

Church Series – Images

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, February 26, 2023

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – Last Sunday morning we addressed the question: “What is the Church of Christ?” (cf. Matt. 16:18b). Those who were away would do well to review this sermon and its notes online at www.NewLifeBarre.org. However, for the sake of summary, let us note the following concerning the Church...

NOTE 2 – The Church is the people of God, comprised of believers from every nation, tribe and tongue throughout space and time. It is made up of all peoples, regardless of race, gender, age and/or social status! All who call upon the Lord shall be saved and shall find entry into His Church.

NOTE 3 – This morning I would like to explore several images utilized in Scripture to define and describe both the nature and function of the Church. We do well to consider the following four images and how each finds application in life and living (i.e., individually and collectively).

#1 – THE FAMILY OF GOD

FIRSTLY, Scripture characterizes the Church as the family of God. Let us begin with the following...

NOTE 1 – The Gospel of John proclaims that those who believe in Christ uniquely become the children of God. Of course, every human being made in the image of God is a child of God through creation. However, there is a distinct relational status conferred upon those who become children by faith...

John 1:12–13 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the **right to become children of God**— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

NOTE 2 – The apostle John understood the gravity of being brought and adopted into the household of God.....

1 John 3:1a

1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

NOTE 3 – I wonder the degree to which we should understand Jesus’ call to be born again (recorded by John) through the filter or lens of spiritual adoption. You see, to the ancients an adopted individual was deemed born again, as placement into a new family signaled the beginning of a new life. Is this not what happened to us when we first believed? We became new creations via new familial connection!

KEY 1 – Let us realize that there is great benefit in this spiritual adoption...

Romans 8:15b–17a (Emphasis Mine)

15 . . . the [Holy] Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “**Abba**, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are **heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ** . . .

Q. Of course, if we are all children of God what does that make us by extension?

A. Spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ (i.e., members of the same spiritual family)...

NOTE 4 – The apostle Paul touches upon this reality in his Letter to the Ephesian people!

Ephesians 2:19 (Emphasis Mine)

19 Consequently, you [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also **members of his household** . . .

KEY 2 – The Church, therefore, is neither a place you go to nor an organization to which you join. Rather, it is a spiritual family to which you belong and a household wherein you are loved. This reality is to be made manifest in the way we treat one another, for the Lord desires a healthy family...

NOTE 5 – Let us talk about healthy families and the applications thereof...

1) Stable – Healthy families are built on the foundation of stable parents. We are built on the Person of J. Christ.

Matthew 16:18b

18 . . . and on this rock [i.e., the truth that Jesus is immutably the Christ and Son of God] I will build my church.

Hebrews 13:8

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

2) Love – Healthy families love (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Love is the indicator that we belong to Christ and one another.

John 13:35 (Christ Speaking)

35 "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

1 Corinthians 13:4–8

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.

3) Sacrificial – Healthy families practice mutual sacrifice. We are to practice selflessness.

Acts 2:42–47

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32–35

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Galatians 6:2

2 Carry [bear] each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

4) Encouraging – Healthy families are sources of encouragement. The same must be said of the Church.

1 Thessalonians 5:11b

... encourage one another and build each other up ...

Hebrews 3:13a (Emphasis Mine)

13 ... encourage one another **daily** ...

5) Comforting – Healthy families are sources of comfort. The same must be said of the Church.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

6) Patient – Healthy families practice patience. We are called to practice patience.

Ephesians 4:1–2

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

7) Conflict – Healthy families properly navigate conflict (cf. Matt. 18:15–17) and practice forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Q1. To what degree are you practically connected to your family in Christ?

Q2. To what degree are you deriving benefit from your brothers and sisters?

Q3. To what degree are you serving the needs of your s. brothers and sisters?

#2 – THE BODY OF CHRIST

SECONDLY, Scripture characterizes the Church as the Body of Christ. Let us begin with this selection...

QUOTE – “When Christ entered our world, He took on a physical body ‘prepared’ for Him (Heb. 10:5; Phil. 2:7). Through His physical body, Jesus demonstrated the love of God, proclaimed the truth of God and performed the works of God, clearly, tangibly and boldly—especially through His sacrificial death on the Cross (Rom. 5:8). After His Ascension, Christ continues His work in the world through those He has redeemed. The Church now demonstrates the love of God, proclaims the truth of God and performs the work of God, clearly, tangibly and boldly. In this way, the Church functions as the Body of Christ.”

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING STORY...

ILL – A WW2 soldier came across a statue of Christ that had been impacted via bombardment or shelling. According to the story, the statue was fully intact, save for hands and feet that had been broken off. The young soldier, evidently a believer, found a nearby board and scrawled the following upon it (i.e., placing it near the base of the statue: “Now we are the hands and feet of Christ.”

Q1. To what degree are you and I the hands and feet of Christ in the earth?

Q2. To what degree are we committed to carrying on the mission of our Lord?

Q3. To what degree do we see the mission of Christ Jesus as our “own” mission?

Luke 4:18–19 (Emphasis Mine)

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

NOTE 1 – Paul draws upon the imagery of the human body to describe the nature and function of the Church...

Romans 12:3–8

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

NOTE 2 – Our bodies are comprised of differing yet interdependent parts (i.e., each having unique function). So it is with the Body of Christ. We are all wildly different with varying functions, yet we are one in Christ. Since we all have a unique part to play, so let us both humbly and dutifully play it unto the Lord. Moreover, let us not despise those who form a different part of the Body (i.e., as Paul notes in the following)...

1 Corinthians 12:14–27

14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Q1. Do you realize that you have a particular function in the greater Body? Are you playing it?

Q2. To what degree do you esteem those with a differing role? Enjoying healthful interconnection?

#3 – THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

THIRDLY, Scripture characterizes the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Note...

1 Corinthians 3:16 (Emphasis Mine)

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are **God's temple** and that **God's Spirit dwells [in you]**?

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (Emphasis Mine)

19 Do you not know that your bodies are **temples of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

NOTE 1 – This is a most difficult image for us to grasp as it relies upon a firm grasp of OT history. Please allow me a few moments to summarize approximately one-thousand-plus years of OT history, beginning with the Book of Exodus...

1) The Tabernacle of Moses

In the Book of Exodus, God gave Moses and the newly-freed children of Israel the blueprints for a portable place of worship (i.e., Tabernacle). This was to be a sacred place for the community of faith, as the presence of the Lord would uniquely manifest within. The Tabernacle communicated the desire of the Lord to be with and amidst His people; quite literally the center of their world. However, there was a problem...

Though the Lord was present with His people, there was still a high degree of separation due to human sin. The vast majority of the population had no access to the presence of God, as it was sequestered to a chamber located in the inner portions of the Tabernacle called the Holy of Holies—a chamber literally blocked off by a thick veil. In fact, only one portion, once a year, had access to that room to make a particular offering (H.P.). Though God was truly with His people, sin still severed humanity from His holy, glorious presence.

2) The Temple of David or Solomon

Many years after the days of Moses, David had the idea of building a grand Temple for the Lord. It seemed wrong to David that he should dwell in a palace while God remained in a tent. Thus, beginning with David and culminating under his son, Solomon, a glorious Temple was built (following the fundamental design given by God at Sinai). This Temple was a sacred place of worship and praise, and it would come to house the presence or glory of the Lord (cf. 1 Ki. 8:11; 2 Chron. 5:14)!

Yet there was still a problem, in that there was still a Holy of Holies and a veil shutting out sinful humanity. Once again, only one man, once a year, had access to the throne room of God on earth. Though the Temple was far more luxurious than the Tabernacle, the same issue remained.

3) Christ Jesus

Centuries later, God the Son took human flesh and made His dwelling among us. This was the closest man had ever been to God, as everyone and anyone could speak with, touch and directly engage with Christ Jesus. However, there was still a separation, in that His flesh functioned as a veil or curtain in itself; the glory of God contained within could not be made manifest due to human sin. Yet something remarkable is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew upon His death...

Matthew 27:50–51 (Emphasis Mine)

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the **curtain** of the temple was **torn** in two from top to bottom.

NOTE 2 – With the death of Christ and the tearing of the curtain, the presence of God was free to engage humanity in a new, unprecedented manner. The death of Christ provides a level of access to God beyond the hopes of any who longed for the presence of the Lord...

1 Corinthians 3:16 (Emphasis Mine)

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells [**in you**]?

Q1. What is the dwelling place of God now in our world?

Q2. What is the unique residence of the Lord in the earth?

A. In the hearts of those who are joined to God by faith in Christ.

Q. What impact does this have? Practical application(s)?

A1. We are to function (i.e., individually and collectively) as a house of prayer...

Matthew 21:13 (cf. Isa. 56:7)

"It is written," he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,'"

A2. We are to function (i.e., individually and collectively) as a house of praise and worship...

1 Peter 2:4–5, 9b (Emphasis Mine)

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house [temple of the Spirit] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . 9 . . . you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may **declare the praises** of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

A3. The Church (i.e., both individually and collectively) is to live in holiness by the Spirit.

NOTE 3 – This latter sentiment is the direct application in the writings of Paul (i.e., immorality)...

1 Corinthians 6:18a, 19–20

18 Flee from sexual immorality. . . . 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

#4 – THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

FINALLY, the Church of Christ is deemed to be the eventual Bride of Christ. Consider the following...

QUOTE – “The Church is likened unto the Bride of Christ throughout the New Testament scriptures. In fact, the union between a man and a woman in marriage symbolizes the mystical union that Christ shall have with His Church (the universal community of faith).” Note the words of Paul on the matter...

Ephesians 5:25–27

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

KEY – Whatever this image communicates, it communicates the deepest union between Christ and His people!

NOTE 1 – The challenge of this term is that it has a future-tense application (v. the current operation of the Church as His Family, Body and Temple). The Church is not yet His Bride, but shall become so upon His Return. The Book of Revelation, penned by John, indicates the marital union of Christ and His people...

Revelation 19:6–8

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people).

Q. What applications can we derive from this “not yet” imagery?

NOTE 2 – We do well to understand a bit re: the culture in which the New Testament scriptures were penned. Of note, there was a betrothal period during which the bride-to-be and the bridegroom were separated. Whereas the bridegroom was to go forth and prepare a place (i.e., home) for his future bride, the future bride was to remain both faithful and watchful of his coming. In time, the groom would appear after his work to collect his bride, commencing the wedding feast and the marital union. Blessed was the one who was found faithful and readied for his coming! Cursed was the unfaithful and/or unprepared woman!

NOTE 3 – The Church is currently in the midst of an extended betrothal period (i.e., app. two-thousand years)! Christ has gone forth to heaven to prepare a place for us (i.e., the rightful work of the groom). We are to remain both faithful and watchful until His Return, keeping holy and prepared for His Coming. This is why He commands us to remain faithful and watchful in numerous Gospel accounts (e.g., Matt. 24–25).

Q1. Are you “keeping your garments clean” (i.e., faithful to Him)?

Q2. Are you watchful for His Coming and Return (i.e., watchful or ready)?

SUMMATIONS

Q. What is the Church of Christ?

A. The Church is the people of God, comprised of believers from every nation, tribe and tongue throughout space and time. It is made up of all peoples, regardless of race, gender, age and/or social status! All who call upon the Lord shall be saved and find entry into His Church (i.e., the family of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, and glorious Bride upon His Return).

CONCLUSION

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, B.S.).

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.