

The Ministry of Mercy, God's Way

Acts 6:1-7

Halifax: 20 November 2011

Introduction:

In our sermon series through the book of Acts, we have recently seen how our Lord faithfully preserves His church.

- If He had not done this and did not continue to do this,
 - there would be no church today,
 - because Satan and all who are in league with him do all they can to destroy her.

- Psalm 125, our Psalm of Focus, puts this protection in verse when it says:
 - **Psalm 125:1-3: Those who trust in the LORD *are* like Mount Zion, *which* cannot be moved, *but* abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.**

In chapter 3 & 4, we saw the church assaulted by warnings and intimidation from the Sanhedrin which is the Jewish Supreme Court,

- but by God's grace she came forth with more boldness than ever before.

Then in chapter 5, we saw her infected with corruption from within by those among her who were hypocritical and so were more concerned for impressing the saints than pleasing God...

- but by God's grace she came forth with a greater reverence for God than ever before because the hypocrites were exposed and brought to the grave.

And last week, we saw the church assaulted by persecution such that all of the Apostles were arrested and beaten by the Sanhedrin,

- but once again she came forth from this better than she was, rejoicing that she was counted worthy to suffer for Christ, and the Apostles did not cease preaching daily in the temple and from house to house that Jesus is the Christ.

In today's text we come to yet another threat to the church—perhaps the most dangerous of all—that of division within the body...

- but once again, by God's grace alone, the church emerges from this threat better than she was...
 - with a more focused ministry of the word and prayer...
 - and with a more focused and efficient ministry to the poor.

In God's providence, the office of deacon is brought forth in its embryonic form,

- which under the direction of the Spirit-led apostles develops into a most useful standing office for the church.

- And not only that, but an example is given to us here about how to settle division in a godly way...
- And not only that, but an example is also provided of the method to be used for the selection of men for the standing offices of the church.
 - By “standing office,” I mean those offices that are not temporary as the office of Apostle and prophet—
 - Men were appointed directly by God to these temporary offices,
 - but they are chosen, as shall see, through the agency of the members and officers to the standing offices.

So in looking at today’s passage,

- I want to commend to you the ministry of mercy—the diaconal ministry—done in God’s way.
 - I want to show you four benefits to this ministry when it is done God’s way...
 - Diaconal ministry done God’s way helps to prevent division.
 - Diaconal ministry done God’s way preserves the ministry of the Word and Prayer.
 - Diaconal ministry done God’s way puts faithful men to work.
 - Diaconal ministry done God’s way advances the gospel.

So let’s get started.

I. Diaconal ministry done God’s way helps to prevent division.

A. Indeed, we see that a division had arisen in the church.

1. Up until now, we have been told repeatedly that the disciples were together with one accord.
 - We have already been told this five separate times—almost evenly spaced throughout the first five chapters.
 - This is how the church ought to be.
 - This was no false unity where people “agree to disagree.”
 - The Greek word translated “one accord” is *homo-thumos* and it means “one holy passion.”
 - They did not get along because they were indifferent, but because they were all passionate about the same thing:
 - the gospel of Jesus Christ by which they had the forgiveness of sins and new life—eternal life that had totally transformed them.
2. But here at the beginning of chapter 6, we see that something has disrupted their unity.
 - Verse 1 says that
 - **Acts 6:1: “there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists.”**

- a. So now instead of having everyone together with one accord, you have two parties—divided along ethnic lines...
- The major difference between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was their language.
 - The Hebrews spoke Aramaic which is almost identical with Hebrew.
 - They made up the greatest number of Jews at Jerusalem.
 - The Hellenists were Jews who came from Greek speaking countries where the Jews had been dispersed.
 - They made up 10 to 15 per cent of the population of Jerusalem.
 - Some of them were proselytes who had been converted to Judaism, but most of them were Israelites.
 - Many of them were older folks who had moved to Jerusalem in their riper years because they wanted to be buried there.
 - For this reason, they would have had a large portion of widows.
 - Because of the language differences, the Hellenists had separate synagogues in Jerusalem...
 - After they became believers and were added to the church, they would have likely have met in congregations that used Greek.
 - Remember that by the time in the history of the church, there are probably at least 10,000 disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem,
 - and though they had larger gatherings at the temple where the Apostles preached each day, they also met in smaller congregations.
 - Understand that the Apostles were by no means the only ministers of the word at this time...
 - There were at least 70 preachers who had been ordained by Jesus to preach the gospel during his ministry, and many of them would have preached in these smaller congregations.
 - It is very probable that others were ordained by the apostles and that among them were Hellenists who preached in Greek.
 - In chapter 8 we see that Philip has become an evangelist—so here is clear proof that there were other ministers of the word in addition to the apostles—

TRANS> But whatever the case, you see that there is a division here between the Hellenists and the Hebrews in that the Hellenists are said to have a complaint against the Hebrews.

- b. This is a very serious and grievous matter!
- 1) Sadly we are so familiar with church division that we are hardly bothered by it—but we should be!
 - Just think of it...
 - There are two parties in the church and one party has something *against* the other party!
 - That word *against* is the problem.
 - Part of the body of Christ is against another part.
 - Here are people for whom Christ died—who have been reconciled to God through Him—and they are against each other!
 - He calls them all His brethren.
 - They are disciples who are to be recognised by their love for one another—but now there is this complaint.
 - 2) The word used here—*complaint*—is a strong word that means murmur—
 - It sounds like what it is—*gog-gus-mos*
 - This is the same word that is used of Israel’s complaining against Moses and against God in the Greek version of the Old Testament.
 - In 1 Cor 10:10, we are given the terrifying warning about such complaining:
 - **1 Cor 10:10: Do not complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.**
 - 3) Oh brothers and sisters, we must labour hard not to let *gog-gus-mos* arise among us!
 - It does not honour the Lord!
 - We should be so thankful for the unity we have as a congregation, but we must guard ourselves because it can come among us.
 - It is caused either by error or by pettiness...
 - Error is when division is caused by our holding to false doctrine or practice...
 - Pettiness is when division is caused by complaining about things that we ought not to complain about—“somebody sat in my pew”.
 - We need to lament the division in the church at large and pray that we do not contribute to it wrongfully by either error or pettiness.
 - Jesus Himself caused a lot of division among the Jews, but He was not the wrongful cause of it by error or pettiness!
 - We need to pray that the Lord would restore the unity of His church.

- B. The division described in our text is over the care of widows.
- Verse 1 describes it with these words...
 - **Acts 6:1: there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.**
1. Is this a petty complaint, or is it a legitimate one?
 - a. We are not told for sure if the widows actually were neglected
 - There is no way to tell from grammar in the original if the widows really were neglected or if it was just the perception of the Hellenists.
 - Probably, they were being neglected, but not deliberately.
 - As is often the case when there are linguistic differences, the Hellenists were taking it personally when it was not personal at all.
 - We are told that this happened when the church was growing,
 - so it was probably just that these widows were overlooked.
 - b. Nevertheless, even though it was not malicious, this neglect was a serious problem indeed!
 - 1) The Jews had a very effective system for the support of widows—
 - They were much more charitable than the Romans or the Greeks who looked upon the poor as associated with dishonesty.
 - The Jews had been taught by the Lord to take care of the poor, and to their credit, they had taken this to heart.
 - The exile had done a lot to purge them of idolatry (of the external kind) and neglect of the poor...
 - so they did ordinarily take care of their widows and prided themselves in it.
 - 2) However, now that the disciples of Jesus had been expelled from the synagogue,
 - the believing widows would no longer be supported by the Jews.
 - That meant that the Christian disciples had to support them...
 - And this was especially difficult because many of them would have lost their jobs when they were put out of the synagogue...
 - We have seen that heroic efforts were made by those who sold their houses and lands in order to provide for the poor.
 - 3) But now if indeed some of the widows were neglected—this was a matter of great reproach to the church!
 - It would have destroyed their reputation among the Jews!
 - And not only that—it was a sinful neglect...
 - And not only that—the widows were going hungry and needed to be cared for!

TRANS> It was definitely a problem!

2. But we can certainly sympathise with the Apostles and other ministers in the church.

a. It was certainly not that they had been idle!

- They were extremely busy, preaching and teaching and healing and receiving new converts daily.
- The Apostles and other ministers could not keep up with everything.
- But the care of widows was not something that could be overlooked.
- It needed to be rectified!

b. Right here and now, the Apostles were in the place of great temptation!

1) If they had been like a lot of elders I have met, they would have gotten highly offended!

- They would have started quoting passages against their critics out of Numbers about the complaints that were brought against Moses.
 - Like Numbers 11:1:
 - **Numbers 11:1 Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.**
 - They would have preached sermons about this.
 - And they would have threatened to bring discipline upon complainers.
- They would have felt sorry for themselves that nobody appreciated all the work that they were doing.
 - Didn't they know how hard they worked?
 - Didn't they know that they had only recently been put in prison and beaten for preaching Christ?

2) But you see that the leaders do not get defensive or on a high horse or anything of the kind.

- They respond to the situation with meekness and humility.
 - They do what we all ought to do when there is a problem like this:
 - They focus on the problem and what needs to be done to fix it.
 - Whether it was only a perceived problem or a real problem, their goal is not to justify themselves,
 - but to come up with a good solution to set things right.
 - And that is exactly what they do!

- C. The solution they come up with is to let the people choose men out from among them who will be able to look after the ministry of tables.
- This ministry of tables is the ministry of distribution to the needs of the poor.
1. So they call a meeting of the church and they instruct that seven men be appointed to this task.
 - a. Just on a side note, it is very probable that “the multitude of the disciples” did not include every member of the church.
 - More likely it included representatives—elders who represented all the people.
 - I say this because there were too many to all meet together and this is the way the language is used in the OT.
 - When *the whole congregation* meets with Moses,
 - it often refers to the elders as it does, for example, in Ex 12:3 where *the whole congregation* is given instruction about the Passover...
 - and then in Ex 12:21, it shows that Moses instructed *the whole congregation* by called for the elders—a presbytery meeting.

TRANS> Whatever the case,

- b. The Apostles leave it to the congregation to choose out the men who will serve.
 - This way, the problem of the neglect is solved.
 - It is really a very simple and straightforward solution.
 - c. And if you look down at verse 5, you can see that this plan pleased the whole multitude!
 - By appointing men to the ministry of tables, everyone was satisfied.
 - The division in the body was healed!
 - The widows were provided for!
2. What a good thing the Lord did here for His church!
 - a. You can be sure that the Lord was in this whole affair.
 - Like the crucifixion of Christ,
 - the whole matter of the neglect, the division, and the solution were according to His determined purpose and foreknowledge.
 - And in this case, it was in order that He might establish the very useful office of deacon in His church.
 - By bringing it about in this way, the people were able to see the need for such an office.
 - The Lord let the problem arise so that they could see the need.

- b. Deacons are God's gift to His people.
 - We need to make use of this ministry that brings peace to the church.
 - Faithful men are needed to devote themselves to this work so that it will be done well and so that nobody will be neglected.
 - We need to pray for brother Andy as he carries out his ministry among us.
 - We need to give thanks for him and pray that the Lord will raise up more deacons in the days to come to help him.
 - When we are aware of needs, we need to let him know about them.
 - Until we have more deacons, the elders also serve as deacons.
3. Understand that in Acts 6, we only have the diaconate in seed form.
- Many exegetes do not regard this as the beginning of the office of deacon.
 - But the early church fathers referred to them as deacons.
 - Though they are not called deacons in our passage, they are said to do the work of serving (*dee-ak-on-eh'-o*) tables—
 - the Greek word *dee-ak-on-eh'-o* is (of course) the verbal form of the word deacon.
 - Those who deny that these are deacons point out that these men are not restricted to the ministry of tables because Stephen and Philip are both later seen to be preachers...
 - But we need to understand that Stephen was not an official preacher—
 - he is only doing what every believer is called to do—giving a defence of the hope that he has...
 - And Philip becomes an evangelist very shortly—and is called an evangelist rather than a deacon.
 - Nevertheless, it is not until Timothy is written that we have two clearly distinguished offices of the elder and the deacon.
 - What is clearly begun here in Acts 6 is a two-fold division of ministry in the church...
 - The ministry (*dee-ak-on-eh'-o*) of the word and prayer...
 - And the ministry (*dee-ak-on-eh'-o*) of tables (care of the needy)
 - Yes, the word *dee-ak-on-eh'-o* is used to describe both sorts of ministry,
 - but later on, in 1 Timothy 3, the word deacon has taken on a specialised use to refer to those who care for the needy.

TRANS> Here in Acts 6, we have the beginning of that two-fold division of ministry and it is to that subject we now turn.

II. Diaconal ministry done God's way preserves the ministry of the Word and Prayer.

A. The Apostles make it clear that they are concerned about preserving the ministry of the word and prayer.

1. In verse 2, they say:

- **Acts 6:2: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.**
- They are saying that it is not desirable—not a good thing—for them to take away from the ministry of the word to care for the poor...
 - They have been expressly set apart by God to preach the word.
 - This is what made Israel unique from all other nations—that they had the very oracles of God...the word was given to them.
 - And this is what makes the Christian church unique—that we have the very oracles of God—the Word of life.
 - The church is the only organisation in the world that has this ministry and it must not be abandoned for anything.
 - It is not desirable for those who are set apart to this ministry to neglect for any other ministry.
 - Certainly, the ministry of tables is very important and ought not be neglected,
 - but the ministry of the word is even more important.

TRANS> And so in verse 3, they propose the ministry of tables be given to others...as we have seen:

- **Acts 6:3: Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;**
2. And in verse 4 they make a resolution to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word...
- **Acts 6:4: "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**
- a. Notice that prayer is added to the Word because the two belong together.
- The Word without the grace of God will accomplish nothing.
 - And God's grace is brought down by prayer.
 - How often Paul urges that prayers be offered up for the ministry of the Word!
 - How he speaks about his own labour in prayer for the Word.

- If even the apostles who had such excellent giftedness in the Word that they spoke without error recognised that prayer was essential for *their* ministry...
 - How much more do ordinary ministers of the Word need it!
 - Please, please, please, pray for me and for the preaching of the word.
 - Without God's blessing, it is all in vain.

- b. Years later the importance of a minister's devotion to the word and prayer is still emphasised in the scripture.
 - Listen to how Paul urges Timothy to be devoted to this ministry!
 - In 1 Tim 4:13-16, he says:
 - **1 Tim 4:13-15: Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.**

 - Give yourself entirely to reading, exhortation, and doctrine!
 - This is a matter of extreme importance for the sake of the health of the church, for in the next verse Paul goes on to say...
 - **1 Tim 4:16: Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.**

 - There is a very real sense in which peoples' salvation depends on this.
 - Just witness what has always happened whenever the church's ministers are no longer devoted to the word...
 - It is only a matter of a generation or two until the gospel is no longer known.
 - The reformation was primarily a return to the scriptures that had been neglected for so long.

- B. My brothers and sisters, this Biblical emphasis on the primacy of the Word is one that we have sought to uphold at Covenant Reformed.
 1. Many of the members of this congregation come from churches where very little attention was given to the ministry of the word...
 - a. Some came from churches where the word was choked out by high-church ritual and liturgy...
 - There were altars and priests and robes and candles and ceremonies and holy days and choirs and bells and incense and great organs—
 - but there were only a few people who could explain that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

- There were few who understood what it meant to follow Christ in everyday life.
- b. Others came from churches where the word was swallowed by programmes of community service...
- There were hundreds of ministries going on to every sort of group—there were social programmes, there were youth groups, there were fund raisers, there were environmental awareness days, etc...
 - but the ministry of word had taken a back seat.
 - The thing that is primary in the New Testament church and that is never to be neglected at any cost was made secondary.
 - And as a result, many of the members did not believe the Bible to be the word of God or that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.
 - We need social action, but the gospel must not be exchanged for social action.
- c. Still others came from churches that were swallowed up with feeling oriented charismatic worship.
- Preaching was replaced with dancing and singing and spontaneous prophecies and tongues and healings and sometimes even out of control laughter or shouting.
 - Everyone could talk about their experiences, but few could explain that we are lawbreakers who need to be reconciled to God.
 - Everyone could talk about the praise team, but few knew what the Bible says about marriage or about a father's responsibility to his household.
 - We need experience, but preaching was given a secondary place.

TRANS> The word must never be given second place.

2. My dear brothers and sisters, sacraments, service, and worship are very important...
- But if they take us away from the ministry of the word, they are diabolical.
 - Satan loves to give us anything in place of the word.
 - That is what he tried to do with the apostles...
 - He tried to draw them away to the ministry of tables...a good thing...
 - but the apostles would not allow it!
- a. The Word is essential because it is through the word alone that we are connected to Jesus our dear Saviour and obtain new life.

- He Himself is the word and we are saved when we hear His voice that calls us to repent and believe the gospel.
 - We cannot know Him in a saving way apart from the gospel.
- b. The Lord judges churches by taking away the word.
 - He takes away their lampstand and leaves them in the darkness to flounder.
 - Talk to the average person in our city...
 - You find that they have a Christian heritage, but you will scarcely find one in twenty that can even articulate the basic gospel.
 - Do not let this happen among us—or to you!!
- c. I am greatly pained to hear of so many who are turning away from the word to go after other things...
 - They do not plan to leave the Word.
 - They feel good about what they are doing—sometimes superior, but they are on the road to ruin.
 - I know because I been on that road!
 - I grew up in a church that had been down that road.
 - They still had a pulpit ministry, but instead of word, they preached social action.
- 3. So what does all of this have to do with diaconal ministry?
 - It is that diaconal ministry puts the ministry of tables—the care of the needy—in the hands of someone other than the ministers of the word.
 - It frees the ministers of the word to devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer for the sake of the church.

TRANS> So the men who take on this ministry of tables must be faithful men who truly do take over this work.

- That is the next topic to which we turn.

III. Diaconal ministry done God's way puts faithful men to work.

A. The men who are chosen are described in verse 3.

- We need to look at how this is done as we consider men for deacons in the days to come.
- The Apostles say,
 - **Acts 6:3: Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;**

1. A good reputation is essential because they must be trusted with the management of money.
 - Even though churches put up safeguards, there are many who fall into the temptation that Judas gave in to.
 - They are running a little short and see that there is an extra cash gift that their church doesn't really need, so they take a little.
 - They must be men who have proven themselves to be generous.
 - If they are going to be entrusted with giving other people's money to the poor, they ought to be men who are already themselves giving to the poor.
 - Some suggest that the men that were chosen to serve may very well have been those who themselves sold houses and lands to provide for the poor.
 - If they do not have a reputation for integrity and for generosity, they are not suited even though they may have book keeping skills.
2. They must be men who full of the Holy Spirit.
 - How can you tell when a man is filled with the Holy Spirit?
 - a. When a man's life is full of the Holy Spirit, he lives for Jesus Christ.
 - The Spirit is the one who joins us to Jesus Christ for new life.
 - He loves Jesus and his life (not just his talk) shows it.
 - b. A Spirit-filled man will have the fruits of the Spirit...
 - Where there Spirit is abundant, the fruit will be abundant.
 - The fruits of the Spirit are described in Galatians 5:22
 - **Gal 5:22-24: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
 - He is no longer living as one who is controlled by his passions and desires, but as one who is controlled by Jesus His master.
 - He is not driven by his sinful passions and lusts, but by the word of God.
 - c. In Ephesians, the filling of the Spirit is described in terms of its effect on a man's relationships...
 - Eph 5:18-21 says:
 - **Eph 5:18-21: And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the**

Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

- His relationship with God is characterised by praising Him in the assembly of the saints and by giving thanks—
 - He is not full of grumbling and bitterness, but with gratitude.
 - Too often, grumbling, bitter men are chosen simply because they are intelligent, organised, good managers, and hard workers who can get things done...
 - But they should not be chosen because they are not filled with the Spirit.
 - A Spirit filled man's relationship with his family is also described here in Eph 5—that he will be one who lives in submission relationship...
 - taking his place a father and husband who manages his family well and lays down his life for them...
 - And in business, as one who does not abuse those who work for him or cheat those he works for.
 - Only such Spirit-filled men should be chosen as deacons.
3. And finally, the apostles say that the deacons must be men who are filled with wisdom...
- I already spoke about the problem of choosing men who know how to get things done even though they are not filled with the Spirit...
 - but they do need to know how to get things done if they are going to be good deacons!
 - They just need to also be filled with the Spirit!
 - A man with wisdom is one who knows what to do in a situation.
 - Many conflicts arise about money in a church, and the deacons need to know how to deal with such conflicts.
 - Besides that, they have to know how to handle the distribution of money without being easily deceived.
 - There are many deceivers who come looking for a hand out from the church, and deacons need to know how to sort them out.
 - They need to find creative to help those who are being helped to do what they can to provide for themselves.

TRANS> So you see that deacons have to be quite the men!

- If they are going to be able to take over the ministry of tables from the elders so that the work still gets done,

- and so that it gets done in a way that honours the Lord and that does not stir up problems,
 - they must be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of wisdom.
 - Otherwise, they be more of a hindrance than a help to the ministry.

B. But how are these men to be found?

1. The proper method for the appointment of deacons or any standing officer is spelled out for us right here in Acts 6.
 - This is the method for the choosing of elders and deacons given to us by apostolic example.
 - a. The congregation is called upon to seek out men who meet the qualifications.
 - You see that in verse 3—it says:
 - **Acts 6:3: seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;**
 - From ancient times, bodies that chose officers do so by a show of hands or by ballot...
 - It is not a popularity contest, but you are look for men who honestly have a good reputation, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and are wise.
 - The congregation is to identify these men.
 - Sometimes, they are in a better position than the elders to know what these men are really like.
 - The congregation's wisdom is seen in the men who are chosen in that they appear to be from the Hellenistic party that raised the complaint.
 - This is indicated by the fact that they all have Greek names,
 - that Stephen comes into conflict with the Hellenistic Jews...
 - and that Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch—
 - That means that he was not an Israelite, but had become a Jew through circumcision as an adult.
 - So at least some, if not all, of these men appear to be Hellenists and this is very wise...
 - The principle is, let the party who had the grievance be put in charge of the matter!

TRANS> So the congregation seems to have chosen well...peaceably...

- But that is not the end of the matter as far as deciding who will serve!

- b. After they congregation has made its choice, the men are brought before the elders (here the apostles who are also elders).

- 1) The elders are to pray for them and lay hands on them to officially set them apart to the office.
 - Prayer is essential because these men will need an extra measure of the Holy Spirit and of grace to serve as deacons.
 - The laying on of hands does not itself impart grace, but the Holy Spirit does and the laying on of hands reminds us to look for this through prayer.
 - 2) And make no mistake.
 - This laying on of hands is not just a rubber stamp of the congregation's choices.
 - The elders can refuse to lay hands on a man if they do not believe him to be qualified.
 - In 1 Timothy 5:22, the elders are warned not to lay hands on anyone too hastily—only if they are sure of the man.
2. The result of this process is that the ones who are ordained to office have a double approval...
- They are approved by the congregation who sees things that the elders do not see...
 - And they are approved by the elders who see things that the congregants may not see.
 - This is far better than having the congregation alone choose, or having the elders force someone upon the congregation that they don't want.
 - It helps to insure, as much as is humanly possible, but that the men who are chosen are truly qualified for this important work.
 - When this procedure is carefully and sincerely followed, it will save the church a lot of grief and trouble.

TRANS> And this brings us to our concluding point...that...

IV. Diaconal ministry done God's way advances the gospel.

- A. The division that arose had the potential to stifle the growth of the church.
 - If it had been allowed to go on, it would have caused great hindrance to the gospel.
 - If the Apostles had become defensive and had refused to give this ministry over to these men, they would have been distracted from the ministry of the Word.
 - Without good deacons, the work of the church will be hindered.
- B. But look what happened after the deacons were appointed...

- We are told in verse 7
 - **Acts 6:7: 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.**
 - Isn't that marvellous?
 - More disciples brought into the kingdom of God!
 - Even many priests!
 - Precious souls, united to our dear Lord Jesus Christ!
 - How kind our Lord is—that there should even be so great a salvation!
 - for anyone—let alone for so many!
 - Just think of the price that had to be paid for the salvation of one soul!
 - The very Son of God had to bear all the shame and the guilt—and the whole curse—to atone for our sins.
 - He had to come under the wrath of God to save us—and He did!
 - Just think of how offensive we were to our God before Jesus saved us...
 - How unworthy that God should do anything but destroy us.
 - But His grace and mercy abounded toward us!
 - And now just think of the all the multitudes that have been saved since then!
 - How kind our Lord is!
 - How gracious He is that any of this should have ever been done.
- C. And just think how graciously He guided these disciples to give deacons to His church...
- All so that widows could be cared for—because He loves them...
 - All so that they could be cared for well without causing division in the church...
 - All so that the ministers of the word could devote themselves more fully to the ministry of the word and prayer...
 - So that the word of God could keep on spreading—
 - or literally, increasing—
 - going forth powerfully to transform the elect in Jerusalem for God's kingdom and glory in Jesus Christ.
 - Our God takes sinful division that might have destroyed the church and turns it into a boon for the church!
 - Brothers and sisters, this is how He works if we will but seek Him!
 - Yes, there is division that for a time brings destruction to the church,
 - but that is only because God is chastening us for our ingratitude for the gospel.

Let us therefore turn to the LORD with thanksgiving for us kindness to us!