

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

In this final session, we will integrate Paul's networking processes and insights across all four letters

We will review the insights from Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Then in the 4th letter, Philippians, we will fill it out more, in very significant ways.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Evangelicals can hardly say the words “apostolic network.”

Global Pentecostals know very little about these network strategies and principles.

Mainline denominations worldwide have completely lost the Acts paradigm and, in many cases, have lost the gospel itself, relating it with a social, cultural gospel, which is now turning woke—the wrong kind of woke (in all civilizations).

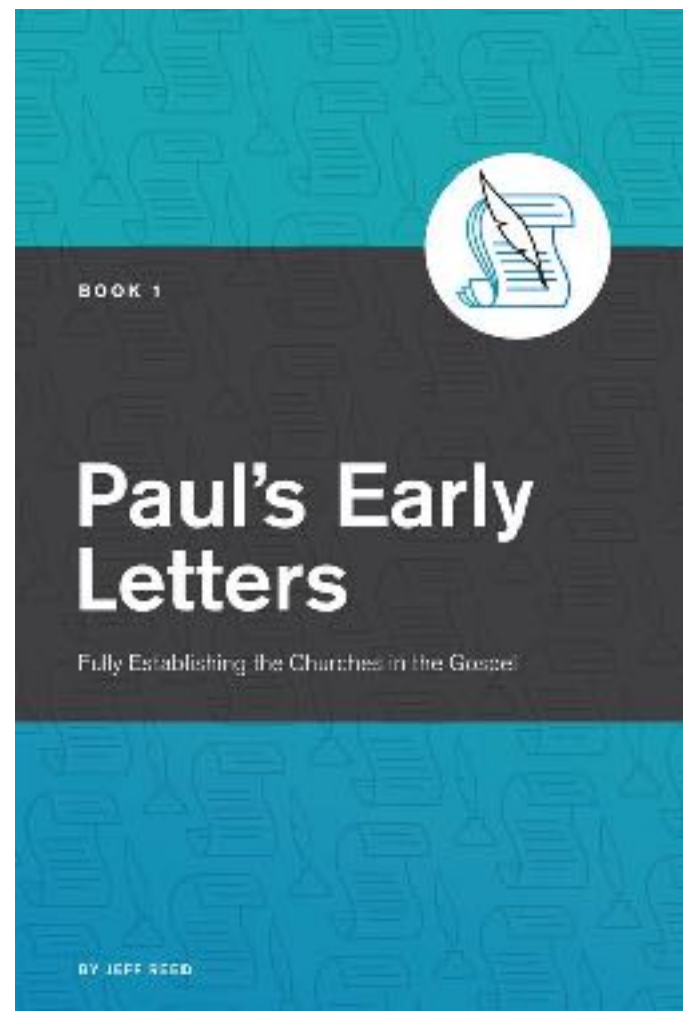
Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Issue: Processes and Insights into Paul's Networking in the Lycus Valley Churches

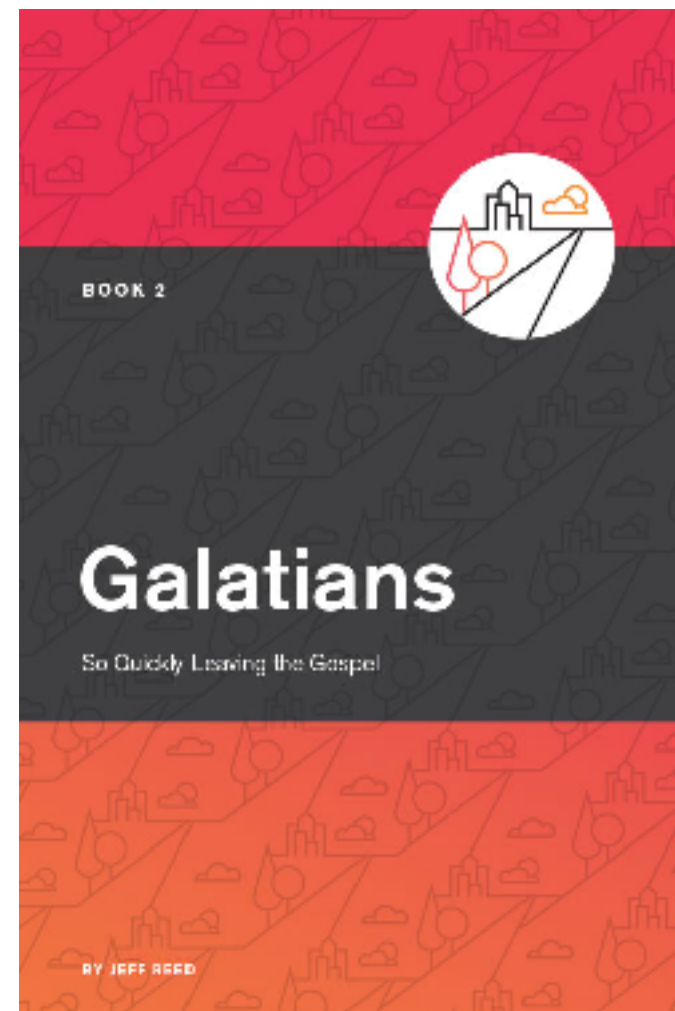
Questions:

1. Why did Paul stay in Ephesus for 3 years? What exactly was he doing?
2. How did he go about establishing the Lycus Valley churches? What was his primary focus?
3. What were his strategic moves? What did he do while still remaining focused on Ephesus?
4. In what ways was Paul doing theology in culture as he dealt with these churches? How does this illustrate what we have been calling "the new perspective of Paul"?

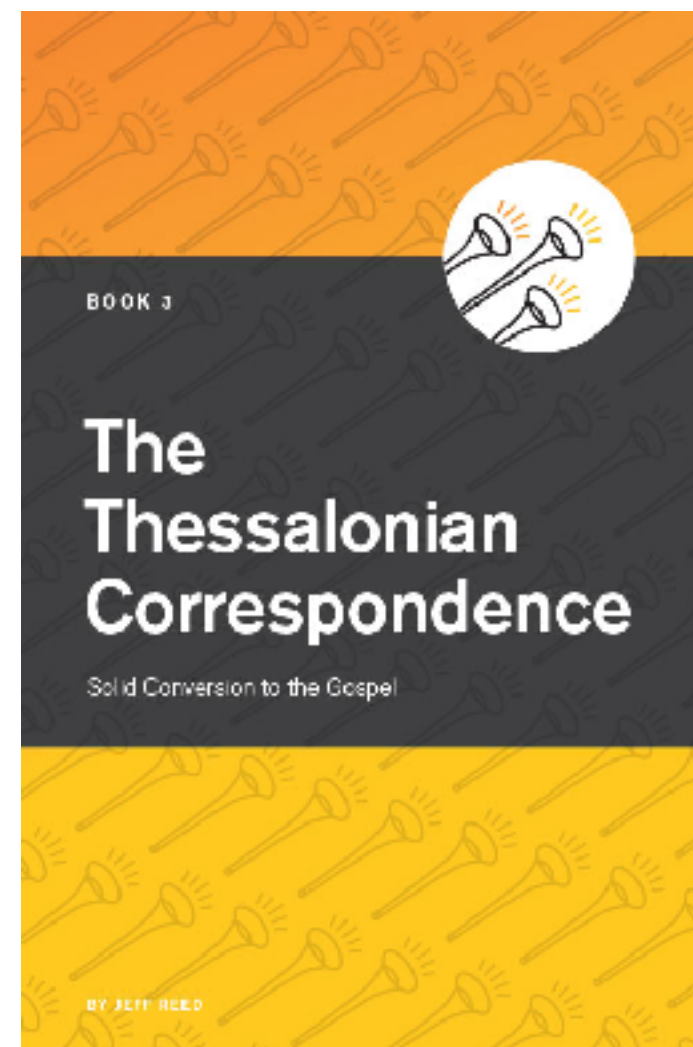
Paul's Early Letters



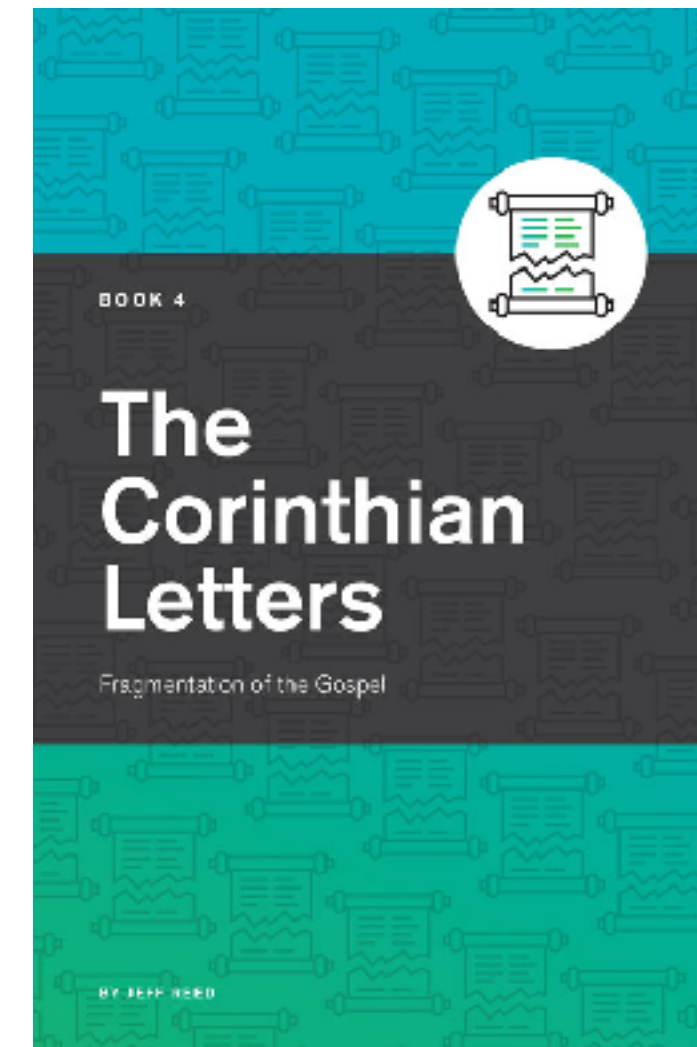
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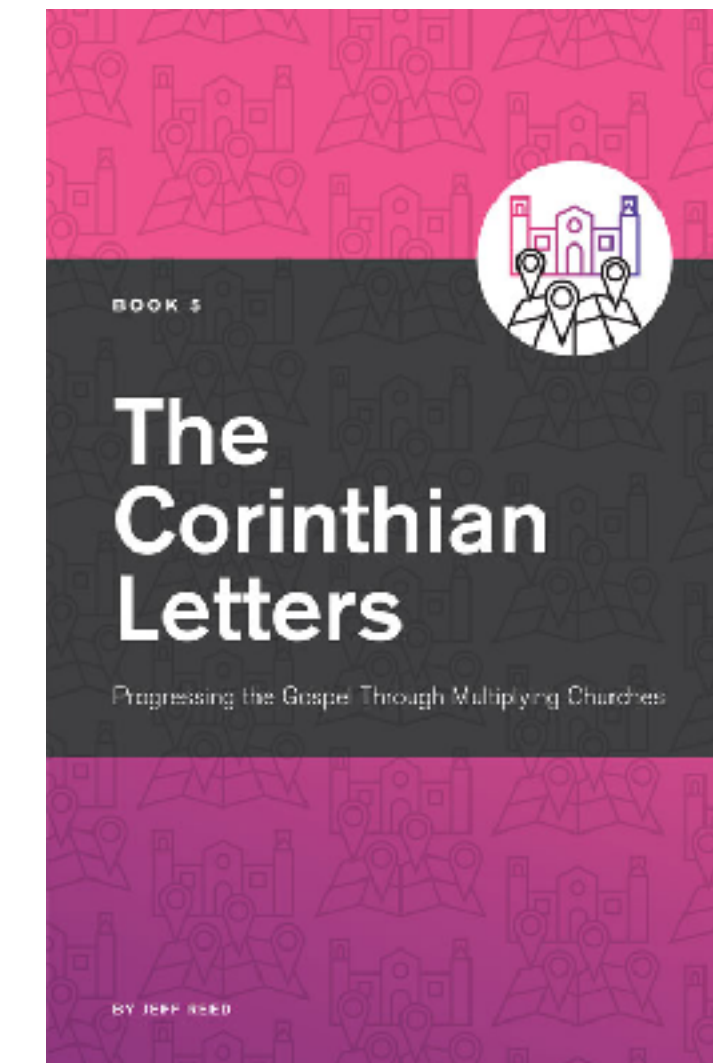
Autumn 49



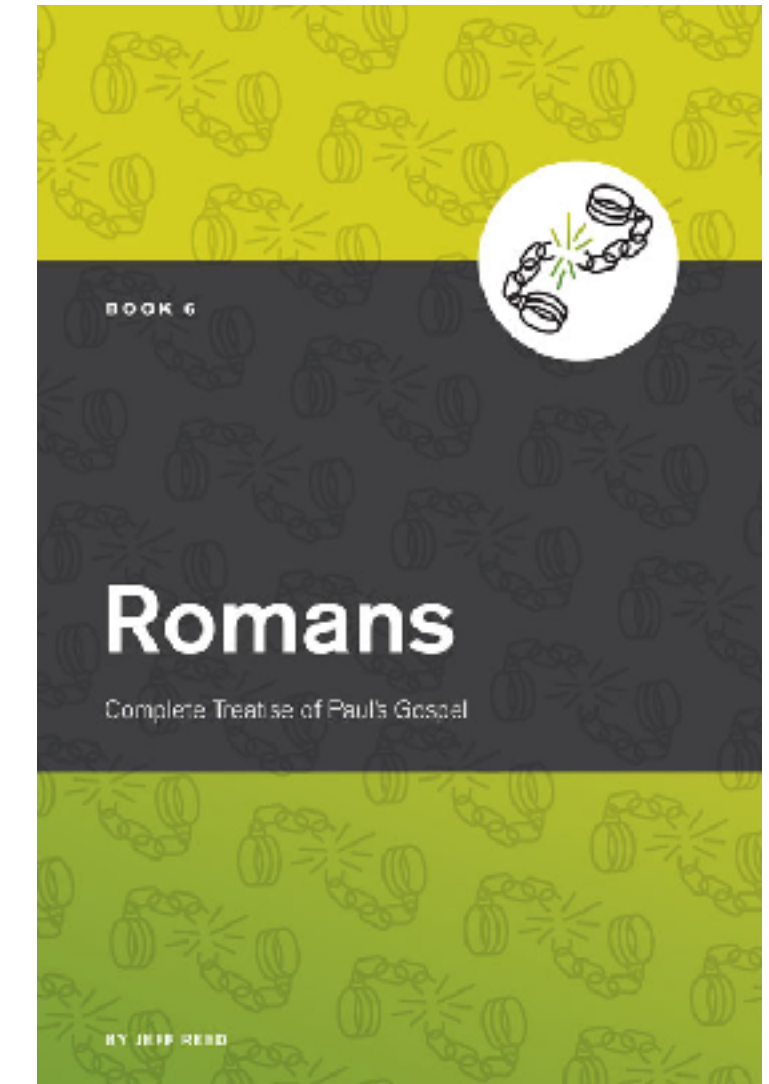
Winter/Sum. 51



Sept. 53



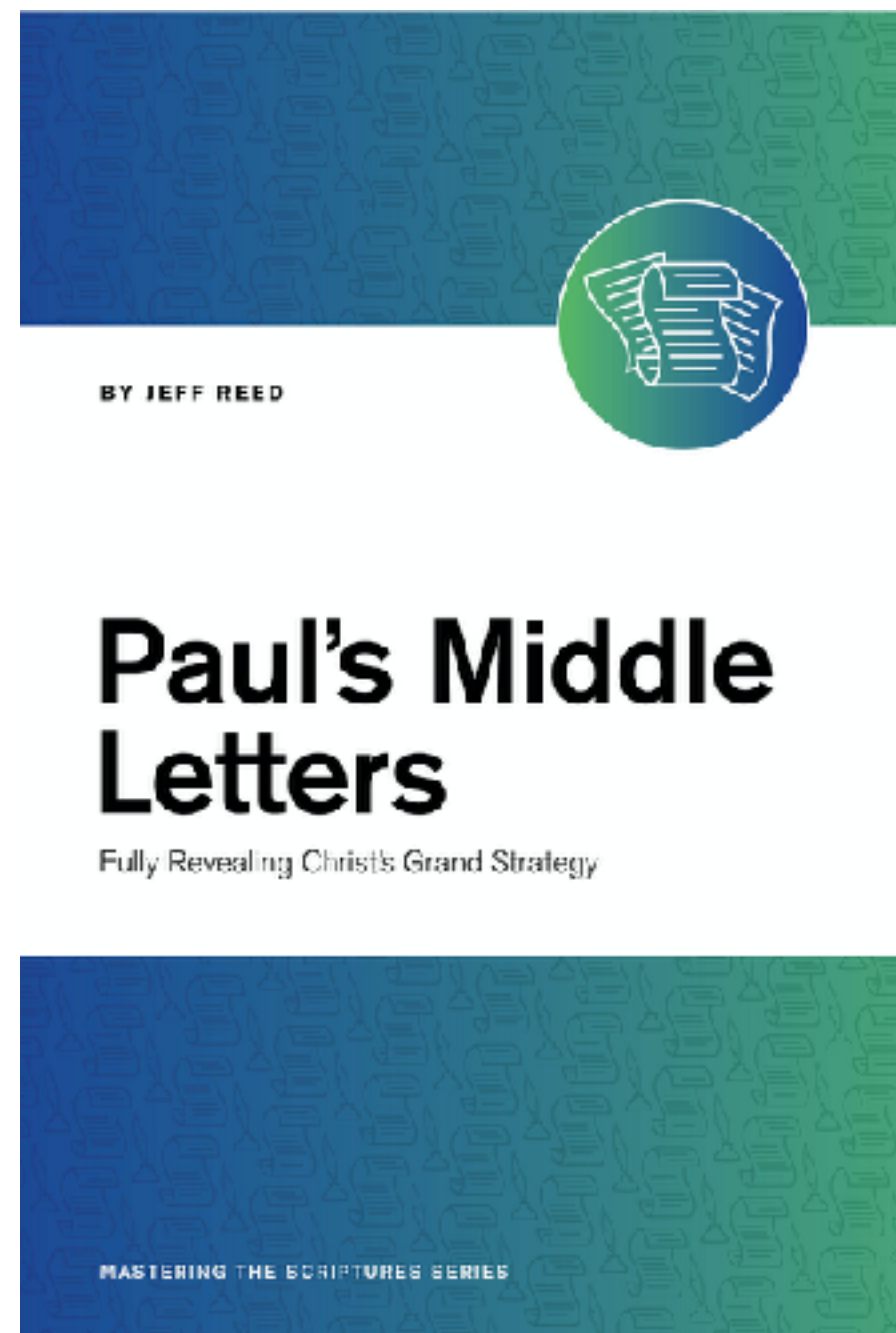
June 56



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Paul's Middle Letters



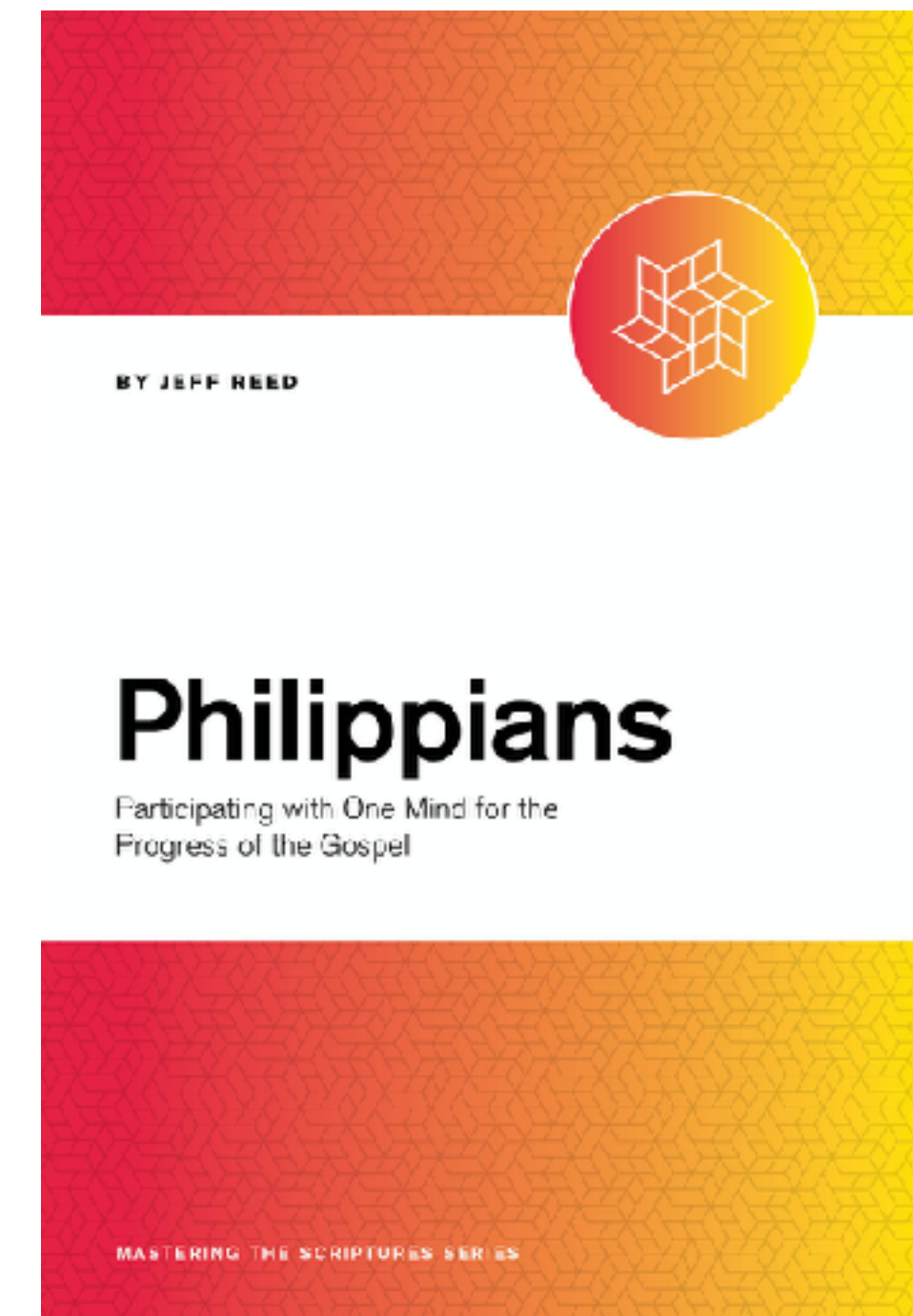
Feb. 60 to March 62



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 living 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: Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

What was going on in Paul's head at he was stuck in prison for 2 years?

Let's review what we know from Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon so far.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Insights into Paul's network strategy (Ephesians review)

1. Paul invested 3 years with the Ephesian elders, teaching them the whole counsel of God, even in their homes, because Ephesus was so strategic.
2. Paul prayed they would fully grasp Christ's grand strategy, which he revealed to them, and become a powerful hub, participating with him in the progress of the gospel.
3. He knew they had to stand firm or there would be a huge hole in his "complex apostolic network." So he challenged them to prepare for a major conflict by being clothed in his teaching (Ephesians), like a soldier preparing for battle.
4. Paul went out of his way to keep them up to date on his situation and progress in the gospel. He asked them to pray fervently for him, again reinforcing the key nature of these churches.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Let's return to the Colossian passages at the beginning and ending of the letter.

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

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father

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

Colossians 1:1–8

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

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

Colossians 1:9–14

Paul's Network and Colossians

Insights into Paul's network strategy (Colossians review, Colossians 1:1–14)

First, he is introducing himself.

- Paul is an Apostle with authority; and Timothy is a key leader, sharing in Paul's authority.
- Epaphras, who brought the Colossians the gospel, is part of Paul's team and reported their faith to him.
- Paul wants to see them secure and steadfast in the faith.
- Paul was given a special commission: to make the Word fully known by revealing the mystery—Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and we are in Him and He in us.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Second, Paul was giving them the big picture.

You can see this in 1:15–20.

1. Christ is everything—from creation until the kingdom is set up—and He is the head of His body, the Church.
2. When you trusted in Christ, your sins were forgiven and you were “transferred into His kingdom” (1:13), specifically His body, the Church, of which He is head; that is His plan for every man becoming mature in Christ—they are in Him and He in them.
3. Through Christ and His body—His Church—God will reconcile all things to Himself, ultimately, setting up the promised kingdom.

This is a condensation of Paul's full revealing of Christ's grand strategy in Ephesians.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

Third, he was giving them a part of the big picture that involves them—their cluster of churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

Colossians was key because it was part of a cluster of churches in the Lycus Valley; it was evidently the most strategic of the 3 churches, which included Laodicea and Hierapolis.

They are now part of Paul's network and mission. He is tying them to his mission, which was given to him by Christ.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. ¹¹ And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, “See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.” ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

What was Paul doing at the end of his letter?

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

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

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

What did we see about Paul building his network from Philemon?

- Paul was doing “practical strategic theology” with the Lycus Valley churches.
- He used the first principles he taught them in Ephesians and Colossians, focused on the household texts, to deal with the issue of sending Philemon's slave Onesimus back to Philemon.
- Besides Paul teaching them Christ's grand strategy, philosophy and first principles of their new faith, he modeled how to use them in thinking through issues in the church, like slavery, from Christ's perspective.
- This was a vital part of deepening and rooting this cluster of churches in his network.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Let's try to enter Paul's head while in prison. What was going on in his head as he was stuck in prison for 2 years?

Time span of middle letters—Ephesus to the Prison Letters

Time in Ephesus—spring of AD 53 to spring of 56 (3 years)

Paul visits elders at Melitus on his way to Jerusalem—April 30–May 2, AD 57

Prison Letters—spring of AD 60 to spring of 62 (4 years later)

Paul back in Ephesus and Colossae—spring to autumn AD 62

Paul writes 1 Timothy (Timothy in Ephesus)—fall of AD 62

Later with John's 7 letters—coming in 2024; Ephesus becomes lukewarm in 3rd gen

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

What was Paul doing in his 3 years at Ephesus?

Paul was doing 5 things:

1. He was building his base in Ephesus, training the senior elders night and day for 3 years.
2. He was expanding his network by preaching for 2 years in the Hall of Tyrannus; 7 key churches were being planted in the region around Ephesus.
3. He was deepening his network and forming a cluster around the Lycus Valley churches.
4. He was doing theology at a very high level as he worked at establishing the Lycus Valley churches, as seen in his dealing with a slavery situation.
5. He was writing these 3 letters (up to this point) in light of his strategy, to sustain and solidify (root) his apostolic work.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

But now Paul is in prison.

Several things were on his mind:

1. He was focused on the Ephesus hub and the Lycus Valley cluster of churches associated with his Ephesus hub.
2. Two problems concerned him. Both could have huge impact on his Ephesus hub and the 7 churches around that hub, especially the Lycus Valley churches. This was the heart of his network at this time.
3. On his final visit to Ephesus, on the beach on his way to Jerusalem, he sees cracks in the Ephesian eldership, even though he had taught them day and night for 3 years just 2 years earlier.
4. So he writes these 3 letters and, as we will see, his next letter, Philippians, fits his concerns like a glove.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Paul's challenge to them:

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ²⁹ I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

Acts 2:28–30 NRSV

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Two years after he had been with the Ephesian elders, before prison, Paul had a farewell meeting with them at Melitus, as he was passing by toward Jerusalem.

Several things can be observed from that visit

1. He reminded them of the comprehensive training he gave them when he was with them in Ephesus those 3 years.
2. He challenged them to guard themselves and the churches, because some would rise up with distorted teaching, probably amongst their team.
3. Evidently he saw cracks emerging. (crackable)
4. Right after his release from prison, he passed them by and left Timothy in Ephesus (AD 62), with instructions that imply Timothy was going to have to wade into the eldership and correct them and appoint new elders.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

He wrote this to Timothy who was in Ephesus

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; ¹⁸ for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves to be paid." ¹⁹ Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. ²¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality. ²² Do not ordain anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

1 Timothy 5:17–22 NRSV

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Paul instructs Timothy to deal with any problems with the Ephesian eldership. He seems to be implying, by these instructions, he would need the elders at this time.

Several things can be observed from these instructions

1. Timothy carried Paul's apostolic authority with him as he worked with the Ephesian elders; and he was to continue these functions after him.
2. Though Timothy had no formal positional authority, in the context of establishing churches and an existing eldership, he might need to rebuke and, in that context, remove and be central in the process of recognizing new elders.
3. The only point here is that the Ephesian eldership was crackable, and these guidelines are there (assuming balanced by established elders and church members) to preserve the apostolic network around Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

One more observation I will include here, which will be developed fully in the Johannine literature in 2026. Here is Jesus' assessment of the church of Ephesus at the end of the second generation and the emerging of the 3rd generation

2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: ² "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. ³ I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Rev 2:1–5

Paul, John's Ephesus Hub (2nd/3rd Gen)

Paul's hub was intergenerational and remained key in the first 200 years. But, evidently, from Jesus' assessment, it came close to having its lamp stand removed around AD 100.

Several things can be observed from this assessment:

1. Evidently at the end of the 2nd generation or beginning of the 3rd generation, their flame was burning low.
2. Though they held to the teaching they received, their practice (deeds) was lagging.
3. Evidently "their first love" was what they embraced from Paul's original letter to them—go back to the Ephesian letter.

But that will have to wait for 2026 with our treatment of John's literature, sprinkling John's fresh insights with the foundation of Paul's treatment of Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles.

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub, Lycus Valley Cluster

What is the essence of the contributions of the Middle Letters (before the addition of Phillipians)?

These actually sit at the heart of his emerging global apostolic network.

1. Paul's 3-fold strategy becomes clear: build your base (Ephesus), expand churches in the regional area around a hub church (hall of Tyrannus) and establish clusters as they emerge (Colossae, Heripolis, Laodecia)—a very simple strategy.
2. Paul paid close attention to doing strategic practical theology amongst the churches, dealing with issues like slavery, based on pushing up the first principles into every issue.
3. Paul kept his heart for the churches pure, which includes a balance between frank speech and constant love for the churches (Ephesian elders, Onesimus and Philemon examples).
4. Paul was willing to pay an inexhaustible price, constantly asking for prayer and support of the network (especially seen in Phillipians).
5. Paul was not afraid to exercise apostolic authority in the churches, even amongst his strategic eldership.

Building Complex Apostolic Networks Today

How do these letters shape how we build complex apostolic networks today?

1. We need to follow Paul's core 3-fold strategy: build your base (Ephesus), expand churches in the regional area around a hub church (hall of Tyrannus), and establish clusters as they emerge (Colossae, Hierapolis, Laodicea)—a very simple strategy.
2. Invest heavily in a strategic eldership, including the ongoing challenging and correcting as needed; use apostolic authority when needed, while giving honor to those serving in this vital role. Develop a passion and love for them.
3. Invest heavily in strategic churches, hubs, clusters, and key individual churches, carefully establishing them in Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles. Teach them to think biblically (strategic practical theology, Philemon example) and develop high level skill to handle the political, cultural, and religious issues that every generation of leaders and churches need to deal with.

Building Complex Apostolic Networks Today

How do these letters shape how we build complex apostolic networks today (cont.)?

4. Carefully draw those churches, like the Lycus Valley cluster of churches, into a vital participation in a complex apostolic network by emphasizing the grand strategy they are part of, the responsibility they have to participate fully, and the importance of legitimate apostolic authority and the authority of a well trained eldership
5. Recognize that this is an ongoing, intergenerational process, as seen in Timothy dealing with the Ephesian eldership and Jesus assessing the Ephesian churches at the end of the 2nd generation, emerging 3rd generation, who kept the teaching but stopped focusing on the mission.

Paul's Network and the Lycus Valley Churches

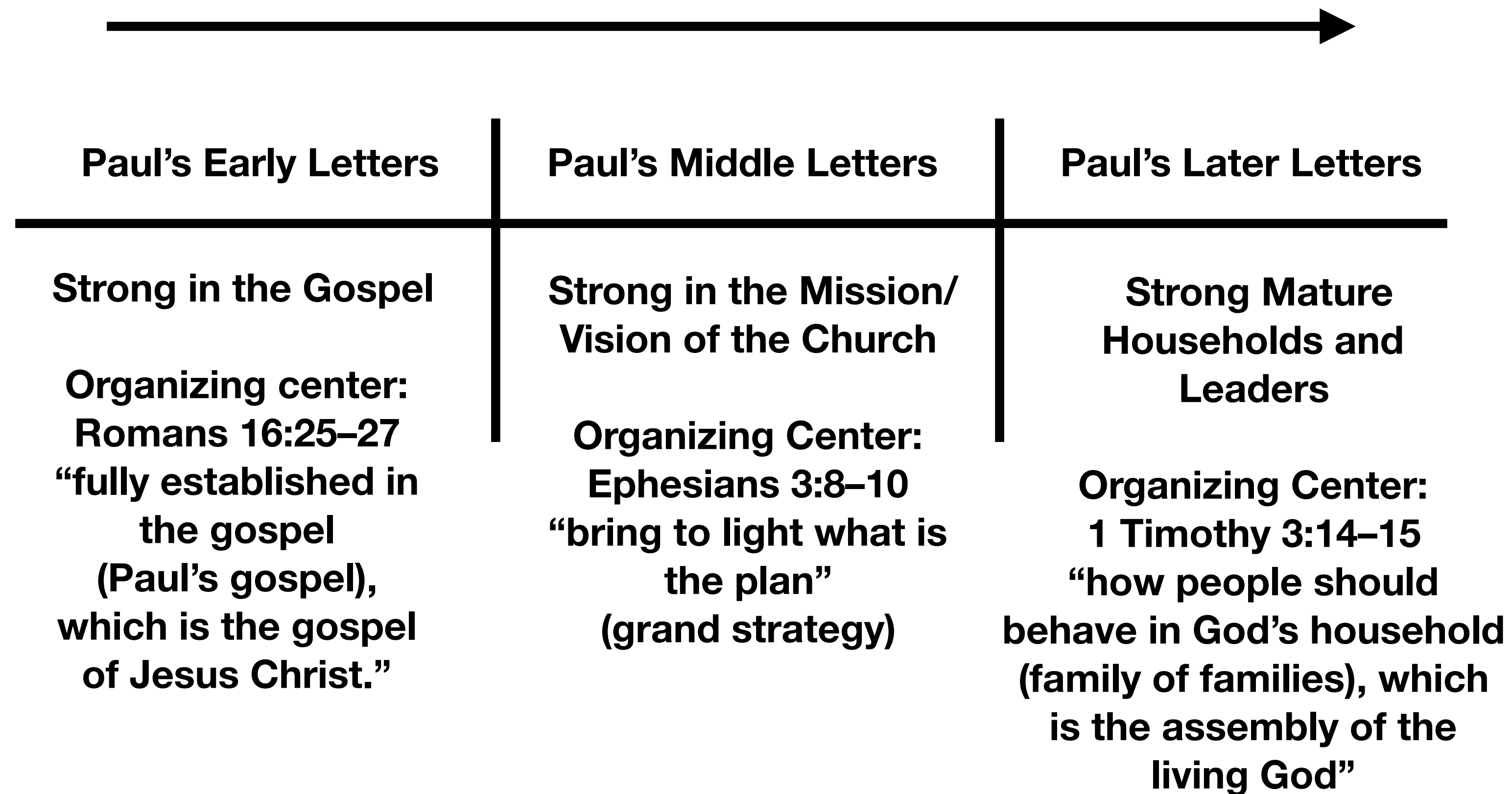
Issue: Building complex apostolic networks today around Paul's 3-fold strategy

Questions:

1. What are the core processes and principles of building a complex apostolic network today?
2. How important is a strategic hub like Ephesus in building a solid network? What are the core elements of establishing that hub? How long might it take?
3. Why are clusters of churches around a strategic hub important? What does it take to build those clusters so they become a vital part of the network?
4. Why has this become so foreign to our churches today, both in the Western Church and in the Global South?

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”

2021

Paul's Network and the Ephesus Hub

Issue: Processes and Insights from Paul in Building Complex Apostolic Networks Today

Questions:

1. What are the basic things we learn from Paul about building complex apostolic networks today?
2. How important is it that we spend significant time building our hubs that will be a base for clusters of churches within the region and cities around the hub church?
3. What goes into building clusters of churches within the sphere of hub churches—those built around the hub church?
4. What does this teach us about doing theology amongst the cluster churches? What does this teach us about the “new perspective of Paul,” which is really the original Paul?