side the recognition of the uniqueness of the church, the integrity of the church came resentment. They were in awe of their lives. They were amazed at their character, but they were outright offended by their message.

In chapter 2, verse 36, the message clearly given, "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." People say, "Well, who is responsible for crucifying Christ?" Well, the Jews are. That's what it says there. Not only them, but certainly them. In no uncertain terms, Peter tells them that, "Whom you crucified." "And when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

"And verse 40, "With many other words, he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'" A very strong message. Narrow, exclusive, confrontive, condemning, judgmental. Come over to chapter 3. It stays the same way, verse 17, "And now, brethren," says Peter, "I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." There is Peter showing his grasp for the first time of the Old Testament.

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away." Again, this message of sin and repentance in the face of judgment was the message that they preached in the early church. It was an offensive message. Chapter 4, "Peter filled" in verse 8, "with the Holy Spirit, says, 'Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the Stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the Chief Cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.'"

That kind of clarity, conviction, boldness, unflinching narrowness and faithfulness to the gospel characterized that early church. Yes, their lives were remarkable. They were not like any that they had experienced. This was a unique group of people with a kind of love and affection and generosity and sharing and humility and character that was unheard of. While they couldn't help but admire their character, admire their integrity, they hated their message. They hated the message. The message never changed. Never, ever changed. The message was offensive and it was narrow and it was exclusive and it was condemning. And it pronounced damnation on everyone who rejected Christ, and so what happened was persecution began.

It isn't too far into the Book of Acts when you begin to feel the animosity. The apostles are imprisoned. You know the story. They are threatened. They are told not to preach. Stephen is killed, crushed under stones. And Saul, chapter 8, verse 1 is in hearty agreement. This is the first time we meet Saul who became Paul, putting him to death. And on that day, a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria, except the apostles. It talks about the burial of Stephen.

There has to be, if the church is to grow, a faithful perseverance in the face of the hostility that comes against the message. It's always going to be that way. You say, "Well if they hate us, isn't that going to kill the church?" Go back to chapter 4, and I remind you of a very important principle. They were speaking to the people, the priest, and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them," this is the apostles, "being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

They admired their life. They hated their message. So they laid hands on them. That's, they arrested them. Put them in jail until the next day for it was already evening. Then this verse, "But many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men alone came to be about 5,000."

You say, well, if you had a strategy to win people over, it wouldn't be to infuriate them. It wouldn't be to condemn them. It wouldn't be to pronounce judgment on them. It wouldn't be to hold them over hell like Jonathan Edwards did by a spider's web thread. That just wouldn't be a good strategy, but that's exactly how the early church grew. It grew under the force and power of the truth. The contemporary church notion is that narrowness, hostility, anger, resentment do not lead to the growth of the church. However, they do in the New Testament. Hostility, narrowness, persecution is not counterproductive to the church. It is essential to the church's growth because it's the natural response of unregenerate people to the truth.

The church will not be built by men with clever means and strategies. The church will be built by God through the truth, the hard truth encompassing the warning of final judgment. They may respect our integrity. They will hate our message. Do we capitulate then? That's the popular thing to do, and people think this is new? Listen to this. I'm reading a quote from Spurgeon, a sermon he preached in 1888. This is what he said, "The new plan is to assimilate the church to the world, and so include a larger area within its bounds. By semi-dramatic performances, they make houses of prayer to approximate the theater. They turn their services into musical displays, and their sermons into political harangues or philosophical, psychological essays. In fact, they exchange the temple for the theater and the turn the ministers of God into actors whose business it is to amuse men. Is it not so that the Lord's day is becoming more and more of a day of recreation or of idleness and the Lord's house, either a place where there is more enthusiasm for a party than zeal for God? Ah me! The hedges are broken down, the walls are leveled, and to many there is henceforth, no church except as a portion of the world. No God except as an unknowable force by which the laws of success and happiness work. This then is the proposal. In order to win the world, the Lord Jesus must conform Himself, His people, and His Word to the world. I will not dwell any longer on so loathsome a proposal." End quote.

Potentially destructive, actually destructive deadly to the true growth of the church. And as we've been seeing in John 6, that kind of stuff just collects false disciples. So what is the plan then that the Lord has to growth the church in this first generation that's the prototype for all generations? His church growth plan involves a transcendent message, a regenerate congregation, and a faithful if not valiant perseverance to preach the truth boldly no matter what the price.

There's a fourth element that comes into play very early in the Book of Acts, and it's a principle that I think is essential in the matter of church growth. It's an evident purity. It's an evident purity, a manifest purity. With so many signs and wonder and miracles attracting people who would come because they were drawn by the signs, by the wonders, by the miracles, there was a serious danger, very serious danger. The danger was the miracle-seekers, the people pouring in to tap into the miracles. The church was then in danger of being polluted. The church was in danger of being leavened. This had to be dealt with. The church had to be protected because the church must be pure.

How was the church going to be protected? There had to be something very severe, something very dramatic that would happen to tell people how serious God is about purity, and it happened in

chapter 5. Look at it. A man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property. You know the story well. Kept back some of the price, but did so with his wife's full knowledge, bringing a portion of it, laid it at the apostle's feet. The background is people were selling goods in order to give money to Christians who needed to be supported. Remember, there's only one church. It's in Jerusalem. It's made up of people who came to Jerusalem for the Passover and then for Pentecost. So they lived somewhere else in another land in another place. They can't go back because this is the only church. These are the only Christians. They stay. So they become a burden. They have to be cared for. So, people are literally selling things, giving things away to support these new believers who are part of the church.

Apparently, the model was that a man sold a tract of land, brought the money, and laid it all at the apostle's feet and said, "Give it to whoever needs it." This wonderful act mentioned in verse 36 and 37 and referring to Barnabas is such a beautiful thing that Ananias and Sapphira want to get the same kind of accolades apparently that the man who did that got. So they decide they're going to sell some property, and they're going to declare to do the same thing. However, they make the declaration. They make the pledge and then they keep back some of the price. So they sold it. They kept some of the price when they said they were going to give it all. They brought a portion of it, laid it at the apostle's feet.

"Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, didn't it remain your own? You didn't have to sell it. After it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.' And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last, and great fear came over all who heard of it."

God killed him right in front of the church. Now, this is not for homosexuality. This is not for adultery. This is not for fornication. This is not for murder. This is not for some massive crime that we would categorize as extreme. This is for simply saying you were going to give all your money and not doing it, lying, lying. And it seems to be somewhat of a minimal lie because after all, he did give some of it. But any sin, even what might appear to be an insignificant one, literally is worthy of execution.

So the Lord just kills him in front of everybody, and then in verse 6, "The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him." There lapsed an interval about three hours, long services, three hours. They're still going at it. His wife finally shows up not knowing what had happened.

"And Peter says, 'Tell me whether you sold this land for such and such a price,' and she said, 'Yes, that was the price,' and she lies. Peter said to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.' And immediately she fell at his feet, and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead. And they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

What a Sunday. What an incredible Sunday. I am quite sure that the next Sunday offering was huge, huge. *[laughter]* The fear of the Lord was in that place. They could deduce what was going on. The sin of lying was enough to bring about divine execution, and that's because God wants His church pure. He wants His church pure. This is the desire of the Lord of the church. That's why ministers have to remember that they are sanctifying shepherds. The trend today is to remove the fear of the

Lord, turn the preacher into some kind of a jokester, funny clever sometimes even coarse, familiar with the pop culture, cool, friendly to sinners, inoffensive. But that isn't the pattern that the New Testament establishes.

The church should be a frightening place because it is awesome to come into the presence of God. It's an astonishing thing that people were literally executed in the church. The Lord desires the holiness of His church, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. That's a command, II Corinthians 7:1. You say, "Well, that's not going to cause a church to grow. That's going to kill a church."

I was sharing with some of the men yesterday from Grace Advance asking the question about church discipline, Matthew 18, church discipline. They were asking me how I came to do that. When I was growing up in ministry, I never heard of any church doing that, going to someone in sin, confronting them, taking two or three witnesses, telling the whole church, putting them out. I never heard of a church doing it. I never knew a church that did it. I had never any personal experience nor did I know anyone who knew anyone who ever knew a church that ever did that.

When I was reading the Scripture before I came to Grace, it was so clear in Matthew 18. I said, "When I become a pastor, if the Lord allows that, we have to do that because that's the first instruction given to the church in the New Testament. We have to confront sin, so we're going to do that." I was told by pastors, "You will empty the place. You can't do that! You can't have people going around confronting people of sin. You can't do that. You can't publicly declare that people are sinning. You can't put them out of the church. You'll destroy the place." To which I basically and maybe naively said, "I don't have a choice. It's what the Scripture says." Will that destroy the church?

Well, you can drop down to verse 13. "The believers were all with one accord in Solomon's portico," a section of the temple ground. Believers were all together. "But none of the rest dared to associate with them." That's an ideal situation. You don't want people who are non-believers comfortable. They didn't join. However, the people did hold them in high esteem. Again, that's back to that paradox of respect for the character of the church and resentment of the message, and in this case, fear of the reality.

You'd think, well, that will kill the church, but look at verse 14. "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes," meaning thousands, "of men and women, were constantly added." What? Church discipline is a strategy for church growth? It's exactly what it says, exactly. How did that church grow? A transcendent, unchanging message, a regenerate congregation, a faithful if not valiant perseverance in the truth no matter how hard the message was, and no matter what price they paid for preaching it; and a commitment to a manifest purity, righteousness, holiness. I say it again, if anything should be true of a leader of the church, it should be that he is a sanctifying influence. Otherwise, he doesn't represent Christ at all.

There is another element that I would like you to see that we find in the early sections of Acts to kind of get us going into the book. And that would be number five, a qualified leadership. Qualified leadership. So much of leadership is example. It's example. Really, two things make up leadership. One is example. The other is instruction. Those are the two components that really are two sides of the same thing. You teach and you model what you teach. It's example and instruction. It is critical in the life of a church that those who are in leadership be qualified. It's not about personality. It's not about money. It's not about business sense, skill. It's all about spiritual qualification and sound doctrine.

The church grows under the influence of Godly leaders. We see that in chapter 6. "At this time while the disciples were increasing in number." Again, this thing is exploding, and remember the Lord is building His church, His way. The disciples are increasing in number. "A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews." That would be the Jews from outside Jerusalem, who have come as I said and stayed. They're complaining that the native Hebrews, the ones from Hebrews are cared for, but their widows are being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

The idea, of course, from the Old Testament on was take care of the widows. Some of them feel they are being overlooked. "So the Twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.'" We've got thousands of people, thousands of people that we're instructing. Imagine now, the church is a few month's old and it has no history. And whatever it is, the apostles are responsible for, and they've got a massive collection of people to teach. And they would be like Paul. They would teach from house to house day in and day out like he did when he refers to that in Acts 20.

They've got plenty to do to give instruction, to take care of the spiritual dynamic, which is foundational. So we can't take over this food problem. "Therefore," I love this, "brethren, select from among you seven men." Seven men to serve the food, seven waiters, seven dispensers, seven people who will fulfill this responsibility. Now, what would you think would be their qualifications? They like people? They're sensitive? Generous? No. Even this task is qualified in a spiritual way. It must be men of good reputation. That's impeccable in their character. That's essentially parallel for the qualifications for elders that develop later in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 above reproach, "full of the Spirit and of wisdom," and put them in charge of this task.

You need spiritually-minded men because this is going to be a mobilization effort, and they've got to be the kind of Godly men who can effectively mobilize people and motivate them to this good end. We, on the other hand, will "devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word." So they chose Stephen, a man not only full of the spirit and full of wisdom and good reputation, but full of faith.

"And Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them." These would be kind of the first deacons. The apostles were like the elders. Apostles, prophets, being replaced by evangelist-teaching pastors who were elders. But in any case, whether you're the teaching apostle or elder or whether you're the serving deacon, spiritual qualifications are critical. They're critical. The apostles, they have to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, and they will be assisted by men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, all spiritual qualities.

The church doesn't need secular wisdom. It doesn't need corporate strategy. It needs Godly leadership. You say, "Can you grow a church that way?" Yes. Go to verse 7, "The Word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

They penetrated the Jewish priesthood. Obviously, behind all of this is the power of the Holy Spirit. But this is a counter kind of plan to the strategies of church growth today. What is it that God uses to build a church, to build His church? What does He use? Well, it's obvious. He uses that transcendent

gospel message that never changes that unalterable message, that cannot change, that must not change. The church has to be devoted to that truth. It has to be devoted to worship to be a worshipping community of people who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

It has to be desirous of purity and holiness meaning resentfulness towards sin. It has to be uncompromising with the world and with false teaching. It is counter-culture. It is an alien reality consumed with worshipping God. It must feel the weight and the gravity of identifying with Christ. It must be submissive to Him. It must be led by Godly leader who are models of everything they teach. Now, having said that and we're only just a little ways into the Book of Acts, we have established a pattern now that's going to flow through this whole book. These are the things that we're going to see. And nothing has changed even until today. The patterns are still the same.

Father, we thank You for our time together today all day. Thank You that we were able to look again in Your Word, and just kind of go over some of these basic things. We thank You, Lord, that we are living the experience that we read about in the Book of Acts. We are part of Your church. We are Your church. We are committed to the gospel message to the ends of the world. We are committed to a regenerate congregation, purity, valiant, courageous, bold perseverance in the truth even if it means persecution. We are committed to spiritual leadership. We are living, as it were, the Book of Acts in this generation.

And we're so thankful that we can see more being raised up to do the same. Grow your church for Your glory. Thank You for making us a part of it by Your grace and sovereign love. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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