

January 28/29, 2006

The Unstoppable Church
The Organized Church
Acts 6:1-7
Pastor Bryan Clark

(Video clip of LBC's organizational structure)

The video clip you watched is actually just a glimpse of the organizational structure here at LBC. It is just a small part of what it actually takes to make ministry possible here week in and week out. The question we are going to wrestle with today is: Is that what God wants? Does God want an organized church? There are a lot of people who have kind of an issue with that, and so we will talk about it.

If you are new with us in the past few weeks, we are working our way through the Book of Acts. We took a little break over the Christmas season, talked a couple of weeks on Stewardship in January, and now we are back to the Book of Acts. One of the things we have learned about the mission of the church in Acts 1:8 is that God has empowered us with His very presence and His Spirit in order that we might be witnesses to proclaim this magnificent message of hope that salvation is found in Jesus alone.

Any way you phrase it or word it, that is the heartbeat of the mission of the church: the proclamation of the message of Jesus Christ to every tribe and tongue and nation in the world. We have learned that we need to be busy about the mission of the church—that is what God has called us to. But it is more than just being busy. We need to be *effective*. There are a lot of people that are busy. There are a lot of churches which have a lot of stuff going on, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are being effective in accomplishing what God has called us to do.

So now we are back to our question: What does that mean in reality? There are people that have an issue with the organized church or how you hear it phrased more often is “organized religion.” But is it more spiritual to just be disorganized or unorganized? If everybody is doing their own thing their own way “as the Spirit leads,” is that ultimately what God intended?

Well, first of all, it has been my experience over the years that those people who struggle with the organized church have a tendency to struggle with issues of authority in general. They don't like authority at work, they don't like authority in the church, they don't like authority anywhere in their lives. Maybe they had a bad experience with a parent growing up or something, but they just have authority issues and it shows up in every arena of their lives. Ultimately, if you don't get that resolved you can't really be intimate with God—because He is the ultimate authority.

But beyond that, is it really more spiritual to just be kind of disorganized and unorganized and just “go with the flow”? Let me ask you this, can you name one business, one organization that is more efficient because they are disorganized, because they are unorganized? No business can survive that way. Some of you are thinking, *I know some!* But the reality is you organize for efficiency.

The same thing is true then within the church. Why all of a sudden if that is true everywhere else, would that be a bad thing within the church? In order to wisely steward people's time, people's talents and people's treasure, we have to be highly organized. But it is not to create some power bureaucracy. It's in order to effectively accomplish the mission—that is the key.

When you think about the most widely used metaphor in the New Testament for the church, what is it? It is the *body*. Can you think of anything that is more highly organized, more complexly organized than the human body? It is an absolute marvel of organization; it has to be. If the different members of my body decide to act independently of one another, that would not be a pretty sight! I think the word we would use for that is spastic. In order to carry out the most ordinary daily functions, there is a tremendous amount of organization within the structure of your body. That is the metaphor God chose to say that is a picture of the church. I don't think it is a hard case to make that the New Testament is very strong in saying there needs to be a structure and organization in the church.

In Acts 6 we are going to see if we can better understand what this is all about and why it is so important. We pick it up in chapter 6, verse 1:

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number... (Acts 6:1a, *NASB)

I just want to go that far and do a little review here. It is very important to remember at this point the church is experiencing significant growth. Most scholars estimate at this point it is somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 people. We know for a fact that earlier than this there were 5,000 men and growing. Now if you add women and children to that, that number back then was around 10,000. So conservatively speaking, there are between 10 and 20 thousand people at this point.

There is a tendency to think when you are looking at the early church, the New Testament church, that they were just kind of disorganized—that this movement was just evolving and they were meeting at people's homes and there really wasn't much structure to it. But that's clearly not the case. As a matter of fact, if you go back to chapter 4:32, there were some comments made that tells us the church was highly organized at this point.

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; [*talking about unity, unified behind the mission. To get 10-20 thousand people unified there has to be a level of authority and organization and structure, of course. But more than that it says...*] **and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.** (Acts 4:32)

Go to verse 34:

For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:34-35)

Now can you imagine trying to organize to meet the needs of 10-20 thousand people? You can't tell me this was just some loosely organized movement. They would have had a significant amount of structure in place in order for those statements to be true. So by chapter 6 there is a lot going on in terms of organization.

We've also talked about the fact that because this was a church on the move, this is the "Unstoppable Church" of Jesus Christ—that the enemy, which is Satan himself, was doing everything in his power to stop the movement. The first strategy was persecution, and we've seen a lot of that in Acts and we will see it through the rest of the Book. One of the strategies of the enemy was to persecute the believers to stop the movement—only it didn't work. It was like throwing gas on the fire. The law of thermal dynamics: The greater the heat the greater the expansion. That has been true throughout the history of the church.

Okay, so that didn't work. If the external attack didn't work, let's do the internal. So it was the corruption of Ananias and Sapphira. It became necessary for the leaders to deal with the corruption within the church. It was dealt with very severely, and at the end of that section Luke tells us the church went back to thriving. It's his way of saying that's what God wanted: problem dealt with...the church continues to thrive.

So that didn't work: the external, the internal...what else? The third strategy, I think, is chapter 6. It is one we might call distraction. Okay, if we can't persecute them to stop them, if we can't corrupt them to stop them, maybe we can just distract them to stop them. What if we could distract a church into getting involved in a lot of good things but losing sight of the main thing? In essence that would be a degree of victory for the enemy.

There are a lot of Christians and churches that are involved in a lot of good things, but somewhere along the way they lost sight of the main thing. That in essence is a partial victory for the enemy, and that is what we wrestle with in the text today. Chapter 6, verse 1:

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews... (v. 1a)

Now this word "complaint" is worth stopping and looking at. This is not a word that means a concern. It doesn't mean a concern was brought to their attention. This is a very negative word. It is always used negatively and usually it is translated grumbling. In 1 Corinthians 10, when Paul is talking about the Hebrew people in the Old Testament and their tendency to constantly grumble before God, this is the word he uses there. We also have a Greek translation of the Old Testament, an old document called the Septuagint. When you go to the Old Testament and you read many of the passages that talk about the Hebrew people grumbling before God and God severely dealing with that, the Greek word that is always used for that is this word. So it is not a neutral word or somebody saying, "I have a little concern here." This is grumbling, this is murmuring, this is causing great division. This is a big problem.

Once in a while I have people say to me, "You know, I have this concern but I sometimes don't know what to do with it because I don't want people to think I am grumbling." Well, I understand that. What is the difference between a legitimate concern and grumbling? We have tried to distinguish that before. Some of it has to do with motive—that only *you* know. But in very concrete terms, when you have a concern and you go to the person who has the empowerment or authority to do something about it, I don't consider that grumbling. As a matter of fact, I consider that a very important part of church life. Every week I have somebody who talks to me about some area of concern. I understand that by and large the majority of the body love me, they love the church, they are excited about the mission, and they are coming to me because of that. They want to see us be as effective as possible. We understand that and we listen with that heart. We want to hear those concerns and make necessary adjustments because that is very important and necessary.

That is not grumbling at all. Grumbling is when you find yourself talking to someone who has no authority and no power to do anything about it. You are just out in the hallway and talking and complaining, or in your LifeGroup, or in some other relationship. There is nothing good that can come from that. It just plants these seeds of negativity and it kind of festers and grows, and frankly, the Bible calls it sin.

That's what was happening here. This was something where people felt they were being treated unfairly and they probably were. It was probably a very legitimate concern, but it just started

festering through the body and this term tells us that by this time it was a problem. It had the potential to be very divisive, so the leaders had to deal with it.

The problem is between the Hellenistic Jews and the native Hebrews. There is a lot of discussion about who the Hellenistic Jews were. People have different opinions. I think in its simplest terms there were two groups. The Hebraic Jews were those who embraced the Hebrew traditions—they spoke Aramaic and they were very Jewish in their way of life.

There were also many Jews who in reality lived much more like the Gentiles. They spoke the Greek language and their basic day-in and day-out lifestyle was much more like the Greeks than the Jewish traditions. Those two groups didn't really like each other very much; there was a lot of tension between them. So you have these two groups coming together within the church and there is a problem. It says:

...because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. (v. 6:1b)

To be a widow in the first century was a very difficult journey. As a matter of fact, it was often difficult just to survive the most basic level of life. So it was the responsibility of the church to make sure that these widows were cared for, that they had shelter and food, that they were safe and they were protected. The Hellenistic widows felt like they were being mistreated compared to the Hebraic widows. In fact, that was probably true. We know there was such tension there, it wouldn't be hard to imagine at all.

One of the things this reminds me of is the complexity of the church. When you realize what God has called us to do and what God has called us to be, it is very complex. Sometimes a group will meet in somebody's home and they sing together and they pray together and they encourage one another and they call that a "home church." But understand that is not a home church. That is a tiny, tiny glimpse of one part of the church.

That would be the same as going to a hospital and looking at the babies in the maternity ward and saying "That's a hospital" and then coming home with the baby and saying, "We've become a hospital." Well, the babies in the maternity ward are a tiny, tiny peek of a hospital. Frankly, it is the nicest peek. Walk around the hospital and what you will find are a lot of people there that are hurting, suffering, struggling and dying. There is an incredible amount of misery that isn't nearly as warm and fuzzy as that baby in the window. But the hospital is responsible for all of that.

In the same way, the church is responsible for people from their greatest moments to their worst moments to everything in-between. There is a strong calling for the church to take care of widows and orphans and the disenfranchised and the unlovely. We are responsible for all of those. The calling is very complex in order to accomplish what God has called us to accomplish. The issue here is these people need to be properly cared for.

So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, 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." (vs. 2-4)

Now, it is very important to understand what is and is not being said here. If you heard the twelve make that statement, there could be a tendency to think what they are saying is, "That job

is beneath us. We have this high and holy calling and we have important work to do and don't bother us with those kind of details." The people are saying, "They are the visionaries, they don't care about people, they only see the big picture and somebody else has to care for these people." I can imagine that if I, as the pastor, made a statement like that what people would say: "Well, he doesn't really care, he's a big shot, it's all gone to his head, he doesn't care about the little people" and on and on it goes. But that isn't what they meant at all!

One thing that is interesting to make a mental note of is when it says "the twelve" it would be easy to just skip over that. But it is worth noting that is the only time in the Book of Acts where they are called "the twelve." I think what Luke is saying here in this particular passage is that there is a leadership structure appointed by God to deal with these situations in the church. They are responsible to organize this.

So what are they saying? What they are saying is: "That is not our calling." They believe they are called to the proclamation of the Word and they go on to say, "Our calling is to prayer and the Word. This is not our calling, so to now devote our time to this would be a distraction to what God has called us to."

So the solution is what? *Well, find yourself a few people and fix this thing.* No, that's *not* what he says at all! As a matter of fact, you can tell they took this concern very seriously by the qualifications of the leaders. These need to be very carefully chosen men who have a good reputation, who are filled with the Spirit, who are wise or skilled in leadership. In other words, he didn't say, "Somebody volunteer to fix this." But he said, "This is a very serious problem and these people need to be cared for. This is very important, so let's get the right people on the job and let's make sure this is dealt with." It is their way of saying this is very important. But what they were distinguishing is that was not their calling. There had to be people in the body that God had equipped and called for that particular job, in order to address that concern, so they could be true to *their* calling.

It is easy for me to relate to that because I feel very similar, in that I think God has called me to preach and teach the Word. I would say that is my primary calling. There are many things over the course of a week that I am involved in, but my primary calling is the proclamation of the Word. That is about 25 percent of my weekly activity. If I take my teaching time and study time and put it all together it is about 25 percent. So obviously there are many other things that I do, but I would say that is my top 25 percent—meaning that the prime hours I have in a day go toward that, and when push comes to shove, that is my priority. If I get a wild and wacky week that is completely out of control, other things will have to go because that has to remain the priority. I seek to do that. The ladies in the office will tell you that I am almost obsessive about certain blocks of time that are necessary in order to make sure I get my preparation done, because game day is on the weekend and I have to be ready.

Now I think as a general rule, I am not real regimented in my life. I guess you would have to ask my family about that. But when it comes to this subject, I am almost obsessive. Patti and I were just talking about that Friday night. Oftentimes when I come on Saturday, people will say, "Did you have a nice Saturday, did you enjoy the weather, did you do this or that?" I think to myself, *If only you knew*—because I am obsessive on Saturday. I have a certain time in the morning where I do preparation, and then I have certain things I do after that, and then I come about mid-afternoon and I have this regimented thing that I do all the way to the 7:15 service time. If anyone interrupts that regiment, it really messes with me... so leave me alone!

But what I have found over the years is that I cannot show up at 7:15 and just spout something. It just doesn't work for me. It takes me all day long to get my mind and my heart right with God to be very careful about what I am about to say. Because I understand I will be held accountable for every word that comes out of my mouth and I need to be very careful with that. So I spend all day trying to get to that point for 7:15 and the rest of the weekend. Now in order for that to happen, there have to be a lot of other people who are also called and gifted to do other things in ministry so that I can fulfill my calling.

When I come on a weekend, I don't have 25 things that I think I have to accomplish on the weekend. We have wonderfully gifted people, both paid and unpaid, who show up to use their gifts and make it happen. I am thinking about one thing when I show up and that sets me free to fulfill my calling. We have a wonderful staff who are very diverse men and women—with different gifts, different callings—and we all work together. One is not more important than the other, one is not higher, one is not lower. We just come together in order to accomplish the mission we have been called to—each of us seeking to fulfill our calling.

Once in a while you hear someone say that the big picture people, the visionaries, aren't nearly as shepherding and caring as those in the trenches. I would tell you, I absolutely reject that. I don't think there is a person on the staff that is more shepherding or caring about the people in this flock than I am, but my calling is to shepherd them and care for them in the big picture. That is how I express my caring and my shepherding. Others express it in a much more tangible, hands-on, in the trenches sort of way. It is just a matter of what God has called you to do.

But this isn't just true of paid staff. It is true of everybody in the body. If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have a high and holy calling. That is why I absolutely refuse to refer to people serving in the church as volunteers. "Volunteer" implies to me that it is optional, and you need to know that it is *not* optional before God. One day when you stand before God, God is going to hold you accountable for your calling. If somehow you have gotten the impression that it's voluntary, that it is optional, I am sorry that we have misled you. The reality is it is either obedience or disobedience. But let me guarantee you, you have a calling. You have been empowered, you've been equipped, you've been wired, and you've been called to make a significant difference in the body of Christ. You need to understand that.

Sometimes when people introduce me they say, "This is our minister." Well, technically that is not true. *You* are the ministers; I am the equipper. You should turn that around and say, "This is our equipper" and I should say, "This is our minister"—because that is biblically true. Ephesians 4 says the job of the pastor is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. We are not paid holy people that do the ministry. We are trainers; we are equippers. You are the saints of the body called to do the work of the ministry. Every time you fulfill your calling you set somebody else free to fulfill their calling, so that we can all be at our best fulfilling the calling that God has given to us.

Almost every Saturday afternoon, if you were to show up here, you would run into a young man, I think he is about 12. His name is Caleb. Ever since August he shows up most Saturday afternoons and works. He vacuums, cleans toilets, and does whatever they ask him to do. That is a pretty remarkable thing if you ask me, and he does it with a smile on his face. He is just a joy. Usually when I come on Saturday afternoon, we engage in some level of conversation.

Yesterday I showed up and there he was. We chatted a little bit and he said, "Pastor, what's the sermon on this week?" I said, "Well, we are back in Acts 6:1-7." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, we are going to be talking about why organizing the church is so important." You

could see this kind of glossed-over look in his eyes, like, *Man I can't imagine anything more boring than that.* I knew I had lost him and I thought, *I have got to do something quick!* So I said, “Caleb, the sermon is about why people like you are so important to people like me.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Do you realize that because you are willing to come here and to serve in this way and to fulfill your calling, you set me free to fulfill my calling? Together God uses that to make a difference.”

He kind of smiled and looked at me, and I said, “Do you realize that every weekend there are thousands of people who come here, and because of the ministry that takes place here their lives will be touched and affected in some way that will change their lives for eternity? And every time that happens to each individual person, God not only rewards me but God rewards *you*—because in God’s mind you were just as much a part of that as me.” He got this big smile on his face and said, “That’s cool!” I said, “It *is* cool! It’s remarkable!”

It is remarkable the opportunity that a 12 year-old young man has to make a significant difference in the lives of thousands of people. Where else can you have the opportunity for an investment like that? Caleb is doing his job. You may be called to something very public or you may be called to something very behind the scenes. But it is about everybody fulfilling his or her calling, so that we can all focus on what God has called us to do as a body and as a team to ultimately make a difference for the kingdom.

That is what the twelve were saying in chapter 6—that they have to be true to their calling. They have to raise up people to deal with these other concerns as they arise in the church. Verse 5:

The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit [*we will talk lot more about Stephen next week*], **and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch** [*those of you who are expecting children, you have a list of fine names there that you can pick from.*]. **And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.** (vs. 5-6)

Once again, this is a statement that says this wasn’t a case of the apostles saying, “Hey, that’s not my problem; somebody deal with it.” This whole idea of very carefully choosing these men and then having in essence this ordination, this commissioning of these men, is a way of saying what they are called to do is very important. It’s just not the apostles’ calling, but they highly valued that somebody else was called to that. They understood the idea of laying on of hands is the idea of it being an extension of the ministry.

I draw a hard distinction between delegation and what I call a “calling.” In my mind, delegation is when I am too busy so I need to get somebody else to do this. There is nothing terribly noble about that. But when you read through the New Testament, it says we are not just delegated ministry, we are *called*. And calling implies that God has wired and equipped and prepared you to do that job far better than anyone else could.

If these twelve would have taken it upon themselves to be distracted from their calling to wait on tables, not only would that have been a distraction from their calling, but they would not have done nearly as good of job because that wasn’t their calling. I understand that when I set other people free to empower them to do what God has called them to be, they do it much better than I could ever do it. The end product is far superior than if I have my hands in everything trying to control it.

So it's a *calling*. When you fulfill your calling you are prepared to do that better and more effectively than anyone else around you. That is why it is so important to take your calling very seriously.

What was the result? Verse 7:

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

This is a constant pattern of Luke. When he tells you something that is relevant to the structure or organization of the church, it is followed by a statement that when it is done correctly there is a thriving of the church. To say that the church kept growing, so much so that even many of the priests were coming to faith in Jesus, is really a radical statement.

Whether you are talking about a business in the marketplace or whether you are talking about a church, if it is not organized properly it hits the ceiling and cannot get beyond that. Oftentimes there is a need to reorganize, to restructure in order to go to the next step, and that's what Acts 6 is all about. There was a need to rethink and reorganize in order to continue to accommodate what God was doing among them. If you can't shepherd more sheep, then God likely won't give you more sheep, in essence.

The reality is it was very important for them to be highly organized in order to be as efficient as possible towards accomplishing the mission that God had given them. But there is always this risk that we start to fall in love with the structures, that we start to fall in love with the policies and bureaucracies. Pretty soon you have people serving the organization instead of the organization serving the people. At that point you don't become more effective; you become less effective. That is always a risk.

The same thing is true about us individually. We can become distracted and we as individuals can become far more concerned about programs and methods and structures and music styles that we lose sight of the main thing we are called to. Let me be perfectly blunt (since I think that is my spiritual gift), if you have not shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone over the last six months, I suggest you not grumble about anything. Because somewhere along the way you lost sight of the point. Somewhere you lost sight that the primary purpose of the church is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him. Before we start grumbling about programs and methods and music styles, maybe we need to get back to the point. Suddenly everything looks a little bit different.

A couple of years ago there was a guy that left the church and bumped into a friend of mine around town and started to dump a load about what he didn't like about the church and what he didn't like about me and on and on. Halfway into this, my friend just stopped him and asked him the question, "When was the last time you shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone?" I said, "What did he say?" He said, "He just stared at me."

If you want to stop people from grumbling to you, that's the question to ask them: When was the last time you shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone? Because that *is* the main thing; that *is* the point. We fall far too in love with our programs and our methods and our structures and sometimes forget what this is all about.

The same thing happens with churches. When I was in Broken Bow, I was a district leader of several churches in the Sandhills. One of these particular churches was creating a bit of a

problem for the Berean Fellowship, and so it was my assignment to go and visit with them and...be a blessing! So we had a meeting with their entire congregation, which was about 20 people, the pastor, and me. During the first half of the meeting they basically told me everything that we were doing wrong as a church and all the ways they felt we had compromised, etc. But then we got to talking about their church, and I just asked them a series of questions. "Tell me what a typical Sunday looks like." "Well, we sing all hymns." "Okay, well there is nothing wrong with that." "Then the pastor preaches a hell, fire and brimstone salvation message." "Okay, then what happens?" "Well, then we do a lengthy altar call." "Then what happens?" "Then we have a closing prayer and everyone goes home." So I asked what I thought was a logical question: "When was the last time anybody ever came forward on one of those altar calls?" "Oh boy, we don't remember; it's been years." "When was the last time you had one visitor on a Sunday morning walk through those doors?" "Well, we can't remember; it's been years."

It's the same group of 20 that have known Jesus for 50 years, and every week there is this evangelistic message and this altar call. I have to ask the question: Who is that for? What is the point of that? In their minds they were being faithful. That is what God had called them to. It isn't their fault if the unbelievers and pagans in the community don't come to church. But in God's eyes that isn't being faithful. That's playing church. They have fallen in love with these structures and convinced themselves they were being faithful. Do you know what they needed to do? They needed to be on their faces before God and ask God, "What do we have to do to be effective in reaching people in this community? Because what we are doing is not working."

We as a very large church are always in danger of falling in love with our programs, our structures and our bureaucracy, to the point we have people serving the system instead of the other way around. If you are a leader in any capacity you need to help us. You need to constantly be evaluating. Are we being effective? Do we have people serving the system, or is the system serving them? Are we being as effective as we can be, and if not, what do we need to do to change? We all need to ask that question in order to continue to be effective. We don't want to suffocate ministry. God may be leading people to some very new and different things and we have to be willing to consider that and continually change.

Oftentimes I hear people talk about trying to model the New Testament church. It is always interesting what people say when they say that. Sometimes there is this picture that the New Testament church was scattered in people's homes and loosely organized and they just did their own thing independent of one another. That is certainly not true.

There is also this tendency to just take a snapshot of the church in one moment of time and say that was the New Testament church. Think about how, in a relatively short period of time, this church went from 70 to 20,000. Are you going to tell me there weren't dramatic changes in the structure and organization in order to go from 70 to 20,000? It just depends at what moment in time you take your snapshot as to what represents the New Testament church. Let me suggest this: If we were going to actually model the New Testament church, the most accurate model of that would be a church that is constantly changing and morphing to accommodate what God is doing among us. That is the New Testament church—radical, dramatic changes in order to continue to accommodate the amazing work that God was doing in their presence.

Now that is hard for some people. Some people don't like change. Some people say, "When are all these changes going to be over?" Well, let me be honest...never. Never! We are always going to be changing, morphing, and becoming what God has called us to be to accommodate what God is doing among us. If you don't like change, there are churches in town that haven't

changed in 50 years and they won't change in the next 50 years. You are more than welcome to go there. But you have to ask yourself, *What is the mission of the church, and is that it?* Yes, we are constantly changing things to accommodate what God is doing, to continue to be faithful to the calling God has given us.

So understand that for a New Testament church to be a faithful church it involves a consistent morphing and changing. There are some of you who are kind of on the edge. We might call you a maverick. You are kind of outside the box and you are a bit of a free spirit. And in your heart you are saying, "Yeah, preach it, preach it!"—because you constantly feel suffocated by the organization or the structure. Before you give me too many "Amens!" let me talk to you. You need to realize there is not one example in the entire New Testament of somebody operating freely and independently outside the structure of the church. The word the New Testament uses for that is rebellion. There is a reason there is order. There is a reason why there is an organization and a structure that God calls the church. Frankly, it is to protect you. And it is to protect others from you.

One of the things I have learned over the years is that mavericks tend to have wild ideas and they tend to go with them and they tend to leave a trail of bodies. We are the ones that come up behind and pick these bodies up and nurse them back to health. I don't think God wants that. We don't want that, and I don't think you want that. Understand this, we need those out-of-the-box, maverick-type thinkers to partner up with us to help us to continue to grow and change and be what God has called us to be. We need those people who irritate us that always ask the questions, "Why are we doing that? That's not working, we need to change that." You may irritate some people, but from our point of view as leaders, we need you. We need you to come shake things up and get outside the box to challenge us to continue to grow and change to be more effective in our ministry.

I think that tension between those who want to hold back and those that are way outside the box is a good tension. Imagine a horse and buggy. You have the horse out front and the buggy with a bench seat. On one side of the bench seat is somebody that has both reins, and they are white knuckled and pulling back as hard as they can. Seated right next to them is somebody with a whip that is smacking that horse, trying to get the horse to go faster. That is the picture of the maverick with that cautious person and the tension that needs to exist. That is a good thing that keeps us from settling and becoming just status quo and falling in love with our programs. We need to partner up in order to become what God has called us to be.

Lastly, all of us who have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior need to understand that we have a high and holy calling. What sets me free to fulfill my calling is hundreds of thousands of people being obedient to their calling—all of us doing our jobs, whether behind the scenes or up front. It is not higher or lower; it is not more important and less important. When God hands out His rewards, they are for every member of the team who made the ministry possible. It is all of us being obedient to what God has called us to do and understanding that if God has wired you and prepared you with His Spirit, you will do that job far better than anyone else around you. We will all be at our best.

You say, "I don't even know where to start. I don't even know quite what you are talking about." The best way to take the next step is to take the Connections Class that is coming up the middle of February. You can sign up for it—that would be a great place to start. There are hundreds and hundreds of places where you can plug in, places where you can flourish as the person God has made you to be.

Ultimately, we must be highly organized as a church—not so that we have this bureaucracy that is suffocating, but that we maximize and wisely steward people’s time, talent and treasures to ultimately accomplish the mission of Jesus Christ.

In the text, the apostles talked about how their calling is to the Word and to prayer. There is a sense in which the pastor is called on a regular basis to lift the body before the Lord and pray with them and for them. That is part of the shepherding ministry of a pastor. So we thought it would be appropriate to close this part of the service by having one of our pastors do that—in essence, to pray over us, to pray with us, and to lift us as a body before the throne of grace.

In the auditorium I am going to invite Gary Jones to come and pray. Gary is our Pastor of Counseling Resources. We really appreciate Gary; he has many wonderful strengths and certainly strengths I don’t have. He is a great part of the team. In the upper room Mark Heilman, one of our Season of Life pastors, will pray. Mark and I probably couldn’t be more on the opposite ends of the scale in many ways, but Mark is a wonderful pastor and I appreciate him dearly. He has many wonderful strengths I don’t possess, and we work together to accomplish the mission. So I will ask these two pastors to lift up our body in prayer .

(Closing Prayers by Pastor Gary Jones and Pastor Mark Heilman)

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Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
The Organized Church
Acts 6:1-7
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “organized church” (or “organized religion”)?

Why do you think some people have such a negative response to the idea of the “organized church?”

2. Can you name one business, team or organization that is more effective because of its lack of organization? What is the purpose of organization?
3. What is the difference between organization that is effective and bureaucracy that is suffocating?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 6:1-7. What was the problem?
2. Estimates of the church size in Jerusalem at this time were anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 people. Remember the numbers given in the text only included the men. According to verses such as Acts 4:32-35, do you think the church at this time was organized or disorganized? Why or why not?
3. What was the concern of the apostles?

Is their concern about higher and lower jobs or about calling?

How does this square with Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:14-26?

4. As the church grew, a problem arose. The people were “complaining.” This word means to grumble. (See Numbers 14:27; 1 Corinthians 10:10.) What is the right way to address concerns or problems in the church? What qualifies as grumbling?
5. What is the role of the pastor according to Ephesians 4:11,12?

Who are the ministers in the local church?

Is someone properly loved and cared for if he/she is visited and prayed for in the hospital by a member of the body but not by a pastor? Why or why not?

6. What might have happened to the church in Jerusalem if the apostles would have given in to pressure to “micromanage” the church?

What was their responsibility?

7. What qualifications were necessary in the leaders chosen to solve the problem?

What does this tell us about how seriously the apostles viewed this problem?

Was it just a nuisance to them or a legitimate concern that required faithful shepherding?

What do we learn from this?

8. If we were to model the New Testament church, would that mean trying to copy their methodology and programming or following their example of being willing to change and adapt to meet various needs as they arise in order to be effective?

9. What was the result of their “reorganization” according to verse 7?

Is good organization a hindrance to accomplishing the mission or a requirement? Why?

Application

1. Where has God called you to serve in the local church?

In what way does that calling affect the accomplishment of the mission of the church?

Does your role matter? Why?

2. What can we do to encourage more people to fulfill their roles as ministers in the body?

3. Is there a particular area of concern in the church that needs attention but you have been waiting for a pastor rather than addressing that concern yourself?

Is it necessary to wait for a pastor, or are you equipped and empowered to minister to this need yourself?