

Church Organization Made Simple

Scripture: Acts 6:17

Code: 44-23

The early church had some serious complexity because it grew so rapidly. And because with that growth, there needed to be an effective and efficient way to minister to the people and to establish an effective witness in and around Jerusalem.

I understand that the church is an organism. It is the only spiritual organism in the world. You do need to understand that. Everything else is an organization. It is that simply means external. Every false religion is an organization orchestrated by men and demons. Every human institution, non-religious, is a structure made by men. It is an external organization. It is a human organization. There's only one spiritual organism, one work of God in the world, and that is the church. The only organization, the only organism that God has established is the church. It is the living organism of people connected to the life of God through union with Jesus Christ. It is an organism. We share common eternal life. Christ lives in us, and there are people who think that because of that reality of an organism, we need to run from being organized. We need to run from structure and everything needs to be somewhat free-flowing.

If you want an example of a woeful lack of structure in a church, you can read the letters that Paul wrote, particularly the first one to the Corinthians. Clearly, the Corinthian church was in a state of chaos. What was absent was any cohesive structure and leadership, and some of them were claiming to be of this leader and some of this leader and some of this leader. And then the mystical folks said, but we're of Christ, and we're connected only to Christ. The chaos in the Corinthian church is pretty clear.

It was to that church, for example, that Paul wrote in the fourteenth chapter and said, "Your services are really out of order." One person has a song. One person has a psalm. One person has something else, and one person has a prophecy. God doesn't do things like that because you must be like God and do things decently and in order. So you have a model for chaos in the Corinthian church, chaos that had to be corrected, chaos that was confusing. Yes, the church is an organism, but it is an organism that requires organization. It requires structure. Let me just kind of lay out what's going on in the book of Acts.

By the time we get to chapter 6, the church is large, significantly large. It's numbering in the thousands and likely the tens of thousands by the time we get to the sixth chapter. They know who the Christians are. From the Day of Pentecost on, they've been baptized. They identify them. They add them to the church as they're converted after the Day of Pentecost. The Lord adds to the church, and they keep record of that. We know that because they know the number. They know that in chapter 4, another 5,000 men were added to the role of the church. The early church met. They met unofficially in the temple daily. They met officially at the certain places and certain times

for public worship, public prayer, and the preaching of the gospel.

They assembled on the Lord's Day for Communion. They continued to be baptized as they came to Christ. The first day of the week was identified as the main meeting of the church, and that happened early on in the very precincts of the temple, which was still under the operation of those who had rejected Christ. They were also breaking bread from house to house. Somebody had to make the bread. Somebody had to plan the event. Somebody had to sort of break down these thousands of people so they could go from house to house. Remember now, the church had been born on the Day of Pentecost, which was a Jewish feast that had such attraction, it was actually demanded all males had to attend the main feast. So in Jerusalem when the church was born were all these people from all over the Mediterranean area. They were Jews who were in the diaspora. They were scattered Jews. They came to Jerusalem.

So now the church is born. They're a part of the church. They're staying in Jerusalem because there's nothing to go back to but Judaism, and they've come from Judaism to Christianity. So they swell the ranks of the church and they have to be housed and fed and cared for. We know that goes on for years because years later Paul is still raising money to care for the poor Pilgrim saints who are still in Jerusalem and never went back home. So there's the need to collect money. We've already seen that some people were actually selling their property and taking the proceeds of their property to distribute it to the apostles and the apostles were using that money to meet the needs of the people.

We know that they would bring their money from the sale of whatever or from their savings, put it at the feet of the apostles when they met on the Lord's Day such as they did in chapter 5. On one of those occasions, you remember Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, hypocritically came, pretending that they brought everything that they had received for selling their property when, in fact, that was a lie. They were executed on that Sunday. That's an illustration of how the early church operated. They met in a certain place. They met particularly on the first day of the week. They brought gifts. Their gifts were disbursed by the apostles to the people in need.

So it didn't take long after the birth of the church that they had a very complex set of conditions that had to be met. A large number of people, people being added to the church every day, people being baptized, people gathering for the Lord's Supper. People gathering in homes for meals. People gathering on the first day of the week, somebody needing to be there to open the truth of God to them to explain to them the meaning of the Old Testament as fulfilled in Christ.

Then somebody had to know the needs of all these people, and somebody had to process the meeting of those needs. This demands structure. It is never an end in itself - structure, but it always is a means to an end. Very early on, just from a personal standpoint, when I came to Grace, I wasn't sure what it was that the Lord was going to do here. Most of what goes on here, I had never seen before. I don't mean just public services, but all the ministries that go on here. I'd never seen anything like them. I had no experience. I didn't invent them. I didn't create them. I didn't suggest

them. I just began to see what the Lord was doing.

I knew that God gave gifts to people, that He pulled gifted people together, that when gifted people were added to the church and the church began to grow, the Spirit of God would prompt the hearts of people. And they would begin to do ministry along the lines of their gifts. Then the Holy Spirit would enable people to do the one anothers with each other laid out in the New Testament, and the church would get a life.

All I wanted to do was to watch that life and support that life with the necessary structure. So, something I never did, and I learned this I think from this very chapter, I never came up with a scheme. I never came up with a plan. I never came up with a structure, and then tried to push the church into it. I always felt like I want to see what the Spirit of God does, and I want to see who the gifted people are that begin to do that ministry. Then I want to come behind that when we see that ministry unfolding and give whatever necessary support and structure and help we ought to give.

That's essentially what I drew out of the experience of the early church. They had an exploding church on their hands, and we sort of had that in a small sense here at Grace Church from the very beginning. They just watched what it was that the Spirit of God was doing, and they began to shape the structure to fit the work of the Holy Spirit. That's always been our commitment here.

The apostles were the key to the church. They were the ones who had the revelation from God. They were the ones who had been with Christ. They were the teachers. They, because they knew the Word of God, were the resource for all the questions that new converts needed to have asked. Their lives must have been daily an exposure to the questions of Jews who had now come to the salvation that was in their Messiah Christ, and who had all kinds of questions about the meaning of the Old Testament and what God was doing, and the meaning of the church and where it was going. The apostles were the initial resource, but as ministry flourished, things needed to get organized. That's just simply basic.

Now, the first time this becomes apparent is in the sixth chapter of Acts. You can look at it with me, the sixth chapter of Acts. Ministry is happening. They're meeting to hear the apostles; doctrine. They are meeting in fellowship from house to house, breaking bread, having the Lord's Table. Baptisms are taking place. Daily meetings with apostles and daily fellowship around the gospel is going on. People with needs are sharing their needs and needs are being met as money is brought to the apostles, and then distributed. Now, this is going on, and it's just kind of happening under the prompting of the Spirit of God and the loving hearts of the people.

This is an organism motivated by love for Christ and love for one another. You remember in the Upper Room, and we'll see that in a few weeks when we get into that in John 13. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another." That was very

evident in the early weeks and early months of the early church. But here the church is exploding, and that's how this begins.

Notice verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing - " and then there are some words added, " - in number." That's obvious. This is what sets this whole text in motion. The disciples are increasing. The disciples are increasing. What is a disciple? A disciple is the same as a Christian, but a disciple looks at a Christian from the standpoint of the student mentality. The word is "learner." It's the word *mathetes*. So there were learners. They were learning Christ. Paul even uses that phrase when he reminds us that we shouldn't sin because we have not so learned Christ. They were the students of Christ, the true followers of Christ, the true disciples.

They were increasing literally in an explosive fashion. So this is where we come to the beginning of the church's need to get organized. Let's just say there's a reason, first of all. There is a reason, and what is the reason? There is inefficient ministry, okay? This thing is not efficient. This is the first point that I want you to understand. Spiritual organization is what we're talking about, and it needs to be applied when there's a dynamic living organism, the church of Jesus Christ growing and increasing, but becoming inefficient. This is at the very outset the point here. Just handling the needs of the believers, the questions of the believers, the issues of the believers, working out the problems of distribution and collection, providing elements. For example, for the Lord's Table, providing all of the locations for baptism, food for meals, who was going to teach here and there, who was going to preach here and there, who was going to do the evangelism. It all mushroomed in the rapid growth of the church.

They were actually now filling Jerusalem with their doctrine. They were, from the standpoint of the Jews, turning the world upside down. They were having a massive impact. They now had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, and so they had in some way accomplished the first point of Acts 1:8. Acts 1:8 says, "You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem and then Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth." So they had accomplished it in Jerusalem so that even the people who rejected the gospel said, "You filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." They accomplished that.

They were now ready to move to Judea, the rest of the land of Israel and into Samaria and on to the world. They were ready to go global, but before they could begin to get out of their own town, they needed some structure. They were on the verge of an evangelism explosion.

The evangelization of those beyond their own city in their country and the next country, the Samaritans, and then the world. They were on the edge of that. They were going to take the gospel to the whole world, to the gentiles. As always, whenever the church sets to do this, evil forces try to prevent it. Now, we've already seen a couple of them. First persecution, remember that. Persecution came against them, and it failed. It only made the message fly faster. They arrested the apostles. They threatened the apostles. They persecuted the apostles, and you know what that did. That just emboldened them to preach with more fire and more passion and more commitment.

And then the second form of evil that attacked them was sin in the church, chapter 5. Persecution couldn't stop them, and even sin in the church couldn't stop them. That is flagrant, lying, deceptive, hypocrisy. That couldn't stop them, but here is something that has stopped a lot of churches: dissension, disunity. Back to verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." You say, well this is inevitable in a church; unhappy people, picky, picky people.

Listen, dissension in the body of Christ is nothing new. We've all seen it, and sometimes we've seen it in rather epic forms. Persecution tends to purify the church. Flagrant, blatant sin tends to be dealt with by the church, but dissension and disunity and in-fighting can dissipate the energy of a church. It can turn a church inward so all of its energy is literally focused on itself and not on the task that it's been called to do. This can be so devastating. Petty pride, insignificant issues, bickering, discontent, jealousy, personal preference, power struggles, all that kind of stuff that makes up so much of church life. It literally saps the very strength out of the church.

Look, in the early years of Grace Church we face some of that. There were times in our early history when mutinies occurred among staff over jealousies. There was a period of time a number of years into the ministry when over 200 people walked out of this church, critical of everything we were doing, critical of the pastors, critical of the leaders, critical of the elders. There have been all kinds of skirmishes of maybe lesser significance than those through the years.

There were times when I could have wished for persecution because it would have been easier to deal with because persecution tends to purify the church. I might have wished for some flagrant sin that would be labeled and dealt with as sin. But the undercurrent of jealousy, bitterness, anger, pride, very hard to deal with. That struggle seems to be constant in the life of the church, as the fact that there are so many churches gives testimony to.

So here we find a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews. Okay, let me just explain this. You've got two groups of people. You've got the native Hebrews who live in Jerusalem and live in Israel, and then you've got the Jews who came for the Passover, and were converted to Christ and are still there. But they're from the Greek world. There are synagogues scattered around the Greek world. There are Jews around the Greek world, but as I said, they would all come to Jerusalem during the feast. The church was born, and they became a part of the church. There was nowhere to go, and so they stayed.

Now, in all honesty, there's no nation I don't think with more sense of responsibility for the less fortunate brethren historically than Jews. One historian says this, "In the Jewish synagogues there was a routine custom. There were officials who were known as receivers of alms. They were

collectors, and they went around the market and around the houses every Friday morning and made a collection of money and goods to redistribute to the poor when the synagogue met. Later in that day on Friday when the people gathered, what had been collected was distributed to them. Those temporarily in need received enough to carry them through, and those permanently in need received enough for 14 meals.” That would be two a day for a week. This was traditional among the Jewish people. They cared for their own poor.

Well, this infant church apparently did the same thing. Now, remember, they’ve lived their lives in a synagogue. They’re used to doing this, and now they’ve got these people who are there who define what poverty is because they’re away from home. They have no jobs. They have no resources. So, immediately they do what they’d always done traditionally. They start collecting money to be distributed to those who are in need.

So you’ve got basically the Israeli Jews and then you’ve got the non-Israeli Greek-speaking Jews from around Asia Minor, North Africa, other places in the Mediterranean. There is the feeling that somehow the Hellenist Jews, the Greek Jews aren’t getting their fair shake, particularly the widows. The complaint comes from the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Now, caring for widows was part of being Jewish. It is an Old Testament pattern. Caring for widows is what you did, and it is repeated in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 5, James 1, “Pure religion and undefined is to care for the widows and orphans.” Though caring for widows was just part of Jewish life and it became part of church life. The feeling, however, was that this wasn’t equal. The old King James says, “A murmuring, a murmuring arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews.”

Now, you’ve got internal dissent, internal discontent. So what is going to be the solution? Verse 2, “So the twelve apostles - ” this is the 11 plus Matthias, who had taken Judas’ place, “ – 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.’” This is a new day because no doubt because they were the apostles, because they were the apostles who were with the Lord and saw the Lord and had delegated miraculous power, power being put on display, many signs and wonders were happening at the hands of the apostles we learn from chapter 2. Because they were the apostles and because there was no time for any leadership to develop or any structure to develop, everything fell to them, absolutely everything. Everybody turned to them for everything, and they realized that they can’t any longer handle this at the level that it’s being demanded. They can’t cover all of their bases. “We cannot neglect the Word of God to serve tables.”

Now, what does that mean? What do you mean serve tables? Well, it could be to serve meals. It could be that the Hellenistic widows were feeling left out of the meals that some of the resident Hebrews were getting. It could be not a meal table. This is the same word that was used for the overturning of the money changer’s tables. So it’s any table where any function occurred. It may mean the table where the coins were distributed, the location where people were given the money that had been collected. Whether it’s giving food and meals or distributing money, the apostles say, “We can’t do it. It’s too much. We can’t carry on the general routine of handling finances, service

duties, distributing money, distributing food, commodities to the people because this is overwhelming us.”

The apostles understood the problem because they knew what their calling was. They said, “It’s not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God, to neglect the Word of God.” We have a priority. We need to be looking at the Word of God, studying the Word of God, preparing to preach and teach the Word of God. That’s exactly what they say in verse 4, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” I don’t know if you assume that every sermon ever preached by an apostle was direct revelation, but that’s a wrong assumption. There are some apostles who didn’t write a book in the Bible. We don’t know that they got any specific revelation. In fact, they got no inscripturated revelation. So they were like anybody else who ministers the Word of God. They had to study the Word of God, and what was their Bible? It was the Old Testament.

Now that they had been able to understand the Old Testament because Jesus had gone to the Old Testament and taught them starting on the day of His resurrection. They had to go back to the Old Testament and do the work of the preparation of the Word, and then the instruction from the Word. We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the *diakonia* of the Word, verse 4, *diakonia*. It’s the word for serve. “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the Word.” We can’t serve the meals. We can’t serve the distribution of money and commodities. You have to find somebody to do that. We have to serve the Word.

They were determined not to let anything overpower the priority. The teaching, preaching, praying by the leaders of the church was critical. That was the established priority; praying to draw down the power of God, preaching to declare the truth of God. This is what the apostles did. This was their priority. We look back at verse 4 for a minute, “We will devote ourselves. We will devote ourselves.” The word “devote” means exactly that. We will devote ourselves continually. Continually, it says in other translations to the Word and to prayer, to drawing down the power of God in prayer and to proclaiming the truth of God in preaching. This is the true priority. This is still the dominant priority in the church. It was established then. It exists today.

The apostles passed off the scene. They were the foundation. The next generation come the prophets, and then the evangelists and teaching pastors of Ephesians 4, and they all have the same responsibility. “He gave to the church apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers for the edification of the saints - ” to teach the Word to the saints, “ - for the building up of the body,” so that the saints could do the work of the ministry to see the body built up.

That is why we are all warned in spiritual leadership to study or to, be diligent to be approved of God, workman needing not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Paul calls to Timothy and he says, “Take heed to the doctrine, to yourself and the doctrine. Read the Word, explain the Word, apply the Word,” in 1 Timothy, chapter 4. This is the dominant reality in the life of the church. So, early on in the ministry of Grace Church from the very outset, I took this seriously. This is the priority, and it’s reiterated later on when Paul writes the letters to Timothy and Titus and talks about

pastoral ministry. "Preach the Word with all authority." Don't let anybody try to avoid that authority. "Preach the Word in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and longsuffering."

This is what we do. We preach the Word because all Scripture is inspired by God, profitable. This is to be the very life breath of the leader of the church. The first generation of leaders is the apostles, and they pass it on to the next generation of leaders, the prophets. We hear about New Testament prophets referred to, and the next generation is the evangelists and teaching pastors that are part of the church now and until our Lord comes.

In 1 Corinthians 9:7, "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit of it? Who tends the flock and doesn't use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment am I? Or does not the law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.' God is not concerned about oxen is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the ploughman ought to plough in hope and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we have sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" That's what he's saying.

Verse 14, "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." So there will be people in the leadership of the church whose role is prayer and the ministry of the Word who gives themselves totally to that, totally to that, and the church supports them in that. 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Double honor - " double *time*; it actually means support, " - to those who gives themselves to the Word of God. Double honor to those who gives themselves to the Word of God." So that was clear in the early church. It became crystal clear in my mind that the primary responsibility in the church is to have a core of leaders whose goal and life commitment is to pray and preach the Word of God.

Now, to summarize, the church was very large. There had developed some friction. It needed to be addressed. The apostles couldn't do it because they were committed to studying the Word of God, preaching the Word of God, and pulling down, as it were, by their prayers, the very power of God. So somebody else has to be found to do this. We come to verse 3, "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." You go from an ineffective ministry to developing an effective core of ministers.

We already have the apostles. We already have those who have the overall pastoral responsibility, but here we come to an efficient leadership for meeting the needs of the church. I want you to notice these qualifications. "Therefore, brethren, select from among you." What does that tell you? That tells you that the people in the congregation played a role. It doesn't say, "The apostles picked seven men." It says, they need to be those whom you recognize, whom you deem worthy. And this would be true even further into the pastoral epistles. If you desire the office of a pastor, an overseer,

an elder, you desire a noble thing, but you have to pass the scrutiny of the church that looks at your life and determines whether you're above reproach, blameless, all of those qualifications. The church weighs in on that.

So from the very earliest days of Grace Church, I knew that whoever was in a position of spiritual responsibility, spiritual ministry, even under the leading pastors of the church needed to be affirmed by the congregation. We always do that, once a year. The names of all of us and all who serve as deacons and deaconesses are brought before the congregation. They all literally serve at the discretion of the congregation in the first place. They're chosen from among you.

To begin with, they chose seven, seven, and they were, first of all, men *andras* males. This is not generic, but this is male. God has always used men to lead the church, men to lead the church. That doesn't mean women aren't important. They're critical, but men have always been in the place of leading the church.

Yes, there were women in the Old Testament who had significant roles. There were women who spoke for God. There were even women in the New Testament who spoke for God, the daughters of Philip. There was even Aquila and Priscilla, and they informed Apollos more perfectly in his theology. Women play a great role, great responsibility, primarily 1 Timothy 2 says, "In raising a godly seed," but they are gifted in all manner of spiritual gifts and have the roles of teaching other women. The older women teach the younger women, teaching children, supporting their husbands. Titus 2 lays their responsibilities out, "Being keepers at home," but leadership in the church is for men.

So, "Select seven men from among you." That means believers in your midst. Now, let me just say this. It ought to be obvious. There's a popular new trend in churches to have people responsible for the finances of the church outside the church. If you're a pastor and you don't want to have to be accountable to the people in your church, you go get ten of your buddies and you create a board, and they decide your salary. This is very popular. And they kind of decide how much money you're going to pay and how much benefit you get, and they sort of become the external board like some kind of corporation. That's completely foreign to Scripture, totally.

"From among yourselves, select seven men." They're not outsiders. They're insiders, and they have to be characterized this way, "Of good reputation." Character first, character, conduct above reproach. They have to have integrity. They have to be blameless, well-attested, good report. They need to be spiritually-minded, full of the Spirit. That would be holy men controlled by the Holy Spirit, living in response to His will. They need to be men who are wise. They are marked by wisdom, spiritual insight, practical wisdom, sound, good, righteous judgment.

You can put them in charge of this task. What is the task? The task is getting food and money to

the right people on an equal basis. You say, “Well, why do you have to have such high spiritual qualifications?” Because this is a spiritual ministry on behalf of Christ for His church, His body. Distributing food has to be done with spiritual integrity, and caring for money has to be done with spiritual integrity. They’re not called elders, and they’re not called deacons. They’re not called any of those things. They’re just the first group of people, men, given oversight to some function in the church that needed to be done right, with wisdom, with spiritual maturity, with good common sense as well as with godliness.

They had to be men who were impeccable because if you’re handling the money and the resources and the assets, you’re susceptible to serious temptation. Remember Judas? Why was Judas the treasurer? Why was he so concerned about wasting the perfume? Not because he cared about the poor, but because what? He had the money. Very important who handles the money. Above all things, they need to be spiritually qualified. It doesn’t matter whether they’re bankers or whether they’re CPAs. What does matter is their spiritual qualification. This is a preview of the more refined leadership of the church that comes in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 where when it talks about elders, they are obviously godly and they must be skilled teachers. But then when it talks about deacons, they must be godly because they, in a sense, replace this first group.

There’s seven. The *mishna* the kind of codification of Jewish law says seven was the number of persons appointed to transact business publicly in Jewish towns. It’s a little town council, and there are always seven because you would always have a majority. This is a temporary setup replaced later. The apostles in a sense, replaced by the elders and pastors, and the men chosen here replaced by deacons. But here’s what is fascinating; verse 5, “The statement found approval with the whole congregation.” They thought it was a great idea. This is amazing. “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.”

Everybody was happy with this idea. They didn’t want the apostles to leave prayer and the Word. They wanted that. So they said, “We’re going to pick seven men.” You know what’s fascinating about that? All seven names are – you ready? – Greek names. All seven names are Greek names. Now, if they were looking at sort of what is politically correct, they probably would have had maybe three Greek Jews and four Israeli Jews just to balance everything off, but they didn’t.

Apparently, the love was so great in the early church, and they were so eager that those Hellenistic widows not be missed, that all seven were Grecian Jews, all seven of them. They said, “You take charge in loving, unity, and welfare.” They put the whole responsibility in the hands of Hellenistic Jews. I learned from this early in the ministry here, significant lesson. The people who have the most at stake in a ministry are the people who should lead the ministry.

I remember when I came to Grace Church they had, I don’t know, maybe ten boards, and the boards ruled over various areas of ministry, and they were people not in that ministry who sat in authority over that ministry. I couldn’t find any biblical model for that. So, through the years, it’s the people

who do the ministry who lead the ministry. It's the people who are pouring their life into it that have all the authority and the empowerment to do that ministry the way they think it should be done. This is an ideal way, and this demonstrates trust and love. So they said, "You care most. You've got the most at stake. These are your people. You take care of the whole thing." I love that kind of trust, don't you?

So we see the reason for the church to get organized, this inequity, this dissension. Then we see the requirements laid out in verse 3. Then we see the roster chosen in verse 5, and they picture the wonderful love and unity of that early church. Then we see the results finally, okay, verse 6 and 7. Now, remember, they're on the brink of global ministry, and it's going to come pretty quick. It's going to come pretty quick. It's not going to be long, persecution breaks out. They scatter, and you know the rest of the story.

You meet the apostle Paul, and the apostle Paul comes into the picture and he's holding the garments of the people who are stoning Stephen to death at the end of chapter 7 and into chapter 8, and breathing out slaughter on the church. The church is scattered, and it begins its global evangelization, and it's not too long until you come to the ninth chapter of Acts. Paul, who is out breathing threatening and slaughter against the church and taking Christians prisoner, has his Damascus Road experience, and all of the sudden the gospel leaps from Judea, Samaria to the world. And another church is planted in Antioch, and from Antioch Paul launches to the world. So they're on the brink of global evangelism.

Again, I didn't know in the early years of Grace Church where this would go, what God's purposes were, but I knew the world was in my heart. There were many years ago when I thought I was going to be a missionary. I even decided I thought I would go to Germany as a missionary, and see if I could bring a second Reformation and show up like a modern day Martin Luther, and bring down all the liberalism. The Lord knew better. But early in our marriage, I even made Patricia endure my escapades off to a junior college to learn German; thinking, I don't know where the Lord is going to take me, but I want to reach beyond here. Early in the years here – for the first ten years that I was here, I didn't go anywhere. I didn't go anywhere, not anywhere. Then, all of the sudden, the ministry of the church began to move into wider and wider circles.

I didn't know it at the time, but I think the Lord was structuring us and organizing us around the priorities of prayer and the Word and faithful people doing ministry that was in their heart to do. Because it was in their heart to the ministry and they were gifted to do the ministry, they had full charge of the ministry. The people who cared the most, invested the most in that ministry, and that made those ministries flourish and succeed, and the testimony of Christ went out of this church as it went out of that early church. The world began to take notice. The next thing we knew, we were going everywhere.

Notice the result, verse 6. "These men they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them." That is a traditional way to affirm visibly solidarity, unity, solidarity. We stand

with them. You see us do that, right? That's why we do that. You wonder why do we bring missionaries up here? Why do we bring pastors that are going to pastor churches? Why do we stand them here and have all the elders come and lay hands on them? Because that's what they did, and what does that say? That says we're with you in solidarity. We put out hands on you. We connect, we link to you. We empower you with our prayers and our trust and our support.

It was a practice in the New Testament. Even Timothy was set apart into the ministry by the laying on of the hands of the elders. So, these men had been really suggested by the congregation, and you can imagine that because the Hellenistic Jews were the ones who felt that they were being offended, that they were the ones that made the suggestion. Those were all Greek names. The names were accepted, and the whole church literally agrees that this is right, and the apostles lay hands on to establish their own complete agreement.

Then verse 7, the real results. "The Word of God kept on spreading." Why did the Word of God keep on spreading? Why? Because the apostles didn't get caught up doing something other than preaching the Word of God. That has to mark a church. It's so easy for pastors to get distracted. There are pastors who want to get distracted because constant ministry in the Word of God is hard. It's tough, and it's relentless. My life never changes. It is a series of Sunday sermons. My whole life since I showed up here February 9, 1969, has been an endless chain of Sundays. The preparation, the preparation, the preparation, never changes, never changes. But the result is because I have been so blessed to be able to devote myself to the Word along with many other of our faithful pastors, the Word of God keeps on spreading. I'm telling you, it spreads now like it never has, like it never has.

Of course, in the early church, verse 7, "The Word of God kept on spreading - " and guess what? " - the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly." Because when the Word spreads, people get converted, and the church was exploding. The Word kept being preached. The number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and the impact was so great, you've got to love this, "A great many - " not a few, not many, " - a great many of priests were becoming obedient to the faith." Whoa. Now, that doesn't mean necessarily Sanhedrin members, but because there were 24 courses of priests, there were thousands of priests scattered all over the place in the land of Israel in every town and village. But most of them were influenced by the Pharisees, and they bought into that system.

Many of the normal, ordinary, run of the mill priests were, I love this, "Obedient to the faith." What a great expression because believing in Jesus Christ is a command, right? They obeyed it.

So, the church had to get organized. It had to get organized to carry out effective ministry, and that ministry needed to be in the hands of the people who cared the most. It had to get organized so that the people who needed to be proclaiming the Word of God all the time were continuing to do that

and weren't distracted to something else.

So does the church need organization? It does, but it's not complicated is it? You have godly, gifted teachers and preachers who sustain the life of the church and the impact of the church by being the source of the spreading of the Word by which people are saved. Then coming behind that, you have faithful people, gifted people, dedicated people who have passionate concerns for various kinds of ministries. You empower, enable, support those people for those ministries, and the church moves powerfully. When all of those things are taking place, the testimony of the church is great, and the Lord adds to His church.

That was kind of interesting for me to think through, by the way, because I hadn't really thought about all of that, that way since 1973 or whenever it was that I began to discover this. But maybe now you understand a little bit about the way Grace Church is, and how God has continued to bless. The Word keeps spreading, doesn't it? The church keeps increasing.

Father, we thank you for a wonderful time tonight for just the joy of being together and beautiful music and wonderful testimonies. We love being the ordinary church, just simple and ordinary, just genuine and real, authentic, lovers of Christ. Thank you for all that you've done in our church. Thank you for blessing our church in such incredible ways. Thank you for empowering us through the faithful prayers of people. Thank you for causing the Word to spread, just incalculable spreading from so many teachers here. Thank you for increasing the results, adding to your church people who were being saved here and far beyond because of what goes on here.

Lord, thank you for raising up godly teachers. Thank you for raising up faithful men who can handle the business side of things, who have spiritual integrity and maturity and wisdom. Thank you for blessing our church. Lord, we don't want to take that for granted. We don't deserve it. We want to say that quickly. We do not deserve it, but your Word doesn't return void. That's what you've said. And we've tried to be the kind of church that your Word lays out, and you've blessed that. Lord, may we stay so faithful that you will continue to bless it. This we ask in your Son's name, amen. Amen.

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

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

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