

The Corinthian Schisms

Issue: Dealing with disunity in churches

Questions:

1. In what sense is the gospel foundational to our unity in the churches?
2. What role does it play in helping us reason through issues that can so easily divide us?
3. What sorts of issues divide our churches today? How are they similar to the Corinthians?
4. How did Paul go about solving those issues and building on the foundation of the gospel?

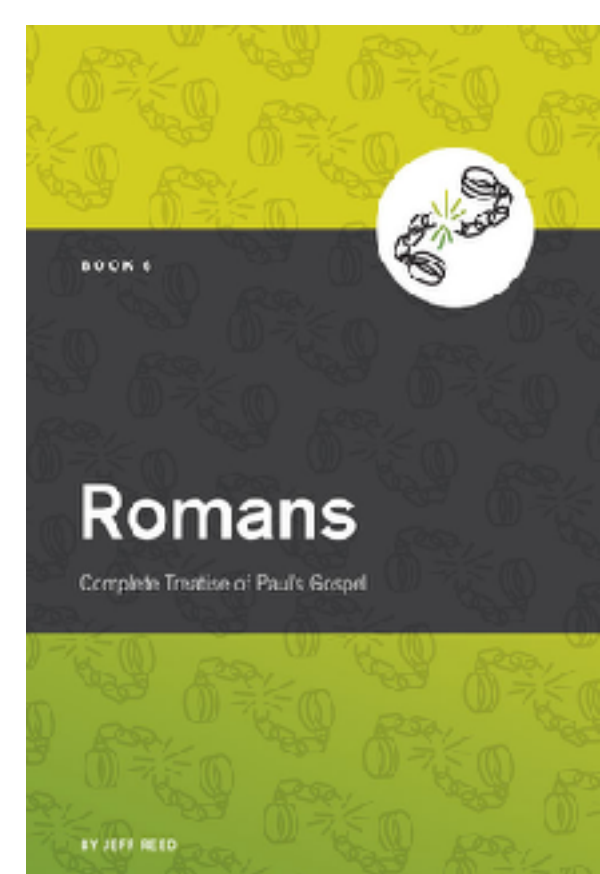
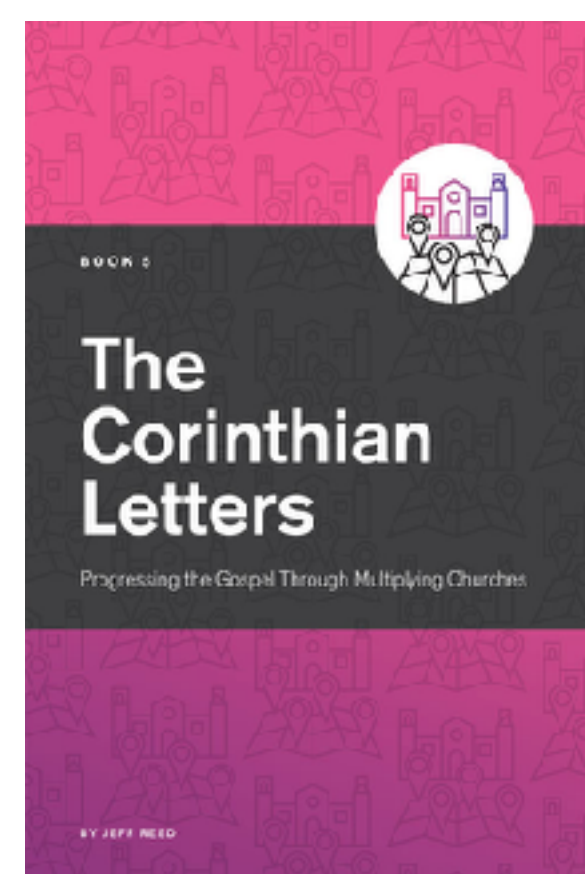
The Corinthian Schisms

Issue: The role of conflict in establishing churches in the gospel

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1. In what sense is the gospel foundational to our unity in the churches? What role does it play in helping us reason through issues that can so easily divide us?
2. What sorts of issues divide our churches today? How are they similar to the Corinthians' issues?
3. How do you view conflicts in the church? Are conflicts good? Are they inevitable?
4. What role do conflicts play in the progress of the gospel? in establishing churches in the gospel?

Paul's Early Letters



The Early Letters

Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Book 2: Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel

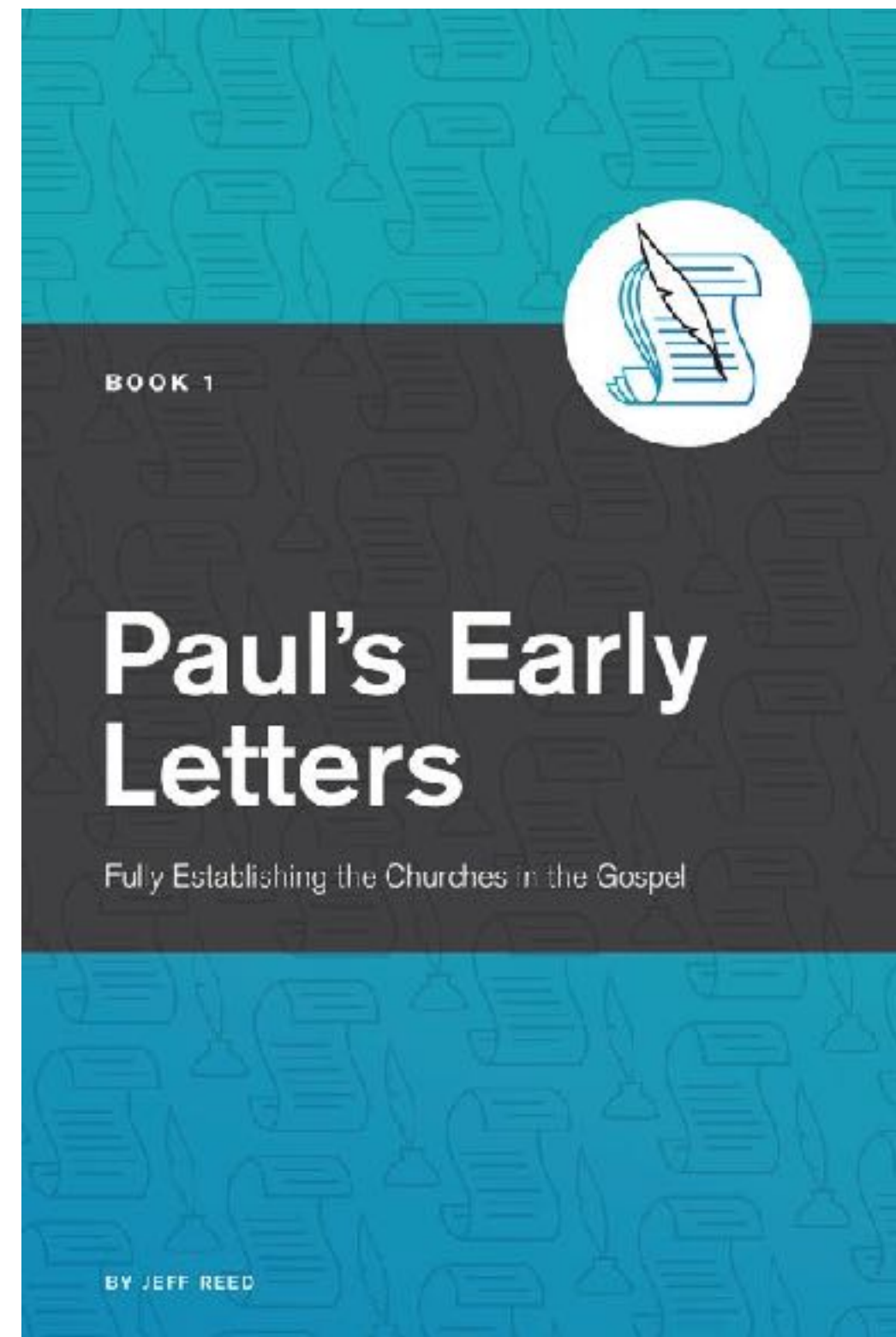
Book 3: The Thessalonian Correspondence: Conversion to the Gospel

Book 4: The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Book 5: The Corinthian Letters: Paul's Gospel Defended

Book 6: Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Paul's Early Letters



Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 1: The Intent of Early Letters

Session 2: The Galatian Problem

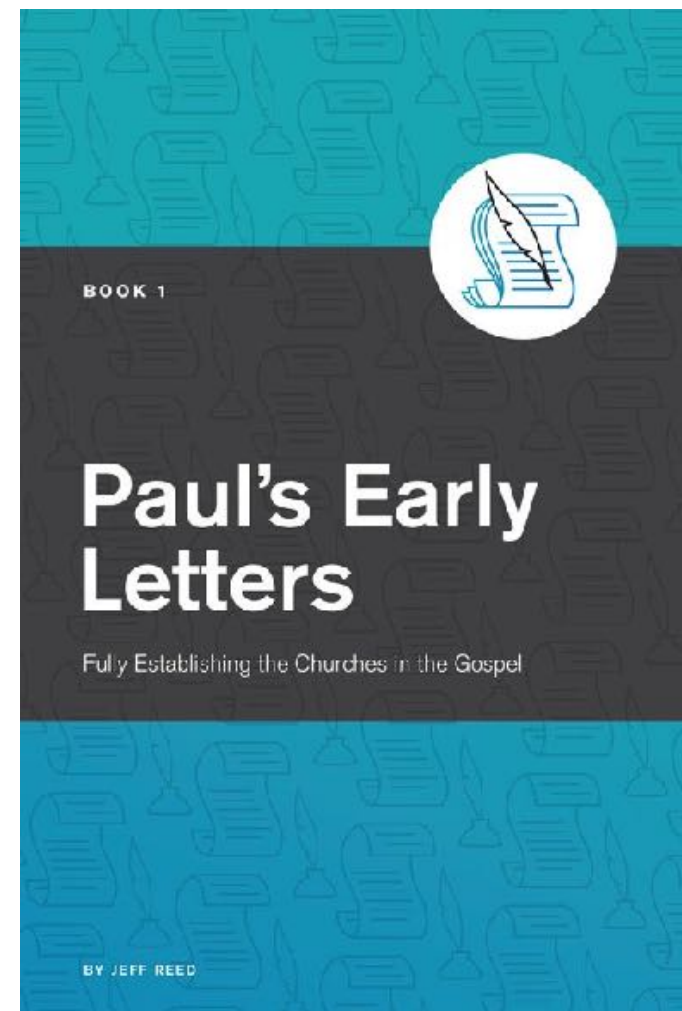
Session 3: The Thessalonians' Conversion

Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

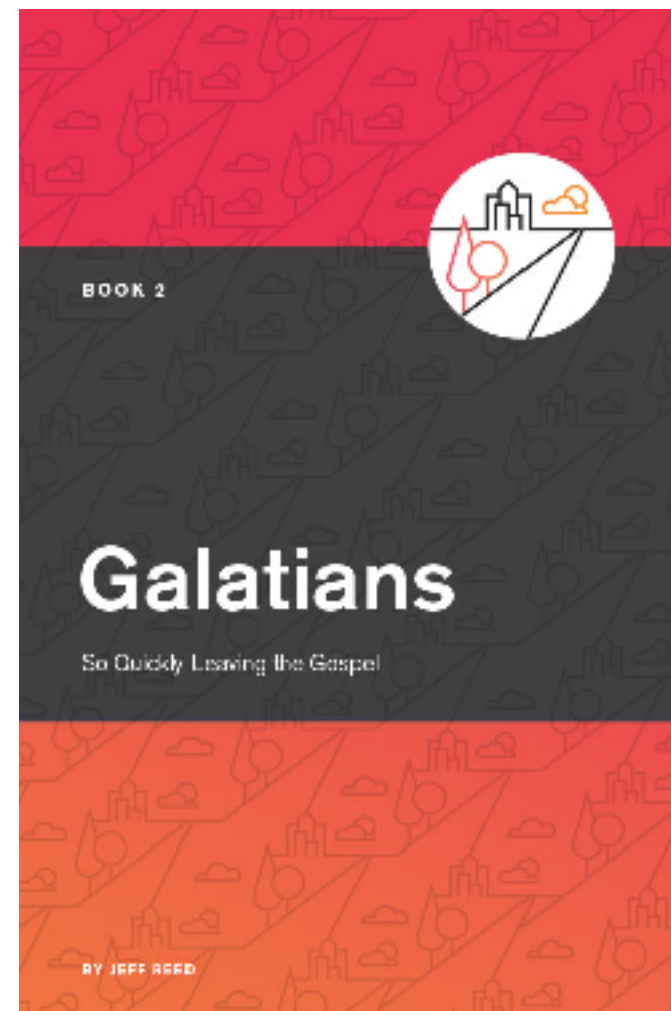
Session 5: The Roman Treatise

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry

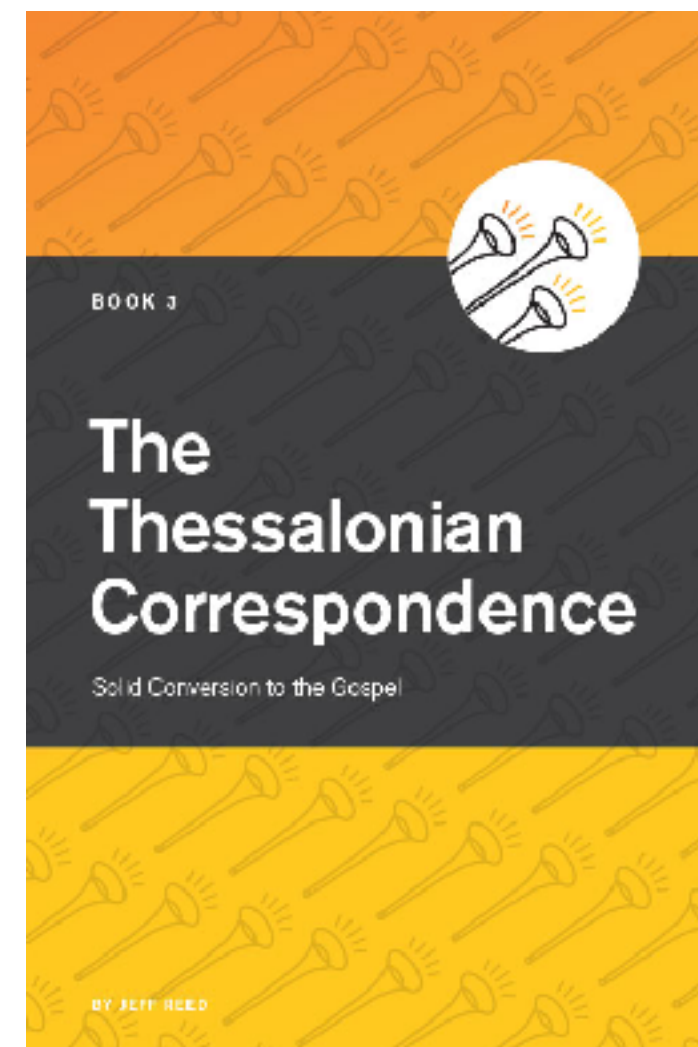
Paul's Early Letters



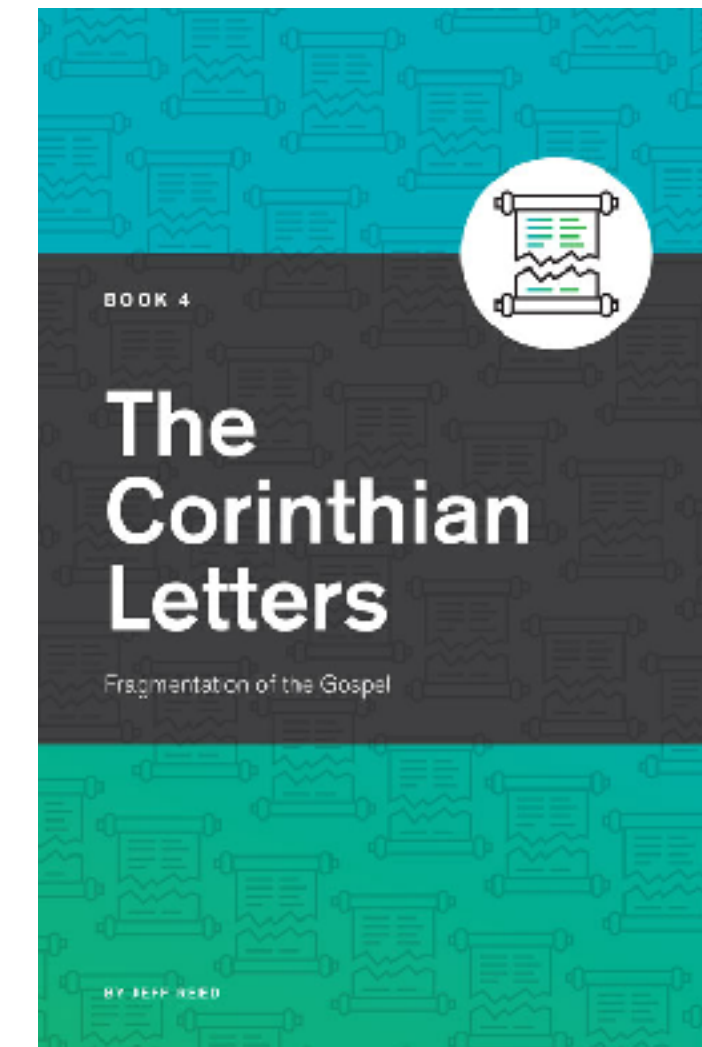
49–56 AD



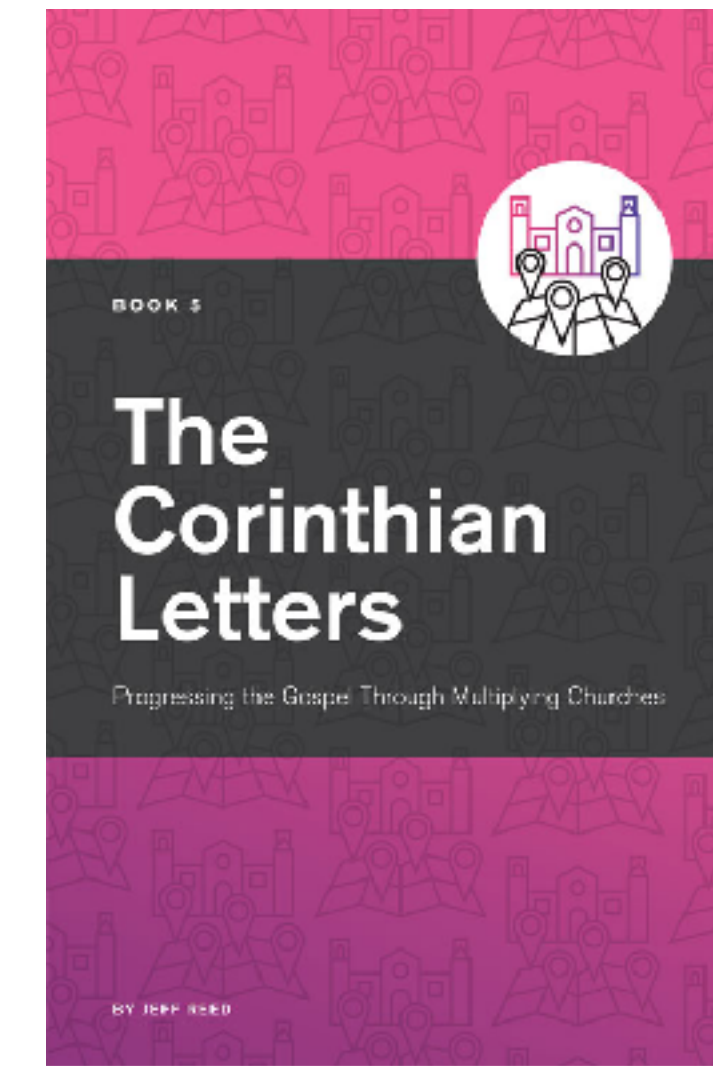
Autumn 49



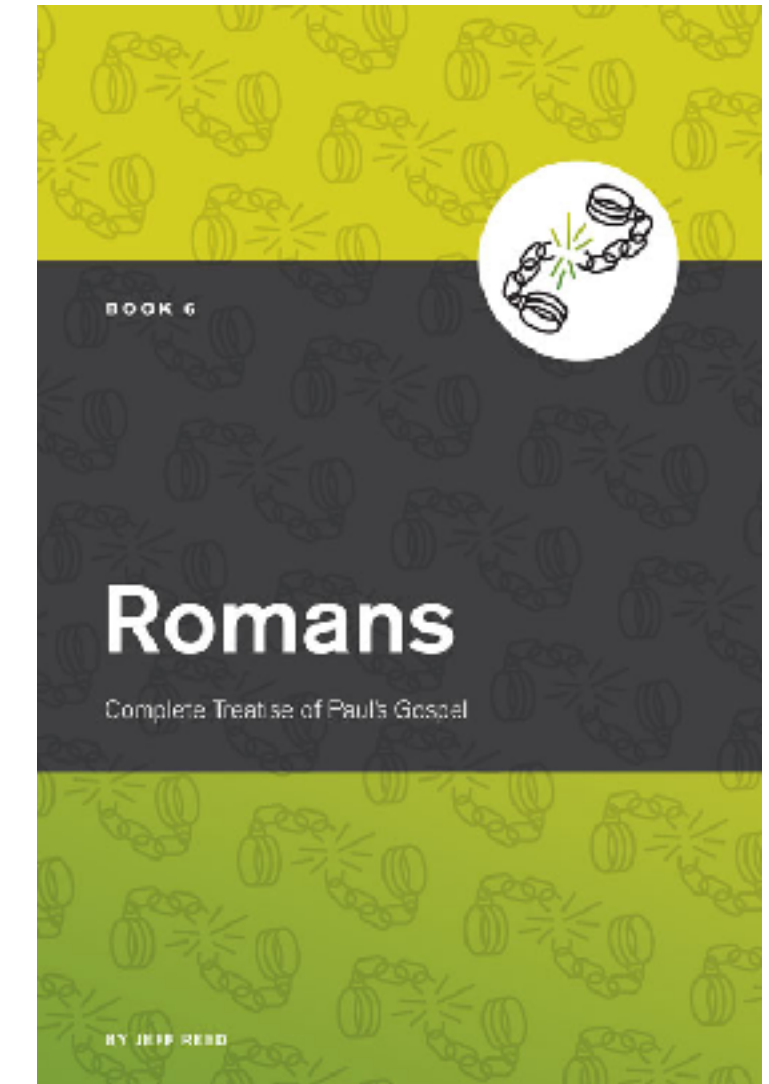
Winter/Summer 51 AD



September 53



June 56



November 56

Paul's Letters

The battle for the gospel went from Autumn 47 until the writing of Romans in the middle of November 56 AD—10 years

Paul's first confrontation with Peter, Autumn 47 AD (Gal. 2:1–10)

Peter in Antioch, Autumn 49 AD (Gal. 2:11–16)

Jerusalem Council, Autumn 49 AD

The early letters of Paul, Autumn 49 to writing Romans in 56 AD

It took Paul a decade to win that argument, which he accomplished with his Romans manifesto on the gospel.

Now on to his rather compact, full unveiling of the Church.

Paul's Early Letters

Romans is key to understanding the entire collection of Paul's early letters to his network of churches.

Several preliminary comments on the context of Romans in Paul's early letters:

1. It is the final and largest letter.
2. It is less occasional than the others—more of a manifesto.
3. It is bookended by sections that tell you it is a more complete treatment of the gospel than the others.
4. Its context is establishing the churches in the gospel, which was the front line of the battle.

Paul's Early Letters

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel, the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, in accordance with the unveiling of the mystery kept hidden for long ages ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, for the obedience of faith among all the nations—²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus the Messiah, to whom be the glory to the coming ages! Amen.

Romans 16:25–27 (N. T. Wright)

Paul's Early Letters

Paul wants to add to their understanding of the gospel by bringing them a complete proclamation,

which will secure, clarify, or build a comprehensive defense of the gospel for them—thus establishing them completely.

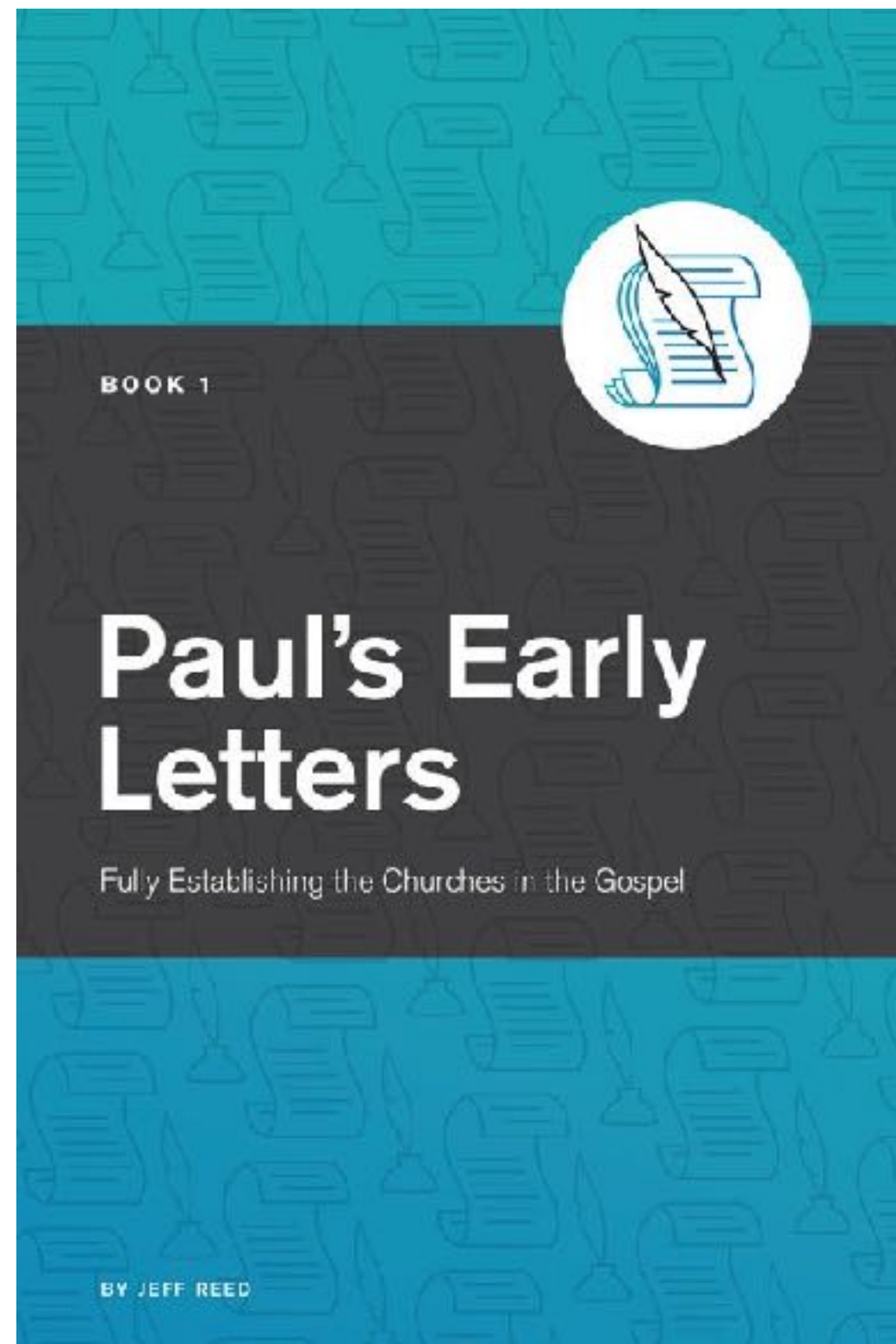
Paul's Early Letters

Notice the term he uses—*establish*.

This is central to the occasional purpose of Paul writing the letters. This can quickly be seen in 3 ways:

1. A central purpose of his 2nd journey was to establish the young churches, Acts 15:36–16:5.
2. He sent Timothy to Thessalonica with the first letter to establish the Thessalonians.
3. He summarizes the Romans letter as having established them in the gospel.

Paul's Early Letters



We will validate this in sessions 2–5, when we look at each of these early letters:

The Galatian letter

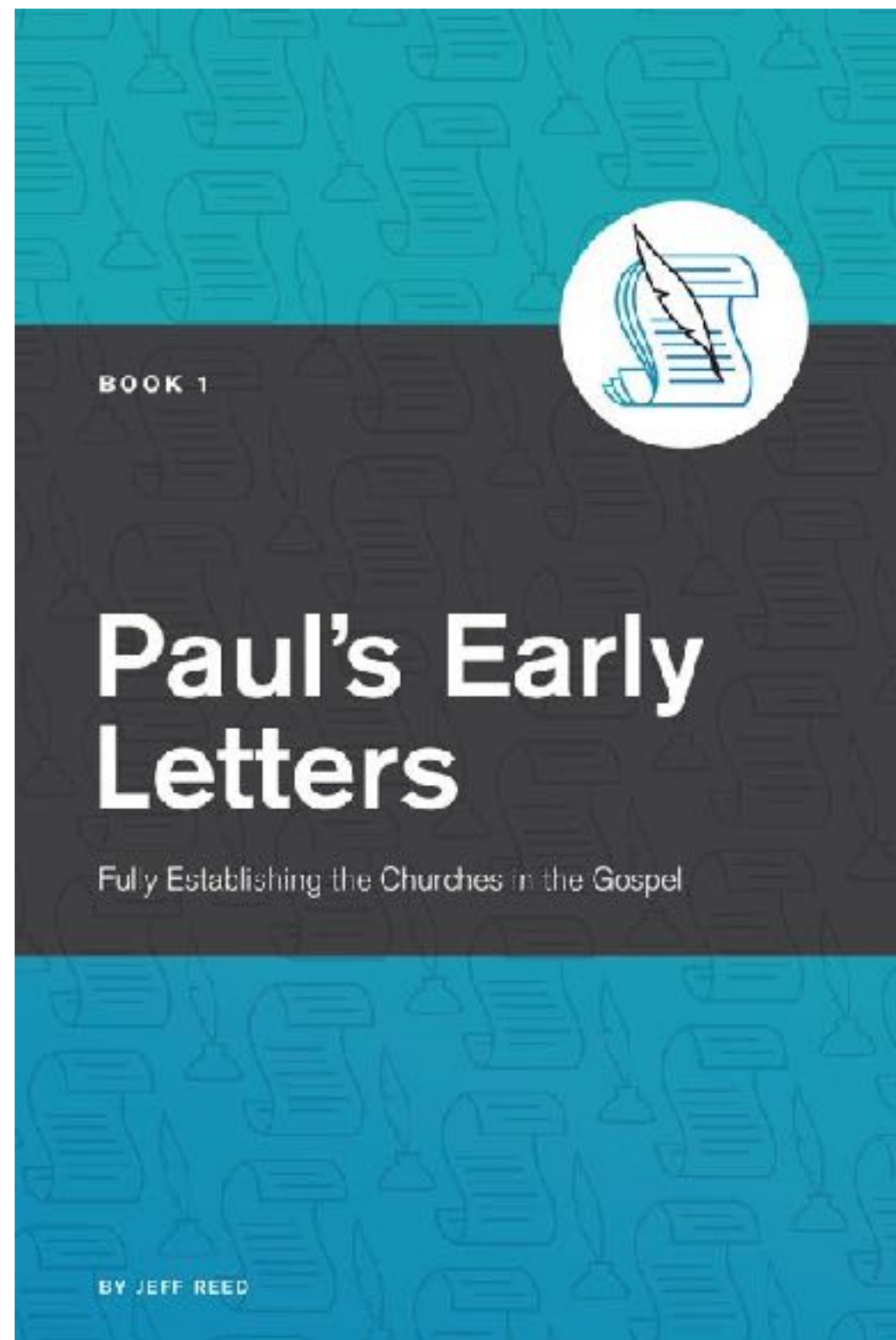
The Thessalonian correspondence

The Corinthian correspondence

The letter to the Romans

But for now, let's do a quick glance at each of Paul's correspondence to the churches in Galatia, in Thessalonica, to the Corinthian churches, and to the Roman churches.

Paul's Early Letters

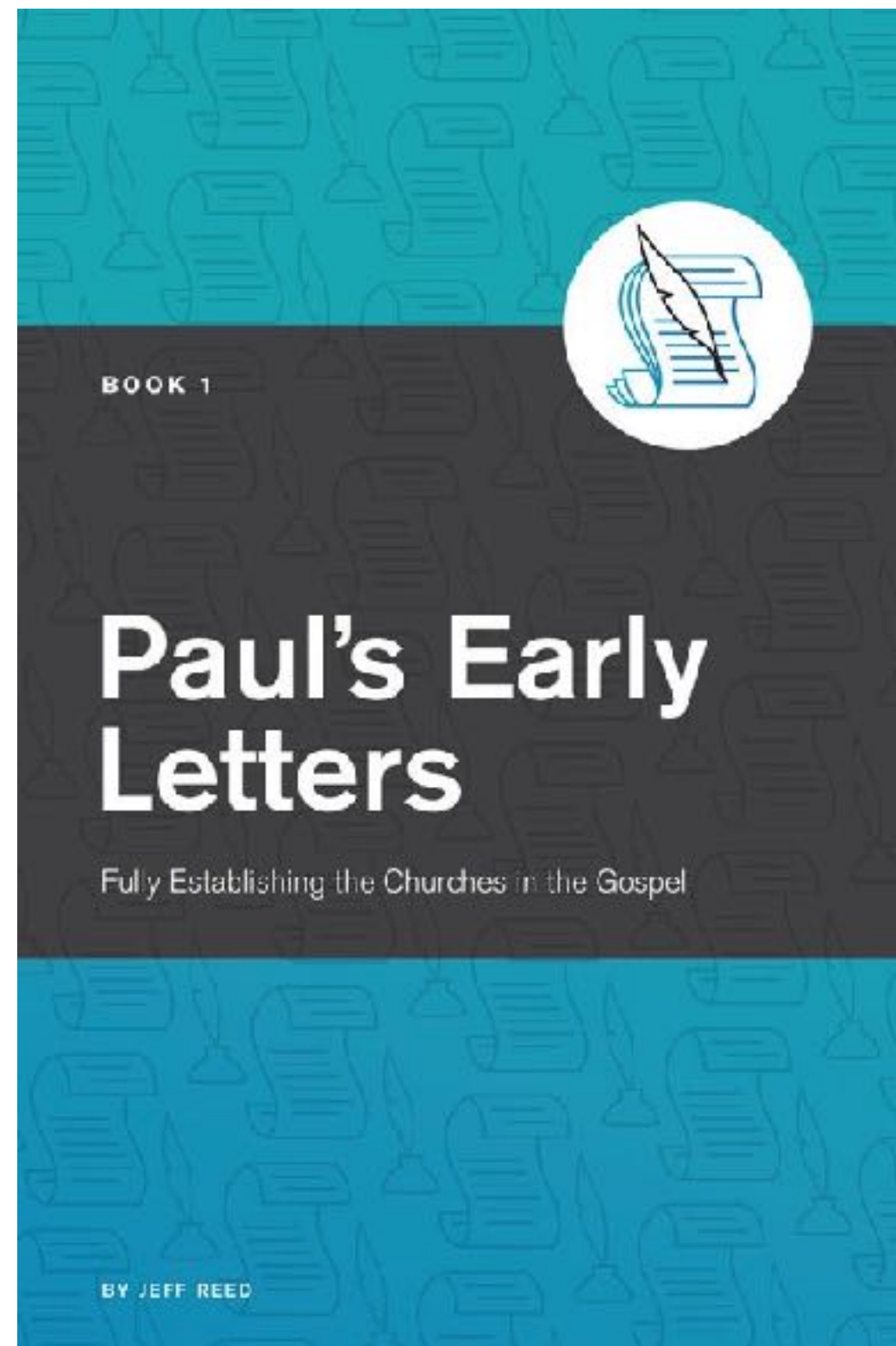


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 2: The Galatian Problem

In Galatians, they left the gospel for another. Here Paul makes a case by confronting Peter, who actually formed the “kerygmatic formulae,” and roots the gospel in the Old Testament law, showing how this all fits in the original plan of God.

Paul's Early Letters

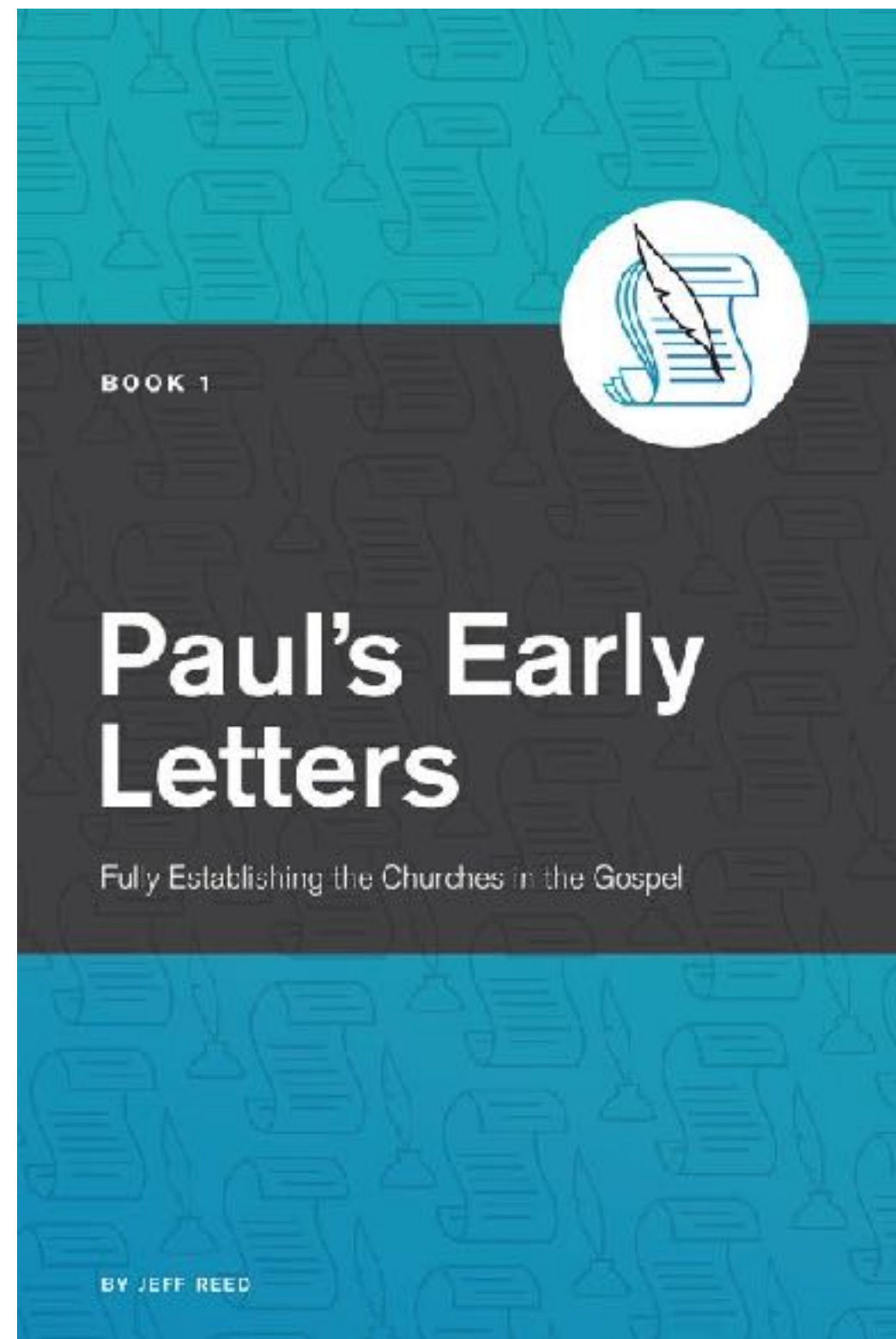


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 3: The Thessalonians' Conversion

In the Thessalonian letters, building on their solid conversion to this gospel, Paul challenges them to become fully established in it.

Paul's Early Letters

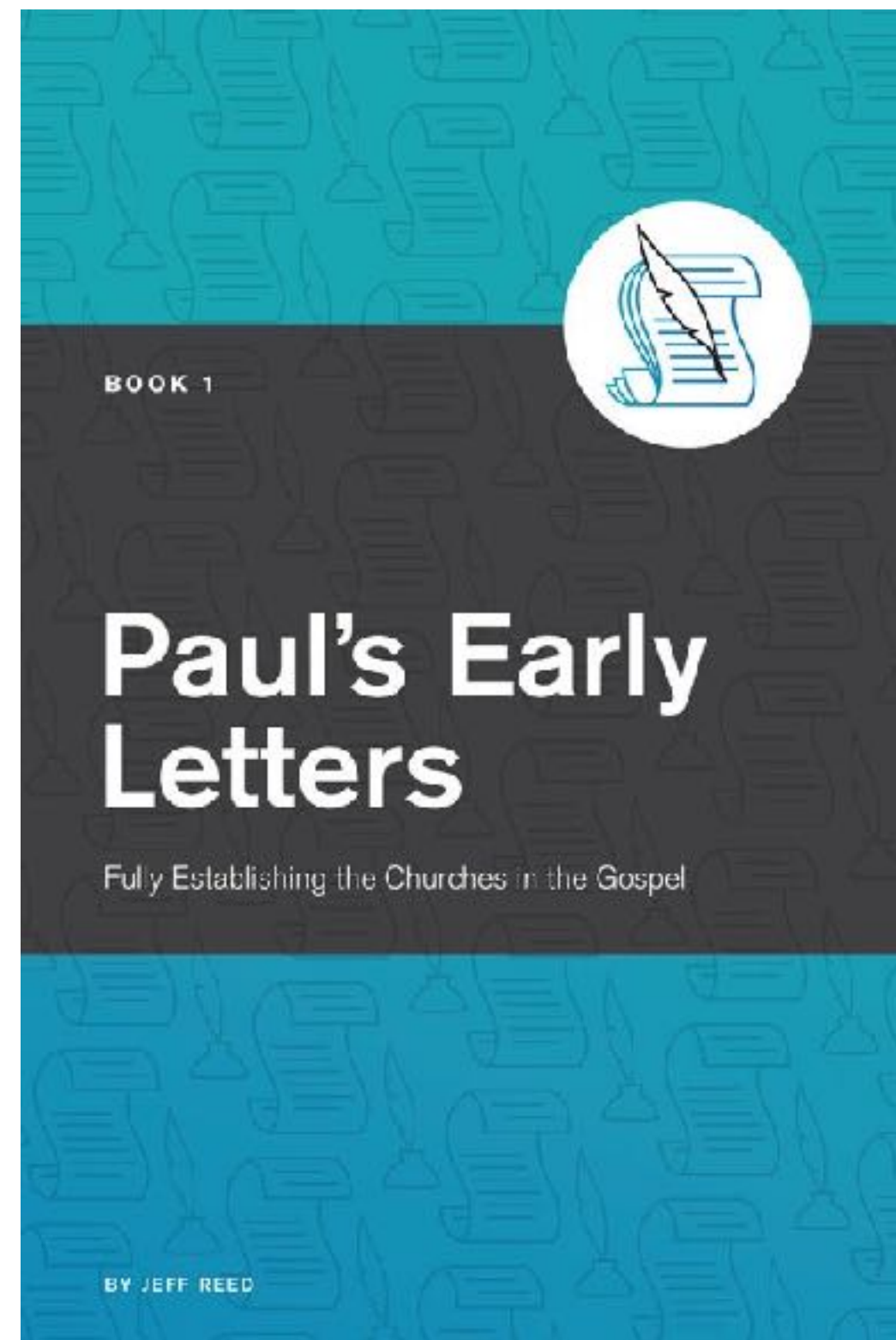


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul relates the gospel to all the divisions in the Corinthian church, defending the gospel as the same one preached by all the apostolic leaders. It is affirmed in statement form in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. He defends his apostleship in 2 Corinthians, opening the understanding of new covenant ministry.

Paul's Early Letters



Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 5: The Roman Treatise

Finally, Paul provides a complete treatise of the gospel to the Romans, introducing the letter with the kerygmatic statement to firmly establish the Roman churches in that gospel, thus fully convincing those who may be confused, by providing the complete gospel.

The Corinthian Schisms

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The Corinthian Schisms

So let's look at the Corinthians schisms and conflicts.

The Corinthian Schisms

¹¹ You see, my dear family, Chloe's people have put me in the picture about you—about the fact that you are having quarrels.

¹² What I'm talking about is this. Each one of you is saying, "I'm with Paul!" "I'm with Apollos!" "I'm with Cephas!" "I'm with the Messiah!"

1 Corinthians 1:11–12 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

Paul knows the churches have schisms that threaten to blow apart their unity and to have a huge effect on the progress of the gospel.

The whole unity of the church is in danger at the very foundation.

How does Paul respond to this news of their divisions?

The Corinthian Schisms

¹⁰ Now I must appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, through the name of King Jesus our Lord, that you should all be in agreement, and that there should be no divisions among you. Instead, you should be fully equipped with the same mind and the same opinion.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

Very simply: Paul wants them to be of the same mind . . . of the same opinion.

His appeal is the fact that they have the mind of Christ.

“But we have the mind of the Messiah.”

1 Corinthians 2:16

But what does this mean?

The Corinthian Schisms

⁵ You were enriched in him in everything, in every kind of speech and knowledge, ⁶ just as the messianic message was established among you, ⁷ so that you aren't missing out on any spiritual gift as you wait eagerly for our Lord, King Jesus, to be revealed. ⁸ He will establish you right through to the end, so that you are blameless on the day of our Lord, King Jesus. ⁹ God is faithful! And it is through God that you have been called into the fellowship of his son, King Jesus, our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:5–9 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

How does Paul understand the previous work he has done amongst the Corinthian churches?

They were well *founded*. Again he uses the word *established*. He specifically states the gospel—the message, the kerygma.

But also in knowledge and gifts—they were fully resourced to have an impact as churches. Paul had laid a good foundation.

The Corinthian Schisms

⁵ So what d'you suppose Apollos actually is? What d'you think Paul is? I'll tell you: servants, through whom you came to faith, each one as the Lord gave. ⁶ I planted and Apollos watered, but it was God who gave the growth. ⁷ It follows that the person who plants isn't anything special, and the person who waters isn't anything special; what matters is God who gives the growth. ⁸ The person who plants and the person who waters are just the same, and each will receive his own reward according to his own work. ⁹ We are God's fellow workers, you see: you are God's farm, God's building.

1 Corinthians 3:5–9 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

¹⁰ According to God's grace, I laid the foundation like a wise master builder, and someone else is building on it. Everyone should take care how they build on it. ¹¹ Nobody can lay any foundation, you see, except the one which is laid, which is Jesus the Messiah!

1 Corinthians 3:10–11 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

⁶ We do, however, speak wisdom among the mature. But this isn't a wisdom of this present world, or of the rulers of this present world—those same rulers who are being done away with.
⁷ No: we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery. This is the wisdom God prepared ahead of time, before the world began, for our glory.

1 Corinthians 2:6–7 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

What is Paul talking about? Why does he use this reasoning?

It is completely consistent with his understanding of who he is. And he is laying a foundation dealing with the conflicts and schisms in the Corinthian church.

The Corinthian Schisms

⁸ I am the very least of all God's people. However, he gave me this task as a gift: that I should be the one to tell the Gentiles the good news of the king's wealth, wealth no one could begin to count.

⁹ My job is to make clear to everyone just what the secret plan is, the purpose that's been hidden from the very beginning of the world in God who created all things. ¹⁰ This is it: that God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, was to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places—through the church!

Ephesians 3:8–10 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

Paul laid a good foundation in them.

He brought them the gospel. (kerygma)

He revealed the mystery—the secret teaching, only made know to him—a wisdom revealed from the spirit who discerns what is going on inside God. (didache)

“Nobody knows what is going on inside God except God’s spirit.”
I Corinthians 2:11 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

There is one foundation—the kerygma and the didache.

Paul, Apollos, and Peter are nothing but stewards.

What matters is what is going on inside God, which is discerned by the Spirit and revealed by Christ, especially to Paul.

This was laid as the foundation by Paul.

The Corinthian Schisms

Think it through:

Paul—the foundation and plan

Christ—the true spiritual followers

Apollos—the eloquent preacher

Peter—the law lifestyle

The Corinthian Schisms

What were the schisms about?

Issues such as liberties, offenses and conflicts, styles of worship, lifestyles and social status, accepting restored believers

General schism—following certain leaders

Specific schisms:

- Unresolved conflicts
- Lifestyle—marriage, singleness, divorce
- Lifestyle—liberties, freedoms
- Social status
- “Spiritual gifts,” worship

The Corinthian Schisms

In these 2 letters, Paul will carefully reason through these schisms, putting them in context.

It will equip us to avoid the same things. He will show how he established them in the gospel—that good news message. They are to build on that foundation.

As you will see, all of the schisms took place in community. So rooting them in the gospel is to root them in the heart and plan of God, which we have in the mind of Christ—the one foundation Paul laid with them.

The Corinthian Schisms

⁵ You were enriched in him in everything, in every kind of speech and knowledge, ⁶ just as the messianic message was established among you, ⁷ so that you aren't missing out on any spiritual gift as you wait eagerly for our Lord, King Jesus, to be revealed. ⁸ He will establish you right through to the end, so that you are blameless on the day of our Lord, King Jesus. ⁹ God is faithful! And it is through God that you have been called into the fellowship of his son, King Jesus, our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:5–9 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Schisms

Paul established them in the gospel, laying a foundation in them that many could build upon.

Now they had begun to split into factions.

In these letters, he will use the gospel, fused with the plan of God —what is going on inside God—to heal these factions and build them back into one community, contributing to the progress of the gospel.

His whole argument is applied to each specific schism.

The Corinthian Schisms

The gospel settles each conflict and keeps them from becoming schisms or divisions.

Specific schisms:

- Unresolved conflicts—why not be wronged; we will rule angels.
- Lifestyle—we are free to fit into a wide range of cultural situations.
- Social status—no longer any difference between us: all need the gospel, all are citizens of the kingdom.

We will deal with several of these and how the gospel shapes our view of conflicts, lifestyle, and social status in book 4 of this series.

The Corinthian Schisms

Now let's turn our attention from schisms to conflicts

They are not the same.

The Corinthian Conflicts

¹² However, when I came to Troas to announce the Messiah's gospel, and found an open door waiting for me in the Lord, ¹³ I couldn't get any quietness in my spirit because I didn't find my brother Titus there. So I left them and went off to Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 2:12–13 (N. T. Wright)

⁵ You see, even when we arrived in Macedonia, we couldn't relax or rest. We were troubled in every way; there were battles outside and fears inside.

2 Corinthians 7:5 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

Those verses — 2 Corinthians 2:12–13 and 2 Corinthians 7:5 — bookend Paul's theological excursion on his theology of New Covenant ministry:

2 Corinthians 2:14–7:5

Conflicts shape our faith! Conflicts without and fears within!

We are like clay pots — when cracked the light of Christ shines out.

The Corinthian Conflicts

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthenware pots, so that the extraordinary quality of the power may belong to God, not to us.
⁸ We are under all kinds of pressure, but we are not crushed completely; we are at a loss, but not at our wits' end; ⁹ we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are cast down, but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 2:7–9 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

The point is: all the conflicts make the light of the gospel real in our lives, thus we live as a genuine follower of Christ in His new Kingdom.

It changes us on the inside conflict by conflict.

This is how the gospel gains power in our lives.

The conflicts extend to the communication of the gospel as well.

The Corinthian Conflicts

¹⁴ But thanks be to God—the God who always leads us in his triumphal procession in the Messiah, and through us reveals everywhere the sweet smell of knowing him. ¹⁵ We are the Messiah's fragrance before God, you see, to those who are being saved and to those who are being lost. ¹⁶ To the latter, it's a smell which comes from death and leads to death; but to the former it's the smell of life which leads to life.

2 Corinthians 2:14–16 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

The gospel creates conflict in the world as well.

Some will respond. Some will not.

To some it leads to life, to some to death. Both are results of a message that creates conflict.

The gospel produces conflict when we encounter it, and as we grow in it.

The Corinthian Conflicts

One more concept is important here.

Frank speech!

Listen to Paul describe how he operates.

The Corinthian Conflicts

¹ Think of the Messiah, meek and gentle; then think of me, Paul—yes, Paul himself!—making his appeal to you. You know what I'm like: I'm humble when I'm face to face with you, but I'm bold when I'm away from you! ² Please, please don't put me in the position of having to be bold when I'm with you, of having to show how confident I dare to be when I'm standing up to people who think we are behaving in a merely human way. ³ Yes, we are mere humans, but we don't fight the war in a merely human way.

2 Corinthians 10:1–3 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

⁴ The weapons we use for the fight, you see, are not merely human; they carry a power from God that can tear down fortresses! We tear down clever arguments ⁵ and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah. ⁶ We are holding ourselves in readiness to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 Corinthians 10:4–6 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

⁷ Look at what's in front of your face. If anyone trusts that they belong to the Messiah, let them calculate it once more: just as they belong to the Messiah, so also do we! ⁸ For if I do indeed boast a bit too enthusiastically about the authority which the Lord has given me—which is for building you up, not for pulling you down!—I shan't be ashamed. ⁹ I wouldn't want to look as if I were trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ I know what they say: "His letters are serious and powerful, but when he arrives in person he is weak, and his words aren't worth bothering about." ¹¹ Anyone like that should reckon on this: the way we talk in letters, when we're absent, will be how we behave when we're present.

2 Corinthians 10:7–11 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

⁶ I may be untutored in speaking, but that certainly doesn't apply to my knowledge. Surely that's been made quite clear to you, in every way and on every point!

2 Corinthians 11:6 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

Paul engaged in frank speech that produced conflict. Look carefully at his words.

“please, don’t put me in a position of having to be bold with you” 10:2

“of having to show how confident I dare to be when I am standing up to people” 10:2

“His letters are serious and powerful... the way we talk in letters, when we are absent, will be how we behave when we are present” 10:10–11

“I may be untutored in speaking, but that certainly doesn’t apply to my knowledge. Surely it has been made quite clear to you, in every way and on every point.” 11:6

The Corinthian Conflicts

Paul's style with the Corinthians:

bold

confident

confrontative

authoritative

very frank

He knew the only way to deal with the issues and conflicts of the Corinthian churches was to confront those causing schisms, escalating the conflicts.

The Corinthian Conflicts

What toll did this process take on Paul?

The Corinthian Conflicts

⁸ You see, my dear family, we don't want to keep you in the dark about the suffering we went through in Asia. The load we had to carry was far too heavy for us; it got to the point where we gave up on life itself.

2 Corinthians 1:8 (N. T. Wright)

²⁴ Five times I've had the Jewish beating, forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned...I've burned the candle at both ends.... ²⁸ Quite apart from all that, I have this daily pressure on me, my care for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:24–25, 28 (N. T. Wright)

The Corinthian Conflicts

So let's create Paul's process in establishing the Corinthian churches in the gospel.

It was a bloody picture.

The Corinthian Conflicts

Paul's process of establishing the Corinthian churches in the gospel:

1. Paul knew the gospel would produce massive conflict when it was presented, bringing some to life and pushing some to death.
2. Paul knew that the Corinthian churches would be in conflict within their communities as the gospel took root in their conflicts, lifestyles, religious preferences, and varying social statuses.
3. Paul knew the nature of the ministry was conflicts without and fears within.

The Corinthian Conflicts

Paul's process of establishing the Corinthian churches in the gospel:

4. Paul confronted the emerging schisms directly in his letters, explaining his need to be as direct as he was being.
 - a. His arguments were direct and powerful.
 - b. He used his authority to defend the gospel and its implications for their schisms.
 - c. He escalated their conflicts by threatening to confront them face to face in a future visit.
 - d. He expected them to follow his teaching and respect his authority.

The Corinthian Conflicts

Paul's process of establishing the Corinthian churches in the gospel:

5. In the midst of escalating their conflicts, Paul instructed the Corinthians in the nature of the conflicts and their power to bring real change in their lives. They were like clay pots, in which “conflicts without and fears within” would produce the power of the gospel in their lives.
6. The process took a huge toll on Paul's life — personal accusations, depression, daily pressure of churches, a huge number of physical attacks — as he progressed the gospel.

The Corinthian Conflicts

The process in establishing the churches in the gospel is a conflict filled process.

It is a bloody picture.

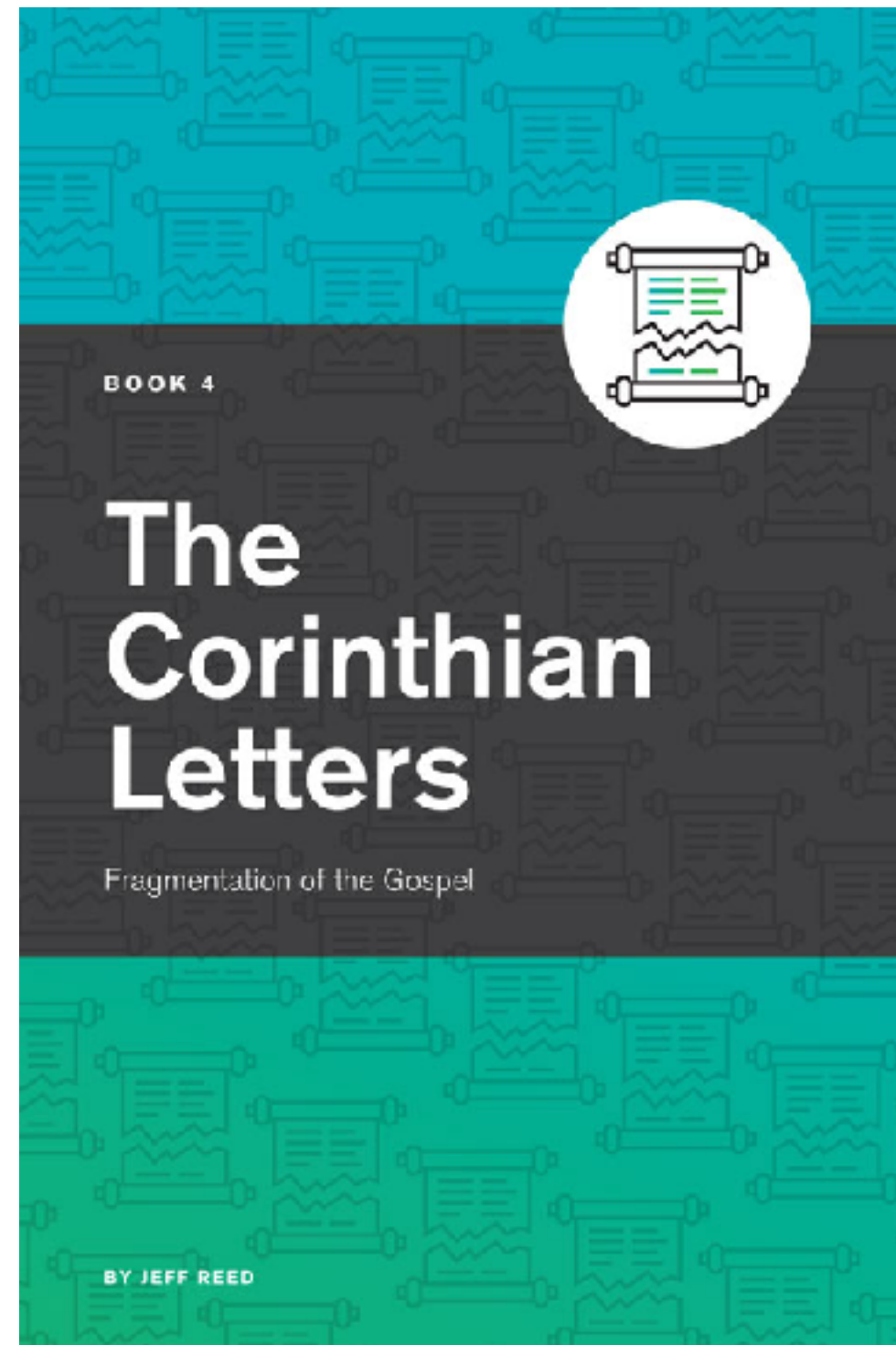
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The Corinthian Conflicts



Book 4: The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Session 1: The Fragmentation of the Gospel

Session 2: Building on One Foundation: The Traditions

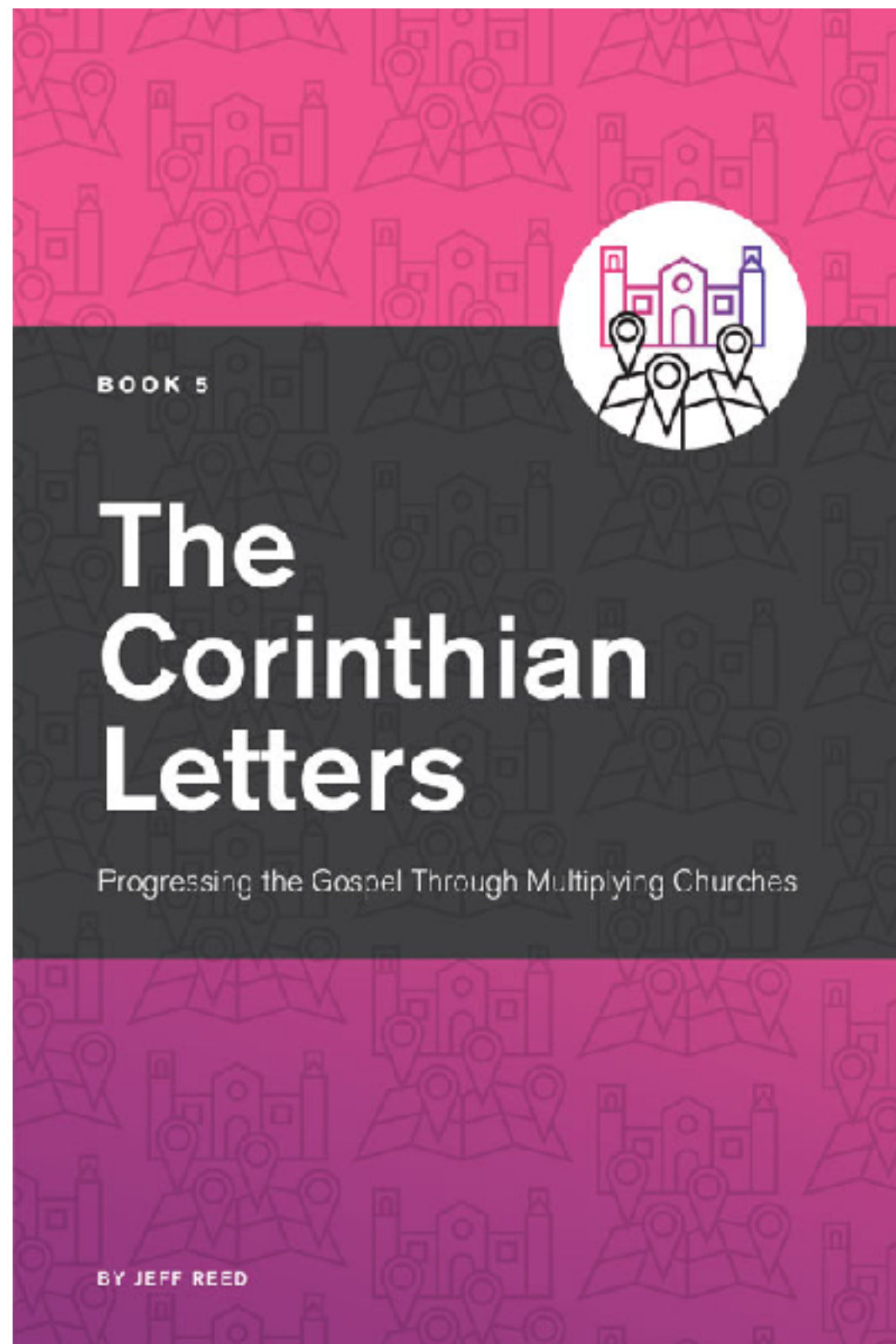
Session 3: Divisions in their Community Life

Session 4: Divisions in their Community Gatherings

Session 5: Back to the Gospel Foundations

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry

The Corinthian Conflicts



Book 5: The Corinthian Letters: Progressing the Gospel Through Multiplying Churches

Session 1: The Pressure of Leading Church Networks

Session 2: The Ministry of the Gospel: Conflicts Without and Fears Within

Session 3: Sacrificing Network to Network for the Progress of the Gospel

Session 4: The Importance of Apostolic Teams

Session 5: The Appeal to the Corinthian Churches

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry

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