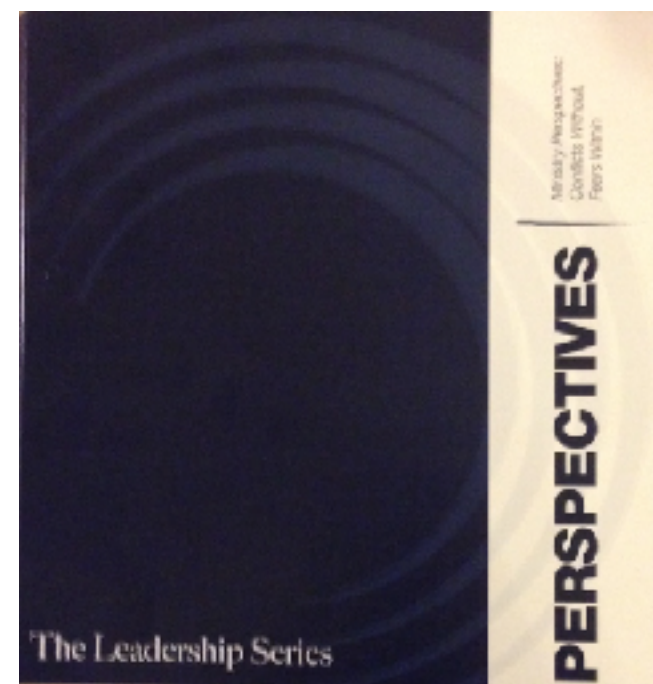


The Corinthian Letters

Progressing the Gospel Through Multiplying Churches

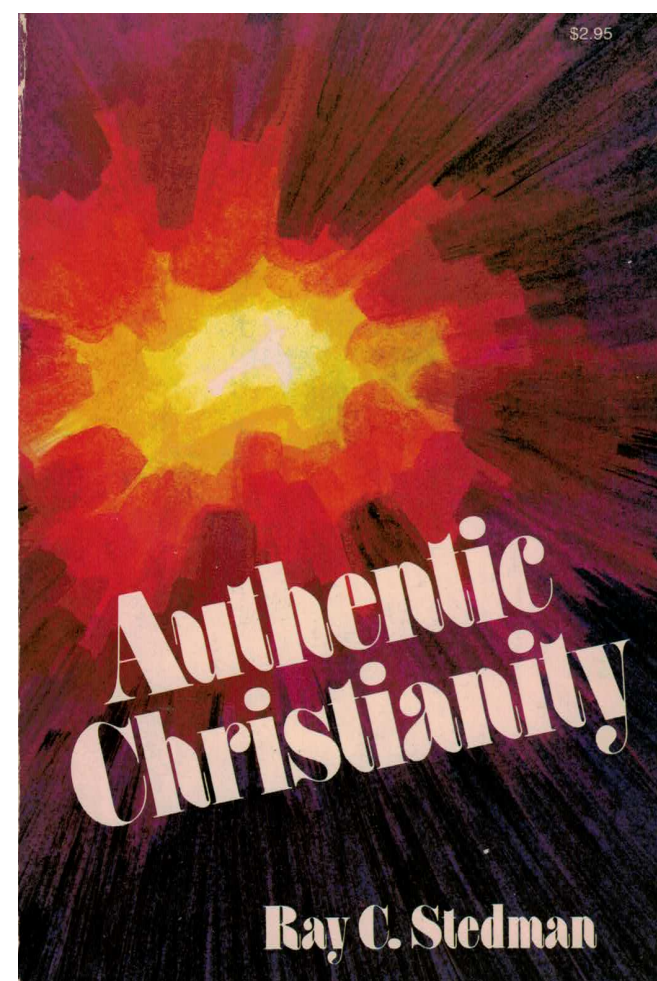


The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within



Specifically, this morning, we are going to focus on 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5.

It is a very special passage. We have a course on it in BILD's Leadership Series I: Ministry Perspectives: Conflicts Without and Fears Within.



I was shaped profoundly in my thinking by a Ray Stedman book: *Authentic Christianity* (1975), which is basically completely built around 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Why this title: The Corinthians Correspondence? Is it a mistake?

Why would Paul devote a large letter to his relationship with the Corinthians? We will continue addressing this issue this morning.

Our focus: How to think about perspective on ministry and our focus on success

India: Success = become a pastor.

China: Success = Western standards.

USA: Success = mega church.

Everywhere: Success = degrees.

USA: Success = D.Min. degrees.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Questions:

1. How would you describe Paul's perspective on "success" in his ministry?
2. What were his standards for measuring success in his ministry?
3. If he had a correct perspective of success in ministry, why was he at times so discouraged, even depressed, and why did he feel so much pressure?
4. What is the relationship of "conflicts without and fears within" to the true success of his ministry?

The New Perspective on Paul



The New Perspective on Paul



The Later Letters

Book 1: Paul's Later Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches
According to Christ's Design

Book 2: 1 Timothy: Ordering the Churches as Households of God

Book 3: Titus: Setting in Order What Remains in the Churches

Book 4: 2 Timothy: Investing in Intergenerational Apostolic
Leadership

The New Perspective on Paul



The Middle Letters

- Book 1: Paul's Middle Letters: Fully Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy
- Book 2: Ephesians: Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy—the Church
- Book 3: Colossians and Philemon: Implementing the New Church Paradigm
- Book 4: Philippians: Participating with One Mind for the Progress of the Gospel

The New Perspective on Paul



The Early Letters

Book 1: Paul's Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Book 2: Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel

Book 3: The Thessalonian Correspondence: Solid Conversion to the Gospel

Book 4: The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

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

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

The New Perspective on Paul

Teaching Mastering the Scriptures

Session 1: The New Perspective on Paul: Rethinking Western Hermeneutics

Session 2: Canonical Structure and the New Perspective on Paul

Session 3: Paul's Traditioning Process: Schematic for Setting Churches in Order

Session 4: Paul's Process of Doing Theology in Culture Within the Grand Strategy Schema

Session 5: Paul's Letters as Tools for Building Complex Apostolic Networks

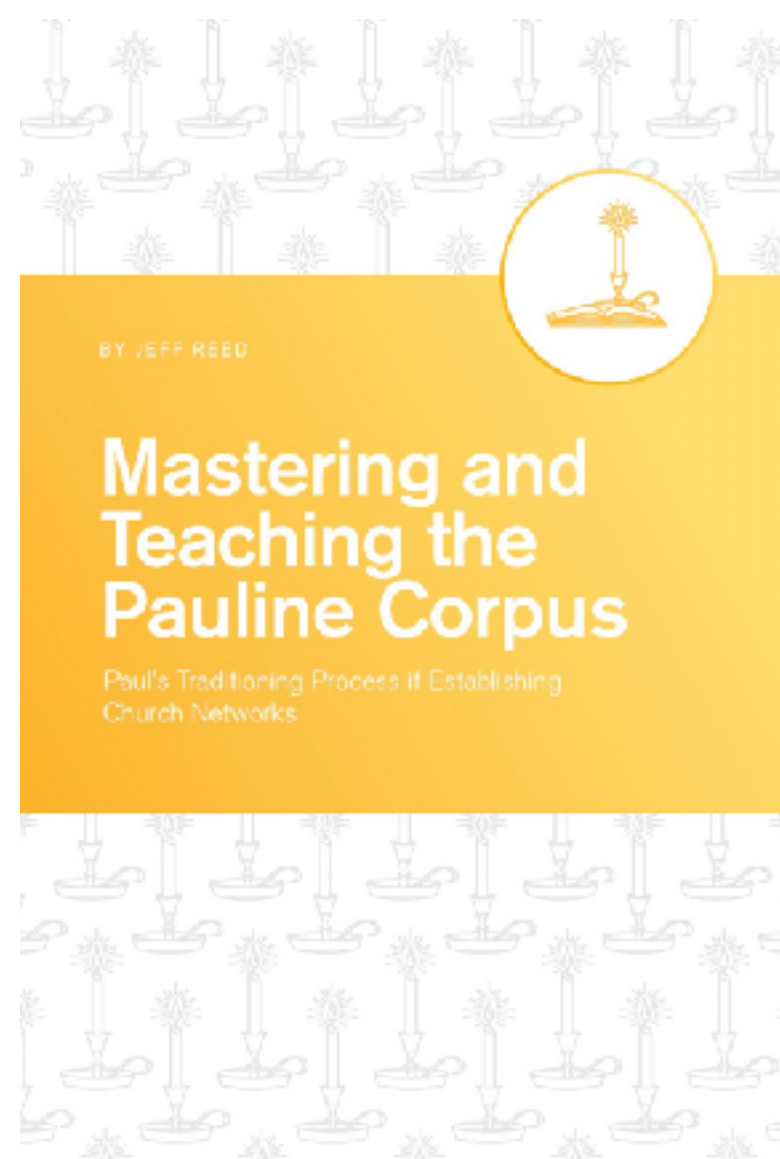
Session 6: The New Perspective on Paul and the Gospels

Session 7: Mastering, Teaching, and Using the Mastering the Scriptures

Appendix 1: Comprehensive Assessment of Complex Apostolic Networks

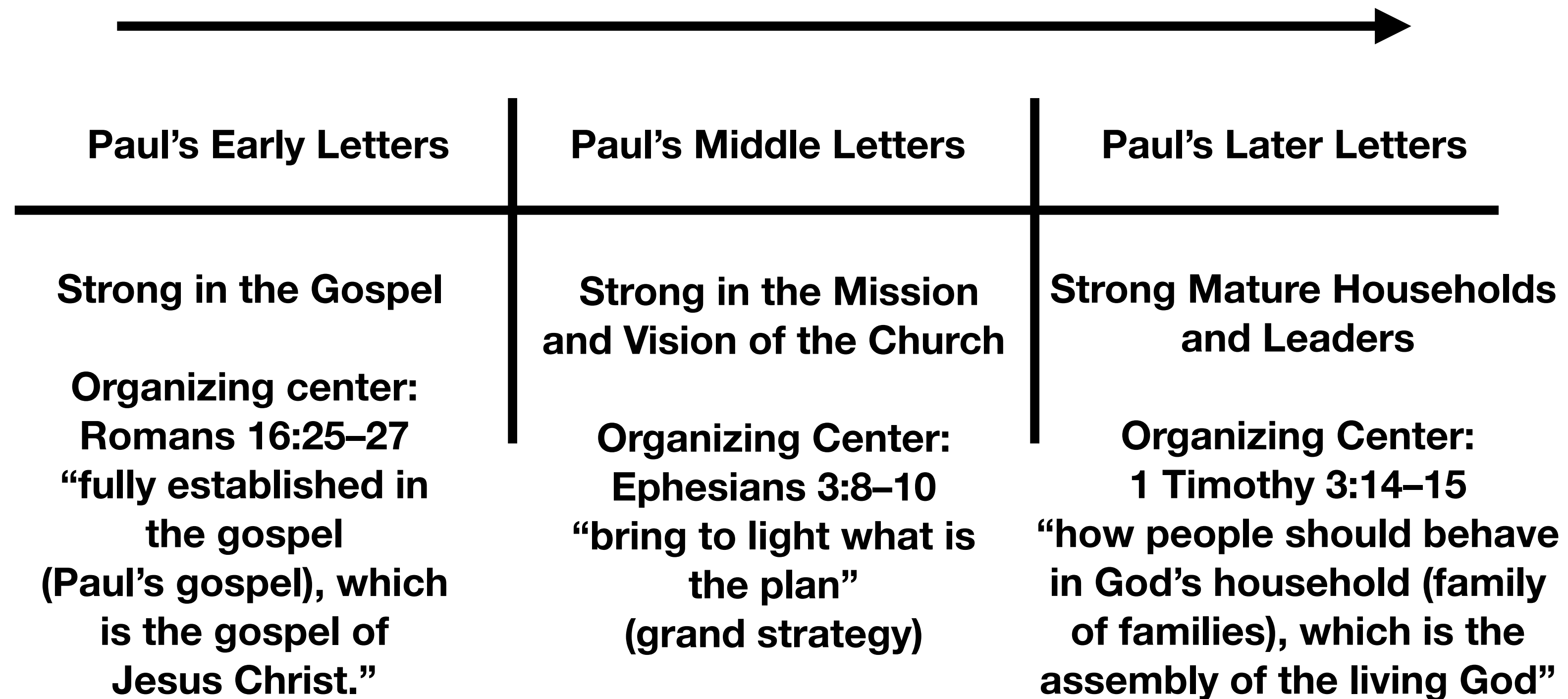
Appendix 2: Annotated Greco–Roman Research Library

Appendix 3: Glossary of Key Biblical Terms and Concepts



The New Perspective on Paul

Topos Schematic (Overall Framework): Establishing Church Networks (Traditioning Paul)

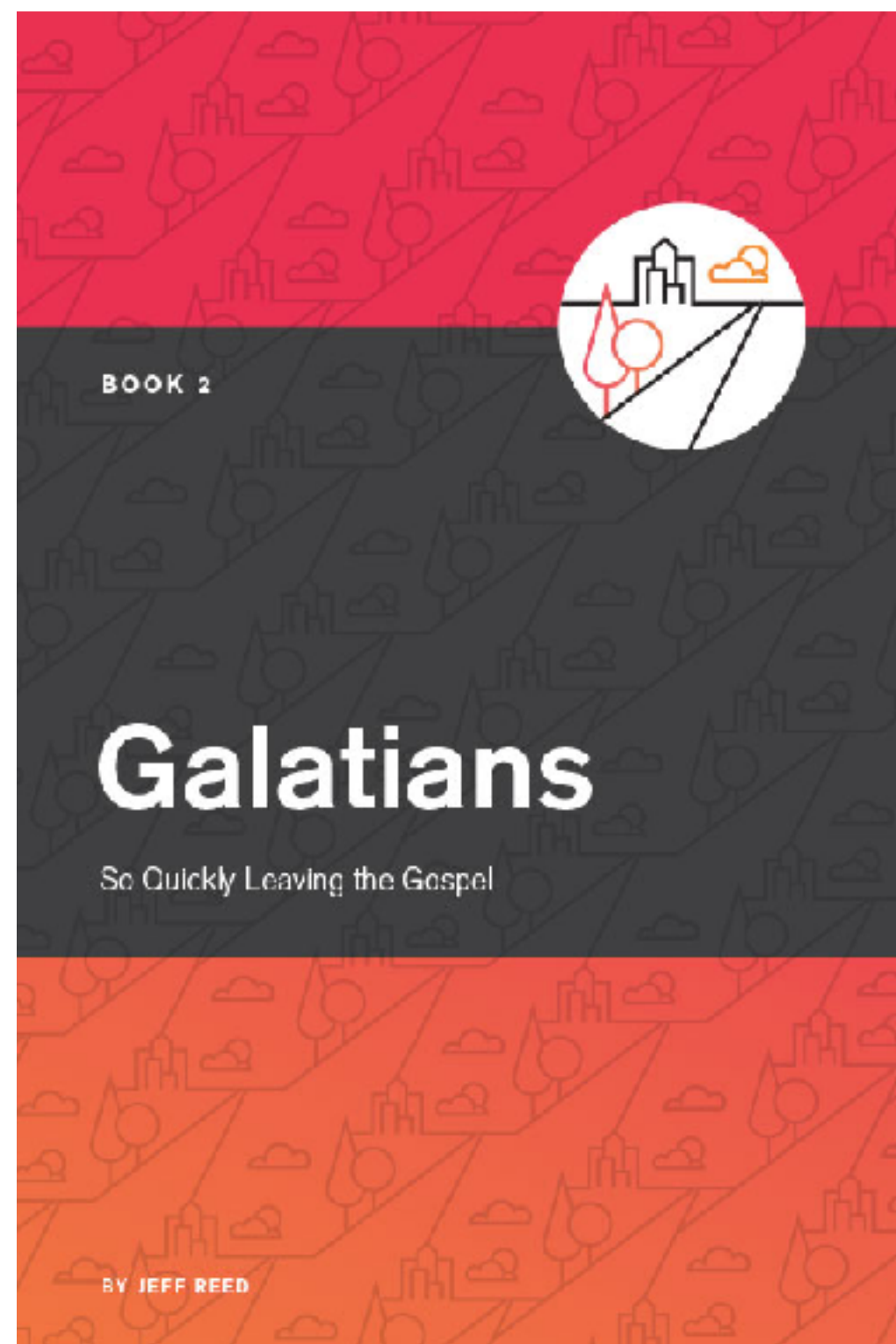


Literary Design: Complex Network Establishing (Encoding) Benchmarks (Traditioning of Paul)



Paul's Early Letters	Paul's Middle Letters	Paul's Later Letters
The Gospel	Mission/Vision of the Church	Mature Households and Leaders
Gospel Formula: 1 Cor. 15:1–6 Peter's 5 sermons, Galatians	Christ's grand strategy Eph. 3:8–10	Churches set in order (household topos) 1 Timothy 3:14–16
Solid conversion: 1 & 2 Thess.	One mature church: equipping saints Ephesians 4:1–16	Solid senior eldership Titus 1:5–9 elders, deacons, women: 1 Timothy 3
"Now concerning..." List of schisms: 1 Corinthians	Household texts (family): Ephesians 5:22–6:9 Colossians 3:18–4:1	Household texts (family of families): 1 Timothy 5:1–6:2 Titus 2:1–21
Gathering Topos: Lord's Supper- Symposium: 1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40	Theology in culture: Philemon	Key, intergenerational apostolic leaders and teams
Perspective of ministry: conflicts without, fears within: 2 Cor. 2:14–7:5	Participation in progress of the gospel: Philippians' model (teams, finances)	Training process, stewardship responsibilities: 2 Timothy
Paul's complete treatise of the gospel: Romans	Network churches: hub (Ephesus), cluster (Lycus Valley), strategic (Philippi)	Leadership virtue/vice cluster lists: 1 Timothy 3:2–4, 8–12; 6:3–5; Titus 1:6–9; 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:2–5
"Pauline cycle" duly recognized gatherings		

The New Perspective on Paul



Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel, Book 2

Session 1: The Galatian Problem

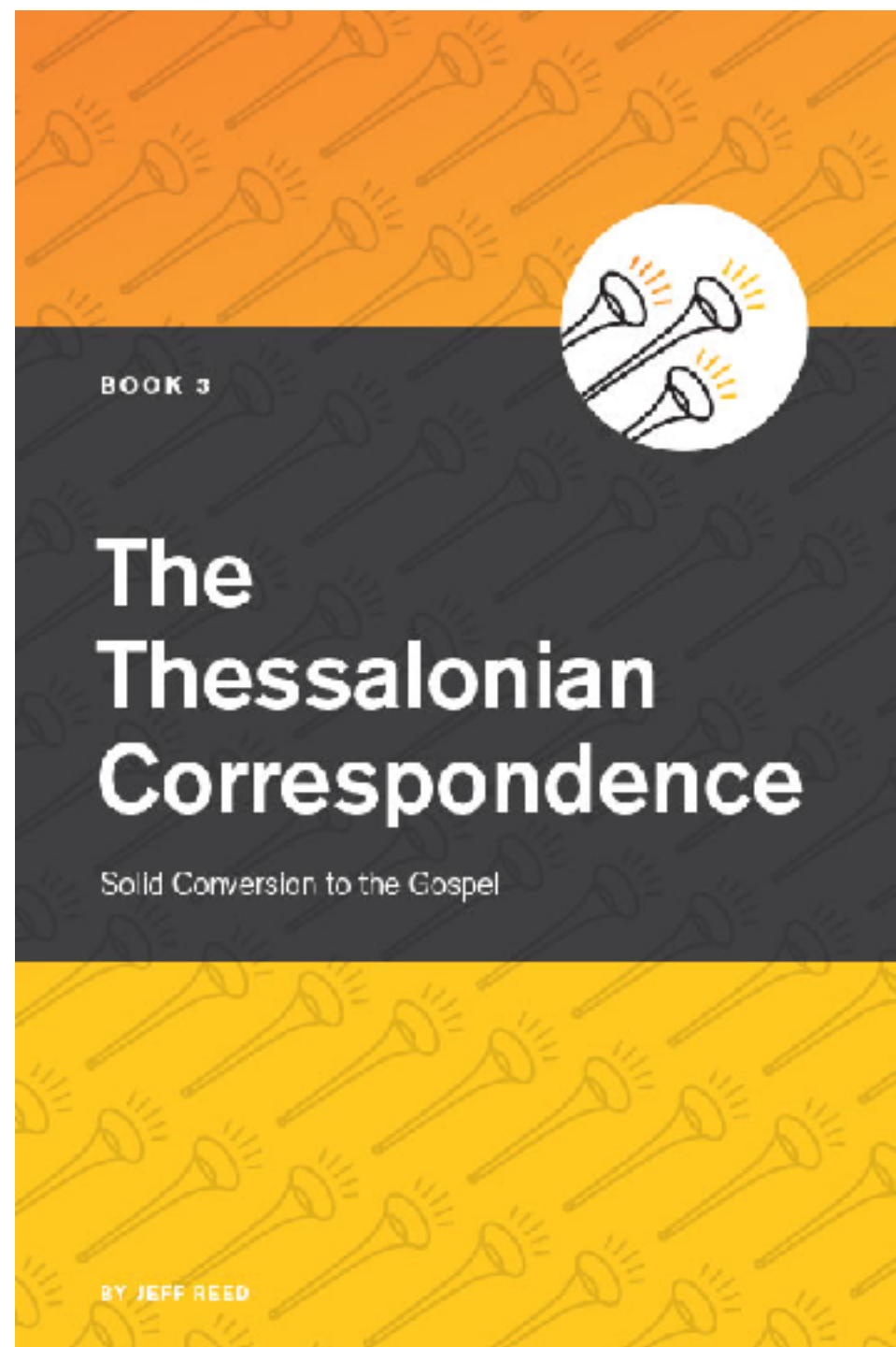
Session 2: The Pure Gospel

Session 3: The Gospel as a System of Living

Session 4: The Gospel and Walking in the Spirit

Session 5: The Gospel and Respecting Leaders

The New Perspective on Paul



The Thessalonian Correspondence: Solid Conversion to the Gospel, Book 3

Session 1: Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians

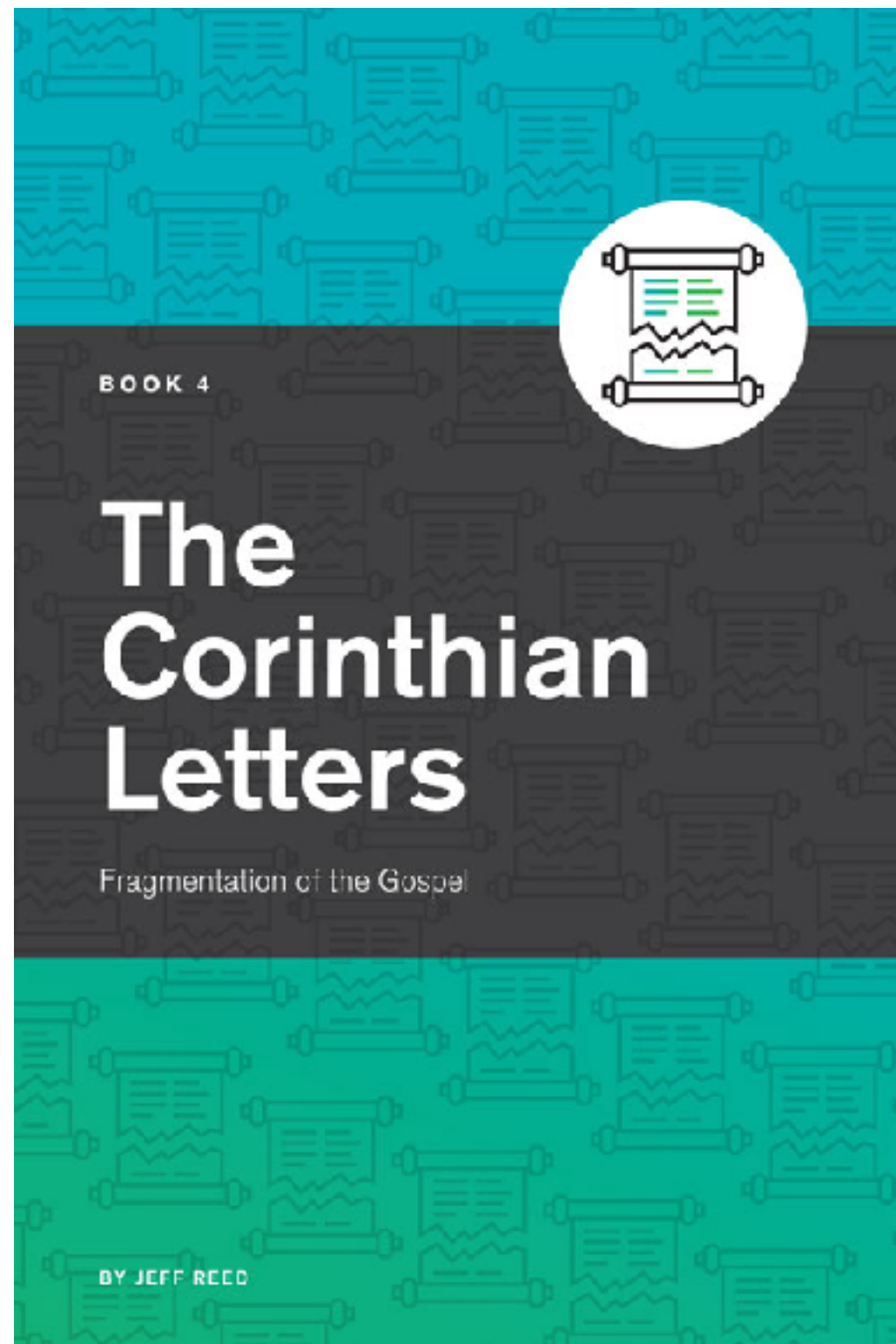
Session 2: Their Dramatic Conversion

Session 3: Three Emerging Problems — Letter 1

Session 4: Further Clarification — Letter 2

Session 5: Solidifying Their Conversion

The New Perspective on Paul



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel,
Book 4

Session 1: The Fragmentation of the Gospel

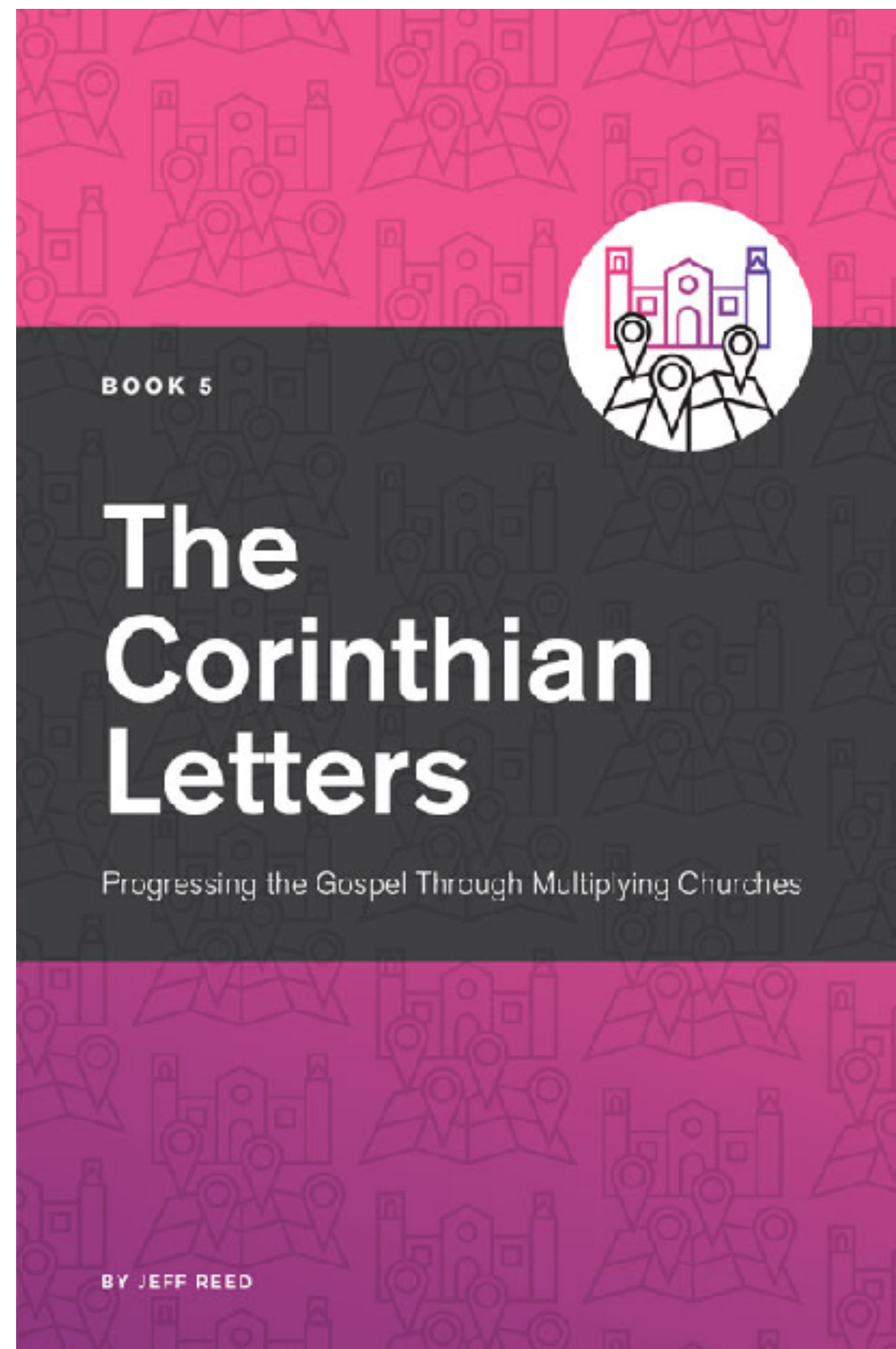
Session 2: Building on One Foundation: The Traditions

Session 3: Schisms in Their Community Life

Session 4: Schisms in Their Community Gatherings

Session 5: Back to the Gospel as Apostolic Tradition

The New Perspective on Paul



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

Session 1: The Pressure of Leading Church Networks

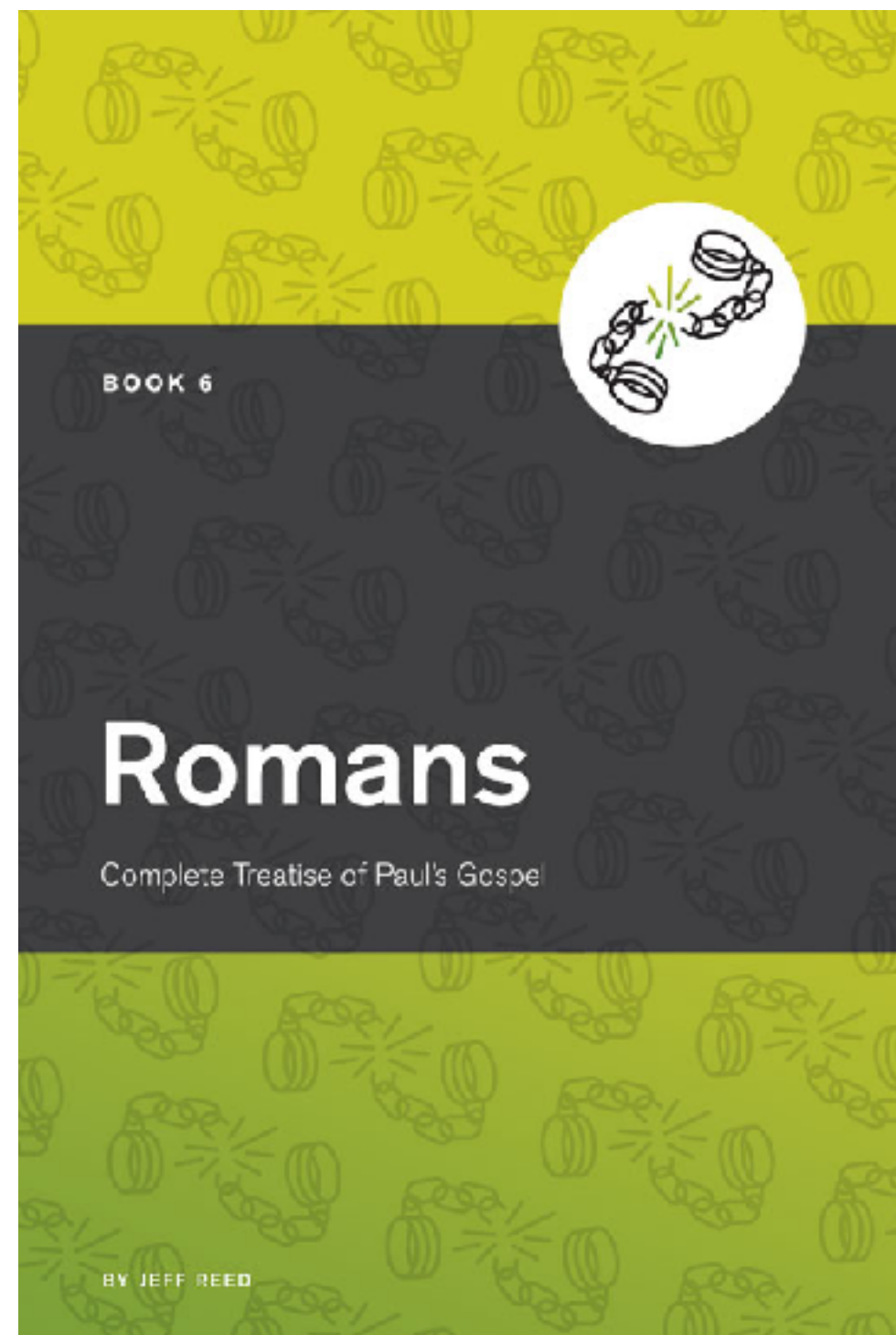
Session 2: The Ministry of the Gospel: Conflicts Without and Fears Within

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

Session 4: The Importance of Apostolic Leadership

Session 5: The Appeal to the Corinthian Churches

The New Perspective on Paul



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

Session 1: The Intention of Romans

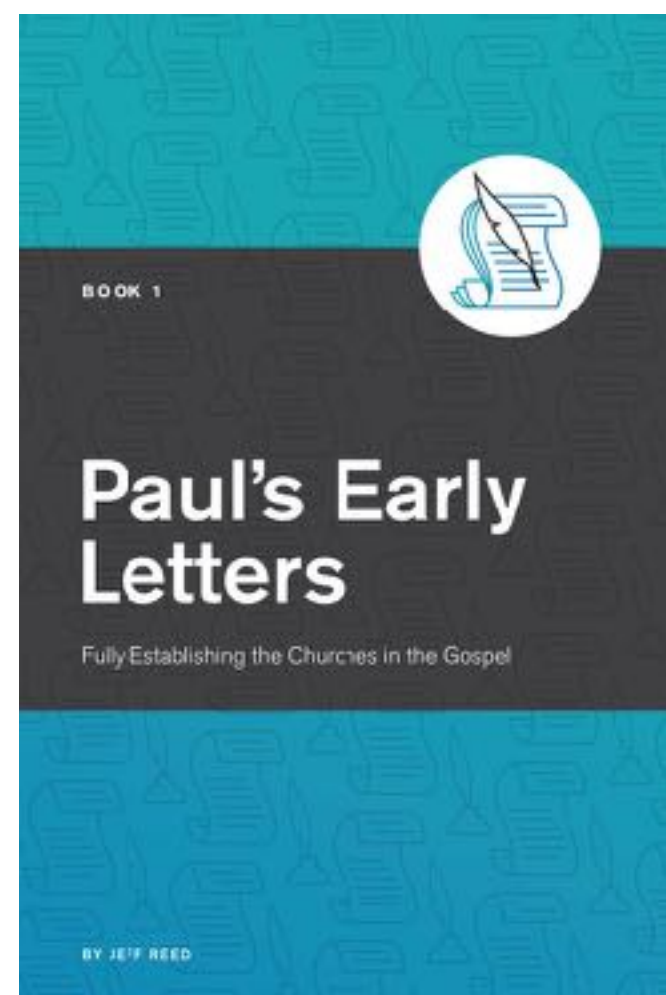
Session 2: The Gospel and The Story

Session 3: The New Gospel Worldview

Session 4: Reframing the Jewish Story

Session 5: The Gospel in Transformed Community

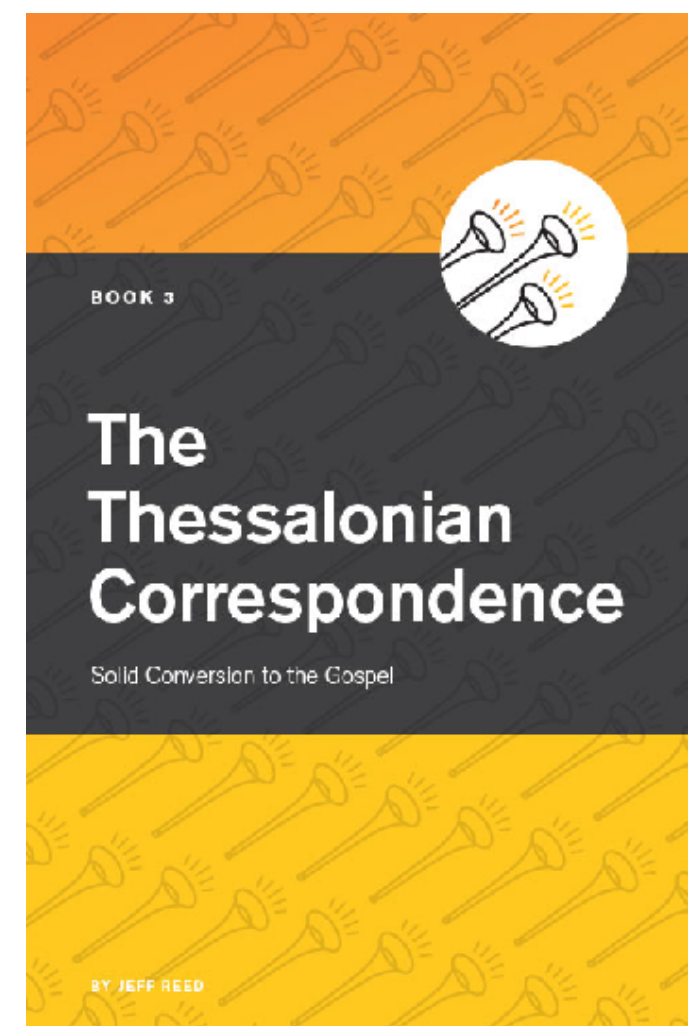
The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



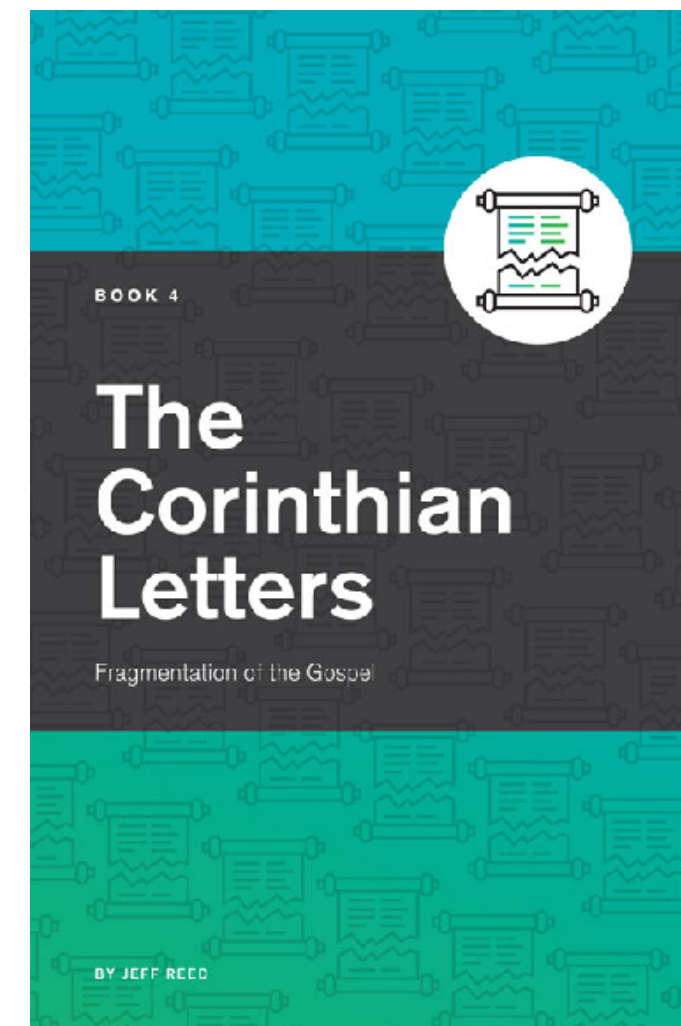
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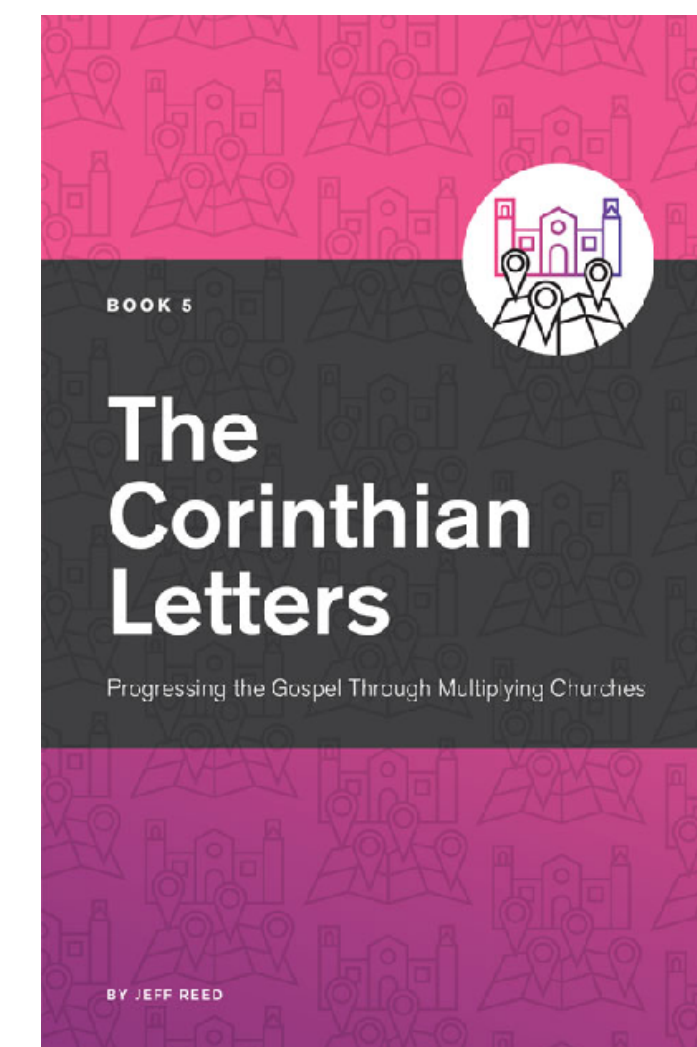
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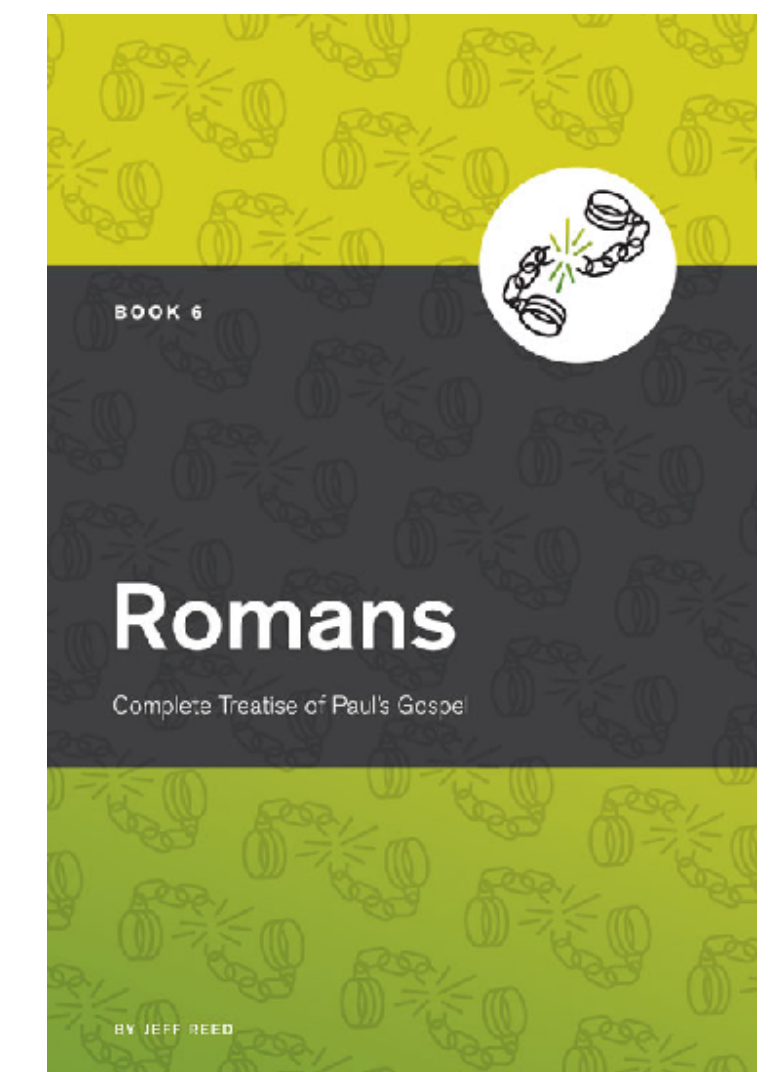
Winter/Summer 51



Sept. 53



June 56



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The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Let's return to our heuristic author's intention statement.

Intention Statement for the Corinthian Letters:

To defend his unique role of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles in the context of all sorts of rivals, keeping the Corinthian churches in his sphere of authority as he continues to build a network of churches committed to progressing the gospel among the Gentiles

by writing his second letter to deal with internal divisions, rooted in differing social status that were fragmenting the Corinthian churches. (1 Corinthians)

by writing his fourth letter to appeal to the Corinthians to remain under his leadership, despite attacks on his apostleship by rival leaders. (2 Corinthians)

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Intention Statement of 1 Corinthians

To deal with internal divisions, rooted in differing social status that were fragmenting the Corinthian churches, so the Corinthian churches would fully participate with him in the progress of the gospel

by applying the gospel to the core divisions that developed by factions within the churches
by specifically addressing factions in

- community life and
- community gatherings

by taking them back to the gospel as apostolic traditioning

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Intention Statement of 2 Corinthians

To defend his apostleship in the Corinthian churches, that they might remain in his sphere of authority and therefore participate fully in the progress amongst the Gentiles, for which he was uniquely commissioned

by describing his internal stress in carrying out his stewardship

by describing the heart of the ministry of the gospel as “conflicts without and fears within” as a context for victorious progress

by defending his apostleship and seeking the Corinthians as partners in that progression

Reflections on 1 Corinthians

We learn a lot about how Paul built his network (movement) of churches:

1. He understood that building the foundation correctly meant that they, the Corinthian churches, were to be part of a network of churches progressing the gospel (open door in Ephesus).
2. The churches were expected to give towards the progress of the gospel (supporting Paul's team as needed, giving to other networks of churches in the complex network).
3. Paul's process of establishing churches involved extended personal visits, sending key members of his team, and cooperating with other legitimate teams working amongst his churches.
4. Paul worked hard to make his churches become a genuine network that saw themselves as an extended, empire-wide family of families. He did this through giving, serving, hosting, family greetings, etc.
5. Paul also saw the teaching he delivered (the didache, rule of faith, see Galatians) as common authoritative traditions (faith, deposit, sound doctrine).

Reflections on 1 Corinthians

Apostolic Authority in 1 Corinthians

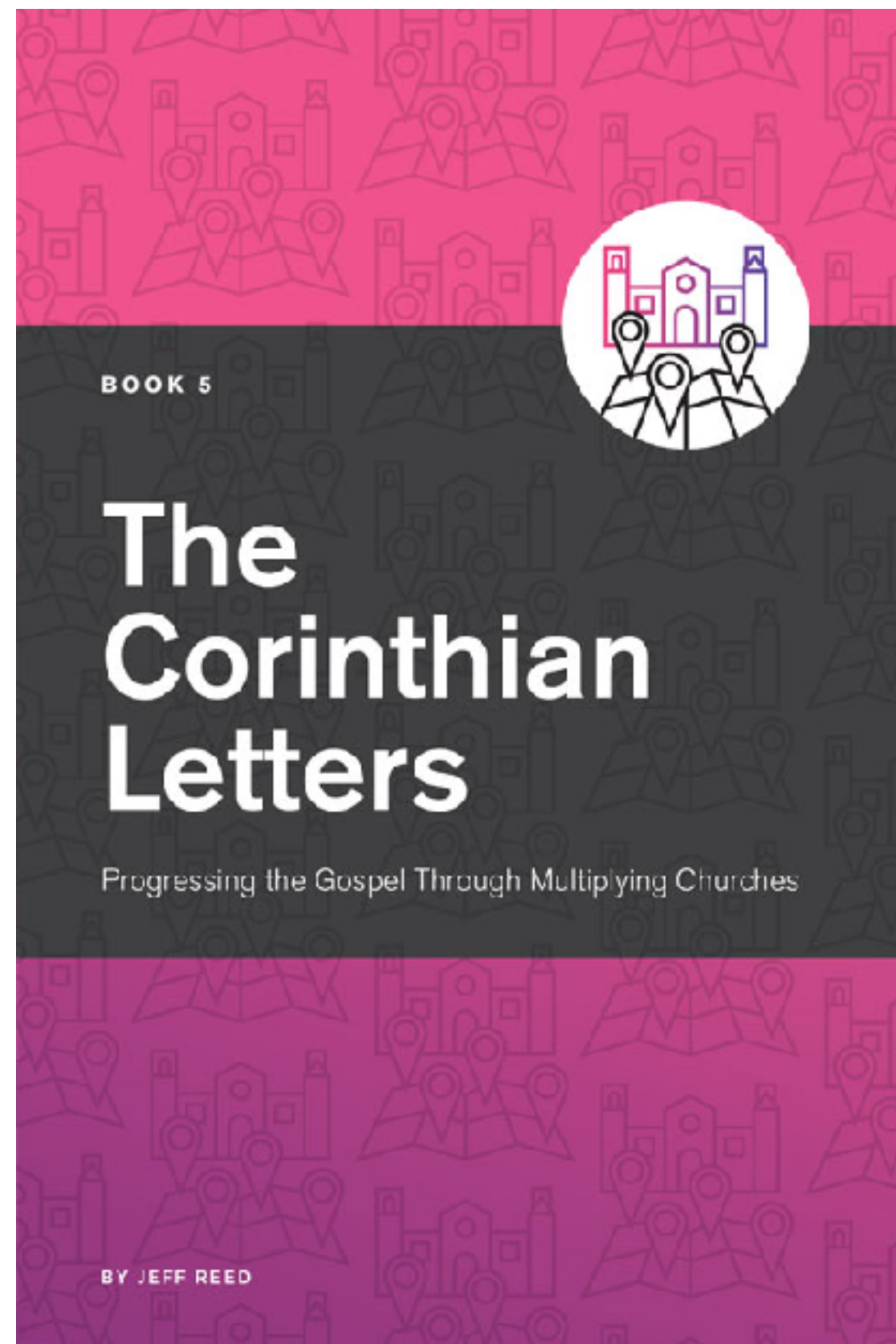
1. Paul came to Corinth in the power of the authority of the gospel tradition, not as one asserting personal authority or demonstrating exceptional oratory skill.
2. Paul understood the foundational nature of the gospel in the form of a formulaic statement and framed much of his authoritative teaching on that base.
3. He saw that gospel as the starting point for solving all of the divisions in the Corinthian churches and foundational to building a one mindedness in the churches.
4. Paul delivered the traditions he received from Christ with confidence and authority, yet with a clear understanding that the Corinthians needed to learn how to think at a principle level, producing the cultural flexibility needed to preserve their unity at a practical cultural level.
5. Paul established a process for future apostolic leaders to follow by working flexibly at a principle level from how he dealt with the divisions in the Corinthian churches, a process we are calling the *apostolic traditioning of Paul*.
6. Paul will further model the importance of apostolic authority in 2 Corinthians; as we will see, he will establish the perpetual need for the functions in 2 Timothy.

Apostolic Authority in 2 Corinthians

Apostolic Authority in 1 Corinthians 1:1-2:11

1. Paul saw his apostolic authority including his key apostolic team members as seen in including Timothy in the introduction to the of 2 Corinthians.
2. Paul understood the authority he exercised in this letters and in necessary visits as including those churches throughout Achaia, of which the Corinthian churches were a hub.
3. Paul saw suffering and persecution as part of the process of bonding them together with him in progressing the gospel as they were informed and prayed for each other in the progress of the gospel.
4. Paul was frank and straightforward in his letters, and clear, not manipulative in revealing to them his plans; and when he changes his plans he gives careful, honest explanation.
5. Paul made his travel plans with full intention of completing them as shared with his churches, but he understood the problems and pressures of his churches may cause him to alter those plans in the context of carrying them out.
6. Paul called on the churches to discipline the person (most likely a church patron whose church was creating the opposition), but to not to make it a permanent rejection.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within



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

Session 1: The Pressure of Leading Church Networks

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

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

Session 4: The Importance of Apostolic Leadership

Session 5: The Appeal to the Corinthian Churches

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Now let's turn our attention 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5. Before he begins his first argument, he gives a brief introduction.

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

2 Corinthians 2:12–13 N. T. Wright

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

2 Corinthians 7:5 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

From a literary standpoint, Paul frames in his argument on his perspective of ministry. How does he think about his ministry in the context of all the conflicts and internal fears?

He unfolds a well-thought-out, deeply theological, personal perspective of ministry.

2:12–13 He leaves a wide open door for the gospel.

7:5 He arrives in Macedonia.

In between these verses, he unfolds his deeply-thought-through perspective of ministry.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Then he summarizes his situation:

“We were troubled in every way; there were battles outside and fears inside.”

troubled = “squeezed, under great pressure, crushed” (LN); “restricted” (BGD)

battles outside = “combat, severe clashes, fights” (LN); “contention, strife” (LEH LXX)

fears inside = “anxiety” (LK); “panic, flight” (LSJ)—the Greek word is *phobos*

Paul was in a constant state of anxiety that zapped all his resources internally and externally, restricting him and all effective progress of the gospel.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Why did he leave the wide open door for the gospel?

Because he had “no rest in his spirit”

rest = relaxation of tension

Titus was supposed to meet him there. He was supposed to bring news of how the Corinthians responded to his letter.

In 2 Corinthians 7:5, he still has no rest—the same word. only here he says their “bodies had no rest.”

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

He doesn't get any relief until Titus comes.

⁶ But the God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the arrival of Titus,
⁷ and not only by his arrival but in the comfort he had received from you, as he told us about your longing for us, your lamenting, and your enthusiasm for me personally.

2 Corinthians 7:6–7 N. T. Wright

In 7:6–16 he expresses he was sorry for the harshness, but happy for their responses, which were so strong that he expressed he now has full confidence in them.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

We will now look at what was going on in him on his journey from Troas to Macedonia.

In the crucible of all this pressure, he forms his theology of his “perspective on the ministry” he had been called to.

At this point, though, it is important to note that thinking right did not relieve the pressure—the toll on him mentally and physically; it just kept him in the battle and fulfilling his calling!

If we are not in the battle and experiencing similar ministry realities, then maybe we are actually not in the battle at all!

Here, now, is Paul’s theology of his “perspective on the ministry”—his view of success, from 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Literary design, schemas, frameworks

A side note on *literary design*. I dealt with this extensively in *Teaching Mastering the Scriptures: Paul's Traditioning Process of Establishing Church Networks* (TMTS). The chart "Literary Design: Complex Network Establishing (Encoding) Benchmarks (Traditioning of Paul)" is key to understanding how to master the Scriptures (it appears 3 times in TMTS, pp. 54, 85, and 135).

1. They are key to topos-based topic statements, giving coherence and understanding to whole sections; there are 3 types of topos/topoi clustering: overarching, subsections, and asides (TMTS, p. 25 and following).
2. They make the big ideas of the apostolic traditioning of Paul, framing in the entire process of establishing believers, churches, and church networks.
3. They actual provide a central part to a whole new paradigm of commentaries, (Kuhn's incommensurate/lexicon argument) and need complete new naming. (I will return to this at the end of this session.)

Literary Design: Complex Network Establishing (Encoding) Benchmarks (Traditioning of Paul)



Paul's Early Letters	Paul's Middle Letters	Paul's Later Letters
The Gospel	Mission/Vision of the Church	Mature Households and Leaders
Gospel Formulae: 1 Cor. 15:1–6 (Peter's 5 sermons, Galatians)	Christ's grand strategy Eph. 3:8–10	Churches set in order (household topos) 1 Timothy 3:14–16
Solid conversion: 1 & 2 Thess.	One mature church: equipping saints Ephesians 4:1–16	Solid senior eldership Titus 1:5–9 (elders, deacons, women: 1 Timothy 3)
"Now concerning..." List of schisms (1 Corinthians)	Household texts (family): Ephesians 5:22–6:9 Colossians 3:18–4:1	Household texts (family of families): 1 Timothy 5:1–6:2 Titus 2:1–21
Gathering Topos: Lord's Supper- Symposium (1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40)	Theology in culture: Philemon	Key, intergenerational apostolic leaders and teams
Perspective of ministry: conflicts without, fears within 2 Cor. 2:14–7:5	Participation in progress of the gospel: Philippians' model (teams, finances)	Training process, stewardship responsibilities: 2 Timothy
Paul's complete treatise of gospel: Romans	Network churches: hub (Ephesus), cluster (Lycus Valley), strategic (Philippi)	Leadership virtue/vice cluster lists: 1 Timothy 3:2–4, 8–12; 6:3–5; Titus 1:6–9; 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:2–5
Pauline cycle (duly recognized gatherings)		

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Future “no theology of Paul” essays (biblical theology–cultural flexibility)

This idea of “No Theology of Paul” essays is made up of topoi-asides within the context of topoi-subsections that are within topos-schemas. I will give 5 examples in this session.

Essay 1: Personal Anxiety, the Spirit, and Ministry Priorities

There are huge issues here to be reflected on as apostolic leaders and senior elders, especially in network hubs:

- relationship of anxiety to strategic ministry decisions
- toll on leaders: conflicts without and fears within
- realistic perspective of ministry demands
- true understanding of success

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

We will now lay out Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry." I will do this by making a topos-based topic statement for each section of 2:12–7:5 and then, after reading the section, in most sections I will do one or two "future essay" slides of key concepts in the section.

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5).

1. Ministry is a "triumphal march," like the returning Roman army with its captives and spoils, resulting in some marching towards death and some towards life. Specifically, in Christ's triumphal unfolding plan for progressing the gospel and building the kingdom through His church, Paul's ministry will lead some closer to life and some closer to death. Christ's triumphal march will always be filled with conflict. 2 Corinthians 2:14–17.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹⁴ But thanks be to God—the God who always leads us in his triumphal procession in the Messiah, and through us reveals everywhere the sweet smell of knowing him.

¹⁵ We are the Messiah's fragrance before God, you see, to those who are being saved and to those who are being lost. ¹⁶ To the latter, it's a smell which comes from death and leads to death; but to the former it's the smell of life which leads to life. Who can rise to this challenge? ¹⁷ We aren't mere peddlers of God's word, as so many people are. We speak with sincerity; we speak from God; we speak in God's presence; we speak in the Messiah.

2 Corinthians 2:14–17 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5):

2. Paul is qualified (with no letter of commendation) as a steward of the New Covenant, in which the Spirit writes His word on the hearts of those who believe, and everyone can see it (not as Moses veiled his face to hide the glory from the Old Covenant on tablets of stone). Now the glory through the Spirit is inside us (the glory of the Lord) and transforming us from glory to glory. 2 Corinthians 3:1–18

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹ So: we're starting to "recommend ourselves" again, are we? Or perhaps we need—as some do— official references to give to you? Or perhaps even to get from you?

² You are our official reference! It's written on our hearts! Everybody can know it and read it! ³ It's quite plain that you are a letter from the Messiah, with us as the messengers—a letter not written with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of beating hearts. ⁴ That's the kind of confidence we have toward God, through the Messiah. ⁵ It isn't as though we are qualified in ourselves to reckon that we have anything to offer on our own account. Our qualification comes from God: ⁶ God has qualified us to be stewards of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit. The letter kills, you see, but the spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:1–6 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

⁷ But just think about it: when death was being distributed, carved in letters of stone, it was a glorious thing, so glorious in fact that the children of Israel couldn't look at Moses's face because of the glory of his face—a glory that was to be abolished. ⁸ But in that case, when the spirit is being distributed, won't that be glorious too? ⁹ If distributing condemnation is glorious, you see, how much more glorious is it to distribute vindication! ¹⁰ In fact, what used to be glorious has come in this respect to have no glory at all, because of the new glory which goes so far beyond it. ¹¹ For if the thing which was to be abolished came with glory, how much more glory will there be for the thing that lasts.

2 Corinthians 3:7–11 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹² So, because that's the kind of hope we have, we speak with great freedom. ¹³ We aren't like Moses: he put a veil over his face, to stop the children of Israel from gazing at the end of what was being abolished. ¹⁴ The difference is that their minds were hardened. You see, the same veil lies over the reading of the old covenant right up to this very day. It isn't taken away, because it's in the Messiah that it is abolished. ¹⁵ Yes, even to this day, whenever Moses is read, the veil lies upon their hearts; ¹⁶ but "whenever he turns back to the Lord, the veil is removed." ¹⁷ Now "the Lord" here means the spirit; and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, without any veil on our faces, gaze at the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, and so are being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as you'd expect from the Lord, the spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:12–18 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Future “no theology of Paul” essay (biblical theology–cultural flexibility)

Topoi–aside: commendation, recognition; qualifications for ministry

Two key concepts here:

official references, 3:1, 2 (2 times): *systatikos*: “commendation, recommendation,” “you stand behind them as approved” (LN); *epistolon* “anything sent by a messenger, message, order, commission, whether verbal or in writing” (LS)

qualified as stewards, 3:5, 6 (3 times): *hikanotes*: “adequacy, qualification” (LN); “competence, capability” (ELS); *stewards*: ministers, servants

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Future “no theology of Paul” essay (biblical theology–cultural flexibility)

Essay 1: commendation, recognition; qualifications for ministry

There is so much here it would be easy to write an essay (see *Interpreting Paul*, volume 1 of *The Canonical Paul* by Luke Timothy Johnson: 23 essay examples)

- What are the qualifications for ministry?
- A key competency is changed lives of churches.
- Formal letters are really old covenant thinking.
- The Spirit is writing on their hearts through Paul.
- They are now qualified for ministry.

This could be a whole essay, a paper, on how to think about qualifications for ministry, which we are all in. It is the base of massive confusion of the clergy–laity issue, and both confuse true apostolic authority and sap the churches of operating like Paul in the power of the gospel (key article in quotes on Paul and commendation).

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5):

3. Paul did not lose heart because he saw himself as a simple clay pot filled with glory that when under all kinds of pressure (conflicts without and fears within) the cracks allowed the light to get out so others could see clearly (except those who were perishing); the entire process of his outer man decaying was producing inner renewal day by day (the ability to see things clearer and clearer—things that count for eternity). 2 Corinthians 4:1–17

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹ For this reason, since we have this work entrusted to us in accordance with the mercy we have received, we don't lose heart. ² On the contrary, we have renounced the secret things that make people ashamed. We don't use tricks; we don't falsify God's word. Rather, we speak the truth openly, and recommend ourselves to everybody's conscience in the presence of God. ³ However, if our gospel still remains "veiled," it is veiled for people who are perishing. ⁴ What's happening there is that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they won't see the light of the gospel of the glory of the Messiah, who is God's image. ⁵ We don't proclaim ourselves, you see, but Jesus the Messiah as Lord, and ourselves as your servants because of Jesus; ⁶ because the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts, to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah.

2 Corinthians 4:1–6 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthenware pots, so that the extraordinary quality of the power may belong to God, not to us. ⁸ We are under all kinds of pressure, but we are not crushed completely; we are at a loss, but not at our wits' end; ⁹ we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are cast down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry the deadness of Jesus about in the body, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. ¹¹ Although we are still alive, you see, we are always being given over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal humanity. ¹² So this is how it is: death is at work in us— but life in you!

2 Corinthians 4:7–12 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹³ We have the same spirit of faith as you see in what is written: “I believed, and so I spoke.” We too believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the God who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus and present us with you. ¹⁵ It’s all because of you, you see! The aim is that, as grace abounds through the thanksgiving of more and more people, it will overflow to God’s glory. ¹⁶ For this reason we don’t lose heart. Even if our outer humanity is decaying, our inner humanity is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ This slight momentary trouble of ours is working to produce a weight of glory, passing and surpassing everything, lasting forever; ¹⁸ for we don’t look at the things that can be seen, but at the things that can’t be seen. After all, the things you can see are here today and gone tomorrow; but the things you can’t see are everlasting.

2 Corinthians 4:13–18 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

I can see two “No Theology of Paul” essays, but there is no space or time to frame them in here, but you now have the capacity to do so.

Essay 3: Cracked Pots, Broken Bones, and a Bright Shining Gospel

Essay 4: Outer Decay, Inner Renewal, and Our Future New Bodies (“glory to glory”)

In the system I am introducing to you, these topos-based topic essays are “asides” in the context of a *topoi-based subsection*: “New covenant perspective of ministry” 2:12–7:5, in the context of the *topic-based schema* of Paul’s early letters, “fully establishing churches in the gospel.”

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5):

4. Paul knew he was going to be given a new body to match his new inner man and that he would have to give account for his ministry at the judgment seat of Christ; so the love of Christ for him motivated him to press on as an ambassador for Christ, not for external recognition and commendations of people but for being used to write Christ on their hearts; and he recognized that all who believed are new creations in process and need to be seen as not merely humans, but as new creations in the development process. 2 Corinthians 5:1–21

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹ For we know that if our earthly house, our present “tent,” is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house no human hands have built: it is everlasting, in the heavenly places. ² At the present moment, you see, we are groaning, as we long to put on our heavenly building, ³ in the belief that by putting it on we won’t turn out to be naked. ⁴ Yes: in the present “tent,” we groan under a great weight. But we don’t want to put it off; we want to put on something else on top, so that what is doomed to die may be swallowed up with life. ⁵ It is God who has been at work in us to do this, the God who has given us the spirit as the first installment and guarantee.

2 Corinthians 5:1–5 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

⁶ So we are always confident: we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live our lives by faith, you see, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, and we would much prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we work hard, as a point of honor, to please him, whether we are at home or away. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of the Messiah, so that each may receive what has been done through the body, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:6–10 N.T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹¹ So we know the fear of the Lord; and that's why we are persuading people— but we are open to God, and open as well, I hope, to your consciences. ¹² We aren't trying to recommend ourselves again! We are giving you a chance to be proud of us, to have something to say **to those who take pride in appearances rather than in people's hearts.** ¹³ If we are beside ourselves, you see, it's for God; and if we are in our right mind, it's for you. ¹⁴ For the Messiah's love makes us press on. We have come to the conviction that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.

2 Corinthians 5:11–15 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹⁶ From this moment on, therefore, we don't regard anybody from a merely human point of view. Even if we once regarded the Messiah that way, we don't do so any longer. ¹⁷ Thus, if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look— everything has become new! ¹⁸ It all comes from God. He reconciled us to himself through the Messiah, and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ This is how it came about: God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah, not counting their transgressions against them, and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors, speaking on behalf of the Messiah, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore people on the Messiah's behalf to be reconciled to God. ²¹ The Messiah did not know sin, but God made him to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might embody God's faithfulness to the covenant.

2 Corinthians 5:16–21 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

I can see another “No Theology of Paul” essay, but there is no space or time to frame them in here, but you now have the capacity to do so.

Essay 5: True Ambassadors and Ministry Motives (example)

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5):

5. Paul saw this massive set of external and internal conflicts as proof of his genuineness to the Corinthians, as part of the process God was using to progress the gospel; and his part was as an ambassador of Christ as Christ was building His kingdom worldwide, which he hoped would motivate true, sacrificial participation of churches in this ministry. 2 Corinthians 6:1–18

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

¹ So, as we work together with God, we appeal to you in particular: when you accept God's grace, don't let it go to waste!

2 Corinthians 6:1 N. T. Wright

Now Paul turns everything he has been saying back to the Corinthians, with an appeal of his total commitment to them, based on all he has just said.

He talked about his qualifications, his sincerity, his intensity, and his direct speech as all being compelled by the love of Christ and his call.

But now he reviews some of his “conflicts without and fears within” as the final motivation for them to stay the course with him.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

³ We put no obstacles in anybody's way, so that nobody will say abusive things about our ministry. ⁴ Instead, we recommend ourselves as God's servants: with much patience, with sufferings, difficulties, hardships, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, going without food, ⁶ with purity, knowledge, great-heartedness, kindness, the holy spirit, genuine love, ⁷ by speaking the truth, by God's power, with weapons for God's faithful work in left and right hand alike, ⁸ through glory and shame, through slander and praise; as deceivers, and yet true; ⁹ as unknown, yet very well known; as dying, and look—we are alive; as punished, yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sad, yet always celebrating; as poor, yet bringing riches to many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

2 Corinthians 6:3–10 N. T. Wright

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5).

1. Ministry is a like the returning Roman army with its captives and spoils, resulting in some marching toward death and some toward life. Specifically, in Christ's triumphal unfolding plan for progressing the gospel and building the kingdom through His Church, Paul's ministry would lead some closer to life and some closer to death. Christ's triumphal march will always be filled with conflict. 2 Corinthians 2:14–17.
2. Paul is qualified (with no letter of commendation) as a steward of the New Covenant, in which the Spirit writes His word on the hearts of those who believe, and everyone can see it (not as Moses who veiled his face to hide the glory from the Old Covenant on tablets of stone). Now the glory through the Spirit is inside us (the glory of the Lord) and transforming us from glory to glory. 2 Corinthians 3:1–18

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5).

3. Paul did not lose heart because he saw himself as a simple clay pot filled with glory that when under all kinds of pressure (conflicts without and fears within) the cracks allowed the light to get out, so others could see clearly (except those who were perishing); the entire process of his outer man decaying was producing inner renewal day by day (the ability to see things clearer and clearer and things that count for eternity). 2 Corinthians 4:1–17
4. Paul knew he was going to be given a new body to match his new inner man and that he would have to give account for his ministry at the judgment seat of Christ; so the love of Christ for him motivated him to press on as an ambassador for Christ, not for external recognition and commendations of people but for being used to write Christ on their hearts; and he recognized that all who believed are new creations in process and need to be seen as not merely humans, but as new creations in the development process. 2 Corinthians 5:1–21

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—his calling, what success really is (2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5).

5. Paul saw this massive set of external and internal conflicts as proof of his genuineness to the Corinthians, as part of the process God was using to progress the gospel; and his part was as an ambassador of Christ as Christ was building His kingdom worldwide, which he hoped would motivate true, sacrificial participation of churches in this ministry. 2 Corinthians 6:1–18

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—Implications for our churches today

1. As leaders and churches, we must see the ministry as "conflicts without and fears within" yet also see the progress of the gospel as Christ building His kingdom as a "triumphal march" (which He is accomplishing through building His Church), a march in which some will grow closer to His kingdom and some will be driven farther away. 2:14–17
2. Our churches and apostolic leaders, themselves, are qualified as stewards of the New Covenant—not by external credentialing but by their competency through the Spirit and the apostolic traditioning—to be writing Christ and His purposes on the hearts of their churches, with the outcome that every believer and every church fully participate in the ministry. 3:1–18

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—Implications for our churches today

3. We must take care not to lose heart in the "conflicts without and fears within" of true ministry, realizing we are simply clay pots filled with the glory of Christ and, when under all kinds of pressure, the cracks allow others to see Christ (except those who are perishing); and the entire process of our outer man decaying is producing inner renewal day by day and will produce results that will count for eternity. 2 Corinthians 4:1–17
4. We will be given new bodies like Christ's when our old one is destroyed, and we will appear before Christ in the future to give an account of our ministry as ambassadors for Christ; therefore, we need to press on in our ministry, recognizing that we are new creations in process and see all believers through this lens. 2 Corinthians 5:1–21

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Paul's theology of "perspective on ministry"—Implications for our churches today

5. We should anticipate a massive set of external and internal conflicts as we serve as ambassadors for Christ and view these conflicts as the process of Christ building His kingdom through His churches and motivating true, sacrificial participation of churches in this ministry, with apostolic leaders today fully sharing in those pressures, as modeled by Paul, and as Paul expected of the Corinthians churches.
2 Corinthians 6:1–18

Apostolic Authority in 2 Corinthians

Apostolic Authority in 1 Corinthians 2:12–7:5

1. Paul's saw setting difficult strategic ministry priorities and decisions as part of his apostolic authority, illustrated in his inner anxiety over the churches in Corinth causing him to leave a wide open door for the gospel in Troas.
2. Paul saw success in his ministry strategies not as the sharpness of his own strategic acumen but only in the fact that he knew he was part of a triumphal procession of Christ unfolding His grand strategy (triumphal procession).
3. Paul knew his apostolic stewardship was short lived and that he was decaying outwardly and being renewed inwardly, so he was compelled to use all of his time and energy as an ambassador for Christ and therefore laying solid foundations in his church networks and key emerging leaders.
4. Paul did not consider formal recognition (letters of commendation) as the proof of his apostolic qualifications, but rather the transformed lives of the Corinthian churches and their sharing in commitment to the progress of the gospel, especially in Achaia.

Apostolic Authority in 2 Corinthians

Apostolic Authority in 1 Corinthians 2:12-7:5

5. Paul's apostolic legitimacy was further cemented by both his experiencing and handling of conflicts without and fears within and by his ability to convince his churches to share in that perspective of ministry, which was contrary to the success of philosophical orators and successful associations of the day.
6. Ultimately, Paul considered his ministry to "not be in vain" but successful if his churches grasped the grand strategy of Christ and could carry the gospel with the power he experienced as he brought that gospel to them; then he would have succeeded in his stewardship.
7. Ultimately, Paul understood that "conflicts without and fears within" were key to his success in effectively carrying out his stewardship with eternal results, and that his churches must learn to participate fully in that perspective of ministry.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Future “no theology of Paul” essays (biblical theology–cultural flexibility) Examples:

Essay 1: Personal Anxiety, the Spirit and Ministry Priorities

Essay 2: Commendation, Recognition, and Qualifications for Ministry

Essay 3: Cracked Pots, Broken Bones, and a Bright Shining Gospel

Essay 4: Outer Decay, Inner Renewal, and Our Future New Bodies (“glory to glory”)

Essay 5: True Ambassadors and Ministry Motives (example)

If I was writing a New Perspectives on Paul Theology

Part 1: The Pauline Corpus

1. Topos-Schema (canonical and book intentions)
2. Topoi-Subsections (literary design)
3. Topoi-based topic statements
4. Topoi-based cultural flexibility (theology in culture)

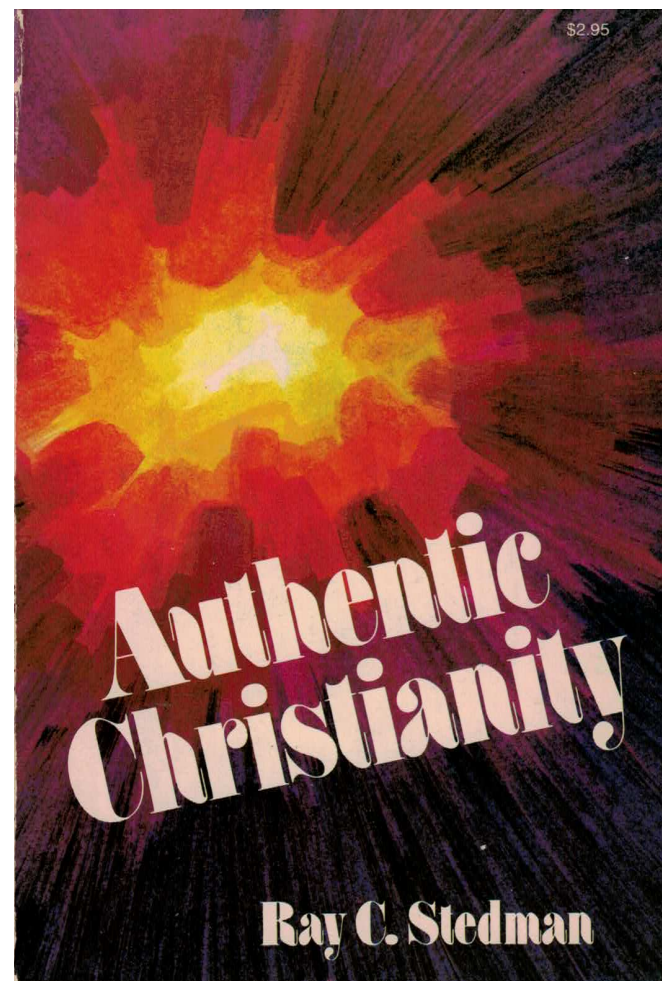
Part II: Topoi Asides: “No Theology of Paul” papers/essays (my own theology—75 years old?)

Literary Design: Complex Network Establishing (Encoding) Benchmarks (Traditioning of Paul)



Paul's Early Letters	Paul's Middle Letters	Paul's Later Letters
The Gospel	Mission/Vision of the Church	Mature Households and Leaders
Gospel Formulae: 1 Cor. 15:1–6 (Peter's 5 sermons, Galatians)	Christ's grand strategy Eph. 3:8–10	Churches set in order (household topos) 1 Timothy 3:14–16
Solid conversion: 1 & 2 Thess.	One mature church: equipping saints Ephesians 4:1–16	Solid senior eldership Titus 1:5–9 (elders, deacons, women: 1 Timothy 3)
"Now concerning..." List of schisms (1 Corinthians)	Household texts (family): Ephesians 5:22–6:9 Colossians 3:18–4:1	Household texts (family of families): 1 Timothy 5:1–6:2 Titus 2:1–21
Gathering Topos: Lord's Supper- Symposium (1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40)	Theology in culture: Philemon	Key, intergenerational apostolic leaders and teams
Perspective of ministry: conflicts without, fears within 2 Cor. 2:14–7:5	Participation in progress of the gospel: Philippians' model (teams, finances)	Training process, stewardship responsibilities: 2 Timothy
Paul's complete treatise of gospel: Romans	Network churches: hub (Ephesus), cluster (Lycus Valley), strategic (Philippi)	Leadership virtue/vice cluster lists: 1 Timothy 3:2–4, 8–12; 6:3–5; Titus 1:6–9; 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:2–5
Pauline cycle (duly recognized gatherings)		

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within



I was shaped profoundly in my thinking by a Ray Stedman book: *Authentic Christianity* (1975), which is basically completely built around 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:5.

I realize that now more than ever. Many times it has been difficult to initiate and engage in paradigm conflicts that caused us to be criticized at every level: from people in our church (now churches), to other churches in the area, to national leaders from seminaries, to parachurch groups, to Christian foundations, who see us as unsuccessful.

But I would rather be sitting with large numbers of strategic national India and China leaders, for example, strategizing at the level of the next emerging Christendom, than receiving letters of commendation from the declining Western institutional church and its enterprises; from Paul's perspective of ministry, we have true success.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

We must realize that the Western perspective of ministry has distorted our perspective of ministry everywhere in the world. Paul's perspective of ministry needs to be recovered along with his process of establishing and building complex apostolic networks.

India: Success is not planting a church and then becoming its pastor.

China: Success is not building Western style churches and theological institutions.

USA: Success is not building a mega-church.

Pastors everywhere: Success is not getting a degree and becoming a full-time pastor.

Pastors everywhere: Success is not getting a D.Min. and then getting a bigger church.

The Ministry: Conflicts Without Fears Within

Issue: Perspectives of “success” in ministry

Questions:

1. How does Paul’s perspective of “success” in ministry compare with our churches today?
2. How does it compare with your own perspective of successful ministry? of success in your own ministry?
3. What about the mega-church vs. small church tension (one seen as successful and the other as not)? How should we think about this? How does denominationalism figure into this discussion?
4. What should our standard of success in ministry look like?