

The Unity of the Church Threatened

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[0:00] Acts chapter 6. We'll be reading the first seven verses. This morning. Acts chapter 6 verse 1.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Also Philip, Proculus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

[1:10] They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient.

The unity of the church is a powerful witness to the world.

In fact, it's a means that God uses to win people to Jesus Christ and faith in him. Jesus said that it's through the unity of the church that the world might know and believe that the Father has sent him. It's the standing miracle then. The standing miracle of God on earth. The sign and wonder of his supernatural love.

Found only in the living God. Who in love sent his one and only son into this world to save men from their love of self and hatred of God and neighbor.

[2:17] And this is how they will know that the Father has sent me. When they see you united together. Now, here's the loveless world then that we live in.

Full of shattered promises of love. Full of broken, failed relationships. Biting and devouring one another. Hating and being hated.

Where people are used rather than served. Where self is put before God and neighbor. And it's into this bankrupt world. A world bankrupt of true love.

That the church of Jesus Christ stands forth. As a refreshing oasis of God's love in a barren desert. And her unity can only be explained by the shocking supernatural love.

That is indeed out of this world. For indeed the Son of God has brought this love into the world. And he is reproducing it in his very own disciples.

[3:22] So that it becomes the badge of those who are his disciples. By this all men will know that you are my disciples. When you have love for one another.

And so in our study of Jesus building his church here in the book of Acts. It is the unity of his church that next comes under attack. And if we're not ignorant of Satan's devices.

We will learn lessons this morning. That we need to maintain the loving unity. That is ours in Christ here. We're going to see the threatening problem.

The wise solution. And the glorious result. First of all then. The problem threatening the unity and growth of the church. It must be said that all churches have problems.

Even the first Baptist church of Jerusalem. With their 12 apostles handpicked by the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we look at this problem.

[4:25] And we want to notice first that it developed. Out of the success of the gospel. You see that? The very first words. In those days. In those days when the number of disciples was

increasing.

And we say what days? Well those days when increased persecution failed to shut up the apostles. When instead of being quiet.

Every day and everywhere. They did not stop. Proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ. In those days.

When more and more people were hearing the message.

And becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. That is followers. Tutors. Learners. Worshipers. Imitators.

That's what disciples of Christ are.

In those days of rapid multiplication of disciples. There arose a complaint. So things were going along quite smoothly.

[5:24] But with the success of the gospel. And the growth of the church. There came growing pains. Relations. And problems. And it's interesting that the problems themselves.

Grew out of a beautiful ministry. That was going on in the church. As they were looking after one another's needs. In the body of Christ. So it all seemed to happen innocently enough.

Let me describe the problem itself. There were poor people in the Jerusalem church. Who needed financial help. And especially their widows. We've already seen in Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 4.

That from time to time. Those who owned land and houses. Would sell them and bring the money. And lay it at the apostles feet. That it might be distributed to anyone who had need.

And it was in that way. That there were no needs in the congregation at Jerusalem. They were being met. In this manner. And as long as the church was relatively small.

[6:25] The 12 apostles could handle this ministry. But the rapid increase of converts in the church. Meant that there were more believers. To be taught the word of God.

And there were more widows. And poor people. To be cared for. And so it was in this great revival atmosphere. That we see in the church at Jerusalem.

That some widows were being overlooked. Neglected. We say falling through the cracks. Not receiving their daily distribution of food.

Now I don't believe there was anything intentional. Or devious on the part of the apostles. It just happened due to the rapid growth. Of the number of members in the Jerusalem church. But there was another complicating element to the problem.

That had to do with the very makeup of the church. They were all Jews at this point in the church. Jewish Christians. But there were two different kinds of Jews.

[7:25] Grecian Jews. And Hebraic Jews. I say that in the main. They were all Jewish Christians. And they had these two different kinds of Jews. The Hebraic Jews were Jews who had grown up.

Who had been born and raised right there in the Holy Land of Palestine. When they read the scriptures. They read them or heard them read from the Hebrew language in which they were written.

That's how they worshipped. They spoke Aramaic. Which was the current dialect of the Hebrew language. And Jesus and the twelve apostles were Hebraic Jews.

As were it seems the majority of believers in the Jerusalem church. Those were the Hebraic Jews.

But then there was another group of Jews. They were no less Jewish than the Hebraic Jews.

They were the Grecian Jews. They had been scattered all over the Greco-Roman world for centuries. Part of God's judgment upon Israel.

[8:25] And scattering them among their enemies. And so they grew up in those places. Speaking Greek. The universal language of the Roman Empire.

And so when they worshipped and read from the scriptures. They read from the Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew. And they were now resettling in Palestine.

And many were becoming disciples of Jesus in the church at Jerusalem. So the church has within it two kinds of Jews. One people divided by two languages.

Which you know can be no small obstacle. If you've ever been in a country that does not speak your language. It can be a barrier to communication and to knowledge of people's needs.

Perhaps that even contributed to the neglect of these widows. Now these two groups experience tensions outside of the church of Jesus Christ.

[9:28] Just in the general culture. We read of Saul of Tarsus. And how proud he was to be of the Hebraic Jews. A Hebrew of Hebrews. And there was this looking down the nose upon Greece and Jews and so on.

But the question is would those tensions and the things that contributed to them be checked at the door? Or would they follow them into the church of Jesus Christ?

Somewhat akin to tensions in the American culture that continue to be experienced in our nation.

Between blacks and whites. Things that would have no place in the body of Christ.

The Grecian. The Hebraic Jews. Well as the church grew and more people needed aid. For some reason it seemed that the widows that got neglected happened to be the widows of the Grecian Jews.

And that brings us to the second point about the problem. It was a threat to the unity of the church. When we think about this problem there was a lot of explosive elements about it.

[10:38] First of all the Greek. The Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews. That is. They murmured.

They murmured. They muttered. They grumbled. It's what the Israelites did against Moses and Aaron and God in the wilderness. It's what God forbids his church in Philippians 2:14.

Do everything without complaining. Murmuring. And arguing. It's what John Calvin says. There is something in this word that has the smell of the flesh.

Robertson describes it as the secret grumblings that buzz away until they are heard. Speaking against your brother. That's slander according to James.

It's judging your brother. And that's what they were. They were murmuring against the Hebraic Jews. Now without overemphasizing it. It does seem that the Grecian Jews rather than going directly to the apostles.

[11:44] And reporting their apparent neglect. Chose rather to murmur. Among themselves. Against the Hebraic Jews. Until the rumblings made their way all the way to the apostles.

I trust that as we value the unity of the body of Christ. We are learning to follow our Lord's instructions. That if we believe someone has sinned against us.

We do not speak to anyone but that person first. We go to them. And we don't speak a word of it to anyone else. Until we've spoken to them.

That's Jesus' way to maintain the unity of the body. It doesn't seem that it was followed here.

There's sparks in murmuring and complaining that could ignite the flesh in others.

You know that? When someone murmurs and complains about you. Doesn't that tend to ignite something in you? Even the meekest man Moses on occasion was unhinged by complaining.

[12:49] And acted regrettably. Church leaders then are not immune to this sort of thing. And that's one of the complicating things about this problem.

It wasn't just the neglect. But it's the way that it was being reported and murmured abroad. And then there's in the complaint. The fact that it's falling out upon party lines.

That didn't help anything. Grecian Jews complained against Hebraic Jews. It seems that the disproportion of widows being taken care of.

And those not. It seems like there's more of our widows. The Grecians were saying. That aren't being taken care of. And you Hebraic Jews. Your widows are being taken care of just fine.

And you can see that their complaint could be easily interpreted as a charge of a sinister plot. To only take care of their own.

[13:46] And really not to care about ours. And any time the race card is played today. Emotions are immediately elevated tenfold. Aren't they? And so here there's at least the appearance of an unfair preferential treatment going on.

Along party lines. A showing of favoritism in a sinful way. Do you see the potential then for rising tensions in this church at Jerusalem?

Especially since it was over financial matters. Well they're getting more than we are. Well I'm not wanting to paint the Grecian Jews black.

But only to point up the real dangers of this threat to the unity of the church. We have here all the raw materials that could easily explode into a nasty church split. Thirdly this problem is Jesus way of preparing the church for further expansion.

The problem. You heard me right. Is Jesus way of preparing his church for even greater expansion. Increased numbers.

[14:56] Means increased diversity. And increased diversity means increased problems. And Jesus uses problems to grow and mature his church.

Don't play hooky on the church. Because she has problems. That's the school he is using. To teach and grow his church. Don't skip out on her.

Just because there are problems. Remember where the gospel of Jesus is yet to go. And what it is yet to do. Just how far is Jesus going to go with this diversity thing in his church?

Well every tribe. Every language. Every people. Every nation. There's a lot of diversity there. And challenges to unity.

And so what we're seeing here in Acts chapter 6. Is Jesus Christ kindly teaching his infant church to walk. Before he expects them to run.

[15 : 54] Beginning right here in Jerusalem. Teaching them how to deal with differences among themselves. Stretching them. Oh but he's going to stretch them a whole lot more.

As we'll see in this book of Acts. Bringing Jews and Gentiles together. Into one church to the praise of his saving grace. Showing that we have a unity in Christ.

Deeper than all the differences between us. Demonstrating that Jesus Christ tears down. The dividing walls that separate people. By healing their unloving hearts.

And brings diverse peoples together. Into one big loving family of God. But how will such large differences. Ever be overcome.

Between Jew and Gentile. If even lesser differences. Within the Jewish community. Themselves cannot be overcome. So Jesus begins here.

[16 : 55] So remember. Problems. Brothers and sisters. Problems in the church. Are the school of Christ. He's building his church.

He's sanctifying her. He's stretching her. He's growing her. He's preparing her. He's moving her out. With the gospel. To all peoples. This problem.

Is Jesus' way of preparing them. For that. And then lastly. This problem. Is something Satan would love to exploit. To destroy the unity of the infant church. What we're seeing in the book of Acts.

Is that. Wherever Jesus Christ is building this church. You don't have to look far. Before you find Satan. Seeking to tear it down. We've seen him trying to. Instill hypocrisy into the church.

Then we see the outward. Persecution. Of threats. And that doesn't work. And so it's up to.

Floggings. And that doesn't stop them. From testifying. And now he's going back inside.

[17 : 53] Seeking to stir up trouble. Within. To destroy the church. And if we only see. In Acts chapter 6. This. If we only see it as a Hebraic. Jews. Versus Grecian Jews.

We miss the major players. The major players. Are the seed of the woman. And the serpent. Jesus Christ himself.

And the devil. Remember the cosmic battle. Behind all flesh and blood. Problems. Well wherever you find disunity.

And disorder in the church. You'll find Satan. Stirring things up at the bottom. He's never far away. Always at the elbow. To manipulate. The situation.

To his advantage. To stir up the flesh. To. To murmuring. And gossiping. And slandering. And criticizing. And cutting down. With tongues. That are set on fire.

[18 : 49] By hell. James tells us. And his aim. Is to use the very same problems. That Jesus is using. To build up his church. His aim is to. Use those problems.

To tear it down. So it's no mystery. Why he might want to destroy. The unity in the church. As we began. I said this is. A powerful witness. To the gospel. The saving.

Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in. Breaking up the unity. Of the church. He is interrupting. Her mission. Disunity in the church.

Drains the church's. Energies. Away from. Gospel proclamation. It distracts her. And diverts her. From a focus. On the great commission. Our great. Unfinished business.

As the church. Why has Jesus. Not come back yet. Because the gospel. Has not reached. Every place. That it is to reach. And that's our vision.

[19 : 44] That's our focus. That's where we're going. But Satan would love to. To sidetrack our. Attention. And get us. Preoccupied.

With lesser things. Often. Petty things. Intramural things. Because you see. Once a church is fighting. Against one another. It is not a church.

That is united. In prayer. For the lost. It is not a church. That is arm. In arm. Laboring together. For the gospel. To be saving sinners.

At home. And abroad. No. Disunity. Has a paralyzing effect. Upon the evangelization. Of the church. And don't think. Satan. Is ignorant. Of that reality. It's by the gospel. That his kingdom. Is being dismantled. One conversion. At a time. He's going to do. Everything he can. To squelch.

[20 : 36] The proclamation. Of the message. Of Jesus saves. And even if the squabbling church. Continues to witness. You see. That it's gutted. Their witness. Is gutted.

Of power. Because disunity. In the church. Grieves. It grieves. Its heavenly occupant. The Holy Spirit. Who's given to the church. For what reason? To empower her witness.

Before the watching world. And a grieved Holy Spirit. With a grieved Holy Spirit. The church's wisdom. Lacks that. All surpassing. Power. Power.

That is from God. And not from man. And even. If she continues. To witness. Her disunity.

Erodes the church's witness. Before the watching world. As they see nothing different. In the church. Than what they see in themselves. There's nothing special. About these people. You know our gospel.

[21 : 29] Claims there's something special. About us. Doesn't it? The gospel claims. There's a power in Jesus Christ. To save us from our sins. And no sins are greater. Than our love sins.

We love ourselves. And we don't love God. With all our hearts. And we don't love our neighbor. As ourself. And the gospel claims. To heal that. At the root. And get us loving God.

And loving others. Our gospel claims. To make. Self-centered people like us. To love one another. To forgive offenses. To overcome.

Natural prejudices. And personal preferences. That would otherwise. Divid us. And it is in the reality. Of that love. And unity. That the church's witness.

Finds authenticity. With the world. And they know. That the father. Has sent the son. There's something supernatural. Going on here. This is not love.

[22 : 25] Found on the earth. God so loved the world. That he sent his son. That's what we're seeing. In his people. So is it any wonder. That Satan would put a bullseye. On the unity.

Of the church. Of Jesus Christ. To promote. Cooling affections. Toward one another. To where we would start. Thinking evil. Of one another. Putting wrong. Interpretations.

Upon. Their actions. Stirring up the flesh. To hold grudges. And envy. And jealousy. And wagging tongues. This problem.

In Jerusalem. Has plenty of handles. For Satan. To lay hold of. And to run with. Well that's the problem. But notice the solution. The wise solution.

To the serious threat. And it is Jesus Christ. Who rescues his church. From all her foes. If we at the end of the day.

[23 : 19] Stand back and say. Boy those apostles. Were sure wise men. The way they handled that problem. We've missed the whole point. Haven't we? We know what those apostles. Are capable of. Don't we? We've seen them.

In the gospel of Luke. And. Seeing them arguing about. Who's the greatest. And seeing all the gunpowder. Of disunity. Right within the twelve themselves. If we see anything different.

In this account. It is owing to Jesus Christ. Their head. Who is pouring. That divine sap. From him the vine. Down into his branches.

You see. Jesus Christ. Fights for his church. He was not sleeping. When the unity. Of his infant church. Was being attacked. He was watchful. And he rises to the occasion.

And he pours out. Upon his people. And upon their leaders. This spirit of wisdom. And of understanding. And of counsel. And of power.

[24 : 15] And of knowledge. And of the fear of the Lord. He pours it out upon them. And so what we're seeing here. In the wise solution. Is our Lord Jesus. Is fighting.

For. His church. Don't miss him. Don't miss him in Acts 6. Don't miss him in church history. That's the whole point. Whether we're looking back.

At past. History of the church. Or present day. History. Jesus. Is guiding. Protecting. Keeping. His church.

Well. First of all. As we think of the wise solution. That came through. The spirit. To these apostles. Their humility. In the face of criticism. They were willing to listen.

To criticism. Complaining. They could have said. Who do you think you are? Questioning. An apostle. Or 12 of us.

[25 : 14] Handpicked by Jesus. Who do you think you are? Do you remember. Who we are? We're the leaders. Of this church. Don't complain. They didn't play the authority card.

Here. Did they? How do you respond. To complaint. And criticism. Are you super sensitive? Super defensive.

Against any critical remarks. Of yourself. Do you lash back? Do you go quiet? Do you refuse to hear it? That's all very natural. And that's what the devil. Stirs up. James says.

Everyone should be quick to listen. Quick to listen. Eager to listen. Do you have a complaint? I want to be eager to listen. To it. And that includes leaders.

Especially leaders. The apostles humbly. Listen to the complaint. Even though it might have been made. In a less than gracious manner. Yes. They could have come directly to them.

[26 : 11] Rather than mumbling about it. Behind their back. Still. They listened. Listened. There's a lesson in humility there. Isn't there? They didn't play the accusing card. In return.

Well. I'm not going to listen to you. You've got a complaining spirit. No. They didn't deflect the guilt away. And the attention away from themselves. They were humble enough.

To bear with their faults. To look past them. And to get to the core. Of the complaint. Is there any truth. To what they are saying.

They were listening. With interest. Nor did they play the self-pity card. Here we are. Working so hard. For these people. I mean. We're not only preaching.

The word of God. To them daily. We're also. Taking care of these gifts. For the poor. And all they can do. Is thank us. By criticizing. No. We don't hear that at all.

[27 : 04] It's not saying. They didn't wrestle. With some of that. If they're anything. Like us. And we know they are. But. But upon examination. Of the criticism. They were humble enough. Even to acknowledge. The apparent.

Truthfulness. Of the criticism. Their own faults. And neglect. Of these Grecian widows. Leaders of churches. That are too proud.

To listen. To criticism. Are too proud. To be leaders. If we're not humble enough. To acknowledge. Our failures. And deficiencies.

We should not be. In that position. Oh. This is. This is beautiful. These are the men. Remember. Who were. Defending their turf. Right. The very last day.

Before Jesus was. Was arrested. As to who's the greatest. Look at their humility. Oh. The spirit of Jesus. Is filling them. You say. What does humility.

[27 : 58] Have to do with the wisdom. That we see in this solution. Everything. James says. Who is wise. And understanding. Among you. Let him show it. By his good life. By the humility. Deeds done in the humility.

That comes from wisdom. The wise man. Is the humble man. The foolish man. Is the proud man. And we're seeing something. Of the wisdom of God.

Given to these leaders. That with humility. They would receive. The complaint. Secondly. They're dealing. With the problem. In a timely manner. They gather.

The whole church. To deal with it. And set forth. A proposed plan. They didn't ignore it. They didn't give the devil. A foothold. They didn't allow. The situation. To ripen. Into deeper division.

But dealt with it. In a timely manner. And then notice. The wisdom. Of the plan itself. Even in the. Form of government. Employed. Was it elder rule. Or was it. Congregational rule.

[28 : 53] I find both elements. Here present. And granted. They were apostles. Yet they were acting. As the leaders. Of this church. At this point. And the lead. Is clearly taken. By the apostles.

They call the church. Together. They set forth. The proposed plan. But notice. They did not choose. The seven. They involved. The members.

Of the congregation. In the remedy. Of the problem. They were called. Upon. To choose. And even to agree. To the plan. To choose. And then. To carry it out.

And there was wisdom. In that. Now up to this point. The apostles. Have been doing. Two facts. Two areas of work. The preaching. Of the word of God. And also.

The distribution. Of the goods. That were laid. At their feet. But they recognized. That the work. Had grown. To such a degree. That they could. No longer. Do both things. Well. And they were not.

[29 : 46] Too proud. To say so. Or to ask. For help. And so. They refused. To be sidetracked. From their primary. Calling. That was no small part. Of their wisdom. It would not be right.

They say. For us. To neglect. The ministry. Of the word of God. In order to wait. On tables. Now they're not saying. You know. This is the only. Really important. Work here. The preaching. Of the word. And this other stuff. Waiting on. That really is unimportant. That's not what they're saying. They're not demeaning that. They have been involved. In that. Haven't they? Up to this point.

Indeed. James. One of the. The first letters. To the early church. At Jerusalem. Says that if your religion. Doesn't do that. Look after the needs. Among you. Of widows. And orphans. It's worthless. This is not unimportant business. That they're just shucking off. To somebody else. No. But they understood. Their calling. And their gifting.

[30 : 42] They were called. And appointed. By Jesus Christ. To preach. The word. It was. By filling. Jerusalem. With their doctrine. Their preaching. That sinners. Were being saved. By the multitudes. And they would not. Be drawn. Aside. From their. Chief. Responsibility. So.

They said. You choose. The seven men. And we'll turn. The work of charity. Over to them. But we will give ourselves. To prayer. And the ministry. Of the word. Remember. All the baptized. Disciples. In chapter 2. Verse 42. Devoted themselves. To what? First of all. The apostles. Teaching. And if. You have a church full. That is devoted. To the. Leaders. Teaching. Then the leaders. Better be devoted. To preaching. And that's what they're saying here. They use the very same word. We will devote ourselves.

[31 : 37] To prayer. And the preaching. Of the word. Again. We see the importance. Of prayer. Satan is not. In the least. Bothered. By preaching. That is not. Joined to prayer.

Because prayer. Brings this all surpassing. Power of God. Into the field. And without it. Our preaching. Is merely words. But with the spirit. It comes in more than word. In power. In the spirit. In deep conviction. We'll give ourselves. To prayer. And to. The ministry. Of the word. So they turn. The responsibility. Of the work of charity. Over to properly. Qualified men. They. They took the lead. In the situation. They determined. The number. That's needed. Seven. They set forth. The qualifications. For them. Choose men. It's the word. For male. In contrast. To female. Because they are to have. Some form. Of leadership. Here. And to be. Authorized. To act. On behalf. Of the church. So they must be men.

[32 : 32] They must be known. They must be men. Of good reputation. Tried men. Attested men. With proven character. After all. They're going to be handling. Your finances.

Here in this church. And dealing with your. Women. And widows. And they must be known. To be full of the spirit. And wisdom. Sometimes. Churches just look. For business men. Well. There's some value. In that kind of wisdom. That's not what's. Pointed out here. They must be men. Filled with the spirit.

They must be. Spiritual men. Above everything else. Guided. And gifted. And controlled. And marked. By the fruit. Of the spirit. With his graces. And gifts. And especially. Wisdom. Not just raw. Knowledge of the bible. But the ability. And willingness. To put. Bible truth. Into. Practical life.

[33 : 27] That's the kind of men. You want for this work. And it will equip them. For everything. That they will meet with. Now you choose them. They're your servants. They're serving your needs. They're handling the monies. That you give. They're your representatives. You choose them. There was a lot of wisdom. In that. That the lord gave them. And it pleased the whole group. How easy is that?

Some people estimate. The church was 20 to 25 thousand people. At this point. You've heard the statement. You can please some people. Some of you don't. It pleased the whole group. If that wasn't God. The son. Pouring out the spirit of wisdom. And love. To unite the people. And especially.

In a situation. That was so full. Of the naughty. Threats of division. Well. Whether this was the office of deacon.

[34 : 23] That was now being instituted. Or whether it was just a prototype. Of that which later. Was noticed. And set aside. Of men who were. Called deacons in the church.

We see the wisdom of God in it. And how. I thank God. For the five deacons. He's given us here. At Grace Fellowship Church. For Chuck. And Dennis.

And Bill. And Stan. And Dan. Love these men. Honor them. Pray for them. Continue to offer yourself up.

In willing service. To help them. As they help us. To be able to give ourselves. To the task. That we are. To give ourselves to.

And they give themselves. To the tasks. That need to be done. In the body of Christ. So you see. The wisdom of God. In handling this.

[35 : 16] This neglect. The neglect is. Widows are not being cared for. And the disciples. The apostles. Had the wisdom to say. We're not going to fix. This neglect.

By neglecting this. But by that. They were neither saying. Well. We're not going to neglect this. We can afford to neglect that. No. No. Both bases were covered. The wisdom of God.

Given to his leaders. So the. The group. Was satisfied. They were all pleased. With the plan. And then they enacted it. They chose seven. Stephen and Philip. Are mentioned. Because we're going to meet them again.

Following chapters. All seven men. Have Greek names. And that may point. I say may point. To the fact. That they were all. Greek speaking Jews. If so.

What a generous concession. From the Hebraic Jews. To have Greek speakers. To meet the needs. Of these neglected. Grecian widows.

[36 : 14] Well. We admire the wisdom seen. And their dependence upon the Lord. As they prayed for his grace. Laid hands upon them. And prayed for his grace. They're saying. By prayer. Lord.

These men need your help. To carry out their function. In the church. That's true of every single one of you. Who've been gifted. By the Holy Spirit. With some gift. You need the Spirit of God.

To enable you. To do whatever that gift is. And so they prayed. And especially for these men. As they laid their hands upon them. Formally.

Handing their. This responsibility over to them. Commissioning them. Giving them the authority. To carry it out. And seeking the blessing of the Lord. Upon all that they do. In prayer.

What wisdom. To depend upon the Lord. And so. We see. The result. The glorious result.

[37 : 10] Verse 7. The unity was preserved. Wasn't it? And that promoted. The greater success. Of the gospel. So the word of God spread. That's the first statement.

The word of God spread. What a glorious result. That's what was being threatened. Either by disunity in the body. It would tarnish the word. That was being spread.

Or shut it down. Or slow it down. Or distract. The apostles from it. Over to waiting on table. And what was the result? At the end of the day. As Jesus.

Poured his wisdom. Upon his church. The word of God spread. And what else happened? The number of disciples. In Jerusalem. Increased rapidly. Even against all the efforts.

Of Satan. To stop Jesus. From building his church. As the apostles. Went to their ministry. Of prayer. And the word. Without distraction. And others cared.

[38 : 06] For the needy. The converts. To Jesus Christ. Multiplied greatly. And get this. A large number of priests. Became obedient. To the faith. These are the most unlikely.

Converts in Jerusalem. Here were some of the. The new trophies of grace. Given to Jesus Christ. From the most resistant group. In Jerusalem.

The greatest enemies. Of the cross of Christ. Usually they were Sadducees. Along with Annas and Caiaphas. But we're seeing. There is an irresistible grace.

In Jesus Christ. That will undo. The resistance. Of the hardest sinner. And make them willing. In the day of his power.

To obey the gospel. Would have been a great work. If just. Five priests. Had been saved. How much. More wonderful is it.

[39 : 02] That Jesus Christ. Saved many of them. A large number of priests. Now own Jesus. As their savior. And high priest. Whatever that would do.

To their career. They became obedient. To the faith. Of the gospel. You know the gospel. Is not only an invitation. It's a command. Have you obeyed the gospel?

You know what it commands you? It commands you. To stop right now. As your back is turned to God. It commands you. Stop now. Not tomorrow. Not a year from now. Now.

Stop the course. You're going on. A rebellion against God. And turn to the Lord. And cast all your hopes of heaven. On Jesus Christ. That's the gospel of command. That's Jesus saying.

Come to me. It's an invitation. But it's a command. Come to me. Right now. Whoever you are. Whatever you've done. You must come to Jesus Christ. And if you wait. If you tarry.
[39 : 59] You're disobeying. The gospel. This is the message. That God is sending into the world. That he has given us eternal life. And this life is in his son.

And he who has the son has life. But he who has not the son. Has not life. So come to Christ for life. Come to me. He says. And these priests became obedient.

To the gospel. And if you come today. You too. Will be forgiven. Even as these priests were. For their Christ hating hearts.

And activities. But you see. That's the result. That's the thing that Jesus was aiming at. All along here. The word of God spreading. Grace fellowship.

Are you about the spreading of God's word? If not. We're out of step with our head. Disunity will distort that. Work. It will slow it.

[40 : 56] It will sidetrack it. We must. Cherish. The unity of the spirit. That's the first. Point of application. The spirit has given us a sweet unity.

Here at grace fellowship. Let's cherish it. Let's thank God for it. Because in this unity. Christ's glory is made known. His gospel is adorned.

And his church prospers. Because there the Lord commands the blessing. And even life forevermore. Be sure the enemy. Has taken notice of our unity.

And will not leave it unchallenged. And then secondly. Let's make every effort. To maintain the unity then. Let's be thankful. And cherish the unity he's given us.

But let's do everything in our power. Make every effort. Paul says. To maintain the unity of the spirit. And the bond of peace. Let's do the things that make for peace.

[41 : 50] Let's go the second mile. Let's shut our lips. And answer a harsh word with a gentle word. Let's put the best construction upon. Our brother or sister's actions.

It's better to be wronged. Brothers and sisters. Than to fracture the unity. So dearly bought by Jesus blood. Because there's always more at stake.

Than our own interests. Our own ideas. Doing things our way. No there is the demonstration. Of the father's supernatural love.

In sending his son. To save sinners. And that's. To be seen in us. So that the world might know. That the world might believe. That he sent us. It's worth. Every effort. That we can make. To maintain the unity. And lastly. Let's grow in the Christ-like graces.

[42 : 52] That promote unity. Do we want to maintain the unity? Then grow in the graces. That promote unity. That spreads it around. Like a sweet smelling aroma. What are they?

Paul says. Well. Be completely humble. And gentle. Be meek. Don't demand. To have your way. Be patient. Bear with one another. In love.

Consider one another. Better than yourself. Seek not your own good. But the goods of others. Let this very mind be in you. Which was in Christ. These are the graces.

That promote unity. You know. That was his prayer. To his father. On the night he was arrested.

That he would unite them. That the world might know.

That the father had sent him. And could Acts chapter 6. Be the answer of his father. To his prayer. Yes son. I will do as you said.

[43 : 49] And keep them. Here in their infancy. From being. Disbanded. And broken. In their unity. To my praise. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus. It is a great privilege. To have heard the gospel. To have had the invitation. Given to us. And the.

The command. To come to you. And to be saved. And I pray for any. Who still. Have not repented. And trusted in Christ. That they would. Be given no rest.

Until they obey the gospel. And cast all their hopes. Upon the Savior. Lord. It's a great privilege. To belong to your people. To be in the family of God.

Where something of the very love. That fills the heart. Of you. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. Is now beating in our hearts. And. We give you all glory for that.

[44 : 44] And thank you for the love. We have experienced. And the unity you've granted. Oh. Protect us. Lord Jesus. Fight for us. And. Build us up.

Not only in our most holy faith. But also in this most holy love. That we might be able to adorn. The doctrines of God our Savior. By a love that will let the world know.

That we're your disciples. And that there is such a salvation. And such a Savior for sinners. So speed your work. Heal the breaches. All throughout Christendom we pray. Wherever your name is. Is mentioned. We ask that it might be. In a demonstration. Of the Spirit's power. Both in word. And in life. Thank you. In Jesus name. Amen.