



# What's the Church all about?

Part 007 - Form and Function - A biblical View

## INTRODUCTION

An understanding of form and function is fundamental to how we understand the purpose, mission and shape of the church we are part of.

Our experience largely shapes our understanding of, and dedication to, the forms our churches take.

## I. FORM AND FUNCTION ILLUSTRATED

**Function = an activity that needs to be performed**  
**Form = the method chosen to carry out the function**

## II. FORM AND FUNCTION IN THE CHURCH

### A. Church Functions

The New Testament includes many commands, laws, instructions, precepts, prohibitions, and principles that the church must carry out. These functions are timeless and supra cultural.

QUESTION:

CAN YOU COME UP WITH SOME EXAMPLES OF CHURCH FUNCTIONS?

### B. Forms

Church forms include all the structures, traditions, methods, and procedures that the church chooses in order to carry out the functions in a particular age, culture, or situation.

These forms can and do vary greatly among local churches—resulting in many acceptable forms for every church function.

QUESTION:

CAN YOU COME UP WITH SOME EXAMPLES OF CHURCH FORMS?

### C. Form and Function Together

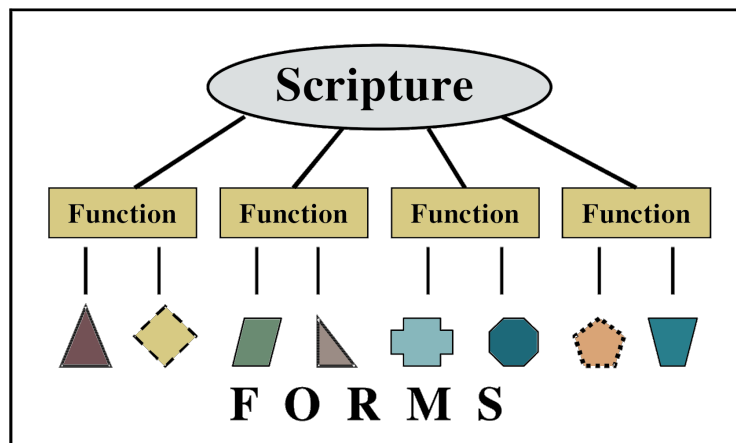


Figure 1

**QUESTION:**

**CAN YOU THINK OF SOME FUNCTIONS THAT HAVE DIFFERENT FORMS IN DIFFERENT CULTURES / TIMES IN HISTORY?**

**III. EVALUATING FORM AND FUNCTION IN THE CHURCH**

It can be difficult to distinguish between forms and functions in the church unless we take the time to analyse them.

In the following chart, a number of functions are listed on the left, and some of the many possible forms of each are on the right.

Table - Forms and Functions

Biblical Function	Possible Form
Prayer	Keeling or Standing
	Silently or Aloud
	Small Group or Individual
	Before Meal or at close of Service
	Confession or Supplication
Teaching the Word	Sermon
	Small Groups
	Bible Study
	Family Devotions
Evangelise	Friendship Evangelism
	Crusades
	Altar Call in Service

Please note that the list of forms on the right side of the chart is not exhaustive—there are many, many other possibilities.

**IN THE TABLE BELOW, TWO SAMPLE BIBLICAL FUNCTIONS ARE LISTED. TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO FILL IN POSSIBLE FORMS ON THE RIGHT SIDE. THEN COMPARE YOUR IDEAS WITH OTHERS IN THE GROUP.**

Function Vs Form

Function	Form
<b>Give</b>	

Function	Form
Worship	

IN THE TABLE BELOW, A NUMBER OF FORMS ARE LISTED ON THE RIGHT SIDE. FOR EACH FORM, DECIDE WHAT BIBLICAL FUNCTION IT FULFILS AND WRITE THAT IN ON THE LEFT SIDE. THEN COMPARE AND DISCUSS YOUR RESPONSES.

### Forms Vs Functions

Function	Form
	Youth Camp
	Church Prayer Meeting
	Church Choir
	Passing an Offering Round
	Church Buildings
	Music in Services
	Kid's Church
	Church order of service
	Reading Poetry in Church

## IV. PRINCIPLES REGARDING FORM AND FUNCTION

### A. The Function Is More Important Than the Form

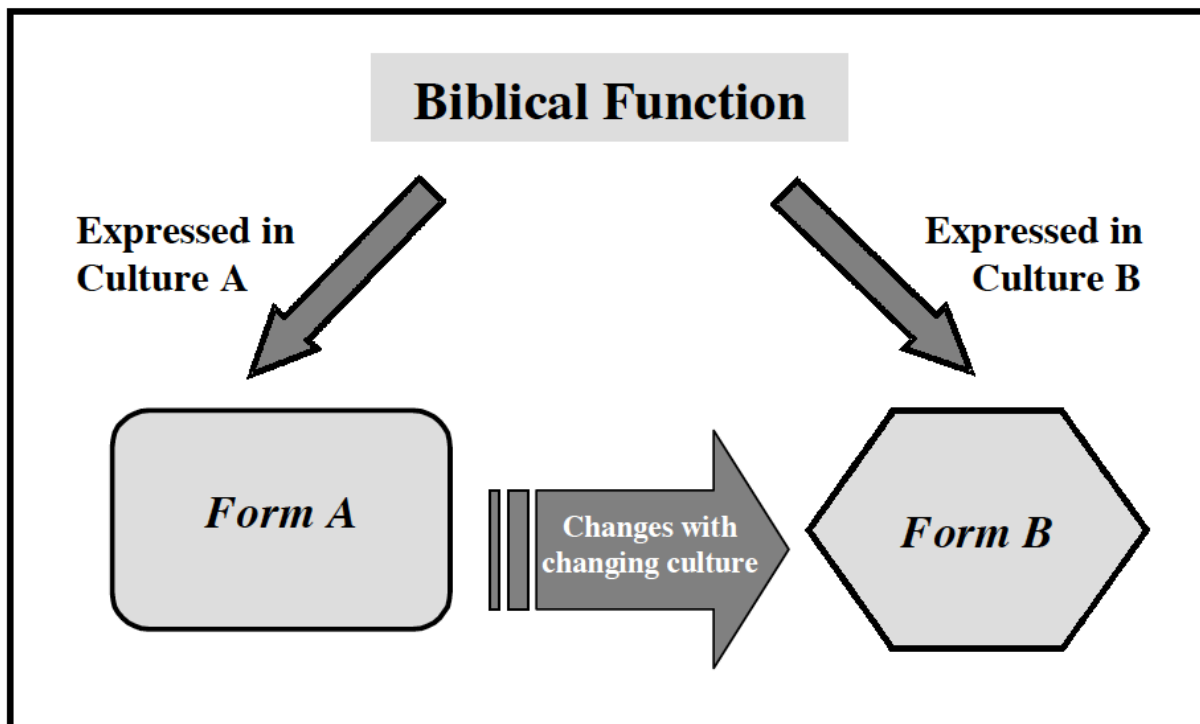
In the Bible, functions are stressed. Jesus was more interested in function than in form. Those who gave Christ the most resistance were those who were addicted to form, rituals and traditions. Forms are not usually prescribed in the Bible.

### B. **Functions Are Absolute and Trans-Cultural; Forms Are Non-Absolute and Variable**

When forms are described in the Bible, we see changes being made in them.

The forms that are described in certain passages are changed or left out in others. They vary from situation to situation.

- Stewardship (1Co 16:1-2; 2Co 8-9)
- Spiritual gifts (1Co 12-14; Ro 12; Eph 4)
- Discipline of church members (Mt 18; 1Co 5; 2Co 2)
- Baptism (Mt 28; Ro 6; Ac 1)
- Day of Worship (Ex 20:8; Ac 20:7)
- Church government (1Ti 3; Tit 1; 1Pe 5)



**QUESTION:**

**HOW WOULD THIS PRINCIPLE AFFECT THE WAY YOU DEVELOP FORMS IN YOUR CHURCH, BASED ON SCRIPTURE?**

### **C. People Often Identify More with the Forms Than with the Function**

It is unfortunate, but people tend to get attached to the form and miss the function.

They can perpetuate forms that have lost vitality in their respective cultures (e.g. the way a worship service is run). This is how churches die.

**QUESTION:**

**CAN YOU THINK OF SOME FORMS PEOPLE GET ATTACHED TO?**

### **D. Forms Should Not Be Changed Carelessly**

Here is the polar opposite of keeping things the same because we like them. And this one can be just as damaging.

### **E. When Forms Freeze, Churches Die**

The purpose of the church is to glorify God through the edifying of the members and the evangelizing of the lost. This is the eternal, unchanging purpose.

The functions are how we accomplish this purpose. They are also given by God, who has told us how He wants us to glorify Him. They are also eternal and unchanging.

A form is only one of many acceptable ways to fulfil a particular function. Forms can change because they are an expression of society.

## ***V. IMPLICATIONS OF FORM AND FUNCTION***

The forms that you choose will largely influence what section(s) of your society you will attract.



Activities	Function or Form

## II. INTERPRETATION

Decide which of these activities is “form” and which is “function” and write your answer in the column on the right. If you decide that an activity is a form, decide what the corresponding function would be and write that in the column with the form. What were the circumstances that led to the choosing of that particular form?

## III. APPLICATION

Look again at the functions behind each of the forms noted in the table above.

List at least one other form that could have been used.

What form does your church use for that function?

Are there other appropriate forms that could fulfil those same functions today?

How would you go about introducing a change of form to a congregation or in a cell group?

What are important issues to consider when trying to introduce change?