

Paul's Middle Letters

Last week we looked at a core set of first principles (philosophy, human traditions) of the world that are common

- ... to all religions
- ... to all cultures
- ... to all political systems

This week we will look at a core set of first principles (philosophy, traditions) of Christ.

Are they intended to be applied

- ... to all religions?
- ... to all cultures?
- ... to all political systems?

Paul's Middle Letters: Colossians–Philemon

Issue: Identifying the first principles of Christ

Questions:

1. In what way does Christ have a set of elementary principles? What does Paul mean here? Is Paul saying that Christ has one set of first principles? a core philosophy?
2. What does Paul mean to be established in the first principles of Christ?
3. What is the essence of the first principles of Christ—of His philosophy and traditions?
4. What is the outcome of living by the first principles of Christ? by His traditions and philosophy?

Paul's Middle Letters – Colossians

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2:8–15

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

3:1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12–17

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, ²⁴ since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. 4:1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, ⁴ so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

⁵ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

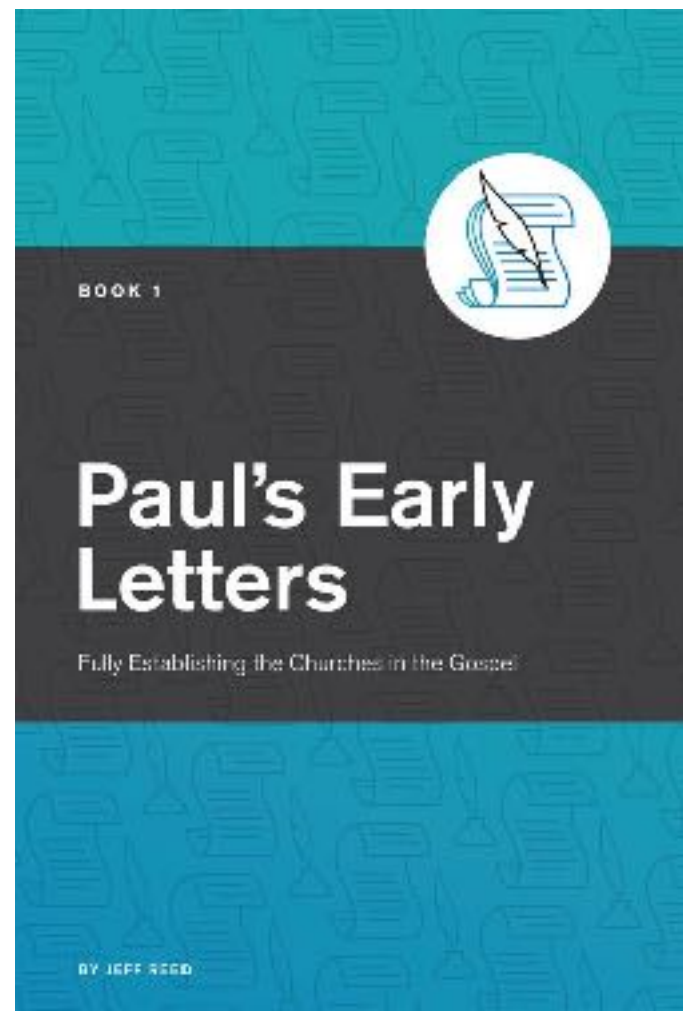
Colossians 4:2–5

Colossians

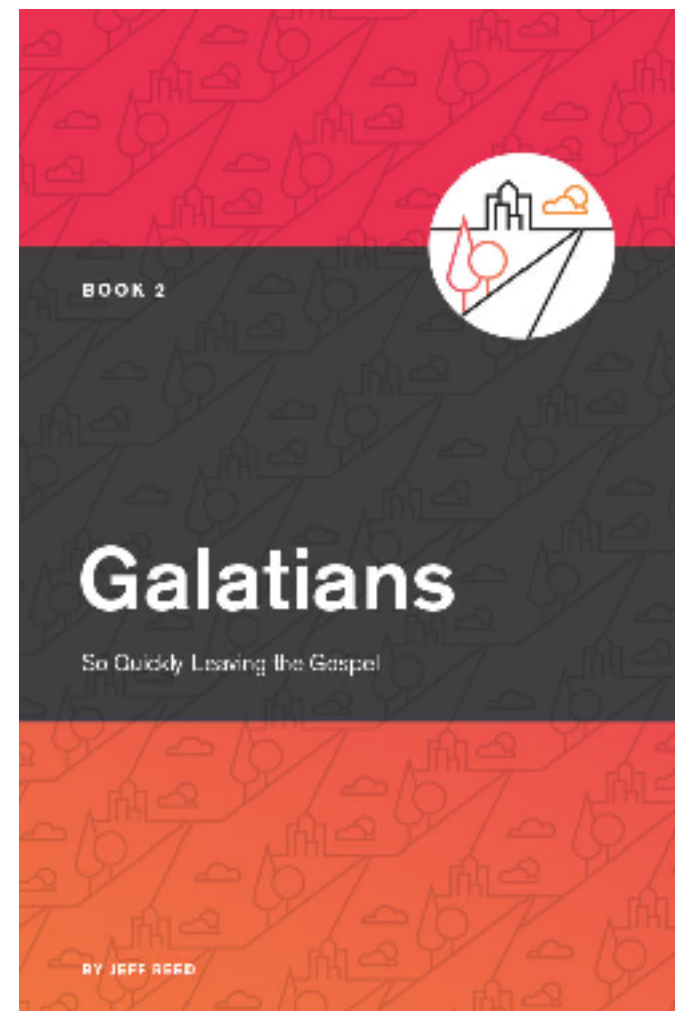
Implementing the New Church Paradigm



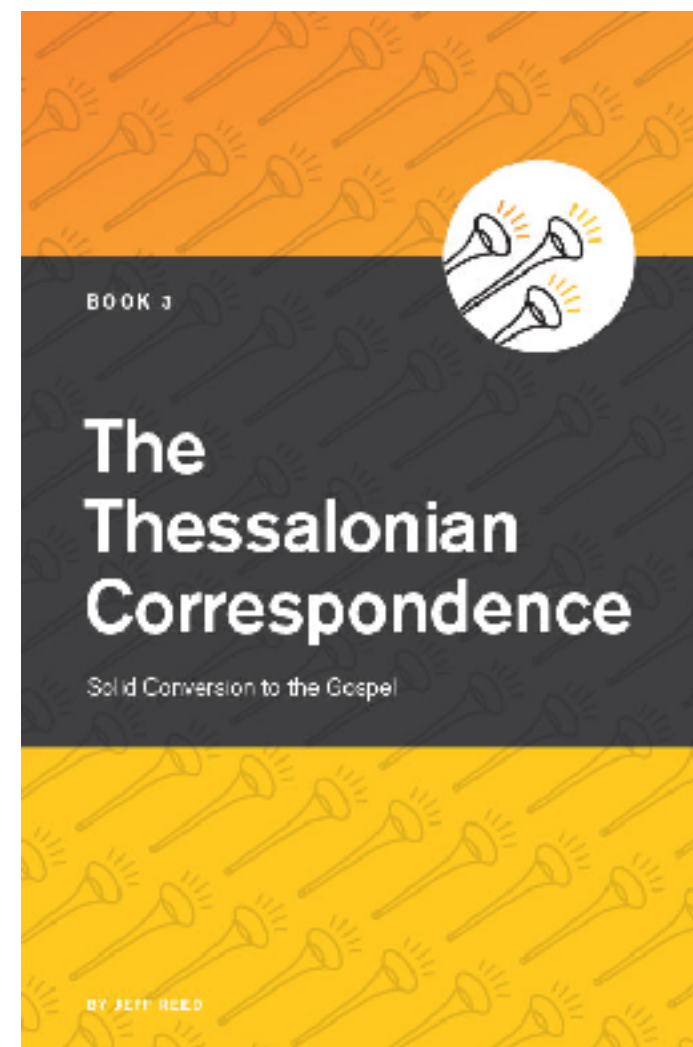
Paul's Early Letters



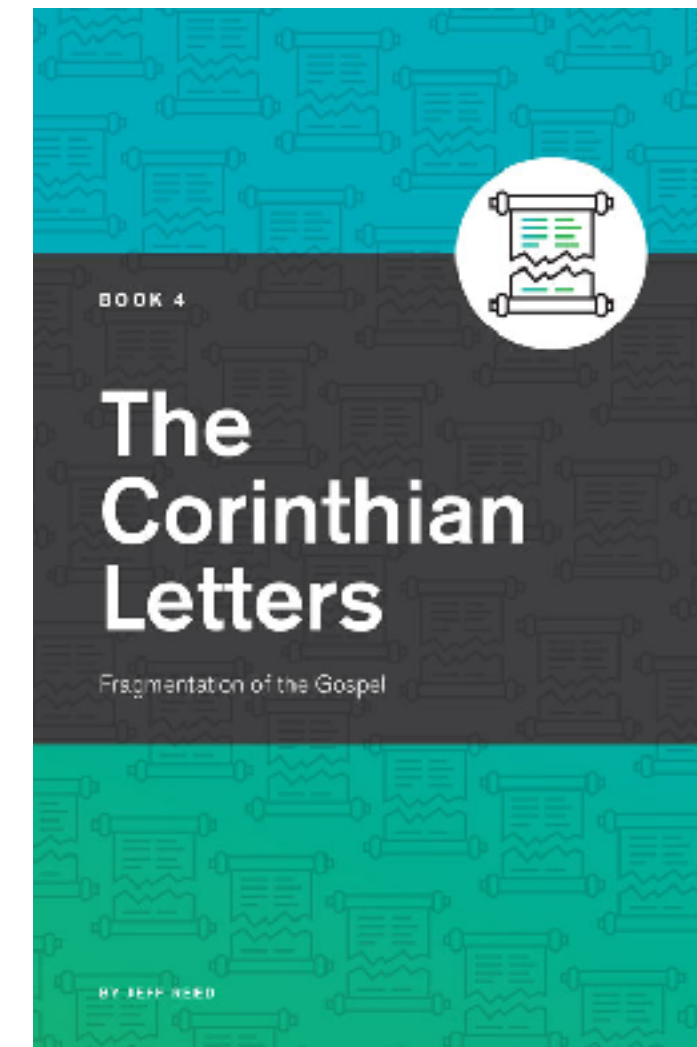
49–56 AD



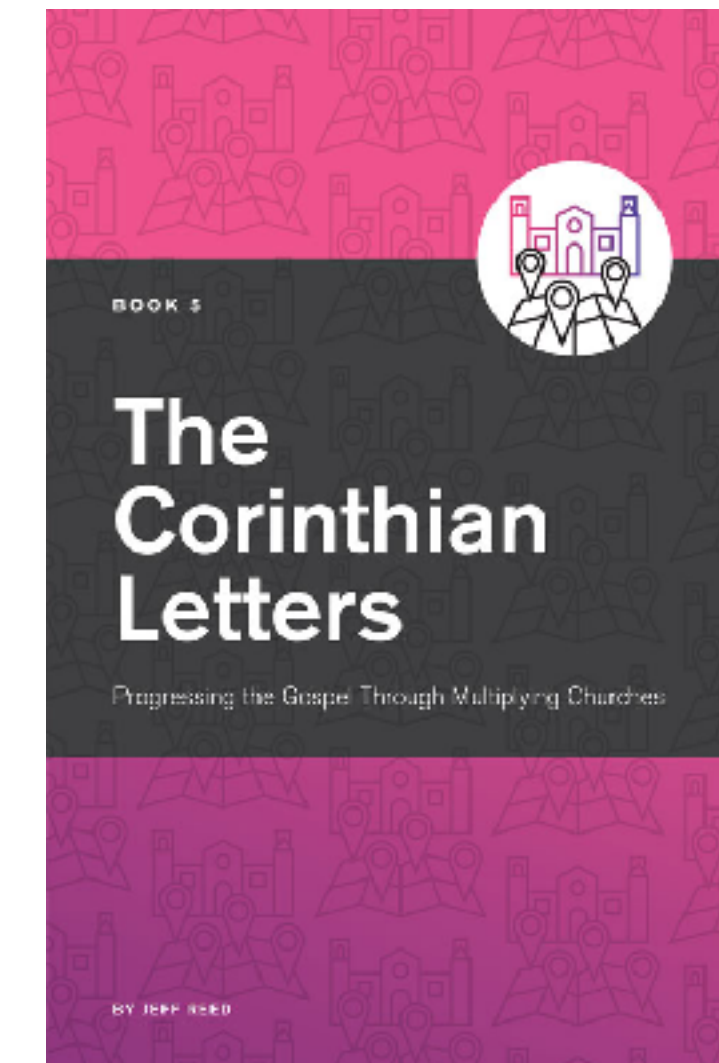
Autumn 49



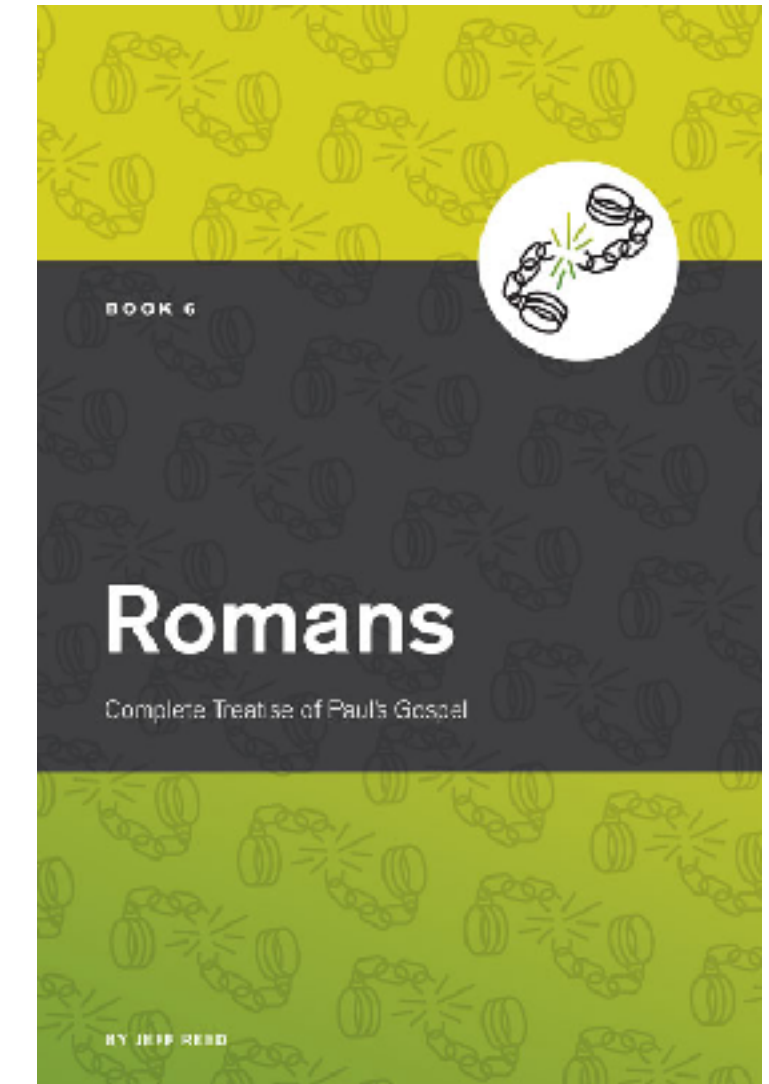
Winter/Sum. 51 AD



Sept. 53



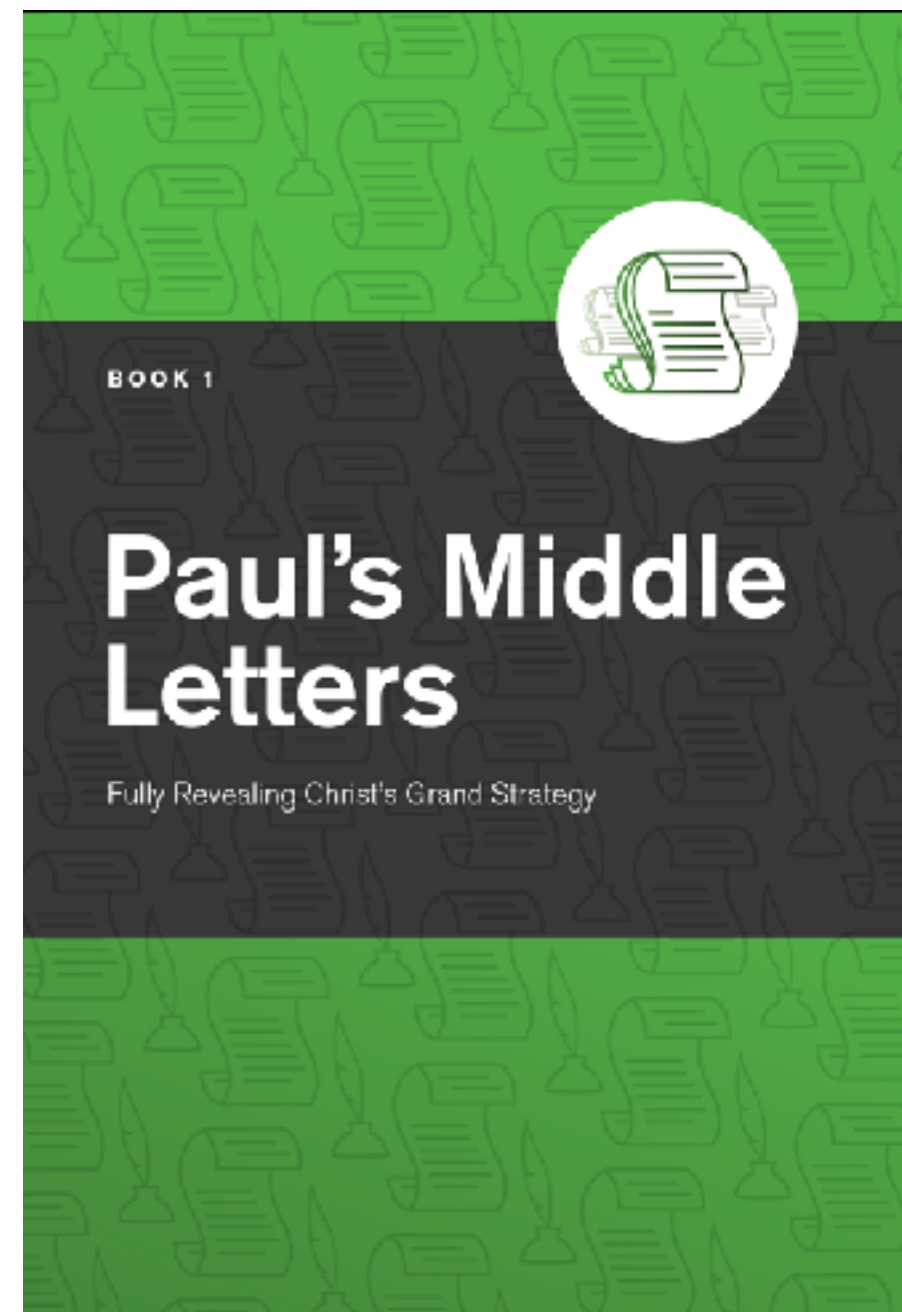
June 56



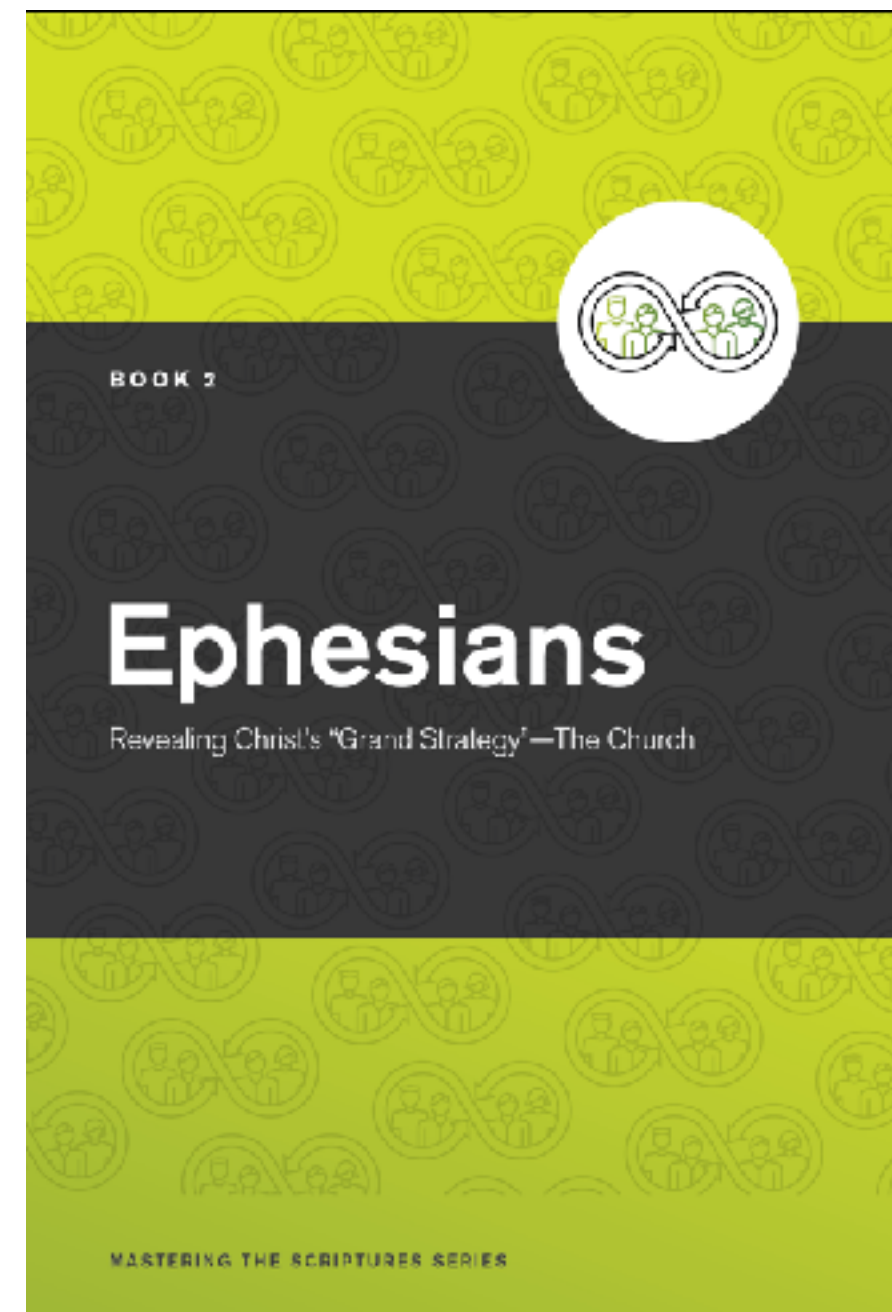
Nov. 56



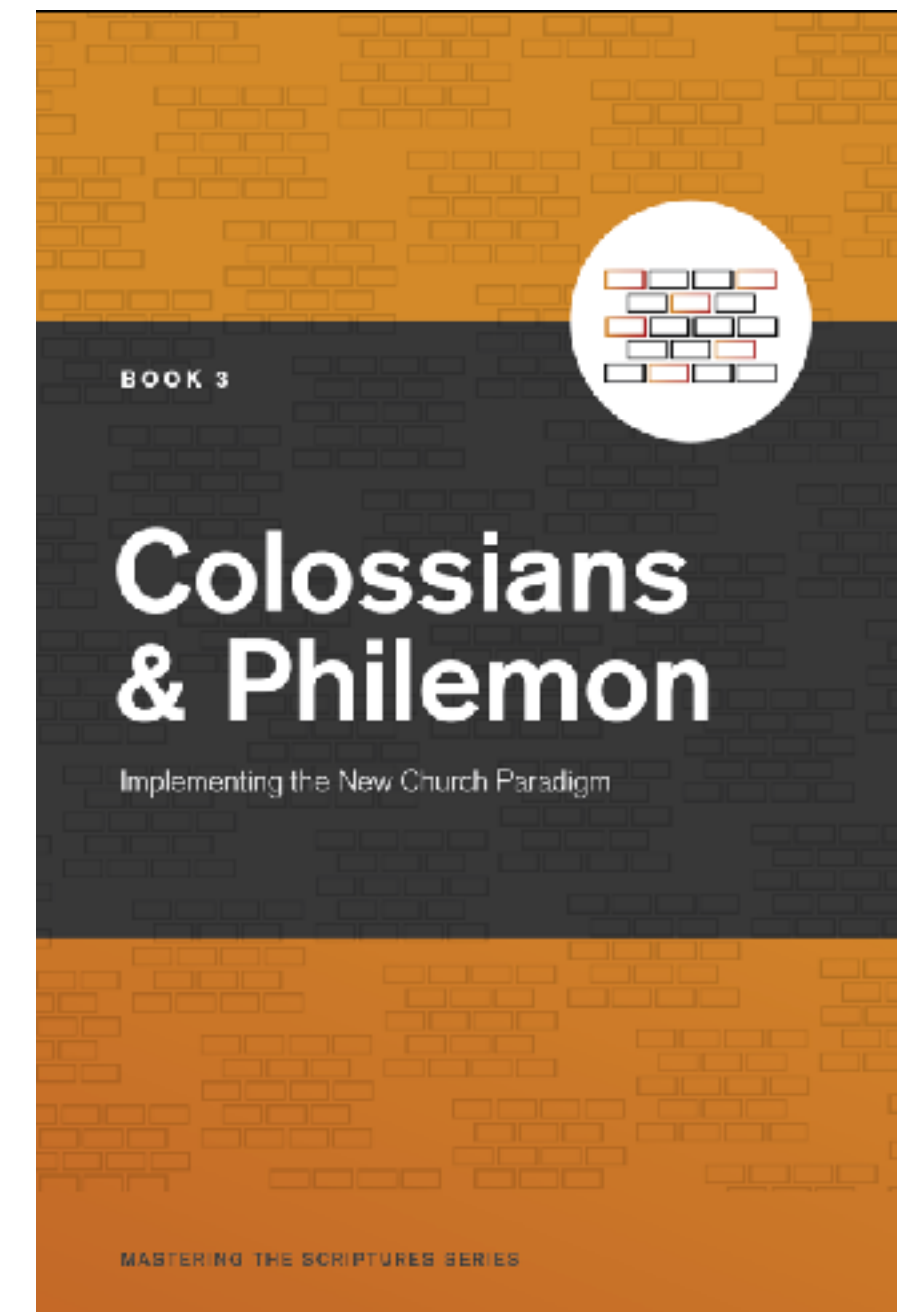
Paul's Middle Letters



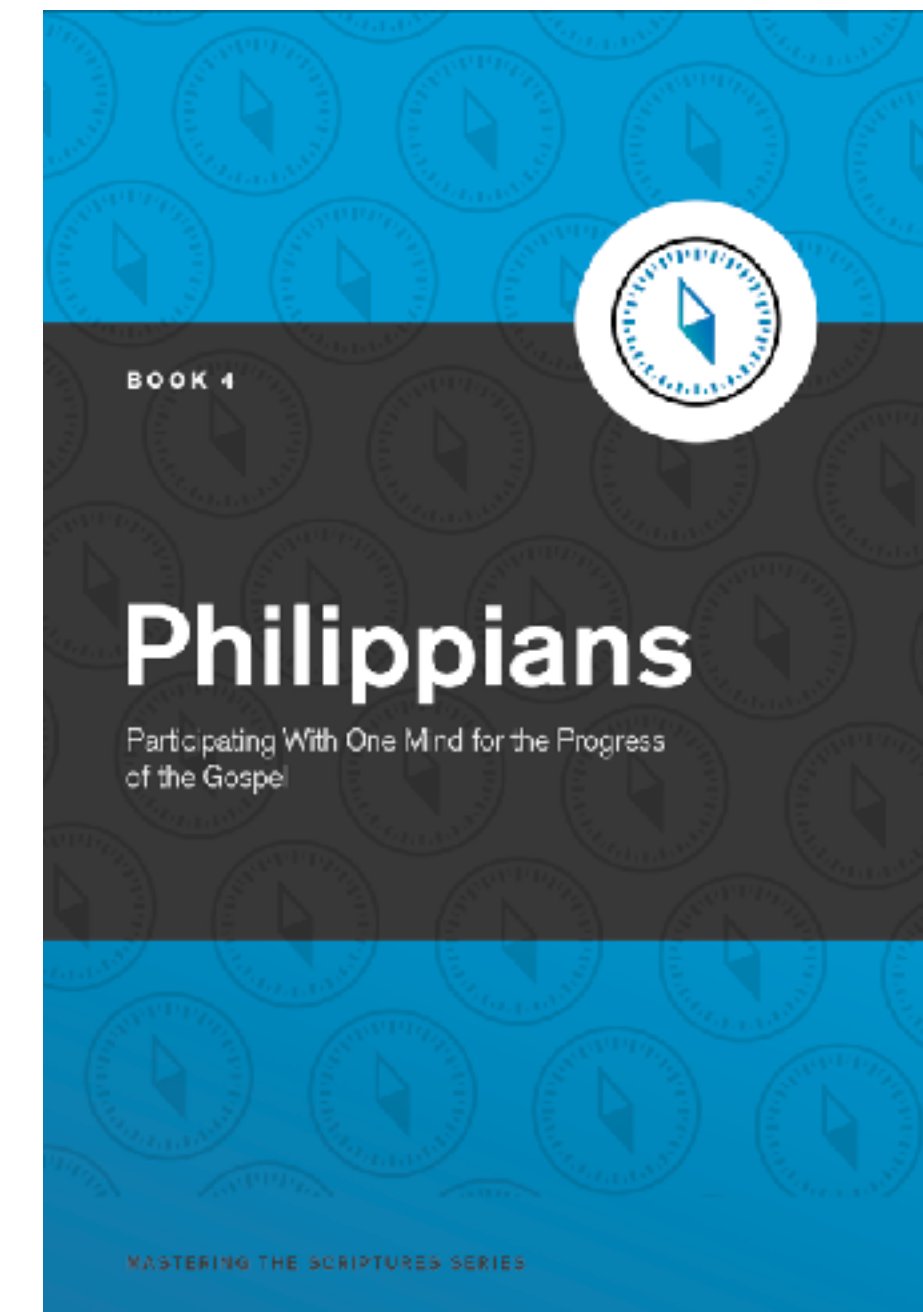
Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62

Paul's Middle Letters

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—the kingdom through the Church—in restructuring all their social relationships, including slavery, around the church as a family of families. That was 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—Philippians

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.

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 a special challenge for the Ephesian churches to fully grasp the significance of their calling and to fully carry out all God intends for them.

Paul's Middle Letters — Ephesians

This letter is strategic in this collection of Paul's four middle letters. In this passage, we see that the Church is the center of Christ's plan—His grand strategy after inaugurating the kingdom.

The organizing center of these letters:

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:7–10

Paul's Middle Letters — Ephesians

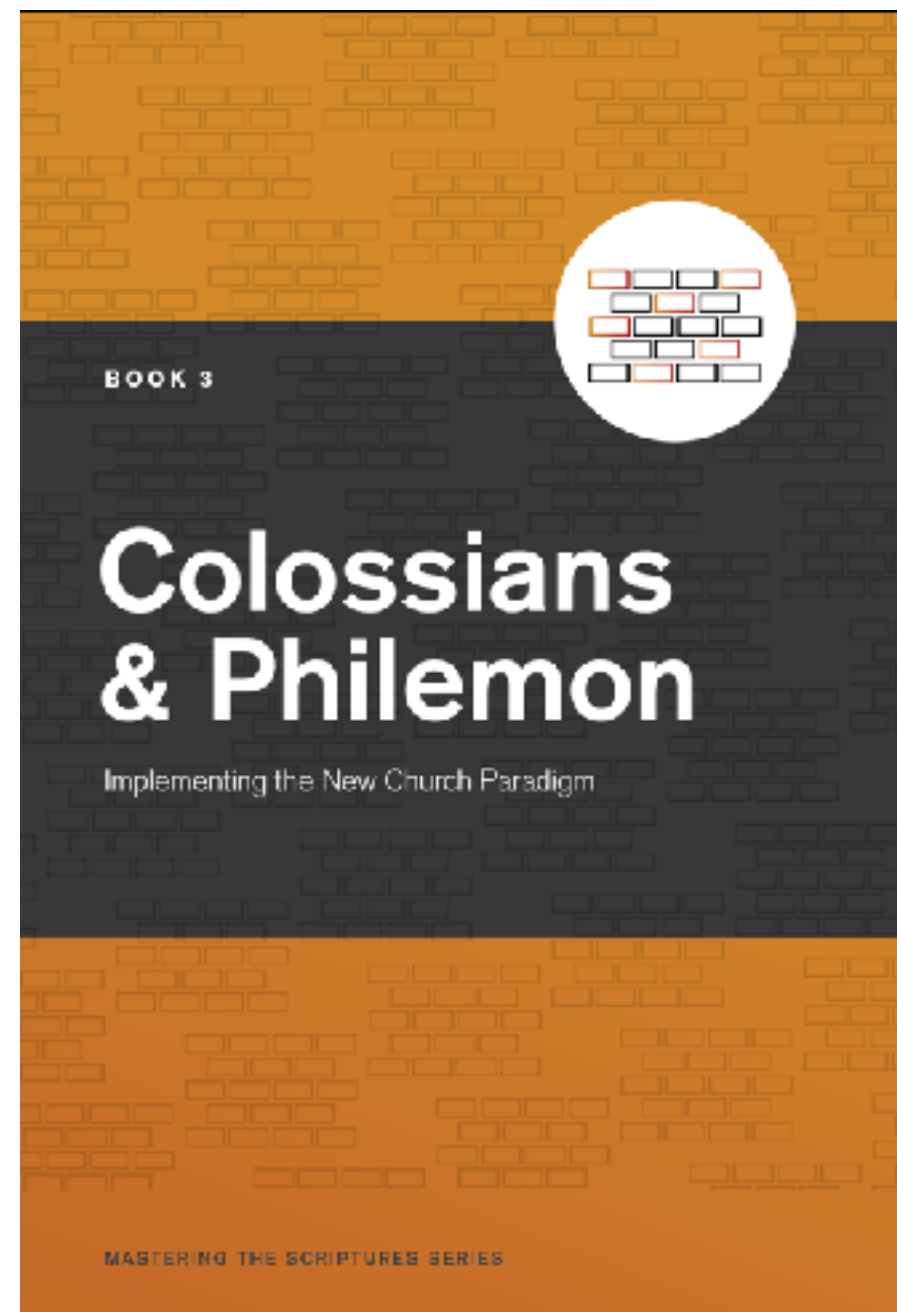
Paul lays out his job description very clearly.

Paul's 2-fold job description:

1. To preach the gospel to the Gentiles (a 10-year battle for the gospel)
2. To fully reveal the heart of Christ's grand strategy—the Church

It is Christ's strategy for progressing the gospel. It will be the heart of His unfolding kingdom, and it will stun the rulers and authorities even in the heavenly places. It was a mystery (hidden) until this time.

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 began by looking at the first section of the letter, 1:1–2:5, to answer that question.

The next 2 sessions, 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 on 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.

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

What did we learn last time from Colossians 1:1–2:5?

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 that they are part of a global movement that will change the world.

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

What is Paul worried about with the Lycus Valley churches?

Paul knew the churches came from very different philosophies from that of Christ. There were many out there arguing a different philosophy than Christ—with a different set of first principles. Many could make logical, enticing arguments.

In the rest of Colossians 2 and 3 he will lay out the contrasting philosophies. By inference, even though there were several major philosophies surrounding them in their culture, they all started from the same set of first principles of the world.

He will start by summarizing the core first principles of the world. What are they?

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Core first principles of the world—essence of the world's philosophy:

1. “food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths” 2:16
2. “insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking” 2:18
3. “Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”? ²² All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings.” 2:21–22
4. ²³ “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.” 2:23

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First principles of the universe

Mixture of the following

- restrictions on food and drink
- mystical, supernatural worship
- religious–cult regulations
- cult rituals, rites
- all sorts of lifestyle rules and regulations
- human commands and teachings

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 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.... ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Colossians 3:1–4; 9–11

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Paul lists several philosophies of the world based on the first principles of the world

- Greek—Did the Greeks have a philosophy? First Principles? Plato—Republic; Aristotle—First Principles
- Jewish—Did the Jewish people of Paul's day have a philosophy? human traditions and sects based on the principles of the world?
- Barbarian—uncivilized, non-Greek, speaking another language (closest to ethnic tribes today)
- Scythian—Iranian nomads with no kingdom (that would change)
- Slavery—both a political and cultural philosophy

Philosophies of the world—based on a core set of first principles can be

- cultural
- political
- religious

Paul's Middle Letters – Colossians

Remember, there were about 5 types of philosophies of the day with human traditions and first principles in how to live.

5 types of philosophies of the day: Sophism, Plato and Aristotle, the Hellenistic Period, Hellenistic Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism

They all had a mixture of the above elements.

What did they have in common? They were all based in “self-imposed piety, humility, and self-denial efforts.” Man's own effort.

Was Paul saying these philosophies of the world were all bad? There are persuasive arguments in each of them. But they were built on the wrong foundation, not on Christ and His philosophy. We will look at Christ's philosophy this week.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Now we are going to look at the same section, 2:6–4:6, to look at the first principles—philosophy—of Christ

Last week, in 2:6–4:6, we looked at a core set of first principles (philosophy, human traditions) of the world that are common

- ... to all religions
- ... to all cultures
- ... to all political systems

This week we will look at a core set of first principles (philosophy, traditions) of Christ.

Are they intended to be applied

- ... to all religions?
- ... to all cultures?
- ... to all political systems?

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

Now we are going to look at the concept of “first principles” in Colossians.

Some people argue that Paul is saying there are first principles of the world, but because it does not explicitly say there are first principles of Christ, Christ is just a relationship first and later first principles. They say Christ is first in Colossians, and the church follows in Ephesians with a focus on the church.

So is Paul saying there are two contrasting sets of first principles (philosophies, traditions) or one set juxtapositioned with just experiencing Christ?

Paul has in mind the former. Paul is making a very careful argument for following Christ's principles (philosophy, traditions) in Colossians—in fact in every one of his letters.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Notice how he presents his case in 2:1–7

⁴ “I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments.”
Many false teachers are making persuasive arguments for the world's core principles (philosophy, traditions).

Paul is afraid they will be led astray, so he is working to establishing them in the faith (synonymous with the teaching, the deposit, the sound doctrine, the authoritative traditions handed down to the churches).

So this letter is about that.

He wants them to be established in Christ's teaching, first principles of the faith, sound doctrine, His traditions, not manmade traditions.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

He also refers to the mystery of Christ

2:1 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.

In Christ is the knowledge and understanding (persuasive argument) of God's mystery—that is Christ himself.

Ephesians reviews chapter one of Colossians—the mystery is that Christ is over all and head of the church, through which everyone will see Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16), and the incredible beauty of God's plan will stun the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8–10). All of this is assumed in Colossians 2:1–7.

Paul's Middle Letters – Colossians

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2:8–15

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

In 2:8–15 he reviews their identity—what happened to them when the gospel was proclaimed to them: their sins were forgiven and they were baptized into Christ.

They are now in Christ.

This is what was talked about to the disciples in Matthew 28:19–20: go, baptize, and teach.

The gospel was proclaimed (kerygma), they were baptized into Christ and identified with his new community, and now they are to be established in the teaching (didache)—the faith.

Paul then follows: Why would you go back to the world's fundamentals (core principles of man-made religious teaching and human traditions)? We saw this last week in 2:16–23.

Instead, focus on Christ's teaching (first principles, philosophy, authoritative traditions) handed down to the churches by the Apostles, 3:1–4:1.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

3:1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Colossians 3:1–4

He begins by telling them to “set their minds on the things above” —not just abstractly, mystically, or experientially on Christ, but on His grand strategy for the church—teaching the core principles (philosophy, grand strategy for the church of which He is head and will show the magnificence of God’s wisdom).

set your minds on—let one’s mind dwell on, develop a frame of mind (philosophy, core principles), to have understanding

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

After telling them in 3:5–11 what to get rid of, as a result of the core principles of the world, he gives them the essence of Christ's first principles (core principles—philosophy, his traditions—authoritative teaching).

The essence of Christ's first principles (philosophy, authoritative teaching—traditions)

Colossians 3:12–17—the community of faith, the household of God, the church

Colossians 3:18–4:1—individual families (household texts)

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—a one minded caring, forgiving family

- Paul is laying out a set of principles for the new communities, the churches (“one another,” “each other,” “live together in perfect harmony.”)
- Relationships are familial in nature—caring for each other, forgiving each other, living in peace, harmony, and humility

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
Col 3:16 NKJ (1982)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. NASB (1995)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; Ephesians 5:18–19 NASB

Do not get drunk with wine; this is simply dissipation; be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs among yourselves, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ always and everywhere giving thanks to God who is our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:18–20 NJB

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. NIV 5:18–20

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. NIV Col 3:16–17

NIV is not consistent.

RSV misses it.

NASB is most consistent and accurate.

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

Several things can be seen here:

- The *filling of the Spirit* is collective in both passages. Paul applies his Ephesians “manifesto” in a very personal way in Colossians.
- The *filling of the Spirit* in these passages is synonymous with the Word in teaching, admonishing one another.
- As the Word is taught in our churches, we need often to accompany it with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in our hearts, realizing we are expressing our thankfulness to God at the same time.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—a one-minded caring, forgiving family

- Paul is laying out a set of principles for the new communities, the churches (“one another,” “each other,” “together in perfect harmony”).
- Relationships are familial in nature—caring for each other, forgiving each other, living in peace, harmony, and humility.
- Letting the word of Christ richly dwell in our churches, teaching and admonishing each other, driving it deeper through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, realizing that we are at the same time expressing our thankfulness to God.
- In all we do in our lives, we need to do it as representatives of Christ and out of thankfulness to God.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, ²⁴ since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. 4:1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—the church is a family of families

- In these household texts, we are given principles on how our families are to be ordered in Christ's new communities—the churches

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Two key words stand out in the household texts that relate to men

Harshly (wives)—foster bitter feelings

Provoke (children)—make resentful, embitter, rouse anger

Both words relate to abuse of authority.

Paul is considerably briefer in this passage in comparison to the Ephesians parallel passage; Paul relates the new community lifestyle of a loving family within the new community.

While there is an order Christ has set forth for his new churches—husbands leading wives and children—it is to be a loving family in tune with what Paul laid out as Christ's new community.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—the church is a family of families

- In these household texts, we are given principles in how families are to be ordered in Christ's new communities—the churches.
- Husbands are to lead, but they must clearly love their wives and children in a way that creates a loving, caring family within Christ's new community.
- Children are to obey both parents.
- In households and in a society in which slavery exists, slaves are to serve as if they are serving the Lord. And masters (again, in the context referring to men leading their households) are to be fair and just so, again, they don't embitter anyone in their household—again, against the backdrop of Christ's new community.

Note: We will address the problem of slavery in cultures where it exists—which has been the case all through history.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, ⁴ so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

⁵ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:2–5

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

We will look at this passage from the vantage point of Christ's core first principles. But it also serves as a transition to the significance of the networks of churches Paul is building; that they are key to the progress of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

So next session, we will revisit this passage again as we finish Colossians.



Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Here we return to Paul's challenge to them in 2:4

⁴ I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible (persuasive) arguments.

Here, we are to let our “speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.”

answer—respond, answer a question, carefully select a response

The root word *κρίνω*, meaning “sort, evaluate, select” is instructive in connection with “answer” as a considered reaction to a statement. The prep. *ἀπό* in the sense of “suitable, based upon (an evaluation)” underscores the element of circumspect selection and judgment. For this reason *κρίνω* / *ἀποκρίνω* can also be used forensically in the sense of reject, pass judgment upon (papyri, Plato). The mid. form *ἀποκρίνομαι* adds to this the dialogical character of conversation and debate. EDNT

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Remember the context of not being “deceived by persuasive arguments” of those around them.

Paul lists several philosophies of the world based on the first principles of the world:

- Greek—Did the Greeks have a philosophy? First Principles? Plato—Republic; Aristotle—First Principles.
- Jewish—Did the Jewish people of Paul's day have a philosophy? Human traditions and sects based on the principles of the world?
- Barbarian—uncivilized, non-Greek, speaking another language (closest to ethnic tribes today)
- Scythian—Iranian nomads with no kingdom (that would change)
- Slavery—both a political and cultural philosophy

It is not enough to become established in the faith (Christ's first principles—philosophy, authoritative traditions), but we must be prepared to dialogue in conversation and debate and give well selected answers.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—Bringing substantial answers to the watching world.

- Individual churches are to pray for leaders of the network they are part of (in this case the Lycus Valley churches), as well as participate with them in the progress of the gospel.
- Each believer must not only become established in the first principles of the faith, but must also be able to hold a thoughtful discussion, even debate, with those from cultural, political or religious philosophies based upon the first principles of the world. They must be able to carefully select a response—our own persuasive arguments.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Basic questions: Do these principles just apply to the churches, or to our cultures and the religious and political systems of our culture and even civilizations?

Yes, but not maybe in the way you first think.

- We are not to try to get those from the world's cultures, political systems, or world religions to live by Christ's principles set out for the churches.
- But rather we must live in such a way that people can see Christ in His churches and be won over to Christ.

The first principles of the world are false, and Christ's are true. So when His churches live by the principles, the world can see the difference and become convinced.

THAT IS PAUL'S WHOLE POINT!! If they are established, they have answers.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Giving an answer:

- Part of giving an answer is in individual conversation as we are asked—maybe leading to a longer dialogue, but carefully selected.
- Part of giving an answer is to address these question in a larger cultural conversation—as Paul did, for example, on Mars Hill, or on the river banks, or in the marketplace.
- Evidently, some are involved in surfacing larger discussions. But once new groups of churches are formed, all believers must be able to give persuasive, ongoing, positive answers in everyday life and cultural situations.

Significance of Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Importance today of understanding and applying the first principles of Christ?

Questions:

1. What is the essence of the first principles of Christ—His philosophy and traditions in our lives and culture?
2. Are His first principles religious in nature? political in nature? cultural in nature?
3. How do we avoid being taken captive by the world's principles—its philosophy and human traditions?
4. If we live by the first principles of Christ, what will be the outcome?

Paul's Middle Letters

Last week we looked at a core set of first principles (philosophy, human traditions) of the world that are common

- ... to all religions
- ... to all cultures
- ... to all political systems

This week we looked at a core set of first principles (philosophy, traditions) of Christ.

Are they intended to be applied

- ... to all religions?
- ... to all cultures?
- ... to all political systems?

Paul's Middle Letters

How are they to be applied?

First, as a carefully selected response to see Christ's core principles in action in our churches and in our families.

When they see a family of families in action, they will begin to see the difference.

Second, as we learn to do theology in culture, larger and larger answers will emerge that can create a cultural, political, or religious dialogue. But they must be founded on the real deal. Let's review what they will see

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—a one minded caring, forgiving family

- Paul is laying out a set of principles for the new communities, the churches. The world would see “one anothering,” forgiving and loving each other, being together in perfect harmony.
- Relationships that are familial in nature—caring for each other, forgiving each other, living in peace, harmony, and humility.
- The word of Christ richly dwelling in our churches, teaching and admonishing each other, driving it deeper through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, realizing that we are at the same time expressing our thankfulness to God.
- In all we do in our lives, we are representatives of Christ; this is out of thankfulness to God.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—the church is a family of families

- In these household texts, we are given principles on how our families are to be ordered in Christ's new communities—the churches.
- Husbands are to lead, but they must clearly love their wives and children in a way that creates a loving, caring family within Christ's new community.
- Children are to obey both parents.
- In households and in a society in which slavery exists, slaves are to serve as if they are serving the Lord, and masters (again in the context referring to men leading their households), they are to be fair and just so as again not to embitter anyone in their household—again against the backdrop of Christ's new community.

Note: We will address the problem of slavery in cultures where it exists—which has been the case all through history.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First Principles of Christ

Principles of the New Community—Bringing substantial answers to the watching world

- Individual churches are to pray for leaders of the network they are part of (in this case the Lycus Valley churches), as well as participate with them in the progress of the gospel.
- Each believer must not only become established in the first principles of the faith, but also be able to hold a thoughtful discussion, even debate with those from cultural, political or religious philosophies based upon the first principles of the world, and carefully select a response—our own persuasive arguments

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First principles of the universe

Mixture of the following

- restrictions on food and drink
- mystical, supernatural worship
- religious–cult regulations
- cult rituals, rites
- all sorts of lifestyle rules and regulations
- human commands and teachings

Paul's Middle Letters

How are they to be applied?

First, as a carefully selected response to see Christ's core principles in action in our churches and in our families.

When they see a family of families in action, they will begin to see the difference.

Second, as we learn to do theology in culture, larger and larger answers will emerge that can create a cultural, political, or religious dialogue. But they must be founded on the real deal.

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

There are two steps then:

First, when new churches are established, the believers in the community will have an abundance of opportunities to give an answer for their faith: in their extended families, in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, and in their universities.

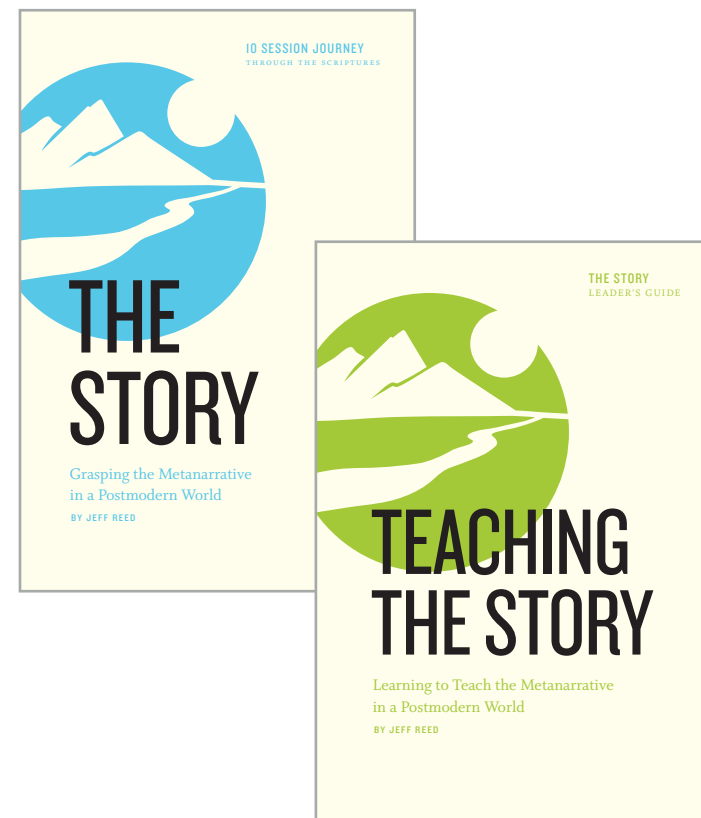
The First Principles Series

Second, as church networks are established and leaders are able to do theology in their culture, the cultural, political, and religion systems have an opportunity to ask questions.

Leadership Series II: *Theology in Civilization*, cultural artifacts

Next week!

Paul's Middle Letters



Paul's Middle Letters



Unit 1: Returning the Church to the Center of the Theological Enterprise

Unit 2: Passing on the Deposit

Unit 3: The Comprehensive Study of Theology

Unit 4: Doing Theology in Culture

Unit 5: Building a Belief Framework in Culture

Paul's Middle Letters



- Basic cultural challenges to Christianity
- Social, political, and economic issues and problems of a culture
- Differing worldviews and religions of the culture
- Everyday living in the community and world

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Final examples

Seek the Welfare of the City house church

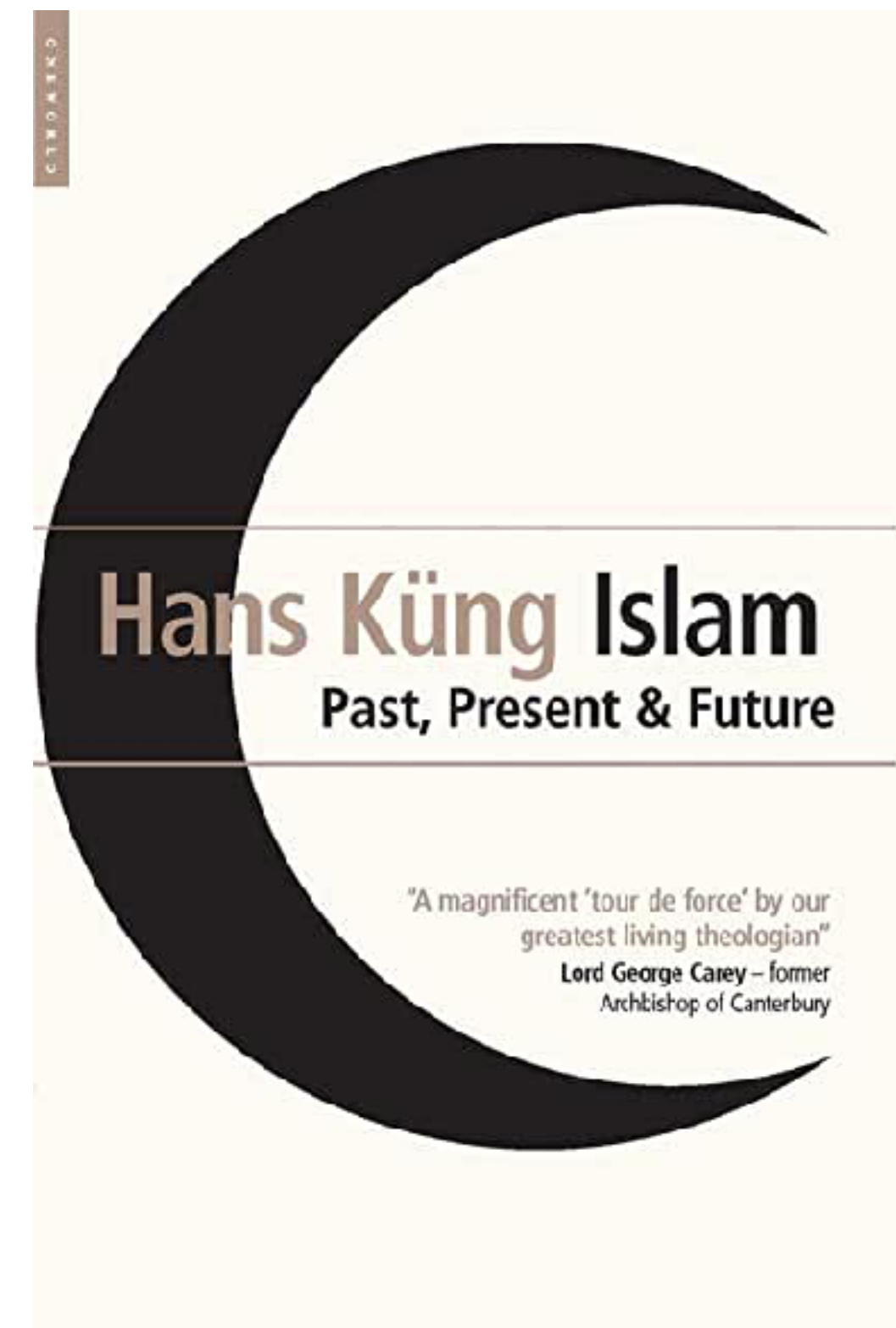
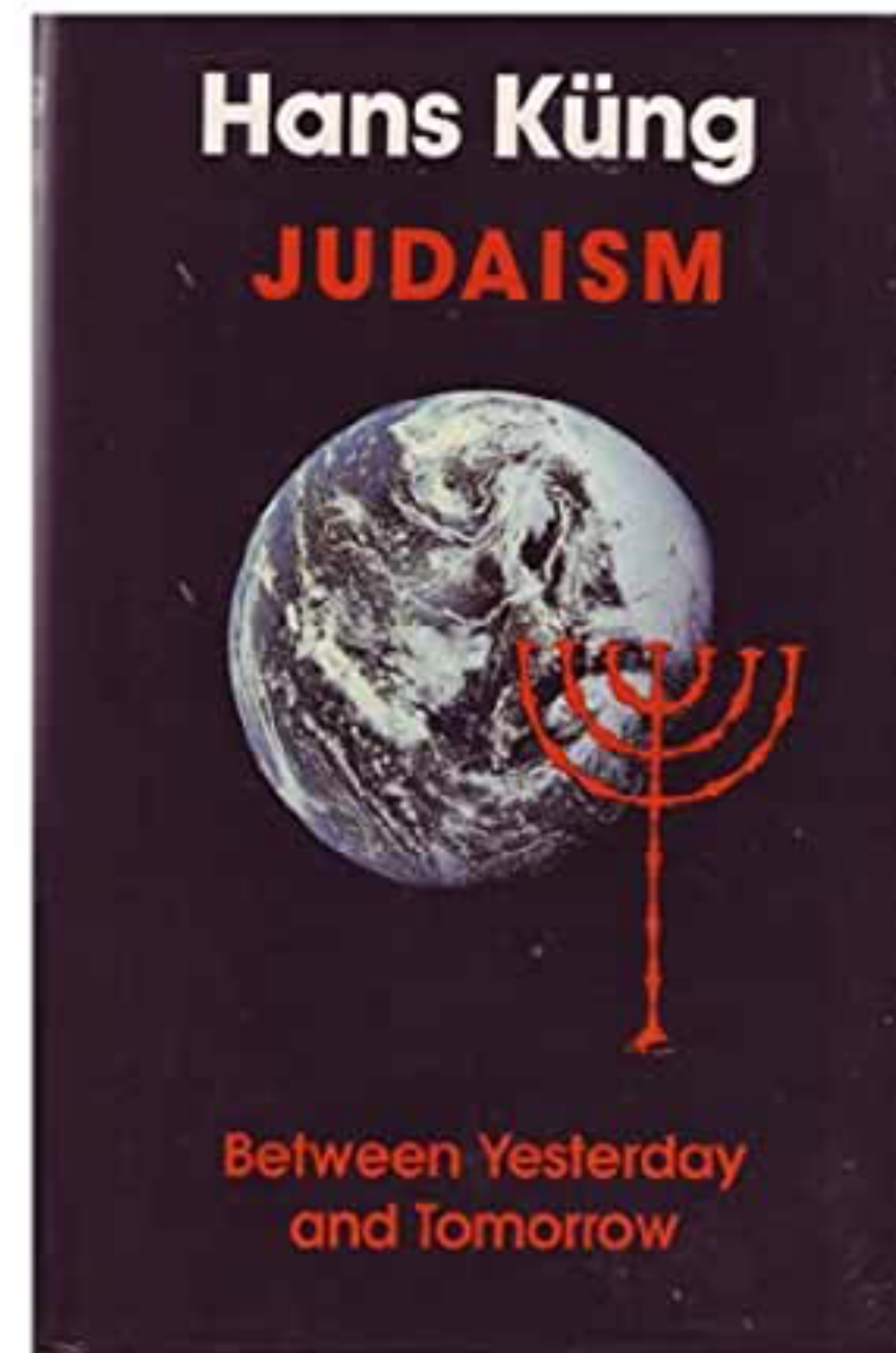
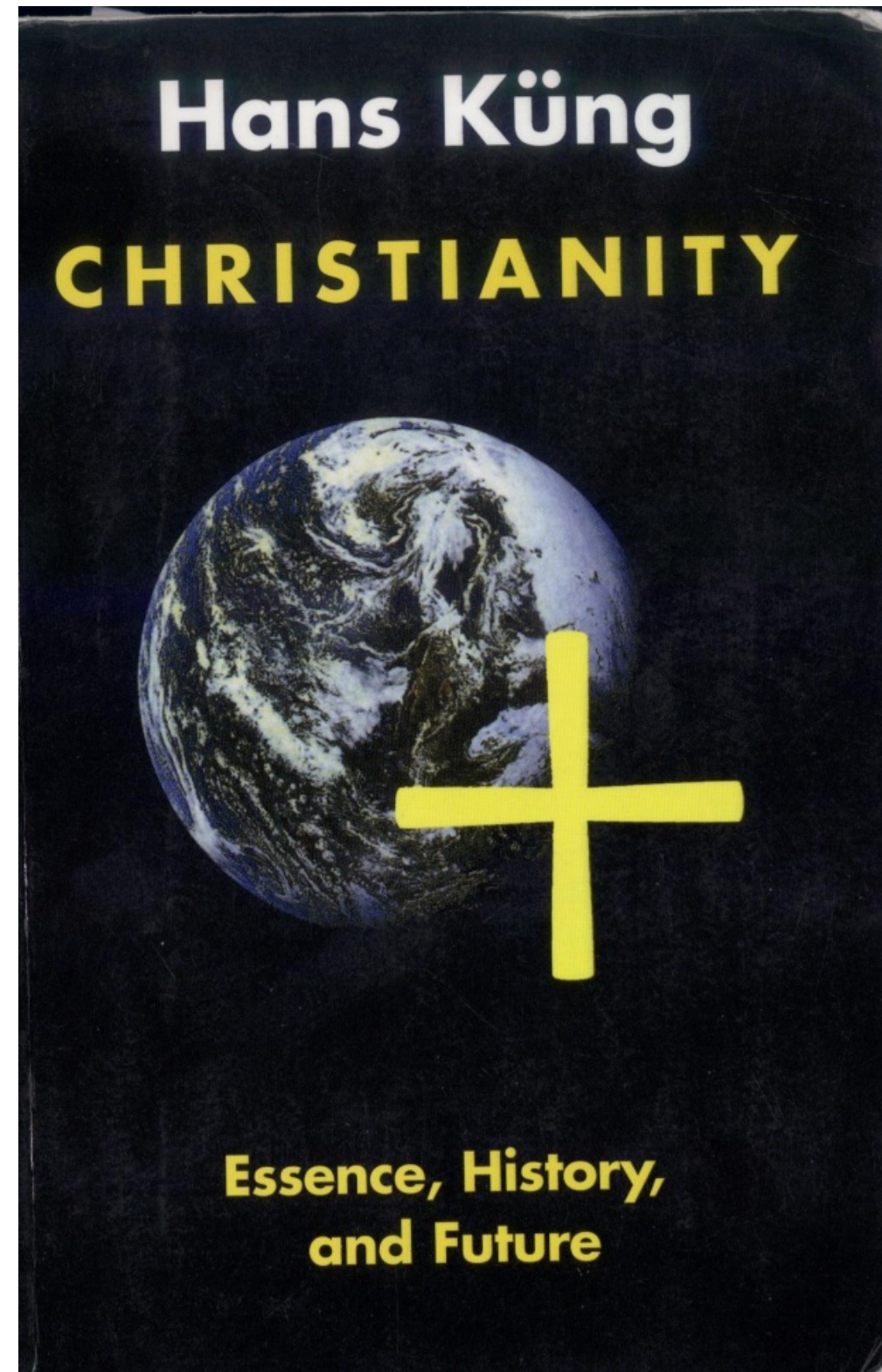
- John— mayor,
- Nancy — Heartland Center
- Sam — Start-Up Ames
- Nate, Sam — Little League etc.
- Several others

Ames Art Community (300)

In our small church, we have 3–4 of the top artists in Ames.

Last week's discussion: Artists have rejected the church. We must learn to give true answers; therefore, we need to be established!

Paul's Middle Letters



Paul's Middle Letters

Mastering the Scriptures Series (parallels both my spheres and white papers)

Apostolic Letters

Paul's Early Letters—2020

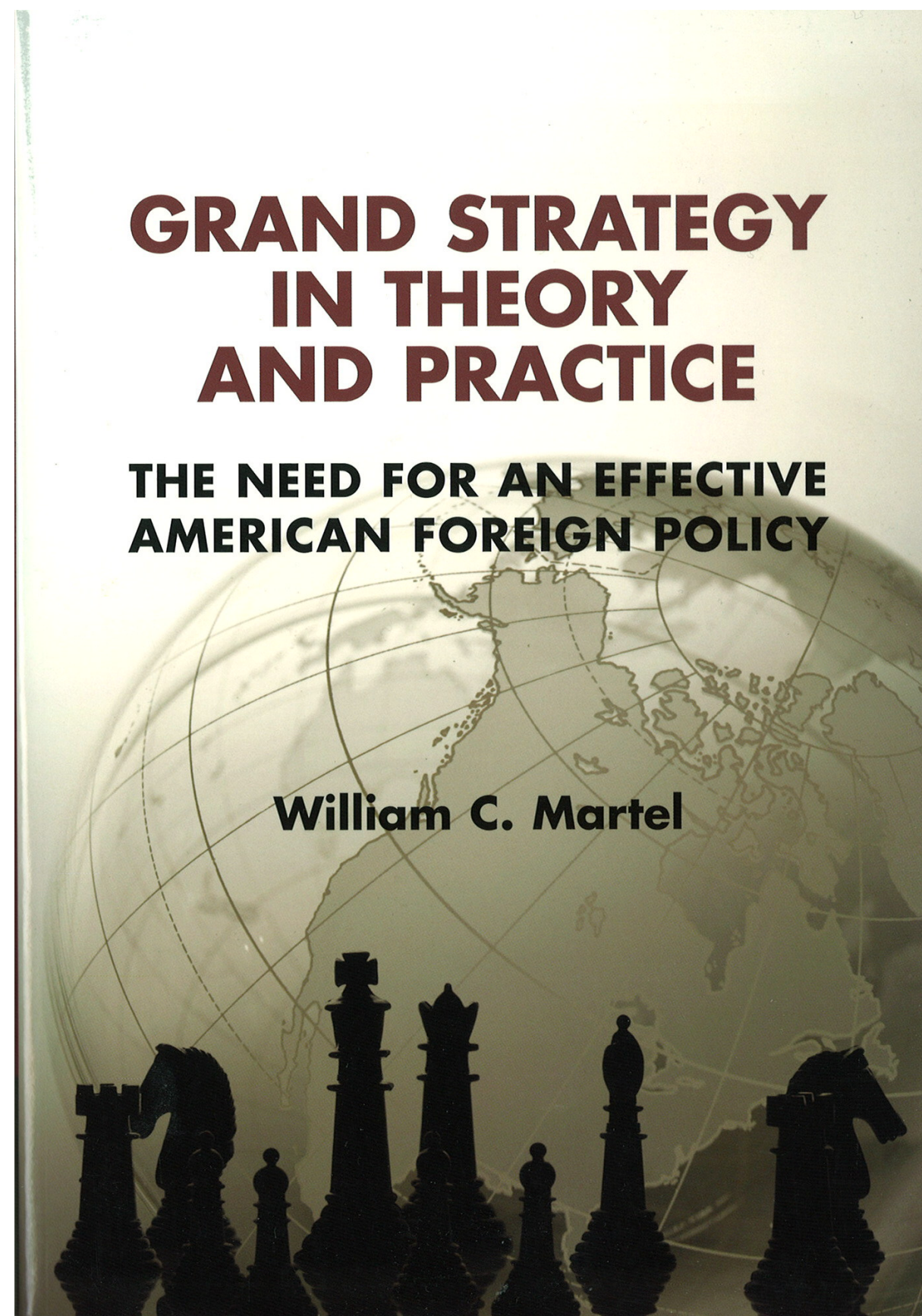
Paul's Middle Letters—2021

Paul's Later Letters—2022

Peter's Jewish Encyclicals—2023

Johannine Literature—2024

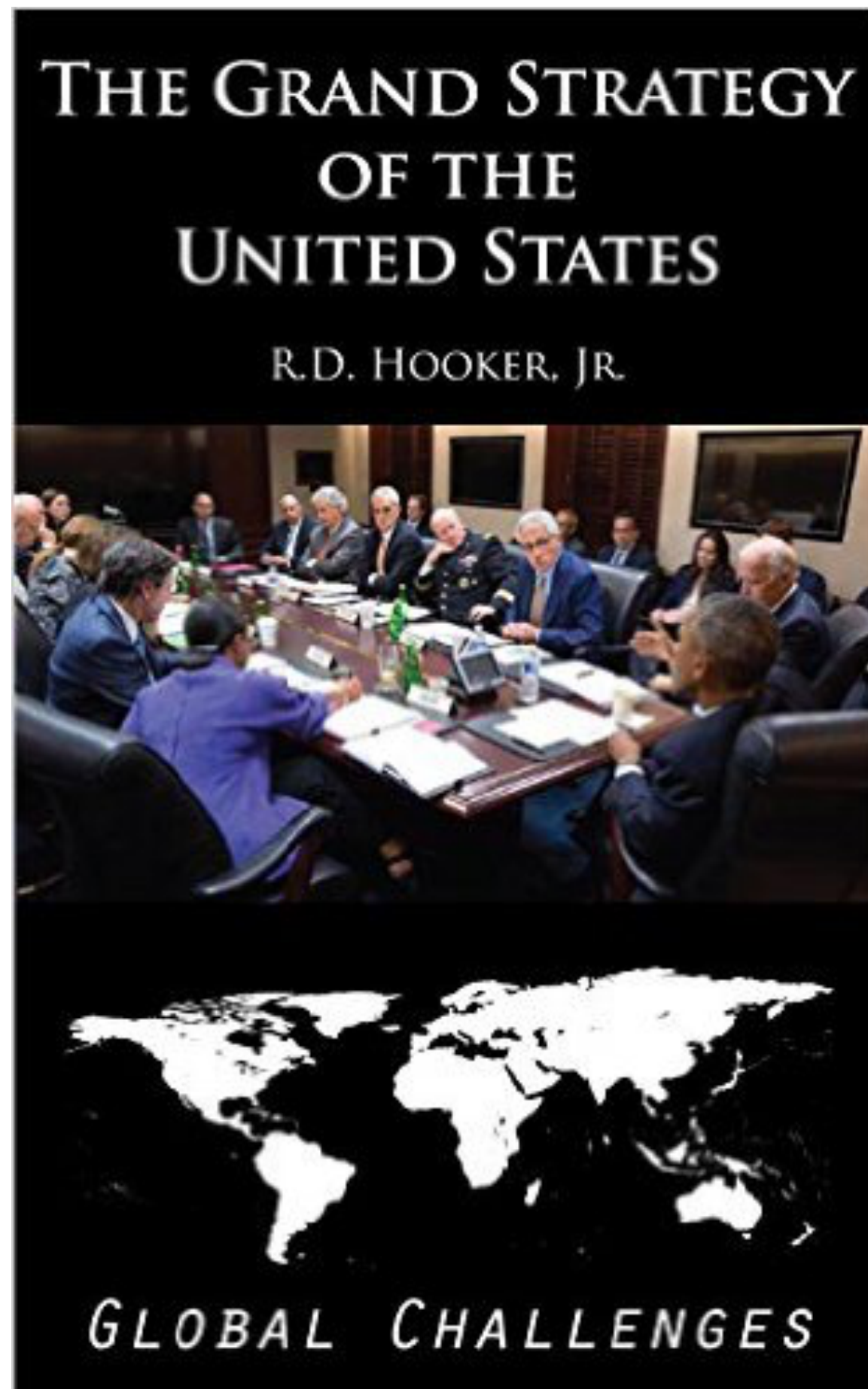
Paul's Middle Letters



- Three guiding principles for developing a grand strategy:
1. Rebuild foundations of authority.
 2. Exercise global leadership to restrain sources of disorder.
 3. Form alliances and partnerships. At the foundation is a coherent doctrine.

At the foundation is a coherent doctrine—first principles.

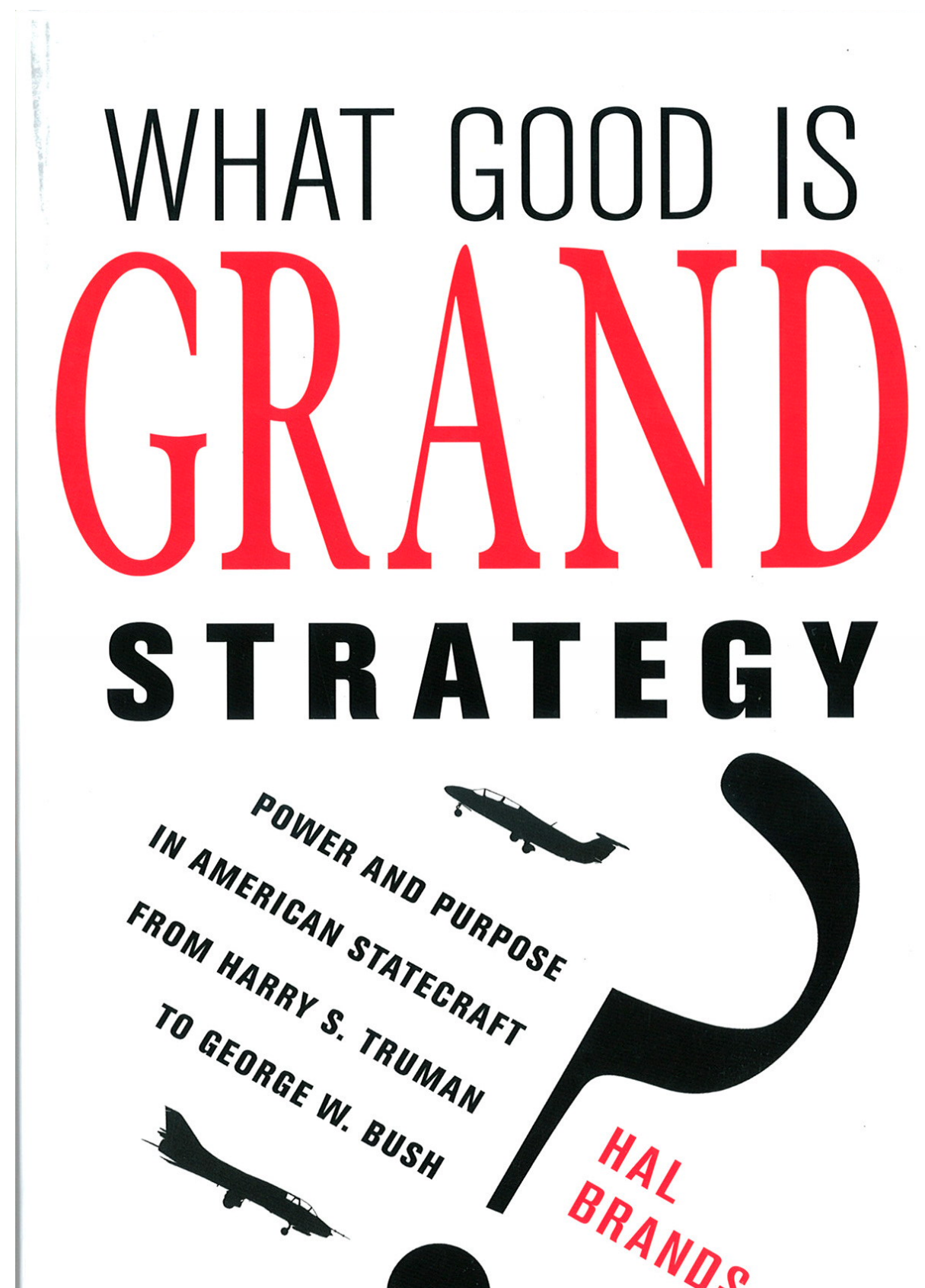
Paul's Middle Letters



At the foundation is a coherent doctrine—first principles.

The Encyclicals and The First Principles are a coherent doctrine, which is “the way of Christ and His Apostles,” the Antioch Tradition (Monroe doctrine).

Paul's Middle Letters



Brands sets forth 10 basic suggestions for developing a grand strategy. Number two is “start with first principles.”