

The Vital Importance of Spiritual Authority

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Acts

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 6. Acts 6. Taking another Sunday away from our study of 1 Peter, which I hope to resume in a couple of weeks, pick up in chapter 2 again. But last week we went to Acts 2 to talk about the resurrection and Peter's first sermon there, and it's interesting and instructive, actually, as we study 1 Peter to step back into Acts. I know I was blessed and encouraged by doing that, to look back at Peter and his life and his ministry, even as we think about applying his epistle to our lives. And so we're going to do that again this morning because in the life of our church, we're at a very important time, season. Every couple of years, we ask for officer nominations. This year we're asking, just like we did last year, because we missed a year because of COVID, and so we're just getting back into the rhythm of every other year, and so officer nominations begin today. In fact, there are some forms in the lobby, for those of us who like to do things the old fashioned way, of actually writing with a pen and paper for the two offices of elder and deacon nominations. And if you're a member of the church, you can nominate if you're over 18, that's one of the checks you have to make; every member over 18 is invited to nominate men for the office of elder and deacon. And we also have an online form that will be going out today, or in the morning, that you can fill it out online if you prefer that.

So I want you to pray about that and so because it's such an important subject, we wanted to take a couple of weeks and look at this important issue, and so today, actually, the title of the message is "The Vital Importance of Spiritual Authority." The vital importance of spiritual authority. This is one of those subjects that no one goes around thinking, you know, I really need good spiritual authority in my life, or it's not something that you think about very much because we often don't think about the things that God wants us to think about naturally; that's why he gives us his word to instruct us in the way that we should think and the things that we should value and things that we should believe. And so this passage this morning, though, really makes this point and drives it home, the vital importance of spiritual authority, how urgent it is for yours and my spiritual well-being that we be under godly authority.

This is something that goes against the way our culture thinks about authority. It's something that goes against what our own souls think about authority, because the very essence of sin, if you think about it, the very essence of sin is the desire not to be under

authority. God said, "You shall eat of any tree except one." They went out from under his authority and rebelled and why did they rebel? Because they were tempted by Satan, who was the first rebel. In glory, before the creation of the physical universe, Satan rebelled against God and he was not content with his station. Lucifer, the angel that became Satan, was the highest created being. He was the archangel of archangels and yet he had violence in his heart, Ezekiel tells us, and he was not content. He wanted to make himself like the Most High. He wasn't content to be submitted under authority. So his rebellion to be like God was what motivated him to rebel, and a third of the angels in heaven followed him in that rebellion. And then what did he say to Eve when he tempted her? "If you eat of this fruit, you will be like God. You don't need to be under authority. You need to make your own decisions. You need to make your own rules. You need to live according to your own designs and desires." And we're going to see as we look through this in the next couple of weeks, that the mark of godly people is a right submission to God above all things, and then to authority in general, and ultimately to God's authority. When there's a contradiction between God's authority and the authority of man, we submit to God's authority over the authority of man. But it is an unmistakable thing in the Scripture that humility and submission to authority are distinguishing marks of faithful believers, faithful Christians.

We need authority in our lives. In fact, just to illustrate this, you think about the two tables of the law, 10 Commandments, and Christ speaks of the two tables of the law, and he gives the two summary commandments that actually explain the whole law, if you think about it. When he's asked, "What's the greatest commandment?" He says, "There are two. The first, the greatest commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. The second, like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And these two commandments serve as rubrics under which the other 10 fall. Four commandments fall under that first commandment, loving God with all your heart is in the first four commandments. "You shall have no other God before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember this Sabbath day to keep it holy." Those four commandments all relate to loving God. The second six commandments relate to loving your neighbor, how is it that you live out the love for God with your neighbor. And what's the first commandment on the horizontal? I know if I were writing it, I would say, "Thou shall not murder." That seems to be the most important one but what God says is the first commandment on the horizontal is, "Honor your father and your mother that it may go well with you and you may live long upon the earth." Then he says don't commit murder. The first thing is you've got to understand to live under authority.

God works through authority and God himself is a God in which we see authority at work in his creation and his redemption. The passage that was read earlier in the service in John 8, Jesus speaks about doing everything that the Father has given him to do. Though he's equal in power and glory to God the Father, he is submitted to the Father in the work of redemption. We see this authority even within the Godhead and the actions of the Godhead, and so we come to an important issue, the urgent importance of spiritual authority.

Now the passage is Acts 6:1-7 and we're going to read this and we're going to spend a little bit of time after we read it looking at the real context of this and spend a lot of time actually there because I think it shows the vital importance of it when you look at it in this light. Acts 6:1.

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we praise and worship You because You are the one true God. You are God and there is no other. You are Triune, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory and we are Your creatures, made by Your hand. We belong to You. We come this morning, Lord, confessing our sinfulness and our need of grace. We thank You that You've given us your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We pray that You would make Your word alive in our hearts. We say with Samuel, when You spoke to him in the temple, "Speak, Lord, Your servants are listening." In Jesus' name. Amen.

So vital importance of spiritual authority. This passage is really, it's powerful to think about. This is what got me thinking about this actually is working through preparing for last week's message and Peter's first sermon and looking at the glory and beauty of the early church. I mean, you look back at some of the verses and how it's described in these first six chapters, it's stunning what God is doing in the early church. And so as we look at those things, we can have, you know, a romantic desire and it's a worthy desire to have more of this at work in our lives and in our community, our church community, but we're going to see as we read through it, that it was, you see the glory and beauty of the early church but you also see the relentless spiritual attacks of Satan trying to disrupt the beauty and unity and glory of the church.

It wasn't easy for the early church. It was a fight, a spiritual battle to maintain the beauty and the glory of what God was doing and this is really what's happening in Acts 6. This is

a spiritual battle being laid out as Satan again attacks the unity of the church because a crisis has happened. Think about this. So the first point is the necessity of spiritual authority. The necessity of spiritual authority. The crisis that arises is the first subpoint 1A. We see a real crisis, verse 1. So we're talking about the necessity of spiritual authority, a real crisis that calls for the need of spiritual authority.

Verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." Now this complaint, the word translated "complaint" in the New American Standard that I'm reading, is a word which means literally "murmuring; muttering." It's a word that speaks of that kind of sound you make when you're upset about something but you're not wanting to make it fully known. In fact, this word is used to describe how people respond when they have a secret issue with what's going on. They don't want to expose it, but they're really upset about it. They murmur. It's a complaint.

And so there was this unspoken problem that was going on. Nobody had come to the 12 and said, "We have a problem," but there was a significant problem going on. In fact, that word actually, when you go back to the Old Testament and you read Exodus and Numbers, those of you who've read those recently remember that one of the things you'll encounter again and again is the fact that the Jews, the nation of Israel, are continually grumbling or murmuring. When you go back and you find that word, it's all over the place in Exodus and Numbers. In the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this same word, "a complaint," is there. Murmuring and complaint is the same word and so those Jews that were reading this or those Christians that were reading the Old Testament as they received this account in Acts, it would resonate with them. This is just like the Jewish people did. They were always having secret complaints in their hearts, grumbling against God. And how deadly that is.

There was this perceived unfairness. Their complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews. Literally the Hellenists against the Hebrews. This is speaking about in the early church, in this moment in history, there is a gathering, extraordinary gathering of believers in Jerusalem that have been formed together by what happened at Pentecost. We saw that last Sunday. The preaching of Peter and the apostles at Pentecost resulted in the salvation of 3,000 people on a single day, 3,000 souls were saved. Peter's gospel presentation of the power and glory of the resurrection brought about great conviction. And so in response to that, the early church is born. Now what happens is, if you remember, we talked about this last time, but I'll just explain it again. You have three pilgrimage feasts each year for the Jewish people. Three times a year that Jews were supposed to make their way back to Jerusalem to make a pilgrimage back to Jerusalem to the temple to worship God. They were to do it for Passover in the spring, March/April. They were to do it again seven weeks later for Pentecost, May/June. And they were to do it a few months later in October, September/October for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now we have in this passage, we're talking about what's happened after what happened at Pentecost. Pentecost, that second feast was when Jews from all over Judea, Samaria, the

surrounding areas, and indeed all over the Roman world came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost to worship God as they were commanded in Jerusalem. It's interesting. Scholars wonder about how many people were in Jerusalem, how many people lived in Jerusalem. Their estimates vary widely. Tacitus, a Roman historian, thought 600,000. More conservative historians say 100,000 Jews lived in Jerusalem. But listen to this. Let's use 100,000 because it works well with the math for all of us and if it's 100,000 Jews, the Feast of Pentecost would have seen the number of Jewish people in Jerusalem swell to about 250,000. They would have increased more than double the population. So you had these Jews from all over the Mediterranean world streaming to Jerusalem to worship God at Pentecost, 150,000 people who don't live there. They get saved. There's an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It's with such power that they're immediately radically converted. They're baptized and they decide to lengthen their trip to Jerusalem.

Do you see that? That's what's happening. It's a unique moment in history. These folks who came planning to stay for a week to two weeks, maybe three weeks, they are now staying for months because their lives have been transformed. They want to continue to drink in the wonder of what Christ has done. They're seeing the miraculous power displayed through the apostles, the miraculous power through the preaching of the word, and so they're staying on. But they're running out of money. This is why they need support and help from other brothers and sisters. This sets the context.

So the widows are those who have even less means to sustain themselves. They can't go out and get a job and make money like some of the folks are doing. Obviously, some of them are finding work wherever they can. And what's happening over time is this passage is telling us the Greek-speaking Jews, that this is the Jews that have come from other places to Jerusalem. They're still Jews but they're from other places and other tongues, people that grew up in or live in Rome or Alexandria or Corinth. Jews that have come from all these places now, they feel like their widows are being neglected because there needed to be money given, and money is being given, to provide for the needs of all the people, but especially for the widows. And so there is this perceived unfairness with an element of ethnic tension. It's not so, like I said, they're all Jews but there's a little bit of that ethnic feel in that since we don't speak Hebrew, or actually they spoke Aramaic, though the word talks about Hebrew, Hebrew had changed enough that it was now closer to Aramaic. They don't speak the tongue, the native tongue of Israel, therefore we're being left out.

So that's the crisis and what's happened is the incredible beauty and glory of what God is doing in the infancy of the church is threatened. In fact, I would mention that I think the first six chapters leading up to this, you have two kind of parallel themes. This is still under point 1, the necessity of spiritual authority. You have two parallel themes going on and it moves back and forth from these two themes through the first six chapters. One is you see the beauty and glory of the church in its infancy, and the second is you see the force and fury of the attacks on the church in its infancy. You see the beauty and glory and you see the force and fury of the spiritual opposition. And you go back and forth. If you read through Acts, the first six chapters, you'll see this, and I'm going to help you walk through that right now.

Look with me back at chapter 2. We read Peter's first sermon, verses 22 to 36 of Acts 2 last week and we saw how they responded, that they were cut to the heart, pierced to the heart in verse 37. Peter said, "Repent, be baptized," verse 38. Verse 40, let's read verse 40. "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" Verse 41, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." 3,000 people get saved, an outpouring of the Spirit. This crowd of people that have come from all over the Roman world and now 3,000 are saved, and so their families are impacted, they're wanting to stay on. And so then, verse 42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." This is a revival that is going on. They see God moving and nobody wants to leave.

Look at verse 43. "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." Verse 44, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." What an amazing time to be alive as a Christian.

Chapter 3. So we don't know exactly when this is, but sometime probably the next few weeks, "Peter and John were going up to the temple", verse 1, "at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb," a young man, well, he's now 40 years old, we're going to find out as we read. He came into the world lame, born lame. He couldn't walk. And so he's laid there at the temple every day to beg for alms. He asked for Peter and John to give him money and Peter says, "I don't possess any gold, but I do possess this: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazarene, walk!" And the man gets up and begins to leap and run and praise God. And so the Jews had seen this man. He was there every day at the temple. And so all of the people around know this man. They can't deny this miracle. The man is overwhelmed with joy.

And so people run to the place, verse 11, the so-called the port, the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement, and Peter preaches his second great sermon here in Acts from 3:12 to 26. And he tells them again what they've done to Christ. Verse 13, "The God of Abraham, Isaac," this is 3:13, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses." He continues to preach and he exhorts them in verse 19, "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away." He continues preaching all the way down through verse 26.

Look at chapter 4, verse 1. Here's the first opposition that we see. I mentioned that you have the beauty and glory of the church, but you also have the force and fury of the

opposition to this new glory at work in the church. Chapter 4, verse 1, "As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening." They arrest Peter and John. The Sadducees were the ones who controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection. The Pharisees did, but the Sadducees didn't. The Pharisees were the theological conservatives of the day, though they were amiss and missed the glory of God. The Sadducees were the theological liberals of the day.

And so they arrest Peter and John but look at verse 4 of Acts 4. So the opposition is happening. The sermon was preached. Peter and John are put in jail, but Luke, the author of Acts, tells us, "But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand." Now it's important to realize it's 5,000 men here in Acts 4:4. It was 3,000 souls in Acts 2. So we're talking about maybe 10 to 15,000 believers now. If you think there's at least as many women as there are men, based on most of my experience, usually you don't find more men in the church than women, so there are probably at least as many women, probably some children, so somewhere between 10 and 15,000 believers at this point. The gospel is going forth wonderfully.

Now Peter and John are arrested. Peter preaches a mini-sermon to the rulers, and they threaten him basically in chapter 4, verses 13 and following, say, "You've got to stop preaching. You can't do this anymore." Peter and John say, in verse 19 of chapter 4, this shows how we don't always obey authority; when they tell us to disobey the authority of God, we reject their authority. Acts 4:19, after they commanded them in verse 18 not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, "But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" Verse 21, "When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed." Everybody knows it. This is a miracle. God has authenticated these men as preaching his truth and so the Sadducees, the priests, let them go.

Now so the gospel is going forth, but persecution, external persecution is the first attack that Satan makes, the arrest, the threats, and how do you respond to that? How are we to respond as the world opposes us? We get some blueprint from this in this early section of Acts. As the world intensifies its opposition against us, we need courage and the way you get courage is prayer because what happens next in Acts 4:23, they respond exactly the way they should to what has happened in Peter and John being arrested. Verse 23, "When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said," and you have from verse 24 to verse 31 a summary of their prayer. They just start pouring out their hearts to God in prayer. This is what they said, "With one accord their voices to God, O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of

our father David Your servant said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.' For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." Do you see the beauty of the sovereignty of God, how encouraging it is to know that God is sovereign? "Yeah, exactly what Your word said would happen, happened. These evil people opposed the gospel, but it was all according to what Your purpose predestined to occur."

And look now, they turn from that praise of God and his sovereignty now to active petition, "And now Lord," verse 29, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence." So when they tell you to stop talking about Jesus, what do you do? Pray. Pray for confidence, for boldness to speak all the more confidently. And they ask also that, "You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." And look what happens after they prayed. "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness." So they responded to this first attack. Satan attacks them and they just beat Satan back through prayer.

And look at the summary in verses 32 to 37, what was going on in the early church. After this prayer meeting, Peter and John arrested, told not to preach, they pray, they continue speaking the word of God, verse 32 of Acts 4, "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them." Listen, one of the things that happens is when the world persecutes the church, it does something powerful to let us know that we are one. And if this happens in our day, we need to understand this is what God wants us to do is understand how much we are one body. And it's an opportunity to see his glory like they did.

"All things were common property to them. And with great power," verse 33, "the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

What an amazing picture of the glory of God at work in the people of God. In this moment of great need, this kind of blessing comes. This isn't the kind of thing we're supposed to experience. People will read these passages and make arguments for communism. What a gross misreading and distortion of the word of God. You don't legislate that. The Spirit of God does this. You give freely, not by compulsion. Communism is a wicked and evil, godless invention of man. Christianity, when the love of Christ overwhelms us, we love and lay down our lives freely for our brothers. That's

the difference and that's what's happening in this moment in history, in redemptive history. This infancy of the church, we're seeing the beauty and glory of the church in a way that it's unimaginable, unspeakable, undecipherable, and as Luke tries to describe it, we can just barely get a grasp of what it must have been like.

But at the same time that's happening, Satan continues, and now he comes on his second attack in chapter 5, verses 1 to 10, the story of Ananias and Sapphira. In the context of where people are laying down, selling their land and their possessions and bringing everything and laying it at the apostles' feet, Ananias and Sapphira hatch a plan basically to sell their property and rather than, you know, keep some of it back and tell everybody that they did, and, "Hey, we're giving you this half or we're giving you 80%," they act like they're giving everything. Their intention is for everyone to think that they sold it and they gave everything just like Barnabas did and some others have done. And so what happens is Peter discerns that in his spirit, and as Ananias comes in without his wife, she's not come, he asks him, "Ananias, did you sell this property for such and such an amount, the amount you gave us?" And Ananias says, "Yes I did." And Peter says, "Why are you lying to the Holy Spirit? While it was in your hand, was it not yours to either sell or not to sell? And once you sold it, wasn't all that money at your disposal? Why would you lie and act like you gave everything when you didn't give everything? It would have been commendable," I'm adding some stuff in, "it would have been commendable for you to give half. That would have been wonderful, but it's the evil of your heart desiring the glory of giving it all when you didn't. That is something that God hates." And you see in this moment, because the moment is so holy, the fellowship is so pristine, so glorious, God immediately strikes the man Ananias dead in the moment. You've lied to the Holy Spirit in this moment and God kills him right there. They take him out and they bury him.

There's a meeting going on, they're still continuing to hear the word of God, they're having a meeting and his wife Sapphira comes in and it says she came in at just the time, right before the men who buried Ananias are coming back in. And Peter asks her, "Sapphira, was the price that you sold what you gave us?" And she says, "Yes." And he says to her, "Behold, the men who are coming back who buried your husband, they're going to bury you too." And she drops dead.

Now that was serious, I mean that doesn't happen very often. The good news is, when you sin, we sin all the time like this and we don't get killed. It's actually when you look at Scripture, even when you look at things like Sodom and Gomorrah, you look at the outpourings of God's wrath, when you read the Bible correctly and you look at it, we really should be amazed that those things don't happen so much more than they do. God is so restrained in the outpouring of his wrath. But he does out-pour his wrath occasionally to let us know this is what we deserve. But praise God he does. I mean, David should have been killed, for instance. Let's share that. David when he sinned with Bathsheba, he took another man's wife, he committed adultery, that itself was according to the law, grounds for execution. Then he has Uriah murdered, that's definitely grounds for execution, yet God has mercy on David because our God is a God who abounds in lovingkindness and compassion. But he is holy and he will find out those who will not humble themselves.

And so what happens then is this attack with Satan was suddenly deceiving the believers to lie to the Holy Spirit. It was going to be disruptive to the fellowship and God deals with it. And so what you see is, what do we need when the attacks come? The first thing we need when the attacks come, when hostility increases, is we need to pray like they prayed. The second thing we need to remember when the attacks come is we need to pursue holiness like they did and maintain a standard of church discipline. That's what's happening in Acts 5. God is exercising church discipline, the Holy Spirit is doing it directly without any need of intervention on our parts. He's removing the unrepentant sinner.

There's a place for that in the life of the body. And now when we look at Matthew 18, in the context of Matthew 18, where we're told how to do church discipline, you know, you go one-on-one, then you take another with you, then you tell it to the church, then if they won't repent after all that, you then remove them from the membership. That's in the context of, immediately before that passage, Jesus said, "What man if he has a hundred sheep and loses one, does not leave the ninety-nine in the fold and go and search for the one? And when he finds the one, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine." Then he says, "If your brother sins, go." Do you see that? When your brother sins and you're going after them, when the church is exercising church discipline, it is the same as Jesus the shepherd going after a lost sheep. That's the heart of discipline. It's restoration and recovery. It's a search and rescue mission. But discipline's a key part of it, and so that says that, in Acts you see this.

Now look what happens after that. Verse 10, "immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband." Verse 11, "And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things." Verse 12, "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem." Listen, he's basically saying, nobody wanted to associate with them who wasn't really born again. There was such a holiness over the church and the opposition so intense that unbelievers, I mean, when they came around the believers, they got saved or they left because of the power of God at work in their midst.

Verse 14, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." We already said there's 10 to 15,000. Now it's even more, the more outpouring of grace. So if it's 250,000 that had swelled Jerusalem, now maybe it's 25,000 or 30,000, still a small number relatively, but what an amazing outpouring of God.

And look what it says next, verse 15, they were added to their number "to such an extent that the people even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed." At this point in redemptive history, God is healing just like he did under Jesus' ministry, continuing to confirm his word.

Verse 17, now the third attack. First attack was persecution. Second attack was internal corruption. Third attack, persecution again. 5:17, "But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles," now not just Peter and John, all of the apostles put them in jail, in a public jail. "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.'"

So an angel lets them out. It's really funny when you read the rest of it too. In the morning, the high priest calls to have them brought from the jail to be tried, all the apostles, and so the jailer goes in to find them and nobody's there. Now all the doors were locked, but there's no prisoners there. And he goes back and tells the high priest, "They're not there. In fact, they're all preaching in the temple." Well, they arrest him again, bring them before the council. Peter again preaches a mini sermon to these guys. And then they become so enraged at his sermon, verse 33 of chapter 5, "when they heard this, they were cut to the quick," they weren't cut to the quick like the audience at Pentecost. Look what it says, "they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time." And he reasons with them. He says, "Look, we don't need to kill these guys. If God is doing this, we don't want to fight against God. If God's not doing it, it will peter out on its own."

And so what happens is, verse 40 of chapter 5, "They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." This time they're beaten, but they realize they've suffered in Jesus name. What a privilege. And look at verse 42, "And every day," they've been told not to preach in his name, "every day in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Such spiritual power at work.

Now, chapter 6, verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose." So this is the fourth spiritual attack. The first, external persecution. The second, internal corruption, Ananias and Sapphira. The third, external persecution. And the fourth, again now, an attack on the unity of the body, the crisis that we talked about earlier, the murmuring because of the perceived slight. Some of the ladies aren't being cared for like others are. It seems to have an ethnic flavor to it. And this was endangering all of that harmony. All of that glory was at stake. That's the magnitude of the moment. This crisis has massive implications. It's not a small thing. It's not a few people just upset, "Can we calm them down? Can we manage it?" No, no. This is a crisis of tremendous spiritual magnitude and so it's interesting and instructive to see how God deals with it.

So we come to the second point. We're not going to spend too much time on the second and third point, I promise. The first point was the necessity of spiritual authority. The second point is the exercise of spiritual authority. We saw that the problem is there. What

happens is there is immediate action taken by the 12. I want to submit to you that it's interesting in this passage, it's the 12 and the seven. The 12 and the seven. The 12 are the 12 apostles. That's the 11 minus. Remember, Judas has killed himself. It's the 11. The added Matthias in Acts 1. So they have 12 now. And the seven are the seven that they're going to choose right here in the action they're going to take, which are Stephen and Philip and the others. And the 12 and the seven, I believe that God is showing us here in the infancy of the church, his pattern for spiritual authority for all time through his church. And it's the 12 and the seven, that is, it's the elders and the deacons. That's going to become clear as the epistles of the church begin to be delivered to the church through Paul and Peter and James and the apostles. Folks argue about this, but I think it's just obvious. The 12 are the apostles. They're the teachers. They're the ones ministering the word, which is what elders are called to do. And the seven, the deacons, are the servants who are taking care of the practical ministry needs of the church. And what we're seeing here is that for the church to be the church, for the church to have the maximum blessing of God upon it, there must be spiritual authority. We sang earlier about Jesus' authority, "Crown him King of kings and Lord of lords." And the way he exercises his authority over us is through his word and through the officers in the church. This is his blueprint for his body.

I want to note a couple of things about the action, the exercise of spiritual authority. The first is the 12 take immediate action. Now, it's instructive, they don't go and reprove the Hellenistic widows for grumbling. They recognize there really is a problem. There really is a reason for the discontent. Now, they probably might have, you know, in a secondary conversation said, "You know, you need to make your need known and not grumble and complain because grumbling and complaining, you know what happened to the Jews back in that day?" But that's not the point of this passage. The point of this passage is they took immediate action. There really was a problem. They were being slighted. And the reality is that just the doing of business in a fallen world, the church is going to run into problems and if you expect the church not to run into problems, you've come to the wrong place. You're in the wrong time. You're in the wrong age. The only place the church won't have problems is in the age to come. And so we should expect problems, we should expect areas where there are deficiencies, things are not as they ought to be, and the question is we need to take action and how do we do that?

So the 12, that is the elders, the apostles, take immediate action. Verse 2, they summoned the congregation of the disciples, literally the multitude of the disciples. What's interesting, they take immediate action and they call on the whole church to get involved in the action. "We have a problem and we're calling on all of you to help us fix it. We all have a role." It requires action by all and they say, here's the instruction, and they provide direction though. They don't just say fix it, they provide direction. They say, "It's not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables, therefore brethren," here's the direction, "select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." So they call on the congregation to choose. This is why you're being asked to make nominations for elder and deacon. You are part of the body of Christ. If you're a believer and you're a member of this church, you have a responsibility to help us to find leaders. And this is exactly what was being done here.

And we see that they're not just to pick men they liked, men they thought were really good in business, men who were effective. It's about spiritual character. They had to have good reputation, that is, they were not men who were known to be, you know, a bad reputation, but good reputation, and secondly, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. And choose them and we will appoint them over this task. And so those men then were put in place by the 12, the seven were put in place, and they oversaw the ministry. They didn't do all the ministry. They engaged the rest of the body in making sure this was fixed.

Now that's the exercise of spiritual authority. They took immediate action. They engaged the whole congregation, and then they appointed leaders. That's the beauty of it. Now the third point, the impact of spiritual authority. We looked at the necessity of spiritual authority, the exercise of spiritual authority, and now finally the impact of spiritual authority. Verses 6 and 7. Well verse 5, "The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen."

So the movement of the spiritual authorities there to do what God was leading them to do, it blessed the whole congregation; the whole people, in one mind, where now, "This is the right thing." So God has restored some sense of unity. So here's three subpoints, the impact of spiritual authority: restored unity; maintain priorities is the second subpoint because it allowed the elders, or the 12, to do what they were supposed to be doing. Verse 2, "It's not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables." Verse 4, "After you choose these men, we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." I mean, the church lives on the truth. We live and we die by the truth and so it must be the priority is the teaching ministry of the church. That's what we're seeing here. In its infancy, with all of the glory that was happening, the thing the 12 needed to be devoted to was the proclamation of the Scriptures and prayer.

So it maintained priority. It reclaimed unity. And thirdly, it continued the progress. Verse 7. Well, verse 6, "And these they brought before the apostles," that is, the seven men, "and after praying, they laid their hands on them." That's ordination symbolizing they've been set apart by the Lord to do this work. And look at verse 7, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." And what's interesting is you look back at verse 1 for a moment. Verse 1, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose." Do you see that? Luke's telling you, "Look what's going on right now is the Lord is working, the Lord is moving, the gospel is going forth. A murmuring arose against that. There's a problem. The progress that we've made is at stake, it's endangered." Then the action is taken, leadership is put in place. Verse 7, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem," and I love this, "and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." That is, when the Sadducees keep dragging them in. The Sadducees controlled the priesthood, by the way. The Pharisees are the Bible teachers in first century Israel and the Sadducees are the priests. So the Sadducees keep arresting them. They have the temple guard, they can send them out and arrest them. They keep bringing them in and they keep hearing Peter preach little mini sermons and

apparently some of the priests around there are getting saved because they keep hearing Peter preach mini sermons. So even what Satan means for evil, God means for good.

I love that too, how Paul mentions that in his letters. How in Philippians he mentions that, "My arrest has really worked out for the further progress of the gospel." He was in chains, but he says the gospel is not chained. And he says, "And so much so that many among the Praetorian guard had become believers." The Praetorian guard was the highest level of Roman soldiers that were assigned to protect Caesar himself. Paul's imprisonment, they bring Paul into prison to stop him from preaching and what happens? You can't, you cannot stop the gospel. He keeps preaching so that even these influential men, leaders in the Roman world are being saved.

So the message for us is don't be discouraged by the opposition. It's actually what we should expect. It's what's always come along to the gospel. When God does something great and glorious, Satan always tries to tear it down. He counterfeits and he attacks that which is good and noble and beautiful and what we're supposed to do is pray like they prayed with the sovereignty of God in view, pray for boldness. Don't pray, "Protect me Lord, don't let anybody come around. No, make me bold in the face of opposition." And then not only prayer, but we're to seek purity, we're to maintain holiness and call one another to holiness. That's the whole point of Ananias and Sapphira, that protects the glory. And then we need spiritual authority. That's what the Lord is unfolding in these early chapters of Acts.

The church is meant to be led by godly men and we all need to be under authority and all of us are under authority if we're being obedient to the Lord. In fact, you think about it, to be saved, what is it to be saved? I mentioned that sin is the essence of rebellion and being your own determiner of truth and arbiter of truth. To be saved, you must not only believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, but you must also affirm him as Lord. You have to submit to King Jesus to be saved. You come under his authority. No longer living for myself. I see my sin, I see how hopeless I am, how helpless I am to save myself. I see what a mess I'm making of my life, that I can't do anything to make myself right with God, but Jesus has done everything necessary to make me right with God, but he requires that I trust in him completely and surrender to him fully. And so a believer is someone who has humbled himself under the Lordship of Christ and then God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. We're people who, as we, I love this in Ephesians 5:18-21, you know, it talked about them being filled with the Spirit. They prayed and they were filled with the Spirit. They spoke boldly. Don't you want the filling of the Spirit in your life? Well, the filling of the Spirit according to Ephesians 5:18-21, the command is be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, always giving thanks for all things through Jesus Christ, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. The evidence of a Spirit-filled believer is we're humble and teachable to other people who bring the word to bear on us. We submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. He goes on to talk about how it looks in the home, how that looks in employment, how that looks with the government.

Spiritual authority is an incredibly important thing in our lives. So the blessing of spiritual authority, the vital importance of spiritual authority in our lives. My prayer for you is that you have humbled yourself before Jesus and you have come to him in a saving way and said, "You are my King. You are my Lord." He'll save any who comes to him like that. And then as we walk with him day by day, we learn to be more and more humble, and at the same time, the beauty of biblical humility is humility and courage and strength go together. It's not like we think humility, weakness or meekness is weakness. No, meekness is power. To be submitted to God and have no will of your own, to be bound to the Lord and do whatever he says makes you fierce as a lion in the face of opposition.

So humble, mighty in Spirit Christians, that's what God wants and we need that in the church and we need leaders like that. So pray for the leaders and pray for the Lord to make us, each one of us, humble servants who submit to Christ and to one another.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for the way that You have ordered Your church. And Lord Jesus, we know that You do all things well. Help us to understand these things and apply these things, understand how it impacts each of our lives. We pray for those that are here today who are still living outside of Your reign and rule. They're deceived and they think that they're going to be happier living their lives according to their own desires, their own will. Give them eyes to see that there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death, that to die in your sins is to spend eternity apart from You in misery and agony. And we praise You that You are such a gracious and merciful Savior, always saying, "Come. Come into Me, you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I'll give you rest. Come drink. Take of the water, buy milk and bread without cost." Father, we pray that You would help us to walk in ways that are pleasing to You. We pray for our church that You would help us to have the leaders that You would have us to have and that as leaders, we would be more faithful, that we would be more like the apostles were in Acts 6, take swifter action, bolder action, but that we would be humble and teachable. We pray You will raise up new leaders for our church and help us all to be as Christians, people who can lead others to walk more like Jesus. We pray this in His name. Amen.