



THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PROGRAM



In this chapter you will ...

- (1) Understand the thrust of the missionary journeys' was church planting.
- (2) Observe how the finished work of Christ applied to all of life is central to the Epistles.
- (3) Recognize the mission of the church as both discipleship and evangelism.
- (4) Marvel at how God still uses broken, messy sinners to advance His glorious plan for the rescue of the nations. In the church, Jesus is still the hero of the story ... He is the Chief Shepherd.

Ephesians 3:1-13 - The Story of God Revealed Through The Church

The apostles preached the whole story of God that culminated in preaching the *"unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Ephesians 3:8). At this point in the story, the mystery of God has been revealed. That mystery is that Jesus is the "seed of the woman", He is the promised son of Abraham through whom all the nations will be blessed. And the Gentiles are now *"fellow heirs and members of the same body"* ... the body of Christ, that is the Church. Now through the establishing of local churches where Jews and Gentiles worship God together the whole story gets told. The Church, birthed by the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, confirmed by the sending of the Spirit, is now the witness of God's glory and wisdom to all nations. And she ministers boldly knowing that *"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18).



One Body

In the previous chapters of the story we have seen God uniquely work with His chosen people ... the nation of Israel. But with the New Covenant promise of the Spirit's coming and writing the law on the heart, that has changed. The book of Acts has transitioned us from ethno-centric to all nations. God so loved all peoples of the world that He sent His Son! And the Church is now that One Body that stands as a witness to the heart of God ... *"the dividing wall of hostility"* has come down, and *"both have access in one Spirit to the Father"* (Ephesians 2:14, 18).

The Glory of God in the Church



The apostle Paul labored to see local churches planted, established, and reproducing themselves in the world. He disciplined men who would disciple men that would disciple other men. Not only was his heart given to the Church, but his physical strength spent for the spiritual health of the local churches he loved. He wrote, visited, rebuked, and affirmed churches from Galatia to Corinth, and Philippi to Rome. He loved the church! And one of Paul's most glorious prayers begs God to do *"far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations"* (Ephesians 3:20-21). He knew that the Spirit of God given to, and living in, every believer was the power to accomplish all that the Church has been called to, both as individuals and as a spiritual community ... and God's glory would be displayed there!

Story-Tellers Takeaways ...

- (1) God's plan is to see churches planted that mature and reproduce more churches.
- (2) The Epistles of the New Testament always describe what Christ has done before dictating what believers should do.
- (3) The mission of every local church is to see her members built up by the Word so they can share the whole story of God with others.
- (4) The story of the early church is full of messy people, imperfect churches, and broken leaders.

My Notes:

How to Read the Story ... the Big into the Small, and the Small into the Big ... all to Penetrate Our Hearts!

Feathers - You must have an understanding of the epic narrative of God's story ... this is Biblical Theology that guides our reading of the story.

Shaft - You must approach each text of Scripture honestly and openly ... this is Exposition of Scripture that shapes our understanding of the story.

Point - You must have a soft heart to worship the author of the story ... this is Gospel Centeredness that changes life.

For Discussion:

- (1) Discuss the difference between “sodalities” and “modalities”. How do they work together?
- (2) Why is church planting so vital to the mission of the Gospel? How will you be more involved in that Biblical mandate?
- (3) How does discipleship advance the mission of God? Which is more primary: Evangelism or Discipleship?
- (4) Compare and contrast some of the main characters of the Old Testament with some of the main characters of the New Testament. What do they have in common? (Abraham, David, Peter, Paul)