

I. The government of the local church

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd of the flock. He is to have preeminence in all things. The Pastor is not to be preeminent. No church member, man or woman, should be a “place-seeker” for preeminence. See 3 John 9-10.

2. The Holy Spirit is to direct the church.

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) See also Acts 4:31; Acts 5:3-4; Acts 9:31; and Acts 13:1-4.

3. The Pastor is the undershepherd.

He should never lord over God’s heritage but be an example to the flock. The congregation should follow him as he follows the Lord.

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

No “clergyman” should ever think himself above the congregation but a servant to them. Jesus, the Head of the church, hates the deeds and the doctrines of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6,15). The word “Nicolaitan” means “to have power over the people.” People should willingly submit to the leaders over them in the church, not be forced into submission.

4. The whole congregation should be filled and controlled by the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Spirit says special things to those who attend church that can never be heard anywhere else. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Revelation 2:11) See also Revelation 2:17,24 and Revelation 3:6,13,22.

The congregation should esteem it’s leadership very highly in love for their work’s sake. “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13).

The government of the local church rests entirely with the members of the body, being separate and independent of all other churches in matter of authority and control, being answerable only to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For example: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen

man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:15) See also 1 Corinthians 5:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15.

5. Each church is to be independent of other churches, yet dependent on God.

The church should not be under the control of a conference, denomination or fellowship. Each church should be independent of man’s control, but dependent on God’s leadership. The church should be autonomous. It should be indigenous but have a world wide vision.

The church is a theocracy not a democracy. God is to have the first and final word in all matters of faith, practice, vision and direction of His church.

Every church is different in it’s personality. Compare the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3. Also see the different characteristics of the churches mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:1; Acts 11:26; Philippians 4:15-19; Colossians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 16:1; and 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Acts 17:11.

Each church, however, can learn from the example of other churches: “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” (Colossians 4:16).

J. The Ordinances of the Church

There are two ordinances of the church – baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

1. Baptism

The Scriptures teach a believer’s baptism by immersion. In baptism, the believer testifies that he died with Christ to sin, that he was buried with Him, and that he has risen to a new life in Him. Read the examples of baptism in Acts 8:12; Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3-10; Matthew 3:15,16; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:38; Acts 9:18; Acts 16:33; and Acts 10:48. This ordinance is in no way a condition for salvation.

2. The Lord’s Supper

This ordinance is for believers only and is a commemoration of the Lord’s death and our continual fellowship with Him. It is a solemn event and Scripture is quite clear that it should not be entered into casually, but only after careful self-examination under the searchlight of the Holy Spirit. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 and Matthew 26:20-30.

K. The Inclusion of the Church

All born-again, baptized believers are welcome to attend and fellowship in the Lord’s church. These members should keep themselves right with God and all other believers and try to be right with the unbelievers of the world also as much as they possibly can.

The church should be careful that it doesn’t become “family-centered” or cater to the rich, educated, etc. It should be all-inclusive to the rich, poor, children, adults, married, divorced, single, widows, widowers, all nationalities, all ethnic groups, all skin colors, all languages, etc. “The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.” (Proverbs 22:2). See also Romans 1:16; Colossians 3:11; Romans 12:5; Galatians 3:28.

L. The Exclusion of the Church

The church is a meeting place and ministry to believers, to equip them to edify each other and then go out of the church into the world to reach unbelievers. The saints are not told to bring unbelievers in but to go out to the lost and reach them. The church should be separated from unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) but not isolated from them (John 17:15-18).

The church should also disfellowship itself from certain believers who are not walking worthy, such as:

1. Fornicators

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;” (Ephesians 5:3). Also read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

2. Heretics

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;” (Titus 3:10)

3. Covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, extortioners

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.” (1 Corinthians 5:11)

4. Unrepentent brothers who have been properly confronted

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

5. Those who cause division and offenses contrary to the sound doctrine of the church

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17). Note: Secure a copy of your church’s Doctrinal Statement and Church Covenant. See also 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 John 10

6. The disorderly

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). The example given in this context is that of a healthy man who will not work.