

18a ACTS

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study this evening to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, so that this time will be well spent, that will prepare us for hours and days ahead. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for the opportunity that we have once again this evening to spend time in fellowship and in the study of your word. We recognize that the truth contained in the Bible is the food for our soul and it strengthens us.

It gives us clarity of vision so that we can see what is needful and what is proper and what is edifying. As we move through our days and through our responsibilities, through our relationships, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who rescued us from a lost and hopeless condition and has given us a meaningful life that has a purpose and has a future and has a great potential. We pray that our study tonight will equip us and enable us to fulfill that potential, to be pleasing in your sight, and to be prepared for the age that is to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Tonight we resume our study of Acts in the fifth chapter right at the end.

We saw that the apostles last time had once again fearlessly declared the resurrection, had been imprisoned, miraculously released, and were dragged once more before the authorities who were intent upon taking their lives, but before they could fulfill that goal, Gamaliel, the Pharisee, a very greatly respected man, one of the foremost scholars of that generation, stood and convinced the Sanhedrin, which had a majority of Sadducean members, to refrain from that. He argued from history. He cited two examples, Thudas and Judas.

Both of these, by the way, were examples that were about 30 years old, 30 years in the past, in other words. There has been a lot of confusion. If you ever get into a very detailed commentary on Acts and get to this section, you will find them going to the Jewish historian Josephus.

Josephus wrote several books. Antiquities of the Jews covers a lot of Jewish history. He talks about a man named Thudas who led an uprising and was quelled.

The uprising was quelled and he was killed. The problem is this took place in 44 A.D. These events in Acts chapter 5 are happening in about 31 to 32 A.D. And because of this, people have said Acts and its author Luke are in error, because how could Gamaliel be speaking of a man who won't do these actions for another 10 years? Well, how many different people named Judas have we already seen in the Scripture? There is Judas Iscariot. There is Judas not Iscariot.

There is this Judas. Judas was a very common name. Thudas was a not uncommon name

in this time.

And Gamaliel and Luke and recording him is explicit in saying that this man preceded Judas who led his uprising in the days of the census. Well, the days of the census that we saw back in Acts chapter 2 verse 1, the days of Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was the governor of Syria and so on, this is way back, 4 or 6 A.D. And the Thudas to whom Gamaliel refers is before that. So, there was another Thudas that Josephus wrote about that was in more recent memory.

It is interesting to me though that Gamaliel reaches so far back in the past because we know from other sources that there were many pretenders who claimed to be the Messiah. Evidently, none of them generated very much of a following until the Lord Jesus came, until John the Baptist came. There were just really isolated, sporadic, flash-in-the-pan type of things.

The biggest ones that had taken place in anyone's memory were 30 years earlier. And what is interesting about this to me is when is the rapture? When will Jesus return? You know, we can set Acts aside for a while. We are sitting here and we think, I am a Christian.

I would prefer not to die. I prefer Jesus to come back and I will meet Him in the air. I was talking to someone today about the timing of the rapture.

I ran into a very erudite, well-educated, scholarly individual who thinks that the rapture of the church is after the tribulation. The whole left behind thing isn't going to happen. Well, we are all left behind.

We are all going to go through the 70th week of Daniel. And of course, because of this, he can't get a job teaching at schools who hold to a pre-tribulational, you know, before the wrath, before the Antichrist, we leave. Well, Dallas Seminary, where I went, believes that.

Thank goodness. And so you might be able to teach a language class or something, but you can't really become a professor and teach all kinds of classes and move up in the ranks if your theological perspective is radically different than the school. And so his current job is kind of coming to an end, and I said, well, you say you have the chance to teach Hebrew down here.

Maybe that will work into something more. He said, well, I don't think so because I'm post-tribulational. I said, well, just let me talk to you for a little bit.

I'll turn you into a pre-trib and then you'll be able to teach because there's only other job offers like in Minnesota and it's cold up there. I said, you don't need to move to Minnesota. Let's just talk for a while.

I'll convince you and then you can stay here. You'll be good. So we had a little brief chat because this actually happened as I was walking into the elevator.

I just, you know, this offhand comment. I said, well, I understand your office is closing here in December. What will you do next? And this led to this conversation.

Well, what is the timing? And so we've talked about this before. You know my speculation, and it is only speculation. I would happily fly up in the air and meet the Lord tonight, tomorrow, any time from now until it actually happens.

But what do we do? We go back and we calculate. We say, well, there seems to be a 6,000-year model of human history before the Sabbath day of the 1,000 years, 4,000 years from Adam to Christ, 2,000 years from Christ to the inception of the millennial kingdom, and you kind of work. And one of the things that struck my mind is, well, if God calculates the 2,000 years from the birth of Christ, and He was born in, let's say, 4 B.C., well, you wind up with the 2,000-year mark hitting in 1996, 1997, 1998, somewhere along in there.

The math is a little screwy because there's no year zero, so it would actually be a year beyond. It would be like 1997 to be 2,000 years from 4 B.C., but anyway. Well, you have to figure out, where am I going to calculate that from? Am I going to go from the birth of Christ, or am I going to go from the crucifixion, resurrection, and day of Pentecost, which is where I calculated it from because, as I was telling the gentleman today, in my understanding of Scripture, there are two clocks on the wall.

Clock Israel, clock church. As soon as Adam leaves the garden, God gives the pendulum on the clock on the left a swing. That's the first clock, the first-born clock.

This is the line that will eventuate in Abraham. You've got Adam, Seth, on down through Noah, Shem, down to Abraham, and this is all proto-Israel. It's all Old Testament.

It keeps ticking, keeps ticking, all the way down. Daniel says there are 70 weeks of years appointed for the summing up and conclusion of all things. 69 weeks from the going forth of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of Messiah the Prince.

Well, 70 weeks of years, if a week of years is 7 years, 70 times 7 is 490 years. And from the going forth of the decree that actually brought about the rebuilding of the temple, you've got Ezra, Nehemiah, and that whole crowd coming back, 483 years later, the Lord Jesus Christ went into Jerusalem, the day they call the triumphal entry, just to the day. 483 years.

Well, there were people that had miscalculated this by 30 years. And so there was an outcropping of people who said, well, I'm the Messiah. No, no, no, I'm the Messiah.

Oh, no, no, I'm the Messiah. And they all cropped up right around the time that Christ

was born because they had this 30-year error. I won't go into all the details of how that came about.

But this is why you have Thutis and Judas and a handful of others all cropping up right around year zero. A few years earlier, a few years later. But that's why this big crowd.

And so when Gamaliel makes his argument, he doesn't say, well, you remember a year before last when we had this crowd of people out in the wilderness. Or you remember those Essenes that are out there in the desert. He says, you remember back 30-odd years ago, we had Thutis.

And then in the time of the census, which was five or six years later, we had another crowd following this man named Judas of Galilee. And he even had the place right. He's from Galilee.

But that was a timing error. These guys misinterpreted the Scriptures and they got the time of the birth correct, which Simeon and Anna and some of the other people who were paying attention to the Scripture knew. Anyway, that's why it's all back in the past 30 years.

So the future guy, 10 years in the future, that Thutis is immaterial. We don't care about him. Josephus can go his own way.

At any rate, the historicity or the accuracy of the facts that Luke gives us in Acts is without question among anybody who takes things seriously. He documented his sources. Don't let somebody come up and unseat you or unsettle you, saying, oh, well, look, Josephus has got so many things wrong.

If anybody's wrong, it's Josephus. That guy is one of the most scattershot historians. People like to quote him when he agrees with Scripture, but there's a whole bunch of stuff he says that does not, and they have to kind of throw that out, much like the early church fathers.

So Gamaliel makes this argument. He says, look, if you look at recent history, 30 years ago, these guys cropped up, had a following, but when they died, people were dispersed, and nothing came of it. If this is from men, it's going to do the same thing.

This most recent manifestation. You see, Gamaliel is kind of an old guy. He stands up, and everybody reveres him.

He, by the way, this Gamaliel, Gamaliel 1, is the grandson of Hillel, H-I-L-L-E-L. And if you do anything in Jewish studies, and look at the rabbis and all that, when you go to the Mishnah and the Talmud and that kind of thing, Hillel is the Billy Graham of Judaism. He is the most well-known rabbi that ever was.

He is quoted. He is practically deified. Well, you're not sure if it was son or grandson.

I think it was grandson, is Gamaliel. And so he also has a lot of the prestige of his family name, because Hillel is already revered, even at this early date. He says, If it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to be fighting against God.

Well, which of those two options do they think it is? Do they think it is of men, or do they think it is of God? I can tell you right now, they were not particularly persuaded by the possibility that it might be of God. They were sure it was not. You know that from verse 40.

They agreed with him. They called for the apostles and beat them. Now, if you think a man is from God, you're taking your life into your hands to beat him, to give him the 39 stripes, 40 minus 1. But that's what they did and let them go.

They departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. This is their message.

Now, it's important to understand this. They've decided, well, if this is of men, it will die of its own weight. Your message is that our Old Testament prophecies that talk about the Messiah and talk about a coming one who is going to be the deliverer of Israel, you say, you Christians, you say that these are fulfilled in this Jesus of Nazareth.

Well, we think you're all wet on that, but we're going to let you be. We're going to tolerate you. We discourage you.

We tell you don't preach in that name. You're wrong. You're blaspheming even, but we're not going to hound you to death.

We're not so upset that we want to kill you all, right? Because what? What is their message right here at the end of the chapter? They preach and teach that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one. Well, the religious establishment can just say you're wrong. Just like today, somebody can say, well, you think a pre-tribulational rapture that we're going to leave before all of the events of Revelation 4 through 20 take place? Well, we just think you're wrong.

We're post-tribulation, and we think it's unfortunate because you ought to be getting ready to go through all of that misery. You ought to be watching for the Antichrist. You ought to be building your bomb shelter and laying in your canned goods because we're all going to go through the wrath.

Well, you can stay here and go through it if you want to. I'm pre-trib and I'm leaving. But Jesus is going to come and I'm going with Him.

And I can show you about 16 reasons in Scripture why. But anyway, this is the idea. They've decided, well, we differ with you strongly and even violently on how to interpret Scripture, but nothing worthy of death, okay? Now, chapter 6. In those days, the number of the disciples was multiplying.

There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. So the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brothers, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

The saying pleased the whole multitude that chose Stephen, a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Now, if you don't mind marking your Bible, you should draw a line all the way across, right between verse 7 and verse 8, because this is the end of section 1 of Acts.

This is the Jerusalem section. Everything we've had up to this point is Jerusalem. From this point, we're going to move into section 2, which is going to talk about things beyond Jerusalem.

In each of these sections, Luke concludes by giving us a summary statement. Verse 7 is the summary statement for the whole first section of what went on in Jerusalem. You see it says, "...multiplied greatly in Jerusalem." Just as a preview of coming attractions, look at chapter 9 and verse 31.

Just move a few pages forward. This is going to be the end of section 2. Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified, walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. They were multiplied.

That's going to be the end of section 2. You can draw a line across right after verse 31 of Acts chapter 9. The third section is going to conclude at chapter 12 and verse 24. Flip a few pages forward there, you find Luke's next summary statement. "...the word of God grew and multiplied." This is in everything that he's covered up to this point.

You're going to now launch into the career of the Apostle Paul. Where Acts chapter 1 through chapter 12 concentrated primarily on the Apostle Peter and those associated with him, chapter 13 through the end of the book is going to be all about the Apostle Paul and those associated with him. So that verse 24, although it seems like a minor marker, is actually a major divider in the book.

I'll go ahead and give you all of these as long as we're on this subject. The next section is going to end at chapter 16 and verse 5. Acts chapter 16 verse 5, where it says, "...the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily." So once again we have a summary. The next one is at chapter 19 and verse 20.

Once again it says, "...the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." And then right at the end of the book, the very last verse in Acts chapter 28 verse 31, you have the final summary statement, "...Paul was in this house for two years, receiving all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." So this gives us six sections in Luke. And we have just now come to the end of the first section as we cover this last material. So what's going on here? "...In those days the number of the disciples was multiplying.

There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists." What do you mean? Hebrews and Hellenists. Who are we talking about here? That would be a great title for this lesson. Hebrews and Hellenists.

People look at it and say, what on earth? Well, what are we talking about? A lot of people have not been able to really come to a conclusion on what this means. What was the nature of the division? This is a cultural divide. We're talking about all Jewish people here.

The Hellenists are not Gentiles. They are Jews. But they're not the same as the Hebrews.

There are two different kinds of Jews in Jerusalem. And they have a wide cultural difference. You can see this today in Southern California, in South Texas, in Florida, in Hispanic communities, and in Asian communities.

Even here in Dallas. In a lot of our minority communities. The first generation of people who came from the, quote, old country have their native language.

Their Spanish speaking and very little English, if any. They speak Spanish in the home. The mother and father speak Spanish to each other.

The children, on the other hand, have turned out to be bilingual. They learn to speak from their parents, and then they go to school, and they learn English, and they do really well. And a lot of them here in Texas, when they're speaking English, they have no trace of a Spanish accent whatsoever.

They sound like any other person. But they can lapse into Spanish that quick, and lapse back into English. I'll never forget sitting down in McAllen, in a Denny's, eating my dinner one night after a long day of slaving over a hot computer.

And it was about 9 o'clock at night, and a bunch of teenagers came in and sat in the booth behind me. There were about six of them. And they never mixed in a sentence,

English and Spanish.

But from sentence to sentence, they would change. Whichever language most suited the nuance of what they wanted to say, that's the language they would use. So one or two sentences would be in English, and then somebody would say something, and the reply would be in Spanish.

And if they started the sentence in a language, they would complete it. But just effortless. And when they were speaking American, you would have never known any of them spoke Spanish.

And when they spoke Spanish, which I can understand more than I can speak, it was perfectly fluent Spanish. And so it just went back and forth. Well, when these people grow up and have children and send them to school here in America, a lot of those children know no Spanish, or no Chinese, or no Korean, or no Cambodian, or no Vietnamese, whatsoever.

No Japanese. They only know English, the language of their adopted country. Mom and Dad are bilingual.

Grandma and Grandpa pretty much speak only the old language. Now this has happened historically all through the history of the United States, but it's currently happening in those communities to a large extent. This is what happened in Israel.

You have the Hebrews, who are the people who have continued to live in the land ever since the return from captivity, speaking Aramaic. And Aramaic is their native language. The disciples.

Aramaic is their first language. If they can speak any Greek at all, it's a second and broken language. However, there were Jews who, when the Romans came in and took over and squashed the whole Maccabean government and legacy, and the Jews tried to be independent there, and then here came the Greeks, and here came the Romans.

A lot of Jews fled, and it's called the diaspora. They scattered, and they scattered all through Asia Minor, all through the Greek Empire, later the Roman Empire, but a lot of them got homesick and wanted to come back. Or, as they got old, they wanted to come back and die and be buried in Jerusalem.

So you have these Hellenized Jews, and some of them, our third, fourth generation, out of Israel, speak no Aramaic whatsoever. And they have found, archaeologically, throughout the Jerusalem area, dozens of synagogues that were Hellenistic synagogues. This is where the Word of God was taught in Greek, and they used only the Septuagint, because there's no point in saying anything in Aramaic.

Nobody understood it. Well, there is a divide, and there is an air of superiority amongst

the Hebrews. Well, we are the true Jews.

We speak the Mother Tongue. You all have been compromised. You have accommodated.

You've gone south, if you're in the north, or you've gone north, if you're in the south. You have been amalgamated. You're not a true Jew anymore.

And they sort of look down on them as second-class citizens. Well, isn't this something we see all the time? As soon as people go to a school for a year, then the next group that comes in, well, you're in the Marine Corps. You're a boot.

You'll always be a boot to me. You'll always be a plebe. You'll always be second-rate.

But you'll never have been around as long as I am in people. We have this nasty streak in our nature that says, I am superior to you on the basis of something like race or like longevity. I've been here longer.

Here's the new crowd. I'm an old-timer. And we love to imbue ourselves with superiority for some reason.

And it is just as evil as it can be. And generally, it's something over which we really had no control. It was an accident of birth or an accident of circumstance that we happen to be there longer.

We happen to be from a certain thing or we claim something in our ancestry or whatever. But we assign a superiority to ourselves and an inferiority to others on this basis. And this is what the Hebrews did to the Hellenized Jews.

They said, Oh, well, yeah, we're real glad you're back, but it's such a shame you can't speak Aramaic. I mean, really, to be Jewish, how can you be Jewish and not speak the language? What kind of a Jew are you anyway? You look like a Greek to me. You sound like a Greek.

You dress like a Greek. You've got Greek furniture. You've got Greek vases.

You've got Greek plates. You've got Greek servants. You look pretty Greek to me.

And there's just this sort of cultural superiority going on. Well, inevitably, as the church accumulates these many, many disciples multiplying in verse 1 of chapter 6, what's going to happen? You get both types of Jews in there and there starts to be a little bit of friction. Yes, in chapter 5, they were all of one heart and all of one mind, but how long can you keep that up? There's this initial surge of goodwill.

It's sort of like 9-11. In the beginning, everyone is unified and everyone has a common goal. Oh, we're all equal victims of this tragedy and we're all working together to help

each other.

Well, give it a few months and here come the lawsuits and here comes the backbiting. Well, where's the money and how come you're getting glorified and I'm not? You think the firefighters are better than the police when you're glorifying them? Everybody starts bickering. The euphoria and the initial camaraderie and unity starts to break down over time because we are human and sinful.

Well, this is the form that it took. The first schism in the church was a rift between the Greek-speaking Jews and the Aramaic-speaking Jews called the Hebrews. This is why, by the way, you will notice the Apostle Paul, when people start questioning his apostleship and saying, we don't really think you're a legitimate member of the team here.

What does he say? Remember, where was he born? Saul of Tarshish. The same place Jonah tried to go. I'm getting on a boat to Tarshish.

That's Tarsus. He's not a native-born Israelite. He was born in Tarshish.

So what does he say? I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised on the eighth day. Don't think because I was born in Tarshish that I am not a Hebrew. I am a native Aramaic speaker.

If anybody wants to boast, I am more so. You want to talk about being a Hebrew? I'm a native Aramaic speaker. I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I sat at the feet of Gamaliel. I'm a Pharisee of the Pharisees. For zeal, I persecuted the church.

You say I don't know something about the law. Listen, I outlawed you when I was a Pharisee. I went around persecuting the church.

I was so zealous for the law. But you notice one of the things he says, I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews. That means Aramaic is my native tongue.

Which was thought to be a point of pride amongst these people. This is what's going on here. There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenes.

They say, hey, you're short changing us. You're looking down on us. Because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Who are the widows? Once again, who are the people who are coming back to Jerusalem from abroad? People getting ready to die who want to be buried. Yeah, I've been away for 30 years, but I'm starting to breathe kind of shallow and turn kind of room temperature here. I'm going to go back to Jerusalem and die.

And who's left? The widow. So these widows, unsupportable. See, the people in Israel

have a support structure.

They've lived there all their life. Oh, my oldest son, my cousin, my nephew. These people coming from afar have made a pilgrimage back.

The old guy dies, and here's the widow. And so the Hellenistic community, the Greek-speaking community, says, hey, our ladies are not getting a fair shake when it comes to support. Now, the daily distribution is not just food.

You get the idea from reading this that, well, they set up a little table and everybody came by with a little tin cup and got a piece of bread and some soup. This isn't it. Remember, all things in common, meeting their needs.

This is all kinds of administration. This is quarters, this is clothing, this is any kind of care that they might need. Shelter, medical attention, whatever.

All of the care of the widows is under this word ministration. This is the word diakonia, where we get the word deacon. They were neglected in the daily distribution.

So the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples. Now, this is kind of interesting language here. This is the only time in Acts that Luke uses the term twelve to refer to the apostles.

The twelve, this is twelve with a capital T, summoned the multitude of the disciples. And this is another kind of unique use of the word here because the disciples, this is a synonym for the early church. They're not called Christians yet.

And so what do you call them? Well, we're going to call them disciples until they pick up the name Christian later in Antioch. So they assembled the church and they said it's not desirable that we, the twelve, should leave the word of God and serve tables. Diakonia.

And this word tables is the same word we get trapeze from or trapezoid. That we should serve tables. But the word tables, this was used for all kinds of things like the tables of the money changers down at the temple that Jesus overturned.

The idea here is the accounting, the taking care in all of the physical ministries of the church. It's not desirable for us to get involved in the day-to-day operations stuff. We need to be studying the word.

So brethren, you seek out from among you seven men of good reputation. Now this is an interesting model. Notice what they do not do.

They say wait a minute, the Greek speaking ladies are getting left out in the ministration. They're getting short-changed. The twelve do not say who's in charge of the distribution? Send them to our office.

We will rake them over the coals. We'll find out what's the matter. We'll lay down the law.

We'll make a policy. You've got to write it all out and give us a report. We'll fix this.

Who's to blame? There's a problem here, but there's no blame assigned. They don't call up the people in charge of the ministry because actually the twelve are partly involved in this. Everybody's kind of pitching in, catch as catch can.

It's not really organized. And verterntly or inadvertently, the Greek speaking ones are getting short-changed. Maybe because they don't communicate as well.

Their needs. Different language barrier. So the twelve say, look, you all have seen the problem.

You think you understand the problem. You provide us the solution. You pick out seven men.

Send them to us. We will grant them authority. You choose them.

We will give them authority. Now this puts me in mind of 1 Samuel in our study of Saul when he's appointed the Nagid. Remember, God anoints him, but the people elect him.

There is a popular acclaim and there is a divine anointing and a divine assigning of authority. And they sort of cooperate. The people want him.

He's head and shoulders above the others. And God confirms that. God in fact knew ahead of time that it was going to be him.

Same thing here. These men are chosen by the assembly and then they are reviewed by the twelve and they are approved and hands are laid on them. Laying on of hands.

This is how Moses anointed Aaron and his sons. This is how they would transfer sin from the individual to the sacrifice. This is a ritual of transference.

So the twelve, by laying on hands, symbolically transfer authority, apostolic authority, for the distribution to these seven men. And these men, Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Icana, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas, all have Greek names. There is not a Hebrew.

You don't see a Yohanan or an El or a Yah prefix or suffix anywhere in these. These are all Greek names. These are all Hellenized Jews.

So they say, look, if you are worried about the Hellenistic widows, here you got seven men who ought to be able to take care of that. They all have Greek names. Be sure to choose those who have reputation, who have a name, and you know as good as an italic there, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

It's not enough to be full of the Holy Spirit. They also need to be job qualified. They need to know how this kind of thing works.

They need to know some accounting. They need to have organizational and administrative skills. They need to have some people skills.

We will appoint them over this business. We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. One of the great things about the New Testament church is that God has not specified a structure.

Anytime you find all of the bishops and popes and all of these hierarchical, even in Protestant churches, where we've got the elders and the deacons and the board and this and that, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with any of that. But to can it and to dictate it and to make it the structure and the structure for all future iterations of the church, this is a body that adapts to meet needs. When a need arises, they meet it.

There was a need for people for shelter and stuff, and so people started selling things. It was not formalized. They just adapted to meet the need.

Here's a need for these widows. Nobody can really keep track of it. So they say, well, let's appoint some men.

And so they do. The principle is there should be a separation between those in the church who minister in the Word and those who minister to the physical needs of the church. It's a natural division.

You need people who can devote themselves to making sure the physical ministries of the church are carried out. You need those who can devote themselves to preaching and teaching the Word without distraction. That is the only organizing principle for the church you will ever find in the pages of Scripture.

There are some qualifications for men who fulfill those roles, some definitions of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom over in the pastoral epistles. But it doesn't say one pastor or three. It doesn't say deacons.

It doesn't say elders. It doesn't say any kind of formal structure of the church. Each group can operate with whatever structure best meets their particular environment, their particular need.

We have a rather informal division of labor and very loose structure in our church. I primarily devote myself to preaching and teaching and studying the Word. Everybody else does whatever comes to hand.

And it's a wonderful system. We never lack for anything. We are all richly blessed, I think.

And if we had a need, if we suddenly had a swell of 200 people coming in, we might have to organize. But with our size, with our conditions, this seems to work. We haven't had any Greek widows complaining yet.

So I assume it's working well. If there are problems, be sure to let me know. I'll lay hands on someone and we'll fix it.

But this is the idea. It is not the Mosaic law in this age. It is the grace of God ministered through the Holy Spirit under the auspices and the guidance of the Word of God.

That's how we operate. So we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look into this a little more closely.

But here's one thing to keep in mind out of this first few verses in chapter 6. We want to guard our souls against this tendency to lift ourselves up on some illegitimate basis. This was wrong. There's no censure and there's no discipline here in the chapter.

But for the Hebrews to look down on the Greek-speaking Jews would be wrong. And all of us fall prey to that in some of the silliest places you can imagine. Well, I've been in the organization longer or I've been in the family longer or I've been wherever I am longer or better or higher or I've got a piece of paper and you don't or some such thing.

And we use it as the basis to look down our nose at someone. When the Bible talks about there being neither slave nor free neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female it is talking about our view of one another that we should prefer others over ourselves. We should look out for the interests of others ahead of ourselves.

Our love should be beneficial even at our own expense. And you don't start saying, well, I've got something you don't in that mode. They're just incompatible.

And that is one of the first divisions that split the church. And you see it even more fully in 1 Corinthians 1. Why do people say, I am of Apollos and other people say, I am of Cephas, I am of Peter? Peter is Aramaic, Apollos is Greek. And they're splitting along those lines.

So we want to watch for that. It is deadly. It will rob us of our growth.

It will rob us of our reward. It is its own reward. And it is a very shallow and petty and temporary victory.

It turns to ashes in the mouth. We don't want to get tripped up by such an insignificant thing and lose out on the great blessings God has for us. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll pick up in verse 3.