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A 6-SESSION STUDY
FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND
THE SCRIPTURES



BELONGING TO A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

First Principles of Community Life

BY JEFF REED

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These materials are designed to integrate with BILD-International resources, which are designed to help churches train leaders.

All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is from the New American Standard Bible.

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THE CENTERPIECE OF CHRIST'S PLAN —THE CHURCH ①

In the first book in this series, *Becoming a Disciple*, we saw that Christ commanded the disciples to take the gospel to the entire world, baptizing and teaching those who believed. We saw that baptism implies initiating them into community. This community was referred to earlier as His church (Matthew 16:18). We will now pick up the idea of His church and attempt to understand how it fits into His overall plan. The passage that we will begin with is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians—Ephesians 2:18-3:11. In this passage, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus to reveal Christ's administration—what His plan is for those who believe. That plan is His church. This passage is one of the main sections in Paul's letters to the churches where he explains his role amongst the churches and, by doing so, sums up the framework for the plan of Christ, which before this had not been made known to men.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 2:18-3:11

Think Through the Questions:

1. What did Paul reveal to the Gentiles? What was his stewardship?
2. Who laid the foundation for Christ's church? Who was the cornerstone?
3. What is Christ's administration (plan)? How does it fulfill God's eternal purpose?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage:

Write a paragraph, outline, annotate, or chart your conclusions—whatever best communicates for you. Be sure to comment on Paul's job description and what exactly was revealed to the church at Ephesus.

Core teaching of Ephesians 2:18–3:11



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on Ephesians 2:18-3:11:

It is important to understand the context of this passage within the letter to the church at Ephesus, and within the context of Paul's whole ministry. This letter was written to the church at Ephesus to motivate them to live lives that were consistent with the whole mission of Christ. The first half of the letter unfolds the whole plan of Christ—His administration and their "calling." The second half of the letter describes how they should live in light of Christ's plan and His specific directives for ordering their lives.

In this passage, Paul states that he has been given a two-fold job description (3:8-10). He was given the responsibility to preach the gospel and “to bring to light the administration.” His responsibility to take the gospel to the Gentiles was revealed to him at his conversion on the road to Damascus. You can read that account in Acts 9. Here he adds to his job description by stating that he was told to reveal Christ’s plan for His church. The term *administration* comes from two words in the Greek: “house” (*oikos*) and “law” (*nomos*). It literally means “house law,” “house order,” or “administration,” and is commonly used for “plan.” Paul’s job was to reveal to the churches Christ’s plan for His church, which he did through his letters to them. In Ephesians 2:11-17 Paul states that the Gentiles were separated from God’s promises and that God was working through the nation of Israel (the Jews). Now, because of the death and resurrection of Christ, the wall between the Jews and Gentiles was broken down. Now those who believe, Jews and Gentiles alike, are made into one new family—the household of God, the church. This new plan—the Jews and Gentiles being one in a new community called the church—was a mystery (3:1-7). The term *mystery* refers to something that was hidden in the past but has now been revealed. Paul had a special role in the revealing of this mystery—bringing to light the house order.

In this passage, he reveals several important aspects of the plan. Notice that the plan—His church—is the way in which the world will understand the wisdom of God Himself. Even the angelic and demonic forces will be able to see God’s wisdom through Christ’s church (3:10). Clearly then, the church is at the center of God’s plan for the universe and will be central to God accomplishing His purposes.

Also, notice how he describes this new community of believers—both Jews and Gentiles (2:18-22). It is described as both a household and a building, specifically a temple. It is a living temple, a community of believers. The whole community is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. All their writings are in the form of New Testament letters to churches and church leaders and gospels that describe Jesus’ life, ministry, and teaching. Christ is the cornerstone of the building, the place you start building from. The church is growing into one living community where the Spirit of God dwells and accomplishes a worldwide witness of Jesus Christ.

The church is at the very center of Christ’s plan for this age. In addition, He has a specific plan for His church. An aspect of Paul’s job description was to reveal that plan to the churches. Through this plan, God’s wisdom is being revealed to all who watch—even the angelic and demonic forces.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote is taken from the book, *What On Earth Are You Doing?: Jesus’ Call to World Mission*, by Michael Griffiths, a well-known and widely respected missions leader.

“In the previous chapter, we saw what Christ does for people corporately. He brings them into membership of new communities of light and love, making them ‘fellow-citizens

with God's people and members of God's household' (Ephesians 2:19). Perhaps sometimes in the West we have lost sight of the importance of these basic Christian communities, and think that churches are merely incidental organizations within institutionalized Christianity. We think that the gospel tells how an individual may be saved. But the letter to the Ephesians declares that both individual salvation and the corporate community are essential parts of the gospel. The churches are not merely incidental means of grace to help individuals to be saved. They are not merely temporary providers of care and protection while we are on earth. God's long term purpose is to produce a new, beautiful, redeemed human society in which he himself will dwell."¹

The quote below is from David Hesselgrave's *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, a classic work on the central role of churches in God's plan.

"Various metaphors describe the church in its relation to Christ. It is his building—'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone' (Eph. 2:19-21). It is his spiritual body—'the fullness of Him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:23 see also 1 Cor. 12:12-13). It is, as it were, his bride—the object of his love and provision (Eph. 5:25-33).

"The church, then, is not an afterthought in the mind of God. He planned for it in eternity past and provided for it in the death and resurrection of his Son (Eph. 1:19-23). And the Son prepared for its formation and development by instructing his followers as to their mission and empowering them by his Spirit (Acts 1:4-8). The church and the churches have no friend like their Lord! If Christians are to love what their Lord loves, they must love the church—and the churches! In the final analysis, Christology is closely allied with ecclesiology. When we inquire into a person's faith, we do well to ask what that individual thinks of Christ and his church!"²

Record any insights from the brief commentary and quotes:



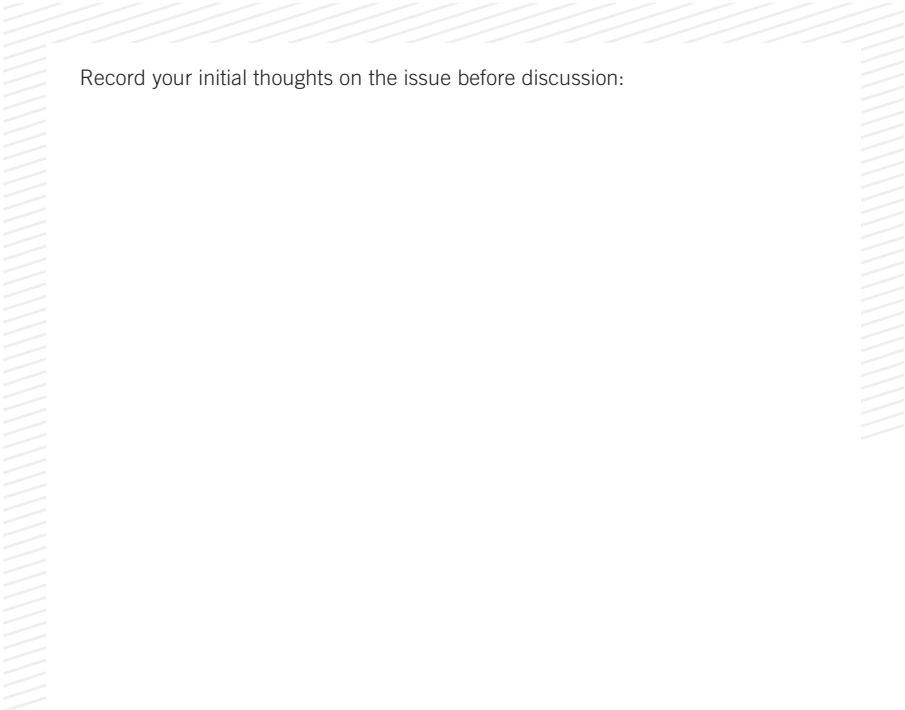
Think Through the Issues

At the very heart of Christ's plan is His church—and therefore His churches. Think through the importance of the church in your thinking. Today we have lost our sense of community and belonging and tend to pursue our individual goals and aspirations. Think through the implications of Christ having a master plan for our communities of faith.

ISSUE: The centrality of the church in Christ's plan

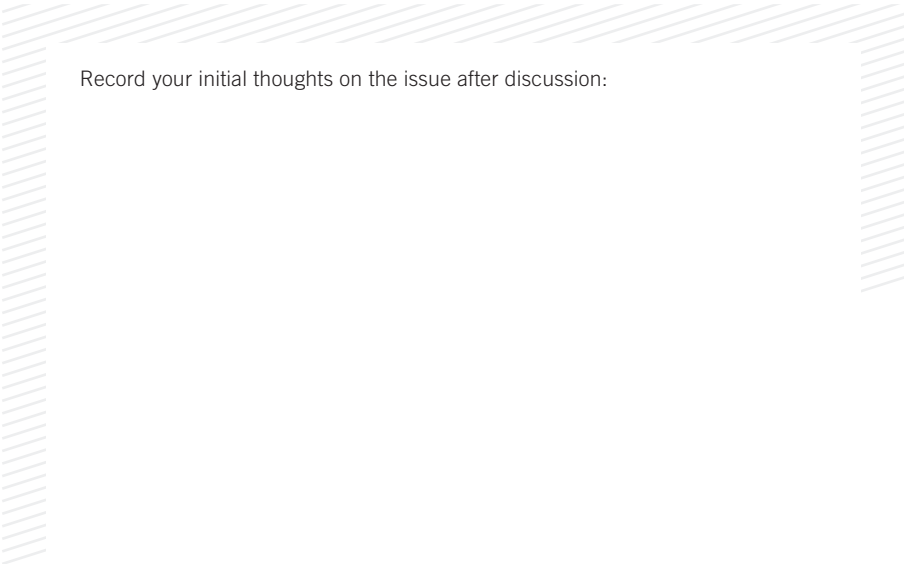
Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. How important is the church in Christ's mission?
2. Is it necessary today that we follow Christ's plan for the church as revealed by Paul?
How do we know it is not outdated?
3. How can we know the details of the plan?
4. Is it important that we make the church central to our life plans?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.



Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion:



Apply the Principles

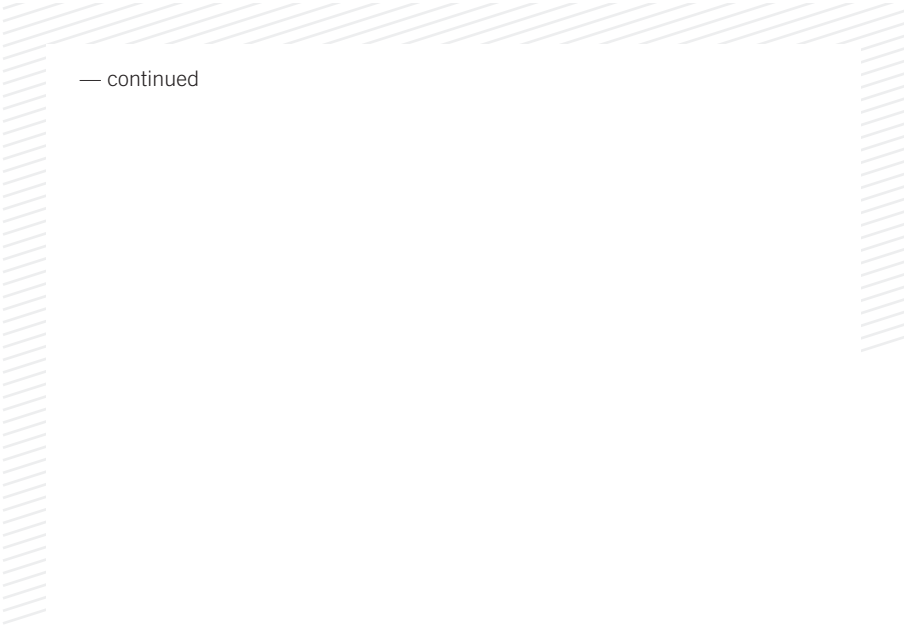
It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

Design an Application for Your Life.

Complete the assigned project and record any additional applications.

There are two aspects to the assigned project. The first part is to write a basic statement summarizing the centrality of the church in Christ's plan. Then record some of your initial thoughts on what it would mean for the church to become the center of your life plan.



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