

Lesson 2—Distinctives: The Ordering of the Assembly

I. Design

- An assembly is a visible local group of believers (Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1:4 ["churches"]). Although the assembly is catholic (universal) in a sense (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 12:13 [by Spirit immersion]), the New Testament is always addressed to visible local assemblies, or individuals therein.
- The assembly is illustrated as the body (Colossians 1:18, 24; Ephesians 1:22–23, 5:30) with Christ as the head (1 Peter 5:4), as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–30; 2 Corinthians 11:2), and as a building (Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9–12; Ephesians 2:20–22).
- The assembly is not a "spiritual Israel" (Romans 11:1–2; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Acts 1:6–7; Ephesians 3:1–6; Romans 11:17–24; Zechariah 12:10), nor is it a replacement for God's future plan with the Jewish nation.

II. Distinctives

A. Biblical Authority: The Sole Authority for Faith and Practice

Key Scriptures:

- The importance of doctrine and teaching.
 - **1 Timothy 4:13-16 (NET)**
¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the spiritual gift you have, given to you and confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on you. ¹⁵Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that everyone will see your progress. ¹⁶Be conscientious about how you live and what you teach. Persevere in this, because by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.
- Scripture is God-breathed and sufficient for all righteousness.
 - **2 Timothy 3:15-17 (NET)**
¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.
- God's Word works effectively in believers.
 - **1 Thessalonians 2:13 (KJV)**
¹³For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.
- Prophecy and teaching come from God, not human interpretation.
 - **2 Peter 1:20-21 (NET)**
²⁰Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, ²¹for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Explanation:

- The **Bible alone** is our ultimate authority—**not church traditions, councils, or leaders**.
 - This principle separates **Baptists from Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and many Protestant denominations** that rely on **church tradition, creeds, or denominational structures** alongside Scripture.
 - **Application:** Every doctrine, decision, and practice in the church must be **rooted in the Bible**, not personal opinions or denominational traditions.
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B. Autonomy of the Local Assembly

Key Scriptures:

- The early church made independent decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - **Acts 6:1-5 (NET)**
¹Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. ³But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch.
- The local church has the authority to exercise discipline and make decisions (**Matthew 18:17**).
- Christ alone is the head of the church (**Colossians 1:18**).
- Christ is the Chief Shepherd (**1 Peter 5:4**).
- Christ is the head of the body, the church (**Ephesians 5:23**).

Explanation:

- Each local assembly is **self-governing** and **not controlled by a larger denomination, convention, or outside authority**.
 - Christ alone is the **head of the church**—no earthly leader, bishop, or pope has authority over a biblical assembly.
 - This differs from **Roman Catholicism (Pope & bishops), Anglicanism (hierarchical bishops), and Presbyterianism (elder rule by synods and councils)**.
 - **Application:** The congregation, under Christ's leadership and biblical guidelines, makes decisions regarding **leadership, discipline, and ministry direction**.
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C. Priesthood of the Believer

Key Scriptures:

- Believers are a royal priesthood (**1 Peter 2:5**).
- Jesus Christ is the **only** mediator between God and man.

- **1 Timothy 2:5 (NET)**

⁵For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human,

Explanation:

- Every believer has **direct access to God** and does not require a **human priesthood** for confession, forgiveness, or worship.
 - This stands in contrast to **Catholicism**, which teaches that **priests act as mediators between God and man** through confession, sacraments, and absolution.
 - **Illustration:** Imagine a kingdom where only a select few could approach the king. In God's kingdom, **all believers have access to Him through Christ**.
 - **Application:** We are responsible for our own **spiritual growth, prayer life, and relationship with God**.
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D. Two Ordinances (Water Baptism, Lord's Supper)

1. Baptism (By Immersion Only)

Key Scriptures:

- Those who received the Word were baptized (**Acts 2:41**).
- The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized after professing faith (**Acts 8:37-39**).
- Baptism symbolizes death, burial, and resurrection (**Romans 6:3-5**).
- Baptism is a picture of being buried and raised with Christ.
 - **Colossians 2:12 (NET)**

¹²Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

Explanation:

- Baptism is **not** required for salvation but is an **act of obedience and public testimony** of faith.
- Baptism is **always by immersion** in the Bible—**never sprinkling or pouring**.
- **Illustration:** Baptism is like a **wedding ring**—it doesn't create the relationship, but it signifies the commitment.
- **Application:** Baptism is the **first step of obedience** after salvation and is required for local church membership.

2. The Lord's Supper (A Memorial, Not a Sacrament)

Key Scriptures:

- The Lord's Supper was established by Jesus (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**).
- Christ's words about the bread and cup (**Matthew 26:26-29**; **Mark 14:22-25**; **Luke 22:15-20**)
- Self-examination before partaking (**1 Corinthians 11:27-32**)

Explanation:

- The Lord's Supper is a **symbolic remembrance** of Christ's suffering and sacrifice.
- It does **not impart grace** or salvation (unlike the Catholic belief in **transubstantiation**).

- **Application:** Participation requires **self-examination, repentance, and reverence**.
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E. Individual Soul Liberty & Responsibility

Key Scriptures:

- Each believer is accountable to God (**Romans 14:5, 12**).
- Avoid causing others to stumble (**Romans 14:13**).
- Use liberty to build others up in truth (**Romans 14:19; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Titus 1:9**).

Explanation:

- Each believer is **personally responsible** for their faith and choices.
 - Churches cannot **force** belief or dictate personal convictions.
 - **Application:** Christians must balance **freedom** with responsibility—avoiding things that may harm others while standing firm in biblical truth.
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F. Saved, Water-immersed Membership

Key Scriptures:

- *Matthew 28:19* – Baptism follows salvation *as a step of obedience*.
 - **Matthew 28:19-20 (NET)**
¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- Those who believed were baptized and added to the church (**Acts 2:41**).
- Baptism is for those who personally believe
 - **Acts 8:36-37 (NET)**
³⁶Now as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, there is water! What is to stop me from being baptized?" ³⁷So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.
- Water immersion is symbolic for spiritual immersion and the resurrection.
 - **Romans 6:3-5 (NET)**
³Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. ⁵For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection.

Explanation:

- Church membership is for **saved, baptized believers**.
- No **infant baptism or forced membership**—each person **chooses** to follow Christ and be baptized.

- **Application:** If you are saved and have not been baptized, this is the **next step**.
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G. Two Offices (Pastor, Deacon)

Only two officials are recognized in the new testament assembly (**Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1**), "pastors" and "deacons".

1. Pastor (Bishop/Elder/Shepherd)

Key Scriptures:

- Elders oversee the flock (**Acts 20:28**).
- Qualifications for pastors (**Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7**).
- Pastors are **shepherds**, not lords over the church (**1 Peter 5:1-4**).

Qualifications:

- Blameless
 - Blamelessness seems to be the overriding principle of the qualifications. It is mentioned first in both passages and twice in Titus. Blamelessness should be seen first in the stewardship of the family (Titus 1:6), and second in the stewardship of the assembly (v. 7–9).
- The husband of one wife (lit. "a one-woman man")
- The Following: Vigilant, Sober, Of Good Behavior, Hospitable, Able to Teach, Leader of His Family, Good Testimony, Gentle, Patient, Meek, Not a Drunkard, Not a Fighter, Not Greedy, Not Covetous, Selfless, Temperate, Just, Devoted to Scripture

2. Deacon (Servant)

Key Scriptures:

- Deacons assist the pastors in practical matters (**Acts 6:1-4**).
- Qualifications for deacons (**1 Timothy 3:8-13**).

Qualifications:

- They must have a good reputation (Acts 6:3), must be wise (Acts 6:32), must be grave (1 Timothy 3:8), must not be double-talkers (1 Timothy 3:8), must not be drunkards (1 Timothy 3:8), must not be covetous (1 Timothy 3:8), must be men of pure faith (1 Timothy 3:9), must be tested and found to be above blame (1 Timothy 3:10), must be husbands each of one wife and have well-ordered homes (1 Timothy 3:12). Their wives must be grave, not false accusers, sober, faithful in all things (Timothy 3:11).

Explanation:

- Deacons **serve the church** and support the pastors.
 - **Application:** Both roles require **strong Christian character and commitment**.
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H. Separation

1. Of the state from the assembly (Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 22:15-29; Acts 5:29)

- The government **should not control** the church.
- The church **must obey God first**, even under persecution.

2. Of the assembly from the world (Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17)

- Christians must **live differently from the world** and reject sinful influences.

3. Of the assembly from errant teaching (Jude 3)

- The church must not **partner with or endorse** groups that compromise biblical truth.

III. Direction

A. The assembly ought to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 3:21)

B. The assembly ought to strive for peaceful unity, recognizing the authority of Christ (Ephesians 4:3-6)

C. The assembly ought to build each other up to maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13)

D. The assembly ought to evangelize (share the good news with) the lost (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 14:24)

E. The assembly ought to demonstrate God's grace (Ephesians 3:9-11)

F. The assembly ought to reflect God's holiness

1. In separation from the world (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 5:8-11; 1 Peter 1:14-15; 1 John 2:15-17)

2. In separation from false teachers (Acts 20:29-30; 2 Corinthians 11:12-15; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 John 9-11)

3. In separation from internal impurity (Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16)