

**Slide 1**

## God's Church Grows In Spite of Satan's Attacks

### **ACTS 6:1-7**

#### **Introduction**

**Slide 2**

1. There are two truths concerning Satan which we must never forget:
  - a. He is real
    - 1) In Revelation 12:9, the apostle John called him “the serpent of old who is called the devil” and said that he “deceives the whole world.”
    - 2) He is the one who deceived Eve in the garden (cf. Genesis 3:13; 1 Corinthians 11:3).
    - 3) Jesus called him “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31).

**2a**

- b. He seeks to destroy our Lord's church
    - 1) In Revelation 12:10, John said he heard “a loud voice in heaven” and that it called Satan “the accuser of our brethren.”
    - 2) The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 6:12, wrote that “our struggle is . . . against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”
    - 3) In 1 Peter 5:8, the apostle Peter called the devil “our adversary” and said that he “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

**2b**

2. Tonight, there is a third truth that I want you to remember — any church that is growing and doing God's will is either already facing or is about to face a ferocious attack by Satan.

3. Time and again we see this demonstrated in the life of the young church in Jerusalem:

**Slide 3**

- a. First, Satan attempted to stop the growth of the church through persecution:
  - 1) In Acts 4, following the healing of the lame man by the Beautiful Gate, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews had Peter and John arrested (Acts 4:3).
  - 2) They commanded the two men "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).
  - 3) Peter and John responded, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to your rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).  
 The church continued to grow.

**3a**

- b. When that didn't work, Satan turned to corruption from within:
  - 1) Many of those within the church were selling their land and their houses and giving the proceeds to the apostles to help those who were in need (Acts 4:34-35).
  - 2) Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of property and kept back a part of the proceeds for themselves, but told the apostles they were contributing the full amount (Acts 5:8).
  - 3) This resulted in the loss of both their lives because "they lied to God" (Acts 5:4).  
 Again, the church grew — "multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number" (Acts 5:14).

**3b**

4. Having failed in these two attempts, Satan utilized a third tactic — distraction.

- a. He knew that if he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which even though it was essential, was not what the Lord had charged them to do, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and preach.
  - b. This would leave the young church without any defense against false doctrine.
5. Tonight, I would like for us to look at how the apostles, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, prevented Satan from doing harm to the Lord's church.
  6. As we do so, I want us to consider what we can learn from their experience.

**Slide 4**

## I. The Problem

### A. "A COMPLAINT AROSE"

1. Luke begins by telling us "the disciples were increasing in number" (*Acts 6:1*).
2. But then he adds, "a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews" (*Acts 6:2*).
3. The nature of the complaint: "their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (*Acts 6:2c*).
4. Some of the members of the church in Jerusalem were apparently grumbling against the apostles who received the relief money (4:35, 37) and were expected to distribute it equitably.
5. Since the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, God had demonstrated concern for the widows in Israel (*Exodus 22:22f.; Deuteronomy 10:18*).

"You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry;" (*Exodus 22:22–23, NASB95*)

"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing." (*Deuteronomy 10:18, NASB95*)

6. Based upon what Paul would later write in his first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:3-16) it would seem that these widows were unable to earn a living and had no relatives to support them.
7. Because of this, the church had accepted the responsibility and a daily distribution of food was made to them.

**4a**

## B. WHO WERE THESE WIDOWS?

1. There were two groups of widows in the Jerusalem church:
  - a. Hebrews
    - 1) These were Jews who spoke only Aramaic, the native language of the Jews in the first century.
    - 2) They were deeply committed to their Hebrew culture.
  - b. Hellenists
    - 1) These widows were Jews of the Dispersion.
    - 2) They not only spoke Greek but thought and behaved like Greeks.  
□ These were the women who being neglected.
2. In truth, there had always been a rivalry between these two groups in Jewish culture.
3. It was a problem that the apostle Paul would later address in his letter to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 3:28).

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28, NASB95)

## C. EVIDENCE OF A DEEPER PROBLEM

1. The issue at hand was more than one of cultural tension.
2. It was a problem of social administration (i.e. organizing the distribution and thereby settling the complaint).

3. It threatened to occupy all of the apostles time and thus hinder them from carrying out the work that Christ had specifically entrusted to them — preaching and teaching.

**Slide 5**

## II. The Solution

### A. THE APOSTLES SPOKE TO THE CONGREGATION

1. The Twelve did not impose a solution on the congregation.
2. Instead, they gathered the congregation and shared the problem with them.

“It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” (*Acts 6:2, NASB95*)

3. It wasn’t that the apostles regarded social work as inferior to that of preaching and teaching, or even that it was beneath their dignity.
4. No, it was the fact that they were not at liberty to distract themselves from those tasks with which the Lord had charged them.
5. Thus, they made a proposal to the congregation (*Acts 6:3-4*).

“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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (*Acts 6:3–4, NASB95*)

**Slide 6**

### B. THE CONGREGATION RESPONDED

1. The congregation recognized the importance of what the apostles were saying and put it into effect.
2. “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.” (*Acts 6:5, NASB95*)
3. All of these men had Greek names which suggests that they too were

Hellenists — this would naturally help to alleviate some of the complaining.

**Slide 7**

### III. Two Principle Truths

#### A. GOD CALLS ALL HIS PEOPLE TO MINISTRY

1. Whether it is “the ministry of the word” or “the ministry of tables” both are Christian ministries.
2. Both ways of serving God and His people are important.
3. We do a great disservice to the church when we think only of those who preach, as ministers.
4. All Christians, without exception, are ministers, because we are followers of Him who came “not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45).
5. We must not limit Christian ministry to full-time church work and missionary service.
6. Full-time Christian ministry can also be exercised in government service, media, professional life, business, industry and the home.
7. We need to regain this vision of the wide diversity of ministries to which God calls us as His people.

**7a**

#### B. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD MUST NOT BE NEGLECTED

1. The apostles were not too busy for ministry, but they were in danger of becoming preoccupied with the wrong ministry.
2. If we are not careful, we can do the same today to those among us who serve as elders and preachers.
3. We do a great disservice to our elders when we overwhelm them with social administration.
  - a. How the contribution is spent.
  - b. Maintaining the building and grounds.
4. We do the same to our preachers when we pull them away from preaching

and evangelizing to do those things of which others are better equipped.

5. When we do this, we bring upon ourselves disastrous results — The standards and quality of preaching and teaching decline since these men have little time to study and pray.
6. The result is a congregation which is hindered from growing to maturity in Christ.
7. Paul said that it is only when elders, preachers and teachers are allowed to exercise their God-given roles that the rest of the congregation can be equipped for “the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (*Ephesians 4:12*).

**Slide 8**

## IV. The Result

### A. THE WORD OF GOD WILL KEEP ON SPREADING

1. This is what happened with the church there in Jerusalem — “The word of God kept on spreading” (*Acts 6:7*).
2. The same will happen here as we each make a conscious effort to see that the “ministry of the word” is not neglected.

**8a**

### B. THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE

1. In the last part of verse 7, Luke wrote, “the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.”
2. So much so that as he adds, “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (*Acts 6:7c*).
3. This verse is the first of six summaries of the growth which Luke inserts throughout the book:
  - a. After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (*Acts 9:31*)
  - b. After the conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius, and the death of

- Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:24).
- c. After Paul's first missionary journey and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 16:5).
  - d. After the second and third missionary journeys (Acts 19:20).
  - e. At the end of the book after Paul's arrival in Rome (Acts 28:30-31).
- 4. Each time the Word was spreading, we learn that the church was growing.
  - 5. The reason for such growth: God was at work and neither humans nor demons could stand in his way.

## Conclusion

- 1. In spite of another attempt by Satan to stop the spread of the gospel, the church continued to grow.
- 2. Each time, God brought growth out of Satan's attempts to stifle the church.
- 3. The resolution of this problem ended up bringing "a great many of the priests . . . to the faith" and Stephen, one of the seven, to the forefront in the proclamation of the Gospel.
- 4. The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:58-60) brought the attention of Saul of Tarsus, whose persecution of the church caused Christians to flee Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), carrying the gospel with them.
- 5. Though Saul was initially "ravaging" the church (Acts 8:3), he too came to the faith and ended up evangelizing the Gentiles throughout much of the Roman empire.
- 6. God uses Satan's obstacles to grow His church and accomplish His will.
- 7. Let us pray that God will overcome any problems which Satan may bring into our lives and cause each of us and His church as well to grow beyond our wildest dreams.