

## **Acts 6:1-7 – Growth brings Greater Needs – Sermon Outline**

**Intro:** The Church is multiplying rapidly, and Satan raises a third assault upon her. He tried persecution by the Jewish religious leaders, corruption in Ananias and Sapphira, and now he tries distraction, that is, distracting the Apostles from their primary calling, with an important but different duty of meeting the bodily needs of the saints.

**Need:** Growth brings more disputes & difficulties, requiring more skilled men in leadership, Elders and Deacons, capable of addressing them, in words, actions, and godly example. Body and soul must be cared for, and God has appointed two ministries in the Church, one for each. The Elder for the soul, the Deacon for the body. As body and soul are distinct but comprise the person and are intimately connected, so are the Elder and Deacon.

**Theme:** Church Ministry includes both soul-care (Elders) and body-care (Deacons).

1. The Greek Speaking Jews complain that their widows are being neglected. (6:1)
2. The Apostles' must continue to preach and pray, so the church must choose godly, gifted men to help. (6:2-4)
3. Seven are chosen and ordained by the Apostles, all are pleased, and the Church keeps growing. (6:5-7)

### **I. The Greek Speaking Jews complain that their widows are being neglected. (6:1)**

- A. The Hellenists are Greek speaking Jews, dispersed, more culturally Greek yet following the Scriptures.
  1. The ethnic and/or cultural issues are at play here. Is this complaint a legitimate one though?
  2. The Apostles were in charge of the distribution, as all was brought to their feet. But, as the church is growing rapidly, the needs do as well, and the ability for them to oversee this adequately is gone.
  3. Matthew Henry notes the first church dispute was over money, and this will happen in faithful churches. We must minimize these issues, and appointing godly men as Elders & Deacons is a must.
- B. God promised to care for the fatherless and widow long ago, so this is no small matter facing them.
  1. In Christ's earthly ministry, He at times went away on His own for rest and prayer, sometimes with His disciples, but it seems almost always the people found them and were needing something.
  2. Ministerial burnout is a real thing. Christ in His humanity, and His Apostles, faced it. Who is sufficient for these things indeed? Christ now glorified at the Father's right hand, gives His infinite Spirit to meet these needs. He will always raise up men for the needs, if we would but pray for it and cultivate it.
  3. As our Church grows, Deacons will be needed, godly and gifted men to meet bodily needs, to do mercy ministry, to help widows and the fatherless and the elderly, and the truly needy locally.
  4. Consider the needs in the Church, and see if you are able to help address them. Deacons must be first tested/examined, and then serve/be ordained. This is a good and noble calling. Desire it men.

### **II. The Apostles' must continue to preach and pray, so the church must choose godly, gifted men to help. (6:2-4)**

- A. The Apostles then, and Elders today, are entrusted with the spiritual care of the congregation, through the ministry of the Word, prayers, and the administration of the sacraments.
  1. The word must be read, preached, prayed, sung, discussed, exhorted, used for encouragement, etc.
  2. This isn't a part time calling, but ideally the Minister is devoted to this work, undividedly.
  3. The Apostles explain their calling, at root, is the ministry of the Word, not the ministry of the body.
  4. Soul care is at the core. This is not to neglect bodily needs, but if your soul is destined for hell, dead in sin, then your body's health means little. Yet, if you are spiritually alive, the health of your body actually matters much more, for we are God's image body and soul, & in our bodies we think & serve.
  5. The curse on man from the fall was not spiritual only, but also bodily. Therefore true ministerial service is not spiritual only, but also bodily. Body and soul are damned, unless redeemed in Christ.
  6. The needs of each, especially in times when there is economic hardship or living in an impoverished country, are such that God has ordained certain men to care for souls, and other men for the body.

7. No one man, no one Elder, nor one Deacon, can do all the work. There needs to be plurality of both.
  8. The 12 Apostles, gifted as they were, even with miracles and healings, could not meet all these needs. Jesus fed the 5,000, but He did not will that the Apostles do a food miracle every day to supply the needs of the body, or mass healings each week to address sickness, disease, etc.
  9. Our finitude must be acknowledged. As Paul says, who is sufficient for these things? None! We must bear one another's burdens. The Church today is hubristic when it thinks it can end world hunger, or that we should open our gates wide to any and all immigrants, because it's a chance to Evangelize.
  10. Further, the Church today thinks its pastors should also be deacons, and the focus should be on the unbeliever and making them feel good, both body and soul, rather than preaching the Truth to them.
  11. What's the quote, if I have a little money, I'll buy books, and if I have a little left over, I'll eat? We must feed our souls before our bodies. But truly, we need to take care of both, and the Church must help.
- B. So the Apostles cannot "leave the word of God and serve tables". This isn't ignoring bodily needs.
1. Rather, they were addressing them already, but the sheer volume of needs and complaints has overwhelmed them. How can 12 men minister to thousands upon thousands, body and soul?
  2. The solution is to appoint 7 godly men, full of wisdom and the Spirit, to do this important work.
  3. Body care, that ministry, is highly commended in Scripture. If you give a cup of cold water in Christ's name to His people, you did it to Christ, and that will be a sign of your conversion on judgment day.
  4. Consequently, if such love is withheld from the body of Christ, such hatred will rise up against you on judgment day and condemn you as not being born of Christ's Spirit. How we serve the body matters.
  5. In 1 Tim. 3, we see Deacon qualifications being similar to the qualification for Elders, except that they are not required to be teachers, as their domain is in the care of the body, not the soul/instruction.
  6. Yet they must hold the faith soundly, they must know the truth well, and they must be teachers in their home and rule their own households well. Deacon's wives must be faithful as well we're told.
  7. Calvin and others note that the Deacons often used to administer the Lord's Supper, of course after the Pastor gave the words of institution. But this showed the Deacons had a spiritual ministry as well.
  8. Deacons are no less ministers than the pastors are. The work diakonia in our text is used to refer to both the ministry of the Apostles, later Elders, and the ministry of the 7, sort of proto-deacons.
- C. This multiplication of men to meet the needs of God's growing & grumbling people has long precedent.
1. Remember Israel in the days of Moses, how he appointed rulers at his father-in-law Jethro's advice, and God chose 70 men to give the Spirit to that rested upon Moses, to help Moses in ministry.
  2. In fact, what we have with Moses is a plain case of what we would call "ministerial burnout".
  3. In Numbers 11, there is a bodily need, also a spiritual need, for the people are complaining, crying like little children saying "*Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!*"
  4. 11:10ff, "*Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"*

5. Moses had hundreds of thousands surrounding his tent, demanding meat in a desert! Children, this is a rebuke to you as well, when you grumble about the food your parents cook for you at dinner.
6. Do not grumble, but be thankful, even if it isn't the tastiest or something you particularly like.
7. In **Exodus 18**, Moses already had chosen men to be rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, to judge the people, for Moses and the people were standing in line all day to have him hear their cases. Moses was like Christ, mediator of the covenant, but wasn't Christ, so couldn't do it.
8. Christ now gives from His infinite power and strength, His Spirit, without reducing Himself, to His people, His Church and body. He gives Elders and Deacons for this, but all in Him have His Spirit!
9. For Moses in Num. 11, the hardest cases, like the lack of meat, came to him, so the other rulers dealing with the lesser matters under him could not help with this.
10. When God then shares the Spirit upon Moses with 70 other, they begin to prophesy, and 2 in the camp from the 70, who didn't go to the tent of meeting, do as well. Joshua is jealous for Moses' authority and tells Moses to rebuke these two men, Eldad and Medad, but Moses says **Num. 11:29**, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" Moses' desire is realized forever in Christ's outpoured Spirit at Pentecost.
11. Not only Elders and Deacons, but all in the Church, women and children included, are gifted with the Spirit for service. This is overseen by the Elders and Deacons, but not carried out by them alone.

### **III. Seven are chosen & ordained by the Apostles, all are pleased, the Church keeps growing. (6:5-7)**

- A. Part of the responsibility and opportunity of the congregation is in proposing church officers, as the Apostles tell the congregation, the growing church, to pick 7 gifted men for the mercy ministry.
  1. Note, the Apostles, now the Elders, still had the final say on who was chosen, and the Apostles alone ordained the 7 men. But officer nominations can and should be open to the congregation in general.
  2. The power of ordination/laying on of hands resides in the Apostles, and now the Elders, as we read in I Tim. 4:14 that the Elders ordained Timothy, etc. The laying on of hands did not fill them with the Holy Spirit, for they already had the Spirit and this gifting, but the Apostles acknowledge that gifting, give their authoritative approval to make them officers, and the whole congregation sees this.
  3. **F.F. Bruce** notes, "*According to the Mishnah members of the Sanhedrin were admitted by the imposition of hands. In the present instance the imposition of apostolic hands formally associated the seven with the twelve, as their deputies to discharge a special duty.*"
  4. Those who preach without being ordained, or take any sort of authority without being called, should not be recognized as true ministers, whether Elders or Deacons, for God has not chosen them.
  5. Ordination may be irregular at times given pressing circumstances, all this takes wisdom.
- B. The 7 chosen are all presumably qualified, though long tradition holds that Nicolas was the founder of the heretical Nicolaitans we read about in Revelation 2, though that is not certain by any means.
  1. All these names are noted to be Hellenistic/Greek, and so it is possible these all are Hellenist Jews chosen, minus Nicolas who is possibly the first proselyte/convert not of Jewish lineage.
  2. If they were all Hellenist Jewish converts to Christ, it would be likely because they would not neglect the Hellenist widows. But given they were to oversee all the bodily/mercy ministry needs, it is likely that there was a balance of Hebrew speaking and culturally living Jews, as well as Hellenized Jews.
- C. 7. The result of the Apostles faithfully handling this issue, and godly men being appointed, gifted for this calling of body-care, complementing the Apostolic/Elder calling of soul-care, is church growth.
  1. This is healthy church growth, not merely numbers of false converts, but even priests are said to be "obedient to the faith". We are told this growth happened because "**The Word of God spread**".

2. Now, if the Apostles had been tricked by the devil into serving tables rather than serving God's Word, the Gospel of the Kingdom would not have spread, the church would not have grown in multitudes, and those already converted would have been spiritually impoverished.
  3. In short, we cannot neglect the preaching of the Word for the sake of serving tables.
  4. Yet, the bodily needs should not be neglected either. What is needed? Both Elders & Deacons.
  5. Both are high and honorable callings, though the table ministry rests upon the word ministry.
  6. If there is no preaching, no converts, there is no church to serve and meet bodily needs.
  7. But if there is only preaching and no serving, there is a body that lacks love and care.
  8. If there was a true neglect of these widows, and that was not addressed, a bodily need, and a spiritual matter, would have failed to have been corrected. That would divide and destroy the body.
  9. Instead, we read the whole multitude was well pleased with the Apostles solution of having them select 7 able men, full of wisdom and gifting to meet these needs. May the Lord give Heritage such men and such wisdom to meet the needs of our flock, and may it grow and abound for His glory.
  10. This harmony among the saints, and their providing for their body and soul needs, kept them as one together, and was a powerful witness to others, all leading to conversions and sanctification in Christ.
- D. **CONCLUDING APPLICATIONS: Elders, Deacons, and the Congregation must work together, love one another, encourage one another, or else there will be division within the body that will destroy it.**
1. I have seen at plenty of churches where there can be at times friction between Elders and Deacons.
  2. It should not be so. Elders should value the work and labor the Deacons are doing, and Deacons should do their work gladly and recognize the Elders have a separate calling within the Church, which includes having the final say on how the offerings will be used, etc.
  3. Manual labor may often go without thanks, or some of the dirty work that deacons may have to do may cause them to complain when Elders or others are not helping.
  4. If you are truly called to such work, you will do it without such grumbling. Pastors and Elders can get plenty of flack from the flock with little thanks at times as well. None of us should complain about this.
  5. And of course the congregation should value both the Elders and the Deacons and their labors.
  6. You might also have a handy Elder, or a Deacon capable of teaching. We will see Stephen was more than a Deacon but also a preacher and prophet of sorts, and Philip will be seen as such later as well.
  7. But there's another issue involved here. Because Deacons are more hands-on, and might give time and aid to widows or other elderly folk in need, it may give the impression that the Elders do not care, because they are not "present" in the flesh as much with such persons.
  8. This could be the case, where the Elders really don't love the sheep and avoid them like the plague.
  9. But it may also be that the Elders are busy laboring, dealing with a spiritual matter among its membership that is urgent and pressing, laboring where they need to labor.
  10. Sometimes Elders and Deacons need to minister together, as financial hardship, loss of a loved one, sickness, etc., is often both a bodily and spiritual need rolled into one.
  11. If counseling is done, proper shepherding care, by the Pastor or the Elders, and there's at least spiritual conversations taking place regularly, even if somewhat informally, that should help the congregation recognize the Pastors and Elders do care about all of them, not just some of them.
  12. Communication is also important. If you need spiritual care, or bodily care, others may not know or recognize it, including the Elders and/or Deacons. Maybe they shouldn't be so obtuse, but if the needs are plainly made known, there is no excuse then for the church officers to fail to address it.