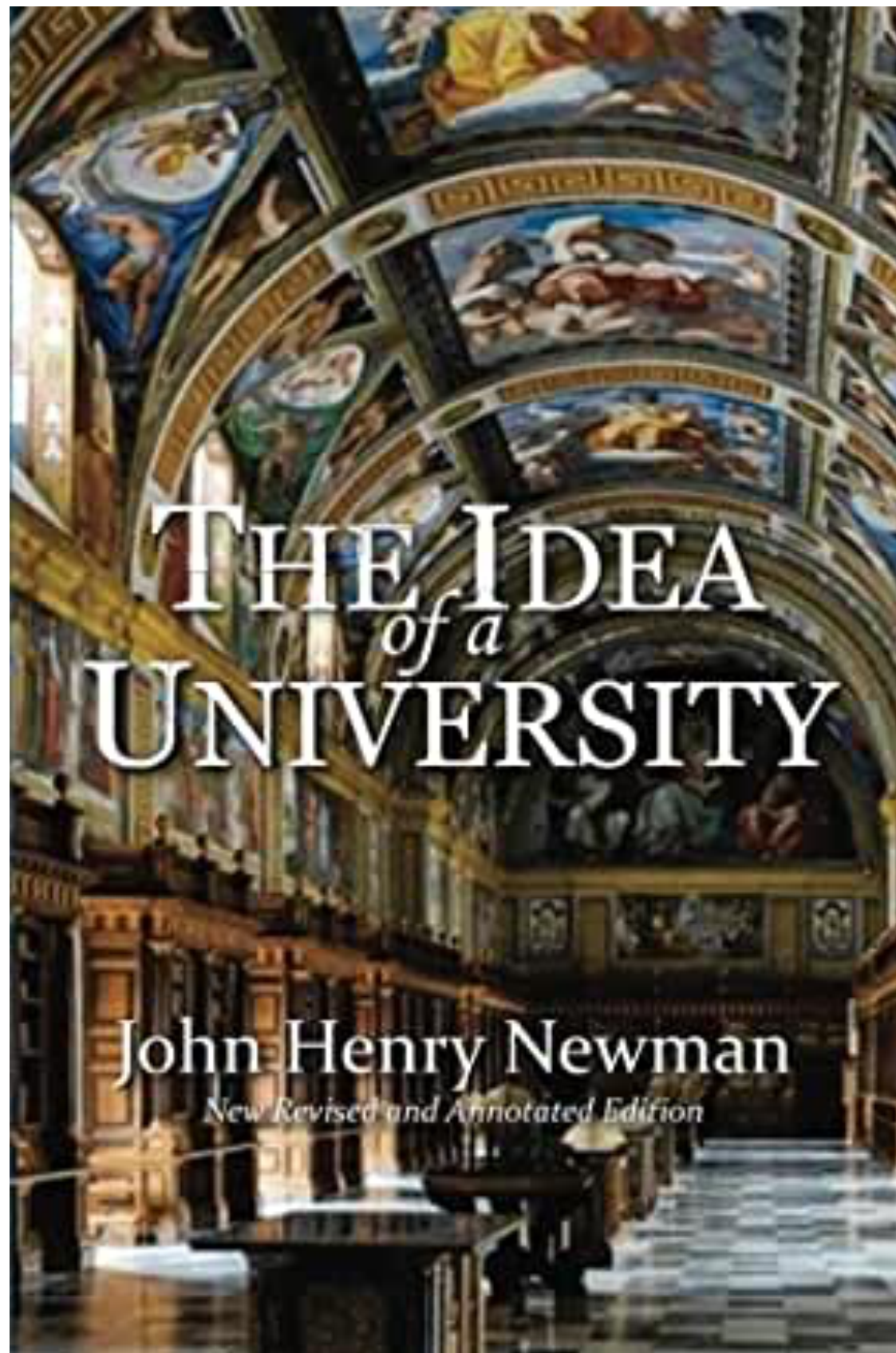


Paul's Middle Letters



“Talents for speculation and original inquiry he has none, nor has he formed the invaluable habit of pushing things up to their first principles, or of collecting dry and unamusing facts as the materials for reasoning.

Still so far I readily grant, that the cultivation of the ‘understanding,’ of a ‘talent for speculation and original inquiry,’ and of ‘the habit of pushing things up to their first principles,’ is a principal portion of a good or liberal education.”

Newman, John Henry Cardinal. *Idea of a University, The* (Notre Dame Series in Great Books) (p. 122). University of Notre Dame Press. Kindle Edition.

Paul's Middle Letters: Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Identifying the First Principles of the World

Questions:

1. In what way does the world have a set of elementary principles? What does Paul mean here? Is Paul saying all philosophy, all principles and human traditions are bad?
2. What does he mean to not be taken captive by the philosophy “according to human tradition”?
3. What is the essence of the first principles of the world—of its philosophy and human tradition?
4. What is the outcome of living by the first principles of this world? by its human tradition 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

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. ¹⁷ These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

Colossians 2:16–19

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? 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. 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.

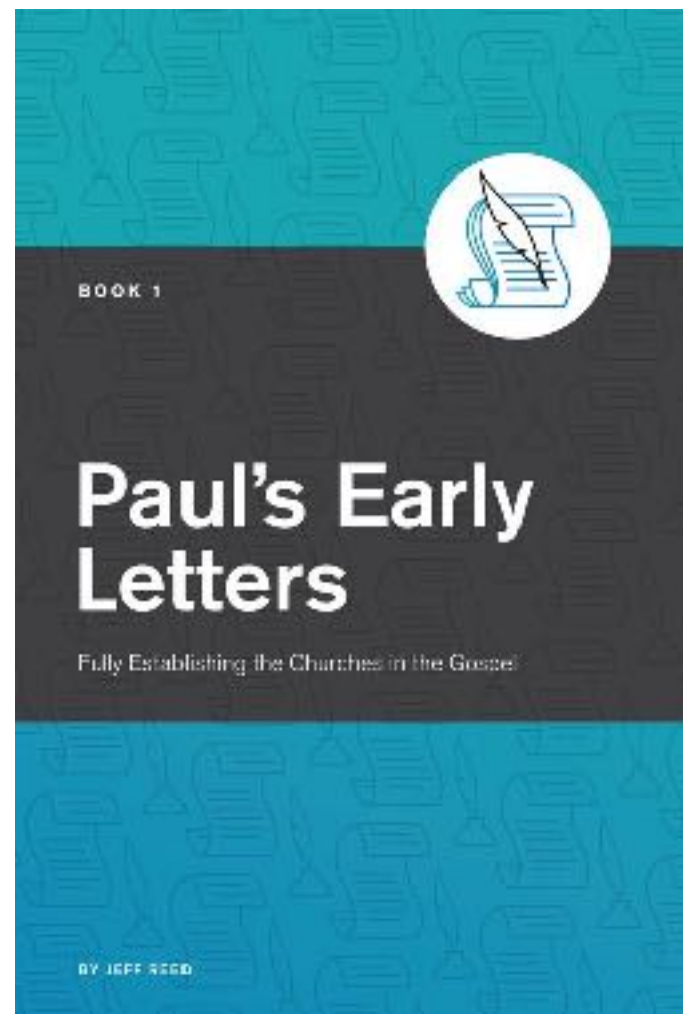
Colossians 2:20–23

Colossians

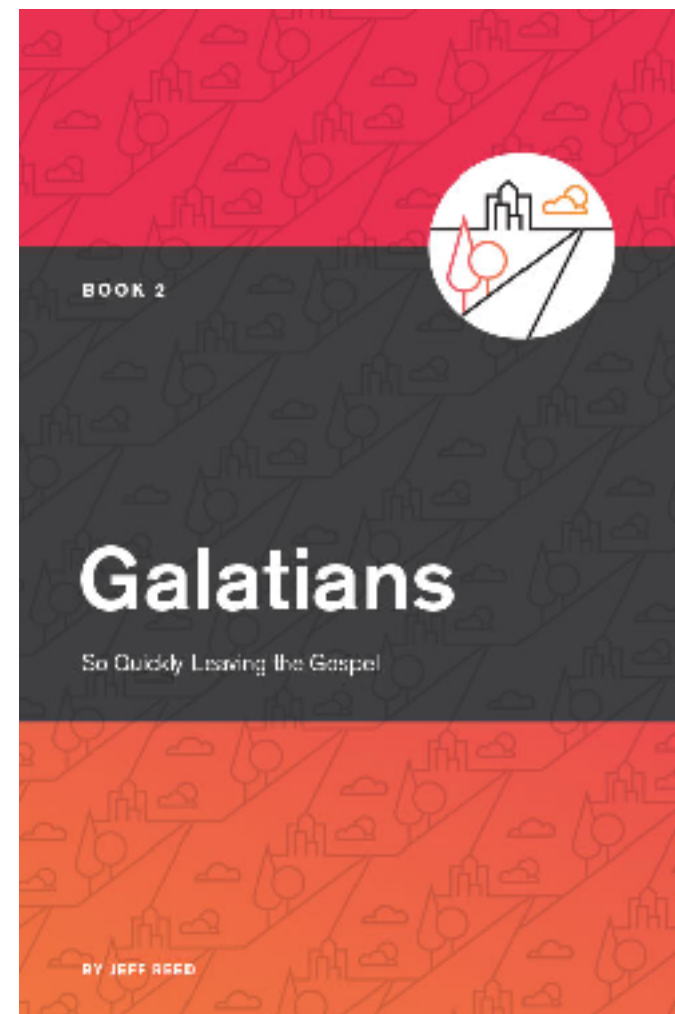
Implementing the New Church Paradigm



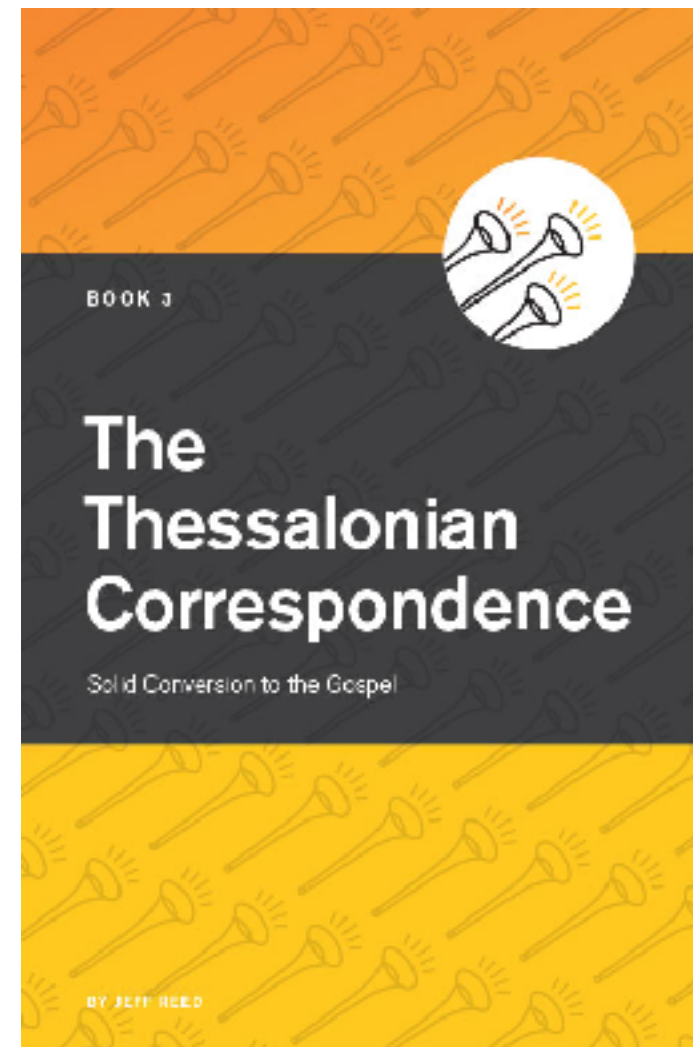
Paul's Early Letters



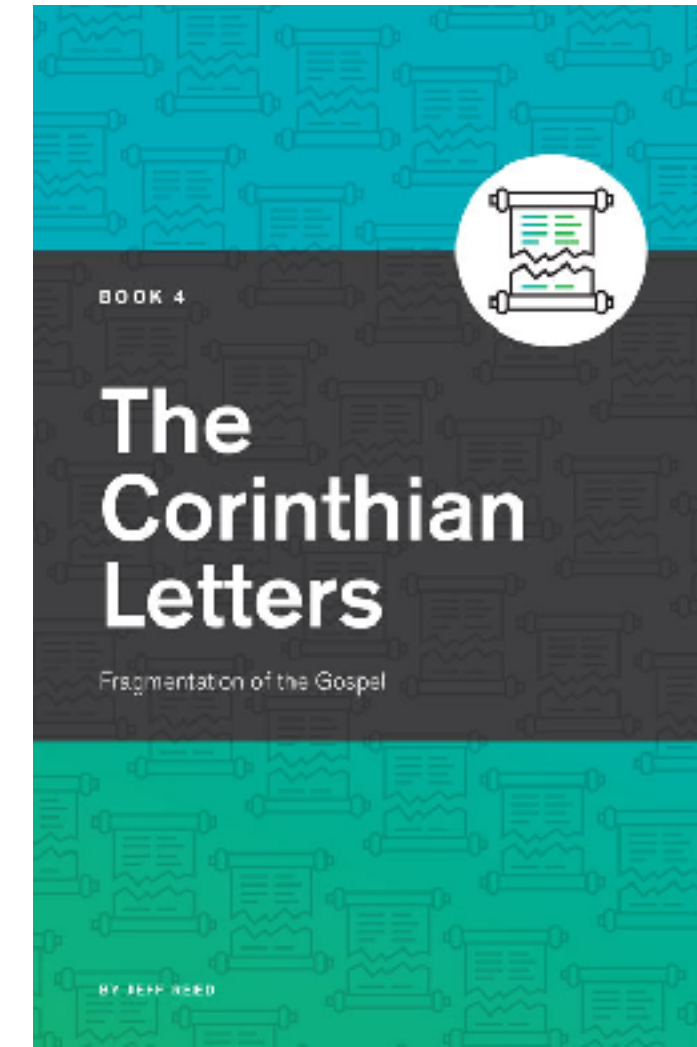
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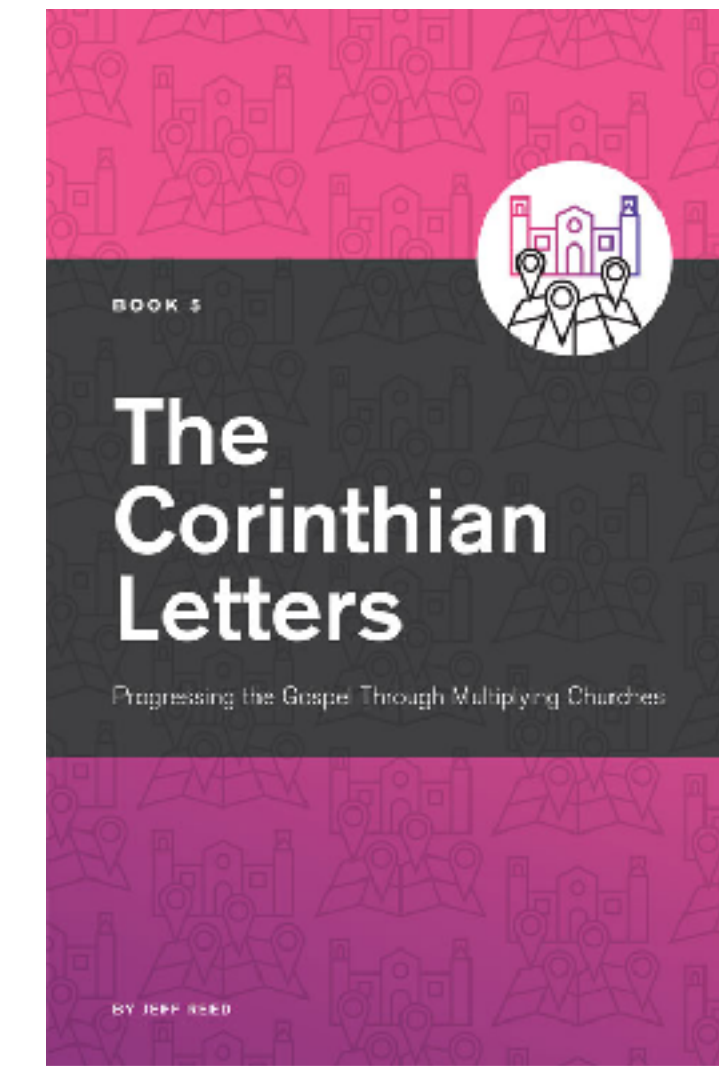
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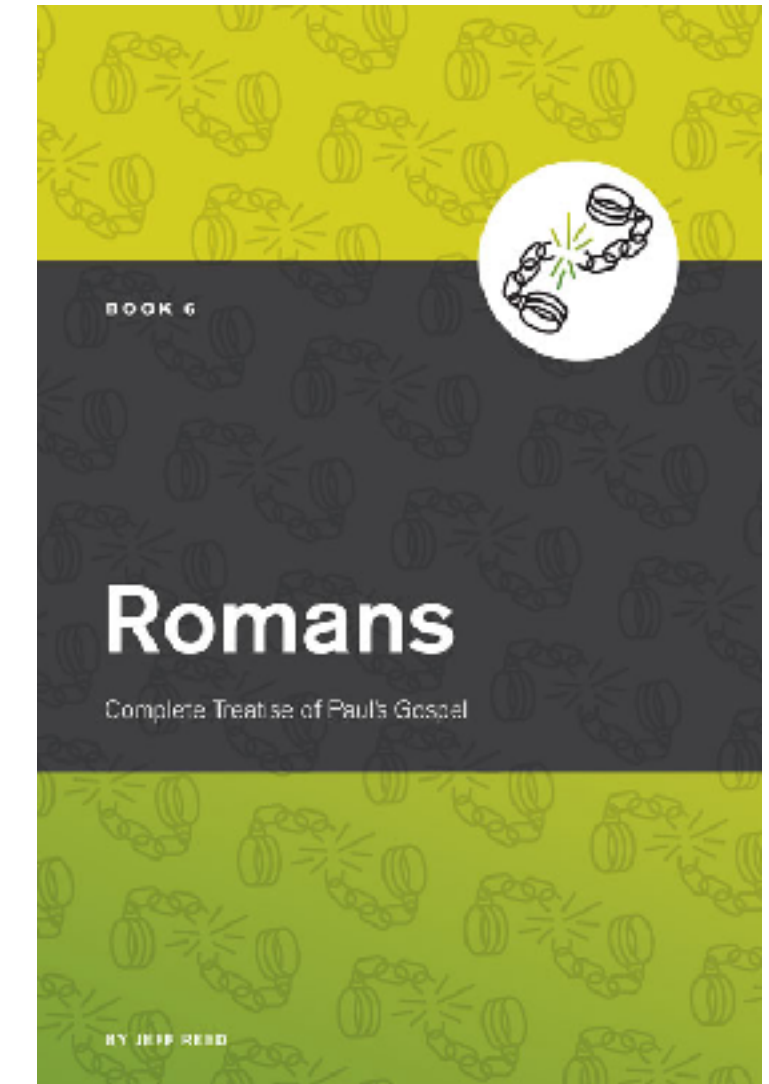
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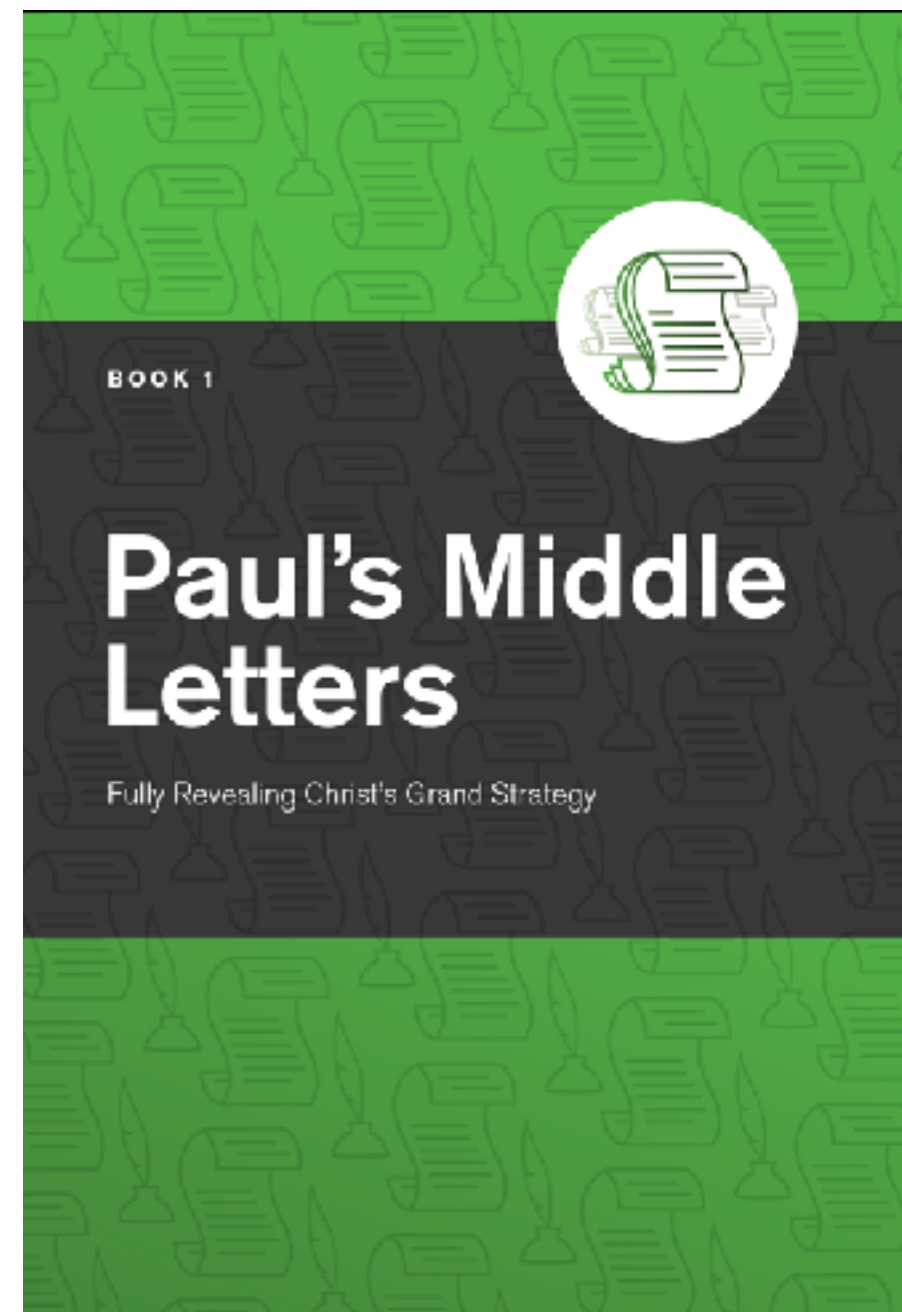
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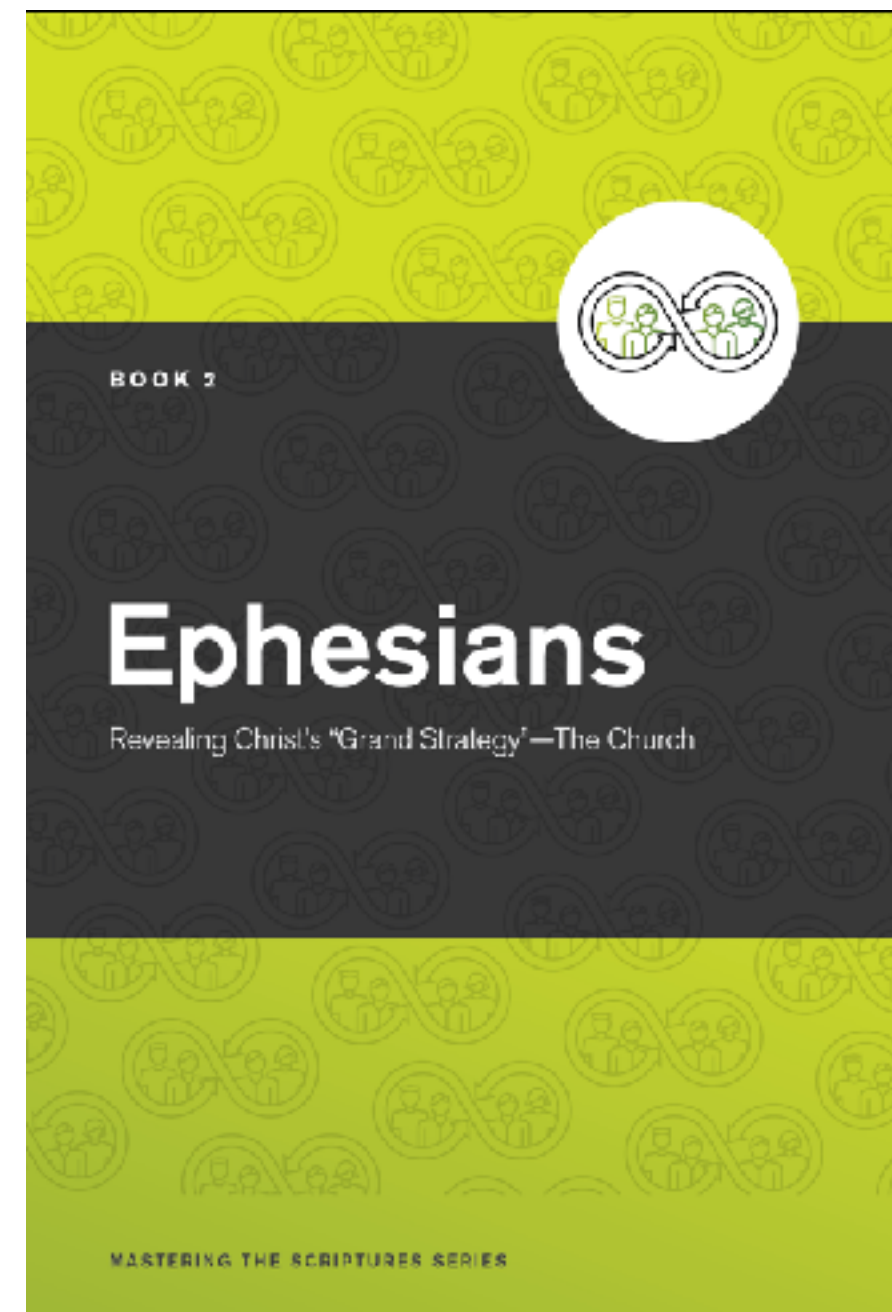
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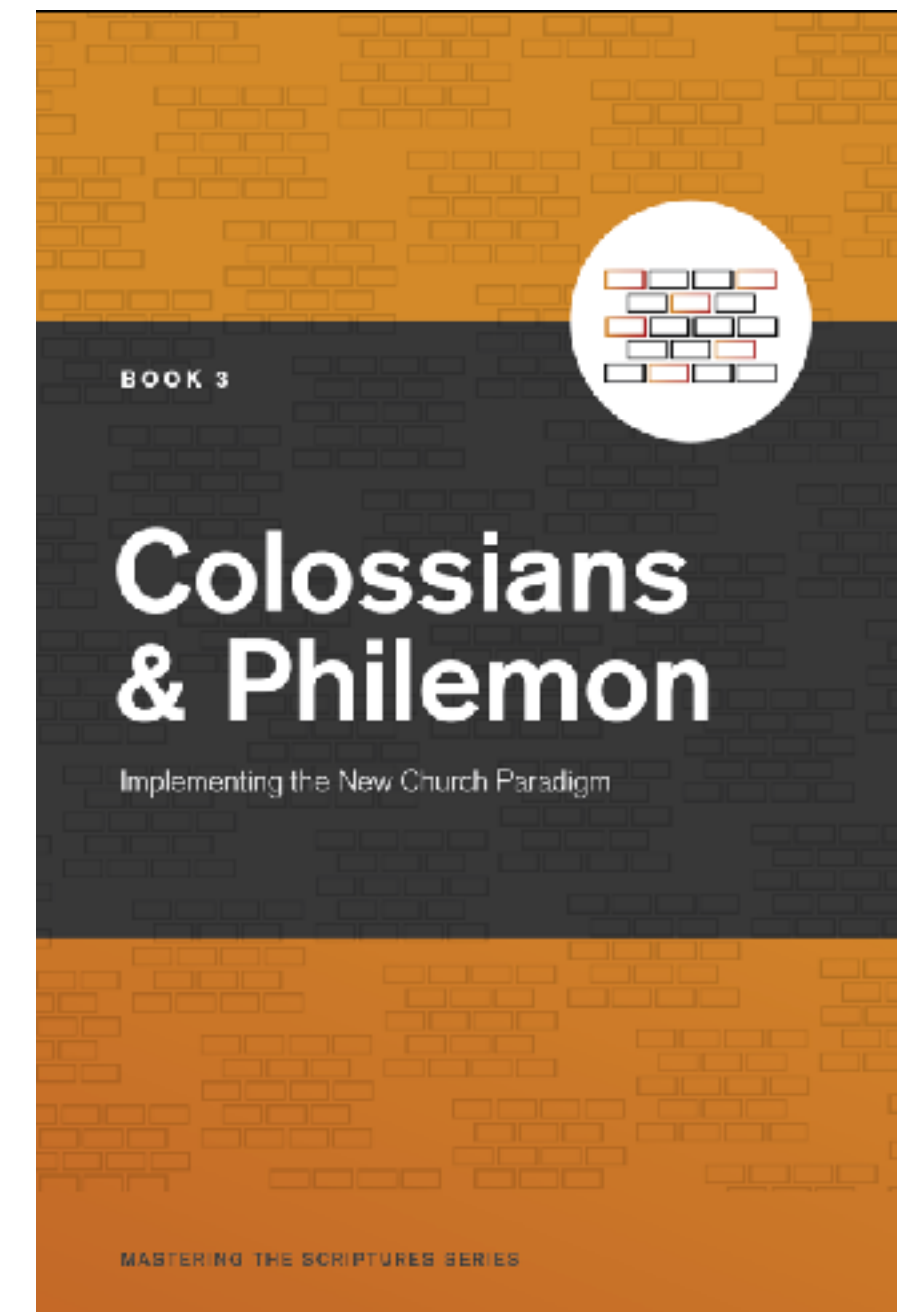
Paul's Middle Letters



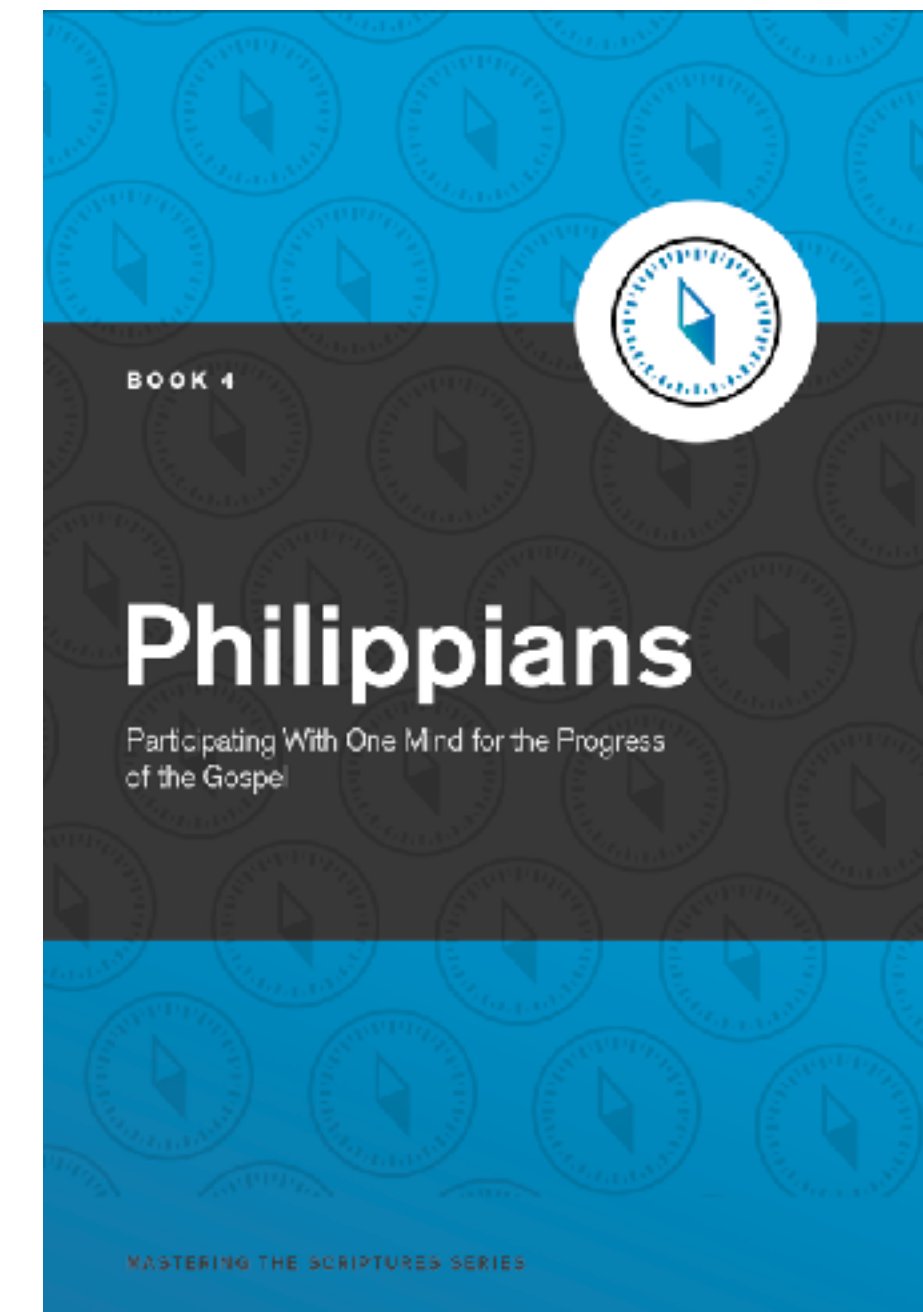
Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62

Paul's Middle Letters

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

Ephesians was written Autumn 60

Colossians and Philemon—Autumn 61

Philippians—early Spring 62

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

Ephesians—hub churches

Colossians and Philemon—cluster churches

Philippians—node churches

Paul's Middle Letters — Ephesians

Ephesians — Hub Churches

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

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians, Philemon

Colossians—Cluster Churches

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

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

Paul's Middle Letters—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

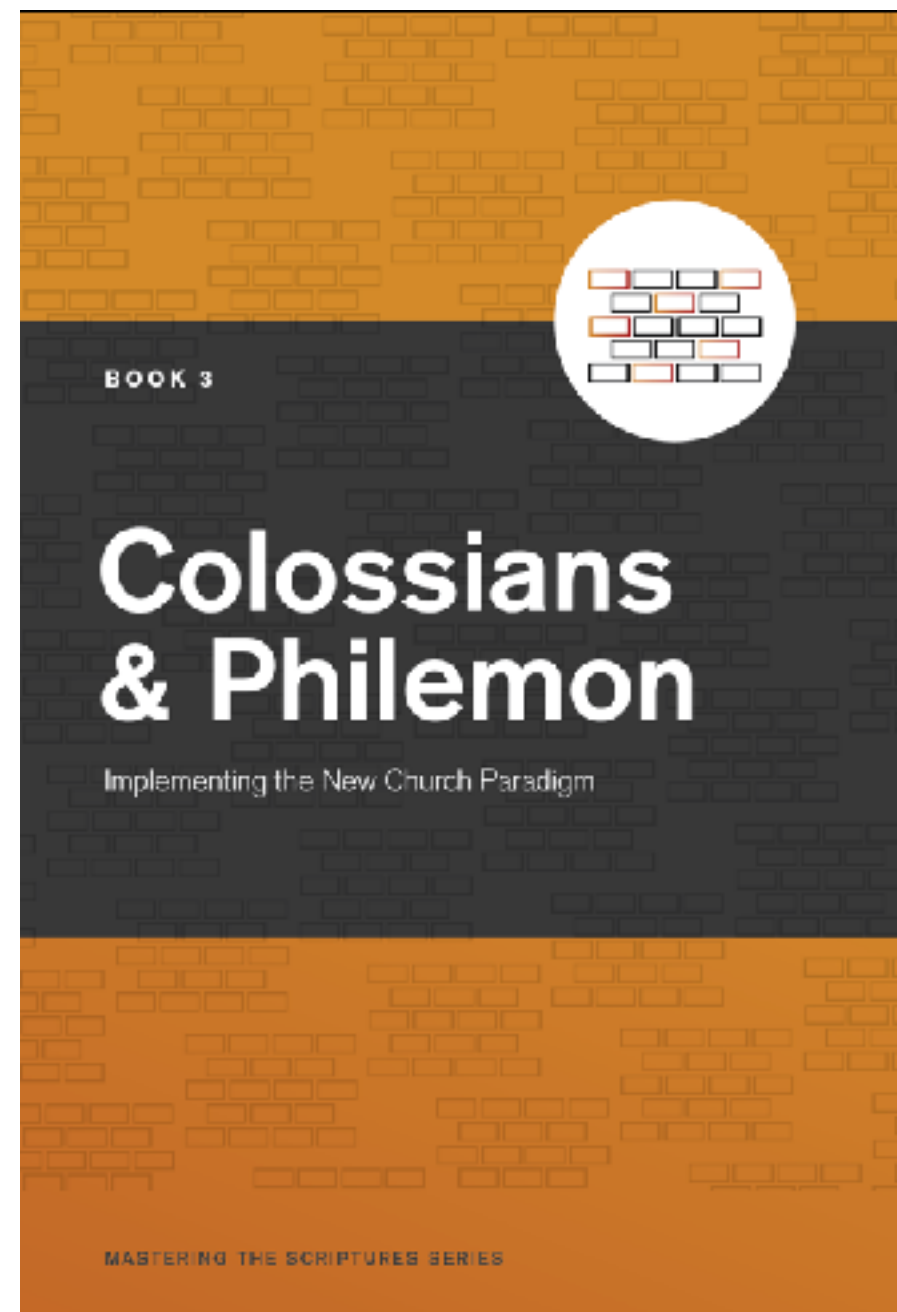
Paul lays out his job description very clearly.

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

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

Philippians—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

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

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

He explains this more in 2:8



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

What is Paul worried about with the Lycus Valley churches?

Several words continue to develop his fear

philosophy—human understanding, human wisdom; in a wide sense scientific men, learned men

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

human tradition—a handing down of human tradition, regulation (See Kung's paradigms)

elementary spirits of the universe—basic principles, elementary concepts—in education of the time used for first principles

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

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. ¹⁷ These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

Colossians 2:16–19

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? 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. 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.

Colossians 2:20–23

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

The main part of Paul's argument is that they are of no value—they don't work.

And they end in devastation.

Is Paul saying everything in the world is bad? No, God created the world. Proverbs 8 tells us it is all an expression of His wisdom and much to be discovered and appreciated. It all points to Him.

Paul is talking about man's philosophy built on the first principles of the world that Satan uses to distort everything cultural, political, and the religious system. It is based on a core set of principles and traditions that are always flawed in the same way because man is fallen and the world is under a curse.

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

The key seems to be the term “promoting self-imposed piety,” 2:23.

promoting self-imposed piety—self-imposed religion, religion thought up by himself

This means any philosophy thought up by man is man-made with the same fundamental flawed principles. And the Lycus Valley churches are susceptible to either remaining or falling back to any one of them.

And as we will discover next week, unless they get fully established, they will mix their old principles and philosophy of the world and the principles and philosophy of Christ.

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

“In that renewal there is no longer...”

In what renewal?

“the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.”

What knowledge?

“no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!”

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 one of them. But they were built on the wrong foundation, not on Christ and His philosophy. We will look at Christ's philosophy next week.

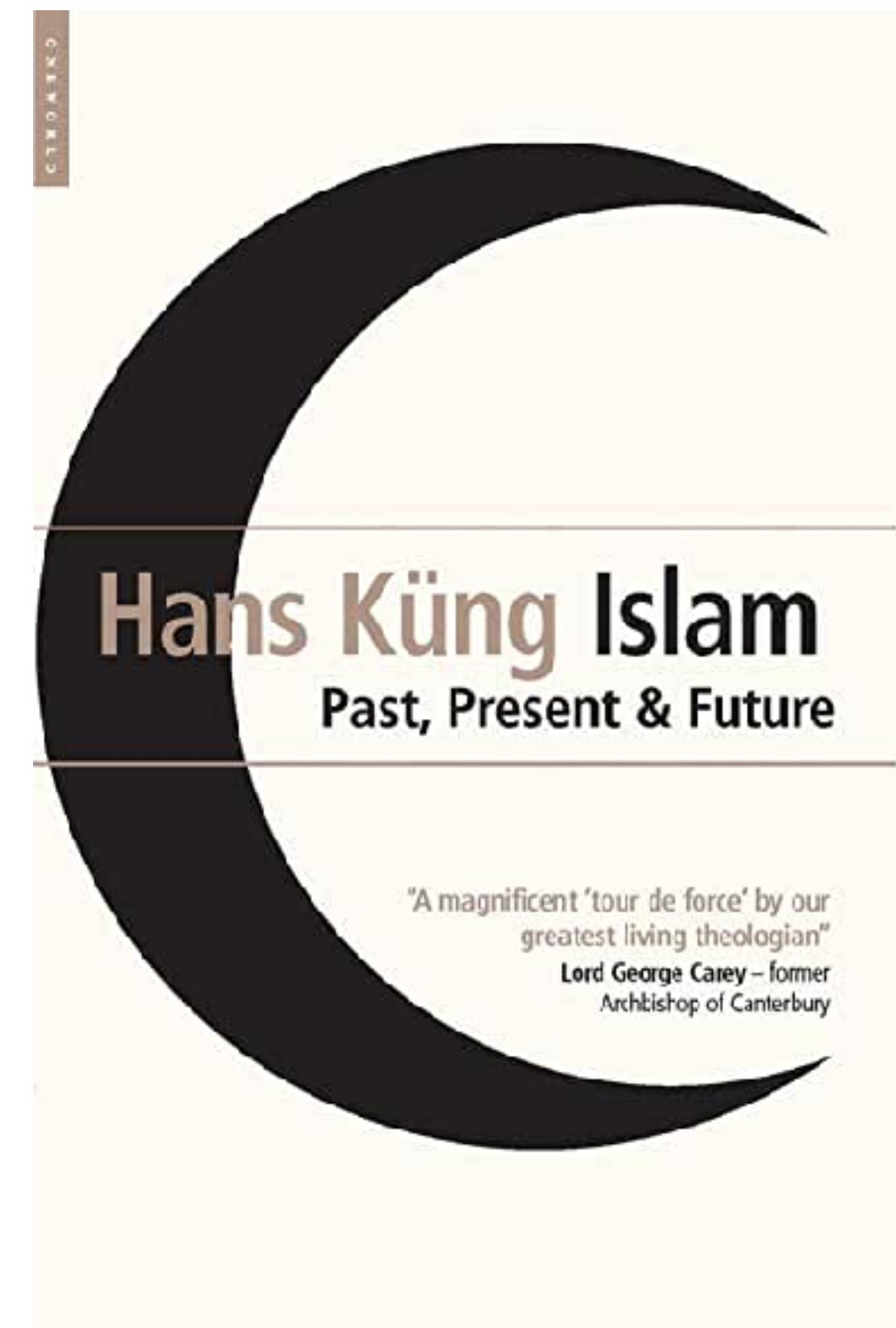
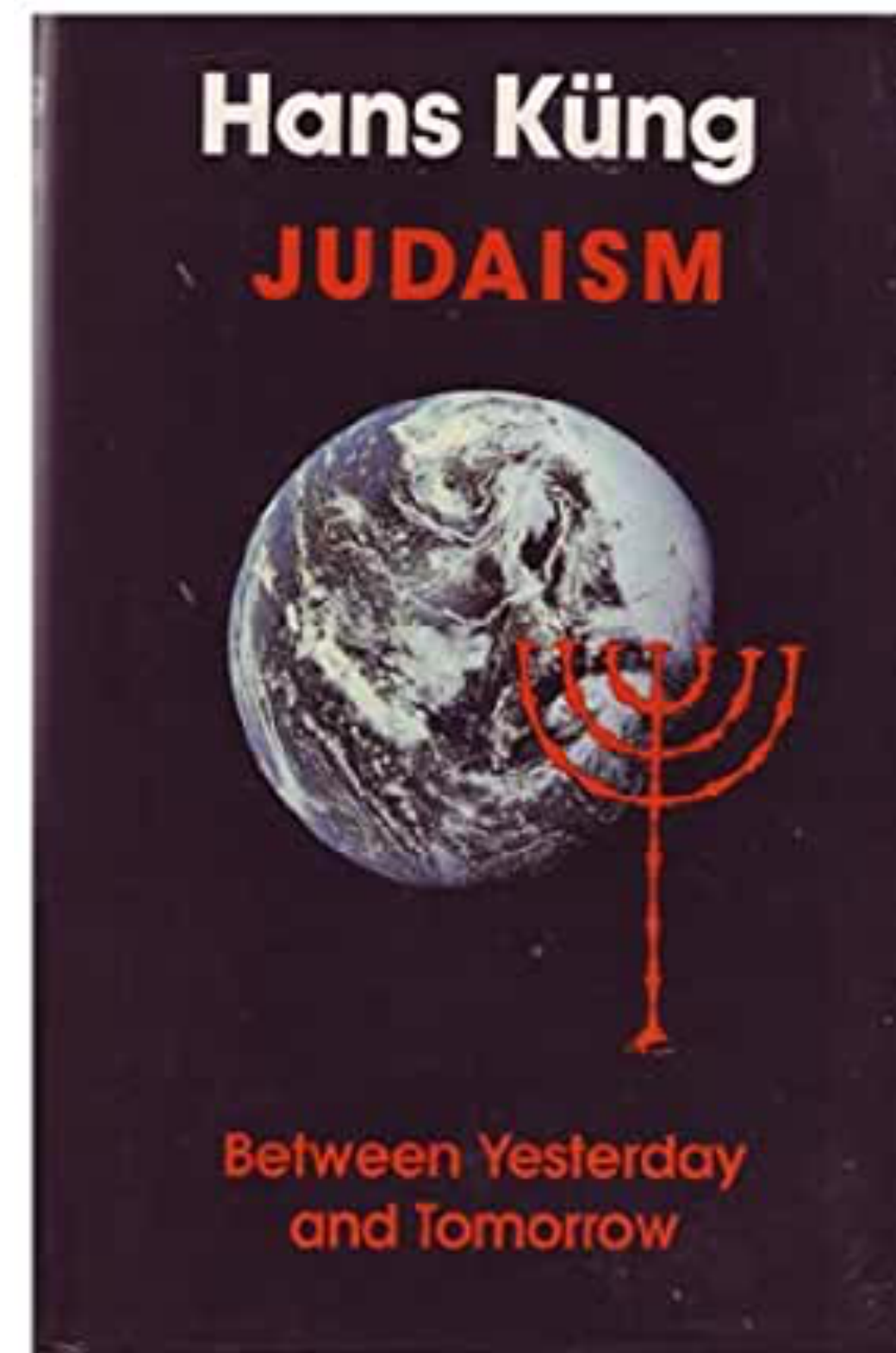
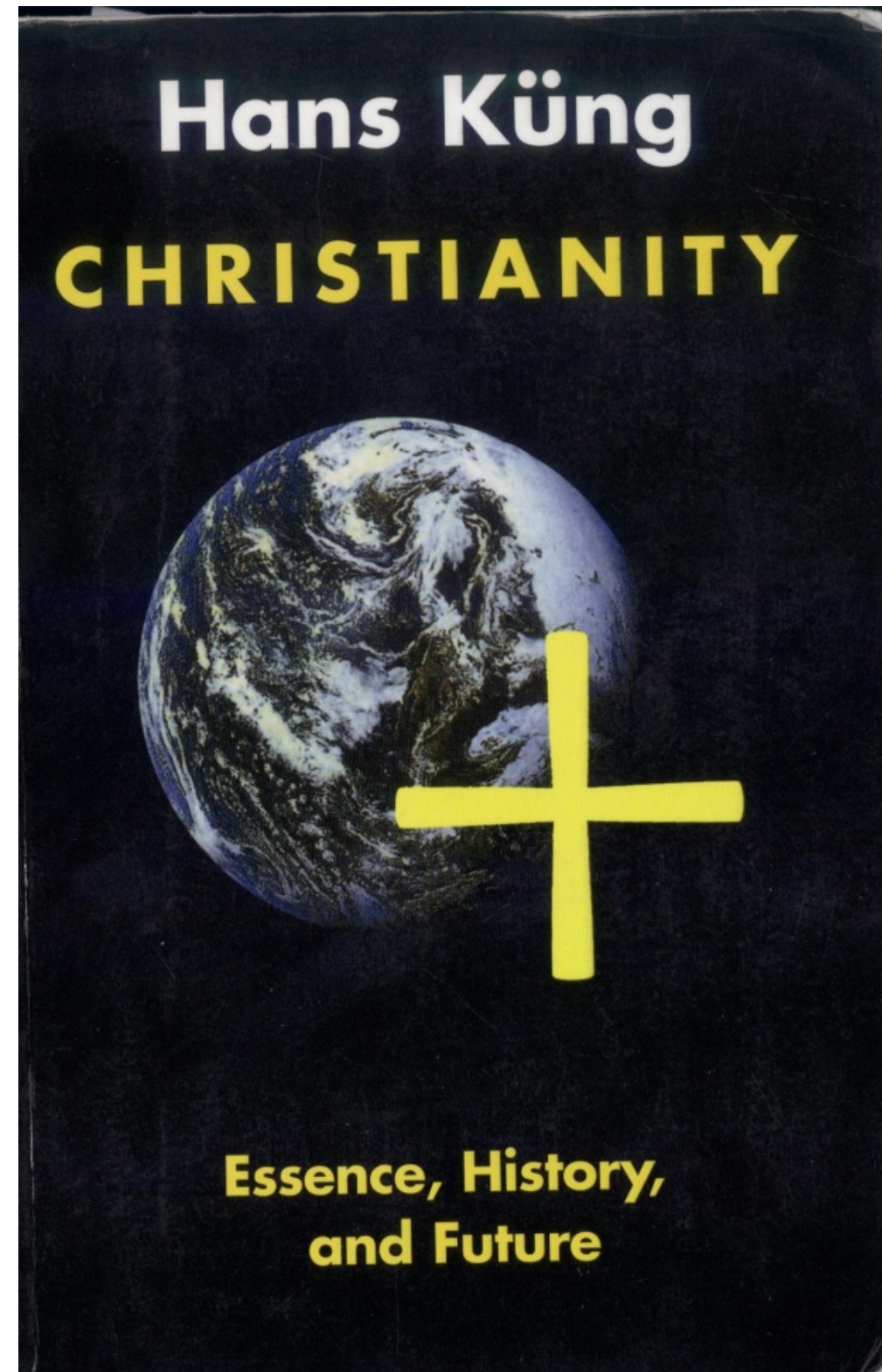
Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

First principles of the universe

Mixture of the following

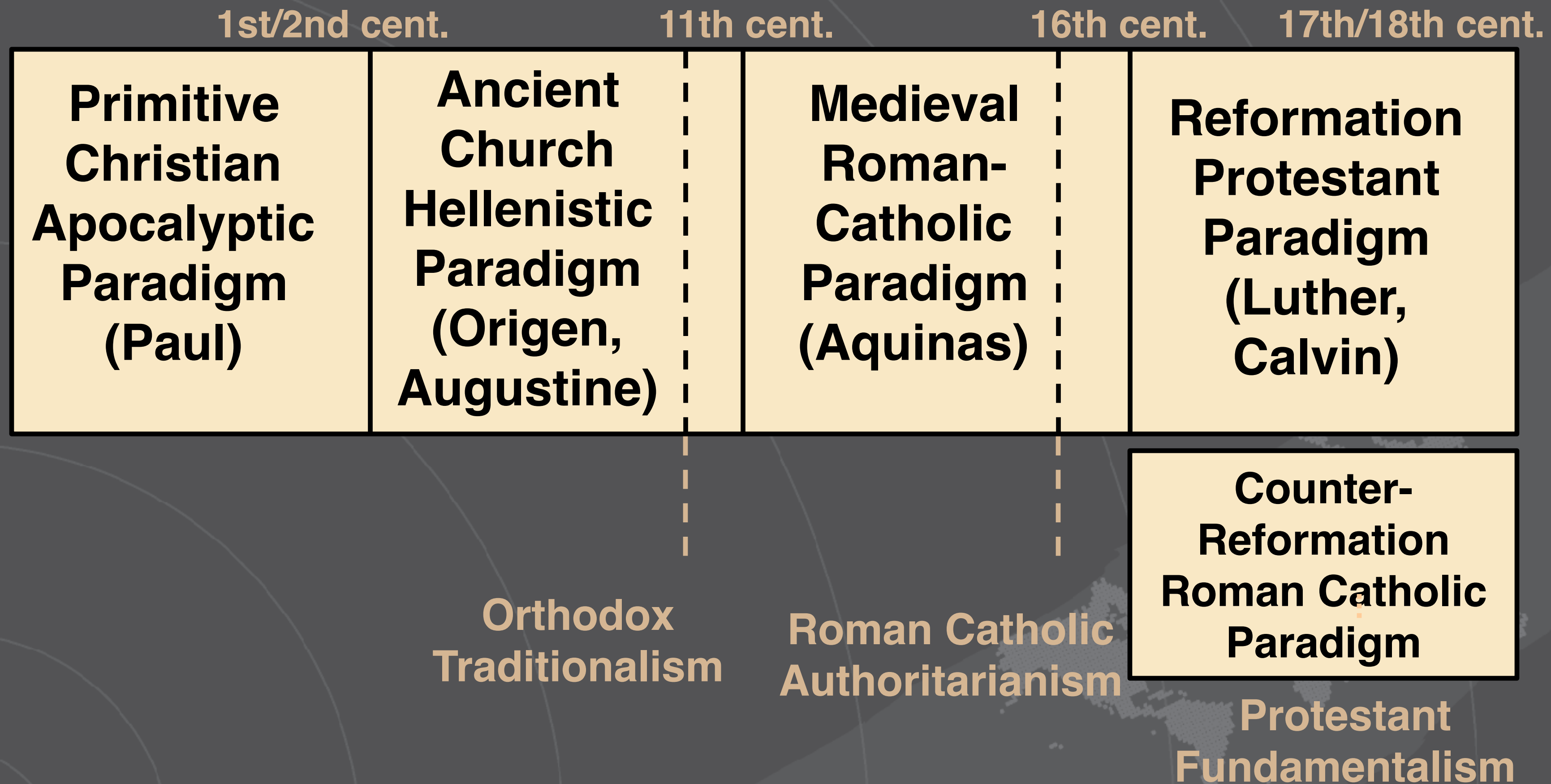
- restrictions on food and drink
- mystical, supernatural worship
- religious–cult regulations
- cult rituals, rites
- all sorts of lifestyle rules and regulations
- human commands and teachings

Paul's Middle Letters



Kung's Paradigms of Theology

(See also Bosch's Theology of Mission Paradigms, built upon Kung)



Kung's Paradigms of Theology

(cont.)

17th/18th cent.

20th cent.

**Modern Enlightenment
Paradigm (Schleiermacher)**

**Contemporary
Ecumenical Paradigm
(postmodern)? (Barth)**

Liberal Modernism



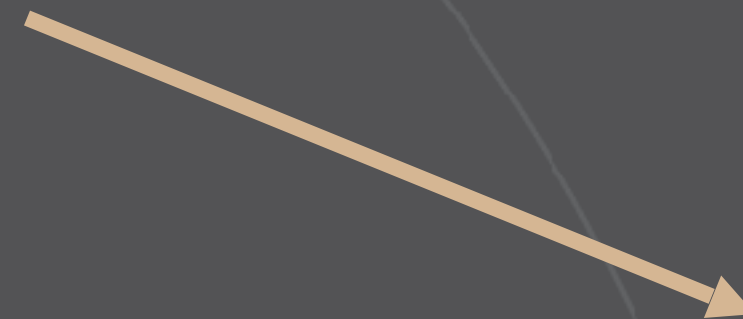
An Emerging Paradigm

1st/2nd cent.

**Primitive
Christian
Apocalyptic
Paradigm
(Paul)**

**Contemporary
Ecumenical Paradigm
(postmodern)?
(Barth)**

**Antioch Manifesto—
shaping the paradigm
based on “the way of
Christ and His Apostles”**



Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

The result from the first principles of the world—human traditions and philosophy

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.

The result of these human philosophies and their core “first principles”

Individually and culturally/politically/religiously

Significance of Colossians—Philemon

Issue: Importance of understanding the contrasting first principles of the world

Questions:

1. What is the essence of the first principles of this world—its philosophies and human traditions in our lives and culture?
2. Which ones are religious in nature? which ones are political? which ones are cultural?
3. How do we avoid being taken captive by the world's principles—its philosophy and human traditions?
4. What will be the outcome if we live by the first principles of this world?

Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Evaluate yourself? What is your philosophy?

Is it cultural?

Is it political?

Is it religious?

Or is it Christ's?

First, are you stuck in one of the traditions?



Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

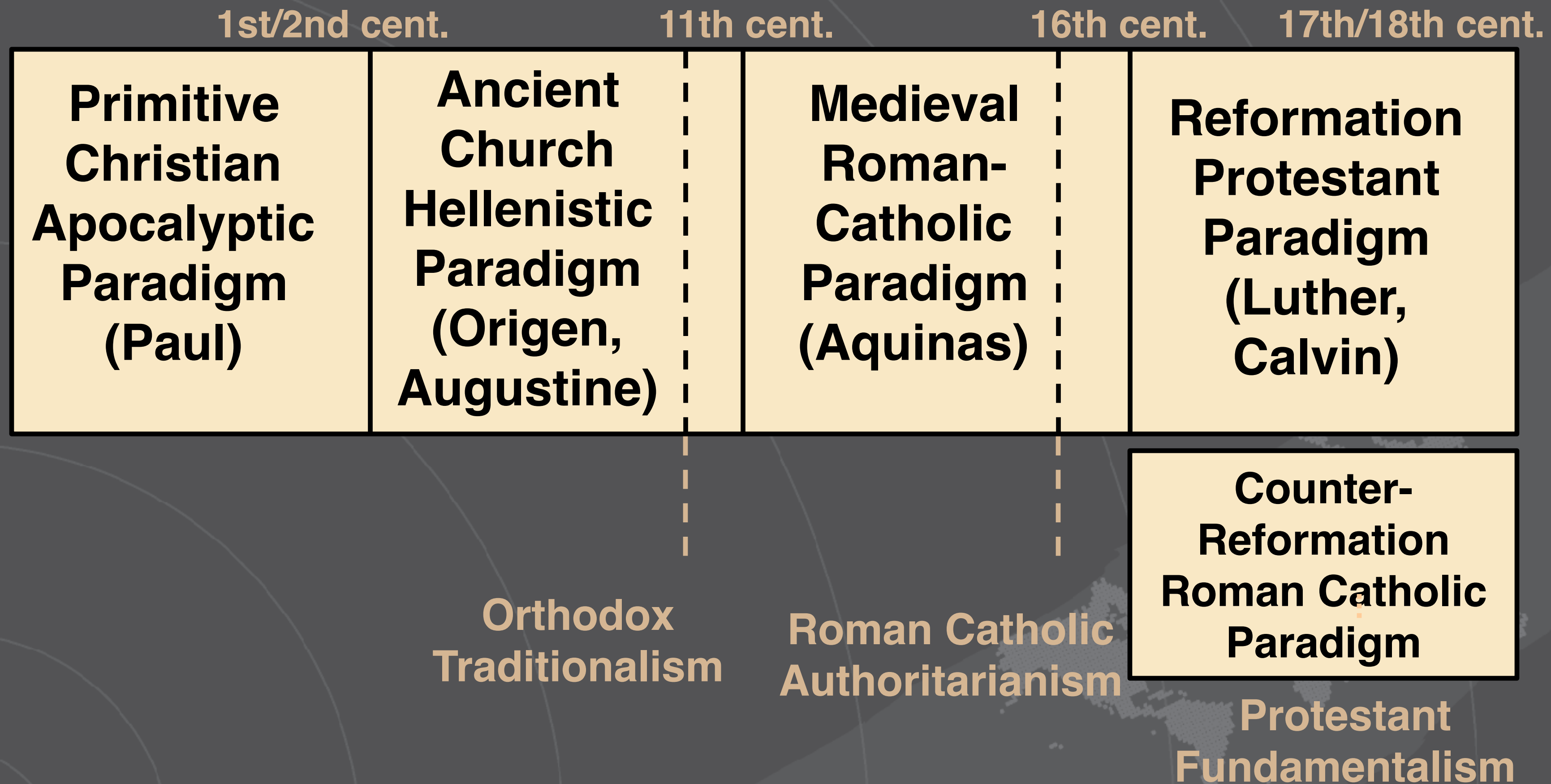
First principles of the universe

Mixture of the following

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Kung's Paradigms of Theology

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Kung's Paradigms of Theology

(cont.)

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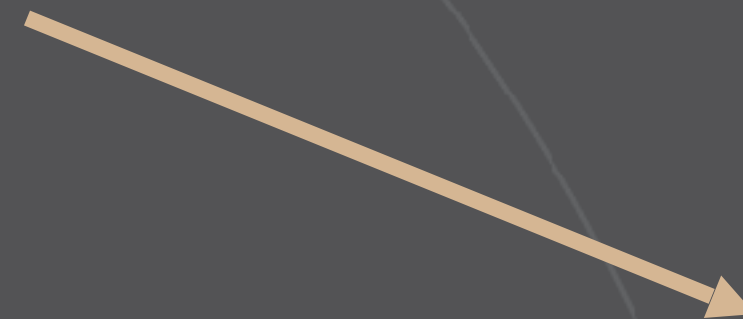
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(Barth)**

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shaping the paradigm
based on “the way of
Christ and His Apostles”**



Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

Your identity and the first principles of the world

If your primary identity

...is a Baptist, you are a captive of the world

...is a Catholic, you are a captive

...is an American, you are a captive

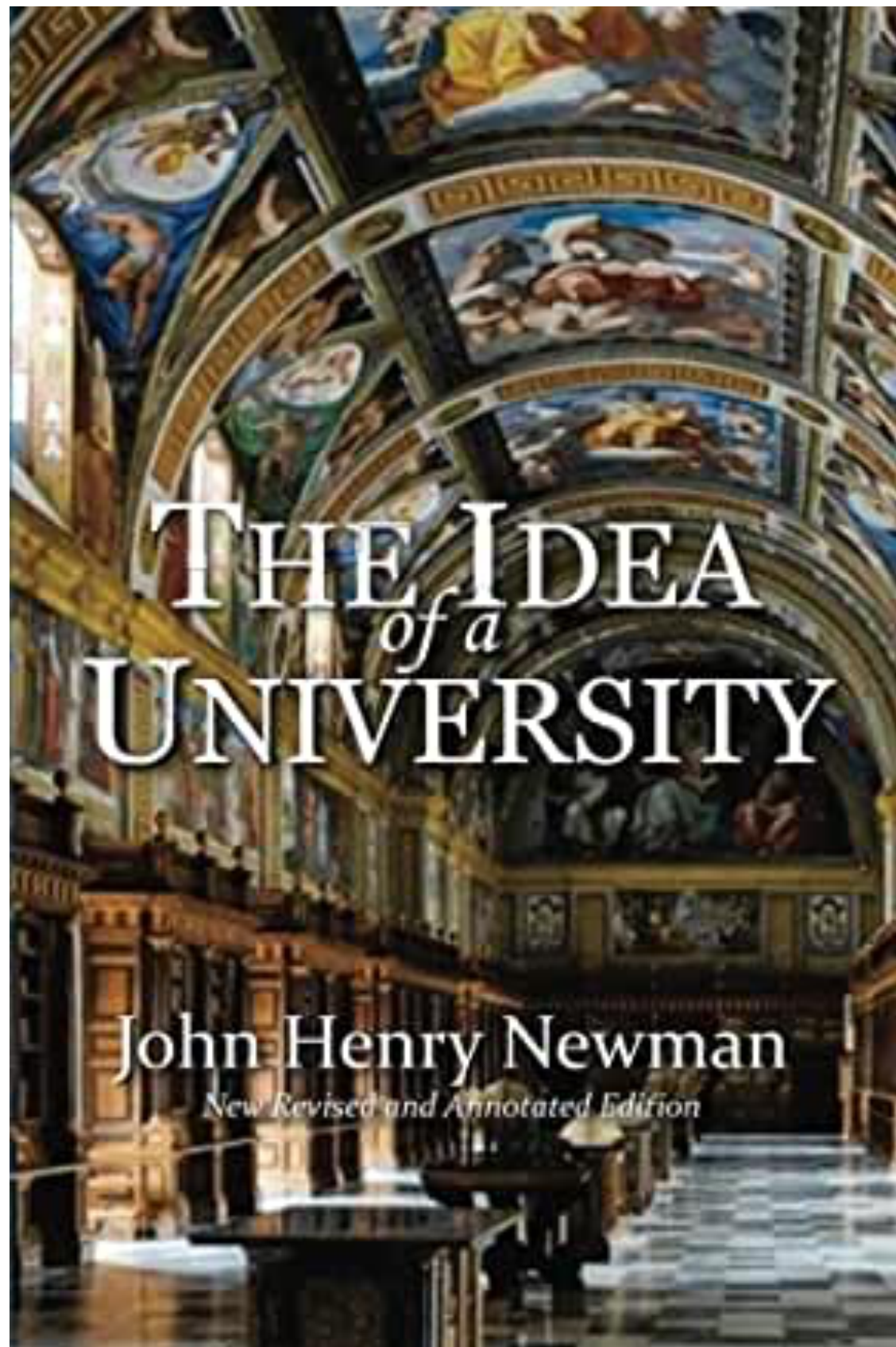
...is a conservative Christian, you are a captive

...is a progressive, you are a captive

...is an African, Chinese, Indian, you are a captive

Next week we will look at our primary identity.

Paul's Middle Letters



“Talents for speculation and original inquiry he has none, nor has he formed the invaluable habit of pushing things up to their first principles, or of collecting dry and unamusing facts as the materials for reasoning.

“Still so far I readily grant, that the cultivation of the ‘understanding,’ of a ‘talent for speculation and original inquiry,’ and of ‘the habit of pushing things up to their first principles,’ is a principal portion of a good or liberal education.”

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Paul's Middle Letters—Colossians

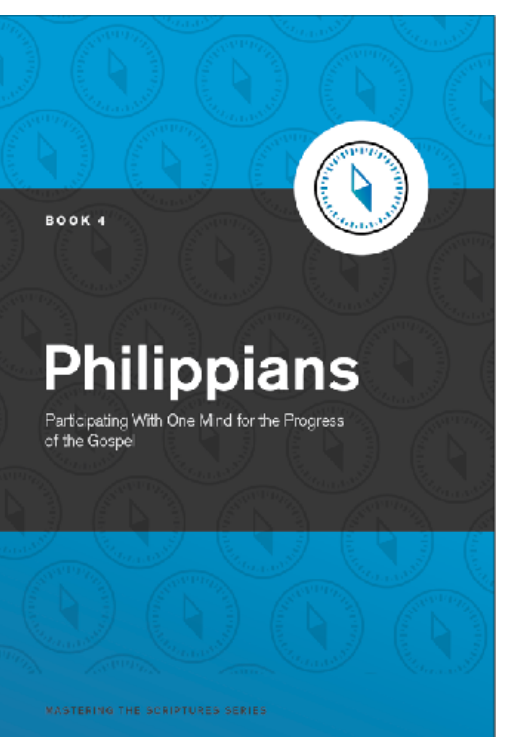
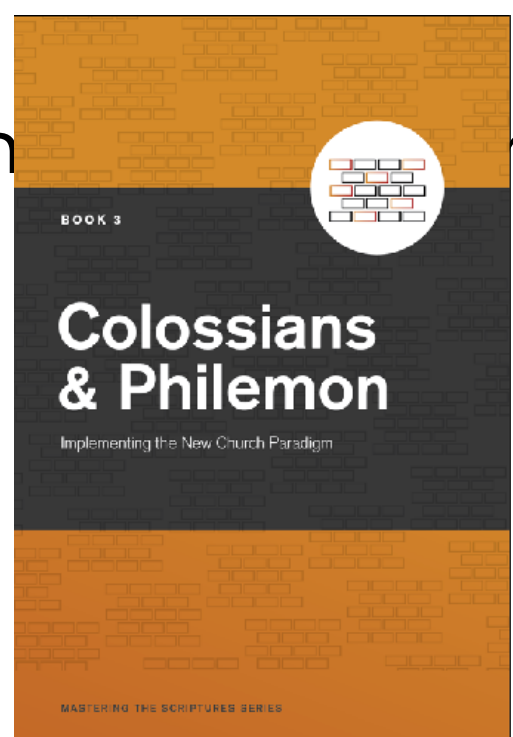
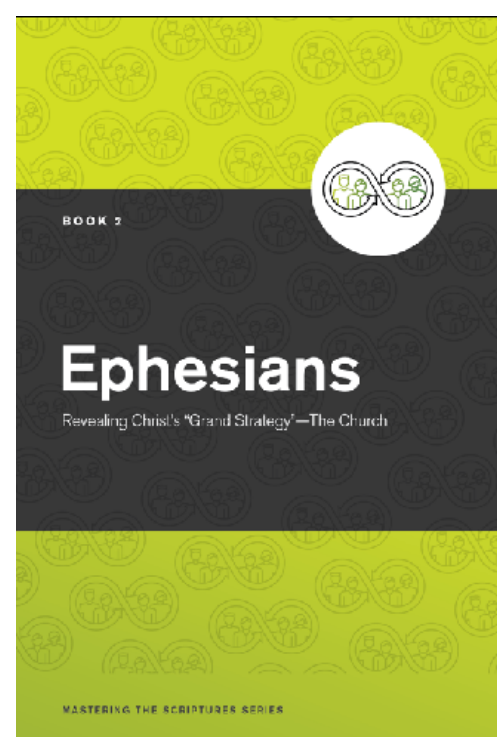
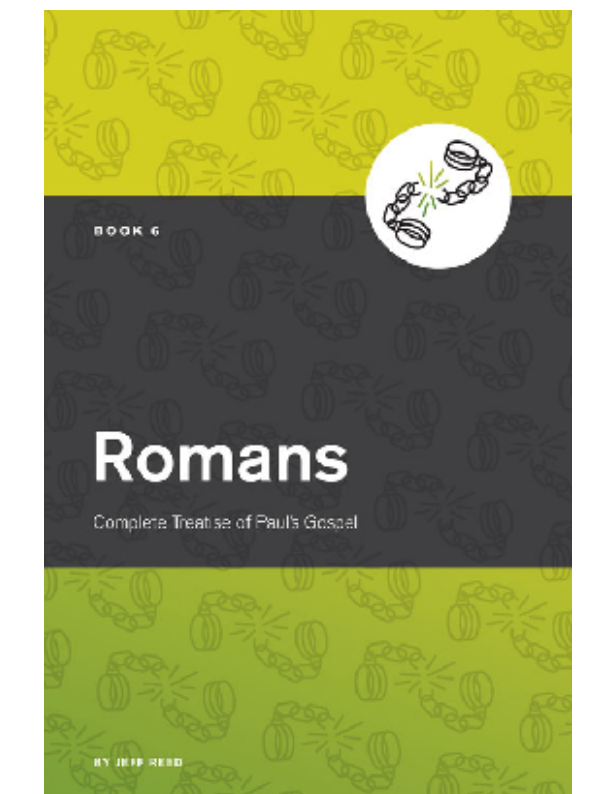
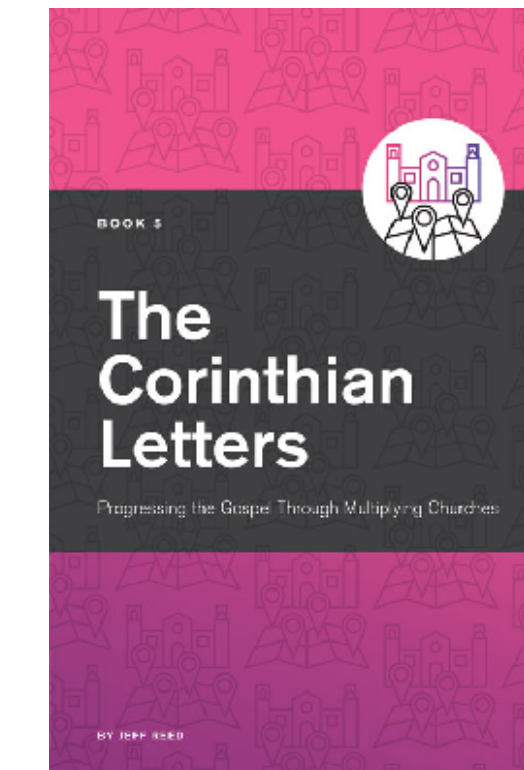
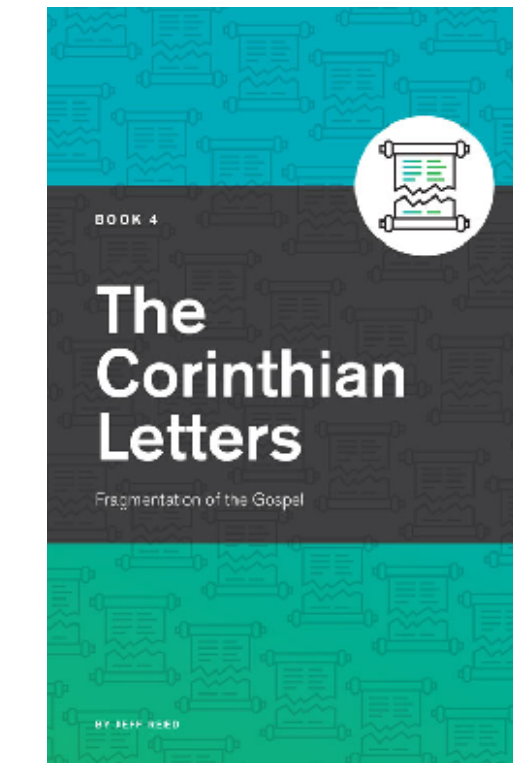
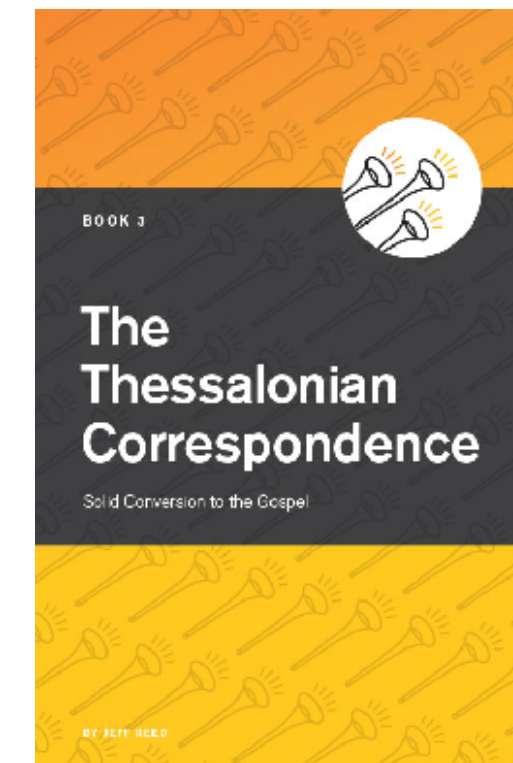
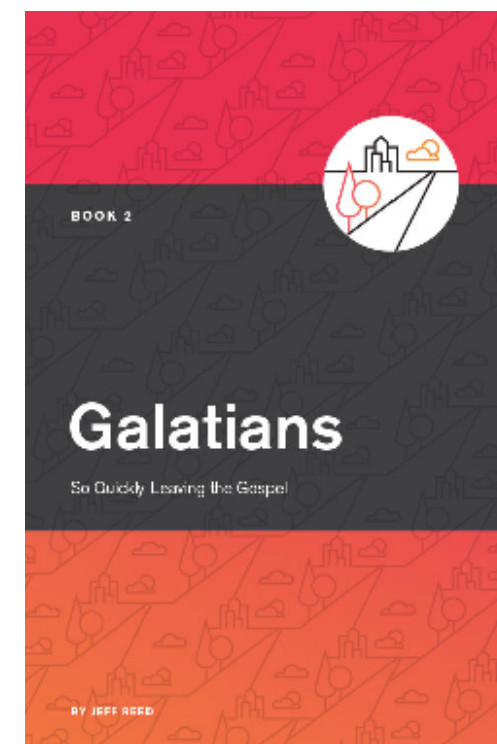
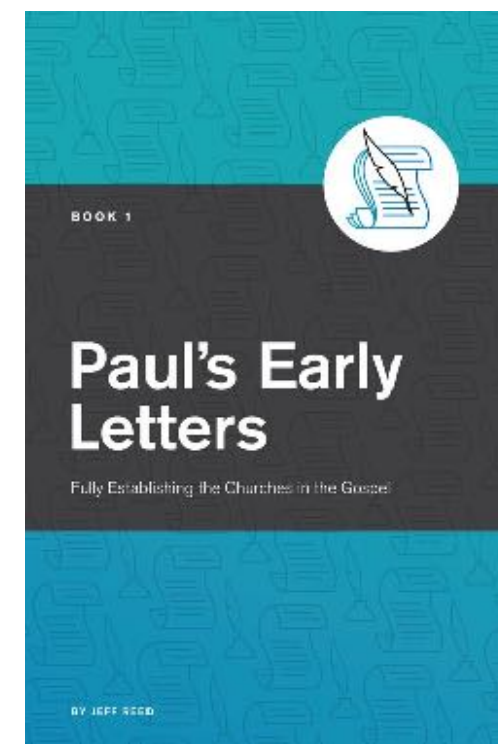
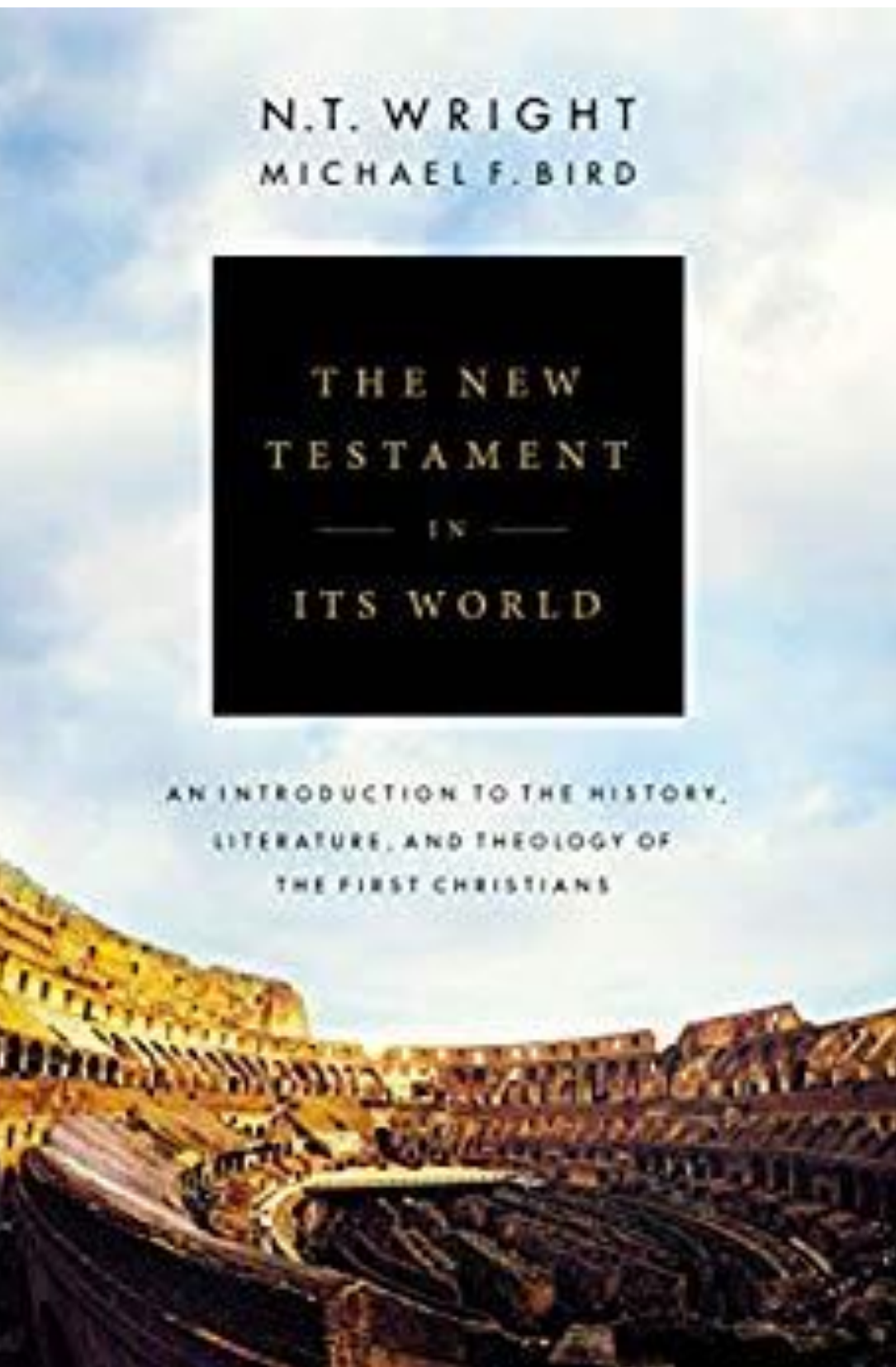
Newman was right.

Lesson to Christian college professors: You must keep “pushing up the first principles” of every discipline.

But you must first begin with the first principles of Christ as your foundation, or your “creative inquiry” will go astray.

If we are to think and serve creatively in this world, we need Christians who understand their identity—founded on Christ—His philosophy and first principles, not the worlds.

Paul's Middle Letters



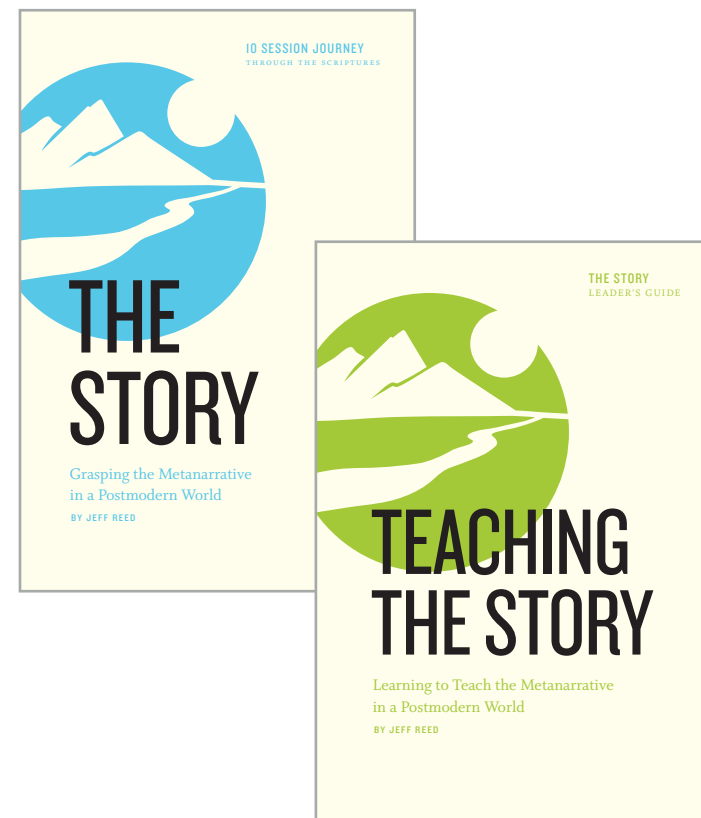
Feb 60 to March 60

Autumn 60

AD Sent 5.3



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

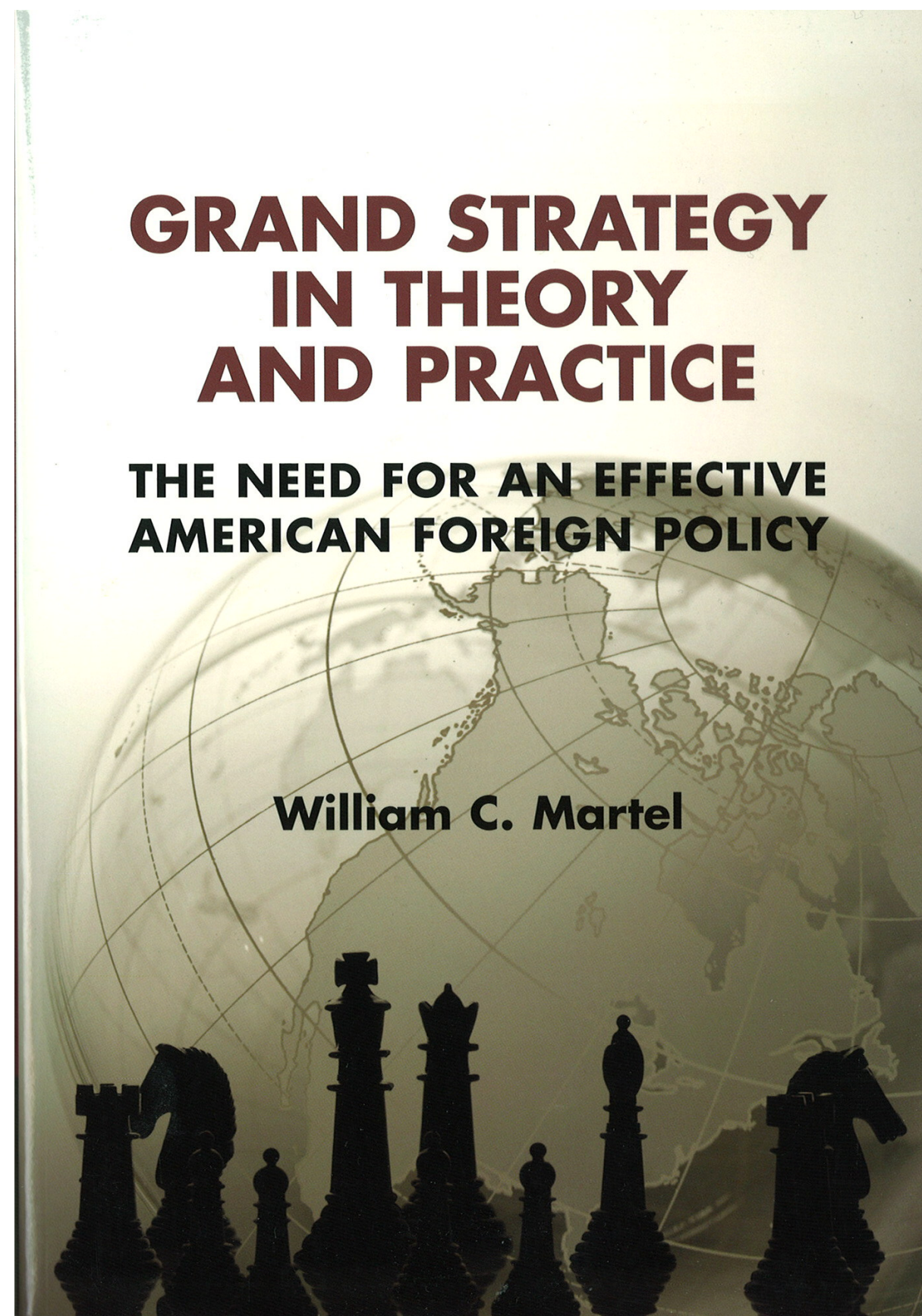
Paul's Middle Letters—2021

Paul's Later Letters—2022

Peter's Jewish Encyclicals—2023

Johannine Literature—2024

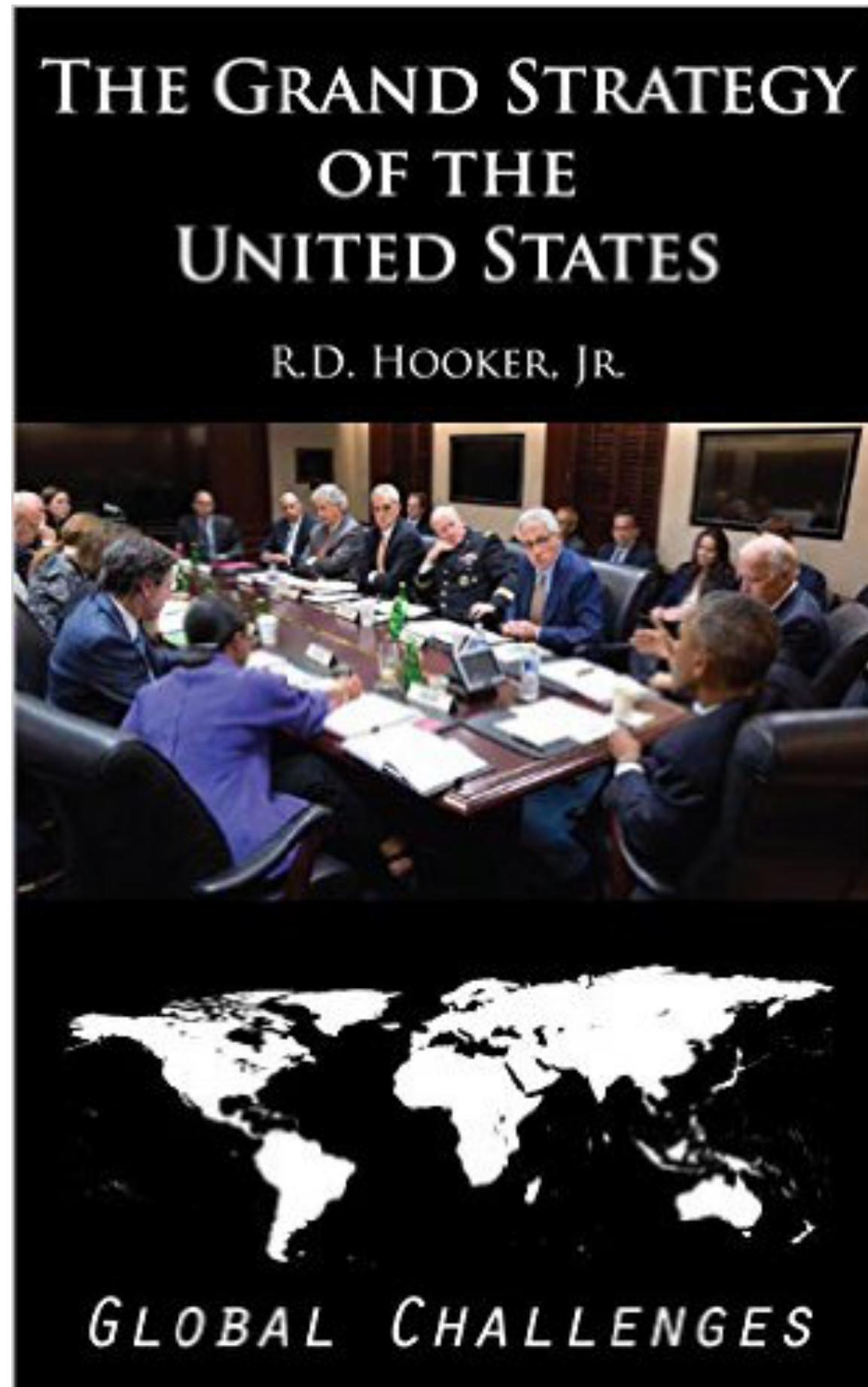
Paul's Middle Letters



- 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.

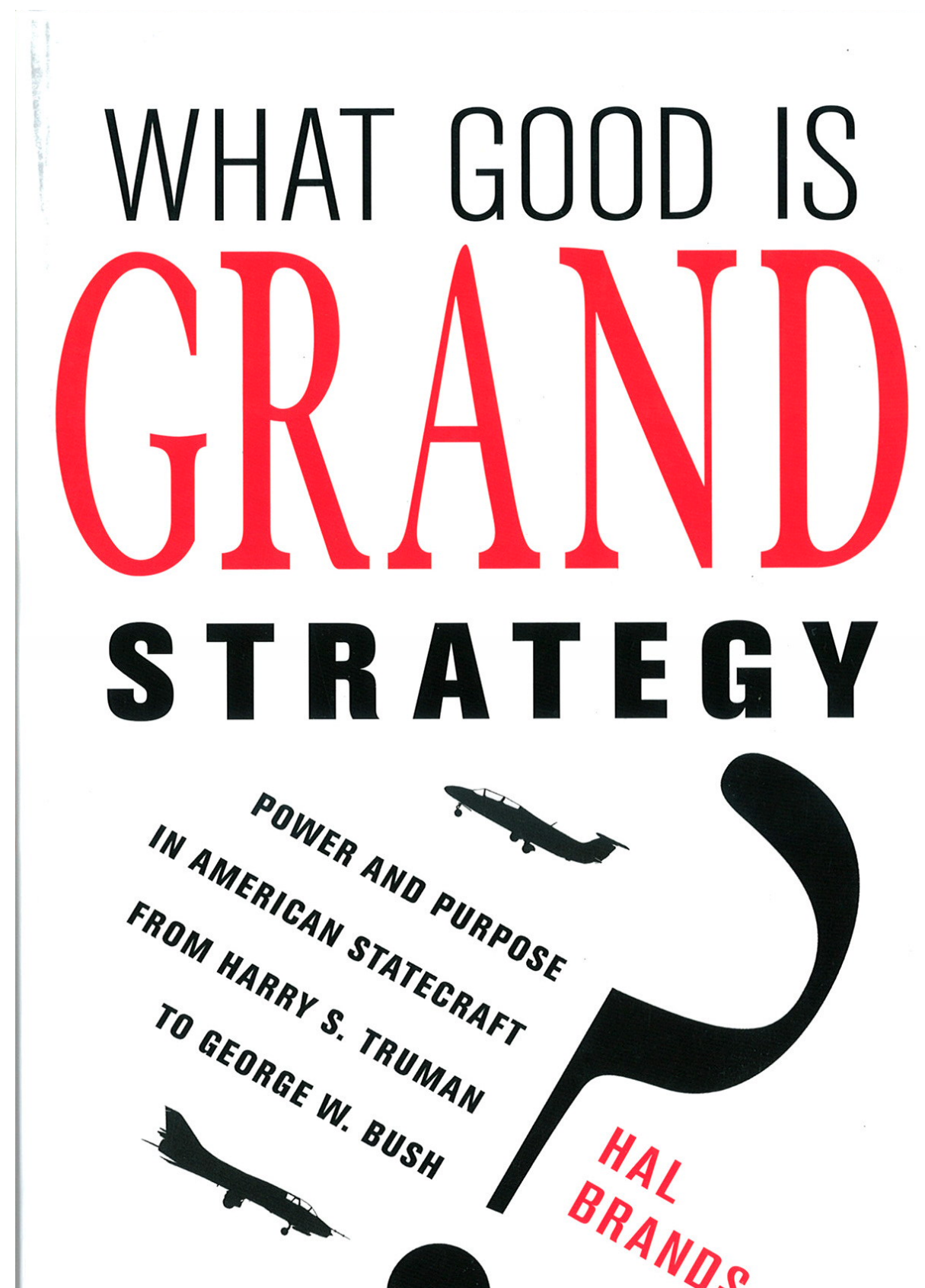
Paul's Middle Letters



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.”