

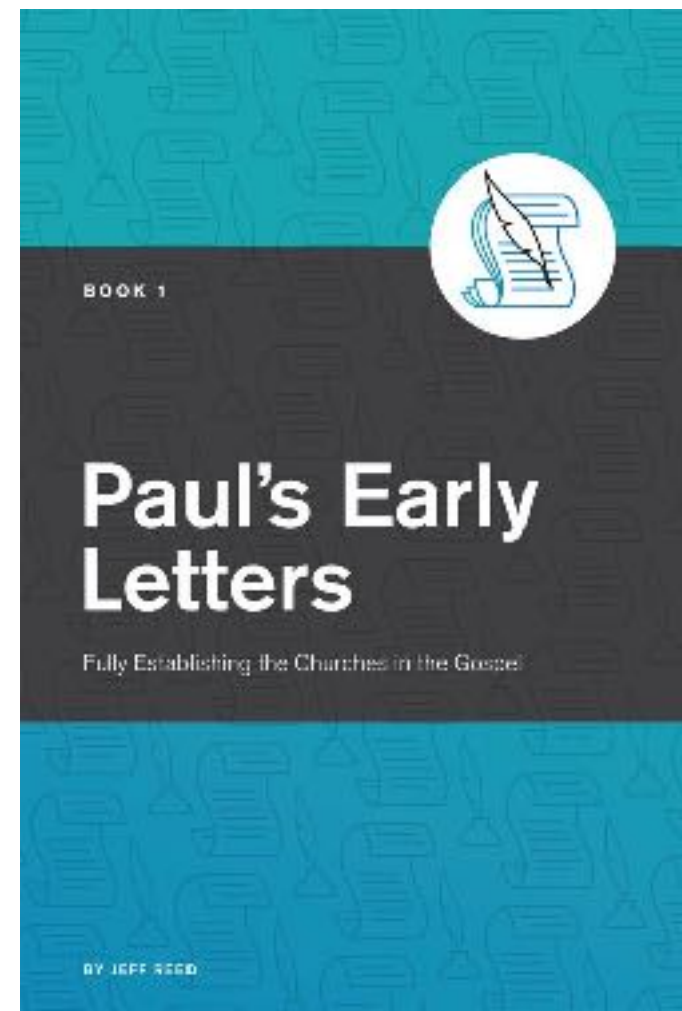
Paul's Middle Letters: Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Paul's Desire to Establish the Lycus Valley Churches

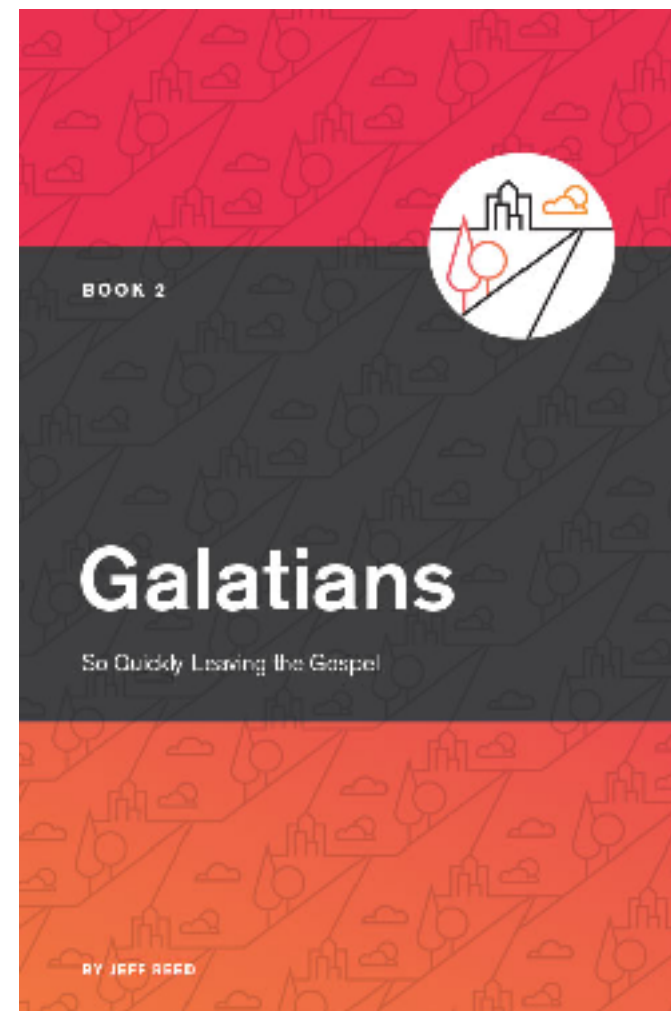
Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians?
2. Colossians was written almost exactly one year after the Ephesian manifesto. In light of its very close parallel to Ephesians, why was it needed?
3. How did Paul apply the Ephesian manifesto to the churches of the Lycus Valley?
4. In what way can we call Ephesians followed by Colossians as the framework of the establishing process?

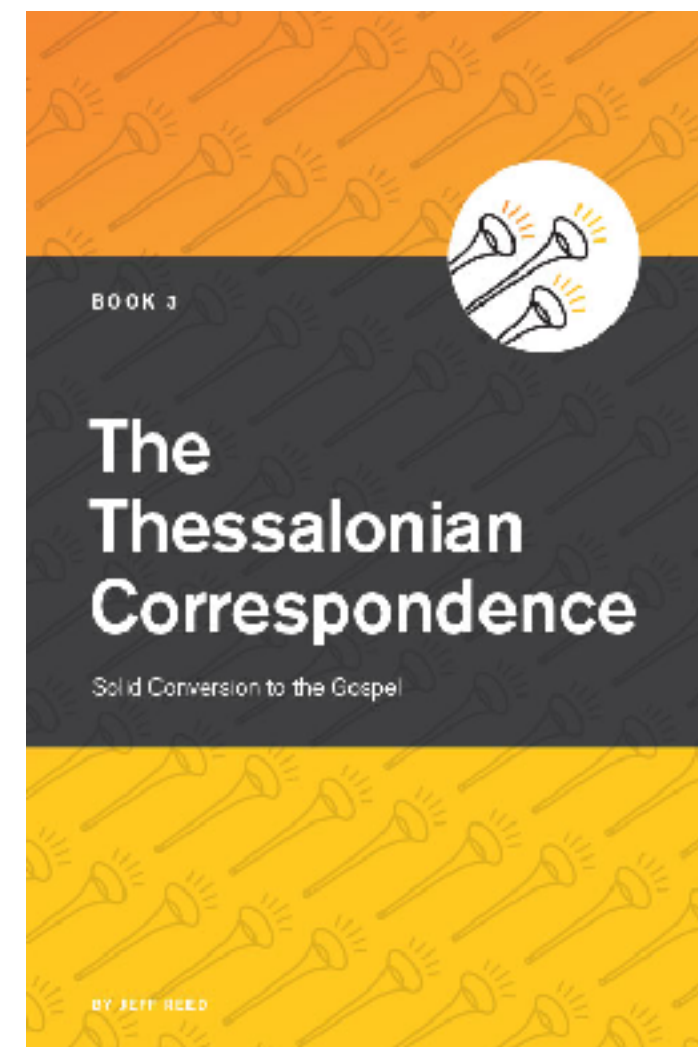
Paul's Early Letters



AD 49–56



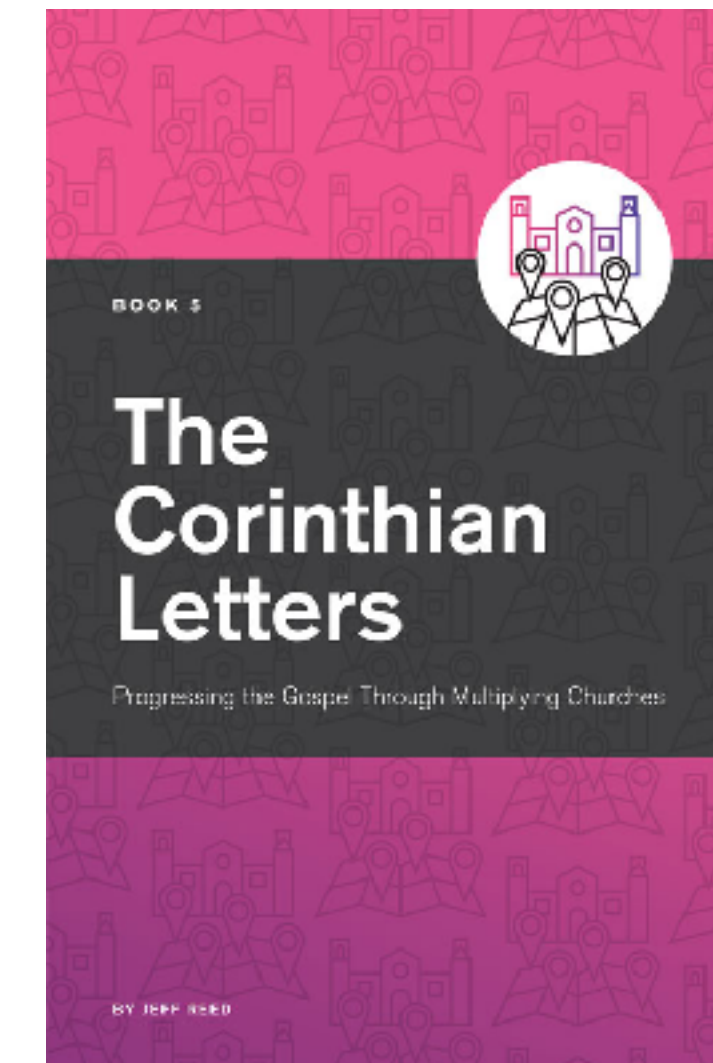
Autumn 49



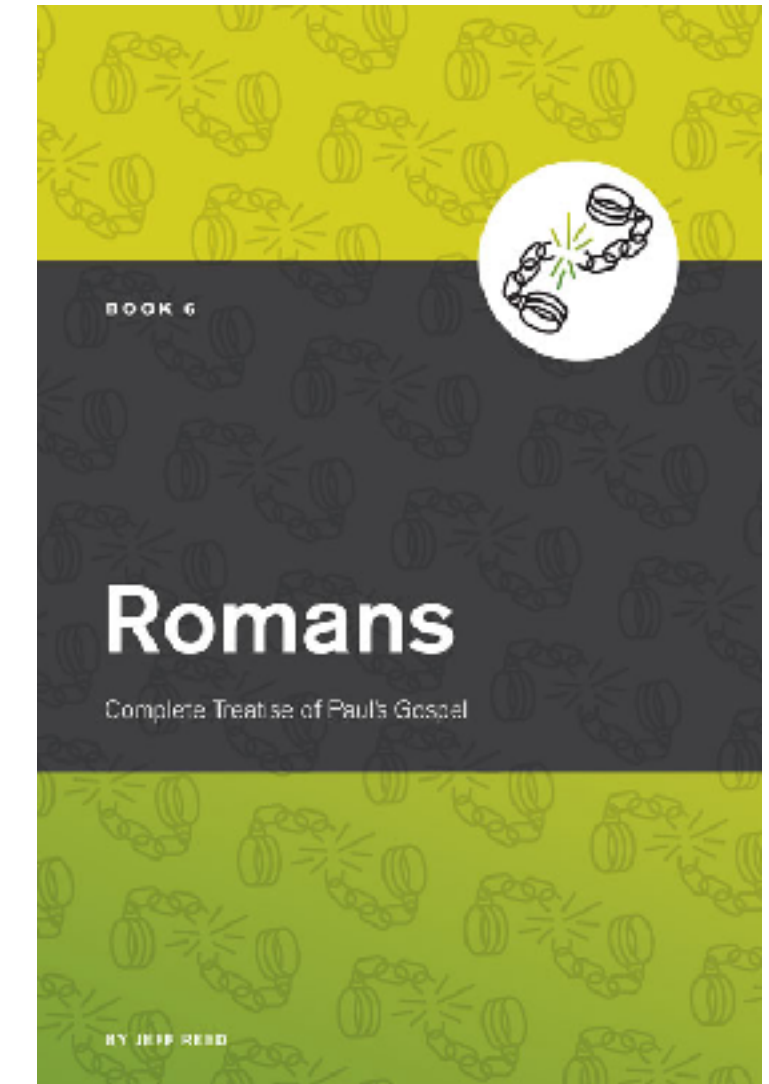
Winter/Sum. 51



Sept. 53



June 56



Nov. 56



Paul's Middle Letters



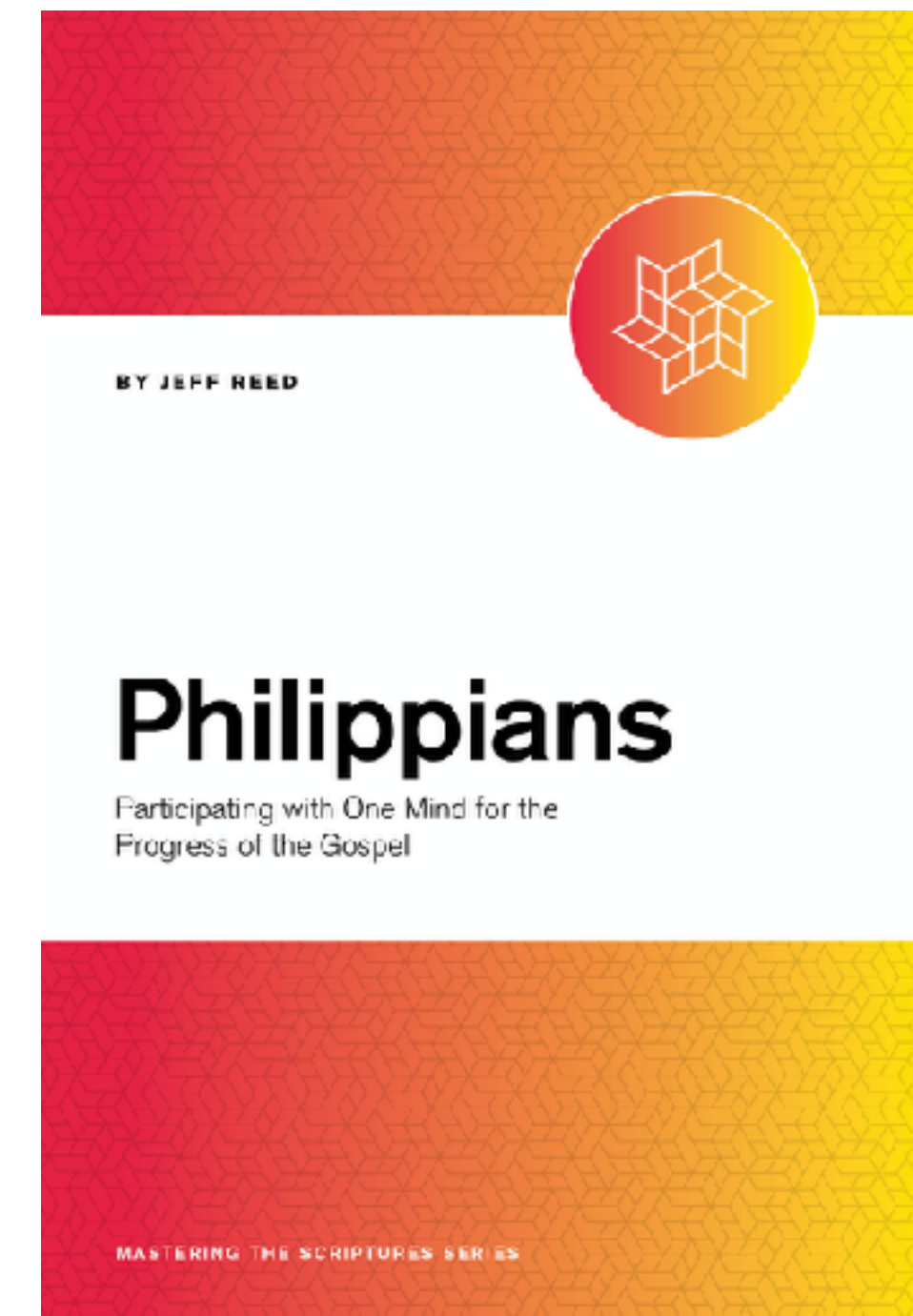
Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62



Paul's Middle Letters

New Testament Theology

It is critical that we treat these letters as a collection within Paul's larger collection.

These letters build on each other as they unfold. And while they each stand alone as a letter to a particular set of churches, they all deal with similar issues that together present a very clear picture of establishing churches in Christ's grand strategy—a full picture of the centrality of church networks in that strategy.

New Perspective on Paul

Old Perspective on Paul

Sanders: “Paul was a coherent, but not systematic, thinker” (like systematic theologians since the Reformation)

Johnson: (What) “they have been taught has been abstracted from certain dialogues and arranged into a logical system that is nowhere to be found as such in the dialogues themselves.” (Plato)

Wright: “not just bits and pieces, miscellaneous topoi which just happen to turn up in these irrelevant ‘contingent’ contexts like oddly shaped pearls on an irrelevant string.”

New Perspective on Paul

Sanders: “Paul as a theological thinker with a coherent viewpoint”

Johnson: “When they actually begin to read the dialogues in all their particularity and complexity, they begin to discover how much exciting and challenging thought has escaped the usual categories.” (Plato)

Wright: “The more time we spend in the careful reading of Paul and in the study of his worldview, his theology, and his aims and intentions, the more he emerges as a deeply coherent thinker. His main themes may well not fit the boxes constructed by later Christian dogmatics of whatever type. They generate their own categories....”

New Perspective on Paul

Old Perspective on Paul

Paul was a systematic theologian like Calvin, but contained unsystematized doctrine that could be systemized by future theologians. But his thought was not organized and fully developed nor fully logical; therefore, it must be made clearer and clearer by highly skilled (Western) systematic theologians.

New Perspective on Paul

Paul was a coherent thinker who did theology in culture amongst his churches, from a framework of fully integrated historical narrative and dense cyclic organizing centers (theological core/topoi). It enables us to do similar theology in culture amongst our churches today, together they make up the essence of Christ's grand strategy.

New Perspective on Paul

Old Perspective on Paul

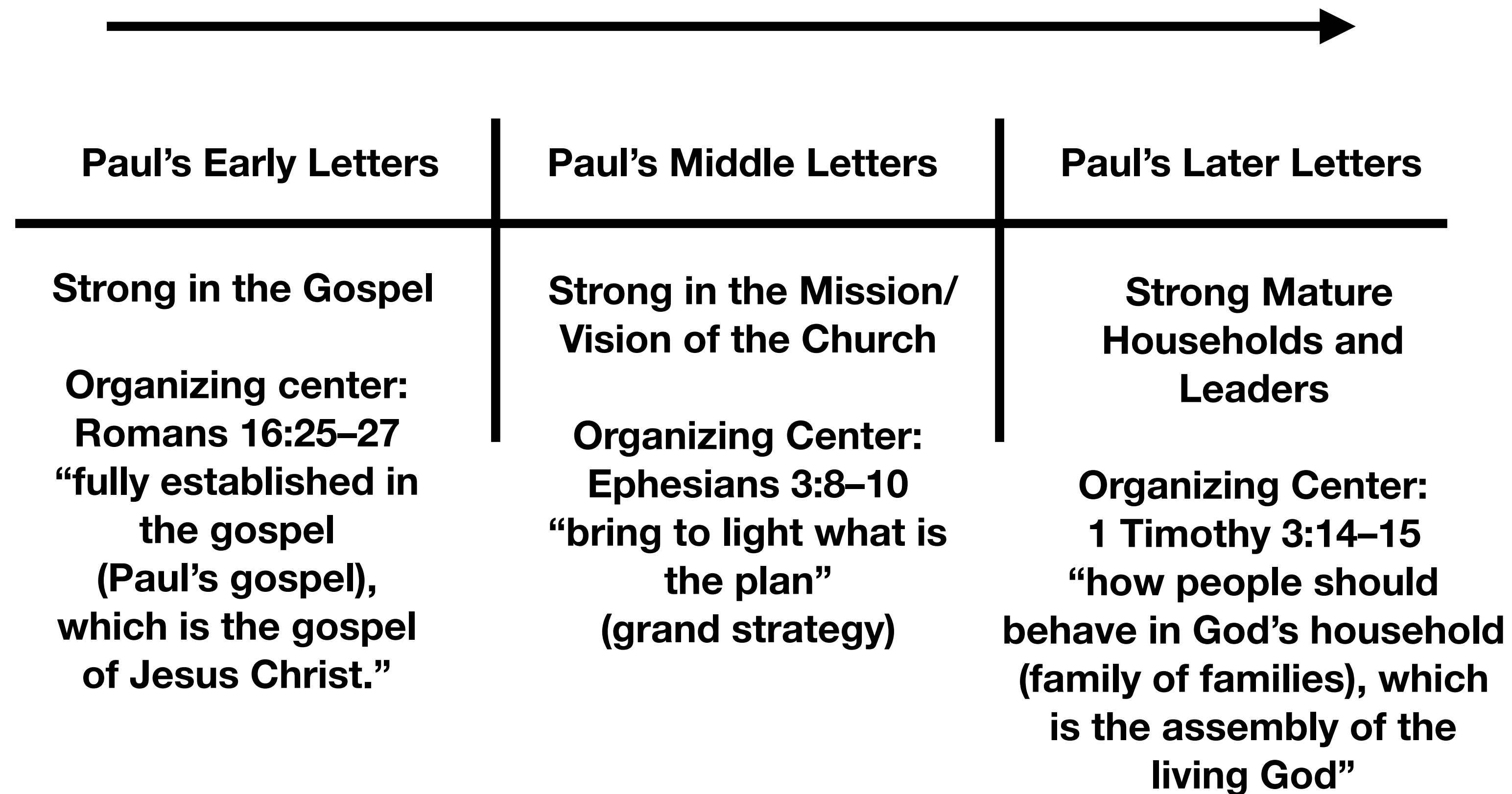
Paul's letters contain miscellaneous, often unrelated topics, that would be useful for future believers, especially in dealing with sin, salvation, and living the Christian life. These topics are a significant part of today's ever growing systematic theologies.

New Perspective on Paul

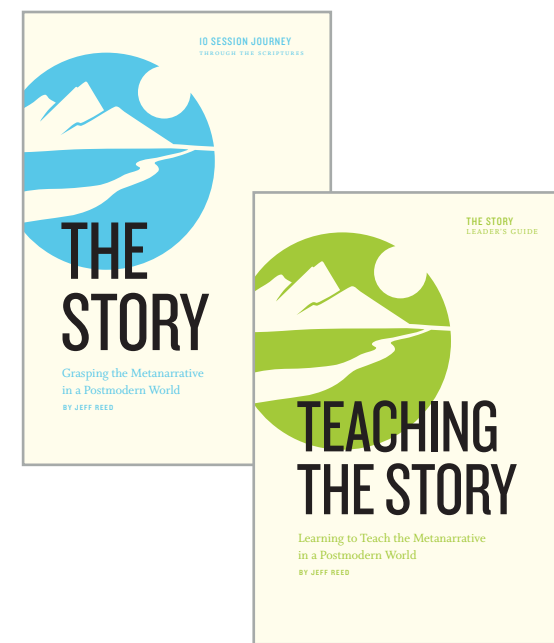
Paul's letters form a coherent, interlocking shape, foundational for churches in any generation to fully understand Christ's grand strategy of the Church being central to His unfolding kingdom and to live in full alignment of that grand strategy.

Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

The Process of Building Strong Churches



New Perspective on Paul



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years "night and day"



Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years



Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year



Paul's Middle Letters

These letters were all written close together (at the end of Acts, 20:30), during the 2 years Paul was under house arrest—from February 60 to March 62. Most likely...

Ephesians was written Autumn 60

Colossians and Philemon—Autumn 61

Philippians—early Spring 62

Here we are looking into the heart of Paul's network

Ephesians—hub churches

Colossians and Philemon—cluster churches

Philippians—node churches

Paul's Middle Letters — Ephesians

Ephesians — Hub Churches

Ephesians: A manifesto revealing Christ's "grand strategy" — the Church — to his key "hub" churches in Ephesus, with special attention to training the elders of this strategic city in the whole plan of Christ for an entire 3-year period.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians, Philemon

Colossians—Cluster Churches

Colossians: An almost identical letter to Ephesians (along with Philemon), written to the house churches scattered throughout the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis) one year after writing his “manifesto” to the Ephesian churches to help them, at a very practical level, to implement the new church paradigm in their network of churches—a model to be used as a framework for the entire history of clusters of churches down through the centuries.

Philemon: To practically illustrate to the network of churches in the Lycus Valley the importance of Christ's grand strategy, of the kingdom through the Church, in restructuring all their social relationships—including slavery—around the church as a family of families, the household social structure of the church, which was evident in the Greek “republic” ideal of the day but fully realized in the emerging kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Paul's Middle Letters—Ephesians

Philippi—A Strategic Partner Church

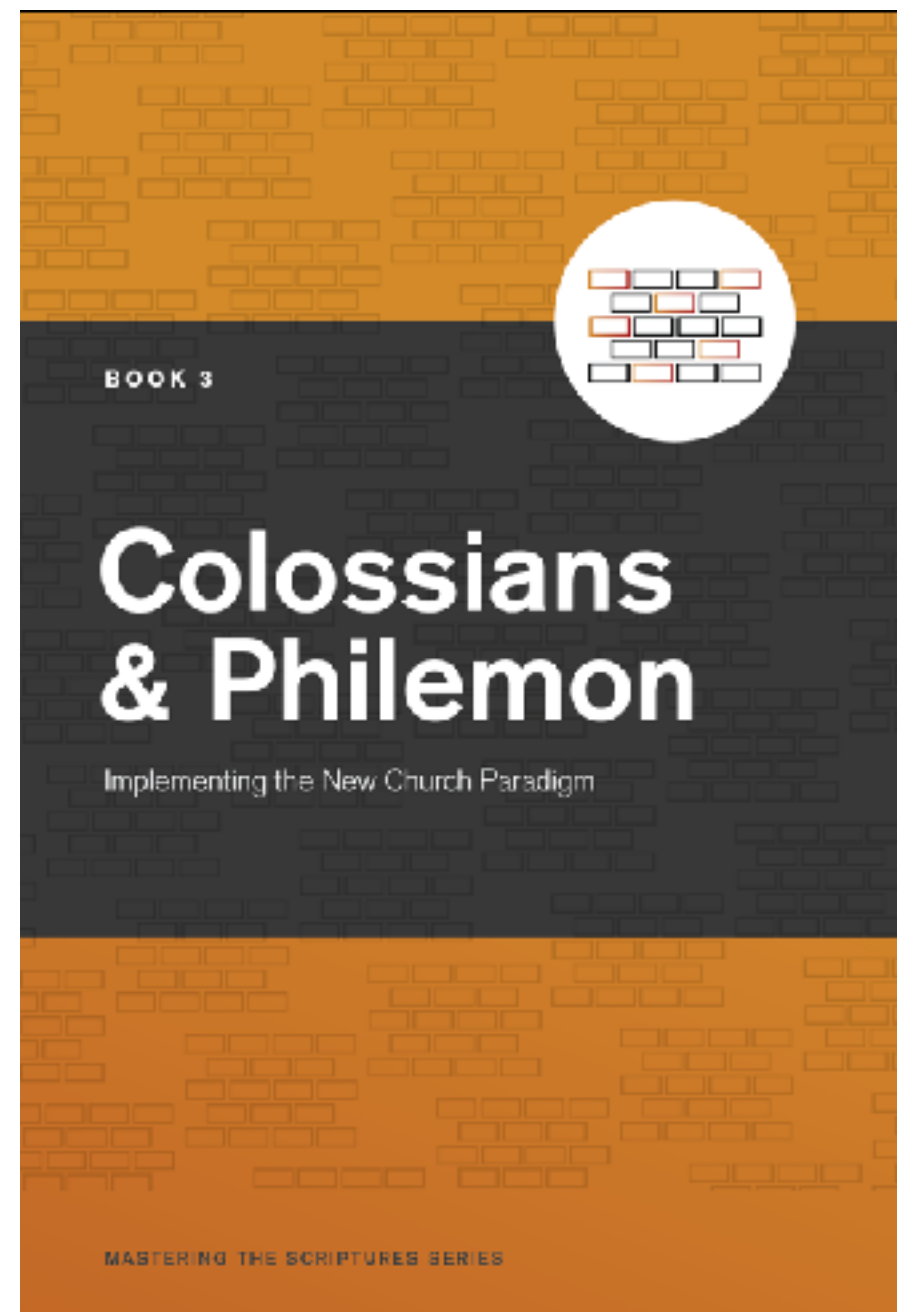
Philippi: a strategic network of churches in Philippi that participated with Paul from its inception. After Paul's full and mature presentation of the centrality of the Church as the heart of Christ's grand strategy for bringing in the kingdom in his letter to the Ephesians, Philippians illustrates the importance of churches participating with one mind in the progress of the gospel through His grand strategy—the Church.

Colossians

Implementing the New Church Paradigm



Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians



Session 1: Situating the Lycus Valley Church in Christ's Grand Strategy

Session 2: First Principles of the World

Session 3: First Principles of Christ

Session 4: The Importance of Network—the Lycus Valley Network

Session 5: Philemon—Doing Theology in the Network

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

The letter to the Colossians is very similar to Ephesians. It is so parallel that it begs the question of why we need a second letter so similar.

We will begin this morning by looking at the first section of the letter, 1:1–2:5.

We hope to answer that question this morning in a very practical way.

Then in the next 2 sessions, we will focus on 2:6–4:6, first looking at the first principles of the world and then the first principles of Christ.

Then finally, in 4:7–18, we will look at the network of the Lycus Valley churches and how they fit within Christ's grand strategy.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

As you will see

Ephesians—is mostly Christ's grand strategy and has a little on Paul's network.

Colossians–Philemon—is similar on Christ's grand strategy and has a lot on Paul's network.

Philippians—is mostly on participating in Christ's grand strategy through Paul's network.

All 4 letters use similar terminology and sort of work as one growing theology of Christ's vision and mission for His churches.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

This would be a good time to review Book 1 in this series, *Paul's Early Letters*, session 3, which is on Colossians. Here is a summary slide from that session:

What was Paul doing at the end of his letter to the Colossians?

- He was introducing them to his team: John Mark, Luke, etc.
- He was building a relationship with them, with all the greetings, including writing the last section by his own hand.
- He was building a cluster network with the 3 cities by the letter exchange and by greetings from the churches of Laodicea.
- He was establishing the practical authority of his team by giving his instructions to his team members for Colossae.

This all becomes a model for building future complex apostolic networks.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

These whole sections are parallel:

Ephesians 1:1–3:21

Colossians 1:1–2:5

The next sections are parallel as well:

Ephesians 4:1–6:10

Colossians 2:6–4:6

Then finally:

Ephesians 6:21–23

Colossians 4:7–18

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷ This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:1–8

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

Several observations

1. This letter is not coming just from Paul, since he includes Timothy alongside his name.
2. Epaphras, one of Paul's apostolic team, reported to Paul that the churches had started in Colossae.
3. The gospel that they received "is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world."

What would they be able to conclude from this so far?

They are part of something unfolding worldwide, and they are part of Paul's network.

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9–14

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Who are the Colossians?

Paul's Prayer

Similar to Ephesians 1:15–23 and 3:14–21

...that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding... May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power.

Paul is praying that they begin to grasp the significance of what has happened to them. They have been transferred into Christ's kingdom, their sins forgiven.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— ²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Colossians 1:15–23

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Who is Christ?

He is everything. He created everything and He will reconcile everything in His kingdom. He is the head of the body—His Church.

In His kingdom, specifically through His Church, He will reconcile everything.

This passage assumes Ephesians 1:3–14, written a year earlier.

That passage tells us Christ is now seated at the right hand of God, having been raised from the dead. His kingdom has been inaugurated and He will rule over everything in the future. In the context of these unfolding realities, His grand strategy now is the Church, through which He will amaze even the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵ I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Colossians 1:24–29

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

So who is Paul?

He is suffering in prison now because he was chosen by Christ to make the word of God fully known—the mystery which was hidden—Christ in you.

This passage parallels and assumes Ephesians 3:1–10.

Paul's job was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (primarily his early letters) and to bring to light what was previously hidden—the grand strategy of the Church.

That is what he is doing in this Colossians letter for the churches of the Lycus Valley.

He has proclaimed the gospel to them through his team, praying for them to fully grasp what has happened to them, establishing them in Christ's grand strategy—both through teaching and engaging them in that strategy through the movement spreading throughout the world.

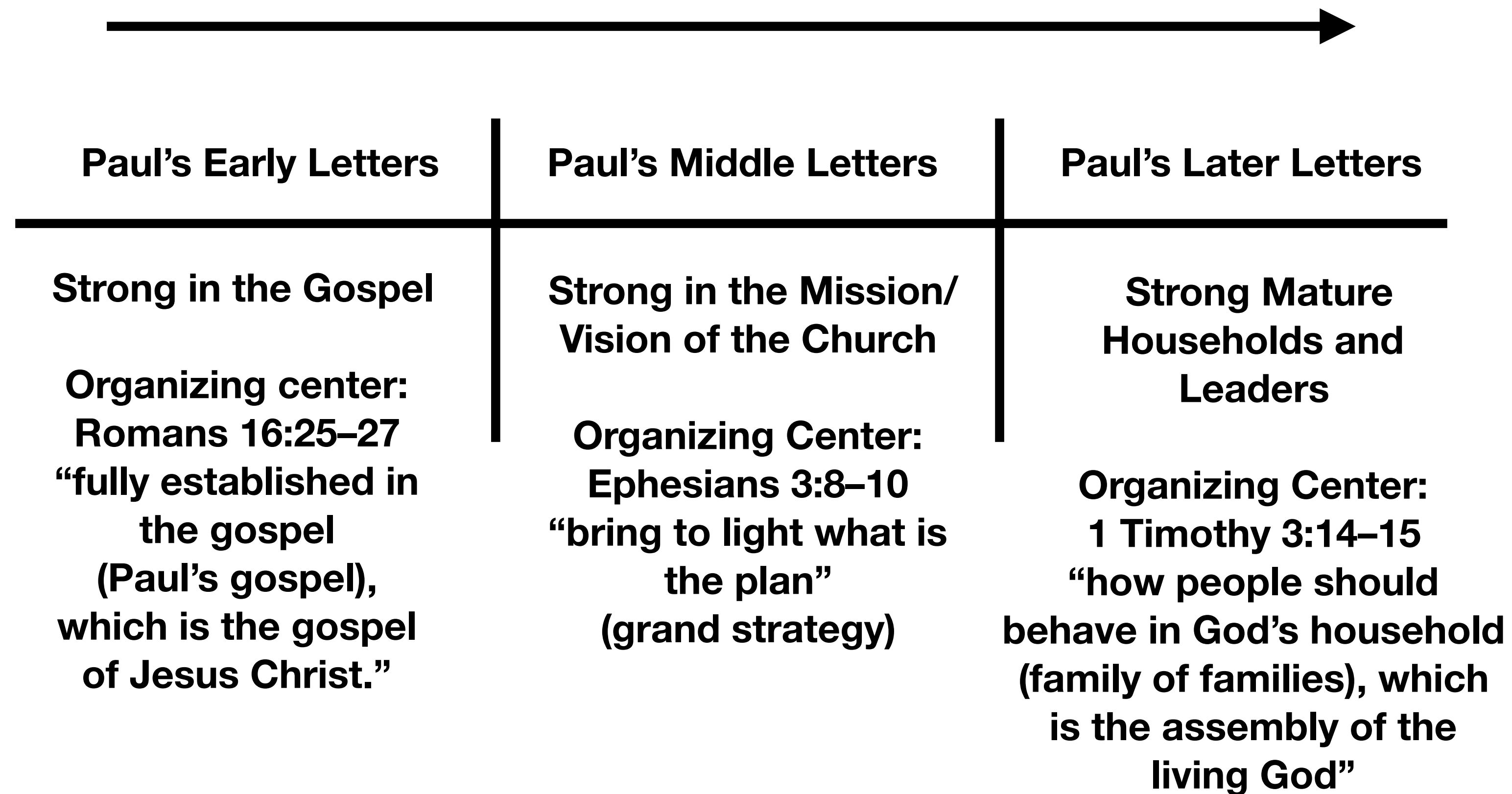
Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Observe how Paul is doing theology:

1. He uses similar terms that are embedded in the very logical treatment of Christ's grand strategy in Ephesians 2:11–4:16. It centers around Christ as the head of the Church, the revelation of the mystery previously hidden, and Paul's commission to bring it to light.
2. A big part of his prayer for them is that they will fully comprehend Christ who is over everything and His grand strategy, the Church. He uses similar phraseology from his Ephesian manifesto, drawing on the two prayers that bookend his larger argument of Ephesians 2:11–3:18.
3. He has a special commission to proclaim the gospel, and they are part of that commission.
4. Yet he does not lay it out in a tight logical argument like he does in 2:11–4:16. But he draws on its essence, Ephesians 3:7–10, and addresses the Lycus Valley churches in a personal way to get them established in this core teaching.
5. This illustrates again how the organizing center of these middle letters is Ephesians 3:7–10.

Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

The Process of Building Strong Churches



Paul's Early Letters	Paul's Middle Letters	Paul's Later Letters
Strong in the Gospel Organizing center: Romans 16:25–27 “fully established in the gospel (Paul's gospel), which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.”	Strong in the Mission/ Vision of the Church Organizing Center: Ephesians 3:8–10 “bring to light what is the plan” (grand strategy)	Strong Mature Households and Leaders Organizing Center: 1 Timothy 3:14–15 “how people should behave in God's household (family of families), which is the assembly of the living God”

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

2:1 For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. ² I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:1–7

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

I see two main things here.

It is clear he is trying to firmly establish the Colossae churches in their faith—grasping what has happened to them, understanding Christ's grand strategy, and becoming fully stable and powerful in their faith.

Why does he bring up Laodicea here? Remember 4:12–13.

¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you... ¹³ For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

By the summary here, I think he is likely telling them this: He wants the same thing for Laodicea as he does for them—the point of the summary—and he wants them to help Laodicea.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Let's try to put some of this together—which we will be doing all through this booklet.

1. Paul is writing this letter to firmly root the churches in the Lycus Valley in their fairly recent conversions.
2. He is building on the work of one of his team members—Epaphras—pulling the churches into fully participating in his network, in the global expansion of the Church, and in his unique apostolic authority.
3. He is skillfully drawing on the Ephesians manifesto to carefully establish them in Christ and His grand strategy.
4. Everybody on his team is praying for them to fully grasp what has happened to them and who they are now (especially when you see the network conclusion in 4:7–18).
5. Paul is writing the Ephesians–Colossians letters with a view of them becoming a template for establishing churches and growing church-based networks around Christ's grand strategy.
6. Part of establishing new churches is to help them realize that they are part of an apostolic network with authority, and they are part of a global movement that will change the world.

Significance of Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Significance of Colossians–Philemon for Our Churches Today

Questions:

1. What is the significance of these two letters for our churches today?
2. In what way is the Ephesians and Colossians–Philemon combination a guide or framework for establishing churches in our networks today?
3. What is the value of establishing a network identity as part of the establishing process in our churches?
4. What might be some of the consequences of establishing individuals as “followers of Jesus” without this framework?

Implications for Our Churches

Let's try to put some of this together, which we will be doing all through this booklet.

1. We need to follow up churches quickly to see that they are grasping what has happened to them and challenge them to become fully established.
2. We need a skillful apostolic team going to strategic areas—proclaiming the gospel and forming churches.
3. We need to skillfully draw on Acts and the Pauline corpus to carefully establish churches in Christ and His grand strategy.
4. Everybody on our apostolic team and key churches must pray for these new churches to fully grasp what has happened to them and who they are now.
5. We need to master the “Pauline corpus template” for establishing churches and growing church-based networks around Christ’s grand strategy.
6. We need a clear process for training new churches that they are part of an apostolic network with authority, and they are part of a global movement that will change the world.

Implications for Our Churches

Randy, Curtis, and Aaron's Church Plant on Yuma

1. Neighborhood outreach—Parenting with a Plan—cluster strategy
2. Inaugurating a Yuma church—Curtis
3. Introducing to cluster (Lycus Valley)—Randy and Aaron
4. Expanding around the world—Jeff
5. Establishing Process—The First Principles