

## ***Lesson 2: What Makes Us Distinct?***

*It's important to note that distinctions are not the same as priorities. By God's grace, our priority will always be the glory of God, as it should be for any church. However, two churches can share the same goals but look very different because they have different philosophical and theological commitments. The purpose of this lesson is to articulate the theological and philosophical commitments that distinguish us from other gospel-preaching churches.*

### **I. Theological Distinctives**

#### **A. Baptist**

##### **1. Congregational Rule (Matt 18:17–18; Acts 6:1–6; 15:22; 1 Cor 5:4–5; 1 Tim 3:15)**

- Congregational rule simply means that the congregation is the final authority in church matters.
- Our constitution states that the congregation is responsible to choose the officers of the church, receive and dismiss members, approve the annual budget, etc. For the sake of efficiency and unity, most other decisions are delegated to church officers or ministry directors.
- Life Point is not under the governing authority of any denomination. We are an independent church.
- The pastors are responsible to govern the church (Heb 13:17); however, they are ultimately accountable to the congregation.

##### **2. Two Offices**

###### **a. Pastor**

- Our constitution establishes a “senior pastor” model of leadership. The congregation chooses the senior pastor, and he is accountable to the congregation. The senior pastor may hire additional pastors after the congregation has allocated funds for the position in the budget.
- We believe the NT terms overseer, elder, and shepherd/pastor refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1–2). The Bible does not make a distinction between teaching and ruling elders, nor does it make a distinction between pastors and a bishop who rules over multiple churches.
- Our pastors will strive to reflect the “servant-leader” model of leadership established by Christ (Mark 10:42–45), using their position to lovingly serve the church and its members. Our pastors want to be available to you for prayer, counsel, and encouragement as much as is possible.

###### **b. Deacon**

- Our constitution states, “Deacons shall assist the pastor in carrying on the work of the church. They shall relieve the pastor of many

responsibilities in order to better meet the needs of the church including, but not limited to ministering to the sick, benevolence, care of property, and visitation. They shall be vitally active in the discipleship and evangelism ministries of the church and shall assist in the ordinances of the church.”

- Up to five of the deacons also serve as trustees. The trustees are the “legal agents of the church.”

### 3. Two Ordinances

#### a. Baptism

- As a Baptist church, we believe in baptism by immersion for those who have a credible profession of faith (Acts 2:41; 8:36–38).
- Baptism does not communicate grace. Instead it is a visible symbol of the spiritual cleansing (Acts 22:16) and union with Christ (Rom 6:3–4) that we receive in conversion.

#### b. Lord’s Supper

- The Lord’s Supper does not communicate grace. Rather, Christ commanded the church to observe this ordinance as a memorial of Christ’s broken body and shed blood (1 Cor 11:24–26) and of the believer’s union with Christ’s sacrifice (1 Cor 10:16).
- The only people who should participate in the Lord’s Supper are genuine believers who approach the ordinance in a worthy manner (1 Cor 11:27–34). Therefore, Life Points asks unbelievers or believers who are not right with the Lord to refrain from participating. Since we believe that baptism is an essential first step of obedience, we also ask those who have not been baptized to refrain.

### B. Dispensational

- Dispensationalism is an approach to Scripture or a method of biblical interpretation that emphasizes distinctions within the outworking of God’s historical purpose.

#### 1. Distinction between Israel and the Church

- We believe that the church is a new creation that began at Pentecost. Since it was a mystery during the OT era (Matt 16:18; Eph 2:11–3:10), it is distinct from national Israel.

#### 2. Fulfillment of Israelite Promises through National Israel

- We believe that God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled through national Israel (Rom 11:1–2, 25–32). The church has not replaced Israel, nor have God’s promises to Israel been passed to the church.
- Therefore we believe that Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (Dan 9:24–27) will be literally fulfilled through the seven year Tribulation.

- The Millennial Kingdom will follow the Tribulation (Rev 20:4–8), and Christ will reign from the throne of David with his bride, the church (2 Sam 7:11–16; Rev 3:21).

### 3. Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church

- Based on our dispensational understanding of the end times, we believe that the next prophetic event to occur is the secret rapture of the church (1 Thess 1:10; 4:13–18).
- The rapture of the church is imminent and will precede the tribulation (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 1:10; James 5:8–9; 1 John 2:18).

## C. Reformed Soteriology (Essentially)

### 1. Grace-Centered Justification

- We believe that man is born spiritually dead (Eph 2:1). He is condemned before God (John 3:18), and he is unable to merit righteousness by his own efforts (Rom 3:19; Gal 2:16).
- Therefore, we believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. Human merit contributes nothing to our legal standing with God (Eph 2:8–9).

### 2. Grace-Centered, Progressive Sanctification

- We believe that at conversion, we are given a new nature and immediately begin the lifelong, gradual process of spiritual transformation (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17).
- Spiritual growth is dependent on our union with Christ (Gal 2:20) and the indwelling Spirit (1 Pet 1:1–2), but it also requires that we work hard and practice spiritual discipline (1 Tim 4:7).
- We reject any view of sanctification that says we need something more than we receive at salvation in order to grow or that says someone can be truly born again and not show fruits of salvation.

### 3. Grace-Centered Perseverance and Eternal Security

- We believe that all who are truly born again will persevere in believing right doctrine and in obeying God's commands (Phil 1:6; 1 John 5:18). Professing believers who fail to persevere were never truly saved (1 John 2:19).
- Because God will certainly complete this process, the genuine believer is eternally secure and will achieve final salvation (John 10:27–30; 1 Pet 1:4–5).

## D. Separatist

### 1. Separation from Worldliness

- Many churches believe that culture is essentially amoral and that in order to reach the world, we must embrace all of culture unless Scripture

expressly forbids an expression. As a result, they will conform to basically any style of music, dress, language, etc. in order to reach the lost.

- We believe the Bible teaches that an anti-God, temporal philosophy and value system dominates the lives of unbelievers and the culture they create; therefore, a Christian cannot be committed to God while also conforming to the world's philosophy and values (1 John 2:15–17).
- God has called Christians to separate from worldliness and to live distinct, holy lives (2 Cor 6:14–18; Eph 4:17–19; James 4:1–4).
- This does not mean that we must reject every aspect of culture. The Scriptures command us to live in the world and to remove unnecessary cultural hindrances while also remaining obedient to God's commands (John 17:11, 14–16; 1 Cor 9:19–23).

## 2. Separation from Theological Error

- The Bible consistently warns the church that false teachers will arise from within its midst (Acts 20:29–30; 1 Tim 4:1–2).
- We are responsible to separate from those who deny essential doctrines (Gal 1:6–9; Jude 3; 2 John 9–11; Rom 16:17). Therefore, Life Point will not grant Christian recognition to any church or organization that denies essential doctrine, nor will we partner with them in gospel ministry.
- We believe that any church or organization that disobeys these obligations has committed a serious offense; therefore, we will separate from those who compromise the faith by granting Christian recognition and fellowship to those who have denied essential doctrines of the faith (Rom 16:17; Phil 3:17–19; cf. 2 Thess 3:6–15).

## E. Young-Earth Creationist

- We believe that the Genesis account of creation represents literal events and that God created the universe and everything in it through his direct, creative word (Gen 1–2; John 1:1–3; Col 1:16–17).
- In particular, Adam and Eve were the direct creation of God and were not the product of evolutionary processes (Gen 1:26–27; Rom 5:12–19).

## F. Complementarian

- We believe that God equally created Adam and Eve in his image. As such men and women are equal persons (Gen 1:26–27; 2:18).
- However, God also created humanity with two distinct and complementary genders (Gen 2:18, 21–24).
- The man's headship in marriage was established before the fall and is not the product of sin. Therefore, God has made the husband the head of the home in every time and culture (Gen 2:21–24; Eph 5:21–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7).
- The NT grounds male headship in the church in the created order; therefore, only men may serve as pastors, and women should not be in authority over men or teach men in the church (1 Cor 11:7–9; 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–14).

## II. Philosophical Distinctives

#### A. Commitment to Expository Preaching

- The preaching schedule in most churches is topically driven. The pastor begins with an idea or question and uses the Bible to support the argument he wants to make. The preacher sets the preaching agenda, and focus of the sermon is application, generally to the felt needs of the hearer.
- In contrast, we are committed to expository preaching. This means that we will primarily preach through Bible books or sections of books with the goal of tracing the argument, finding the authorial intent, and demonstrating its significance for life.
- We are committed to an expository model because we believe that God's Word is powerful and that God's inspired Word can set a far better preaching agenda than man ever could (2 Tim 4:1-5).

#### B. Commitment to Conservative, God-Focused Worship

- **God-Focused:** The primary purpose of worship is not to entertain an audience but to please the Lord by praising God for his greatness and thanking him for his gifts (Heb 13:15). We are committed to using songs with theologically rich lyrics that magnify God and the gospel. The music must complement and magnify the truth of the song, not overshadow it.
- **Congregationally Driven:** The focus of our worship will be Spirit-filled, congregational singing, not the specialized performance of a few. Our worship must equip and encourage believers to press on in their faith (Eph 5:18-20).
- **Conservative:** Based on our understanding of worldliness, we believe that music has moral significance within a cultural context. We want to use music that reflects our cultural context while resisting worldliness. It must communicate reverence and holiness. It must be accessible to the congregation, meaning that they can understand the text and sing with confidence.