

# “And the Word of God Continued to Increase”: How to Be a Healthy Church in Trying Times

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>1</sup> Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” <sup>5</sup> And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1–7)

### Second Week . . . Second Lesson

- A. This is now our second week dealing with this text. And I told you last time that I was going to have the same basic outline for both of these messages, but that I was going to bring out something different each time.
- B. The three headings under which I’ve been organizing my thoughts on this are: (1) The Problem; (2) The Solution; and (3) The Lesson.
  - 1. For those first two headings I’m going to quickly retread some of the same ground, but I’ll highlight new details and insights as I go.
  - 2. And then when we come to that third heading, that’s where things will start to take a significantly different path.
    - a. Last time, as I said, the lesson I drew out was dealing more with us as individuals, on a personal level. In particular, I wanted to do what I could to help us learn from these apostles here how to discern God’s will for our lives when there’s forks in the road and things. I hope you found it encouraging.
    - b. But now, with this second sermon, the lesson I want to draw out is going to deal more with us as a church, on a corporate level. I want to learn from this story here what it looks like to function as a healthy church even in the midst of trying times.
- C. As with last week, we’ll spend the majority of our time dealing with this Lesson. But still, let’s quickly make our way back through the Problem and the Solution . . .

## (1) The Problem

### A Cultural Divide

- A. You remember, perhaps, this problem faced by the early church here is precipitated by a sort of cultural divide that's begun forming in the community.
1. That's what is meant in that opening verse (v. 1) by the identification of these "Hellenist" Jewish Christians and these "Hebrew" Jewish Christians.
    - a. "Hellenists" were those that were of the Diaspora, they had lived elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world, and they'd only sometime recently migrated back to Palestine. As a result, they had been influenced by and imbibed much of the Hellenistic (or Greek) culture—their values, customs, and especially their language. They primarily would have spoken Greek.
    - b. This is in stark contradistinction from these so-called "Hebrews"—those who, on the whole, had lived in and around Palestine for quite some time, and they had traditional Jewish sensibilities, and while they likely knew some Greek to get around, they probably primarily spoke Aramaic.
- B. So there were cultural differences here, even among these early Jewish Christians. And these cultural difference, as often happens, became the wedge that started to drive these two groups apart.
1. The Hellenistic widows it seems were being "neglected" or overlooked in the "daily distribution" of benevolence and resources. They weren't being cared for in the same capacity with the same attentiveness as those Hebrew widows were.
    - a. It was likely an honest mistake resulting from the cultural and language barrier, but, nevertheless, it wasn't good. And the Hellenistic Christians here aren't happy.

### A Rising "Complaint"

- A. So we're told in v. 1 that "a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews . . ."
1. The word translated "complaint" here is the Greek *goggusmos*, which just sounds bad, doesn't it? It's defined as an "utterance made in a low tone of voice; behind-the-scenes talk; displeasure, expressed in murmuring" (BDAG).
- B. It's a concerning word, to say the least—especially if you're familiar with the OT.
1. In fact, in the LXX, this same word is used a number of times to refer to the "grumbling" of the people of Israel against Moses and Aaron and, ultimately, against the LORD himself (cf. [Exod. 16:7, 8, 9, 12](#); [Num. 17:5, 10](#)).
  2. The parallels between the NT and OT at this point are staggering!

- a. There too, if you remember, God had just worked a great redemption for his people in Egypt. He was bringing them out from the house of slavery and forming this new community around himself out in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land . . .
  - b. . . . and yet there was grumbling, murmuring, complaining, and it threatens to derail the whole thing. Indeed, many of them did fall under God’s judgment for it.
- C. So this is no small matter that the early church is dealing with here.

## A Warning for Us

- A. And I do think there is a bit of a warning for us in this, isn’t there?
1. As a church, Mercy Hill, though small, is actually wonderfully diverse. We’re diverse in ethnicity, in age, in socioeconomic status, in education, in vocation, in stage of life, in life experience, even in language, etc. It seems to me, we have a little of everything and not a lot of anything.
    - a. And, while there’s great potential for good in this, and you can really showcase the beauty and power of the gospel and its ability to form and shape a new people as one in Jesus . . .
    - b. . . . there’s also great potential for disconnect and trouble, isn’t there? Because, in light of our many differences, we may misunderstand each other, speak over each other, even judge or despise each other:
      - i. “How could they say that? How could they wear that? How could they listen to that? How could they watch that? How could they eat or drink that? How could they do that?” Things could fracture and fray.

(1) Far from showcasing the gospel’s beauty and power, we could actually undermine it in the way we conflict and divide.

## Conflict from Without and Within

- A. When you step back and really take in the bigger picture of the church in Acts to this point, you realize it’s been riddled with conflict all along the way, hasn’t it? Conflict from without. Conflict from within.
1. So in [Acts 4](#), it’s conflict coming at them from outside, from the religious leaders there in Jerusalem.
  2. Then in the first part of [Acts 5](#) it’s conflict coming from inside, with Ananias and Sapphira—there’s sin in the camp.
  3. Then, in the latter part of [Acts 5](#), it’s from outside again, more persecution.
  4. Now here, in the first part of [Acts 6](#), it’s from inside again, with these complaints.
  5. And we’ll see in a few weeks, in the latter part of [Acts 6](#), it’s persecution from outside yet once more. And on it goes . . .

- B. The church, this side of heaven, is a church at war, a church under fire, a church in conflict.
  - 1. If you come to church looking for a conflict-free, comfort-filled space, I'm sorry to say, but no such church exists.
    - a. The Bible doesn't shy away from this fact. It's right here at the beginning. Conflict from without, conflict from within.
- C. The bigger issue that should concern us, then, isn't so much that there is conflict outside and inside the church. We know there will be.
  - 1. The bigger issue, rather, is what are we going to do with it? How will we respond to it? That's what really matters.
    - a. So what do they do here? When the complaints are rising, when the discontent is simmering towards a boil, when tensions are high, when church unity and witness are threatened, how do these apostles and this early church respond? What do they do?
      - i. And what can we learn from it?

## (2) The Solution

### Not How, But What?

- A. Here's where we come again to consider the Solution.
  - 1. If you remember, last time I focused on the how. Meaning: I just wanted to help you see how, in the midst of all these opinions and pressures, they were able to discern God's will for them at all.
  - 2. Now, with the how behind us, this morning I want to focus in on the what. What did they actually propose here? What is the solution to this problem?
- B. And for this, all I want to do is just reread with you [vv. 2-4](#): “<sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.<sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
- C. Now, rather than say anything else here under this second heading, I actually want to move right along with you into that third heading, the Lesson.
  - 1. I'm going to bring out things about this solution that they propose in these verses, of course, but, in it all, I'm going to try to connect it to us as a church and make sure we learn the lesson that's being taught here.

2. At the end of the day, I think we're meant to learn in all this how to be a healthy church in trying times. And I see five implications in this that I want to bring out for us now this morning . . .

### (3) The Lesson

#### Implication #1: A Healthy Church Unapologetically Prioritizes the Ministry of Gospel Word

- A. You see that in our text, don't you? This unapologetic prioritization of the ministry of the Word—preaching and teaching the gospel? It's right on the surface of the apostles' response here.
  1. In v. 2, it is put negatively: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."
  2. In v. 4 it's put positively: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." "We're not going to let this go. We can't. It's a ministerial priority."

#### The Word of God Is the Seed of the Church

- A. You see, there's a conviction deep in their bones, that the Word of God is the seed of the church. If you stop scattering the seed, the church won't grow. There will be no fruit. It starts with this.
- B. And they got this, of course, from Jesus himself—both from his teaching and from his example.
  1. From his teaching, in the Parable of the Sower, do you remember what the seed is? It's the word of God. "The seed is the word of God," Jesus says explicitly in [Luke 8:11](#).
    - a. There would be no plant, no spiritual growth, in the first place, if there wasn't first the seed scattered, the gospel preached.
  2. From his example, consider what he tells the crowds when he had been ministering in Capernaum. He's healing and doing all these marvelous miracles and things. So the people, naturally, don't want him to go. They want him to stay. They beg him to stay. We're told in [Luke 4:42-43](#) that, even when he was out alone seeking his Father in a desolate place, "<sup>42</sup> the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them,<sup>43</sup> but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'"
    - a. Did he come to heal and feed and serve? Certainly.
    - b. But he first came to preach—to minister the good news of the gospel. And not just to those in this little locale, to all people everywhere.
      - i. It's the ministerial priority. Because it's the seed of the church. It's where it all starts.

- C. This is why Paul would later open his letter to the church in Colossae, saying: “<sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth . . .” (Col. 1:3-6).
1. Why are you bearing fruit as a Christian? Well, it’s because the Word of God, the gospel seed has been planted in you, it’s been met with repentance and faith, it’s taken root, and it’s growing, fruit is developing now on the branches of your life.
- D. It’s interesting. This same language is picked up later in that last verse of our text back in Acts 6. Did you notice it? Look at v. 7. Luke doesn’t merely say that the disciples multiplied. He begins there by saying: “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem . . .” (cf. Acts 12:24; 13:49; 19:20). Do you see it? He’s making a point.
1. He puts in parallel structure here these two idea of the disciples multiplying and the word of God increasing as if to say, the two are virtually one in the same, or at least that the two are essentially related.
  2. In other words: when disciples are multiplying it must also be that the word of God is increasing because the only way to multiply disciples for Jesus is by way of the preaching of the word of God. The two rise and fall together.
    - a. If the word isn’t preached, disciples aren’t made: “<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . [how?! . . .] <sup>20</sup> teaching them . . .” (Matt. 28:19–20).
- E. Even the word there in Acts 6:7 translated “increase” literally means “to grow”, in an organic sense.
1. It’s the same word used by Jesus in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:8).
  2. It’s the same word used by Paul in Col. 1 (v. 6).
  3. He uses it again elsewhere in 1 Cor. 3:6, when talking about his ministry he writes: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” The plant is growing, what’s the seed? The Word, the gospel.
- F. All this to say: If you’ve ever wondered why I feel somewhat justified preaching “longer” sermons, well here it is. I assure you: it’s not because I hate you and am trying to torture you. It’s actually because I love you, and I want the Word of God to bear good fruit in your life. It’s the seed. It’s the fuel. It’s my priority.
1. Of course, there’s more to the church than the Word or whatever, and sometimes I preach too long, I get it.
  2. But it starts here.

“Unapologetically”?

- A. Now, why do I say we should “unapologetically” prioritize this?

1. Well, because people are always going come demanding that the church and its leaders give themselves to something else. And you can't do it, you can't cave—at least not until the ministry of the Word is securely in place at the center of all church life and activity. I'd do nothing else until that's in place.
  - a. Because the world doesn't need another social club or social service or philanthropic non-profit.
  - b. It needs the gospel.
    - i. It needs to hear of the damnation we deserve from God for our sin, and of the damnation Jesus took in our place on that cross.
    - ii. They need to hear about the horrors of hell and the hope of heaven.
    - iii. They need to hear about the love of God for sinners, his mercy heart, ready to forgive and wash at the slightest twitch of repentance and faith, if you would just come, filthy as you are.
    - iv. They need to hear, they need to hear, they need to hear . . . the Word . . . the good news!
  
- B. Christianity isn't first about what we are to do for God or for others. It's about what God has done for us in Jesus at Calvary. That's where it starts.
  1. And if you lift up anchor from that to go busy yourself with, to go "devote" yourself to, something else . . . that's where it ends.
  2. There would be no more Christianity or church if there's no more Word. So don't apologize for your commitment to God's Word. This is why we're here.
  
- C. I love this story that's told about Charles Spurgeon and the way he kept his priorities unapologetically: "Spurgeon guarded his Saturday evening sermon preparation time, allowing no intrusion. Once, an uninvited guest came to his home to see him while he was preparing for Sunday. When the maid answered the door, this person sent her to Spurgeon, requesting an audience with him. Spurgeon directed her to say that it was his rule to see no one at that time. The visitor replied, 'Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see him immediately.' The frightened maid brought the message, but Spurgeon answered, 'Tell him I am busy with his Master, and cannot see his servants now.'" Oh the boldness, not to cave to social pressure. But to keep priority on the Master and his Word.
  1. I want to be a pastor, I want to be a church, like that!

## Implication #2: A Healthy Church Passionately Promotes the Ministry of Gospel Deed

- A. Now, having said all that I just said about the priority of gospel word, let me make this abundantly plain: serving tables, meeting needs, loving neighbor, all of this still matters . . . incredibly so!
  1. I might even be so bold as to say that the ministry of gospel deed is just as important as the ministry of gospel word.
    - a. Just because one comes first doesn't mean that one is inherently better.

- b. These two are equal in importance but different in priority.
- c. One necessarily precedes the other, but that doesn't mean it matters more than the other.
  - i. You have them both in the church, or you don't truly have either.

B. Think about the plant analogy we've been using again.

- 1. The seed may be where it starts, but the seed isn't really the point, is it?
- 2. No, it's the plant, the fruit that comes—in other words: the deeds, the changed life, the growth in godliness, the service.
  - a. We don't just sit around and talk about Jesus. We start to look more like Jesus. That's the fruit.
    - i. The seed, when it's properly cared for, grows up and bears fruit, or something was wrong with the whole thing.

C. Did you see this in our text? It's very interesting.

- 1. The apostles don't use their call to prioritize the ministry of the Word as an excuse to neglect the ministry of good deeds to these widows who were being overlooked.
- 2. Just because it couldn't be their call, their priority, personally, doesn't mean it didn't matter to them.
  - a. It still was incredibly important to the church as a whole that something be worked out here. Because the gospel isn't just in word only. It changes the life and the community.
    - i. If these widows are being told that God so loves them he gave his only Son for them, but the Christians who bear his name can't even find it in their hearts to give them a little time and care, it cheapens and hollows out the gospel. It makes the whole thing seem false and disingenuous.
    - ii. It's as if we write a check for them in the preaching of the Word and then when they go to cash it at the bank they come to find it bounces, there's nothing in the account. Turns out it was just a bunch of hot air.

D. This is what James famously goes on about in the second chapter of his letter: “<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14–17).

- 1. Here he's only revisiting and fleshing out that which he had already stated earlier in the first chapter: “<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. . . . <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: [the first thing he lists . . .] to visit orphans and widows in their affliction . . .” (1:22–27).



- E. So it matters that our gospel words are matched up with gospel deeds. Just because these apostles couldn't do it themselves, doesn't mean they didn't care about it. Do not misinterpret their lack of bandwidth as lack of concern!
1. But what do they say? Look at v. 3: "Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." "We can't do it. But it must be done."
- F. And so it must be here at Mercy Hill, right?
1. Isn't it the temptation to say of the various needs: "Oh, the pastors, the preachers, they will take care of it all. That's what we 'pay' them for, isn't it?"
  2. But that's not what we see in our text. And it's not what we see elsewhere in the Scriptures either . . .
- G. I think of what Paul in Eph. 4, where he's talking about the gifts of grace we're all given in Jesus, and he says: " <sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . ." (vv. 11-12).
1. Notice, he doesn't say that Jesus gives these apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (those primarily involved with the Word) "to do all the work of ministry themselves so the saints don't have to." No! That's not it. You might wish he wrote that. But he didn't.
  2. What did he actually say? Well, these leaders who are giving themselves to ministering the Word of God are not given to do everything for you, they're given to equip you—"to equip the saints for the work of ministry" themselves, "for building up the body of Christ . . ."
    - a. The inverse of all this is plain: If for whatever reason the ministers of the Word take it upon themselves to try to do all the work of the ministry (whether from their own ego or from the pressure of people in their church), the whole body will suffer, it won't be built up for Christ.
- H. So a healthy church not only unapologetically prioritizes the ministry of gospel word, it also passionately promotes the ministry of gospel deed.

### Implication #3: A Healthy Church Prayerfully Appoints Qualified Leaders

#### Elders and Deacons

- A. The next thing we see is that a healthy church doesn't just prioritize or promote such things. They actually put qualified leaders in place and commission them to help oversee such things.
- B. Here I'm thinking in particular of the two perpetual offices of the church we have described for us in the Scriptures: namely, the elder and the deacon.
  1. The ministry of the word, while in a fundamental sense, it's the particular responsibility of the apostles here at the start, we'll see later that that responsibility in a subordinate way is passed on to the elders.

- a. They would appoint elders in the various churches they planted and commission them in particular to teach and preach the word.
  - 2. Here in our text, we see what many commentators understand to be the green beginnings of the diaconate, the deacons. In fact, the word from which we derive the word deacon (Gk. *diakonos*), shows up here in v. 2 with this idea of “serving” (Gk. *diakoneō*) tables.
    - a. And we understand that, while the elders are occupied primarily with the ministry of gospel word, the deacons are installed to focus in primarily on this ministry of gospel deed.
- C. I think of it like this: deacons are appointed both to liberate the elders so they can focus on the broader ministry of the word and to legitimize that ministry of the word by serving and loving those under the elders’ care.
  - 1. On the one hand, they liberate. They serve the tables so the elders can serve the word. They free the elders up so they can talk about the gospel.
  - 2. But, on the other hand, they legitimize. They exist to help make sure the church isn’t just all talk; that the gospel has hands and feet; that our gospel checks don’t bounce; that we don’t say, “Be warm and filled in the name of Jesus” while we send them away cold and empty ([James 2:16](#)).
- D. That’s why we have deacons here at Mercy Hill.
  - 1. Deacons over Home Groups, over Kids and Youth ministries, over missions, over musical worship, over finances and administration, and so forth.

## Qualifications and Correlations

- A. It’s really interesting, we see these qualifications called for by the apostles in v. 3: “[Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom . . .](#)”
  - 1. The context and the language here seems to be quite clearly recalling those scenes in the OT where men were first being commissioned to build the tabernacle and, later, the temple. ([Exod. 31:3; 35:31; 1 Kgs 7:14; 2 Chr 2:13](#)).
    - a. These same two ideas of being filled with the Spirit of God and having wisdom show up. That’s how they have skill to build the structures, and the ark of the covenant, and the furnishings, and the altars, and the garments for the priests, and all this.
      - i. In other words: these were qualifications required of those who literally built the church back in the OT.
- B. Here’s the connection, I think: This is how we still build the church, but now in a spiritual sense. We don’t come to a physical temple anymore, we are the temple, “[living stones](#)”, being brought together and built up in Jesus (cf. [1 Pet. 2:4-5; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17](#)).

1. And for the church to be built up like this, we need, alongside the elders, deacons: men and women “full of the Spirit and of wisdom . . .” helping us establish and oversee such ministries of gospel deed.

## Implication #4: A Healthy Church Happily Empowers All of Its Members

A. I wonder if you noticed this? When the apostles came to the conclusion that it wouldn't be right for them to give up prayer and preaching to meet this need, that they needed others to step in and do it, they don't just gather the church and pick the few men they wanted for the task.

1. They don't flex their apostolic authority and dominate things here. How easy would it have been to say: “We are apostles. We'll decide.” But they don't do that.
2. No, instead, we see that they include “full number of the disciples” (v. 2) in the decision-making process: “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.” “You pick them. We'll appoint them. We trust you. We're involving you in this.”
  - a. This isn't just top-down, do-what-we-say, domineering leadership.
  - b. This is letting in the rest of the church members. They have the Spirit of God too and there's wisdom in their perspective on the matter.

B. And, indeed, this wisdom of theirs is put on full display when, at last, we see in v. 5 the seven men whom the congregation selects.

1. Many commentators have pointed out the fact that every man on that list appears to have a Greek name, suggesting that they are likely known to be Hellenists.
  - a. The church, therefore, selects as deacons those who would have been uniquely positioned to help with the problem at hand.
    - i. They didn't just choose their favorites.
    - ii. They chose those most appropriately suited for the job. These seven men would have understood the cultural and linguistic issues and could help navigate and work for unity where there once was such great threat of division.

(1) It's a brilliant move. And again it came, not from the apostles directly, but from the members.

C. This is one of the reasons why at Mercy Hill we have Covenant Membership in the first place. We want to give power away.

1. We believe that the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (cf. Matt. 16:18-19; 18:15-20) have been entrusted not just to apostles or elders, or even deacons, but to the church as a whole, to the membership.

- a. And so, following the Scriptures' example, we include our members when installing/uninstalling church officers, when welcoming/excommunicating church members, when making other important decisions, and so forth.
- D. If you've not yet taken the next step of becoming a covenant member here, I encourage you to consider it. Because a healthy church happily empowers all of its members, and we aim to be like that here.

## Implication #5: A Healthy Church Winsomely Engages the Unbelieving World!

- A. Amid all this internal turmoil—people complaining, factions forming—it would have been so easy for the church to just simply cave inward with self-concern and forget the broader mission of reaching the outside world. “We have too much to worry about inside the church.”
- 1. But they don't get sucked into that. They care about the community, as we've seen. But they don't lose sight of the grander purpose and mission Jesus has put them on.
- B. How do I know? Well, look again with me at the last verse of our text, [v. 7](#): “[And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.](#)”
- C. It seems to me there are often two extremes we can go to when it comes to the relationship between community and mission in the church.
- 1. On the one hand, we can, as I've said, so prioritize community that we neglect mission.
  - 2. But on the other hand, we can so prioritize mission that we neglect community.
    - a. But, truthfully, the two, as we see here, are meant to go together.
    - b. Because, interestingly enough, one of the greatest evidences we have for the reality and validity and power of the gospel is the church community that's been transformed by that gospel.
      - i. How do you know Jesus is alive? Well, people should be able to look at the church, his body, and see as much.
- D. And that's what's happening here. I love that last line: “[. . . and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.](#)” They saw something different here than they'd seen elsewhere in Judaism.
- 1. It's very interesting. We know that new synagogues would often form around various cultural distinctives and differences. The Jews, it seems, wouldn't necessarily try to unite in one. They would just create another.
    - a. That's what we see referred to down in [Acts 6:9](#) actually with this mention of “[those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen . . . , and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia . . .](#)” There were various synagogues, it would seem, to go along with these various groups within Judaism.

2. So what this early was doing was something different.

- a. These Christians, they didn't just split and divide and start their own thing.
- b. They weathered the conflict, worked through it, and came out all the stronger because of it.

i. And the priests are asking, how? How are all these people together as one?

(1) In a word: Jesus. The cross. The gospel.

E. In many ways this sermon has just been tracking right along with our mission and values at Mercy Hill.

- 1. The first implication dealt with restoring us to God and our core value of Faith, the gospel.
- 2. Implications two thru four dealt with restoring us to neighbor and our core value of Community, where we learn to love and serve and get along together.
- 3. And then here, with this fifth implication, we come to restoring us to city and our core value of Mission. We exist not just to know God, not just to do life together, but to winsomely engage the unbelieving world.

F. It's all connected. And it's all part of what makes a healthy church. And oh how I so badly want Mercy Hill to be a healthy church like this . . . even in trying times. Lord help us!