

Church 2023: Nature & Function

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, March 12 & 19, 2023

INTRODUCTION

In recent weeks we have noted the following concerning the nature and function of the Church of Jesus Christ:

NOTE 1 – The Church is the people of God, comprised of believers from every nation, tribe and tongue through space and time. It is made up of all peoples, regardless of race, gender, age or social standing. All who call upon the Lord shall be saved and find entry into His Church, becoming the Family of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit in the earth.

NOTE 2 – As this series moves to a close, let us elaborate upon the nature and function of the Church of Christ.

Q. What are the core purposes of the Church? For what ends do we exist?

#1 – WORSHIP

FIRSTLY, the Church of Christ was established for the purpose of WORSHIP...

FYI – The Church, as a community of worshippers (identity), is to be an agency of worship unto God (activity).

Q. Do you know that God seeks for genuine worship and worshipers?

John 4:23 (NIV) [Christ Speaking to the Samaritan Woman at the Well]

23 . . . a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

NOTE 1 – The ancients thought worship was about external ceremony and matters of geography (Jerusalem). Such notions still prevail if we are honest! We still make it about what we wear and where we gather, etc. Jesus, however, proclaimed that real worship was about the expression of the human spirit or heart, informed by biblical truth apprehended by the mind (i.e., heart and mind working together to communicate reverence, affection and adoration). Let it be said that...

NOTE 2 – There is a place for the human heart in worship; for passion and emotion. Without *spirit*, we are left with dry formalism and dead ritual. There is also a place for the human mind, for we must know something of the One we worship (e.g., He transcends the earthly temples or locations we associate Him with). Without *truth*, we are often left with unscriptural emotionalism, etc.

KEY 1 – The Church exists for true worship...

1 Peter 2:4–5, 9 (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 [i.e., 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.

NOTE 3 – The Early Church demonstrated a commitment to such worship...

1) Worship Was a Daily Function of the Church

Acts 2:46–47a (NLT, Emphasis Mine)

46 They **worshiped** together at the Temple **each day**, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while **praising** God . . .

2) The Church Worshipped Despite Verbal and Physical Persecution

Acts 5:41 (NIV, Emphasis Mine) [Post-Flogging]

41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Acts 16:22–25a (Emphasis Mine) [In Philippi Post-Exorcism]

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing hymns** to God . . .

3) The Lord Selected People for Ministry in the Context of Worship

Acts 13:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 **While they were worshipping** the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

4) The Early Church Worshipped God for His Working in the Earth

Acts 21:17–20a (Emphasis Mine) [Post-Missionary Journeying]

17 When we [i.e., Paul, Luke and their Missionary Companions] arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 When they heard this, **they praised God...**

KEY 2 – The Early Church knew they were made to worship and lived a lifestyle of worship accordingly. Do we?

Q1. To what degree are we given to genuine and daily worship?

Q2. To what degree is such worship present in our highs and lows?

Q3. To what degree do we experience the presence of God in wors.?

Q4. To what degree are we moved to expression by the One we serve?

QUOTE – “To worship God is to recognize His worth or worthiness; to look God-ward, and to acknowledge in all appropriate ways (e.g., singing, shouting, dancing, hands uplifted, kneeling, laying prostrate, etc.) the value of what we see.” –J. I. Packer

#2 – DISCIPLESHIP

SECONDLY, the Church of Christ was established for the purpose of DISCIPLESHIP...

FYI – The Church, as an assemblage of disciples (identity), is called to make disciples (activity).

1) The Lord Desires Disciples v. Converts

NOTE 1 – Christ does not desire a lukewarm people characterized by passive allegiance. Rather, He wants followers who strive to become like Him in all things (i.e., despite the cost). The term *disciple* speaks to a follower or student, indicating both dedication and loyalty. Christ was exceedingly clear concerning the cost of being His disciple...

Luke 9:57–62

57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

59 He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

61 Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” 62 Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Luke 14:25–26

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 16:24

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

NOTE 2 – The ancients who first heard such words would have understood this point well. Romans forced criminals to carry their cross as a sign of submission to Rome. Picking up your cross and following Christ indicates a complete sense of surrender to Him; unto death. Thus, there is no room for any form of Christianity which espouses “easy-believism.”

KEY 1 – Want to know one of the biggest issues in the modern church? It is FULL of converts and FEW disciples.

2) The Lord Calls His Disciples to Make Disciples

NOTE 3 – Those who are growing in the Lord as disciples are expected to help others grow as disciples. Note....

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.”

NOTE 4 – The Early Church took this call quite seriously. How seriously? Note this moment of Paul’s work...

Acts 20:7–11

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. 9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. 10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” 11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.

NOTE 5 – Figures like Paul gave themselves to the work of making disciples...

Colossians 1:28–29

28 He [Christ] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

1 Corinthians 11:1

1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

NOTE 6 – Figures like Paul gave themselves to the work of making disciples who in time would disciple others...

2 Timothy 2:1–2

1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

KEY 2 – We are here only because generations before us labored to make disciples...

Q1. Who disciplined you?

Q2. Who are you discipling?

Q. When will the work of discipleship end?

Matthew 28:18–19a, 20b (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, . . . 20 . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, **to the very end of the age.**”

Ephesians 4:11b–16 (Emphasis Mine)

11 . . . Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Q1. To what degree are you engaged in living as a disciple of C.?

Q2. To what degree are you engaged in the work of discipleship?

#3 – FELLOWSHIP

THIRDLY, the Church of Christ was established for the purpose of FELLOWSHIP...

FYI – The Church, as a vital company of believers (identity), is called to live in fellowship (activity).

NOTE 1 – The term *fellowship* is not a common term in our generation (i.e., slipped out of cont. vernacular)...

Q. What is *fellowship*?

A. The Greek term for *fellowship* is *koinonia*, which means a “close mutual association.” The term suggests a deep connection between parties; a relational bond or companionship characterized by the sharing of life experiences and a common cause; an abiding union or sense of communion.

ILL. – The Fellowship of the Ring (i.e., nine disparate figures bound together in common mission and purpose)!

NOTE 2 – The Church was designed to be a brotherhood of deep connection; a community wherein relational bonds and companionship flourished, made manifest by the sharing of life experiences and a common cause; a context wherein union with Christ and with one another would proliferate...

KEY – The Early Church modeled such fellowship, community and connection...

Acts 2:42–47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

NOTE 3 – Such spiritual connection or unity is made possible only through the work of Christ (binding agent)....

Ephesians 4:1–6

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. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

NOTE 4 – Such spiritual connection or unity is made possible only through the shared call of Christ (purpose)....

Matthew 28:18–20

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.”

Q. To what degree do we understand our nature and function in this arena?

#4 – SERVICE

FOURTHLY, the Church of Christ was established for the purpose of SERVICE...

FYI – The Church, as a body of servants (identity), is called to serve in the Name of Christ (activity).

Q. What does it mean to serve?

A. To render aid to those in need as a manifestation of Jesus' sacrificial love and compassion.

NOTE 1 – The Early Church demonstrated a commitment to serve one another and the world at large...

1) Supernatural Working(s) to Alleviate Need

Acts 2:43

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles [and later by numerous others beyond the apostolic band].

Q. What types of miracles were in play?

A. The casting out of demons; healing the sick; raising the dead, etc.

NOTE 2 – Each miraculous sign worked to alleviate the pain and suffering experienced by another! Scriptural miracles centered upon meeting the real needs of real people, that they might know and perceive the compassion of the Lord. Consider the following...

Acts 3:1–8

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

2) Natural Working(s) to Alleviate Human Need

Acts 2:44–45

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 2:9–10 (Emphasis Mine) [Paul w/ Church Elders]

9 James, Cephas [Peter] and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to **remember the poor**, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

Q. Why was the Early Church moved to such service?

A1. Perhaps because a great many of them had been personally impacted by the example of Christ Himself! Jesus modeled a lifestyle of sacrificial service and the meeting of human need. After all, if their Lord and Master was willing to wash feet and feed the hungry, how could they not strive to serve?

A2. Perhaps because the teaching of Christ was alive in their hearts and minds re: service. Who could hear the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the lips of Jesus and not feel the compulsion to help their neighbor in need? Who could listen to the Separating of the Sheep and the Goats (cf. Matt. 25) and not feel a sense of responsibility for how they treated the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the homeless or the prisoner?

A3. Perhaps because they personally knew of Jesus' death and sacrifice to help a lost world in need. A great many within the Early Church knew of the Christ who gave Himself up close and personal. How could they not follow in His sacrificial footsteps by showing concern for the very thing Jesus came to save (i.e., ppl. in need)?

Q. To what degree are we moved by the example, teaching and sacrifice of Christ?

Q1. Who can you serve in your family?

Q2. Who can you serve in your workplace?

Q3. Who can you serve in your l. community?

Q4. Who can you serve within this very church?

Q1. What have you to give to those around you?

Q2. What time, talents or gifts might you offer?

Romans 12:6–8

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.

Q1. How might your service impact people for Christ?

Q2. How might your service impact you as a Christian?

ILL. – The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa -- the city of his birth -- but only on condition that the instrument never be played upon. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The moldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.

#5 – EVANGELISM

FIFTHLY, the Church of Christ was established for the purpose of global EVANGELISM...

FYI – The Church, as a cloud of witnesses (identify), is meant to proclaim the Gospel of Christ (activity).

Mark 16:15

15 [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel [i.e., good news] to all creation.”

NOTE 1 – We are meant to share the good news that in Christ there is pardon for sin and restoration to God (i.e., for time and eternity). We are those who lovingly call people from darkness and sin to light and life, declaring that message outlined in the Gospel of John...

John 3:16–17

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

NOTE 2 – We are those who have been given an eternity-changing message and ministry...

2 Corinthians 5:17–21 (Emphasis Mine)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the **message of reconciliation**. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

NOTE 3 – Consider that figures like Paul shared the gospel both tirelessly and without shame...

Colossians 1:28–29

28 He [i.e., Jesus] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Romans 1:16a

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, [for] it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Q. To what degree do you live by such words? (PERSONALIZE)...

Colossians 1:28–29 (Emphasis Mine)

28 He [i.e., Jesus] is the one that I proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that I may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Romans 1:16a (Emphasis Mine)

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, [for] it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Q. To what degree do we recognize our accountability before God in this grand task?

1 Corinthians 9:16b (Emphasis Mine)

16 . . . **Woe** to me if I do not preach the gospel!

NOTE 4 – The Early Church was committed to the task of evangelism...

Acts 2:42a, 47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching . . . and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

NOTE 5 – Certainly the teaching of the apostles included the gospel if people were daily being saved! Moreover, the very context of Acts occurs immediately after Peter proclaims the message of Christ on the day of Pentecost, with three-thousand being added to the Church that day!

NOTE 6 – In Acts 3, subsequent to the healing of a crippled beggar, Peter clearly preaches the gospel message to Jewish spectators. This would result in opposition, as Peter and John were brought before the Jewish ruling council as to the healing and their message. What did Peter share with this ruling council? Note...

Acts 4:12

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

NOTE 7 – After being warned to no longer preach in the Name of Jesus, consider their reply...

Acts 4:19b–20

19 . . . Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

NOTE 8 – Upon their dismissal, they and the other disciples prayed for God to give them capacity to preach...

Acts 4:23–24a, 29–31

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God . . . 29 Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

NOTE 9 – In Acts 5, the apostles were all imprisoned for their ministry. Consider what transpired...

Acts 5:20

18 They [i.e., Jewish ruling council] arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." 21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

Q. What happened after the religious leaders discovered their breakout and further preaching?

Acts 5:27–28a, 29–32

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name.” . . . 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

NOTE 10 – After determining to flog these disciples and further command their silence, this takes place...

Acts 5:41–42 (Emphasis Mine)

41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 42 **Day after day**, in the temple courts and from house to house, **they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.**

NOTE 11 – In Acts 8, persecution scattered the Jerusalem-based disciples throughout both Judea and Samaria. What did the Early Church do wherever they were scattered? They began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ...

Acts 8:4 (Emphasis Mine)

4 Those who had been scattered **preached** the word **wherever** they went.

NOTE 12 – In time, revival would hit Samaria and impact Ethiopia through the ministry of Philip (i.e., Philip who was originally called on to help distribute food)! It turns out that God can use any vessel who is willing to be used in His great work!

NOTE 13 – In Acts 10, we read of Peter preaching the gospel to a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He and his whole household were saved in kind, fully opening the door for the gospel to spread beyond the confines of Israel and the Jewish people. It is in Acts 10 that the disciples begin to realize that Jesus was serious about reaching “all the world” (cf. Matt. 28; Mark 16). In fact, the remainder of the Book of Acts chronicles the missionary exploits of the apostle Paul and his band of peers, all the way to Rome!

KEY 1 – The Early Church was committed to the work of evangelism. Are we?

Q1. To what degree do we understand the gospel?

Q2. To what degree do we prepare to share the gospel?

Q3. To what degree do we pray for opportunity to proclaim?

Q4. To what degree do we overcome inherent fears or hesitancy?

KEY 2 – Let us close with the words of a spiritual giant of Christendom...

QUOTE – “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.” C. H. Spurgeon

SUMMATIONS

Q. What is the nature and function of the Church?

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 or social standing. All who call upon the Lord shall be saved and find entry into His Church, becoming the Family of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit in the earth. The Church exists for the purposes of Christ-Centered Worship, Discipleship, Fellowship, Service and Evangelism.

KEY – May this be true of New Life in this hour! If not now, when?

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.).

NOTE 3 – Potluck Supper taking place next Sunday after Service. May the Lord bless you...

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.