

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
13 July 2014
The Church as God Intended

The Design of the Church
Ephesians 3:10-11; Acts 2:42-27

This morning we're starting a new series and it's called "The Church as God Intended". We're going to take a close look at the church. What its purpose is, how it is structured, how it grows, what it means to be a member. In the process we're going to look at the importance of the church in the world today, how the church affects people's lives and so on.

Let me show you something unique and beautiful. If I told you that I made it, would you believe me? If I told you that nobody made it, would you believe me? You wouldn't believe me either, right? Why? Because we know that it would be crazy to think that it just came out of nowhere. Logic dictates that an intricate and beautiful creation such as this would have been designed by someone.

This morning, I'd like to compare it to the church. The church is a beautiful creation of God. It is unique and wonderful. But it did not come about by chance. The church has been designed with God's forethought, planning, and intention. In fact, this church you are a part of today is a part of God's grand design.

Let me first make it clear that the church I'm talking about is not this building. Because first of all, this is a cafeteria. Second of all, even if this building were like a real church building like the one where CRBC meets or the huge shopping mall-like structure where McLean Bible Church meets, that is not the church I'm talking about. I'm talking about those people who

are saved, who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the body of believers throughout history, that's the church I'm talking about.

Fil-Am Church is a local church. Like other local churches in the area, it is a visible manifestation of the invisible universal church of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at Ephesians 3:10-11 *“Through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Did you catch that? *“This was according to the eternal purpose he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* So since the beginning of time, God had already the church in mind. And if you're here and you know you're a part of God's church, then God had you in mind already since the beginning of time. It's no accident that you are here. Say to your neighbor, “It's no accident you're here”.

From now on, I'm gonna tell you to say something to your neighbor every now and then. For two reasons, to wake you up and for you to wake up your neighbor. So, this will help in breaking the monotony.

One thing we should know about the church then is that God Designed the Church.

In everything that God designed, there is a purpose. He designed the sun, the stars, the moon, the earth, the trees, the animals, the plants, the birds, people, all of these have a purpose. Nothing was designed and created without a purpose. Even the often-discarded appendix has a purpose. For years, medical researchers are wondering what it is for but recently it was discovered that it aids in cleansing our digestive system.

So, God designed the church. He designed it in such a way that would bring glory to him and would build up his people and minister to others.

This morning, I'd like to share with you what a church should look like based on Acts 2:42-47. Please open your Bibles and turn to Acts 2:42-47 and let's read together:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

In these verses, we see the qualities that characterize a New Testament church. And this is how God intended the church to be. I hope and pray that we'll be that kind of church, Amen?

Say to your neighbor, “Are you listening?”

Okay, now all of you are listening and so let us look at the first quality of a New Testament church.

1. IT IS A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

v. 46 says, *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”* Why did they meet? They met to worship. The New Living Translation says, *“They worshiped together at the Temple each day.”* They didn't go there to just talk about the coming family camp or how to decorate the church or make plans for a building. They met to worship. Every day! Talk about passion. This people have so much passion for God that they couldn't be stopped from meeting every day. I don't know whether there's any group of Christians today that actually do this.

We can meet two, three, four times a week but seven times a week will be a stretch. Not for these early Christians. They were so fired up that an everyday worship service was quite common.

They took worship seriously. They took it seriously because Jesus said, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* (Matthew 22:37) Worship is an expression of our love to God. You worship only that which you are devoted to mentally, emotionally, and physically. Whatever you’re devoted to, that is the thing you worship. If you’re here this morning but your mind is on that business deal you’re going to make, or on that car you want so much, or on that tuition you’re going to pay, or on the World Cup final between Argentina and Germany later on, then you’re not worshipping. Jesus says, *“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”* (Matthew 4:10)

Many people, even Christians, are devoting themselves to other things besides God. There’s your career, your house, your car, your cool gadgets, and they take up much of your time and energy. You know what, all these things are temporary. Only God is eternal. Besides, he is your creator and he deserves your worship. Sometimes we even get so busy working for God, we don’t have time to express our love for him through worship.

Throughout Scripture we’re commanded to celebrate God’s presence by magnifying the Lord and exalting his name. Psalm 34:3 (NASB) says, *“O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together.”* We shouldn’t worship out of duty; we should worship because we want to. We should enjoy expressing our love to God.

The second quality of a New Testament church is that

2. IT IS AN ENCOURAGING CHURCH

v. 42 says, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

Let me talk first about fellowship. It says that they devoted themselves to fellowship. The Message says, “They committed themselves...” To devote then is to commit. It just means that these early believers were always so eager to meet with one another. And they have made that commitment. No wonder they were there in the Temple Courts everyday. Not only to worship God, but also to encourage one another.

Now, fellowship is a translation of the Greek word ‘Koinonia’ which means far more than just meeting together, eating, and having a good time. It means a closeness, a sharing, a common bond, a feeling of togetherness, of belonging to each other, of belonging to the family of God.

It’s “fellowship,” caring about one another, that causes you to roll out of bed on Sunday morning while others simply roll over and go back to sleep. It’s a strong desire to meet with fellow Christians, encouraging one another, learning from our experiences, sharing our victories, and comforting one another in our setbacks.

Note that breaking the bread together and praying are part of fellowship. Breaking the bread refers to partaking the Lord’s Supper. Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to observe the Lord’s Supper as often as they can. That’s why we observe the Lord’s Supper every first Sunday of the month.

When the early Christians met, prayer was always in their agenda. They prayed for each other, prayed for others, prayed for the prayer requests of others. Prayer is a big faith-booster. A great encouragement. I can’t forget the times when I prayed for someone who is emotionally distressed and after the prayer, I noticed the person’s face brightened up.

Apparently, many of them have become cold as years went by that it was necessary for Paul to remind them in Hebrews,

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”

Believe it or not, there are some Christians who don't believe that belonging to a local church is necessary. They reason that they are saved already and therefore belong to the universal invisible church. Warren Wiersbe, a Christian author, tells a story about it. He said in his book that a free-lance missionary visited a pastor friend asking for financial support. “What group are you associated with?” his friend asked.

The man replied, “I belong to the invisible church.”

His friend then asked, “Well, what church are you a member of?”

Again he got the answer, “I belong to the invisible church!”

Getting a bit suspicious, his friend asked, “When does this invisible church meet? Who pastors it?”

The missionary then became incensed and said, “Well, your church here isn't the true church. I belong to the invisible church!”

His friend replied, “Well, here's some invisible money to help you in your invisible church!”

So, a New Testament church is a worshipping church. It is also an encouraging church.

Thirdly,

3. IT IS A TEACHING CHURCH

Now, the church exists not only to make us feel the presence of God through worship. It doesn't exist just to lift us up emotionally because of fellowship. That is the feeling part.

The church exists also to fill our minds with the truth in order to develop us spiritually for the purpose of making us like Christ. This is the thinking and being part. The term we usually refer to this process of making Christ-like believers is discipleship.

v. 42 says, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.”*

The early Christians not only were committed to fellowship, they were also committed to learning. They wanted to grow. They wanted to advance from just being a mere baby Christian to a full, maturing one. There's no other way that this can be done except through learning from others. Which just implies that the early church put emphasis on teaching the Word of God. They were much involved in the business of discipleship.

Discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This process begins when a person is born again and continues throughout the rest of his life. Colossians 1:28 (NCV) says, *“We continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ.”*

Discipleship can be done one-on-one or as a small group or as a class. We have opportunities to learn in this church. We have Sunday school for our youth and young children. We have IMPACT Class for adults. We have Young Adults Bible Study. We have home groups. I just hope that our home groups are not invisible like the invisible church of that dubious missionary.

Say to your neighbor, “Is your home group visible?”

The fourth quality of a New Testament church is that

4. IT IS A SERVING CHURCH

v. 45 says *“Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”* Giving came naturally to these early Christians.

They were so zealous to give that they even sold their stuff so that they can continue to give. Why could they do this? Because they believed in a God who they cannot outgive. Luke 6:38 says, *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.”*

Giving is an act of service. In other words, when you’re giving, you’re doing ministry. When you give to someone, you’re ministering to that person.

Giving involves not only money but also your time, your energy, and sometimes your whole being. V. 43 says, *“Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”* I’m sure these wonders and miraculous signs were not just for show but for healing the sick, for making the blind see, the lame walk, the hungry fed, and so on.

Today, wonders and miraculous signs are not the norm. We hear miraculous healing every now and then but many of us are not like the apostles who have the gift of healing. Yet, God is also healing people through us by our prayers, our constant care for them, our feeding them. When they get healed, that in itself is a miracle.

I’d like us to be more involved in ministry to the people in our community. This summer, we can pass around bottled water to people like we did in the past. It’s an opportunity to quench their thirst and, who knows, an opportunity to lead them to the living water given by Jesus. So, service ministry leaders, are you listening?

Now, I’m almost done. I’m going to give you the fifth quality. Say to your neighbor, “Thank God he’s almost done. Otherwise, I’ll be gone.”

And so, the fifth and final quality of a New Testament church is that

5. IT IS A WITNESSING CHURCH

V. 47 says *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* The church multiplied, the church grew in number. How did it happen? Was it because people just became curious and started to come to church? No, it was because someone told them the good news. It says that those who were added to the church were saved already. It only means that someone witnessed to them. As the Bible says, *“How can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?”* (Romans 10:14 NLT)

That’s one quality that helped the church to really grow dynamically. They witnessed and they witnessed a lot. You see, the church exists to communicate God’s word. We are ambassadors for Christ, and our mission is to evangelize the world.

For some Christians, however, it’s one of the hardest things to do. At times we probably feel it would be so much easier if we could be like Lucy in the old Peanuts cartoon: Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "I would have made a great evangelist." Charlie Brown answers, "Is that so?" She says, "Yes, I convinced that boy in front of me in school that my religion is better than his religion." Charlie Brown asked, "Well, how did you do that?" And Lucy answers, "I hit him over the head with my lunch box."

Now, the word ‘Go’ in the Great Commission is from the Greek that means “as you are going.” It is every Christian’s responsibility to share the Good News wherever we go. It doesn’t stop.

We are to tell the whole world of Christ's coming, his death on the cross, his resurrection, and his promise to return. Someday each of us will give an account to God regarding how seriously we took this responsibility.

Conclusion:

Folks, if we want to become a New Testament church, a church that is vibrant, healthy, growing, making an impact in people's lives, and glorifying God, we must keep these qualities in mind.

And we must keep them in balance. Each quality corresponds to a particular purpose of the church: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, , and Evangelism. These five purposes are what should drive our church. Not traditions, not personalities, not events, not finances. But purpose. Because we want to become a Purpose-Driven church. Amen? Say to your neighbor, "We want to become a purpose-driven church."

It's obvious then that our mission is to fulfill the purposes of the church. To conclude this message, I want us to read our Mission Statement together. It's in your outline: "To bring people to Jesus and turn them into fully devoted followers of Christ".