

Chapter V

THE CHURCH OF PAUL

We cannot, of course, speak of this church from personal experience. All we know of it is to be discovered only in the Pauline Epistles and the Book of Acts in the New Testament. Here we briefly examine this church as seen in these sources, looking to the same salient features as in Chapter IV. I list these features here again by way of reminder:

- 1. Size
- 2. Divisions
- 3. Doctrine
- 4. Administration
- 5. Adjudication
- 6. Recruiting
- 7. Worship and ritual
- 8. Relation to the world
- 9. Life

1. Size

The church of Paul was very small because it had just been planted and was struggling to achieve growth within the powerfully entrenched pagan religions of the Roman world and the ancient Jewish faith. It was a baby that, like Moses, was born into a hostile environment and there was a real question whether it would survive. Here, therefore, we don't need to ask how big it was. We need to ask, rather, what was its attitude toward growth in the world, and its expectation of growth?

Just as in Chapter IV, there is no need here for an exhaustive survey because the end of our quest can be seen almost before we start. Let us go first to Paul himself and his attitude toward growth and expectation of the same.

His expectation seems to have been heavily influenced by Isaiah 45. We quote here vs. 22 & 23:

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

This prophetic passage appealed to an element of universalism in Paul's mind. He knew, of course, that multitudes among the Gentiles disbelieved not only in Jesus but in God also. Nevertheless he anticipated a change in this situation before the last day that looked to the final judgment on all nations as anticipated above by Isaiah. He reasoned, rather inconsistently, that

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God's disposition is such as to have mercy on whom he will and display wrath on whom he will, while at the same time looking forward to a universal salvation,

For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. (Romans 11:32)

He said, "A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:25)

Then he proceeded to appeal directly to Isaiah 45:22,23 in saying,

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live,' says the Lord, "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praises to God."

To Titus he wrote, For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men. (Titus 2:11)

When he thought of the numbers that were to find salvation through the gospel and enter into the church, his favorite words were "many" and "all." Here are some of the most prominent examples:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5:15)

Then, as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18,19)

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ. (Romans 12:4,5).

These few are representative of several other instances in Paul's letters where he reveals that, in his heart, there was the sure expectation that many, many persons were to respond to his gospel and enter into the church. And why shouldn't they? He was offering the most precious treasure imaginable – eternal life – and he was offering it as a free gift, absolutely without cost! This would require a vast transformation of the religions of the world, but this was no problem for Paul, to whom the world "was reconciled" in Christ. Believing as he did that the end was near – that the Lord was at hand – he was therefore impelled to expend his energy rapidly in an effort to place the message of his gospel before all men, so that all might be saved. And he was correct in evaluating the numbers, for the church proceeded to encompass the Empire so that, by the beginning of the Fourth Century, possibly a majority of its inhabitants were either in the church or heavily influenced by the church. Just as they remain to this day, they were and are many!

This is the flavor of the message regarding numbers throughout the New Testament epistles, including the Book of Revelation. In the Acts we have these examples:

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

And the hand of the Lord was with them (at Antioch) and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:21)

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So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. (Acts 16:5)

As I indicated above, the Book of Revelation carries the same expectation forward:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, . . . Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-14)

The church in the New Testament, then, was dominated throughout by this expectation, that they saw as quickly becoming a reality, that so many were to be saved and enter the church as constitute a great multitude, which no man could number. The operative key words for size tended to be "many," "all," and "a great number." The goal and expectation was the reconciliation of the whole world to God. Let us just assign the single key word of huge as in the previous chapter.

2. Divisions

Was the New Testament Church of Paul a united church? We can do no better here than to quote K. S. Latourette:

Actually, as the writers of the New Testament clearly recognized, the Church was far from fully attaining this ideal. It was badly divided . . . Even in the first generation of its existence the church was torn by dissensions. In one local unit of the church, in Corinth, there were factions between those who professed adherence respectively to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ, and between rich and poor. As we are to see more particularly in a moment, the Church was deeply and bitterly divided between those who held that to become Christians, Gentiles must adhere to Judaism through the symbolic act of circumcision and those who maintained, with Paul, that this was completely to misunderstand and pervert the gospel. Before the first century of the Church was out, some were denying that Christ had come in the flesh, presumably foreshadowing movements, notably Gnosticism, which in the second century were to be major sources of division. Morally the Church was far from perfect. Some of those who wished to be regarded as Christians were adopting the attitude, technically called antinomianism, which was drawn from a misconception of man's response to God's grace and which was to recur again and again through the centuries, that the Christian need not be bound by any moral law. In at least one local congregation at the time of the common meal, some became drunk. We hear, too, of members of the Church being accused of fornication. In one congregation we have the spectacle, later to be almost chronic, of an outstanding member who was eager for power and control. (K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, v. 1, p. 112, © 1975; Harper, San Francisco)

This is not a pretty picture, and it was a true one in spite of the fact that in all his epistles to the churches, Paul stressed the great importance of unity and repeatedly rebuked those who were, in his opinion, responsible for divisions within the church.

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are on body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4,5)

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For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one spirit. (I Corinthians 12:12,13).

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27,28)

We should acknowledge the heavy emphasis on love in all the epistles, especially those of Paul and the Pauline School. It is love that produces unity and perfectly harmony in the church, as indicated by this text:

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:14)

We must also acknowledge that, in spite of his ability to talk the talk of unity and love, Paul comes forth from the pages of the New Testament as one of the primary causes of quarrels and dissensions in the church. We are all aware of the many divisive issues that he promoted. This is very clearly displayed in his dealings with the Jewish apostles who inherited the mantle of Jesus at Jerusalem. His position was absolutely uncompromising. This is not bad in every respect, for it may be that Christianity would never have been anything more than a small sect within Judaism apart from his firm position on the issues. Yet his most fundamental disposition was not one of love, and this slips out many times in his epistles.

As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:9)

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (I Corinthians 14:37,38)

I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. (Galatians 5:10)

One can conclude from such statements that Paul was heroically contending for the faith "once for all delivered to the saints." One can also conclude that his defensive attitude, quick to make uncompromising judgments of those who disagreed with him, made a great contribution to the divisiveness that began in his generation and continues in the church to this very day.

The divided church is clearly evidenced in the Revelation. In every case, the messages addressed individually to the seven churches in Asia recognize the existence of serious and deadly divisions within them.

I can only conclude, based on the evidence throughout the New Testament, that the New Testament church of Paul, and of the apostles, was heavily divided in spite of the fact that the leaders recognized and preached unity and condemned divisions. Something was wrong, missing, from early in the history of the church. Perhaps also something was there that should have been missing, and we are still harvesting the fruits of divisiveness throughout the world.

I will not discuss them in detail here, but we do not have to look too carefully to discover that

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many of the factors that contribute to a divided church in the modern world, as discussed in the previous chapter, were also present in the New Testament church of Paul. I list them again by way of reminder:

- 1. Doctrine
- 2. Race
- 3. Nationality
- 4. Economics
- 5. Education
- 6. Egotism
- 7. Politics
- 8. Worship

Race and nationality were factors, though perhaps not so strong as today. Economics was also a factor, as indicated in, for an example, in the Epistle of James, where James rebukes the churches for making distinctions between the rich man and the poor man. (James, 2:1-7) We are hard put to find education and politics as divisive factors, but Egotism and Worship heavily divided some congregations. Paul was himself perhaps the chief egotist, and his churches were divided on the manner of their worship, as indicated in his rebuke of the Corinthians:

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 assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. (I Corinthians 11:17-21)

In our search for an appropriate key word to describe the divisions of the Pauline church of the New Testament, again, as in the previous chapter, *myriad* comes to the fore.

3. Doctrine

As in the discussion of doctrine in the previous chapter, here we are not discussing the contribution of doctrine to divisions in the New Testament church of Paul, but we are asking, "What are the roots of doctrine in that church?" From whence came it? Our best guide here comes, again, from Paul's epistles.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:14-17)

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:10-12)

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But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. (I Corinthians 2:9-13)

The scriptures (Law and the Prophets), the Christ (the risen Christ as he appeared to Paul), and the Spirit are all represented in the Epistles as the source of sound doctrine. In addition, Paul sometimes gives credit to "the word of the Lord", but in view of his statement to the Corinthians, and his failure to quote the words of Jesus, we see that what he must have meant by "the word of the Lord" was the word of Paul himself, as he said he received them from the risen Christ:

If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. (I Corinthians 14:37)

What other source does one need, when one has the mind of Christ? (I Corinthians 2:16) I can only conclude that, ultimately, the source of doctrine for the New Testament church of Paul was none other than Paul. "Paul" must be our key word here.

4. Administration

Again we must confine our discussion, as in Chapter 4, to the source of ultimate authority and to the manner in which that authority was disbursed. What was the source of authority in Paul's churches? How did it flow from the source?

Not only in Paul, but everywhere in the New Testament there is but one stated ultimate source of authority, which is God the Father. This authority flows from God through Christ the Son to the "body" of which Christ is the head. There are so many texts to establish this point that I do not even need to quote them. Anyone who reads the New Testament must have realized that this is true. One passage comes to mind immediately and I must share it as representative of the many:

I do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, . . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

How, then, does the authority flow? Paul's favorite metaphor for the church is the human body, and he always has Christ placed at the head. The authority flows from the Father through the Son (who is the head), then from the head to the various members of the body. We see the exact mechanism when we read this:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues . . . If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (I Corinthians 12:27 . . .)

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14:38)

So, it is quite simple. From the Christ, the head, the flow is first to the apostles, then through various other offices, or functions, within the body. And, when it comes from the apostles, it must be from the Lord. Paul is an apostle, so that whatever he commands is of the Lord so that he becomes the channel of the Lord's authority. Thus he saw himself as fully authorized to exercise authority over the churches, which he did without reservation.

In the New Testament church of Paul, God the Father is the source of all authority, which issues from him through Christ the Son, thence to Paul the apostle, thence to prophets, teachers, etc. until the most menial member of the body has been invested. Its administration is hierarchical. This, however, is only the way that Paul presented it. How did the authority really flow, and what was its real source? As I have explained in Book II, Paul did not listen to Jesus, therefore he must himself have been the source of all authority in the New Testament Church of Paul. The key word here is "Paul."

5. Adjudication

Paul's church at Corinth had a practice that made him very unhappy. They were taking their disputes to the civil courts, and when Paul learned of it he blasted them as we see in I Corinthians 5:1-6:8 (quoted in part below). This is a rather long passage that you can refer to directly, and here I will quote selected verses interspersed with appropriate comments. It had been reported to Paul that one of the church members, a man, was consorting with his "father's wife." The church had taken no action except that there is some implication that they had met and decided to do nothing. So Paul rebuked them:

And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (I Corinthians 5:2)

Then he proceeded immediately to reveal that, in his mind, he, Paul, was himself the ultimate judge in such matters. In this case, he had passed his judgment already without giving the accused a hearing:

For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. (I Corinthians 5:3,4)

Then he, the judge who has already passed judgment, instructs the church on how to proceed to administer his judgment:

When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (I Corinthians 5:4, 5)

I have labored over this instruction zealously, but have been able to come to no other conclusion but that Paul has passed a death sentence on the man. I realize that in modern terms this seems an extreme interpretation, but we must evaluate these words in the milieu of a First Century Jew whose past zeal for the revered law of his people included a disposition to enforce that law in every detail, including its command to stone adulterers and false prophets (Did he not assist in the stoning of Stephen?). The Law was very clear as to the prohibition of this offense:

A man shall not take his father's wife, nor shall he uncover her who is his father's. (Deuteronomy 22:30)

Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered her who is his father's. (Deuteronomy 27:20)

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These commandments come after this one:

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall purge the evil from Israel. (Deuteronomy 22:22)

The father's wife was, of course, "the wife of another man." I believe Paul surely had these injunctions in mind, though he may not have expected the church to carry out such a drastic penalty. Nevertheless, he intended that they "purge the evil" in one way or another. He interjects a brief summary at the end of Chapter 5:

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." (I Corinthians 5:12,13)

In Paul's churches, Paul himself is the Supreme Court. He passes judgment without giving the accused a hearing, and he does it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, he is also present with the congregation when it meets to apply the penalty of his judgment, when "my spirit is present." All such matters are to be adjudicated within the church, not in the civil courts. But the Corinthians had been going to the civil courts also, probably because, prior to becoming Christians, that was their practice. Paul blasts them on this count also:

When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren. (I Corinthians 6:1-8)

So, we have a very clear picture of adjudication in the New Testament Church of Paul. It must be confined to the church, where first someone must be found who is "wise enough to decide" so that disputes do not go outside the congregation. In the hard cases, Paul decides, serving as the supreme judge who is authorized to issued decisions in the name of the Lord Jesus! He has been in some contact with the words of the Lord here, but in the final analysis, the judge in every judgment is Paul himself. Our key word here must, as in the prior feature, be Paul.

6. Recruiting

All the early missionaries were Jews and they followed the natural course by first going to the synagogue in every city to bear witness to their gospel. Being Jewish themselves, it was a familiar setting; further, they were loyal to the same God as the Jews, and it was easy to find opportunities to witness in that setting. They drew on the same roots, and the basis message was that the Messiah for whom Israel had waited so long had finally arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They were impelled by a sense of urgency, believing that there was a limited time to witness prior to the Lord's return, and it was necessary for them to carry the message to the entire world as quickly as possible.

They always seemed to find, on first hearing, a few in the synagogue who wanted to hear more. These were very often the Gentile "God fearers" because the universal nature of the message appealed to them even more than to those of the traditional Jewish faith. Further, the earliest missionaries, the Apostles, Barnabas, Paul, and Apollos to name a few, were not requiring the

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onerous admission rites characteristic of the Jewish synagogue. Primarily, the males did not have to be circumcised to acquire full status as members of the new movement. They could continue to worship the same God and even counted themselves the true inheritors of the promises of that God.

As to the Jews who were not persuaded, they opposed the missionaries and sometimes took violent action against them. Typical was the Jews at Corinth, where they "opposed and reviled" him. He shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:5f) He only went next door to the synagogue, to the home of one Titus Justus, a Gentile who received him warmly, and we are even told that the ruler of the synagogue, one Crispus, believed with all his family. We are left to suppose that he also left the synagogue and went next door. Paul remained, for some eighteen months, "teaching the word of God among them."

We can well imagine that the loyal Jews in the synagogue were not at all happy about this, so they finally seized Paul and brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, who refused to hear the case. After only a few more days, Paul left them and sailed for Syria. Did he flee for his life? Undoubtedly that was a factor. The loyal Jews in the synagogue must have been very frustrated in their efforts to be rid of him and they might have felt well justified in taking up stones against this interloper who was leading so many people astray, just next door!

In spite of all the conflicts and confusion that resulted wherever the Christian missionaries appeared, their work continued to prosper, but primarily among the Gentiles. Their universal message, their testimony to one God of all men, and their cheap admission price must have been very appealing to many of the Gentiles who were having doubts as to the validity of their polytheism. Paul's message at Athens, delivered in the Areopagus, demonstrates this universal appeal:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." (Acts 17:24-27)

By comparison with the religions of the pagan world to which the early missionaries took their message, it was to many ears most wonderful. So, the missionaries continued to rush across the world from city to city, winning a few in each place then rushing on. Those left behind assembled according to the norms of the new religion and broadcast the message throughout their city and its territory. There was, as it were, a spiritual vacuum in the world and the missionaries filled it. It was a formidable beginning for a formidable religion and the Mediterranean world and its environs, at least the metropolitan areas, were covered in the space of a generation of two. We do not know the details of those years because they were not documented, or the documents have been lost, but when the documents began to appear in the second and third centuries they reveal a world thoroughly seeded with the message of the New Testament church of Paul. They truly responded to the command of Jesus issued in the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20)

For a key word here, we could select from among several, witnessing, preaching, missions, etc. But since we seek a single word, witness should serve well.

7. Worship and Ritual

The New Testament church of Paul had few if any buildings, but the firm evidence from the Scriptures is that they met to worship in diverse places, primarily in the homes of members of the congregation. The house of Titius Justus, next door to the synagogue at Corinth that was mentioned above is a good example. Another example is seen in the introduction to the letter to Philemon:

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philemon 1:1-3)

So much for the place of worship. What did they do in the course of their worship? Here we have good evidence from Paul's epistles, including the following list:

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (I Corinthians 14:26)

In Chapter IV we gave the following list of worship activities in the church of today, which I show here again for comparison:

- 1. Sacred music, including congregational, choral, and solo hymn singing.
- 2. Public, common prayer, including the Lord's Prayer
- 3. Eucharist or Lord's Supper
- 4. Collection of tithes and offerings
- 5. The sermon
- 6. The minister, often cloaked in "ministerial attire", specifically, a long robe.

These lists compare rather well. Item 1, Sacred music, corresponds to the first item listed in Corinth, "each one has a hymn." Item 2 from our list is missing at Corinth. No mention of prayer! (He mentions both fasting and prayer in I Corinthians 7:5) This may have been an oversight, for in his First Letter to Timothy, Paul urges thusly:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands, without anger or quarreling; (I Timothy 2:8)

Here he was not specifically discussing public worship, but I think it safe to assume that he meant it to be included. However, there is no record anywhere in the New Testament of either individual or public offering of the Lord's Prayer.

Item 3, Eucharist or Lord's Supper, also fails to receive mention in Paul's list. He included this in I Corinthians, however, where we have the first description of the Lord's supper that appears in written form. Here is the text:

When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat . . . So, then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another – if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home – lest you come together to be condemned. (I Corinthians 11:20-34)

The Acts informs us that they came together to eat a common meal, possibly because they had all things in common, including their table. There is no record there of the Eucharist, and it is uncertain that Paul intended to be giving instructions for worship when he described it to the

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Corinthians. We have to leave a question mark as to whether this was a part of the public worship of the New Testament church of Paul. But if it was not observed, they did indeed observe a common meal when they came together, so we will conclude here that there was a correspondence in this item.

Item 4, Collection of tithes and offerings, also is not mentioned in Paul's list of worship activities. Nevertheless we will assume that there was, at least in some cases, a correspondence, based on this text:

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. (I Corinthians 16:2)

Item 5, the sermon has no mention as such, but we do have mention of "a lesson" and "a revelation" and "an interpretation" that could very well constitute sermons, in at least some cases. The "revelation" may more properly correspond to what we today would call a prophecy, and there are many congregations that provide opportunity for individuals to prophesy. Item 6, the minister, either with or without his robe, is hard to place in Paul's churches. We should note that Paul's list is of those things that "each one" contributes to the meeting, and there is no indication that any one person was assigned the task either of leading the worship or delivering the sermon, though I think it safe, in view of the many New Testament references to preaching and teaching, that both of these activities were pursued in the New Testament church of Paul.

Paul's lists also includes "tongues" that are not mentioned in my list from Chapter 4. Perhaps it should have been included, then we would have the perfect number, seven items instead of six. In Paul's churches everything, including tongues seems to have been spontaneous contributions as the Spirit moved the individuals in the congregation. We note, however, that at least in the church in Corinth, this spontaneity had resulted in much disorder, with different individuals speaking simultaneously, and Paul was seeking to bring them to order. Perhaps the structured services such as the church in the modern world displays grew out of the necessity for bringing order to the worship experience.

As I search for a key word to describe the worship experience in the New Testament churches of Paul, the word spontaneous comes first to mind, but then I see that he has both prescribed and proscribed elements of worship, so perhaps a key word candidate is structured. But these actions on Paul's part constitute a binding of this feature in his churches, so instead of structured I will choose a smaller word, "Bound."

8. Relation to the World

Under the Old Covenant, the people of Israel made a concerted effort to separate themselves from the Gentiles. It was essential, to prevent their backsliding into pagan ways and beliefs, to maintain a sharp separation. When Joshua led them into the Canaan, they proceeded to maintain this separation by any means, including the slaying of their pagan foes that inhabited the land before them. The fact is, however, that after all was said and done, they had indeed maintained the separation, but had in the process established but one more nation of the world, equivalent to a pagan nation that, like them, was created and sustain by bloodshed.

Modern Israel was created and maintains itself by this same worldly means.

When the first apostles moved out into the pagan world with their gospel, they sought to create and maintain precisely this same separation and relation to the pagan world. As in the case of ancient Israel, their motive was to maintain the purity of their life and doctrine. The apostolic message to the Corinthian church is the best example of how they thought about these things:

Be not mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or

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what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:14-18)

It is as clear here as it was in the days of Joshua that the intention of this separation was to separate the early Christians from their former pagan ways and idol worship. It was not a separation of Israel from pagan ways, but the separation of the church, the "new Israel" from the same sort of influences. It is precisely the same separation that the Church in the modern world maintains – a separation on the basis of religious and moral principles, yet one that leaves the individual free to maintain an association with the larger world and its patterns.

To its credit, the New Testament church did not succumb to the militarism of either the world or their Israelite predecessors in Canaan, for history bears them witness that they were close enough to the Lord to refuse military service. But they nevertheless maintained a fundamentally positive attitude toward the world and eventually succumbed completely to the world and its attachments by becoming, within four hundred years, the powerful church of early Catholicism, that not only was not separate from the world, but ruled the world in a worldly way, including first of all by the sword. Symbolic of the union that the church in the New Testament maintained with the world was the appearance of the symbol for Christ on the shields of Roman soldiers in the army of Constantine as he gained the victory in the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge. By that date, October 27, 312, there were many Christians serving in the army.

The seeds of the ultimate melding of the Church with the world were sown in the days of the Apostles. I believe the prime influence for this was that, from the beginning, the New Testament Christians failed to understand the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught and instituted it. They thought that God was going to give them the whole earth for their "Kingdom of God" just as he had given to Israel the Land of Canaan for their "Kingdom of God." This mood yet dominates the church in the modern world as I explained in Chapter 4. They finally came to believe that it could be instituted by military means, as in the days of Joshua, and thus they proceeded to claim the power of the Roman Empire when Constantine opened it up to them.

Perhaps Paul was more instrumental than any other single person in cementing this attachment to the world by his failure to realize the true nature of the distinctions that set the children of the world apart from the children of God. I say this because he maintained his Roman citizenship and utilized its privileges without hesitating. We see this by his example in Acts 22:27,28:

So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

Paul maintained and exercised the privileges of citizenship. Naturally the New Testament Church of Paul did the same without hesitation, and thus began the joining, at the chest, of the Church and the world. The individuals that compose the Church remain cemented to the world's most fundamental institution, the state; therefore their institutions, including the Church, also retain what is more than just a relationship, but an actual identity with the world.

The New Testament Christians were not becoming "not of the world" but were only separating themselves from their pagan neighbors in the expectation that God would move the nations of the world to become of them. Thus would come the Kingdom of God in all its glory. Of course, in view of the numbers that I set before you above, they have largely succeeded in achieving their goal. This is nowhere more obvious than in the democratic states of Twenty-first Century Christendom where the preaching of loyalty to both "God and country" is the norm. The creeping worldliness

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that began in the New Testament church of Paul and the apostles therefore was not in the least reluctant to take on the trappings of the world. One of our modern historians said it best:

Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome. (Durant, Caesar and Christ, p. 619, Simon and Schuster, © 1972)

There is a common theme that began in this New Testament Church of Paul and yet continues to dominate the thinking of churchmen worldwide, which is that the Christ will return to establish the perfect rule of God on the earth. They saw that this was God's gift to the early Israelites as they set up the Kingdom of God under David and Solomon; it must, they thought and still think, be repeated when Christ returns to rule the entire world. The minds of churchmen remained bound, therefore, to the system of the world in the New Testament Church of Paul and those minds continue to be so bound to this day.

The key word that best defines the relation of the early Christians in the New Testament Church of Paul to the world is bound." It is same word that describes the relation of the Modern Church to the world as set forth in Chapter IV.

9. Life

There is considerable evidence in the New Testament that Paul and the members of his churches sought to maintain an attitude of detachment from the life of this world. Many early disciples gave up their lives in this world for the sake of Christ, and so gave an eternal testament of their hatred of that life. Yet, there is almost complete absence of the rhetoric one would expect of those who maintained the attitude, with Jesus, of the hatred of life.

Paul did once write:

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Nevertheless, it clear that he failed to realize the enmity that exists between the attitude of the love of life and that of the hatred of life, as is clear in this quotation:

. . . while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (I Timothy 4:8)

This reveals the belief in his mind that the godliness that comes from the acceptance of the gospel and discipleship to Jesus has a positive relation to both the life in this world and the life eternal. That this is Paul's basic stance tends to be confirmed by the fact that he appealed to his Roman citizenship to avoid a beating or perhaps to save his life after his arrest at Jerusalem. (Acts 22:22-29)

There is only one more reference in the entire New Testament that gives any evidence that members of the New Testament Church recognized the crucial significance of a proper attitude toward life described in the Great Principle of Jesus:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death."

That this is the sole direct reference to the Great Principle outside the gospels demonstrates conclusively that the New Testament Christians maintained a positive attitude toward life in this

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world, following the influence of their founders, especially Paul. Chronologically they were still very close to their Lord, and had communication with those that had known the Lord and heard him teach. His Great Principle must then have been communicated to them, but only a few realized its significance so as to seal their faith in martyrdom. Paul could have done the very same, on numerous occasions, from the day of his arrest in Jerusalem to the times he saved his life from shipwreck. The record always shows Paul saving his life, never losing it. It does not even preserve for us how he finally died. Considering the crucial issue that was at stake, Paul had many opportunities to die a martyr, and by such a death would have given a glorious witness to the Great Principle of his Lord. That the Church has not preserved for us a reliable record of the manner of his death indicates very strongly that the Church did not comprehend the Great Principle. The shadowy tradition to the effect that he died a martyr at Rome in the latter sixties has no real substance. Were the tradition founded in truth, the early disciples would have moved heaven and earth to see that it was enshrined in the scriptural record. Why did Luke not complete the story in the Acts? We don't know but if, after all he endured, Paul yet died a coward, denying the faith, Luke would have had a very good reason to stop the story where he did.

As the key word, then, we can say with a fair degree of confidence that the attitude to life of the New Testament Church of Paul was positive.