

Church Series – Nature of the Church

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, February 19, 2023

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

NOTE 1 – Last Sunday morning we addressed the following declaration of Christ...

Matthew 16:18b (NIV)

18 . . . I will build my church . . .

NOTE 2 – Those who were absent should review this sermon and its notes online at www.NewLifeBarre.org. For the sake of summary, this declaration of Christ established His intent to form and fashion an entity called the Church. This being said...

Q1. What is the Church of Christ?

Q2. What is its nature and function?

NOTE 3 – These are Q's we will address throughout the next several sessions. Let us begin with the following....

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Q. What do you think of when you hear the word CHURCH?

NOTE 1 – I am sure that the vast majority of individuals might think of a physical building or place of worship. The facility we are meeting in this morning is called a church, so such a response is perfectly understandable. However, the NT idea of the Church transcends this rather limited sentiment.

NOTE 2 – The word “church” (Gk. *ekklesia*) first appears in Matthew 16:18. The literal meaning of this term is a “called out assembly” and indicates the idea of a PEOPLE belonging uniquely to God. Thus, when we think of the Church of Christ, let us think of a divinely-ordained people v. a site or facility. So...

Q. What is the Church of Christ?

A. A PEOPLE belonging to Christ Jesus...

Q. What can be said of this people? Consider the following...

NOTE 3 – Though the ancients were familiar with the term *ekklesia* in varying political and/or social contexts, Christ spoke of His Church in contrast to other assemblies. In fact, His Church was to be something wholly new and different. One biblical commentator puts forth the following insight(s)...

NOTE 4 – “In the Church, Jesus would unite believing Jews and Gentiles to form a new family, temple and body (Eph. 2:11–3:12). In the Church, natural distinctions would be rendered unimportant and insignificant (Gal. 3:28). Though believers would meet in local congregations to worship and serve the Christ, they would ultimately belong to the Church Universal. Therefore, there is a oneness to the people of God (Eph. 4:1–6) that is to be expressed through unity and love (John 17:20–26).”

KEY – Those who would understand the character and nature of the Church must understand these elements...

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH PT. 1 (ALL PEOPLES)

The Church is a people comprised of believers from every nation, tribe and tongue: both Jew and Gentile alike.

NOTE 1 – I do not think we understand the revolutionary nature of this statement. We do well to recognize that for nearly two-thousand years (i.e., from the days of the Patriarchs to the Apostolic Church), the Jewish people believed themselves to be the sole people of God. To a degree, such a perspective is understandable....

NOTE 2 – The Jews were the chosen people, descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the ones set free by the hand of God during the Exodus, and theirs was the giving of the Law at Sinai. God led them for forty years in the wilderness, ensuring that they came into their inheritance in the days of Joshua. It was they who worshipped the One True God, dwelt amidst the Tabernacle, built the Temple, and received prophetic oracles throughout the centuries—oracles which signaled the affection and mercies of the Lord.

NOTE 3 – The apostle Paul touched upon their singular place before God w/ the following...

Romans 9:4b–5 (Re: the Jewish People)

4 Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

NOTE 4 – In time, the idea of God loving any people beyond the Jewish people became an unwelcome and foreign concept in Israel, met with revulsion and hostility. The Jews of Jesus' day maintained a deep hatred of the Samaritans (i.e., half-breed Jews) and Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews)...

KEY – Then Christ came and promised to build a people comprised of every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue...

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH PT. 2 (THE TEACHING OF CHRIST ET AL.)

KEY – The universal scope of the Church permeates the teaching (not to mention the ministry) of Christ...

Luke 13:22–30

22 Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

26 "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

28 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

John 10:14–16 (Emphasis Mine)

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have **other sheep** that are **not of this sheep pen**. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be **one flock** and **one shepherd**.”

Mark 16:15–16 (Emphasis Mine)

15 He said to them, “Go into **all** the world and preach the gospel to **all** creation. 16 **Whoever** believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Matthew 28:18–20 (Emphasis Mine)

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of **all** nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 (Emphasis Mine)

8 “ . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all **Judea** and **Samaria**, and to the **ends of the earth**.”

NOTE 1 – We see the outworking of His purpose in the Book of Acts: **a)** in Acts 8 Philip brings the gospel to Samaria wherein revival takes place; **b)** Philip brings the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch in the very same chapter; **c)** in Acts 10 Peter opens wide the door to the Gentiles re: Cornelius; **d)** and in Acts 13–28 the apostle Paul brings the Gospel to the ends of the earth (i.e., Rome) (cf. Acts 1:8 ABOVE)

NOTE 2 – In fact, it was Paul who penned the following statement re: the global nature of the Church of Christ!

Ephesians 2:11–22

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH PT. 3 (SIGNIFICANCE & APPLICATION)

Q1. To what degree do we understand the significance of this revolutionary reality?

Q2. Why should it matter to us that the Church is comprised of Jew and Gentile alike?

Q1. Who among you is of pure Jewish bloodline and descent?

Q2. What would be your fate if He chose to work exclusively via Jews?

Q3. How many of you rejoice that God has made a way for us all to enter in?

FYI – I sing the song of the Living Creatures and the 24 Elders of the Book of Revelation...

Revelation 5:9 (Emphasis Mine)

9 . . . “You [Christ] are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from **every** tribe and language and people and nation.”

Q. What nations (i.e., people groups) are present here this morning at New Life? [SHARE]

NOTE 1 – In reply to our overarching Q’s...

Q. What is Church and its nature?

NOTE 2 – We can put forth the following A...

A. The Church transcends a physical site or a grouping of believers. Rather, the Church of Jesus Christ is the people of God, comprised of all believers from every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue (i.e., Jew and Gentile alike).

KEY – Yet more must be said! Consider the following afresh and anew...

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH PT. 4 (NATURAL DISTINCTIONS)

NOTE 1 – Though ancient peoples were familiar with the term *ekklesia* in varying political or social contexts, Jesus spoke of His Church in contrast to other assemblies. In fact, His Church was to be something entirely new and different. In the Church, Christ would unite believing Jews and Gentiles to form a new family, temple and body (Eph. 2:11–3:12). In the Church, natural distinctions would be rendered unimportant and insignificant (Gal. 3:28).

Q. What does it mean that “natural distinctions would be rendered unimportant and insignificant”?

A. We have noted that the distinction of race (i.e., Jew v. Gentile) became irrelevant for entry into the Church. Yet other distinctions, those elements that naturally divide and/or tribalize us, would also become irrelevant. This precept is perhaps expressed best by the apostle Paul...

Galatians 3:26–28 (REPEAT)

26 . . . in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Q. What is Paul teaching in this passage?

- A1.** Entry into the Church was and is NOT limited to one nationality (Jew v. Gentile).
- A2.** Entry into the Church was and is NOT limited to one socio-economic level (Slave v. Free).
- A3.** Entry into the Church of Christ was and is NOT limited to one particular gender (Men v. Women).

NOTE 2 – These would have been radical propositions in antiquity. Consider the following selection or quote....

QUOTE – The Church “violated every accepted societal norm. It would be common to walk into an ancient church and find a Roman centurion (a leader amongst men) being instructed by a lowly soldier, and that with great joy (knowing that the soldier was of greater maturity in Christ than he). It would be common to find the great and the prestigious of the world breaking bread and sharing the Lord’s Supper with those who were deemed insignificant by the standards of society. You would find women learning of the Lord, functioning in the spiritual gifts along with the men. You would see Jew and Gentile united in worship. It was truly a people of all peoples!”

NOTE 3 – I cannot help but think of the words of Peter on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Joel 2)...

Acts 2:17–18 (Emphasis Mine)

- 17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on **all** people.
 Your **sons** and **daughters** will prophesy, your **young men** will see visions,
 your **old men** will dream dreams.
- 18 Even on my **servants**, both **men** and **women**,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.”

NOTE 4 – Under the OT, the working of the Spirit amidst the people was limited to kings, priests and prophets. However, in the NT Church, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all of the people of God (e.g., young and old, men and women, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, etc.). The old divisions have no bearing upon the workings of Christ both in and through His people!

- Q. How would you feel if God welcomed only Jews? (STAND)**
- Q. How would you feel if God welcomed only the men? (STAND)**
- Q. How would you feel if God welcomed only the wealthy? (STAND)**
- Q. How would you feel if He welcomed only the young or old? (STAND)**

KEY – We do well to understand that the Church of Christ is the people of God, comprised of all believers from every nation, tribe and tongue; both Jew and Gentile alike. It is made up of all peoples, regardless of race, gender, age and social status! All who call upon the Lord shall be saved and shall become part of His Church (i.e., His family, temple and body in the earth). Next Sunday we will address these latter elements in greater detail.

Q. What does it mean that we are his Family, Body, Temple . . . and eventual Bride.

CONCLUSION 1

Q. Would you stand with me as we close our service?

KEY – We are going to close with worship. This is your opportunity to commit to Christ.

POST (PW) – Those who wish to linger or receive prayer may feel free to do so. As we depart from this place...

CONCLUSION 2

NOTE 1 – Feel free to give either in person or online at www.NewLifeBarre.org.

NOTE 2 – Feel free to participate in our “beyond-Sunday” ministries (MM, WM, Study).

NOTE 3 – Please remember that “Potluck Supper” is next Sunday AM following our Service

2 Corinthians 13:14

14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.