God’s Design for the Ekklēsía: The Assembly of His People

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Forward

The material presented on this website may differ from commonly held or traditional views within modern evangelical

Christianity. Some of the conclusions may challenge long-held assumptions and are offered in the spirit of careful biblical and historical examination.

This work is not intended to provoke controversy for its own sake, nor to diminish the sincerity of those who hold differing interpretations. Rather, it is offered in the spirit of careful biblical examination and historical inquiry. The purpose of this site is to encourage thoughtful study of the Scriptures, the original language of the biblical text, and the historical context in which the early believers lived and gathered.

Readers are encouraged not to accept or reject these conclusions on the basis of tradition (Mark 7:7–9), popularity (Matthew 7:13–14), or personal preference (Proverbs 14:12), but to examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11).

If the content here challenges long-held assumptions, it is hoped that such challenge will lead not to division, but to deeper study, humility, and renewed confidence in the authority of God’s Word.

Authorship Statement & Church Terminology

The content on this webpage was developed with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) as a research and writing aid for organizing material, improving grammar and clarity, and assisting with structure and flow. Historical sources, biblical texts, and Greek lexicon references were consulted to evaluate and confirm the information produced through this process.

All material presented here has been reviewed and verified by the webmaster of this site to the best of his ability, with

the intent of avoiding false, misleading, or biased conclusions. Nevertheless, readers are encouraged to exercise personal discernment and to examine all claims carefully in light of the Holy Scriptures.

Scripture remains the final and highest authority. This site exists to encourage thoughtful study, not blind acceptance. As the Bereans were commended for searching the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11),[1] so also should every reader test what is presented here against God's Word.

Reader's Note on Terminology

Throughout this webpage, the term *assembly* is used in place of *church* to reflect meaning of the word *ekklēsía*, as Greek lexicons define *ekklēsía* as a gathered congregation—assembly—rather than an institutional concept.

This choice is made for clarity and faithfulness to the language of the New Testament.

An Introductory Question for Every Believer:

Do you believe that when the Bible gives us clear instructions—whether from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself or from His Apostles writing under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit—that we, as Christians, are bound to follow them as they are delivered? If your heartfelt answer is, "Yes, my desire is to obey God's Word in all things," then this conviction must be applied to one of the most foundational aspects of our faith: the very definition of a New Testament assembly and its practices.

Many sincere Christians today find themselves in various

gatherings, from online meetings to traditional services, assuming these are valid expressions of an assembly. But does our practice align with the explicit blueprint provided in Scripture? Let us test our traditions against the enduring standard of God's Word.

Part 1: The Foundation of an Assembly: The Necessity of Biblically Qualified Elders

The New Testament term for church is *ekklesia*, meaning a ***"called-out assembly."*** However, not every gathering of believers constitutes a fully organized New Testament assembly. The defining mark is the presence of **biblically qualified leadership**.

This understanding of *ekklesia* as a physical assembly is not merely drawn from doctrinal reasoning but is confirmed by standard Greek lexicons. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *ekklesia* as ***"those who anywhere, in city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body."*** This description emphasizes locality ("city or village"), corporate formation (***"constitute such a company"***), and embodied unity (***"united into one body"***). These elements correspond with the New Testament's consistent portrayal of assemblies as identifiable, gathered bodies of believers. For further lexical support, **see Appendix A** – Thayer's Definition of Ekklesia

While we cherish the promise that Christ is spiritually present wherever two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20), this is a promise for prayer and fellowship, not a blueprint for assembly governance. A **biblically recognized assembly** requires a **God-ordained authority structure**, centered on the office of **elder** (also called

overseer or pastor).

Scriptural Foundation 1: The Apostolic Mandate for Elders

> ***Titus 1:5:*** *"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order,* ***and appoint elders in every town as I directed you****."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** Paul's instruction to Titus is not a suggestion; it is a command to complete an essential task. The phrase "*in every town*" establishes the norm: every local assembly was to be **led by a plurality of appointed elders**. A gathering without such appointed elders is, by this apostolic standard, incomplete and "out of order."

Scriptural Foundation 2: The Non-Negotiable Qualifications for Elders

> ***1 Timothy 3:1-7:*** *"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church (assembly)? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** God, **not man**, sets the standard for **assembly leadership**. These qualifications are comprehensive, focusing on proven character ("*above reproach*," "*manage his own household*") and spiritual maturity ("*able to teach*," "*not a recent convert*"). This

list is a divine filter. A man who simply "*volunteers*" or is "*voted in*" without meeting these specific criteria is holding an office Scripture does not authorize him to hold. His authority derives from his conformity to God's standard, **not from a popularity contest.**

Scriptural Foundation 3: Authority is Recognized, Not Seized

> ***Acts 14:23:*** *"And when they had* ***appointed elders for them in every church*** *(assembly), with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** The initiative for appointing elders came from the apostolic founders of the assembly (Paul and Barnabas), not from the congregation itself. This appointment was done with solemn prayer and fasting, recognizing that the choice of leaders is a weighty spiritual matter delegated to the Lord. This **contrasts** sharply with a modern group where **a person** simply assumes leadership or **is elected by a vote** of unequipped believers.

Conclusion for Part 1: An online group or any other gathering that functions without biblically qualified elders appointed according to this pattern is, by the New Testament definition, a ***Bible study or fellowship group***. It is a **valuable part of Christian fellowship** but lacks the authority structure of a **duly constituted local assembly (ekklesia)**.

Part 2: The Lord's Supper: A Covenant Meal for a Covenanted Assembly

Understanding the proper **constitution**[2] of a assembly is

essential to correctly administering the ordinances Christ gave it, especially the Lord's Supper. This sacrament is often observed as a brief, symbolic ritual, but its institution and early practice reveal a deeper, more tangible reality.

Scriptural Foundation 4: The Original Context Was a Real Meal

> ***Luke 22:19-20:*** *"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they* ***had eaten****, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"*
> ***1 Corinthians 11:21:*** *"For* ***in eating****, each one goes ahead with his own* ***meal.*** *One goes hungry,* ***another gets drunk****."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** The Lord's Supper was instituted *during* the **Passover meal**—a *deipnon*, meaning the main **evening feast**. The Corinthian passage proves this continued in the early assembly. The abuse Paul condemns—some getting drunk—is impossible if they were only consuming a thimble of juice. The Greek word for "***supper***" is *deipnon*, **a shared feast**. The problem was their gluttony and division *during this* ***communal meal***, not the fact that a **meal** was taking place.

Scriptural Foundation 5: The Command Requires a Physical, Unified Gathering

> ***1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 20, 33:*** *"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you* ***come together*** *it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you* ***come together as a church*** *(assembly), I hear that there are divisions among you… When you* ***come together,*** *it is not the Lord's supper that you eat… So then, my brothers, when you* ***come together*** *to eat, wait for one another."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** The phrase "*come together*"

translates the Greek word *synerchomai*, which means to **physically assemble in one location.** Paul's entire correction hinges on this **physical unity**. The command to "*wait for one another*" (v.33) is nonsensical in an online setting where people log in at a set time. It is an instruction for a single **physical gathering** where the body acts as one. A virtual meeting cannot fulfill this command.

Scriptural Foundation 6: The Authority to Administer Comes from the Lord through His assembly

> ***1 Corinthians 11:23:*** *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you…"*
> ***1 Corinthians 4:17:*** *"…my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church (assembly)."*

- **Exegetical Argument:** Paul's authority to instruct the Corinthians on **the Supper** came directly from the Lord, and he "*delivered*" this tradition to the assembly. This ordinance was entrusted to the *assembly*, under the **oversight of the elders** who guard the apostolic teaching. Therefore, the **authority to administer the Supper is not independent**;[3] it is derivative. It flows from Christ, to the Apostles, to the established assemblies they founded, and is **guarded by the elders of those assemblies**. A leader recognized only by an **online group** has no biblical standing to administer a covenant meal for a body that is not constituted as a true assembly according to Scripture.[4]

Conclusion for Part 2: A **virtual** "*Lord's Supper*" fails the biblical test on **authority, context,** and the fundamental **meaning of "coming together."** It is an invalid observance. The common assembly practice of a wafer and juice, while **a**

departure from the fuller meal context, is valid when **administered by a true assembly with qualified elders within a physical gathering,** as it retains the essential elements of authority and corporate unity.

Part 3: Interpreting Acts 2:42 Correctly: A Snapshot, Not the Entire Blueprint

A common defense for informal gatherings, like online groups, is the claim that they fulfill the description in Acts 2:42.

> ***Acts 2:42:*** *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*

The argument is made: "We have teaching from the Bible (*the apostles' teaching*), we have fellowship online, we break bread (*in our way*), and we pray. Therefore, we are a assembly according to Acts 2:42."

While this verse provides a beautiful and essential snapshot of the early assembly life, it is a grave hermeneutical **error to use** this descriptive passage ***in isolation*** to define an assembly, while ignoring the *prescriptive* instructions given later in the epistles that detail its necessary structure and authority.

1. Acts 2:42 is Descriptive, Not Exhaustively Prescriptive.
The Book of Acts is primarily a historical narrative—a description of what an early assembly *did*. The Epistles *(like 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Corinthians*) are primarily prescriptive—they contain commands for how the assembly *must be* organized and governed for all time. To build a doctrine of the assembly on Acts 2 alone is like looking at a photograph of a family eating dinner and concluding that a family is defined solely by that activity, while ignoring the legal and

relational structures (*marriage, parenthood*) that actually *define* the family unit.

The four activities in Acts 2:42 are the *vital signs* of a healthy assembled body, but **they do not describe the *skeleton***—the essential structural framework that gives the body its form. The skeleton is provided by the **prescriptive texts on eldership**.

2. The "Prayers" in Context Reinforce Physical Gathering.
Regarding the claim that their online prayer time fulfills the "*prayers*" of Acts 2:42, we must again look at the context. The "*prayers*" (ταῖς προσευχαῖς – *tais proseuchais*) in Acts consistently refer to structured, corporate prayer in the Temple or in homes (Acts 1:14; 3:1; 12:5). It signifies the *united prayer of the physical assembly*.

While praying together via technology is a wonderful practice for fellowship, it is not a substitute for the corporate prayer of a physically gathered covenant community under authority. The "*prayers*" in Acts 2:42 are one activity within the broader context of a physically unified body. To pluck prayer from that context and use it to justify the absence of the other biblical requirements (*eldership, physical gathering for the Supper*) is to misuse the verse.

3. The "Apostles' Teaching" Itself Commands Assembly Order.
This is the most critical point. The very "*apostles' teaching*" to which an early assembly was devoted *includes the commands about assembly governance found in the epistles*. The Apostle Paul, whose teaching is part of this apostolic foundation, explicitly commanded the **appointment of elders** (Titus 1:5) and gave detailed instructions for worship and order (1 Corinthians 11, 14). Therefore, a group that claims to be devoted to the apostles' teaching but **ignores the apostles' commands regarding eldership** is, by definition, *not* truly devoted to the apostles' teaching. They are **selectively obeying** only the parts that suit their current practice.

Final Conclusion: A Call to Loving Obedience

This examination is not meant to question the sincerity of believers but to call us all to a higher standard: **loving obedience to God's revealed design.** The Lord, in His perfect wisdom, has given us a pattern for His assembly for our protection, growth, and His glory.

If we truly desire to follow Scripture "*as it is written,*" we must humbly align our practices with the **apostolic foundation**. This means valuing the **God-ordained authority** of the local assembly, **led by biblically qualified elders**, and participating in the Lord's Supper as it was delivered to the saints: as **a profound covenant meal** administered by a recognized assembly, celebrating the tangible unity of Christ's body as a testimony to a watching world. Let us be Christians who not only love the Word but who diligently obey its patterns.

Footnotes:

Appendix A — Lexical Support from Thayer's Greek Lexicon on Ekklesia

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *ekklesia* in part as:

"a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own

affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake; those who anywhere, in city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body."

Several key elements of this definition reinforce the New Testament understanding of *ekklesia* as a physical and local church *(assembly)* rather than an abstract or virtual institution.

1. "In city or village" – Local and visible identity
Thayer's phrase "in city or village" identifies the *ekklesia* as a group situated in a real geographical location. This excludes the idea of a scattered or purely virtual body. An *ekklesia* is a company of people who can be identified as belonging to a particular place, just as Scripture speaks of churches in Jerusalem, Corinth, Philippi, and Ephesus.

2. "Constitute such a company" – Formation by gathering
To "constitute a company" means to form a group into a recognizable body. A company does not exist while individuals remain dispersed. It comes into existence when people are gathered together as one body. This language aligns with the ordinary meaning of the English word church *(assembly)* and with the narrative use of *ekklesia* in Acts 19.

3. "United into one body" – Corporate and embodied unity
The phrase "united into one body" does not describe a merely spiritual or conceptual unity. It describes a corporate body joined together in practice and presence. A body can be addressed, corrected, warned, and dismissed as a whole. This matches Acts 19, where an *ekklesia* could be confused, instructed by authority, and ultimately dismissed (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).

4. Supporting scriptural references presuppose gathering
Thayer's supporting passages (Acts 5:11; Acts 8:1–3; 1 Corinthians 6:4; Philippians 4:15; Revelation 2–3) all assume:

- identifiable local groups
- interaction among members
- oversight and accountability
- physical presence

These passages cannot be fulfilled by a purely virtual or abstract association. They presuppose embodied fellowship and assembly.

5. What Thayer's definition does not support
Thayer's definition does not describe:

- an invisible organization
- a virtual-only gathering
- a group united merely by belief while remaining physically separated

Instead, it describes a company of people who are united together as one assembled body in a locality.

Conclusion of Appendix
Thayer's Greek Lexicon confirms what the narrative of Acts 19 already demonstrates: *ekklesia* refers to a company of people united as one assembled body in a specific place. This lexical evidence strengthens the conclusion that redefining *ekklesia* as a virtual or institutional "church" departs from both the language of Scripture and its historical usage.
