

Paul's Middle Letters: Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Identifying the first principles of Christ

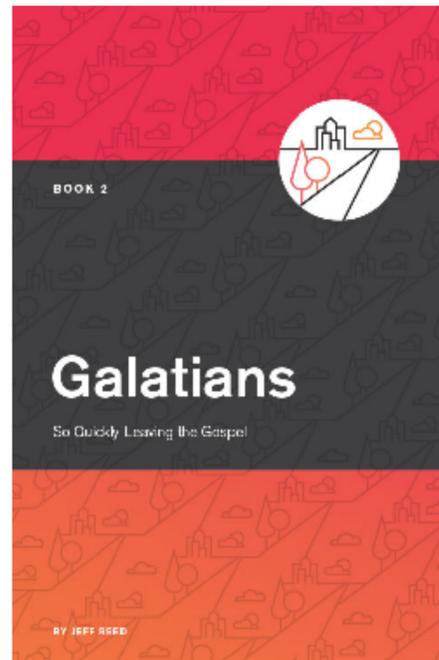
Questions:

1. In what way does Christ have a set of elementary principles? What does Paul mean by that? 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?

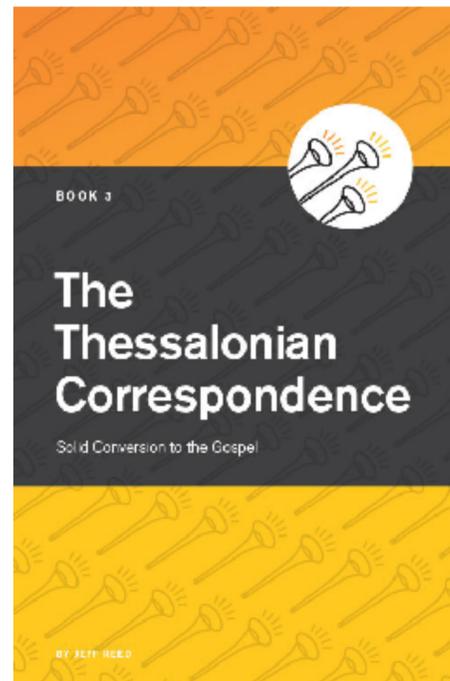
Paul's Early Letters



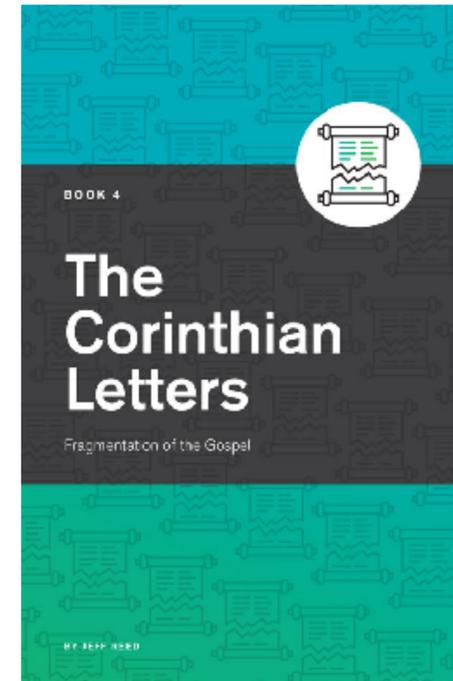
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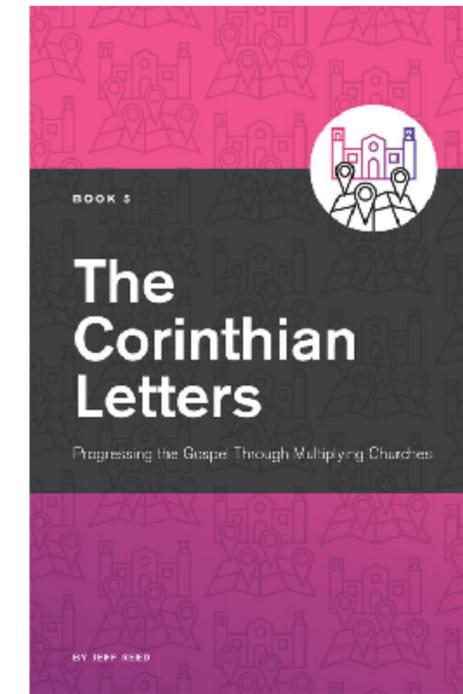
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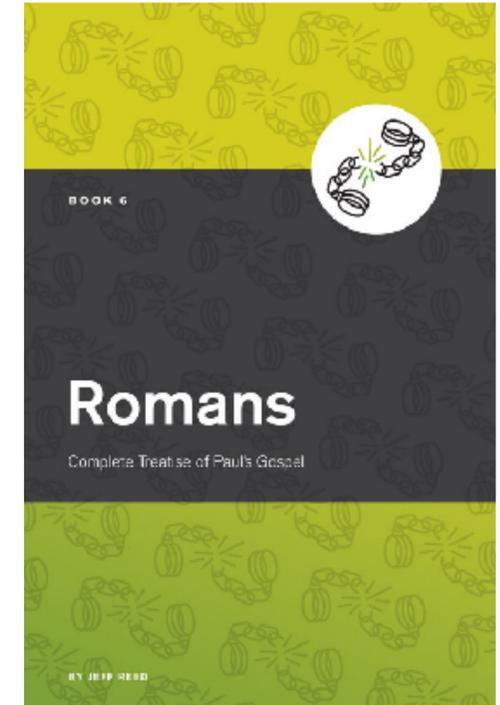
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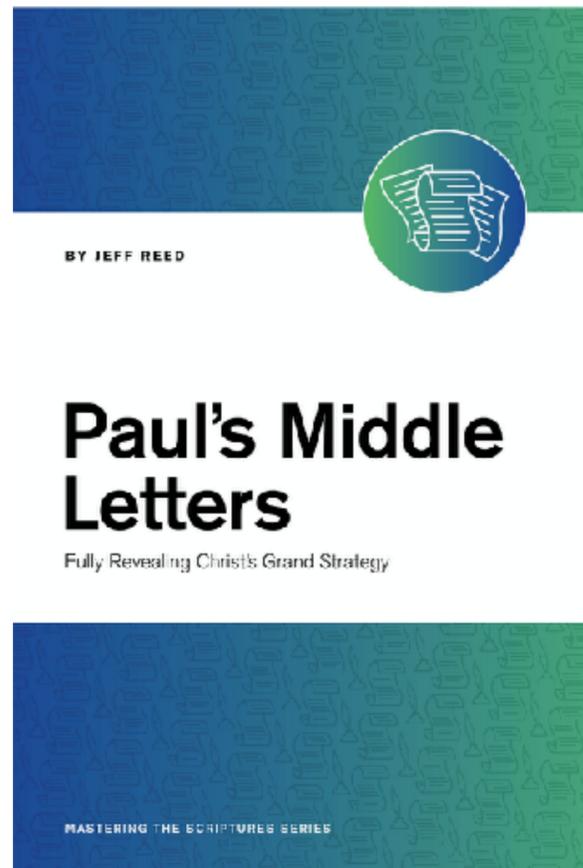
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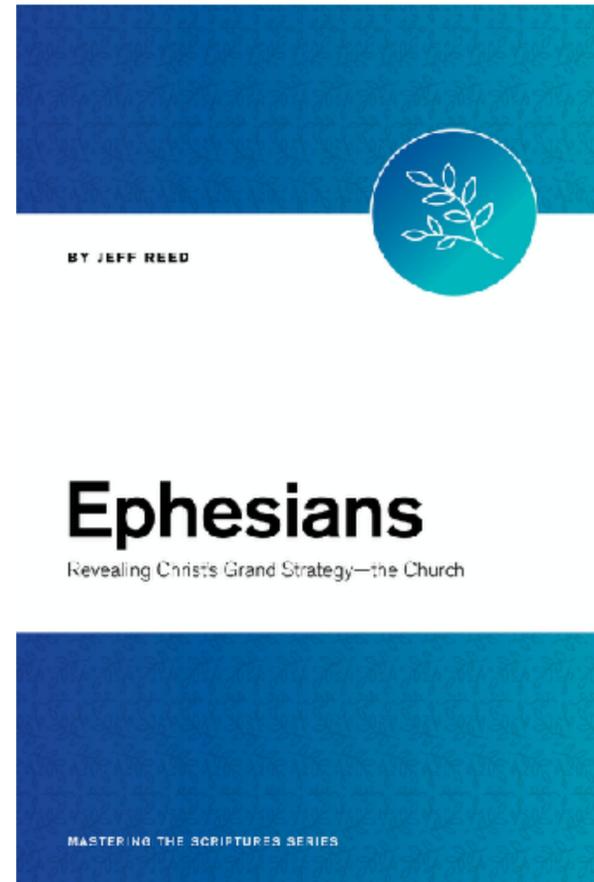
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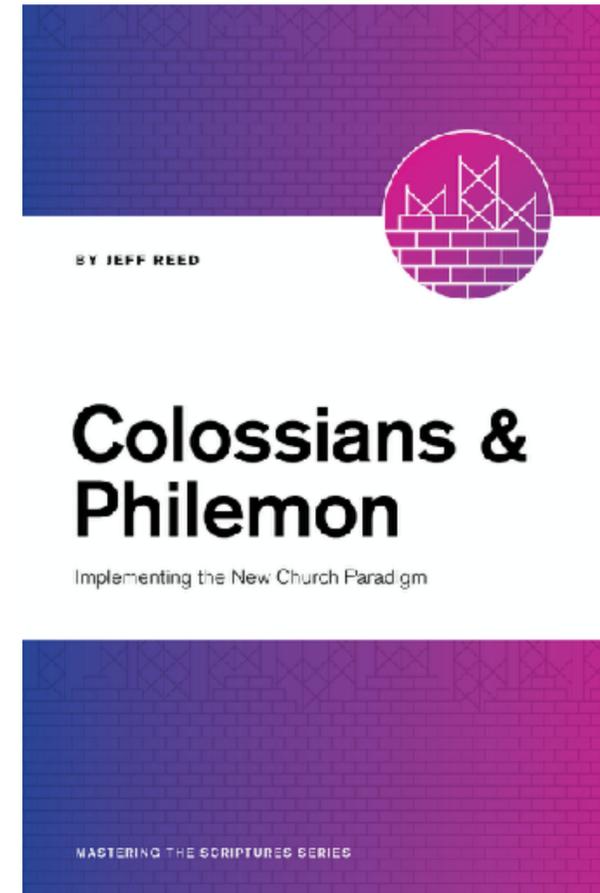
Paul's Middle Letters



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, including a full picture of the centrality of church networks in that 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 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.

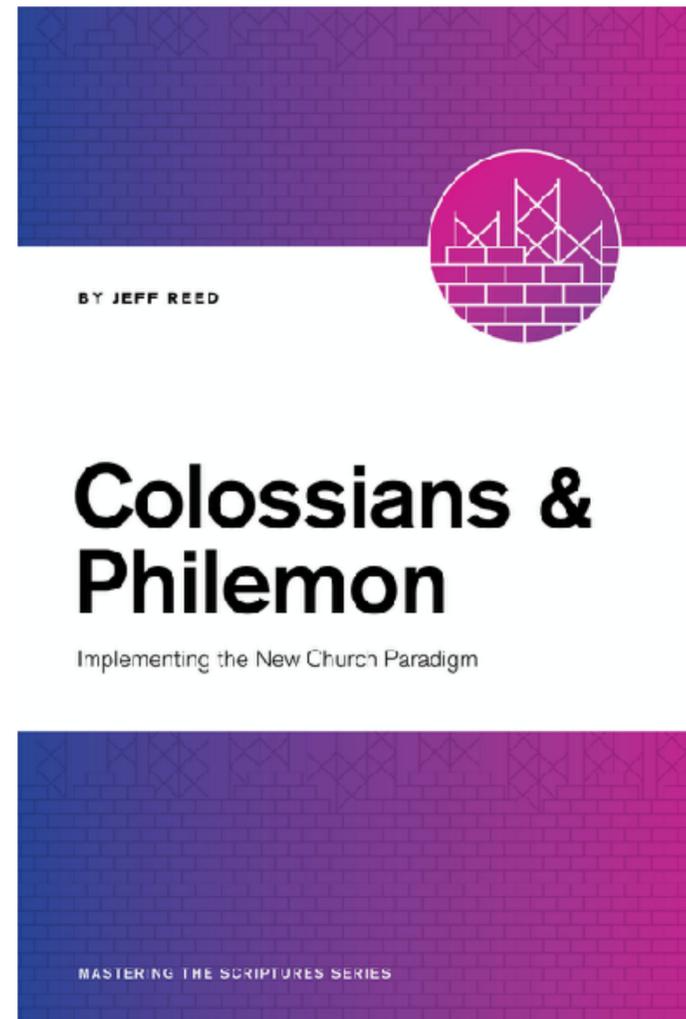
All 4 letters use similar terminology and sort of work as one growing theology of Christ's vision and mission for His churches.



Paul's Middle Letters

Fully Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy

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: Philemon—Doing Theology in the Network

Session 5: The Importance of Network—the Lycus Valley Network

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

What is Paul worried about with the Lycus Valley churches?

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

Plausible arguments — persuasive speech

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Paul wants to see them established in the faith—rooted and built up in the faith. He is concerned about the “firmness of their faith,” 2:5, and them being “established in the faith, just as you were taught,” 2:7.

There are two philosophies, two traditions, two sets of “first principles” in view here: those of the world and those of Christ. The body of the letter lays out these two sets:

“the first principles” (core tradition, philosophy, teaching) of the world 2:16–23

There were two general philosophies of the world these churches were facing—Judaism and Greek philosophy and religions. Paul reviews their general principles.

“the first principles of Christ” (authoritative tradition, philosophy, teaching) 3:1–4:6

Here Paul lays out the core first principles (authoritative tradition, philosophy, and teaching of Christ

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

Why was Paul not careful to say exactly the same thing exactly the same thing in these parallel passages in the two letters?

Why were his lists of first principles not the same in both letters?

Why was the household text in Colossians shorter than the text in Ephesians?

Why did the parallel passages of Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the filling of the Spirit in one and the “word richly dwelling” in the other, with the same outcome?

Paul's Middle Letters – Colossians

Remember what Paul is doing and not doing. Remember how Paul is doing theology.

Paul is a coherent thinker (New Perspective of Paul).

1. He is not trying to say what is true and not true in philosophies of the world and human traditions passed on down.
2. He is generalizing at a principle level that complete philosophies and human traditions, including religious systems (including Jewish and Christian traditions), are ultimately built on a set of first principles.
3. By using the phrase “plausible arguments,” he is assuming there is truth in all of these systems, but when the world and man build them, ultimately they wind up opposing Christ's first principles.
4. Paul was reasoning from the philosophy, first principles, and grand strategy Christ had revealed to him. It allowed him to assess every other cultural, philosophical, and political philosophy with a simple process of pushing them up to their first principles.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First principles of the world

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

Remember, Paul is not trying to give an exhaustive or exact list of the first principles of the world, but he is giving the essence, which can easily be applied to all the philosophies of the world (political, religious or cultural) in a way that the Colossian churches would be able to think through whatever philosophy they are bringing into their new life in Christ.

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—the 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

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 is first in Ephesians.

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

Paul has the former in mind. He 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 establish them in the faith (synonymous with the teaching, the deposit, the sound doctrine, the authoritative traditions handed down to the churches).

So Colossians is about that.

He wants them to be established in Christ's teaching, the 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 is reviewed in 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. 3:12-17

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

This is very interesting, and gives great insight into how Paul theologizes, as well as gives us great insight into what he means by being filled with the Spirit. Compare the parallel verse in Ephesians 5:18

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.

Colossians 3:16 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

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 (continued)

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

Now let's turn to the household texts: 3:18–4:1

First Principles of Christ (continued)

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

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

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 that the new community lifestyle is 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: In the next session, 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; 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

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 also must 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 — their own persuasive arguments.

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

Basic questions: Do these principles just apply to the churches? Or do they apply 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 responding in individual conversations as we are asked; it may lead to a longer dialogue, but carefully selected.
- Part of giving an answer is addressing these questions in a larger cultural conversation; Paul did this, 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.**

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

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—Colossians

This session, the 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, 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) are to be fair and just, again so as 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 — their own persuasive arguments.

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

How are they to be applied?

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

When the world sees 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.

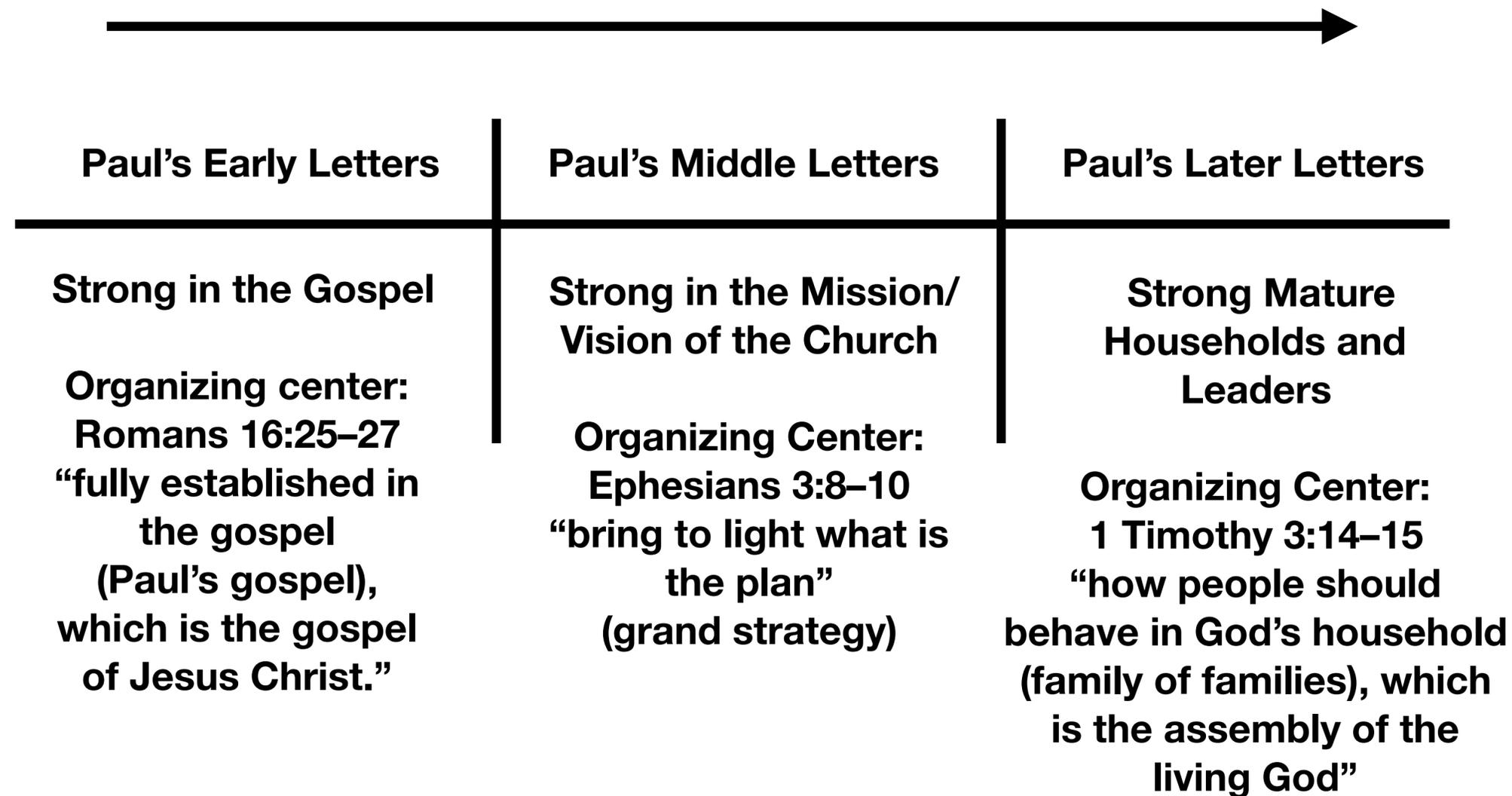
Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

If you understand the basic philosophy of Christ (His grand strategy and core principles) and the basic philosophy of the world (its grand strategies and core principles):

- you can think theologically in culture, on your feet, and give a reasonable answer for your faith when the conversation presents itself.
- you will not be led astray by plausible arguments by those presenting a cultural narrative (cultural, political or religious), but you will be able to think things through with the mind of Christ.
- you will have a full and growing understanding of the philosophy of Christ (grand strategy and core principles) as it unfolds across all of his letters and grows even more when they are situated fully as the foundation of the New Testament.
- you will develop the mind of Christ and be able to think biblically and critically and avoid plausible arguments of the world; you will be able to do theology in culture everyday on your feet, as you think across Paul's early, middle and later letters.

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

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.

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

Think how The First Principles series and Mastering the Scriptures series are designed (not a set of exact topics that I arrange for you).

The First Principles Series 1 and 2: 40 major passages

The First Principles Series 3: Acts and examples of Paul's Early, Middle and Later Letters

Mastering the Scriptures: Paul's Letters — Paul's early, middle and later letters

Leadership Series II: Acts and Paul's letters

Paul's Middle Letters — Colossians

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?