

If Paul has a 'proprietary' program, as we have proposed, it would essentially mean he had a unique and distinctive approach to ecclesiology in addition to his different gospel and different ethic. His "church" would function under different rules, structures, and principles compared to other assemblies of Scripture. It would reflect his unique theological revelation, leading to a different ecclesiology, or understanding of the church and its functions.

Is there a Pauline ecclesiology? If so, how is it set apart from other assemblies?

A NEW THING

Christianity did not evolve from the Jewish synagogue, but was distinct, with its own rules and doctrines, as Paul envisioned a new entity separate from the synagogue. This is evident in the earliest source of church history, the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles.

Peter's congregation met in temples or synagogues and followed Jewish practices. Conversely, Paul's gatherings often took place outside synagogues, emphasizing a significant departure from Jewish traditions. Paul introduced teachings that diverged from the synagogue, such as salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, not Mosaic Law adherence.

In Ephesians 2:15-16, Paul rejected the need for adherence to the Mosaic Law for salvation, introducing a new church that is neither Jew nor Gentile. Paul's "ecclesia" represents a new entity, started by Paul himself based on his unique revelations.

NEW OFFICES

In the Pauline assembly, the Bishop and Deacon roles were the leadership offices, differing from the Jewish assembly. These offices, introduced by Paul, were not mentioned in the Old Testament or the Gospels. Paul's churches lacked roles akin to a priest or rabbi, highlighting his unique ecclesiology. Although Acts 6 mentions men assisting apostles, it doesn't establish an 'office' like Paul did. The Deacon role likely arose from a leadership need within congregations. Paul formalized this role with specific duties, differentiating it from any position in the Jewish synagogue.

NEW FUNDING

The Jewish temple system was funded by a 10% tax (tithe) on the produce of the Land of Israel, given to the Levites for the upkeep of the Temple. The "sect of the Nazarenes" under Peter sold their possessions and lived communally. The Pauline church, however, was funded through voluntary giving, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 9:7. This model differed from the obligatory Jewish tithing system and the communal arrangement of Peter's followers. Although local synagogues may have also relied on free will offerings, Paul introduced a distinct financial model for local churches, which also introduced the concept of a paid pastor, as advocated by Paul in his writings.

A FREE CHURCH

Paul introduced a "free church," a revolutionary idea that deviated from Jewish synagogue norms. Each local Pauline church congregation operated autonomously, making their own decisions on doctrine, practice, and governance. Membership was voluntary and worship, led by lay leadership, was simple with a central focus on preaching. The Pauline church differed greatly from the established Jewish system, replacing a priestly system with power vested in the local congregation. It was a radical shift reflecting Paul's theology.

The most significant aspect of Pauline churches was their independence from government. Unlike the Jewish system with a theocratic component, Paul advocated a church separate from governmental control. Paul's teachings emphasized a church functioning independently of state influence. This autonomy further highlighted the unique nature of Pauline ecclesiology. Paul spoke of living a Christian life in heaven and being subject to governing authorities, but recognized their limited roles.

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

In contrast to the Jewish assemblies, which had a rigidly structured worship involving Sabbath observances, holy days, and a fixed measure of sacrifices to be offered at specific times and places, the Pauline congregation was marked by freedom. There was no prescribed day, time, or even method of worship.

While Paul did establish certain guidelines for worship leadership, including gender restrictions, and emphasized the importance of orderliness in worship gatherings, his approach to ecclesiology represented a significant break from the established norms. His teaching concerning the gatherings of the body of Christ

was something entirely new and unique, not tied to the traditions of the Jewish synagogue. It is likely that attending a worship service in a Jewish synagogue and attending one of Paul's churches would have been vastly different experiences, akin to "night and day."

WHO ARE THE CHURCH?

The members of this "new man" Paul speaks of are a unique entity in themselves. They are not Israel, either physically or spiritually. The church is not a new Israel or a spiritual continuation of Israel. It is not bound by the Old Covenant nor does it replace or fulfill the promises made to the nation of Israel. It is a completely new entity, separate from Israel, with its unique identity, purpose, and destiny. That is, there is no degree of continuity between Israel and the church. Israel continued (even in a current state of blindness) as the church began.

The new man is also not a part of the New Covenant. The New Covenant, as prophesied in the Old Testament and sealed in Christ's blood is a covenant made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31). The church is neither the direct participant of nor the indirect beneficiary of the New Covenant. The church operates under a new dispensation of grace, not under the conditions of the New Covenant. A quick look at the description of the New Covenant would display the truth that the description of the New Covenant is nothing like the description of what God is doing today. Those who place the church under a New Covenant umbrella are simply practicing replacement theology, as the New Covenant belongs wholly to Israel.

Finally, the members of the new man are not the bride of Christ. The metaphor of the bride is often used in the Old Testament to describe the relationship between God and Israel. In the New Testament, a bridal analogy is used, albeit seldomly, to describe the relationship between the church and the Lord. Yet this is always analogy, and Paul never directly identifies the church as the bride of Christ. Instead, he speaks of the church as a body, with Christ as the head. Once again, the oft' used comments of the church as the "bride" (and, more oddly, as the "local bride") are simply forms of replacement theology.

In essence, the members of this "new man" are those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, or religious background. They are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Being a "new man," the church has no continuity with Israel. It is, as testified, a "new" being. God is currently working through the church, which is the body of Christ, and will someday rapture the church out of this world and begin working once again with Israel, the chosen ethnic people of God.

DOES THE CHURCH HAVE NEW ORDINANCES?

A common misconception that has been passed down through church history is the belief that the church has two "ordinances," namely baptism and the Lord's Supper. This assumption is so deeply ingrained that it is almost universally accepted by Protestant and evangelical denominations. However, this belief warrants closer examination, as it may not align with Paul's unique ecclesiology and his teachings about the church as a distinct entity.

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper have their origins in the Gospels and, though deeply rooted in Christian tradition, are neither unique to the church nor rooted in the church, but rather to Israel.

The term "ordinance" is commonly used to refer to practices like baptism and the Lord's Supper, suggesting that these practices are "ordained," or established by law. However, it is crucial to remember that the church, according to Pauline theology, is not under law but under grace. This distinction is fundamental to understanding the essence of the church. The church is not bound by legalistic requirements but is free to worship and express faith. The insistence on the term "ordinance" may reflect an ingrained human inclination towards legalism, a desire for concrete rules and regulations within the church. However, this inclination can potentially undermine the understanding of the church's true nature as free, operating under grace rather than law. Consequently, while the church continues to use the term "ordinance," it is not because these practices are scripturally declared as such, but perhaps because of an entrenched mindset that desires some form of "law" for the church.

Personally, I believe that we are not ordained to perform these two acts, nor are we ordained not to. These practices, while deeply rooted in Christian tradition, are not explicitly mandated in Paul's teachings regarding the church. It's crucial to understand that these practices, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are not prerequisites for salvation nor do they hold any salvific power. They are symbols, mere representations of spiritual experiences, and not sacraments that confer grace in and of themselves nor ordinances that place a person into an "obedience zone" with Christ.

If one chooses to observe baptism or the Lord's Supper, it should be done with great care, ensuring that the memorial aspect of these practices is well-communicated. These are simply methods of testimony and remembrance that we have devised to give a ceremonial aspect to our faith, a way to tangibly express and recall the basis of our faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

However, it is paramount that we avoid the pitfall of seeing these as checkboxes to be ticked off a list of Christian duties. In my opinion it would be better to avoid them altogether than have them become, in any manner, a step of obedience or a step toward sanctification in Christ.

BAPTISM

The ordinance of baptism is derived from the accounts of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River, as well as Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19 to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" This act, it is taught, signifies the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is often taught as "the first step of obedience" for a Christian.

However, it's crucial to note that Paul himself asserted that he did not come to baptize. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, he declares, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." This statement clearly differentiates baptism from the preaching of the gospel. Under Pauline theology, a believer's completion and identity are found in Christ, as stated in Colossians 2:10: "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." Therefore, a believer's obedience and spiritual standing are not contingent on the act of water baptism.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper, as observed in more evangelically minded churches, originates from the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples before His crucifixion. As described in Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." He then took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." This practice was further mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, where he quotes Jesus saying, "This do in remembrance of me."

While the Lord's Supper can be a beautiful symbolic reminder of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, it has also been a tremendous source of theological confusion. Throughout history, the church has been involved in deep debates about the meaning of the elements of bread and wine. These arguments have given rise to terms like "transubstantiation" and "consubstantiation".

During the Reformation, these debates became particularly heated. The Roman Catholic Church taught the doctrine of transubstantiation, the idea that the bread and wine used in the Eucharist actually become the body and blood of Christ. In contrast, Martin Luther, the initiator of the Reformation, proposed the concept of consubstantiation. According to this belief, the substance of Christ's body and blood coexist with the substance of the bread and wine in the Eucharist.

Moreover, different from both Catholic and Lutheran doctrines, some "radical reformers" like Huldrych Zwingli proposed a "memorial view". According to this perspective, the bread and wine are merely symbols that remind believers of Christ's sacrifice, and no change occurs in the elements themselves.

These differences in understanding the Lord's Supper demonstrate the wide range of interpretations that exist within the church, reflecting the complexities and nuances of Christian theology, but also reflecting the theological maze present in the minds of participants when the Lord's Supper is served. Could a church or a Christian be in a right-relationship with God and not observe the Lord's Supper in worship? Absolutely! This itself displays that the observance is a form of memorial and not an ordinance in any way.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Pauline ecclesiology represents a radical departure from both Judaism and the "little flock" of Peter. It redefines the concept of the church, breaking away from traditional Jewish practices and establishing a new entity, a "new man," that operates under grace and not under the law. This new entity is not bound by the traditions of the past, but is free to worship and express faith in its unique way. The teachings of Paul, as revealed in the New Testament, emphasize the distinct nature of this new entity, highlighting its unique identity, purpose, and destiny.