

Acts 6 - **Warning Light** –

- I am sure this has happened to many of us ... if not all. You are driving down the road, listening to your favorite tune (praise and worship) podcast, talk radio...
- And then it happens...Warning Light comes on...What shall you do?
 - This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine
 - You better figure out what the problem is. You can be certain that the cost and collateral damage will be far greater if you don't confront the issue head-on.

We live in a world of conflict – Conflict (been defined as) Angry disagreement between people or groups.

- Our world is Saturated with *angry disagreements* – It is literally all around.
- There are national conflicts, racial conflicts, political conflicts, family & marital conflicts.
- Unfortunately the Church is No different

The Church in Acts 6 finds itself in conflict – There is a complaint between two groups of people. Today, by God's grace, through His Word, we will see how the early church dealt with the complaint, and we'll see what we can learn from this passage.

We are walking through our sermon series – Unstoppable Force: the Church – a people of hope for the world

- I want us to examine the Structure of a New Testament Church – Two Offices – next week, Lord willing, we will look at the Two Ordinances

The Title of Today's Message is Warning Lights – Acts 6

The Church was experiencing Exponential Multiplication

- There was 120 in Upper Room on the day of Pentecost
- Acts 2 – 3,000 added; Acts 4:4 – 5,000 added, People coming to Christ daily
- Acts 5:41 Luke says that believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women
- There are thousands of believers likely, tens of thousands of believers by this time
- So much so that Luke in describing the growth does not use the word added, but here uses the word multiply to describe the growth of the church

It's in Acts 6 that Luke, the writer of Acts begins to describe the growth of the church by using the word ***multiplication***

Acts 6:1- ¹Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying...

Acts 6:7 - ⁷Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 6 ***begins*** and ***ends*** with a reference to growth.

- What we have sandwiched between these two statements is a threat to the Christian movement and the story of how it was overcome. So the point of the text is to teach us how the growth of the church is threatened and how to overcome the threat. **John Piper - [Link](#)**

Acts 6:1-4 - ¹Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily

distribution.² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:5-6 - ⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Acts 6:7⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the **disciples multiplied greatly** in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Problem Identified

The Early Church was **growing** – People were coming to Faith in Christ in **droves**...but there was a problem...A Threat to church, and the spread of the Gospel.

There seemed to be a **Three-fold Threat**

- There was a group of widows being neglected, which lead to a conflict (complaint)
- Potentially hindering the spread of the Gospel

Widows Neglected

Acts 6:1-4 - ¹Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their **widows were neglected** in the daily distribution.

- It would seem that the early church followed the pattern of the synagogue ... Every week funds were collected to feed the poor
- We have seen the generosity throughout our study in Acts...
- This Church became known for it's **Radical Generosity** – many selling possessions to make sure that needs were met

The Problem was the expansion of the Church – A Good Problem (but still a Problem)

- This was more of a result of **human limitations** rather than **intentional neglect**
- The Church was just too big for this group of 12 to handle
- The Church had outgrown it's structure.

Division Mounted

There appears to be growing **cultural** and **ethnic tension** among believers in the early church

Notice **Acts 6:1** - ¹Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because **their** widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

- There might have already been **two movements separated** along language and cultural lines.
- The system in Acts 4:34 to take care of the poor was not working for everyone particularly for the Greek-Speaking widows

It would not be an overstatement to say that the Church faced an existential Threat.

Their very being was at stake – the church's very existence was threatened – This could tear the church apart.

- John Piper said, "If that (neglect of widows) were to continue, then Christians would come into **dis-repute** and the **glory of Christ would be dimmed** in the eyes of the world and the movement would experience a serious setback.
- This problem threatened spread of the Gospel to all nations.
 - Jesus said Acts 1:8 – You will be witnesses, where, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and where else? To the end of the earth
 - This endangered the spread of the good news and threatened to dim the glory of Jesus - IBID

Furthermore...If that was not enough...this problem not only need to be solved, but it must be solved the right way.

I am sure you have heard the phrase, **"Work Hard, Not Smart"**

- You almost get the sense by the Apostle's response in verse 2 ...the apostles said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables)
- *If they gave more hands-on time to the widows, this problem would go away*
- In other words, If Peter and John and James would just work a little **harder**, there would be no problem.

Potential Problem – Ministry (could be) Abandoned

Acts 6:2 - ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables..."

Acts 6:4 - ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

- **It wasn't as if they did not feel this ministry was important**
- But they understood their primary calling was to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- **James 1:27** - Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
- I'll say more about this in a moment – Everyone has been called to serve – in some capacity.
- Everyone is needed so the body can function properly

Here is the Solution

Problem Solved

Acts 6:2-4 - ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables (Greek word **diakonia** – Get our word Deacon).

Acts 6:3 - ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

I want you to notice the two district offices – How they work in harmony to protect the unity of the church, to care for the needs of the church, but ultimately how, through this, they expanded the Kingdom of God

Notice the Two Offices Mentioned here... Office of Apostle is no longer applicable (this is an example of how to structure the church

Our Structure: Two Offices – Pastor (Elder, Bishop) & Deacon

Leading Servants – Pastor, Elder, Bishop

- **Pastor** - The word means “**shepherd.**” The pastor is to lead his people as a shepherd would his sheep. He is never to drive them or run before them.

Servant Leaders – Protect Unity – Serve the Body – Support the Pastors

- Word “**deacon**” means “**servant/minister**” “to serve” The deacon is not to rule as the pastor rules. The office of deacon was instituted so the pastor would have more time to pray and minister the Word.

Pastor: notice Acts 6:2

Acts 6:2 - ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that **we** should leave the word of God and serve tables.

- There is a **Plurality of Spiritual Leadership** – This continued throughout the OT
 - Matter of Fact, the New Testament never mentions a specific number of elders for a congregation, but it regularly refers to “elders” in the plural:
 - Acts 14:23 - “When they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord” (Acts 14:23; see also 11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23);
 - Acts 16:4 - “they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for them to observe” (Acts 16:4);
 - Paul called together the “... elders of the church” (Acts 20:17); “The following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:18);
 - **1 Timothy 4:14** - Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.
 - **Titus 1:5** - For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—
 - **James 5:14** - Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
 - **1 Peter 5:1** - “I exhort the elders among you”
 - **WE ARE SMARTER THAN I – WE ARE STRONGER THAN I**
 - When evangelicals today hear the word elder, they often think “Presbyterian.”
 - Johnathan Leeman in his book *Understanding Church Leadership* said, “While it is historically accurate to associate elders with Presbyterians, it is not accurate to associate them exclusively with Presbyterians.
 - The first Congregationalists in the sixteenth century taught that eldership was an office in a New Testament church. And elders could be found in Baptist churches in America throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century.
 - For instance, W. B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote a book on church life in which he strongly advocated the idea of a plurality of elders in one local church. (Leeman, *Understanding Church Leadership*, 20-21)
 - I am grateful for the Spiritual Leaders God has given this church

Acts 6:4 - ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Primary Tasks of Pastor / Elder is the Ministry of the Prayer and the Word of God.

Prayer – James 5:14 – Through Public Prayer, Teaching, Modelling

- **James 5:14** - Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

The Word – 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2

- 1 Timothy 3:2 – “able to teach”

- 2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...² Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Shepherd – Acts 20:28 – The most comprehensive word for Pastor / Elder (include knowing, feeding, leading, protecting)

- **Acts 20:28** - Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Equipping – Ephesians 4:11-13 (and maturing of the Saints)

- **Ephesians 4:11-13** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Raising Up More Spiritual Leaders 2 Tim. 2:2

- **Paul told Titus this is why I left you in Crete...** not only to set things in order, (but) appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—
- **2 Timothy 2:2** - And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Seems Self-Serving – I will give an account ...

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, **for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.** Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

That is the Leading Servants – Now quickly notice the Servant Leaders – Acts 6 gives us a good look...

Protect Unity – Acts 6:1

- Acts 6:1 - Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Multiply Ministry – Acts 6:2

- Acts 6:2 - Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Serve the Church – Acts 6:3

- Acts 6:3 - Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, **whom we may appoint over this business;**

Other Notable Offices -

- While we recognize two offices, there are other positions assigned to help the church and its various ministries...
 - Committees – 4 Primary (Buildings & Grounds, Finance, Personal, Constitution & By-laws)
 - Trustees, who are legal representatives of the church. Trustees represent the church on financial and legal documents.
 - Service Teams – Security, Media, First Impressions...

Every Member a Minister!

- Discover Your SHAPE – Spiritual Gift, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experience.
- As we all discover how God has shaped us, as we deploy these gifts and talents The Word of God Expands and the Hope of the Gospel Spreads.

Problem was Identified – Warning Light appeared

Problem was Diagnosed – Solution was set forth...this is the result...Acts 6:7

Acts 6:7 - *"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith"*

Take special note of these three fruitful outcomes:

- The Word of God *increased* (ever-greater influence).
- The disciples *multiplied* (vs. "added" – cf. Acts 2:41, 2:47, 5:14).
- A *great many* of the priests came to faith in Christ (these were His enemies)!

The Bullpen: Info that did not get "called into" the sermon

The Two Offices:

Acts 20:28 *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."*

Acts 6:2-4 *"Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."*

These deacons were to "serve" by eliminating from the pastor's duties tedious responsibilities that very quickly increased as the size of the congregation grew.

We also have Committee and Service Teams that facilitate the organization of the Church, and serve both inside the Church and outside in the community

Service to others was not admired by the Greeks. Instead, they admired developing one's own character and personality always with an eye to maintaining self-respect. Diaconal service to others would have been regarded pejoratively as "servile." The Bible and Jesus, though, present service quite differently. If we were to transliterate (and not translate) the key words in John 12:26, we would hear Jesus saying, "If anyone deacons Me, he must follow Me. Where I am, there My deacon also will be. If anyone deacons me, the Father will honor him." In Matthew 20:26, we would hear him saying, "Whoever wants to be great, must be your deacon." And in Matthew 23:11: "The greatest among you will be your deacon." (Leeman, Dever, *Understanding Church Leadership*, pp. 5-6)

Deaconing The Word

Deaconing Tables

And a church needs both types of deaconing—of the Word (elders) and of tables (deacons)—so that one is not confused with the other and neither is forgotten. Churches should neglect neither the preaching of the Word nor the practical care for the members that helps to foster unity. Both of these aspects of a church's life and ministry are important. (Leeman, Dever, *Understanding Church Leadership*, pp. 6-7)

Find Voddie Baucham on Young Man on fire for Jesus, must be called to preach – He is living according to God's design

- Voddie Baucham "The Mediocrity of Christian Men in America." Baucham argues there that the standard for Christian men has been set so low that a young man who displays a seriousness for the things of God will be immediately pushed toward pastoral/preaching ministry. He goes on to attribute this to a desire from other men in the church to create distance between the casual and the serious, as to not make those men feel guilty about "their mediocre pursuits."
- Baucham states: "Modern American Christianity is the only place in our culture where we will tolerate this cognitive dissonance between a man who will say, 'I've been walking with God 30-40-50 years, and I know nothing.'"

6:3 Disciple – Very Grateful to Daniel Henderson – Strategic Renewal [Link](#) - Daniel Gives A Portrait of a “6:3 Disciple”

These seven were unquestionably to be “*men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.*”

Many commentators believe this was the beginning of a deacon-type ministry, which certainly could be the case. **But the Key word here is disciple.**

- It's the first time it's used, and it's used three times – 6:1,2, & 7
- What is emphasized is **Character over Competencies** – They looked for men of character more than talent.
- They were looking for what Henderson describes as, “...a maturing and growing follower of Jesus

A disciple (the Greek word is *mathetes*, and occurs over 260 times in the New Testament) is a **learner, a student, an apprentice, or a practitioner.**

- Acts 6:3 challenges and inspires.
 - “Here is the target,” it seems to imply.
 - These people who walked with God in such a way were positioned to be greatly used by Him.
- Remember what was said of Peter and John – they were untrained and uneducated men, but it was obvious they had been with Jesus
- When you “apprentice” under Jesus, when you follow Jesus, in time you take on His Character.

Notice the Portrait of 6:3 Disciples

A Heartfelt Commitment to Exemplary Living – a “good reputation.”

- These men stood out amongst the thousands of believers.
- They were known for things like...honesty, integrity, compassion.
- They not only had a good reputation – they had a good testimony – It was evident

Philippians 2:14-15 - Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

A Humble Submission to the Holy Spirit – “full of the Spirit.”

- These 7 were not only to be of good reputation, but **were to be empowered by the indwelling Spirit of God**
- Remember we talked about this as we introduced our study on Acts
 - We are baptized with the Spirit at Salvation
 - We are exhorted to be continually filled with the Spirit
- In Galatians 5 Paul contrasts a disciples full of the Holy Spirit – Their life will be characterized by...
- ***Galatians 5:22-23*** - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.
- By contrasts, someone who is filled with uncleanness, anger, drunkenness are not walking in the Spirit.

The Third Character Quality of a 6:3 Disciples is...

A Hunger for Godly Wisdom – “full of wisdom.”

“Wisdom” literally means, “skill for living well.” It is, simply, truth applied to life.

- These seven were marked by being people of understanding and peace, likely known for their proven insight, judicious decision making, and prudent, biblically informed, godly choices bringing vitality and well-being into any situation.
- **James 3:17-18** - But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Maturing, growing disciples of Jesus Christ look like this: *People of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom.* This speaks to obvious fruitfulness grown from authentic, God-dependent roots.

Next Steps

Pursue Godliness

- Not just reserved for Church Leaders – Pastors, Deacons, SS Teachers, Committee Leaders
- God said, “Be Holy For I, the Lord am holy!
- Seek daily to live under control of the Holy Spirit
- I’m not there...Why Not? What is holding you back?
- Take a Step!

Pursue Peace

- Seek the Solve a problem the Right way
- **Acts 6:1** - ¹Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a **complaint** against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because **their** widows were neglected in the daily distribution
 - The word “complaint” – to say anything in a low tone usually expressing dissatisfaction or discontent
 - You almost get the sense... “*Well, the Apostles are taking care of their own, but are not taking care of our widows.*”
- This was a legitimate problem that needed to be addressed
- **Adrian Rogers** says that “Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint—not that a person comes out and says to the right person, at the right time, in the right spirit, for the right reason, that something needs to be done.
- Well, that’s always acceptable, and that’s always good—when a person comes in the right spirit, at the right time, to the right person, and for the right motive.
- Philippians 2:14 - Do all things without complaining (murmerings) and disputing,
 - If time, do all ...griping and complaining, fussing and cussing.

Pursue Service

- All hands on Deck – Many hands make light work
- We are better together – Tyler Eiland – “We are Smarter Than I”
- We are one Body – We all have different functions, task,
- We have different gifts abilities, passions

- When we all work together, the Gospel spreads...notice ACTS 6:7

Aren't these the outcomes for which we hope and pray? Genuine, maturing 6:3 disciples, with their serving hands and their faithful hearts, will see God act.

“daily distribution”

I love Luke's play on the word diakonia which he uses in [Acts 6:1](#) to describe "serving food" and in [Acts 6:4](#) to describe "serving" the word of God! Literal bread is necessary for physical life and spiritual bread is necessary for spiritual life.

Conflict in Church is Inevitable

- **25 Silly Reasons for Church Conflict – Rainer** [Link](#)

Illustration - When a certain Dallas church decided to split, each faction filed a lawsuit to claim the church property. A judge finally referred the matter to the higher authorities in the particular denomination. A church court assembled to hear both sides of the case and awarded the church property to one of the two factions. The losers withdrew and formed another church in the area. During the hearing, the church courts learned that the conflict had all begun at a church dinner when a certain elder received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him. Sadly, this was reported in the newspapers for everyone to read. Just imagine how the people of Dallas laughed about that situation! This brought great discredit not only to the church but to Jesus Christ! The tiniest events sometimes cause great problems. Again and again a church has ward off a frontal attack only to be subverted from within. - Kent Hughes

A Baptist was marooned, alone, on an uncharted island. He lived there for several years before a passing ship happened to see his fire one night and changed course to investigate. When some of the crew made their way by boat to the island, they found the man and three huts that he had built. They asked him, "What are these three huts?" He answered, "One is where I live, and one is where I go to church." When they asked him what the third hut was, he said, "Oh, that one, that's where I **used** to go to church." [Link](#)