

Spiritual Organization

Acts 6:1-7

I. Review.

- A. The church is redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ people—The body of Christ.
- B. Jesus Christ is the head, the architect, builder and owner of the church.
- C. Four priorities of the church—Devoted to biblical teaching/preaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.
- D. Context of the church—Faith. Hope and love.
- E. The process—To mature in Christ: Ephesians 4
- F. Mission of the church—Go into all the world and make disciples through the teaching of God's Word.

II. The need for organization (Acts 6:1-7).

A. Unity.

- 1. The Acts church was unified—Acts 2:2; 2:44; 4:32
- 2. Jesus Christ emphasized the great need for unity in His “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17.
- 3. The apostle Paul emphasized unity through his picture of the church as a body—the body of Christ.

B. Chapter 6 is the first record of “disunity” in the church.

- 1. The process from the leaders.
 - a. Identify the *problem*
 - b. Have *priorities*.
 - c. *Participation* from the body
- 2. Contributors of the problem—Massive increase in size and grumbling.
 - a. Pentecost
 - b. Conversion

3. Satan's tactics to derail the mission of the Acts church.

a. Persecution, corruption, distraction.

III. Restoring unity.

A. Not compromising on their priorities (V.2).

1. Priority #1— The delivering of the Word of God.

2. Important task—To serve tables.

B. Participation from the “body” (V.3-5).

1. Delegating the “serving of tables” to seven godly men.

a. A “prototype” for deacons.

b. *Diakonos* = to serve, servant.

C. Results—A divisive problem did not result in disunity nor did it derail the mission of the church (V.6).

Spiritual Organization

Acts 6:1-7

We've taken the Sundays in the month of July to talk about the church... setting out to shed light on four big questions to get us all on the same page... an adaptation of *Life's Four Biggest Questions*...but for the church...1. *what or who is the church?* 2. *Why is the church here?* 3. *What is the church to do?* And 3. *Where is the church going?*

A little review to bring it all together

First we saw that the church is not a “what” or a “where” but a “who”...it is all the redeemed in Jesus Christ...the church is saved people...that's the church... Paul describes the church as the Body of Christ...Ephesians 1:22-23

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

We saw that the foundation of the church is the gospel of Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ is the architect and builder of the church... not man... and the church is His... He called it “**My church**” in Matthew 16...Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

Jesus also tells us in Matthew 16 that the church will be victorious over all evil... over Satan...we learned that the church is to be completely devoted to a minimum of four things I called *Ground Zero*” ... four priorities of the church:

Acts 2:47 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

Apostle's teachings—preaching/teaching... **Fellowship**—*koinonia* which is a closeness together; caring for each other's needs, sharing with all who are united (in communion) by the common bond of Jesus Christ.

Breaking of bread—sharing meals together... especially the Lord's Supper... **Prayer....** Last week we saw that the context of the church... everything the church does is in the context of the “divine trilogy” of *Faith, Hope and Love*... three imperatives...

From Hebrews 10... Let us **draw near** with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith in God's promises... Let us **hold fast** to the hope we have in Jesus Christ and **Let us consider** how to stimulate one another to love and good works... **FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.**

All those things are for the purpose of growing each one of us into being a mature disciple of Jesus Christ...Ephesians 4:11-14

And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to

the building up of the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,

Why?...what for?...what purpose?

Mission of the church—After His death and resurrection...right before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left His disciples with marching orders that probably left them a bit bewildered, scared and uneasy... He said **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

Matthew 28:19-20

And I take it Jesus left them right after that... Mark tells us in his gospel that **after He had spoken to them was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God...**

I imagine the disciples looked at each other and said something like “now what?”... *how are we going to do all that?...remember what He told us?...stay put in the city until we are clothed with power on high... the Holy Spirit.*

We get to the book of Acts and it all kicks into motion...Luke begins Acts with Jesus’s last words to the disciples before He ascended...Luke records Jesus saying **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the end of the earth.**

So the mission of the church is to reach the world for Christ, make disciples...

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Now one more thing I want to bring out this morning... the church is an organism...but it needs organization...the larger the organism gets the greater the need for organization... a lack of organization can lead to inefficiency, confusion, and a loss of focus on the church’s purpose....and unity.

There’s an overriding theme that is throughout the book of Acts... it is the theme of unity... the very first verse in Acts 2:1 says **they were all together in one place...** they were not all over the place... they were unified in what they were doing...(V.42) devoting themselves with the apostles teachings, to fellowship, breaking of bread and to prayer...

The same place... the same activity...a couple verse later... 44 **and all those who believed were together and had all things in common...**again in verse 32 of chapter 4 **And the congregation**

of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and not one was saying that any of his possessions was his own but, for them, everything was in common...

The picture here is unity...*not communism*... so the very first church reveals to us the importance of being united in pursuit of God's plan... Jesus Christ foreseeing the potential for disunity to sneak its way into the church prayed that amazing prayer in John 17

20“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

Unity is so vital to the church that one of the Holy Spirit's greatest mission is to work out unity with us... 1 Corinthians 12:13

13 For also by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The apostle Paul gives us a picture of just how unified church is... it is the picture of the human body.

All believers are baptized into one body by one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), forming a single spiritual organism... Romans 12:4 - 12:5

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function.

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another,

The human body is a great example of the church... the human body is an amazing organism... so is the church.

I tend to listen to health podcasts that have anything to do with heart health... last week I heard that the human body has approximately 60,000 miles of blood vessels in total... the role of these blood vessels is to transport blood to all other parts of the body...

They went on to talk about the brain... in your brain there are over 100 billion neurons, nerve cells all shaped to take in information and give out information... regulating everything you experience...see, hear, touch... controlling over 600 muscles in your body.

All so that your body can function as a unit... the same for the church... there is the “head” of the church... the head is NOT the pastor... it is Jesus Christ...**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,**

Jesus is the head of the church body...He gives the orders... The Holy Spirit is like the nervous system that conveys the message from the head Jesus Christ to the rest of the body.

If one part of the body decides not to cooperate, the rest of the body is affected... we are designed to all work unified together, ... not in opposition to any other part... what happens to one part of the body affects all the other parts of the body.

An obvious example of this would be when you hit your thumb with a hammer... the pain does not stay confined to the thumb... the entire body feels the pain.... The thumb on the other hand yells over to the hurting thumb... *hey what are you guys doing over there!?*

What happens when you get a plugged artery?... or five of them (I can attest to)... the entire body screams *Yikes we're in big trouble!*... In a biblical God designed church with Jesus at the head... when a member is hurt... all the other members feel the hurt...

When one member experiences great joy... we all feel that joy... when one part of the body has a need, the body desires to step in and help that member... when we get to Acts 6... the church has exploded with body members... and that unity that is vital for body life has been compromised...

Chapter 6 is the first recording of the church having a division in it...they are divided by a problem that has arisen due to a lack of organization... What started out a small organism of 12 then to 120 or so people... the very first “church”... no organizational plan... no church constitution...no committees... nothing but this organic body of believers coming together, praying, sharing meals, and being taught Scripture...

Now... in such a short time... housing problems... people that have been displaced from their homes in other regions needing to be fed and cared for...they had very little money... we're told that people sold their property and possessions to help take care of those in need... and thousands were in need...

What is so great about this chapter is how they deal with and solve **the problem**... they don't ignore the problem... they didn't sweep it under the rug and say, it'll blow over and we can go on...they addressed it and took care of it.

What was behind their being successful in fixing this problem was by having **right priorities**... *Priorities are the things that are considered most important and should be addressed before other tasks, goals, or concerns. They help determine how to allocate time, attention, and resources.*

the right priorities include the cooperation from the entire body...and the implementation of these priorities will result in progress... God's plan [mission] for His church....

Read verse 1

The problem is characterized by two things...massive growth—**they were multiplying in number** and they were **grumbling**...growing and grumbling...verse 1 opens with a church that has grown to tens of thousands all in one spot... Jerusalem.

If we go back to the beginning of Acts...The eleven disciples and the other believers in Christ...about 120 total disciples...they replace the vacancy of Judas with Matthias, back to 12 disciples...they stay in Jerusalem all together...waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit...

Which comes on the Day of Pentecost...we'll look at that in detail when we begin our series on the Holy Spirit next week... the point here is... once empowered by the Holy Spirit... the church is initiated and it literally explodes in numbers... supernatural growth.

Acts 2 tells us Peter tells everyone to **repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the Holy Spirit.**

About three thousand came to the Lord that day...from 120 to 3000...BAM!...by Acts 4, another 5000 “men” were added to the roles of the church... add to that their wives and many of their children... the church may be as large as 15,000 in just a matter of days... and Luke tells us the **Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved**... those who make up the church...

Think of the logistics of having the church together... literally thousands and thousands... Luke tells us they met together... all of them... Jews from all over the Mediterranean area had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost...

Pentecost brought together with it Jews from Jerusalem referred to as the **Hebrew Jews**, who spoke Hebrew.... and thousands and thousands of Jews from Greek speaking regions who spoke Greek called the **Hellenist Jews**...They are here for Pentecost...and thousands come to Christ...

They don't go home... they stay in Jerusalem...it is estimated that by chapter 6, almost a year has gone by... what have they been doing?... meeting as the church **devoting themselves to the apostles teachings, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer**... Acts 2:42

And Jesus just keeps **adding to their number** Acts 2...In 6:1 it says the **disciples were multiplying in number**...**God has gone from adding to multiplying**!... As wonderful it was to have such an evangelistic explosion... think of all the problems that surfaced...

It's one thing to handle the needs and problems of 120 or so people.... But tens and tens of thousands?...did I mention sinful people?... not to mention Satan... where's he been during all this?... working!...

As early as chapter three we see persecution of believers... Satan's first attempt to destroy the church through **persecution**... it doesn't work... the church keeps growing.... by chapter 5 tactic number 2... **corruption**... Corruption is *the misuse of power for personal gain*....I like what Webster says Corruption is **a departure from the original or from what is pure or**

correct...Ananias and Sapphira who tried to deceive God, did not end well... God removed them from the church and the church kept growing.

So now, Satan pulls out number three attempt to derail the body of Christ... put a little cancer in the body... through **distraction**...C.S. Lewis in The Screwtape Letters, **distraction** is one of the key tactics used by the demons to lead humans away from God.

In the first letter, Screwtape advises his nephew Wormwood *to keep the patient's mind occupied with trivial or conflicting ideas, such as jargon, philosophical debates, and "academic" or "practical" distinctions rather than clear spiritual truths.*

Distraction in the first century church could easily lead to dissention... remember the two groups of people in this church... the converted Hebrew and the Hellenist Jews, culturally different from each other, almost like two races... Satan tries division between these two groups to compromise the church.

If I can get these two groups to be distracted with internal conflict... their gospel message will be buried!...it won't get out!

John R.W. Stott

We cannot proclaim the gospel of God's love with any degree of integrity if we don't exhibit it in our love for others...nothing is so damaging to the cause of Christ as a church that is torn apart by jealousy, rivalry, slander and malice, or preoccupied with its own selfish concerns.

The Hellenists... the outsiders were grumbling against the Hebrew Jews...

Here's the situation...at this time there was a routine Jewish custom... there were Jewish officials who were known as *receivers of alms*... they would go out to the markets, to the Jews houses every Friday morning and collect money and goods to redistribute to the poor late Friday afternoon when people gathered in the synagogue...

Those who were in need would receive 14 days of meals... the early church apparently carried on this custom... the Hellenist Jews were mostly in poverty being from another region...They did not expect to be in Jerusalem any longer than Pentecost...so, no jobs, out of money, no resources but what the church could provide...

So there's this feeling amongst the Hellenist Jews they are not getting their fair share... *our widows are being overlooked!*... so what is it that solves this crises?... **a clear understanding of priorities**... the church's priority.

Read verse 2

The first thing the apostles do after identifying the problem was to restore unity... but they do not restore unity by compromising on priorities... they address the problem and come up with a

solution... the church can only be united if it understands and accepts God given priorities... what is the priority of the church when we gather together?

*It's not to serve tables!...*serving tables are important... but there is a priority that is above serving tables... **what is serving tables?** It could be several things... it could actually be referring to the table that meals are served...

It could be where money is exchanged for the ability to purchase food... **Tables** is used in other places to refer to *the table of the money changers*.... Whatever, the serving of tables is an important function in this church... it provided resources to those in great need.... Specifically widows. This is an important function!

But the twelve apostles identified a greater priority than serving tables... the delivering of the Word of God to the church and to those outside the church... here's their reasoning... *If the church is to become the church that God wants it to be, it has to prioritize what God wants it to do...*

God wants the church to prioritize the teaching/preaching of God's Word... **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, What are we to do to get them to become baptized disciples of Jesus?**²⁰ **teaching them** to keep all that I commanded you...

So... *What we are going to do is verse 4... We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the Word.... We can't allow ourselves to get distracted from the priority of the church...*

The apostles didn't feel above serving tables...

The apostles weren't unable to serve tables...

It wasn't that the apostles didn't want to serve tables...

It all was a matter of priority... it wasn't their highest calling... Just thinking about how large this early church is... tens of thousands... can you imagine the needs!... If the 12 apostles start serving tables... they will NEVER serve the gospel!...it would become a gigantic dining hall...

THIS IS WHY THE CHURCH IS A BODY... each body part has a function that serves the entire body... some are hands for holding babies, some are feet for walking, some are legs for support... not everyone is the mouth for speaking God's Word!

The church body takes care of the many important needs in the church so that the priority of delivering God's word can be unhindered.

I was thinking this week how many churches have left their priority of preaching the Word of God for serving tables... I mean completely reprioritized the serving of tables OVER the exposition of God's Word.

In attempts to become more culturally relevant... more socially acceptable... more inclusive..
forget the narrow minded Gospel message, just serve food to the poor... just raise money and do
 nice things for people...**everyone has a right to feel good in this life**... be nice to everybody...

There is a real tendency for churches to leave the preaching of the Word of God for the serving
 of tables... Satan victorious!...pastors are hugely guilty of this... in many ways serving tables is
 more appealing and even some are easier than preaching God's Word every week...

[I'm not defending, praising, or extoling, complaining or trying to drawing attention to myself...
 but preaching is hard work!... since the last apostle... all sermons...including ALL of mine have
not been by direct revelation from God...I have to study!

Some liken sermon preparation as like chewing broken glass... David King likens the weekly
 preaching burden to Sisyphus rolling a boulder uphill only to have it roll back down.

J.Vernon McGee

Asked *why don't more pastors preach/teach through the Bible as you do?....* verse by verse...
 expository preaching... all he said...*Because they're lazy!*...it's harder to prioritize and stay with
 it!. So, when these apostles tell us they can't serve tables but they will **devote themselves to
 prayer and to the service of the word**... they've filled their plate!

The priority... the preaching /teaching of God's word.

But the problem hasn't been solved...They don't ignore the problem... it's an important problem
 that needs to be dealt with... that's why God made the church a body!

Read verse 3

Many think that this is referring to the birth of having deacons in the church... these seven men
 are the world's first deacons... and therefore... churches should model this and select seven
 MEN to take care of tables and they shall be called deacons!

I agree with those who say this is a *prototype* of the office of deacon but it isn't a mandate for all
 churches...mainly because it lacks a mandate... it seems to be a solution to a specific problem
 that helps to emphasize the real priority of the church.

But it is a solution for all churches desiring to keep the main thing the main thing...the word
 translated as "serve: in this passage, as "serve tables" is the Greek word *diakonos* which simply
 means "Serve" or "servant"... it is not until Paul's writing in 1st Timothy 3 that we see for the
 first time the word "deacon".

So this is all working out wonderfully... they had a **problem**.... They went to their **priorities** to
 solve it... now they need **participation** from the body...the church.

Read verse 5

The entire problem is solved by sharing the problem with the entire body... note the whole church involvement... verse 2 **the twelve summoned the congregation... Therefore brothers select from among you... everybody... verse 5 and this word pleased the whole congregation.**

Everyone is involved... not just the twelve... but the entire church body...those names... the reason they're hard to pronounce is they are all Greek names... think about that!... whose complaining?... The GREEK speaking Jews... they are complaining about the indigenous population...

*Let's put Greek men on this problem... this is a great maneuver to regain unity...there's a principle at play here... MacArther commented on this... **the people who have the most at stake in ministry are the people who should lead the ministry.***

Choose the right people to fill the jobs...gifts, talents, personalities...the ones who have the most at stake... choose them...

Read verse 6

Some say "*see! They're commissioning deacons*"... maybe... but standing with someone, praying with and for them, laying hands on them was a traditional way to affirm visibly solidarity and unity with them... *We're all in with you on this!*

SO... what were the results of keeping the priorities of the church straight?... of maintaining unity... utilizing the entire church body?

Read verse 7

Amazing!... a divisive problem that surfaced in the church did not derail the church!... wise leadership recognized the need for organization... it was through organization that the priority could remain the priority BUT the important secondary concerns could be taken care of as well...

Our church is not tens of thousands body parts... But I remember a verse that goes something like *where two or more are gathered, you have 500 opinions*... diversity is wonderful when it is in unity...

A church of any size must be set in their **priorities**... so when you have **problems** you refer to your priorities and then seek **participation** from the body...