

Fil-Am Community Church

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“The Church”

1 Peter 2:9-10

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This morning, we’re continuing our series on Foundations: Our Fundamental Beliefs as Christians. Today, we’re going to look at the doctrine of the church. What the church is, what is its purpose. We’re going to cover a lot of things this morning and so, let me go on ahead and tackle the first point:

I. What is the Church?

Many Christian churches have the word “church” in their name. Like Fil-Am Church, Calvary Road Baptist Church, Journey Church, and so on. What does church mean? First, we define it by saying what it is not. It is not a building. It is not a location. You may have the biggest building in the area, like McLean Bible Church, but their building is not the church. What then is the church? It is those people who meet in the building. Like all of us here, we are a church. In the Bible, the word used for church is *Ekklesia* which means “called-out assembly”. In Spanish that’s Iglesia. The ekklesia or the church therefore is a group of people who have been chosen by God to call as his own.

Now, there is a local church and a universal church. Fil-Am Church is a local church. The same way with CRBC or McLean. Now, put all these

together with all the churches that existed since the time of the disciples and we have the invisible, universal church. This invisible, universal church is also known as the body of Christ and more endearingly, the family of God.

Now, let me ask you: All of us who belong to Fil-Am Church, how are we called in terms of denomination? Baptists! I thought I heard someone say ‘Pentecostal’. That’s all right. Because you belong here too. Altho’ you may have an identity crisis. Anyway, we are Baptists because we are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia. Plus the fact that we adhere to Baptist teachings and traditions. And we’re in good company. Billy Graham, Rick Warren, Tony Evans, David Jeremiah, David Rhodenhizer, they are all Southern Baptists. Still, some of you may ask, Why can’t we be non-denominational? We could. But if we are, some will ask. Why can’t we be Baptists? The point is, it has nothing to do with denominations. It has something to do with upholding the Bible and in my personal opinion, that’s what Baptists exactly do. I won’t go into any details about this. But, there’s one thing I’d like you to know. This series is actually based on the Baptist Faith and Message adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in June 2000. Now, you can say to your neighbor, “That’s what I thought”.

But, I don’t want you to get hung up on labels. Just because I’m a Baptist and you’re not a Baptist, you’re not saved. Just because you don’t believe in eternal security, you’re not saved. Just because you speak in tongues, you’re not saved. Augustine said, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

So, denominations are merely labels. When we get to heaven, God will not say, “Have you been a good Baptist?” or “Did you jump and shout like the Pentecostals?” or “Were you sprinkled with water as a baby like the

Presbyterians?” The question that all of us should have the right answer to is “Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior?” If your answer is “Yes” to that question, well and good.

If you’re not a Baptist but you’re a Christian, you’re going to heaven, too, although Baptists will sit in the front row in heaven. And so, at the moment you receive Jesus Christ in your heart as your Lord and Savior, you become a Christian, you are born again, you have eternal life, and you become a member of the invisible, universal church. Then, you find a church that is local, and you apply for membership in that church.

Now, looking at our text this afternoon, it gives us a profile of God’s family, the church. Verse 9 starts by saying that all of us believers are God’s chosen people, “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.*” Peter is saying “You are special. You are not just any kind of people.” Therefore, as members of the Family of God,

I. We Occupy a Unique and High Position

You see, our being special stems from the fact that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to belong to Christ. Ephesians 1: 4 tells us: *4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

You see, although we made a decision to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, it is God who worked in our hearts to make that decision. That is what it means to be chosen by God. Salvation then is God’s work from start to finish. We actually don’t have a role in it. It is like when you get to heaven, there’s a big sign over a gate which says, “Enter if you choose to have eternal life”. So you enter thinking it was your choice. Then, as you get past that gate, you look back and the sign now says, “Welcome to those who

have been chosen from the foundation of the world.” God knows and is sure that you will enter that gate.

That is a mystery – God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. It’s hard to reconcile two seeming contradictory concepts. But the Bible teaches that and we don’t really know the answer until we get to heaven.

In any case, the fact that we are God’s chosen people means that we occupy a unique and high position on earth and in the heavens. On earth, our position is unique because we are the only ones who, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. Look at verse 5 of our text:

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.

This spiritual house is the church whose head or foundation is Jesus Christ, the living Stone in capital S as verse 4 says, *“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.”* The Greek alphabet has no small or capital letters. But it’s obvious that the stone in verse 4 refers to Jesus that’s why Bible translators capitalized it. In fact, it’s different from the other stones because it actually is a rock, a big unmoveable stone. Look at verses 7-8, *“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’, and ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”* This rock is the cornerstone, the foundation of the building. In ancient times, when steel beams were unheard of, when they started to build a building they would put first a big rock or stone where two walls are going to be erected. This then would provide stability to the whole structure. Christ is the cornerstone or the rock on which the church is built. If you remember, once Jesus asked Peter, *“Who do you say I am?”* And Peter replied, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* Then Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, *“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will*

not overcome it.” At first glance, it seems Jesus is saying that Peter is the rock. However, in Greek “Peter” is petros which means stone or rock also but “rock” is petra which means large rock.

So, that large rock is Jesus on which the church is founded and the forces of evil will never prevail against it.

In the earlier verse we read, 1 Pet. 2:8, the word “rock” is also petra. Thus, the church is founded on the Son of God himself and not on any human being.

Now, let us talk about our high position. Let us turn to Eph. 2:6:
6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus

Brothers and sisters, as far as God is concerned, we are already seated in the heavens. Each of us has a place there and no one can take that away from us. This should assure us every time we feel like we’re not going to make it. Brothers and sisters, we already made it! The enemy has no hold on us. Remember, we are God’s chosen people and His protection is always upon those whom He has chosen. Jesus said in John 10:28-29 that no one can take His sheep or chosen ones out of His hand or his father’s hand.

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”

Now, as members of the family of God,

II. We Have Been Given Certain Privileges

Continuing in verse 9, we see that God’s people are described as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. In Old Testament times, only priests were given the privilege of offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. They serve as mediators between Israel’s holy God and his sinning

people. This set-up changed when Jesus Christ came to earth and died. By his sacrifice, he tore the veil that separates the people from God.

Thus, all believers have now become priests themselves because they are able to come to God directly but still through the intercession of the High Priest which is Jesus Christ.

This is why the Bible in Hebrews 4:16 exhorts us to approach God's Throne of Grace, *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

As his children, this is one of our privileges. We can come to God the Father without going through any human intervention. Do not think that God will not hear your prayer just because you are not a Pastor, or a missionary, or someone actively involved in ministry. God listens to all his children, whoever they are and whatever their capacity may be. If you've heard of the term Priesthood of all believers, this is what it is all about.

Another privilege we have is that we have been made holy. "Holy" means "set apart." Like your toothbrush, you set it apart. To you, that is holy. No one can touch it. Not even your wife. Over your dead body.

God has set us apart from others to make us his own. No one can touch us. The enemy cannot touch us. Holy means also we are cleansed. We are no longer tainted by sin in the sight of God. We are already righteous in the sight of God. And so, there is no need for us to make ourselves clean because God himself has cleansed us by the blood of Jesus. 1 John 1:7 tells us that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. *"But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin."*

He did this by dying for us on the cross. Sadly, billions of people don't realize this.

They rely on their own works in the hopes of entering heaven. In India, there is a festival called Kumbha Mela held every three years at four different locations in rotation. In this festival, Hindus make a pilgrimage to the Ganges River which they consider as the most sacred in the world. Then, in the river banks they bathe themselves thinking that the waters of the river will purify them and release them from the cycle of life and death or reincarnation.

So, every three years, they do this and they don't mind the pollution in the river. If you grew up in the Philippines, just imagine yourself going down to Pasig River to take a bath. As you know, that river has become so dirty and polluted. So, we see the great lengths that people in India will go to just to become holy.

Christians, you are privileged. You don't have to go to any river to make yourselves holy. Even if you don't take a bath, you're still holy. Say to the person next to you, "You are holy." And don't say anything else.

So, because we belong to the family of God, we occupy a unique and high position. We also have been given certain privileges. And thirdly,

III. We Are Peculiar and Precious to Him

The King James Version uses the word "peculiar" to describe God's people. It says, "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*" You know what, the word "peculiar" is rather peculiar. It stands either for "special" or "strange" as the dictionary says. But these words actually go together. If you are special, then you are strange. It comes with the territory. What it means is that people who are not part of the family of God / don't realize how special you really are / and so when they see you acting differently, they say you are strange.

When I was in college, there were a number of Christians in campus. They belonged to CCC, IVCF, and a few other less-known organizations. These Christians were known for their zeal in witnessing. Moreover, they were known also to be decent, peace-loving, do-gooders, etc. During exam time, while everybody else was frantic and cheating, they remained calm and never compromised their honesty. I wasn't a Christian then and like everybody else, I felt there was something strange about them. "They are too good to be true" is what a lot of students said.

I hope that extends to us here. I hope when people see us they say, "Kuya Rey is too good to be true." Amen, Ate Rose? "Christine is too good to be true." Amen, Merbin? "Vanessa is too good to be true." Amen Jeff? I hope people don't say "Rolly is not good and it's true." My wife, don't say Amen.

Too good to be true is a big compliment. You know what, in early Christian times, what is it that made Christians different from non-Christians? LOVE! It is their love for one another that attracted unbelievers to Jesus. Because they loved one another they shared food, they took care of those in need, they prayed for each other, and I guess they didn't gossip. Gossip destroys relationships. Gossip has no place in a Christian fellowship. You know how to avoid gossip? Avoid talking about people. Talk about ideas. Someone said, "Great minds talk about ideas, small minds talk about people." And why did I bring up gossip? It's because gossip is the #1 disease that can wreak havoc in a local church. But love can make a church strong. Amen? Say to your neighbor, "I love you with the love of Jesus".

Christians, you are special and precious to Him. He bought you with his own blood. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8 NIV) Rest in God's

love. Be assured that His love will see you through. You are precious to Him.

Now, that we have established what the church is, let's answer the question

II. What is the Purpose of the Church?

A. We Declare the Praises of God

The last part of verse 9 says, "*that you may declare the praises of him.*" Being people of God, Peter tells us to be vocal about our family association. There are a lot of things to be proud about our heavenly father. We shouldn't hide the fact that God is our Father. If Bill Gates or Steve Jobs were your father, wouldn't you be proud of them? If Michael Jordan were your father, wouldn't you be proud of him? Well, I know our own fathers may not have a star status like them but if you're really proud of your father, there's something to brag about him, right?

And we have a Father in heaven who is far far far far greater than any father you can think of. He is almighty, powerful, faithful, loving, merciful. He is just awesome! We should be praising him to other people. We should be telling others that he exists and that he is alive and that he is so good all the time.

When was the last time you told others about God's goodness? When was the last time you testified to others about God's power in your life? In our home groups, we often have a testimony time. This is an occasion wherein we tell others how good God has been to us, his healing, his provision, his intervention in our lives. We should take the opportunity to participate in such a time because I'm sure God takes delight in the praises of his people. Our attitude should be like that of David, who praised God not only in good times but in bad times as well.

We should praise Him not only this church but in other places as well. For example, when there's an opportunity, we can tell others how God has brought us through a trial in life.

We can tell them God has been faithful to us. Who knows, that might be an occasion for the person we're sharing with to open their heart to the Lord.

So, we praise him. And the more important purpose,

B. We Tell Others about the Gospel

The last part of verse 9 says that God called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Before God called us, we were all living in darkness, we were blind, we didn't know where we were going. Some of us thought that we were on the right track only to find out later that it led to death. In fact, without Christ, the Light of the world, all roads led to death. One thing is clear, Jesus saved us from death and gave us eternal life by his death and resurrection. We weren't saved because of our good works but because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. As verse 10 says,

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

That is the gospel. The gospel of God's grace. Because of His kindness which any of us don't deserve, we have been given the opportunity to become a part of God's family. There are others out there who need to see the light. Billions of people are dying, they need Jesus in their lives. The lost will continue to walk in darkness unless we point them to the Light of the world. In fact, this can be accomplished only when we follow the marching orders of Jesus to us in Matthew 28:19-20, "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have commanded you.*"

Earlier, I said that denominational labels are not important to God. What is important to him is that you answer correctly if he asks you, “Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation?”

You may say “Yes” to this question. But what will your answer be if God asks you another question that goes like this, “When you were on earth, did you share the message of salvation to the lost or did you keep it to yourself?” I’ll let you ponder that question.

Through this message, I just wanted us to see how beautiful and wonderful the family of God is. There’s a lot of clubs and organizations out there that we can join but nothing can be more satisfying, uplifting, and reassuring than being a part of God’s family. Amen?

Just to remind you, by virtue of His calling, God has placed us in a unique and high position, he has given us certain privileges and considers each one of us as peculiar and precious to Him.

The question now is, “Would you like to belong to the Family of God?”

Let us pray.....