

# Major Bible Themes

## 52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*  
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### The Church: Her Organization and Ordinances

- Introduction
  - The Church (the body of Christ) is perfectly organized as one body of believers joined together by the baptism of the Spirit and placed under the direction of the head (Jesus Christ).
  - God has also sovereignly organized the members of His Church into groups of believers within local churches.
  - During the Apostolic Age of the Church, the apostles planted local churches, chose those who would be in positions of leadership, and oversaw the spiritual growth of those churches.
  - After the last apostle died, the pastor of each local church came under the direct authority of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:12-16, 20).
- The Order of the Church
  - The New Testament describes two different leadership roles within the local church – Elder and Overseer.
    - ✦ Elder (πρεσβύτερος, presbuteros)
      - The term elder refers to a spiritually mature believer (Acts 15:22-23; 1 Pet 5:1, 5).
      - This term is the same as that used to refer elders of Israel who were considered to be mature in the faith and able to hold positions of authority.
      - Elders are prime targets of Satanic attacks and, therefore, given greater protection from false accusations (1 Tim 5:19).
      - A local church may have multiple elders (Acts 20:17; Jas 5:14).
    - ✦ Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, episkopos)
      - The term overseer refers to the office held by the one elder who is called as the leader of the local church (1 Tim 5:17).
      - The overseer of a local church should always be an elder, but most elders will never serve in the office of overseer.
      - The spiritual gift of pastor-teacher is perfectly suited for the office of overseer, but an overseer might not have this gift.
    - ✦ The primary role of the elders and overseer is to shepherd the flock of God within the local church (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-2).

- The New Testament also recognizes a very specific serving role within the local church – Deacon.
  - ✦ Deacon (διάκονος, diakonos)
    - The term deacon refers to someone who carries out tasks in service to another.
    - The office of deacon within the local church is held by those who dedicate themselves to serving the congregation, thereby freeing up the overseer and elders to devote themselves to the study of the word of God and prayer (Acts 6:1-4).
    - The spiritual gift of service (Rom 12:7) is perfectly suited for the office of deacon, but a deacon is not required to have this gift.
    - The role of the deacon is service, not leadership, so there is no restriction against women serving in this office (Rom 16:1).
    - Those who serve as deacons may also take on leadership roles within the local church, but this would necessarily be limited to the men who hold the office (1 Tim 2:12).
  - ✦ As with the elder who holds the office of overseer, those who aspire to the office of deacon are subject to very high standards of qualification (1 Tim 3:1-13).
- The Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the Church calls believers to serve in the office of overseer or deacon in a local church.
- Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ removes overseers and deacons from these offices when it is His will.
- It is not biblical for the congregation to hire or fire their pastor and/or to nominate and elect their deacons.
- It is biblical for the congregation to recognize what the Lord is doing within their local church and this recognition may be expressed by acknowledging approval or disapproval of a proposed placement into or removal from office (Acts 6:5).
- The Ordinances of the Church
  - Although the Roman Catholic Church recognizes a number of ordinances, the New Testament gives legitimacy to only two ordinances for the Church – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
    - ✦ Water baptism is a ritual for Church age believers that is observed today in two modes – affusion and immersion.
      - Affusion is performed through sprinkling or pouring water symbolizing the Holy Spirit being poured out at salvation.
      - Immersion symbolizes the believer’s identification with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
      - Regardless of mode, water baptism does not accomplish any part of salvation nor does it impart spiritual power.
      - The true baptism of the Church is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs at the moment of salvation (1 Cor 12:13).

- Because water baptism is intended for believers, there is no biblical justification for infant baptism.
- Water baptism should be observed by believers as a public declaration of their identification with Christ.
- ✦ The Lord's Supper (Communion) is a ritual for Church age believers instituted on the night before the crucifixion.
  - The bread represents the body of Christ – His sinless humanity which was offered up as a sacrifice for our sins (Matt 26:26).
  - The cup represents the blood of Christ – His sacrificial death which was necessary for our sins to be forgiven (Matt 26:27-28).
  - The bread and the cup are merely symbols designed for us to remember Christ in His absence (1 Cor 11:23-25).
  - The Lord's Supper looks back to Jesus Christ on the Cross in anticipation of His glorious return (1 Cor 11:26).
  - The Lord's Supper is a solemn observance which should not be done in an unworthy manner, so believers must examine their own souls and confess sins as necessary in order to avoid temporal judgment (1 Cor 11:27-29).
- Questions
  - Compare and contrast the organization of the Church during the Apostolic age and during the age of the local church.
  - To whom is the pastor of a local church today accountable?
  - What are the two leadership roles within a local church?
  - What constitutes an elder within a local church?
  - Why are two or three witnesses required to bring accusations against an elder?
  - Can there be more than one elder within a local church?
  - What constitutes an overseer within a local church?

- What spiritual gift is perfectly suited for the office of overseer? Is it necessary for an overseer to have this gift?
  
- Should there be more than one overseer within a local church?
  
- What is the primary role of the elders and overseer within a local church?
  
- What is the role of the deacons within a local church?
  
- What spiritual gift is perfectly suited for the office of deacon? Is it necessary for a deacon to have this gift?
  
- Can women serve as deacons? If so, with what limitations?
  
- Why are those who hold office within the local church held to very high standards?
  
- Is it biblical for congregations to hire/fire the overseer or to nominate/elect the deacons?
  
- What are the two biblically supported ordinances for the Church?
  
- Describe the two modes of water baptism and what they represent.
  
- Is infant baptism biblical?
  
- Describe the Lord's Supper and what the bread and the cup represent.
  
- Do the bread and the cup become the body and blood of Christ during Communion?