***The First Deacons***

**Summer 2021, Acts 6:1-7 August 1, 2021**

***So the word of God spread.  
The number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly,  
and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*Acts 6:7**

**Catching our breath**

1 *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing . . . .*

Acts 6:1

1) Growth does not guarantee \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) Luke has given the believers a new name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (“believers” in Acts 2:44)

**Growing pains**

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 . . . .*

Acts 6:1

1) The church has always faced multi-culturalism: cultures clash but the gospel unites

2) Complaining is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Philippians 2:14; 1 Peter 4:9; Exodus 16; Isaiah 58:7-12)

3) Growth led to an administrative \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4) Making sure needs are met (see 2 Thess. 3:12; Titus 2:14; ) is an important role for the disciples

**The apostles’ solution**

2 *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. 3 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 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”*

Acts 6

1) The apostles recognized the need to share leadership (see Exodus 18)

2) “Wait on tables” is NOT a put down (see Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3; Philippians 1:1)

3) Overseers (elders) and deacons have different but essential ministries in the church

Key question: how do today’s VDM share the apostles’ “prayer and word” ministry?

**Learning from the disciples’ decision**

5 *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

*7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Acts 6

1) The decision was made corporately and by consensus

Key question: how much of this process is prescriptive?

2) The decision honored the input of the Hellenistic members of the community

3) The decision reflects what the Holy Spirit thinks is most important of our leaders

**Even more Pentecost lessons for the church today**

1) Watch (and organize) for God’s surprises!

*7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Acts 6

If we pant to see the Word of God increase, multitudes added to the disciples, and a great company of those who are least likely to be saved brought in, there must be an adequate instrumentality. Nothing can avail without *the operation of the Holy Spirit and the smile from heaven.*

from Spurgeon’s “Great Success” sermon (attached below)

2) Rule #5 (paraphrased): Don’t waste grace and power

8 *Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people . . . .*

Acts 6 (go back to Acts 4:32-35 for the importance of grace and power)

3) It’s OK to know the opposition

8 *Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, 10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.*

Acts 6

4) Diaconal work must remain a priority for the church (for our members and community)

May we not take a lesson from that, that God's great influences, when they come into a man, do not concern themselves only with great intellectual problems and the like, but that they will operate to make him more fit to do the most secular and the most trivial things that can be put into his hand to do? The Holy Ghost had to fill Stephen before he could hand out loaves and money to the widows in Jerusalem.

Maclaren’s work on Acts 6 (read all of Section III for the importance of the Holy Spirit)



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has a wonderful sermon (especially the conclusion to the unconverted) on this text at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0802.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0802.htm)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermon on this text is at  
<https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15>

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon at [*https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47*](https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47)and his important [“Hope for the City”](http://storage.cloversites.com/highpeakfellowship/documents/Hope_For_The_City.pdf) sermon on Acts 8 begins with the Stephen story.

John Piper has an interesting take on this passage at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias%20)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

# Table Description automatically generated

CRCNA Church Order, Article 25

c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all

people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers.

Deacons shall lead the members in ways that inspire faithful stewardship

of their time, talents, and resources and so give life in this world the shape

of God’s kingdom. Thus deacons shall create and encourage participation

in structures and ministries of mercy, justice, and reconciliation, both locally

and globally. All of this shall be done with words of biblical encouragement

and testimony, which assure the unity of word and deed.

CRCNA liturgy for the ordination of deacons:

Deacons serve by leading and equipping the church to minister to its members and the world in a rich diversity of ministries, awakening compassion, demonstrating mercy, seeking justice, and collaborating with God’s Spirit for the transformation of persons and communities. In imitation of Christ’s mercy, deacons teach us to love God, our neighbors, and the creation with acts of generous sharing, joyful hospitality, thoughtful care, and wise stewardship of all of God’s gifts. Deacons offer holistic responses that respect the dignity of all people, working to change exploitative structures and systems, equipping the church for ministries of reconciliation and peacemaking, and seeking opportunities for advocacy. To help them accomplish these tasks, deacons are to identify and develop gifts in both the church and community. By adding to all this words of encouragement and hope, deacons demonstrate in word and deed the care of the Lord himself.

### Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Acts: at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

### FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

'Men … full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' … 'A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost….'   
'Stephen, full of faith and power.'—ACTS vi. 3, 5, 8.

I have taken the liberty of wrenching these three fragments from their context, because of their remarkable parallelism, which is evidently intended to set us thinking of the connection of the various characteristics which they set forth. The first of them is a description, given by the Apostles, of the sort of man whom they conceived to be fit to look after the very homely matter of stifling the discontent of some members of the Church, who thought that their poor people did not get their fair share of the daily ministration. The second and third of them are parts of the description of the foremost of these seven men, the martyr Stephen. In regard to the first and second of our three fragmentary texts, you will observe that the cause is put first and the effect second. The 'deacons' were to be men 'full of the Holy Ghost,' and that would make them 'full of wisdom.' Stephen was 'full of faith,' and that made him 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Probably the same relation subsists in the third of our texts, of which the true reading is not, as it appears in our Authorised Version, 'full of faith and power,' but as it is given in the Revised Version, 'full of grace and power.' He was filled with grace—by which apparently is here meant the sum of the divine spiritual gifts—and therefore he was full of power. Whether that is so or not, if we link these three passages together, as I have taken the liberty of doing, we get a point of view appropriate for such a day [Footnote: Preached on Whit Sunday.] as this, when all that calls itself Christendom is commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit, and His abiding influence upon the Church. So I simply wish to gather together the principles that come out of these three verses thus concatenated.

I. We may all, if we will, be full of the Holy Spirit.

If there is a God at all, there is nothing more reasonable than to suppose that He can come into direct contact with the spirits of the men whom He has made. And if that Almighty God is not an Almighty indifference, or a pure devil—if He is love—then there is nothing more certain than that, if He can touch and influence men's hearts towards goodness and His own likeness, He most certainly will.

The probability, which all religion recognises, and in often crude forms tries to set forth, and by superstitious acts to secure, is raised to an absolute certainty, if we believe that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Truth, speaks truth to us about this matter. For there is nothing more certain than that the characteristic which distinguishes Him from all other teachers, is to be found not only in the fact that He did something for us on the Cross, as well as taught us by His word; but that in His teaching He puts in the forefront, not the prescriptions of our duty, but the promise of God's gift; and ever says to us, 'Open your hearts and the divine influences will flow in and fill you and fit you for all goodness.' The Spirit of God fills the human spirit, as the mysterious influence which we call life permeates and animates the whole body, or as water lies in a cup.

Consider how that metaphor is caught up, and from a different point of view is confirmed, in regard to the completeness which it predicates, by other metaphors of Scripture. What is the meaning of the Baptist's saying, 'He shall baptise you in the Holy Ghost and fire'? Does that not mean a complete immersion in, and submersion under, the cleansing flood? What is the meaning of the Master's own saying, 'Tarry ye… till ye be clothed with power from on high'? Does not that mean complete investiture of our nakedness with that heavenly-woven robe? Do not all these emblems declare to us the possibility of a human spirit being charged to the limits of its capacity with a divine influence?

We do not here discuss questions which separate good Christian people from one another in regard of this matter. My object now is not to lay down theological propositions, but to urge upon Christian men the acquirement of an experience which is possible for them. And so, without caring to enter by argument on controversial matters, I desire simply to lay emphasis upon the plain implication of that word, '*filled* with the Holy Ghost.' Does it mean less than the complete subjugation of a man's spirit by the influence of God's Spirit brooding upon him, as the prophet laid himself on the dead child, lip to lip, face to face, beating heart to still heart, limb to limb, and so diffused a supernatural life into the dead? That is an emblem of what all you Christian people may have if you like, and if you will adopt the discipline and observe the conditions which God has plainly laid down.

That fulness will be a growing fulness, for our spirits are capable, if not of infinite, at any rate of indefinite, expansion, and there is no limit known to us, and no limit, I suppose, which will ever be reached, so that we can go no further—to the possible growth of a created spirit that is in touch with God, and is having itself enlarged and elevated and ennobled by that contact. The vessel is elastic, the walls of the cup of our spirit, into which the new wine of the divine Spirit is poured, widen out as the draught is poured into them. The more a man possesses and uses of the life of God, the more is he capable of possessing and the more he will receive. So a continuous expansion in capacity, and a continuous increase in the amount of the divine life possessed, are held out as the happy prerogative and possibility of a Christian soul.

This Stephen had but a very small amount of the clear Christian knowledge that you and I have, but he was leagues ahead of most Christian people in regard to this, that he was 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Brethren, you can have as much of that Spirit as you want. It is my own fault if my Christian life is not what the Christian lives of some of us, I doubt not, are. 'Filled with the Holy Spirit'! rather a little drop in the bottom of the cup, and all the rest gaping emptiness; rather the fire died down, Pentecostal fire though it be, until there is scarcely anything but a heap of black cinders and grey ashes in your grate, and a little sandwich of flickering flame in one corner; rather the rushing mighty wind died down into all but a dead calm, like that which afflicts sailing-ships in the equatorial regions, when the thick air is deadly still, and the empty sails have not strength even to flap upon the masts; rather the 'river of the water of life' that pours 'out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb,' dried up into a driblet.

That is the condition of many Christian people. I say not of which of us. Let each man settle for himself how that may be. At all events here is the possibility, which may be realised with increasing completeness all through a Christian man's life. We may be filled with the Holy Spirit.

II. If we are 'full of faith' we shall be filled with the Spirit.

That is the condition as suggested by one of our texts—'a man full of faith,' and therefore 'of the Holy Ghost.' Now, of course, I believe, as I suppose all people who have made any experience of their own hearts must believe, that before a soul exercises confidence in Jesus Christ, and passes into the household of faith, there have been playing upon it the influences of that divine Comforter whose first mission is to 'convince the world of sin.' But between such operations as these, which I believe are universally diffused, wheresoever the Word of God and the message of salvation are proclaimed—between such operations as these, and those to which I now refer, whereby the divine Spirit not only operates upon, but dwells in, a man's heart, and not only brings conviction to the world of sin, there is a wide gulf fixed; and for all the hallowing, sanctifying, illuminating and strength-giving operations of that divine Spirit, the pre-requisite condition is our trust. Jesus Christ taught us so, in more than one utterance, and His Apostle, in commenting on one of the most remarkable of His sayings on this subject, says, 'This spake He concerning the Holy Spirit which *they that believed* in Him were to receive.' Faith is the condition of receiving that divine influence. But what kind of faith? Well, let us put away theological words. If you do not believe that there is any such influence to be got, you will not get it. If you do not want it, you will not get it. If you do not expect it, you will not get it. If professing to believe it, and to wish it, and to look for it, you are behaving yourself in such a way as to show that you do not really desire it, you will never get it. It is all very well to talk about faith as the condition of receiving that divine Spirit. Do not let us lose ourselves in the word, but try to translate the somewhat threadbare expression, which by reason of its familiarity produces little effect upon some of us, and to turn it into non-theological English. It just comes to this,—if we are simply trusting ourselves to Jesus Christ our Lord, and if in that trust we do believe in the possibility of even *our* being filled with the divine Spirit, and if that possibility lights up a leaping flame of desire in our hearts which aspires towards the possession of such a gift, and if belief that our reception of that gift is possible because we trust ourselves to Jesus Christ, and longing that we may receive it, combine to produce the confident expectation that we shall, and if all of these combine to produce conduct which neither quenches nor grieves that divine Guest, then, and only then, shall we indeed be filled with the Spirit.

I know of no other way by which a man can receive God into his heart than by opening his heart for God to come in. I know of no other way by which a man can woo—if I may so say—the Divine Lover to enter into his spirit than by longing that He would come, waiting for His coming, expecting it, and being supremely blessed in the thought that such a union is possible. Faith, that is trust, with its appropriate and necessary sequels of desire and expectation and obedience, is the completing of the electric circuit, and after it the spark is sure to come. It is the opening of the windows, after which sunshine cannot but flood the chamber. It is the stretching out of the hand, and no man that ever, with love and longing, lifted an empty hand to God, dropped it still empty. And no man who, with penitence for his own act, and trust in the divine act, lifted blood-stained and foul hands to God, ever held them up there without the gory patches melting away, and becoming white as snow. Not 'all the perfumes of Araby' can sweeten those bloody hands. Lift them up to God, and they become pure. Whosoever wishes that he may, and believes that he shall, receive from Christ the fulness of the Spirit, will not be disappointed. Brethren, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,' shall not 'your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?'

III. Lastly, if we are filled with the Spirit we shall be 'full of wisdom, grace, and power.'

The Apostles seemed to think that it was a very important business to look after a handful of poor widows, and see that they had their fair share in the dispensing of the modest charity of the half-pauper Jerusalem church, when they said that for such a purely secular thing as that a man would need to be 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' Surely, something a little less august might have served their turn to qualify men for such a task! 'Wisdom' here, I suppose, means practical sagacity, common sense, the power of picking out an impostor when she came whining for a dole. Very commonplace virtues!—but the Apostles evidently thought that such everyday operations of the understanding as these were not too secular and commonplace to owe their origin to the communication to men of the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

May we not take a lesson from that, that God's great influences, when they come into a man, do not concern themselves only with great intellectual problems and the like, but that they will operate to make him more fit to do the most secular and the most trivial things that can be put into his hand to do? The Holy Ghost had to fill Stephen before he could hand out loaves and money to the widows in Jerusalem.

And do you not think that your day's work, and your business perplexities, come under the same category? Perhaps the best way to secure understanding of what we ought to do, in regard to very small and secular matters, is to keep ourselves very near to God, with the windows of our hearts opened towards Jerusalem, that all the guidance and light that can come from Him may come into us. Depend upon it, unless we have God's guidance in the trivialities of life, ninety per cent., ay! and more, of our lives will be without God's guidance; because trivialities make up life. And unless my Father in heaven can guide me about what we, very mistakenly, call 'secular' things, and what we very vulgarly call trivial things, His guidance is not worth much. The Holy Ghost will give you wisdom for to-morrow, and all its little cares, as well as for the higher things, of which I am not going to speak now, because they do not come within my text.

'Full of grace,'—that is a wide word, as I take it. If, by our faith, we have brought into our hearts that divine influence, the Spirit of God does not come empty-handed, but He communicates to us whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are fair and honourable, whatsoever things in the eyes of men are worthy to be praised, and by the tongues of men have been called virtue. These things will all be given to us step by step, not without our own diligent co-operation, by that divine Giver. Effort without faith, and faith without effort, are equally incomplete, and the co-operation of the two is that which is blessed by God.

Then the things which are 'gracious,' that is to say, given by His love, and also gracious in the sense of partaking of the celestial beauty which belongs to all virtue, and to all likeness in character to God, these things will give us a strange, supernatural *power* amongst men. The word is employed in my third text, I presume, in its narrow sense of miracle-working power, but we may fairly widen it to something much more than that. Our Lord once said, when He was speaking about the gift of the Holy Spirit, that there were two stages in its operation. In the first, it availed for the refreshment and the satisfying of the desires of the individual; in the second it became, by the ministration of that individual, a source of blessing to others. He said, 'If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink,' and then, immediately, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' That is to say, whoever lives in touch with God, having that divine Spirit in his heart, will walk amongst men the wielder of an unmistakable power, and will be able to bear witness to God, and move men's hearts, and draw them to goodness and truth. The only power for Christian service is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power for self-government is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power which will keep us in the way that leads to life, and will bring us at last to the rest and the reward, is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit.

I am charged to all who hear me now with this message. Here is a gift offered to you. You cannot pare and batter at your own characters so as to make them what will satisfy your own consciences, still less what will satisfy the just judgment of God; but you can put yourself under the moulding influences of Christ's love. Dear brethren, the one hope for dead humanity, the bones very many and very dry, is that from the four winds there should come the breath of God, and breathe in them, and they shall live, 'an exceeding great army.' Forget all else that I have been saying now, if you like, but take these two sentences to your hearts, and do not rest till they express your own personal experience; If I am to be good I must have God's Spirit within me. If I am to have God's Spirit within me, I must be 'full of faith.'

# Growth Pains (Acts 6:1-15)

Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15*](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15)

41 So they left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. 42 And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ ([Acts 5:41-42](javascript:%7b%7d)).[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P9_420)

1 Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. 3 But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch. 6 They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them. 7 The word of God continued to spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 They incited the people, the elders, and the experts in the law; then they approached Stephen, seized him, and brought him before the council. 13 They brought forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop saying things against this holy place and the law. 14 For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” 15 All who were sitting in the council looked intently at Stephen and saw his face was like the face of an angel ([Acts 6:1-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P12_2988)

### Introduction[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P14_3892)

The mission of the apostles (and the church) is to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus to lost men and women, beginning in Jerusalem, but extending to the entire inhabited world. This was the final command of our Lord to the apostles:

7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

If there is one thing that the Sanhedrin has made clear to the apostles, it is that they must stop preaching the good news of salvation through the risen Messiah, Jesus Christ:

And they called them in and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus ([Acts 4:18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

And they summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them ([Acts 5:40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The disciples were not intimidated. They made it clear that they intended to keep on preaching Jesus:

19 But Peter and John replied, “Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, 20 for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard” ([Acts 4:19-20](javascript:%7b%7d); see 5:27-32).

Indeed, they rejoiced because they were privileged to suffer for the name of Jesus:

So they left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name ([Acts 5:41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

They prayed for greater boldness to proclaim the gospel, and God responded:

29 And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage, 30 while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously ([Acts 4:29-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As a result, the Word has gone forth in power, for they did not cease to preach Jesus:

And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ ([Acts 5:42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we come to chapter 6, we find a different kind of threat to the preaching of the gospel. It is not another instance of persecution, nor another prohibition from the Sanhedrin; it is a crisis within the church, which could distract the apostles from their primary mission. Let us see how this crisis is dealt with, and what lessons there may be here for us.

### The Structure of this Message

When I have taught through Acts previously, I dealt with Acts chapter 6 in two lessons.[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P31_7224) I taught [Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d), and then dealt with the last half of chapter 6 along with chapter 7 – Stephen’s sermon and resulting stoning. I have chosen to deal with chapter 6 differently this time. We will study all of chapter 6 in this lesson, and then deal with chapter 7 in our next message.

While the chapter and verse divisions of the Bible are not a part of the original text,[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P33_7651) they are very useful to us. In Acts, these chapter divisions would suggest that we consider both sections together: (1) the problem of the neglected widows in verses 1-7; and, (2) the powerful preaching and resulting arrest of Stephen in verses 8-15.

I have come to the conclusion that much of Bible study has to do with “connecting the dots” of Scripture. The “dots” (so to speak) are just far enough apart that the natural man will not see the connection. The believer will see these connections through the ministry of the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 2:9-16](javascript:%7b%7d)). And so it is that I have committed to consider all of Acts chapter 6 in one message, seeking to understand not only the message of each of the two major divisions, but also to grasp the relationship between the two divisions. Let us look to the Spirit of God to make the truths of this text, like all others, clear to our hearts and minds.

#### The Problem of the Neglected Widows [Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. 3 But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch. 6 They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them. 7 The word of God continued to spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith ([Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### The Setting

As we have seen from earlier statements in Acts, the church continued to grow, in spite of opposition and persecution. Here, I believe that Luke calls our attention to the growth of the church because it was part of the problem the apostles must deal with. Church growth was a factor in the friction that was surfacing in the church due to discrepancies in the care of its widows.[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P39_10136) Growth has its benefits, but it also has its pitfalls.

In order to understand the problem that had arisen in the growing church in Jerusalem, we must be aware of the differences between “**Greek-speaking Jews**” and “**native Hebraic Jews**” ([Acts 6:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). A “**native Hebraic Jew**” was most likely born and raised in Israel. In Texas, you will see cars with a bumper sticker that reads: “Native Texan.” I’ve seen others that read, “I wasn’t born in Texas, but I got here as fast as I could.” “**Greek-speaking Jews**” were most likely born and raised in one of the Greek-speaking countries outside of Israel.

It was not just a matter of the place of one’s birth, but of one’s native language. “**Native Hebraic Jews**” would have spoken Aramaic (closely related to Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament). “**Greek-speaking Jews**” would have spoken Greek and also the native tongue of their country. These would be the languages in which those gathered at Pentecost heard the praises of God:

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Completely baffled, they said, “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!” ([Acts 2:5-11](javascript:%7b%7d))

The apostles (and perhaps others) who spoke in tongues were Galileans, and thus they were “**native Hebraic Jews.**” Those who had come from various distant locations were “**Greek-speaking Jews**.” The miracle at Pentecost was that those who were “**Greek-speaking Jews**” heard “**native Hebraic Jews**” speaking the praises of God in their own native language – not Greek, but the native tongue of their place of birth.

Beyond one’s place of birth and language, there were other distinctions between these two groups. Most notably, there would be significant cultural differences. They did things differently. No wonder that there were many synagogues in Jerusalem (as we will shortly see in [Acts 6:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). These Hellenistic Jews met for teaching and fellowship in synagogues with people of the same place of birth, language, and culture.

The “**native Hebraic Jews**” may very well have been in the majority. If now, they at least had many advantages over the others. This was their turf. They were the ones who could, and would, speak with greater authority. No doubt, they tended to look down on those “late comers” who could not even speak Aramaic.

The growth of the church was one reason why the number of widows the church cared for was large. But there was another reason. Many “foreign” (i.e. “**Hellenistic**”) Jews felt that the end times were near, and thus they wanted to spend their last days in or near Jerusalem. This was the place where it would all come to a head. And so many widows seem to have spent most of their resources getting to Jerusalem. They may very well have left their families behind, which means their source of support was left behind.[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P47_13537) With such a growing population (it wasn’t just widows who wanted to relocate to Jerusalem), property in Jerusalem was scarce, and prices were undoubtedly high. The widows may have been forced to find housing outside of Jerusalem proper, perhaps in some of the “suburbs.”

While we are not told the ways in which the Greek-speaking widows were overlooked, it is not difficult to imagine some possibilities. There could have been geographic issues, like distance from Jerusalem proper. Perhaps the feeding tables were set up in Jerusalem proper, but many of the Greek-speaking widows lived too far away (and there were no “Meals on Wheels” available). Perhaps language played a part. What if the announcements as to where and when feedings would occur were written in Aramaic? The Greek-speaking widows would be left in the dark as to where to eat.

The discrepancy in the care of the widows does not seem to be intentional on the part of the native-Hebraic saints. The recent disaster with Hurricane Katrina provides us with an illustration. If I understand it correctly, it seems that shortly after the hurricane struck, the only way for people to apply for help was on-line. Now, how could someone whose home was destroyed apply on-line? The poor would not have had a computer in the first place, and they surely would not know how to use one. Help was available, but it was not equally available to all. Some inadvertently (it would appear) were given preference over others. And there was complaining as a result. No wonder.

There was grumbling[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P51_15118) going on in the church at Jerusalem, and the apostles learned of it. The grumblings were not the grumblings of the Greek-speaking widows; they were the grumblings of the Greek-speaking saints, who took up the cause of their widows. The grumblings were not against the apostles, but against the native-Hebraic Jews, whose widows were faring far better.

We are not given a report of the entire process, but only of its conclusion. The apostles called the believers together to announce the solution they had reached. They first set aside any expectation that the twelve should neglect the teaching of the Word in order to personally correct the neglect of the widows. It would be wrong for them to allow this problem to redirect their priorities. The apostles could, however, correct this inequity by delegation. And so they laid down the requirements for those to whom this task would be given. The men of the church should select seven men,[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P53_16689) who will oversee “this necessary task.”[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P54_17008)

The apostles do specify that these seven men must be highly qualified. They must have a good reputation, and they must be “**full of the Spirit and of wisdom**.” The apostles do not specify that these men must be Greek-speaking Jews, and yet the names of all seven are Greek names. One of these men – Nicolas – was a proselyte, a Gentile who had converted to Judaism. The church seemed to recognize that these Greek-speaking widows would best be represented and cared for by Greek-speaking men.

It is noteworthy that Stephen is named first, and that he is further described as “**a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**” ([Acts 6:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). The second person listed is Philip. It is these two men – Stephen and Philip – who will greatly contribute to the advance of the gospel through evangelism. Both are being introduced by Luke, in preparation for further descriptions of their ministries. Stephen will follow immediately ([Acts 6:8–7:60](javascript:%7b%7d)); Philip will reappear in Acts chapter 8.

The seven men were placed before the apostles, who laid their hands on them and prayed. The laying on of hands seems to have signified the identification of the apostles with these men and their ministry. In other words, these seven men were acting on behalf of the apostles. This is similar to the laying on of hands in [Acts 13:3](javascript:%7b%7d), where the church at Antioch identified with the ministry of Barnabas and Saul (Paul), when they went out as missionaries. In addition, the laying on of hands in conjunction with prayer may also involve the bestowing of gifts necessary for the task. We find this indicated in [1 Timothy 4:14](javascript:%7b%7d) and [2 Timothy 1:6](javascript:%7b%7d).

We should probably note that these seven men are not called “**deacons**” (*diakonos*) in this passage, although the same root word for service or ministry (*diakonia* – noun) is found in verses 1 (“**distribution**”) and 4 (“**ministry**”), and the verb (*diakoneo*) is found once in verse 2 (“**to wait on**”). I am therefore willing to see the apostles as functioning something like elders, and these seven as functioning as deacons. The deacons enable the elders to more effectively carry out their primary mission by relieving them of other important areas of oversight.

In verse 7, Luke gives a summary report, indicating the impact of the apostles’ decision to appoint these seven leaders.

The word of God continued to spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith ([Acts 6:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Three things are indicated here. First, the “**word of God continued to spread**.” This same expression is found later in [Acts 12:24](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Acts 19:20](javascript:%7b%7d). Luke is not describing church growth here, but rather the ever widening circle in which the gospel is proclaimed. A similar statement is made in [Acts 19](javascript:%7b%7d):

This went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord ([Acts 19:10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Word of God was not restricted, either by the opposition of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish religious leaders, or by the threatening crisis in care for the widows.

Second, the church continued to grow in numbers: “**The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, . . . .**” ([Acts 6:7](javascript:%7b%7d)). Nothing, it seemed, could stop the growth of the church. In the light of Gamaliel’s counsel to his brethren ([Acts 5:34-39](javascript:%7b%7d)), this should suggest that God was in this movement. By now, the reader is hardly surprised to read of the church’s continuing growth.

Third, we are told that many of the priests came to faith in Jesus, or rather that they became “**obedient to the faith.**” I have often pondered why Luke would choose to tell us this here, in this context of caring for the widows. I would note first of all that the expression “**chief priests**” occurs frequently in the Gospels and in Acts.[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P66_20979) Almost always, the chief priests are spoken of in a negative way. They were leaders in the opposition to Jesus, and in His death. When the simple term “**priest**” or “**priests**” is found, it is not nearly as negative.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P67_21286) My friend remarked after this message that the priests were the “**deacons**” of the Old Testament system. They were, in one sense, “investigators.” Priests and Levites were sent to check out John the Baptist by “**the Jews**” ([John 1:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). When Jesus healed a leper, He sent them to the priest to be declared clean (see [Luke 5:14; 17:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). The priests routinely worked with those things which were the “**shadow of things to come, the substance of which was Christ**” ([Colossians 2:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). The writer to the Hebrews would expand this in much greater detail. The priests would look upon the veil that was torn at the time of our Lord’s death ([Matthew 27:51](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The priests would, by virtue of their work, have observed first hand the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders, who talked piously, but whose actions were an entirely different story:

40 They devour widows’ property, and as a show make long prayers. These men will receive a more severe punishment” ([Mark 12:40](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Matthew 23:13-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Surely James was right when he wrote:

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world ([James 1:29](javascript:%7b%7d)).

If this is so, then the priests would recognize the faith of the gospel as true religion, and Jesus as the true Messiah.

I am reminded here of the doubts of John the Baptist, the question he asked of Jesus through his disciples, and our Lord’s response in [Matthew 11:2-6](javascript:%7b%7d). In effect, Jesus answered John’s question, “Look, John, at what I am doing, and judge for yourself if this isn’t the work of Messiah.” It wasn’t just what Jesus said, but also what He did, that was so compelling. The apostles were not only proclaiming the words of Jesus; they were practicing the works of Jesus. This was compelling proof for those who had eyes to see. Many of the priests therefore came to faith in Jesus, in part due to the way the church responded to the needs of its widows.

#### Success Leads to Arrest [Acts 6:8-15](javascript:%7b%7d)

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 They incited the people, the elders, and the experts in the law; then they approached Stephen, seized him, and brought him before the council. 13 They brought forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop saying things against this holy place and the law. 14 For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” 15 All who were sitting in the council looked intently at Stephen and saw his face was like the face of an angel ([Acts 6:8-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I am not surprised to read about Stephen in these verses. After all, Stephen was just introduced in the preceding verses. But what does surprise me is that these later verses ([Acts 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.) make no mention of Stephen’s work as a deacon. His work with the widows may have provided many opportunities for witness, but Luke does not directly link Stephen’s ministry as a deacon to his success as a preacher of the gospel.

To press this matter further, verse 8 seems to introduce Stephen in a whole different light. In verse 6, Stephen was described as a man “**full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**.” In light of the requirements set down by the apostles, he was also well spoken of and was “**full of the Spirit and of wisdom**” ([Acts 6:3](javascript:%7b%7d)). But now Stephen is described more as an apostle than as a deacon.

Earlier in the Book of Acts, Luke has said this of the apostles:

With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all ([Acts 4:33](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon’s Portico ([Acts 5:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now in chapter 6, we are told that Stephen was “**full of grace and power**” and that he was “**performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people**” ([Acts 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d)). Does it not sound as though Stephen has been granted those powers restricted to the apostles earlier in this same book? His preaching ministry, then, appears to arise out of these gifts, and not out of his ministry as a deacon.[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P82_26109)

In verses 1-7 of chapter 6, the Greek-speaking Jews were grumbling against their native Hebraic Jewish brethren. Here, certain Greek-speaking Jews are strongly opposing the preaching of a fellow Greek-speaking Jew. The Jews who oppose Stephen are obviously not Christians. Saul (later known as Paul) may very well have been among them.

There is much we would like to know that Luke does not tell us in these last eight verses of Acts chapter 6. For instance, we do not know why the twelve apostles are absent in this account. One reason may be that Stephen is a Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jew, while the twelve are native Hebraic speakers. Stephen’s teaching and preaching may have taken place in the Hellenistic synagogues, which were likely to be found in Jerusalem (or its suburbs), while the apostles preached in the temple courts. The Hellenistic Jewish synagogues appear to be the source of the opposition to Stephen’s preaching, while the native Hebraic Jews (the “establishment” in Jerusalem) are the source of the opposition to Jesus. The establishment seems to have “backed off” from their opposition, taking a “wait and see” approach, thanks to the persuasive argument of Gamaliel. Stephen’s Hellenistic opponents are unwilling to “back off.” As a Hellenistic Jew, Stephen may also have grasped more fully the implications of the gospel. He may have understood that the time for adding many Gentiles to God’s flock had come and that the Jews would be put on the shelf for a time.[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P85_27930) He may also have grasped more clearly that the temple would soon be sacked, along with the city of Jerusalem. His message, therefore, may have been more specific, and thus more disturbing for an unbelieving Jew.

Something else we are not told, that would be of great interest, is exactly what the content of Stephen’s preaching was. In [Acts 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d), we are simply told that Stephen was performing signs and wonders. Nothing is said about the content of his preaching. Surely it must have been similar to the preaching of Peter, as it is recorded in the early chapters of Acts. Stephen’s sermon in the next chapter may give us some taste of what was included in Stephen’s earlier preaching.

At first, these Greek-speaking Jews sought to oppose Stephen by debating with him. That did not work. I suspect that just as the Jewish religious leaders only succeeded in looking foolish by trying to debate with Jesus,[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P88_28909) so Stephen’s opponents only furthered his cause by arguing with him. Our Lord’s words are thus fulfilled in the preaching of Stephen:

12 “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13 This will be a time for you to serve as witnesses. 14 Therefore be resolved not to rehearse ahead of time how to make your defense. 15 **For I will give you the words along with the wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict**” ([Luke 21:12-15](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

When words prove ineffective and arguments fail, desperate men turn to more desperate measures. They induced some who claimed that they heard Stephen, “**speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God,**” ([Acts 6:11](javascript:%7b%7d)). As I read these words, I am reminded of the story of Ahab and Jezebel, who similarly accused Naboth of “**cursing God and the king**” because they wanted his property (see [1 Kings 21:1-16](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was a carefully orchestrated conspiracy. The people believed the false testimony and were enraged, as were the elders and the scribes. Only after this did they arrest Stephen and bring him before the Sanhedrin for trial. At this trial, false testimony was given by those who accused Stephen of incessantly speaking “**against this holy place**”[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P91_30286) and the law. They further testified that they heard Stephen saying that “**Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this [holy] place and change the customs that Moses handed down**” ([Acts 6:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As is often the case, there was a measure of truth in this accusation. The temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed:

1 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings. 2 And he said to them, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!” ([Matthew 24:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d))

18 So then the Jewish leaders responded, “What sign can you show us, since you are doing these things?” 19 Jesus replied, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again” ([John 2:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

20 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Those who are inside the city must depart. Those who are out in the country must not enter it, 22 because these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. 23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away as captives among all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” ([Luke 21:20-24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

28 But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For this is certain: The days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore children, and the breasts that never nursed!’ 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ 31 For if such things are done when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” ([Luke 23:28-31](javascript:%7b%7d))

The enemies of the gospel had twisted Jesus’ words when they accused Him and so, too, did the enemies of the gospel who opposed Stephen. Jesus had spoken about the destruction of His body as a destruction of “**this temple**” ([John 2:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d)), but that was not a reference to the actual temple in Jerusalem, but rather a reference to His death and resurrection. Jesus did speak (especially to His disciples) about the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (for example, [Luke 21:20-24](javascript:%7b%7d)), but He did not suggest that it was He who was personally going to do this in the way His adversaries (and now those who opposed Stephen) indicated. They were portraying Stephen as a kind of terrorist, just as they did Jesus.

The second line of attack was to accuse Stephen of teaching that Jesus would set aside the customs handed down to them by Moses. The inauguration of the New Covenant would change a good many things with regard to the Old Testament law. Some things (like the keeping of the Sabbath and the ceremonial food laws) would change. But many of those things that would be set aside were not actually the teachings of Moses, but rather the traditions of the Jews:

1 Then Pharisees and experts in the law came from Jerusalem to Jesus and said, 2 “Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don’t wash their hands when they eat.” 3 He answered them, “And why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Whoever insults his father or mother must be put to death.’ 5 But you say, ‘If someone tells his father or mother, “Whatever help you would have received from me is given to God,” 6 he does not need to honor his father.’ You have nullified the word of God on account of your tradition” ([Matthew 15:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This is something Jesus took up in His Sermon on the Mount (see [Matthew 5-7](javascript:%7b%7d)). He would frequently say, “**You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say to you . .** **.**” (see [Matthew 5:21-48](javascript:%7b%7d)). By this He meant, “You have heard your religious teachers say . . . (as their application of the law of Moses), but I say to you . . . ‘Here is what the law of Moses really meant; here is how you should understand the law.’” In our Lord’s teaching, His coming was to be understood as fulfillment, more than abolition:

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place. 19 So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 5:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The message of the “witnesses for hire” was, “Jesus of Nazareth whom Stephen preaches (with great success and growing numbers of followers), threatens to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and to cast aside Moses and his teachings.” This was anathema to devout Jews, and they responded accordingly.

What irony we find in verse 15:

All who were sitting in the council looked intently at Stephen and saw his face was like the face of an angel ([Acts 6:15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Without a doubt, Luke intended for us to recall this Old Testament scene:

27 The Lord said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” 28 So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water. He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. 29 Now when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand – when he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. 30 **When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to approach him**. 31 But Moses called to them, so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke to them. 32 After this all the Israelites approached, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 32:27-32](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

These Hellenistic Jews were accusing Stephen of preaching against Moses, and yet Stephen looked just like Moses, after he had been on the holy mountain speaking with God. His face was aglow. The words Stephen spoke were given to him by the Holy Spirit, and thus they were the very words of God, just like the words Moses spoke (with glowing face) were the words God had given him on the mountain. It will get even better in Acts chapter 7, for there it ends with Stephen sounding just like Jesus, at the time of His death.

### Conclusion

In our text, Luke has described two situations. The first ([Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d)) describes how the apostles dealt with the inequities that existed in the treatment of the widows. The second ([Acts 6:8-15](javascript:%7b%7d)) is Luke’s account of the power of God through the ministry of Stephen, and the reaction this brought from his fellow Hellenistic Jews. Let us begin by exploring the implications of these texts for us, and then conclude by considering how these two parts of chapter 6 fit together to teach us an important lesson.

*(1) Legitimization.*How do we know that the gospel as we have it – the gospel as set down by the apostles – is the real thing? Our text continues to demonstrate the authenticity of the apostles as those who believe in Jesus and who speak for Him, with His authority and power. During His earthly ministry, Jesus performed many signs and wonders:

1 Now Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did he get these ideas? And what is this wisdom that has been given to him? What are these miracles that are done through his hands? ([Mark 6:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d))

36 As he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37 As he approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen: 38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ([Luke 19:36-38](javascript:%7b%7d))

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know – 23 this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles. 24 But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power ([Acts 2:22-24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

So, too, the apostles performed many signs and wonders (including Stephen):

Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles ([Acts 2:43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon’s Portico ([Acts 5:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people ([Acts 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

You will remember that when John the Baptist had his doubts as to whether or not Jesus was the true Messiah, Jesus encouraged John to consider His works, for they were the work of Messiah:

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds Christ had done, he sent his disciples to ask a question: 3 “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” 4 Jesus answered them, “Go tell John what you hear and see: 5 The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them. 6 Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” ([Matthew 11:2-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Apostle James put it this way:

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world ([James 1:27](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When the priests (and many others) beheld the way the church cared for its widows, many concluded, “This is true religion.” No wonder so many of the priests came to faith in Jesus. The words and works of the apostles were likewise the words and works of Jesus. This should have been an indication that both Jesus and His apostles were true servants of God, who spoke for Him with full authority.

The apostles are legitimized by the opposition they receive to their ministry. Just as they did as Jesus did and taught as Jesus taught, so they were opposed in the same way Jesus was. The opposition was intimidated by our Lord’s success and popularity with the people:

47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we allow him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation” ([John 11:47-48](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Jewish religious leaders were likewise threatened by the success of the apostles, including Stephen:

14 More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number, crowds of both men and women. 15 Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them. 16 A crowd of people from the towns around Jerusalem also came together, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits. They were all being healed. 17 Now the high priest rose up, and all those with him (that is, the religious party of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy ([Acts 5:14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God” ([Acts 6:8-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our Lord’s opponents initially tried to discredit Jesus by debating with Him ([Matthew 21:23](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.), but when they miserably failed ([Matthew 22:46](javascript:%7b%7d)), they resorted to false charges ([Matthew 26:59](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.), which led to His death. The same thing nearly happened to the apostles ([Acts 5](javascript:%7b%7d)), and did happen with Stephen:

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 They incited the people, the elders, and the experts in the law; then they approached Stephen, seized him, and brought him before the council. 13 They brought forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop saying things against this holy place and the law. 14 For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us” ([Acts 6:8-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We will see shortly that Stephen’s death was, in certain regards, like that of our Lord. When we read the Book of Acts it has a familiar feel, as well it should, for men respond to the apostles the same way that they responded to the Lord Jesus.

*(2) Cultures clash, but the gospel unites.*In the end, the polarization we find between the Greek-speaking Jews and the native Hebraic Jews in [Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d) is rooted in the clash of two different cultures. While both groups were Jewish, they were very different in their place of birth, in language, and in culture. The work of Christ at Calvary unites Jews and Gentiles in one body as “**one new man**” ([Ephesians 2:15](javascript:%7b%7d)). Cultural differences provide potential tensions, but the gospel of God’s grace is sufficient. The decision of the apostles and the choice of the seven by the church put to rest a potential problem.

I am delighted to look out into the faces of our congregation and see a wide diversity of race and culture. I believe that true Christian unity, practiced and preserved in the context of diversity, is a distinguishing mark of Christianity. This is one of the ways the world will know we are His ([John 13:34-35; 17:21](javascript:%7b%7d)). To maintain unity in diversity, we need to appreciate the value of diversity and also to be sensitive to the way our culture may adversely affect others. We need to be quick to respond biblically to tensions that may be rooted in cultural diversity.

*(3) Our text is a lesson in church leadership*. I am making the assumption that the twelve are roughly equivalent to elders, and that the seven are essentially deacons. If this is valid, then we should see that deacons oversee areas of responsibility so that the elders can devote themselves to their primary tasks. We might say that the deacons assist the elders by assuming administrative responsibilities that enable the elders to give more attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

In our church, we believe that the church is to be governed by a plurality of elders. There are many ways to govern. Some elder boards rule with a heavy hand (not unlike some pastors). I believe that our text provides a model for how elders should rule. The elders listened to what was being said, and observed what was going on in the church. They responded quickly to a potentially serious problem. They reached a decision as to how it should be handled. They established priorities and laid out guidelines by which the problem would be solved. Their decision was acceptable to all parties and readily embraced by the church. The church was allowed to select their own leaders, within the boundaries of the qualifications set down by the apostles. The apostles then laid their hands on these men and prayed for them. Here is a healthy relationship between the elders and the flock. It was not congregational rule, but the elders did not fail to listen to the congregation, to respond to their concerns, and to involve them in the solution.

*(4) Our text reminds us that the care of widows and the poor is a most important matter.* As we have seen already, James tells us that true religion is concerned with the widows and the orphans ([James 1:27](javascript:%7b%7d)). Luke has taken considerable effort to show us that the early church was deeply concerned about meeting the needs of those in the flock. Great sacrifices were made in order to care for those in need. You will recall that when the apostles commended Paul, they gave him this one instruction:

7 On the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was to the circumcised 8 (for he who empowered Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles) 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who had a reputation as pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 **They requested only that we remember the poor**, the very thing I also was eager to do ([Galatians 2:7-10](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

As elders, we have been discussing ways to be more in touch with the needs of our widows and other vulnerable members of our church body. As we mature as a church and so do our members, there will be an increasing number of widows and older single women in our congregation. We need to be thinking of ways that we may minister to their needs. It may be by buying or building housing, or by providing transportation, or food, or fellowship. The way we care for our widows has a great impact on other areas of ministry. The church that cares for its widows (and orphans)[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P138_48769) is one that will stand out as having true religion.

*(5) Our text is yet another illustration of the sovereignty of God in Acts.*I have to smile as I read our text, because God had a somewhat different plan than the apostles did. The apostles sought to solve a practical problem (conflict because of an inequity in the feeding of the widows) in a spiritual way. They rightly discerned their priorities and set about with the appointment of “**deacons**” to enable them to carry out their primary tasks (prayer and the ministry of the Word) in the church. They appointed seven men as “**deacons**” so that they could preach. And then God chose to make two of these seven “**deacons**” into great preachers. These two men, Stephen and Philip, were the key to the evangelization of the Greek-speaking Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. God modified the plan of the apostles. As good as it was, God had another plan, a better plan. God works in mysterious ways, as we see in our text.

*(6) Connecting the dots of Acts chapter 6.* We’re back to where we started – my sense that we should study Acts chapter 6 as a unit, because the two halves of this chapter are closely related. Let us now seek to connect the dots of these two texts, and see where it leads us.

The obvious connections are, well, obvious. In verses 1-7, Stephen is introduced as the first of the seven “**deacons**” who are appointed to oversee the care of the widows. In verses 8-15, Stephen is presented as the powerful preacher who seems to match the apostles in power. In verses 1-7, we find the Greek-speaking Jews murmuring against the native Hebraic Jews because their widows are receiving inferior care. In verses 8-15, we find other Greek-speaking Jews strongly opposing Stephen. When they cannot defeat him with rhetoric, they take more extreme measures – procuring false testimony against him as a blasphemer.

But what other connections do we find between the two halves of Acts chapter 6? Let me suggest that the key is understanding the fundamental unity of truth and obedience, between preaching and practice, in the Christian faith. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus underscored the necessity of hearing and doing:

24 “**Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock**. 25 The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. 26 **Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand**. 27 The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!” ([Matthew 7:24-27](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

Later in Matthew, Jesus strongly rebukes the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, that is, for their failure to live according to their teaching:

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 “The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. **But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach**. 4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them” ([Matthew 23:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The Book of Acts begins with these words:

“I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about **all that Jesus began to do and teach**” ([Acts 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Our Lord’s ministry was not just preaching. Jesus also ministered to the needs of those He encountered. He healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, and fed the hungry. When John the Baptist expressed doubt as to whether Jesus was the real Messiah, Jesus pointed him to His deeds, and not just to His doctrine, as important as that was ([Matthew 11:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The early chapters of the Book of Acts contain two of the great sermons of the Apostle Peter, and next, one great sermon of Stephen. As critical as these sermons are, we need to see that they were accompanied by service. The apostles performed signs and wonders, and many healings. The words of the apostles were accompanied by their works, and the works of those who believed their teaching. We find in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d) not only a wonderful sermon ([Acts 2:14-40](javascript:%7b%7d)), but the account of amazing works – not just signs and wonders, but sacrificial sharing with those in need ([Acts 2:42-46](javascript:%7b%7d)). We find the same in chapters 3-5. There is both powerful preaching ([Acts 3:11-26](javascript:%7b%7d)), but also powerful deeds ([Acts 4:32-37](javascript:%7b%7d)). Words and works.

Now, we come to chapter 6 and the problem of the unfed widows. The apostles recognize that their primary mission is “**prayer and the ministry of the Word**” ([Acts 6:2, 4](javascript:%7b%7d)). But they do not minimize the importance of the work of caring for their widows. And for this reason, they appoint seven godly men to oversee this important ministry.

We might wrongly assume this means that the apostles will only pray and preach, but this is not the case. We see the healing ministry of the apostles (particularly Peter) both before chapter 6 (see [Acts 5:14-16](javascript:%7b%7d)) and after (see [Acts 9:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d)). As my friend put it, the apostles not only “teach,” they “touch” those who are in need.

Now, when we come to the last half of Acts chapter 6, we might suppose that we are going to be reading about widows being fed by “**deacons**.” We might assume that the apostles have a monopoly on the speaking ministry, and that the “**deacons**” are restricted to the “serving” ministry. This is not the case at all, and I think this is Luke’s point. Lest we be like the hypocritical Pharisees of [Matthew 23](javascript:%7b%7d), we must not only talk the talk, we must also walk the walk. We all must speak and serve.

Stephen, a man who has been appointed as a “**deacon**,” is now ([Acts 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.) found to be performing signs and wonders and speaking with such power that his adversaries are unable to refute him. They must resort to underhanded schemes and brute force.

Let me put it this way. The issue in chapters 4 and 5 is this: Will the apostles be muzzled by the threats and persecution of the unbelieving Jewish leaders? The answer to this is a resounding, “No!” The issue in [Acts 6:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d) is this: Will the apostles be muzzled (or silenced) because of the physical needs of the widows? In other words, will the apostles be distracted from their primary ministry of prayer and proclamation of the gospel, by the urgent need of caring for the widows? The answer, once again, is “No!” The question in [Acts 6:8-15](javascript:%7b%7d) is this: Will the proclamation of the gospel by the “**deacons**” be swallowed up by the task of caring for the widows? The answer is still “No!” Teaching and touching, doctrine and practice, words and works must not be separated.

This is the message that we find in the Book of James:

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can this kind of faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,” but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is it? 17 So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; well and good. Even the demons believe that – and tremble with fear. 20 But would you like evidence, you empty fellow, that faith without works is useless? ([James 2:14-20](javascript:%7b%7d))

We seem to think that we can debate men into the kingdom of God. We cannot. Our words must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. But in addition, our lives must reflect the truth of the words we speak. Acts is not just about preaching; it is about preaching buttressed by practice.

All too often, liberal social programs sever their ties to the gospel message and the Word of God. This ministry is so important, and the needs so great, that the preaching of the gospel falls through the cracks. People thus end up with full stomachs, but empty lives. Conservative Christians sometimes take the gospel to the lost, but they don’t address their pressing physical needs. This is not true to the Christian faith, and it is counter-productive for the gospel. We must strive to maintain both preaching and practice.

*(7) One last thought.*There is a subtle shift taking place in our text (and also in the following chapters). There is a shift from the native Hebraic-speaking apostles to Greek-speaking apostles (Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and so on). There is a shift from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and then to the remotest part of the earth. There is a shift from Jewish evangelism to Gentile evangelism. And the change is taking place before our very eyes in our text. I find it interesting to note that the strong opposition of Greek-speaking Jews brings about the death of Stephen, but it does not silence the gospel. It propels the gospel outward, to more distant places, and to those outside of Judaism. The death of Stephen is a pivotal event.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P9_421) I have included the text of [Acts 5:41-42](javascript:%7b%7d) because it is closely tied to chapter 6. Chapter 5 thus ends with the statement that, in spite of the persecution and threats the apostles received at the hands of the Sanhedrin, they were not intimidated, and they were not silenced, nor did the preaching of the Word cease. Chapter 6 will introduce another threat to the preaching of the gospel – another way that the preaching of the Word might be hindered.

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P12_2989) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P14_3893) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson11 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on January 15, 2005. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P31_7225) [/viewseries/20](https://bible.org/viewseries/20)

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P33_7652) <http://www.fuller.edu/ministry/berean/chs_vss.htm>

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P39_10137) Thus, the title for this message: Growth Pains.

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P47_13538) See [1 Timothy 5:3-8](javascript:%7b%7d).

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P51_15119) I prefer the term “**grumbling**” to “**a complaint**,” even though this is the way many translations render the term. This is the term used to refer to the grumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness (e.g. [Exodus 16:7, 8, 9, 12](javascript:%7b%7d)). Thus, the KJV reads, **“. . . there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews . . .** **.**” Above all, I prefer the rendering of the NLT: “**But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.**”

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P53_16690) The oversight of the care of the widows is given to seven men. These men are to be selected by the men (brothers) of the church. One might think that caring for the widows would be women’s work, but not the choice of the seven, nor the work of oversight, given to the seven.

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P54_17009) The NET Bible rightly emphasizes the fact that this is not an insignificant matter; it is a very real and important need. It deserves the best efforts of highly qualified men.

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P66_20980) Matthew = 18 times; Mark = 14 times; Luke = 12 times; John = 10 times; Acts = 11 times.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P67_21287) Only [Acts 4:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d) speaks somewhat negatively of the priests, for here it speaks of the priests, along with the captain of the temple guard, arresting the apostles for preaching in the temple area.

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P82_26110) I am not suggesting that his preaching had nothing to do with his ministry as a deacon. I am only pointing out that Luke does not stress the relationship between Stephen’s role as a deacon (or prototype deacon), but rather the relationship between his endowment of great power, like the twelve apostles possessed.

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P85_27931) As Paul, another Hellenistic Jew, will spell out in [Romans 11](javascript:%7b%7d).

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P88_28910) See [Matthew 22:46](javascript:%7b%7d).

[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P91_30287) I wonder if the expression, “**this holy place**,” is broad enough to include both the temple and Jerusalem. Jesus warned that both would be destroyed, and Stephen may well have reflected this in his preaching.

[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15" \l "P138_48770) We have just recently entered into this phase of ministry. Some of our members are adopting orphans. We have established a relationship with some Russian Christians who seek to minister to the many Russian orphans. This is a wonderful opportunity to practice what our Lord taught us to do.

HOPE FOR THE CITY

THE GOSPEL, HOPE, AND THE WORLD

[ DR. TIMOTHY KELLER | Sermon transcript, 15 November 2009]

Acts 8:1–8 — And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deep­ly for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

Redeemer’s vision, or mission, can be summarized in three words: gospel, city, movement. The gospel changes everything; serving in the city is the very best way to minister the gospel; and we don’t want to be just a church, just an institution, but a movement—a dynamic movement of many churches and ministries throughout the city.

Therefore, this passage is fitting and apt because Acts 8—this case study of Philip the evangelist going into the city of Samaria and doing ministry there—shows us all three things. It shows us what it means to be a movement, what it means to effectively minister in a city, and how to do that by living out the pattern of the gospel in our lives.

A MOVEMENT

We see what it means to be a movement in verses 1 to 4. Verse 1 says, “Saul was there, giving approval to his death.” This is the very end of the story in chapter 7, where we learn about Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr. Stephen was executed, stoned to death, for preaching the gospel. In verse 1 we see that Saul (Saint Paul—later on he would be converted) was there. Perhaps there was something about what he saw in Stephen, that though he was there passively approving, though he didn’t throw any stones, he saw something in Stephen that terrified him, radicalized him, and alarmed him. In any case, we read in verse 3 that after this event Saul began to be the active leader of a persecution. He was trying to destroy the church.

And, as a result, even though verse 1 says the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (they sort of went underground), everyone else—all the lay people—had to flee for their lives, and they were scattered. But the effect of the persecution was actually to strengthen the church—to spread the church, and to spread the gospel—because verse 4 says, “Those who had been scattered [all lay people] preached the word wherever they went.” The word “preached” is not the word you and I think of—we think of somebody publicly speaking to a group. But this word is actually the word “evangelize,” and what we are told is everybody evangelized.

Here is what happened. At the church in Jerusalem there was great preaching, and it probably grew because people brought their friends to hear the great preaching. But then the persecution happened, and they were pushed out. We are told that they took what they had learned from their teachers and preachers and they

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began to gossip the gospel, share the gospel, and counsel their friends with the gospel. They began to evangelize. Everybody did. They took what they had and they began to do it themselves.

The church is not supposed to be a body of people with a small number of providers—me, other ministers— and everybody else just coming and being customers. God used the persecution to turn the church into an entire community of providers so everybody was in mission together—absolutely everybody. Everybody was evangelizing—everybody was embodying the gospel, sharing the gospel, teaching the gospel, gossiping the gospel from person to person.

You see this all through the Bible. In Genesis 12, God comes to Abraham and says, “Abraham, I want to bless you. I want to come near to you. I want to bring you in close to me. I want to be intimate with you. I want to give you my love.” Wow! That’s what we want! But then he says in the same sentence, “I want to bless you, that you may be a blessing.”

God never calls you radically in without sending you radically out. He never calls you in and blesses you and fills your heart with love except to make you to be a blessing, to send you out to others (cf. Psalm 67:1–7). That is the reason why he says to Abraham, “I am going to really bless you. Now get out!” Take a look at Genesis 12. God says, “I am going to bless you. I am going to love you—now get out! Get out of Ur. Get out of your country. Get out of your culture. Get out of your comfort zone.” That’s the paradigm.

I want you to see something else. This is what one commentator on the book of Acts says about God using the persecution to send out the people so that everyone became a person in mission: It was not because of some mission plan that was approved and put into action by the leaders of the church that this great expan­sion happened. It was ordinary believers taking the opportunity to share the message wherever they went. The apostles became “the stabilizing, verifying, and unifying element in a mission that moves to new areas and groups without their planning or control.”1

Now that is a movement. In a bureaucracy, people at the top completely control everything. But in a movement, where everybody owns the mission, everybody is participating, even though you still need leaders. The apostles were “stabilizing, verifying, and unifying”—and yet there was a spontaneity about the church. All kinds of new initiatives bubbled up all over the place. The apostles didn’t send Philip to Samaria—he went. What happened is God used the persecution to turn his church into a movement, a movement in which everybody is in mission. Everybody is initiating.

That is actually a big part of what God is calling our church to be. By the way, I would say that most of the time—and we are going to talk about this as we go on here—for most churches and Christian communities that get renewed and turned from a kind of fat and happy institution into a dynamic movement in which everybody owns the vision, it usually happens through trouble, through persecution, or through something very bad. It is rare for a community to voluntarily seek it. And this voluntary venture is what we are trying to do at Redeemer over the next ten years. So, first of all, we learn here about being a movement.

MINISTERING IN THE CITY

The second thing we learn here is about the importance and the nature of city ministry (or urban ministry).

THE IMPORTANCE OF URBAN MINISTRY

Notice that everybody is scattered: verse 1, they were scattered; verse 4, they were scattered. That is significant in the Bible, because when the people of God are scattered, or when they are dispersed, urban ministry becomes very important.

1. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation,* First Paperback Ed. Vol. 2. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 2:102.redeemercitytocity.com | The Gospel, Hope, and the World—Hope for the City 3

In the Old Testament, when the Babylonians conquered Judah, what we see is similar to what we have here in Acts 8. The Jews were scattered away from Jerusalem, and they come to a pagan city, Babylon, which was just as filled with people they didn’t like as Samaria was. (We will get to why the Jews and the Samaritans didn’t get along.) But the Jews—you can read about this in Jeremiah 29—were exiled away from Jerusalem, and they were put into a big, pagan city, Babylon. And then God told them, counterintuitively, to seek the joy of the city. He told the Jews, “I want you to seek the peace and prosperity and shalom of Babylon. Pray for it, for if it prospers, you will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). Your community will prosper if you pour yourself out in deeds of service and seek the prosperity and the peace of the city where you are.

It’s actually common sense. God is saying to us the same thing he said to the Jews: “If you love the city—if you pour yourself out for the city, if you seek the good of the city—how much of a better witness could there be to show the city that your god is God? If you want your community and your faith to grow, then care about the city.”

Urban ministry was crucial when the Jews were exiled, and in the New Testament it becomes crucial to the Christians being scattered. In fact, the whole book of Acts is all about Christians in cities. Do you know that almost everything that happens in the book of Acts happens in a city? The entire early church’s history unfolds in cities. Virtually every Christian you meet in the New Testament is a city dweller, and when Paul wanted to reach a province or a nation, he went to the biggest city in that nation and started churches there. Do you know why?

First of all, the best way to reach the nations is to reach the city. Some years ago I heard a lecturer say that if Paul really wanted to reach the nations, he could have gone into a particular nation and learned their language and learned their culture (and it is very hard to learn a new language and new culture) and minister there for ten years. And then he could have gone to another nation and learned the culture there and the language there, and ministered for another ten years. And that might have killed him, but if he was still alive, he could have tried it a third time, and learned a third language and a third culture and ministered to a third nation. And by that time, he would be dead.

Or, he could go to a city—go to Antioch, go to Rome—and in every city there are dozens and dozens of ethnic groups and nationalities and people groups, and they are all working in the lingua franca of the city. And then all Paul had to do—and this is what he did—was go to the cities and minister to the cities, and automatically the gospel got into the lifeblood of dozens and dozens of national groups, and it spread to the nations. You go to the city to reach the nations.

Secondly, you go to the city to reach the culture. If you go to a village, you might win a lawyer or you might win an artist—but if you go to the city, that is how you have an impact on the art world, and that is how you have an impact on the legal profession. And because Christians were inordinately focused on cities all during the first two or three centuries of their history, by the year 300 A.D. over half the populations of the Greco-Roman cities were Christian, but the countryside was pagan.

In fact, do you know where that word pagan comes from? It is a Greek word that means a “man of the country” or a “farmer.” See, the farmers, the people in the country, were pagans, and the people in the cities were Christians. But as the city goes—whatever has captured the city—that is where the culture is going. That is the reason the brutal, old pagan culture was displaced by Christianity, because people went to the cities. Do you see the importance of city ministry?

Let me say this very clearly. The Bible says—Jesus says—to take the gospel to every creature. That means you have to have Christians everywhere there are people. You have to have churches everywhere there are people. Jesus is saying you need Christians in every place, and there is no warrant for saying all Christians have to live in a city.

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But I want you to keep something in mind. Over at least the next 150 years, massive numbers of people will be moving into the great cities. For example, 150 years ago in Europe, the rural areas got to their “carrying capac­ity.” A family had six or seven children or so, and there was no more land, and since only one or two kids could get the farm, people began streaming into the cities to get jobs. As a result, the first great megacities of the world were the European cities. They became huge.

The same thing is happening now in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. What is happening now is the cities of most of the world are growing in size enormously. Somebody has said that basically there is a new Bangkok, as it were, formed every three months. That means eight or nine million people are moving into cities just about every three months.2 Over the next 150 years, millions of people are going to be moving into cities, which means in most of the world, the cities are growing in size. And in all of the world, because of tech-nologies, cities are growing in influence.

Therefore, for at least the next 100, 150, 200 years, most human beings are going to be living in cities, and the church does not know much about ministering in cities. What does that mean? It means we have got to be there. We have got to go there. It means we have got to be good at urban ministry. It is incredibly important.

THE NATURE OF URBAN MINISTRY

We also see in verses 5 to 8 what we need to be effective at urban ministry. There are three marks. Do you know what they are? The three marks of effective ministry are word, deed, and racial reconciliation.

**Word ministry**

Look at verse 5: “Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.” That is word ministry. The word “proclaim” is what you think of; it is the word for “preach.” It is the word for public proclamation, public teaching of the Bible.

Except notice it says that he preached the Christ. He knew what the Bible is about. The Bible is not just about various principles and things you have to believe or do in order to be blessed by God. Oh no! The Bible is about Jesus. It is about Jesus Christ, and how he came to earth to rescue us and to save us by his grace. We see that Philip did not just show up in town and do good deeds. He preached the Word. He called people to repentance. He showed people the life-transforming message of the gospel.

**Deed ministry**

But the second thing is deed. Verse 7 says, “Evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.” Look at that. People were delivered spiritually from interior evil, but, on the other hand, it says paralytics and cripples were healed, which means people were getting help for their physical needs. Don’t be distracted by the fact that this is miraculous, because it is not the only way to give people help for their physical needs. In fact, in Acts 4:32–35, you see a place where it says that the early Christian community shared everything they had, so there was no poor person among them.

All of Jerusalem saw the Christians taking care of people in need, helping them with their physical needs, and then it says, as a result, the apostles’ preaching was received with great power. It makes perfect sense. It even says so in verse 6: “When the crowds…saw the…signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.” Or, in short, people will listen to our words if they see our deeds. If they see us loving the city—if they see us meeting people’s needs, if they see us caring about the city—they are going to listen to the word. It has got to be word and it has got to be deed.

**Racial reconciliation**

The third mark of dynamic, effective urban ministry is racial reconciliation. You say, “Where does it say anything about racial reconciliation?” That is one of the things that is so remarkable about the entire chapter.

2. See “The Brown Revolution,” *The Economist*, May 9, 2002.redeemercitytocity.com | The Gospel, Hope, and the World—Hope for the City 5

The Samaritans and the Jews utterly hated each other. There was tremendous racial animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews. One of the most amazing passages in the Bible is verse 5, because Philip is so unlike Jonah. Jonah? Yes, Jonah.

The book of Jonah is about God calling a Jewish prophet to go and preach to Nineveh, to the Assyrians. There was great racial animosity between the Jews and the Assyrians. They were mortal enemies. God says to Jonah, “I want you to go and preach to your mortal enemies. I want you to call them to repentance.” (See Jonah 1:1–2.) You probably remember one thing about the book of Jonah, but there were actually two things that happened. One thing was Jonah tried to run away. And God had to send a storm, and Jonah is eaten by a fish and regurgitated—the only regurgitated prophet we have! You have probably heard that part of the story, but the part you probably haven’t heard about is Jonah then goes to Nineveh and he preaches to these people that he hates, and unfortunately for him, they repent. He is furious because he wanted to see God “nuke” them. The book ends with him still furious.

Listen, whatever culture you grew up in, whatever people group you grew up in, your people group has taught you to look down on some other people group and say, “Oh those people.” God is trying to overcome the Jewish prophet’s antipathy to this other racial group, and at the very end of the book, he is still trying. It just hasn’t worked.

But here is Philip in Acts 8, and he just goes. He is a Jewish evangelist, a Jewish Christian, and he goes to Samaria. No fish. He is not swallowed or regurgitated—he just goes. Why? Do you realize how amazing this is?

The gospel works on the pride of our heart and the inferiority of our heart. My experience of tension between racial groups is there is a combination of superiority and inferiority going on. Until the gospel changes our hearts, we all struggle with inferiority, so what we do is we try to say our culture is superior. Our people are superior, not those people over there. We laugh at those people over there, and that creates this tension.

But what the gospel does is it works on both your superiority and your inferiority. It says you are a sinner, absolutely lost, and you can only be saved by sheer grace. There is nothing you can do about it. That destroys your superiority. But it also says the Son of God loved you so much that he was willing to come and give himself for you. That destroys your inferiority. And when your superiority is knocked down, and your inferiority is filled in and lifted up, you can reach out.

It is astounding but crucial for the Christian church, especially in cities where there is so much multi-ethnicity, to show the rest of the world how the gospel does destroy your superiority and your inferiority, and therefore brings people together who outside in the rest of the world would not be able to be together. The gospel makes people friends who out in the rest of the world would never be friends.

Do you know how it begins? It begins very simply. You have to use the gospel on your heart. You have to look at your own superiority and inferiority, work on it, and then when you come into the church, be aware of the fact that you tend to gravitate to people like yourself. Our default mode is to be just like the world told us to be: “Go after people like you. Hang out with people like you.” You have to catch yourself, and you have to start to reach across the barrier and use the gospel and make friends with a brother or sister who is not like you. That is how it starts. And unless we are able to show the world people getting along in here that can’t get along out there, then we really haven’t applied the gospel to ourselves.

Therefore, the marks of effective urban ministry are word, deed, and racial reconciliation, which change the world because they change the city.

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THE PATTERN OF THE GOSPEL IN OUR LIVES

Lastly, the text shows us how to be a movement and how to minister in the city by living out of a pattern of the gospel.

Do you know where the pattern of the gospel is? It is the whole chapter. It is something I only realized recently. Look at all this life and joy in Samaria—urban Samaria. It is amazing. Where did the life and joy come from? The life and the joy of verses 5 to 8 follow the death and the misery of verses 1 to 4.

Look at all the misery in verses 1 to 4. There is death. There is destruction. Verse 2 says, “Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him,” and the word there means “agonizing grief.” There is death, destruction, and agonizing grief, and then in verses 5 to 8, there is life and joy. Misery and death—joy and life. But here is what I want you to see. The joy and life don’t come in spite of the misery and death—they come through it. The joy and the life come because of the misery and the death. The death has caused resurrection.

How does this work? The pattern here is a gospel pattern. Here is the irony: Saul sought the destruction of the church, and what did it lead to? The expansion of the church. Saul sought to scatter the church, but all it did was to lead to more gathering. He tried to kill it—it led to more life. If you try to put the church to death, it leads to resurrection.

If you go to back to chapter 7 and read about Stephen, you see how it happened. When Stephen was put up in front of a kangaroo court, on trial for his life, was he scared? Maybe. But was he angry? Did he lash out at them? Did he call them names? No. We are told that his face was like the face of an angel. He had joy. He had radiance. As they were killing him, he said, “Lord, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing” (v. 60).

And because he died like that, it electrified the church. In other words, he accepted his suffering; he accepted his death and died nobly. He died faithful to God and faithful to his friends. And, as a result, that particular kind of death led to resurrection. It led to more life. He died that others might live. The Samaritans found new life because he died. Do you see a pattern there?

This pattern has happened constantly in the history of the church—that greater persecution and violence toward Christians and greater oppression and trampling does not ever lead to violence in return. It leads to greater love. It leads to greater joy.

The best example of Acts 8 that we have today is actually what happened in China in the twentieth century. After World War II, when the Communist government took over, they threw all the Western missionaries out and they killed a lot of the Chinese pastors. They threw out the Western missionaries and said that was the end of Christianity in China. But do you know what happened? Ironically, it is the very same thing that happened here in Acts 8, because the Chinese church had become too dependent on the Western missionaries. They were the providers, and the churches were the customers; the missionaries brought in the money, and they had their fingers on the controls. But when the Communist government expelled the Western missionaries and began to persecute the church, it turned them all into people of mission. It turned them all into providers. It turned them into people that preached the Word and evangelized everywhere they went. It made the church indigenous, and the church just exploded in growth.

In fact, you see it over and over again. You try to kill the church—you try to persecute the church; you try to stamp it out—but if you use violence on the church, it only makes it grow. And the response is not growth in violence; the church doesn’t grow like that. It grows in love.

The persecuted Chinese church today (after having grown at least 50-fold over the fifty years after the expulsion of the Western missionaries) is only 5–7% of the population, but when the great earthquakes hit

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the Sichuan Province of China in 2008 and 68,000 people died, one million Chinese people volunteered and came and did relief work. And even though the Christians were only 5–7% of the population, probably up to half of all of the volunteers were believers—Christians. Because the more you kill Christians, the more you oppress them—as Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs is seed”—the better the church gets. The livelier the church gets. The more death, the more resurrection. The more destruction, the more expansion. The more scattering, the more gathering.

This has been true for two thousand years. Why would that be? How could it be? You know, there are an awful lot of people, groups, and associations that when you start to oppress them, they fight back. They get guns. They shoot you. Why are Christians different?

It is because of the gospel. What is the gospel? The gospel is Jesus. Why was Stephen able to take the condemnation of a kangaroo court with radiance? Why was Stephen able to give his life so that Samaria would live? The answer is because he was literally looking at someone. Just before he died, he says, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56) He was looking at someone, who also when he died said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) He was looking at someone who didn’t just get the wrath of a kangaroo court, but the wrath of cosmic justice on all human evil.

Jesus Christ took all of our punishment for our sins. And Jesus didn’t just die so that Samaria would live—he died that the world would live. And because Stephen was looking at Jesus doing that, he was able to take his suffering with poise. He was able to take it with faithfulness. He was able to take it with joy, and his death led to resurrection.

By the way, Jesus’ death changed Stephen so that he was able to die in order that others may live. That can happen to you, too. Now, I am not suggesting, though it might happen, that you be martyrs. Here is what I am suggesting. It is the principle of the thing.

If you give your finances with radical, promiscuous generosity for the needs of the city—if you give like crazy out of your finances—that is a kind of death. Do you know why? You are dying to all kinds of stuff you could have afforded, all kinds of fun things you could have done if you hadn’t given to others. But if you die—if you experience that death, the death of radical financial generosity—there will be joy in the city. Death will lead to resurrection.

Or, what if you just stick your neck out and say, “I want to identify as a Christian in New York City.” I don’t mean be obnoxious about it. I just mean be willing to let people know you are a Christian. If you do that, there will be some death, oh yes—some people will walk away. Some people might avoid you. You might miss out on a job or get passed over for a promotion. You are experiencing a death, but if you are willing to open up to other people about your faith, that death will lead to life for others. It will lead to resurrection.

If you pour yourself out for others, the way Jesus literally poured his life out for you, it will lead to joy in the city. That is the principle. That is the pattern of the gospel.

His death leads to your life. His death has led to your eternal life, and now, seeing what he has done for you, it will enable you to pour your life out for others, and there will be joy in the city. And if there is joy in the city because you are living out of the pattern of the gospel in your life, it will change the world. Let’s be that kind of movement.

Let’s pray.

Our Father, we thank you that you have given us this vision. You have given us this model. You have given us this pattern and this power. And now we ask that we would realize that, here, as a church. Lord, we ask this not just for Redeemer, but for all the churches of the city, and not just for the churches of New York City but the churches of the cities of the world. Help us to become a movement, to minister effectively in cities out of the gospel—its power and its pattern. We ask this in the name of the one who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. It is in his name we pray, Amen.

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# Good Earnests of Great Success A Sermon [(No. 802)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c14.htm) Delivered on Lord's-Day Evening, January 12th, 1868, by C. H. SPURGEON, At the [Metropolitan Tabernacle,](http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/index.html) Newington at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0802.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0802.htm)

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."—Acts 6:7.

Logo

Description automatically generatedERTAIN things preceded this prosperity—the counterpart of which I verily believe we have experienced among ourselves. There had been a little trouble in the church; some had thought one thing, some had thought another. There appeared to have been a just cause for complaint. The apostles, conciliatory in their temper, and earnest in their endeavour to keep the church together, as all true ministers should be, proposed the election of seven men who should distribute the contributions impartially among the poor. This was agreed to and acted upon by the entire assembly, and straightway the multitude of them that believed were of *one heart, and of one soul.* Well might great grace rest upon them all, for *they loved each other with a pure heart fervently.* Such unanimity, as a rule, I consider essential to church prosperity. If there be divisions amongst you, and one shall say, "I am for this," and another, "I am for that," how can you expect that the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of peace, should be present with you, and working among you? But when we are knit together in brotherly affection, the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. Where brotherly love continues, and saints walk in holy unity, the witness they bear is powerful, and the increase they gather is palpable.  
  
So I felt when I met with the brethren last Thursday night. The attendance at the church meeting was very numerous, and the unanimity that prevailed not only gratified me, but I must confess astounded me too. I think all of us who know anything of the history of churches, especially those of a democratic order, where we recognize the rights of every member, understand how easy it is for thoughts to diverge, for counsels to vary, and for excellent brethren conscientiously to disagree. A breach once made has a tendency to widen, and a rent, unless speedily repaired, may tear a church to pieces. But not so much as a single word was spoken, nor do I know that so much as a single thought crossed the breast of any one that evening, contrary to the general current of unanimous opinion with which you elected my brother to take upon himself the office proposed to assist me in my work. I felt as if I could only weep my joy. I knew of no words by which I could express it, because I looked not only at the unity itself, but regarding it as one of the qualifications for future prosperity, I thought within myself, "Surely God will bless us; surely he will bless us yet more abundantly than aforetime."  
  
Moreover, my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, you know that some two or three years ago, Baptist churches of London scarcely knew each other. There might have been some secret love between them, but certainly there was no manifest display of it. But now for two years we have been associated together to the number of eighty or ninety; in fact, there are now nearly a hundred of the churches among whom union has been cemented. We have been enabled to do some service for the Master by this incorporation, but whatever service we may have done or may not have done, this certainly has been the result of our meeting with each other, that the churches have come to feel themselves to be a whole, they keep rank, they walk together as a phalanx, desire to be faithful to Christ, and to bear each others' burdens. If anyone had told me, three or four years ago, that I should live to see, as I did last year, this house filled with the representatives of our Baptist churches met together to pray, I should have said, "If the Lord will open windows in heaven, may such a thing be!" But it has been, and by God's grace it will be yet again, and we shall clasp hands next Tuesday, and go on for another campaign against the common enemy, united as one man, first to Christ, and then to one another. May we not look upon this as a sign that God is intending to bless all our churches, to pour us out a blessing such as we shall not have room enough to receive? The Lord send prosperity. Amen, say we, amen from our hearts. And amen we hope all God's saints will say. May the blessing speedily be sent. Since we have the first matter I am hopeful.  
  
But many will urge discouragements. "How is it likely," says one, "that we can hope to make an impression upon the present age? What means have we but the simple gospel of Jesus Christ?" We are certainly not among the wealthy, and we count not amongst us the great ones of the land. Our membership has always been, and still is, among the poor. How shall we expect to tell upon so huge a city as this, or to exert any influence upon so great a country; and, above all, how shall we make any impress upon the population of the whole globe? My dear brethren, we are weak, but we are not weaker than the first disciples of Christ. Neither were they learned, nor were they the wealthy of the earth: fishermen, the most of them, by no means men of cultivated ability—their tramp was that of a legion that went forth to conquer as well as to fight. Wherever they went and wielded the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, their enemies were put to confusion. It is true they died in the conflict. Some of them were slain by the sword, and others of them were rent in sunder by wild beasts; but in all these things they were more than conquerors through him that loved him. The primitive church did tell upon its age, and left a seed behind which the whole earth could not destroy; and so shall we by God's grace if we are equally set upon it, equally filled with the divine life, equally resolved by any means and by all means to spread abroad the savour of Jesus Christ's name: our weakness shall be our strength, for God shall make it to be the platform upon which the omnipotence of his grace shall be displayed. Keep together, brethren, keep close to Christ; close up your ranks. Heed the battle cry; hold fast the faith; quit yourselves like men in the conflict, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. Only may the King himself lead us onward to the fray, and we shall not fear the result.  
  
Having thus looked at the precedents of that prosperity enjoyed by the church at Jerusalem, we shall, this evening, with deep earnestness, *ask your attention to the means by which a like prosperity may be procured for such churches as do not enjoy it now;* secondly, we shall have a word or two upon *the results of such prosperity;* and then, thirdly, upon *the alternative which is before every church, either to obtain such prosperity or else to mourn over grievous evils.*  
I. WHAT ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS PROSPERITY MAY BE PROCURED?  
  
If we pant to see the Word of God increase, multitudes added to the disciples, and a great company of those who are least likely to be saved brought in, there must be an adequate instrumentality. Nothing can avail without *the operation of the Holy Spirit and the smile from heaven.* Paul planteth, Apollos watereth, and God giveth the increase. We must never begin our catalogue of outward means without referring to that blessed and mysterious potentate who abides in the church, and without whom nothing is good, nothing efficient, nothing successful.

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,  
With all thy quickening powers."

This should be our first prayer whenever we attempt to serve God, for if not, we begin with pride, and can little hope to succeed by prowess. If we go the warfare at our own charges we must not marvel if we return stained with defeat. O Spirit of the living God, if it were not for thy power we could not make the attempt, but when we rely upon thee we go forward in confidence.  
  
As for the ostensible means, would any church prosper, *there must be much plain preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.* I have been struck lately in looking through the history of the Reformation, and of the times before the Reformation, with the remarkable downrightness of the testimony of the early preachers. If you look at the life of Farren you find him not preaching *about* the gospel, but preaching *the gospel.* So it was with John Calvin. He is looked upon now, of course, a theologian only, but he was really one of the greatest of gospel preachers. When Calvin opened the Book and took a text, you might be sure that he was about to preach "Through grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And it was the same with Luther. Luther's preaching was just the ringing of a big bell, the note of which was always, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and live! It is not of works, lest any man should boast, but by faith are ye saved, and by faith alone." They spake this, and they spake it again; neither did they couch the doctrine in difficult words, but they laboured with all their might, so to speak, that the ploughman at the plough-tail should understand, and that the fish-wife should comprehend the truth. They did not aim at lofty periods and flowing eloquence; of rhetoric they had a most contemptible opinion, but they just dashed right on with this one truth, "He that believeth hath everlasting life;" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And, my brethren, if we are to see the church of God really restored to her pristine glory, we must have back this plain, simple, gospel-preaching. I do believe that the hiding of the cross beneath the veil of fine language and learned dissertation is half the cause of the spiritual destitution of our country. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. I would sooner say these few words and then cease my testimony, than utter the most splendid oration that ever streamed from the lips of Demosthenes or of Cicero, but not have declared the gospel of Christ. We must keep to this. This must be the hammer that we bring down upon the anvil of the human heart again, and again, and again. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord! God forbid that we should know anything among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified! Look to him—not to the priest, not to your good works, not to your prayers, not to your church-goings or your chapel- goings, but to Christ Jesus exalted. Look to him in faith, and God is willing to forgive you, able to forgive you, to receive you, to make you his children, and for ever to glorify you with himself. We must have much more of this plain preaching, and not only plain preaching but plain teaching. Sunday School teachers, *you* must teach this same gospel. I know *you* do, but full many Sunday School teachers do not. A certain denomination has made the confession that after having had their schoolrooms crowded with children, they do not know that any of those children have afterwards come to be attendants at the places of worship. Miserable confession! Miserable teachers must they be! And have we not known teachers who believed in the doctrines of grace, and upstairs in the chapel they would have fought earnestly for them, but downstairs in the schoolroom they have twaddled to the little children in this kind of way—"Be good boys and girls; keep the Sabbath; do not buy sweets on a Sunday; mind your fathers and your mothers; be good, and you will go to heaven"!—which is not true, and is not the gospel; for the same gospel is for little children as for grown-up men—not "Do this and live," which is after the law that was given by Moses, but "Believe and live," which is according to the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. Teachers must inculcate the gospel if they are to see the salvation of their classes, the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel, for without this no great thing will be done.  
  
And if we would see the gospel spread abroad in London as once it did in Geneva, as once, under John Knox, it did in Scotland, as it did in Luther's day throughout Germany, we *must have much holy living to back it all up.* After we have done the sermon, people say, "How about the people that attend there? What about the church members, are they upright? Are they such people as you can trust? What about their homes? Do they make good husbands? Are they good servants? Are they kind masters?" People will be sure to enquire this, and if the report of our character be bad, it is all over with our testimony. The doctor may advertise, but if the patients are not cured, he is not likely to establish himself as being well-skilled in his art; and the preacher may preach, but if his people do not love the gospel, they kick down with their feet what he builds up with his hands. As I told you this morning, the followers of the early Reformers were distinguished by the sanctity of their lives. When they were about to hunt out the Waldenses, the French king, who had some of them in his dominions, sent a priest to see what they were like, and he, honest man as he was, came back to the king, and said, "As far as I could find, they seem to be much better Christians than we are. I am afraid they are heretics, but really they are so chaste, so honest, so upright, and so truly pious, that, though I hate heresy—I hope your majesty does not suspect me on that account—yet I would that all Catholics were as good as they are." Now, this was what made the gospel victorious in those days— the stern integrity of those who received it, and thus it will be still. It cannot be otherwise. But if you become worldly, if you members of this church are just the same as other men who have no grace and make no pretensions, what is the good of your profession? You are liars before God unless you live above the common life of the rest of mankind. Oh! to get back to the simplicity of Christian manners! I cannot go into particulars, and ordain that this you shall do and that you shall avoid, but you know very well what the simplicity is, and were it carried out there is a great deal that is now practised amongst professors that would have at once to be given up. As the books were burned when Paul preached, so there would be a great deal to be burned in the Christian church if we had the Spirit of God in all his power to bring us back to the old simplicity of the Christian faith. And why not? If you put the sword into the scabbard, you cannot kill with it; you must pull it out, and let it glitter in all its naked sharpness. If you put the sword of the gospel into the scabbard of worldly conformity, as some of you do, you cannot expect that there will be any power in it. Draw it away from your worldly company, and your pernicious customs, and then shall you see that it still has power to kill and to make alive. There must, then, be holy living as well as plain testimony.  
  
Yet all this would not suffice, if the church is to be multiplied and many are to be saved, unless we add *individual, personal exertion.* I am so full with one theme today, that if I plough in the same furrow this evening as I did this morning I cannot help it, for I am anxious to make that furrow very deep and broad. I believe that no Christian church can have prosperity if only a part of the members are active for the conversion of souls. Why, sirs, it had got to be a thought among Christians that we ministers were to do all the work of bringing souls to Christ, and that you were to sit still and enjoy the sermon, and perhaps criticise it and pull it to pieces. But this was not orthodox; according to Christ's law, every Christian is to be a minister in his own sphere; every member of the church is to be active in spreading the faith which was delivered not to the ministers, but delivered to the saints, to every one of them, that they might maintain it and spread it according to the gift which the Spirit has given them. Shall I venture a parable? A certain band of men, like knights, had been exceedingly victorious in all their conflicts. They were men of valour and of indomitable courage; they had carried everything before them, and subdued province after province for their king. But on a sudden they said in the council-chamber, "We have at our head a most valiant warrior, one whose arm is stout enough to smite down fifty of his adversaries; would it not be better if, with a few such as he to go out to the fight, the mere men-at-arms, who make up the ordinary ranks, were to stop at home? We should be much more at our ease; our horses would not so often be covered with foam, nor our armour be bruised in returning from the fray, and no doubt great things would be done." Now, the foremost champions, with fear and trembling, undertook the task and went to the conflict, and they fought well, no one could doubt it; to the best of their ability they unhorsed their foe and they did great exploits. But still, from the very hour in which that scheme was planned and carried out, no city was taken, no province was conquered, and they met together and said, "How is this? Our former prestige is forgotten; our ranks are broken; our pennons are trailed in the dust; what is the cause of it?" When out spoke the champion, and said, "Of course it is so! How did you think that some twelve or fifteen of us could do the work of all the thousands? When you all went to the fight, and every man took his share, we dashed upon the foe like an avalanche, and crushed him beneath our tramp; but now that you stay at home and put us, but a handful, to do all the work, how can you expect that great things should be done?" So each man resolved to put on his helmet and his armour once again, and go to the battle, and so victory returned. I speak to you tonight, I, one of the rank of God's servants, and I say, my brethren, if we are to have the victory you must be every one of you in the fight. We must not spare a single one, neither man nor woman, old nor young, rich nor poor, but you must each fight for the Lord Jesus according to your ability, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done upon earth even as it is in heaven. We shall see great things when you all agree to this and put it in practice.  
  
Combined with this *there must be much earnest prayer.* The prayer of faith! have we not held it in high esteem, have we not made some considerable proof of it in this place? We hope to have more faith—a great increase both of volume and power. Nothing is impossible to the man who knows how to overcome heaven by wrestling intercession. When we have seen one, two, or ten, or twenty penitents converted, and when we have sometimes been heartily thankful that a hundred have been added to this church in a month, ought we ever to have been satisfied? Should we not have felt that the prayer which was blessed to the conversion of a hundred, had it been more earnest, might, in the divine purpose, have been answered with the conversion of a thousand? Why not? I do not know why London should not be shaken from end to end with gospel truth before this day twelve months. You will say, "We have not enough ministers." But God can make them. I tell you, sirs, he can find ministers for his truth—ay, if he willed it, among the very offscourings of the earth. He can take the worst of men, the vilest of the vile, and change their hearts, and make them preach the truth if he pleases. We are not to look to what we have. The witness of the senses only confuses those who would walk by faith. See what he did for the church in the case of Saul of Tarsus. He just went up to the devil's army, and took out a ringleader, and said to him, "Now, sir, you preach the gospel which once you despised." And who preached it better? Why, I should not wonder if ere long in answer to prayer we see the Ritualistic clergy preaching the gospel! Who can tell—the Romish priests may yet do it, and repeat the tale of Luther and Melancthon. Were not Luther, and Melancthon, and Calvin, and their comrades, brought out of Papal darkness to show light unto the people? We have heard with our ears, why may we not see with our eyes, the mighty works of God? The Lord can find his men where we know nothing about them. "Of these stones," said the Baptist, as he pointed to the banks of the Jordan, "Of these stones God can raise up children unto Abraham;" and as he could then, so he can now. Let us not despair. If we will but pray for it, our heavenly Father will deny his children nothing. Come, do but come, in simplicity of heart, and *according to your faith* shall it be done unto you.  
  
Would you see the church greatly increase, and the kingdom come to the throne of the Son of David? then *we must all get more intense glowing spiritual life.* Do you understand me. There are two persons yonder. They are both alive, but one of them lies in bed. He wakes, but he says, with the sluggard—

"You have woke me too soon, I must slumber again,"

and when he gets up he gazes round with vacant wonder and strange bewilderment. He has no energy, he is listless, and we say of him, "What a lifeless creature he is!" "He is living, but with how little vitality! Now, you see another man. His sleep is short; he wakes soon; he is out to his business; takes down the shutters; he is standing behind the counter waiting upon this customer and that; he is all active; he is here, there, and everywhere, nothing is neglected; his eyes are wide open, his brain is active, his hands are busy, his limbs are all nimble. Well, what a different man that is! you are glad to get this second man to be your servant; he is worth ten times the wages of the first. There is life in them both, but what a difference there is between them! The one is eagerly living, the other is drawling out an insipid existence. And how many Christians there are of this sort! They wander in on a Sunday morning, sit down, get their hymn book, listen to the prayer without joining in it, hear the sermon, but might almost as well not have heard it, go home, get through the Sunday, go into business. With them there is never any secret prayer for the conversion of men, no trying to talk to children, or servants, or friends, about Christ, no zeal, no holy jealousy, no flaming love, no generosity, no consecrating of the substance to God's cause! This is too faithful a picture of a vast number of professing Christians. Would it were not so. On the other hand, we see another kind of man—one that is renewed in the spirit of his mind; though he has to be in the world, his main thoughts are how he can use the world to promote the glory of Christ. If he goes into business, he wants to make money that he may have wherewith to give bountifully for the spread of the gospel. If he meets with friends, he tries to thrust a word in edgeways for his Master; and whenever he gets an opportunity, he will speak, or write, but he will be aiming to do something for him who has bought him with his precious blood. Why, I could pick out, if it were right to mention names, some here who are all alive, till their bodies seem to be scarcely strong enough for the real vitality and energy of their souls. Oh! these are the cream of the church, the pick and choice of the flock, the men who are true men, and the women who are the true daughters of Jerusalem. The Lord multiply the number of such; yea, may he make every one of us to be such, for I am afraid that we all of us need quickening. I know I do myself. It is a long time since I preached a sermon that I was satisfied with. I scarcely recollect ever having done so. You do not know, for you cannot hear my groanings when I go home, Sunday after Sunday, and wish that I could learn to preach somehow or other; wish that I could discover the way to touch your hearts and your consciences, for I seem to myself to be just like the fire when it wants stirring; the coals have got black when I want them to flame forth. If I could but say in the pulpit what I feel in my study, or if I could but get out of my mouth what I have tried to get into my own soul, then I should preach indeed, and move your souls, I think. Yet perhaps God will use our weakness, and we may use it with ourselves, to stir us up to greater strength. You know the difference between slow motion and rapidity. If there were a cannon ball rolled slowly down these aisles, it might not hurt anybody; it might be very large, very huge, but it might be so rolled along that you might not rise from your seats in fear. But if somebody would give me a rifle, and ever so small a ball, I reckon that if the ball flew along the Tabernacle, some of you might find it very difficult to stand in its way. It is the force that does the thing. So, it is not the great man who is loaded with learning that will achieve work for God; it is the man, who, however small his ability, is filled with force and fire, and who rushes forward in the energy which heaven has given him, that will accomplish the work—the man who has the most intense spiritual life, who has real vitality at its highest point of tension, and living, while he lives, with all the force of his nature for the glory of God. Put these three or four things together, and I think you have the means of prosperity.  
  
II. Time flies, and therefore while I briefly hint, I must leave you largely to meditate, THE RESULTS WHICH FLOW FROM THIS PROSPERITY—*souls are saved.*  
John Owen said that if you had to preach to a whole nation for twelve months, in order to win one soul, it would be good wages, for a soul is so priceless, that to redeem it from going down to the pit would be worth the expenditure of all human strength. Richard Knill once said, that if there were only one unconverted person in the wilds of Siberia, and that God had ordained that every Christian in the world must go and talk to that one person before he would be converted, it would be an exceedingly little thing for us all to do, to go all the way there through the cold, and frost, and snow, to win that one soul. And he was right, and I may well stir you up to energy when the result will be the conversion of souls.  
*The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified.* Who would not wish to live, or even to die, for this?

"Let him be crowned with majesty,  
Who bowed his head in death,  
And let his praise be sounded high,  
By all things that have breath."

If you have not forgotten what he suffered for you, dear friends, do you not wish to see him crowned with many crowns? He wore the crown of thorns for you, would not you wish to see the fruit of his soul's travail, the removal of the curse, the extension of his kingdom, the honour of his fame, the growing enthusiasm of his subjects—to make his excellency apparent, and his praise more and more famous to the very end of time? I know you would, and therefore I ask you to strive together with us in your prayers and your efforts, that the number of his disciples may be multiplied greatly.  
  
Moreover, the result will be *to build up the church itself,* for there is no good done in the name of Jesus which does not redound to the satisfaction of his bride. If you do good to another, you are taking the shortest way to do good to your own soul. As those who promote sanitary measures for the benefit of the neighbourhood are thereby favouring the conditions of their own health, so the promulgation of saving knowledge throughout the world is augmenting the peace and the welfare of our own hearts, and of all who are already saved. Truly, I believe, that some persons are never comfortable in religion, because they are selfish in it. If they began to live with some object, their constant distress of mind would soon be rolled away. May God, therefore, stir us up, that the whole church may thereby be blessed.  
  
III. But I must now come to the point with which I proposed to finish, namely, THE ALTERNATIVE WHICH I THINK STANDS BEFORE THIS CHURCH AND EVERY OTHER CHURCH.  
  
Either we must get a high state of prosperity, or else we shall lack what is to be dreaded to the very uttermost. How many churches there are which have proved the truth of what I am now going to say! They have not tried to increase; they have not cared about conversions, and very soon there has been murmuring. One did not like the minister; another did not like the deacons; a third objected to a brother that was introduced; and all this, perhaps, was quietly hushed up because they were too respectable to come to an open disturbance, but still there it was—the fire in the embers; and thus it kept on till, by-and-by, they come to one of two things, either lethargy or else division. They settled down as quiet and sober religious people. The minister was not excited; not he! The people could not be stirred. The boast was that there were so many carriages on a Sunday outside the chapel. Some trusted in chariots and some in horses, but there was nothing about conversion. Why, I know churches whose baptismal pool would have been green by now if the water had been standing in it, so few have there been added to their number. And yet they are not at all dissatisfied. "No," the good deacon says, "you know our pew-rents keep up very well; we have not a seat to let in the gallery!" "Ah!" and says the minister, "And while we have the most respectable people in the town come among us, we do not approve of these revivalists down the back street who are trying to catch those poor sinners; at least, if they want them, they may have them, for we do not want them." That is the style in which some of these people talk. If they do not say it in words, they think it in their hearts. Well, and when a church does get into that dreadful state, it becomes noxious as a very dunghill. And when there is very little spiritual animation there soon comes to be the ferment of very great division. Somebody or other cannot bear this. Some young and fervent spirit speaks out about it, and the minister does not like it, the deacons do not like it, and they try to put him down. Then half-a-dozen more of the members think that he is right, and the life that is in the church wakes up. The trumpet is sounded, and there is a troop led off to establish a healthy organization somewhere else, and the old corpus is left to rot as it may, and to decay as many churches do. Now, were I a prophet, I might tell you what should come to pass in latter days; but speaking as a monitor, rather than as a seer, I should not wonder but I could almost tell what you will come to by-and-by. In my day may it never, never be. You will get to be very respectable over at the Tabernacle; after I die you will have an organ, I dare say, and you will get a fine parson to deliver the most polished discourses to you, and where you will then drift I can readily guess. The Lord have mercy upon you, and save you from it. This is the tendency, however, of every church, it matters not what it is. Where the most honest, simple, faithful preachers have been, the people have got to be too great for the gospel, and too proud to receive the truth in the love of it. May it never happen in our days, however, and if earnest prayer can prevent it, may it never happen so long as the world stands, but till Christ comes may you be an honest, truth- loving people, striving together for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and never departing from the earnest simplicity of the faith. But unless we keep up the earnest spirit amongst us, we shall very soon degenerate into the ordinary dead-alive Christianity, which is only half as good as nothing at all, because it gives men a name to live when they are dead.  
  
The picture I have drawn may seem to you too highly-coloured, but I assure you that I have seen such things. I am not old, but I have lived long enough to see churches go in this way; ay, and churches too, that were once warm-hearted. I have seen young members who were once earnest grow cold. I have seen old members who were once content to worship with the humble ones, get a little up in the world. Then "of course" they must go to *church!* I have seen congregations broken to pieces, and churches split up, and the bottom of it all has been because the vital godliness has been drained out of the system; the love of God has not remained in the heart, for when the rich man has the love of God in his heart, he delights to see the multitude gathered together; he is glad to do his part, and help in all he can. And the learned man, if the preaching does not always suit him, yet he is glad to think that the unlearned have a preacher whom they can understand. Whoever the man may be, or however great and famous, if he loves Christ he is satisfied with the simple truth. "Give me that," says he, "and that is enough. I can get my fine thinking and my fine reading in the weekdays if I want it; but on the Sabbath let me hear of Jesus; let me hear the story of the cross; let me see sinners led to Calvary—it is all I want, and I am well content if I have this."  
  
Are there not many here tonight who are unconverted? They will wonder perhaps what I am making all this stir about. Let me address myself personally to you. O ye unconverted women, it *is about you* that we are concerned. And *you,* ye unconverted men, it *is about you* that we are anxious; we are seeking after you. Why, for our own sakes, if there were none to be saved, we might be content to hear far different doctrine from this. The doctrines of grace are sweet in our ears, and our souls would be well enough fed by them. But because we want to see you saved we have to talk with you, and attend to these practical matters since we want to see you brought to Christ. Now look at the text, and it may give you some comfort if you are willing to lay hold on Christ. Do you notice, it is said that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"? Now, these priests were they that conspired to crucify Christ. They were once the bigoted enemies of the gospel, but they became obedient to the faith. Why should not you, then? I know the devil tells you that you have been too great a sinner. That cannot be. Perhaps he reminds you that you have been a scoffer, or have lived in immorality, or have been self-righteous, which is as heinous a sin as any other. Ah! well, but the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin. A young woman wrote to me the other day— I do not know who she is, but she said, "I cannot tell anybody, but I have done so-and-so, a dreadful sin indeed, if my mother knew it it would break her heart." I do not know here, and therefore her mother will never know it from me, but she says, "Can I be saved?" Young woman, you can! She says that she is worse than Magda-lene, for Magdalene did not know Christ when she was a sinner, but she did know the gospel, and yet sinned. Oh! well, if you are worse than Magdalene, Christ will be glorified in saving such a one as you are. Only come with all your sin about you, and throw yourself at his feet. Trust him! Trust him! Do him the honour to believe that he can save even such an abominable sinner as you have been. Though you have gone to the utmost extremity of human guilt, and looked over the gulf of endless misery, yet still believe him; trust him, and he will be as good as ever you can think him to be; for when you think your highest thoughts of him, he is higher than your highest thoughts, and can save even to the uttermost. The priests were obedient to the faith; why not you? They believed in Christ, saw the fold, entered in, and were saved; why should not you be like them? Did you notice how it is described? They were *obedient to the faith."* Then it seems that the gospel is all summed up in that word "faith." To be obedient to the faith; to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; to trust him because he has suffered in your stead; to believe that the divine justice is satisfied with the death of Christ, and to rely upon that satisfaction which Christ has rendered, that is to be saved, to be obedient to the faith. We sang at the Lord's Table, this morning, that sweet verse which really is the quintessence of the gospel, and therefore I will repeat it to you, though you already know it so well:—

"Nothing in my hand I bring: Simply to thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Yes, just as you are come and depend upon the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. And this is what the stir is all about, we cannot bear that you should drift down to destruction, we cannot bear that there should be cataracts of souls leaping down the eternal gulf. We cannot endure that Satan should gloat his malicious soul with the prey of tens of thousands of mankind. We cannot bear that Christ should stand neglected, that his cross should be despised, that his blood should be trampled on. O come to him! He will not reject you. Him that cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out. Breathe a silent prayer to him now. Cast your soul upon him, sink or swim.

"Venture on him, venture wholly, Let no other trust intrude,  
None but Jesus Can do helpless sinners good."

But he can do it. Rely on him, and eternal life is yours.  
Brethren and sisters, as we are in the New Year now, and have only reached the second Sabbath in it, let us begin and sweep out of the house the old leaven of ease and self-indulgences and lukewarmness, and let it be our cry before we go to our beds tonight, that the Lord would make us to be real living Christians, make us flames of fire from this time forth truly to serve him who served us even to the death. You will never get to be too warm. I am persuaded you will not be too zealous. I only wish I could get into such a devout enthusiasm myself as that of the apostle Paul when constrained by the love of Christ, he said, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God." When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. How much more unprofitable when we have done so little! The Lord quicken this church. The February meetings are coming on, when we shall be specially and earnestly seeking the ingathering of souls. Believers, you who are mighty with God in secret, pray for these February meetings, that the month may be a holy month to us, the best month we have ever had, that more may be gathered into the church than ever have been in our times. Make that a point of prayer, and prove God now whether he will not hear you, and you shall find he will to your soul's comfort. Amen.