

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Philippians—the last of Paul's middle letters

Why was it included in the NT?

What value does it have for us today?

In this letter, what do we learn about churches participating in the progress of the gospel? about our focus and sacrifice for that progress globally?

This has always been one of my favorite books. When I was in my 20s, and did a lot of Scripture memorization, I memorized it. But I still learned more this time around.

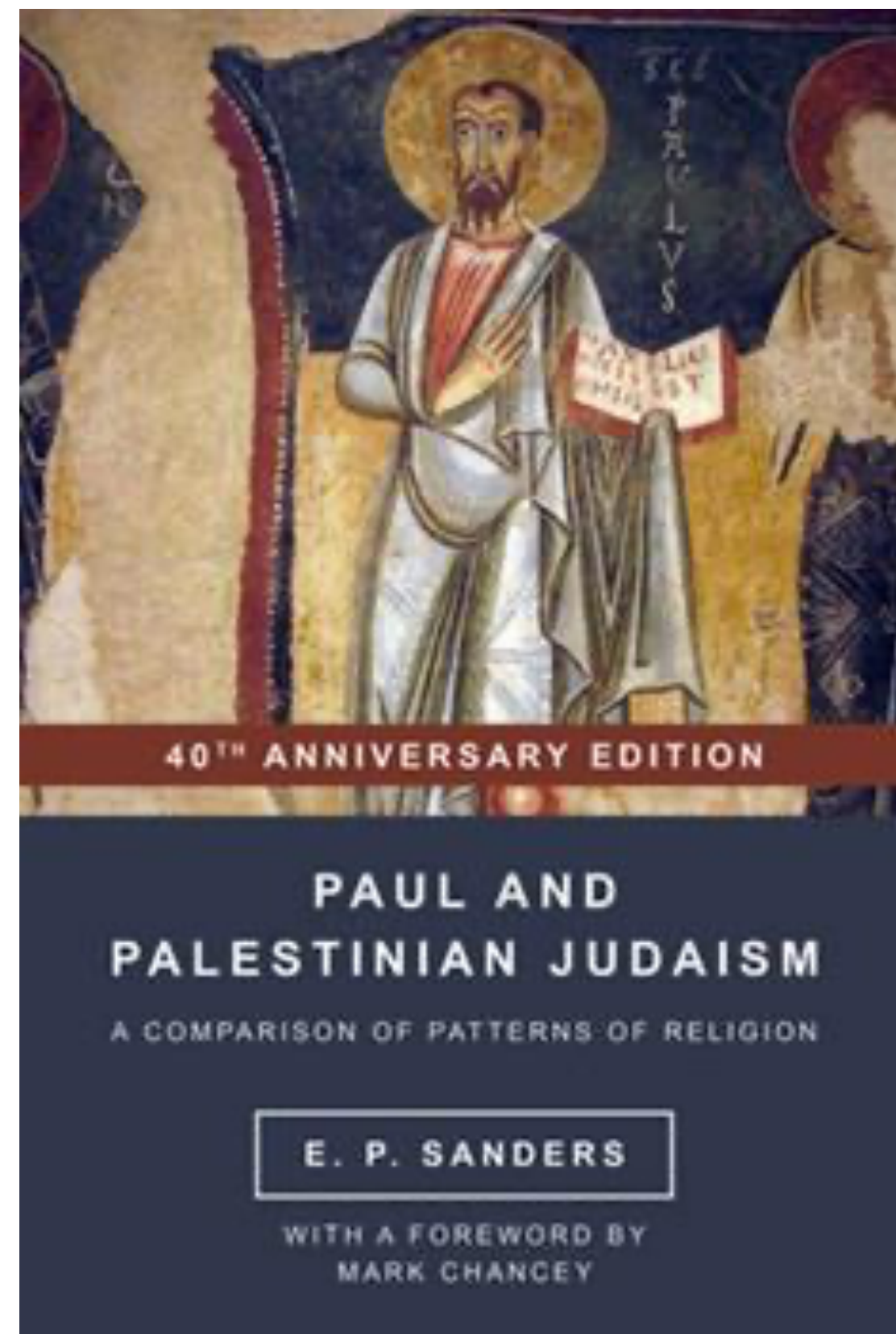
# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Issue: Significance of Philippians

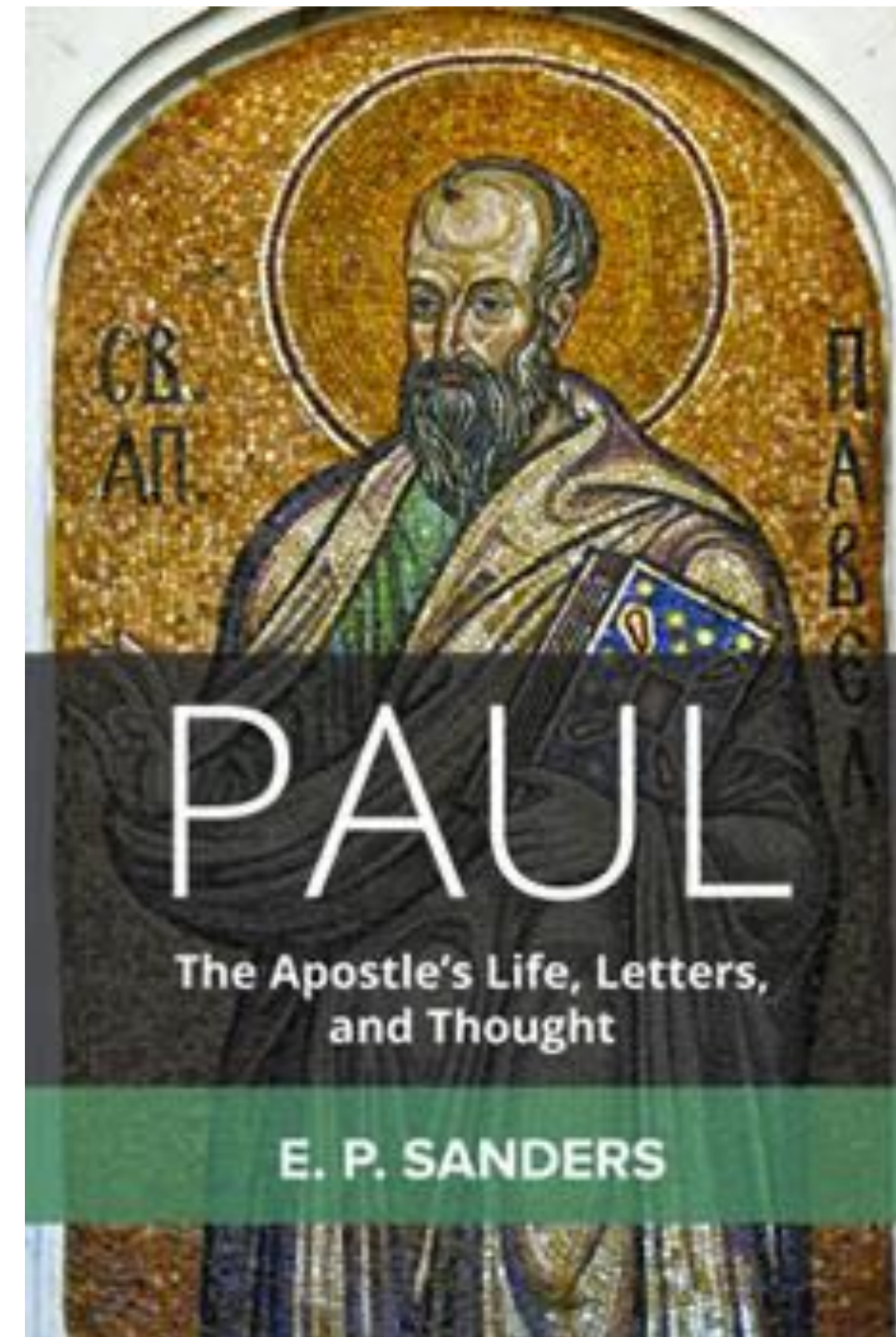
Questions:

1. This letter is not theological in the same sense as Ephesians and Colossians. Why was it included in the collection?
2. How does it contribute to the vision of the centrality of the Church as Christ's grand strategy as unveiled through Paul in Ephesians and Colossians?
3. What problems were emerging in the Philippian churches that caused Paul to write this letter?
4. In what sense is the church at Philippi a prototype for all churches participating in the progress of the gospel?

# New Perspective on Paul—Liberal

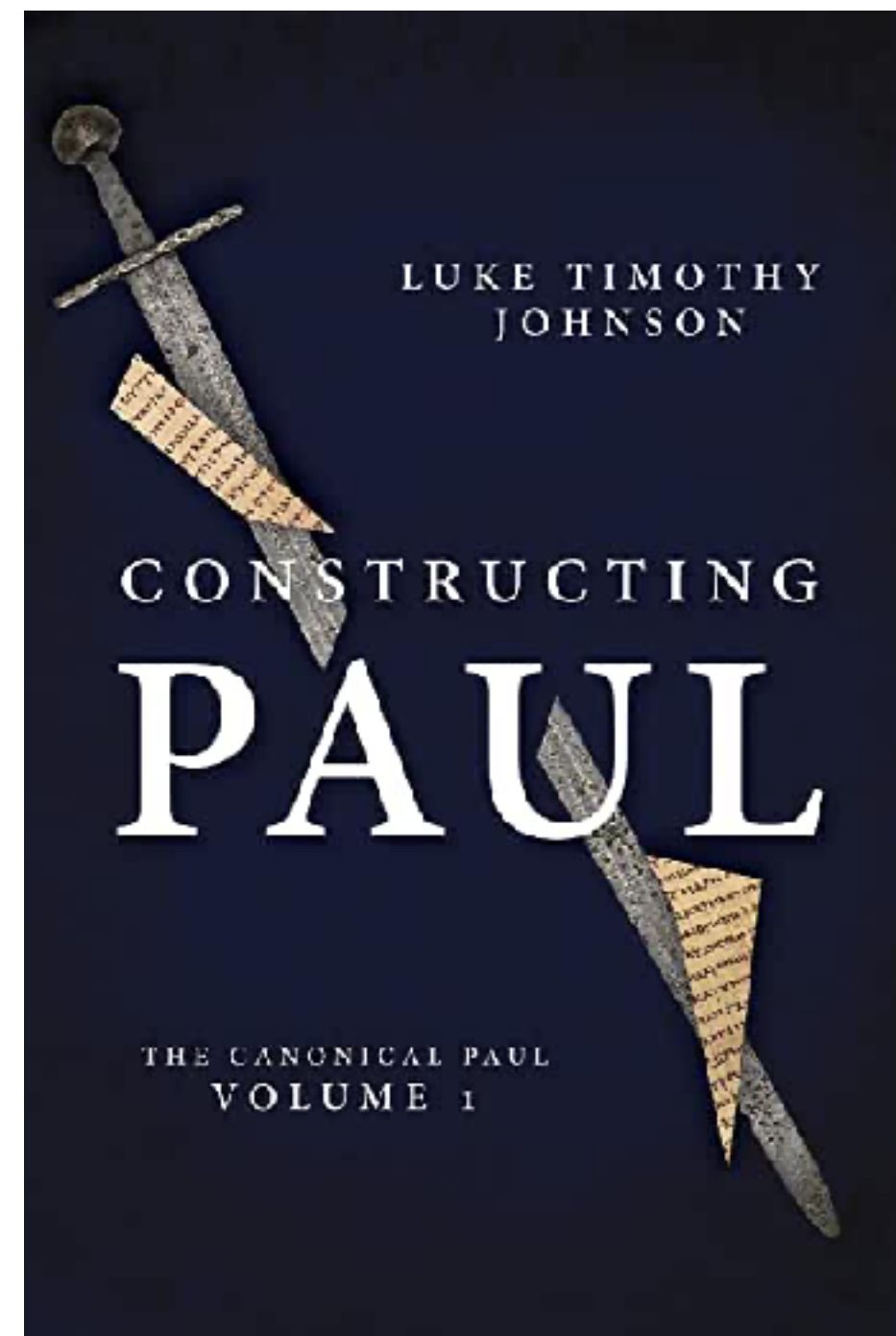


1977

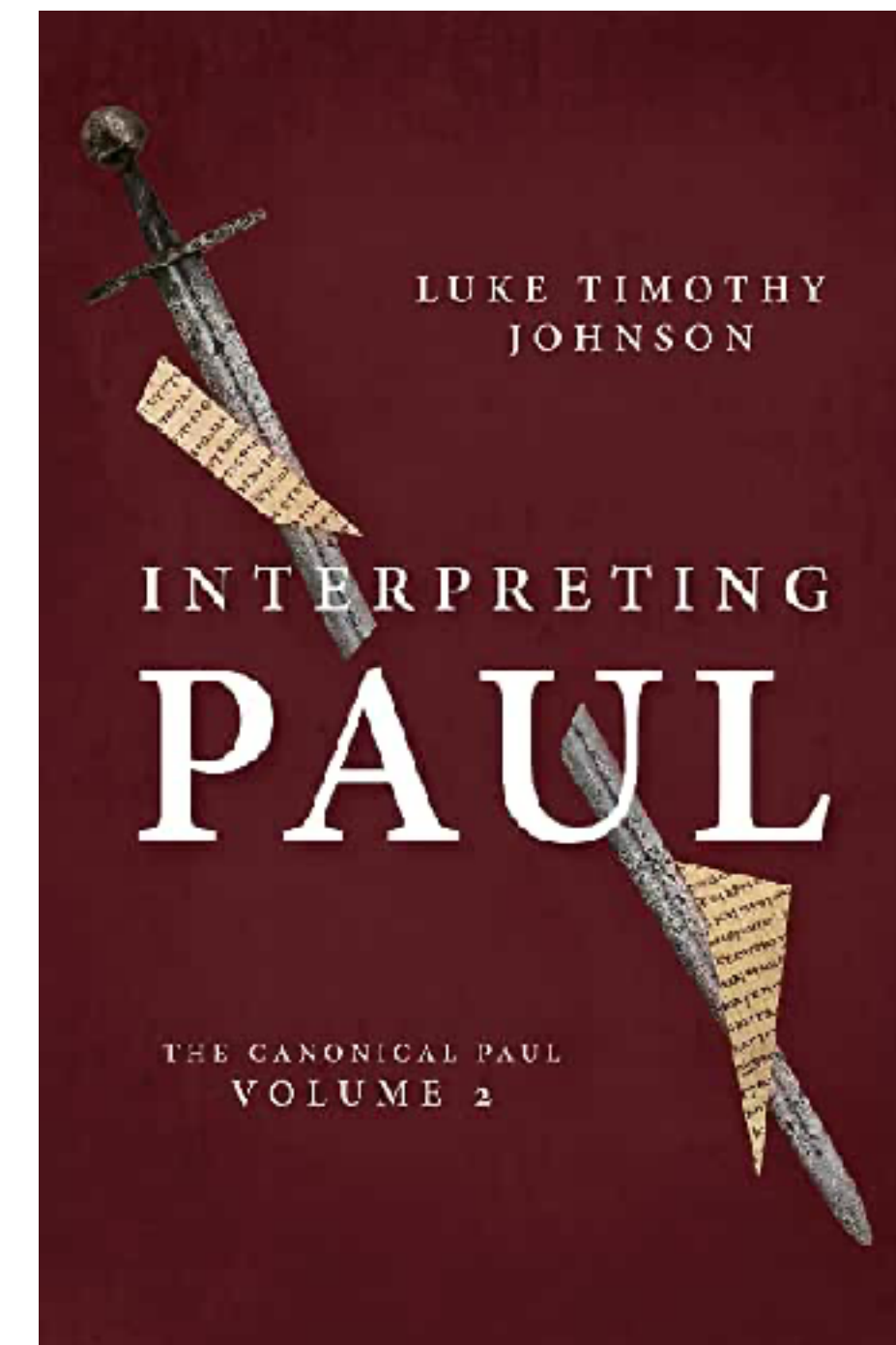


2015

# New Perspective on Paul—Catholic

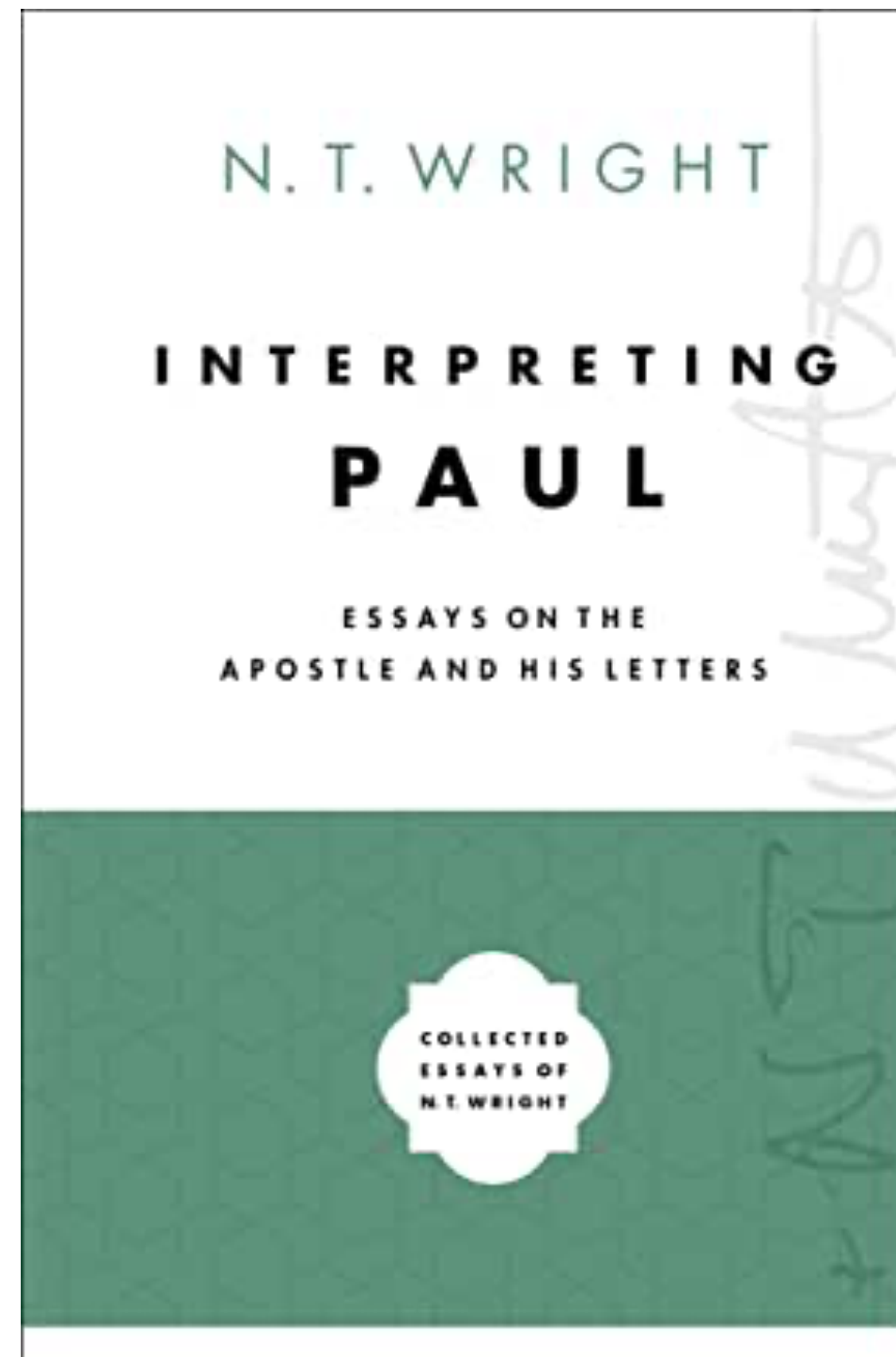


**2020**

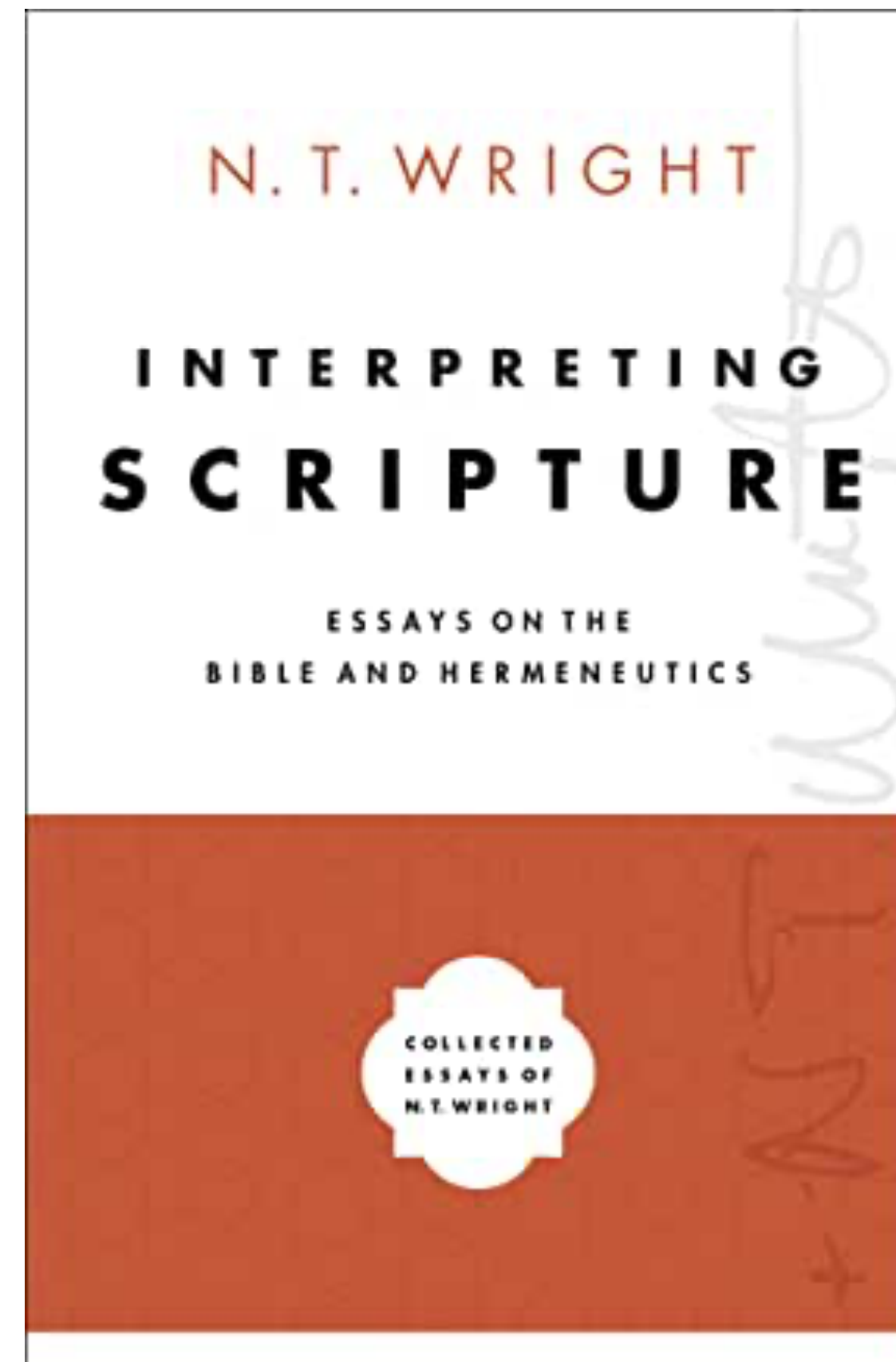


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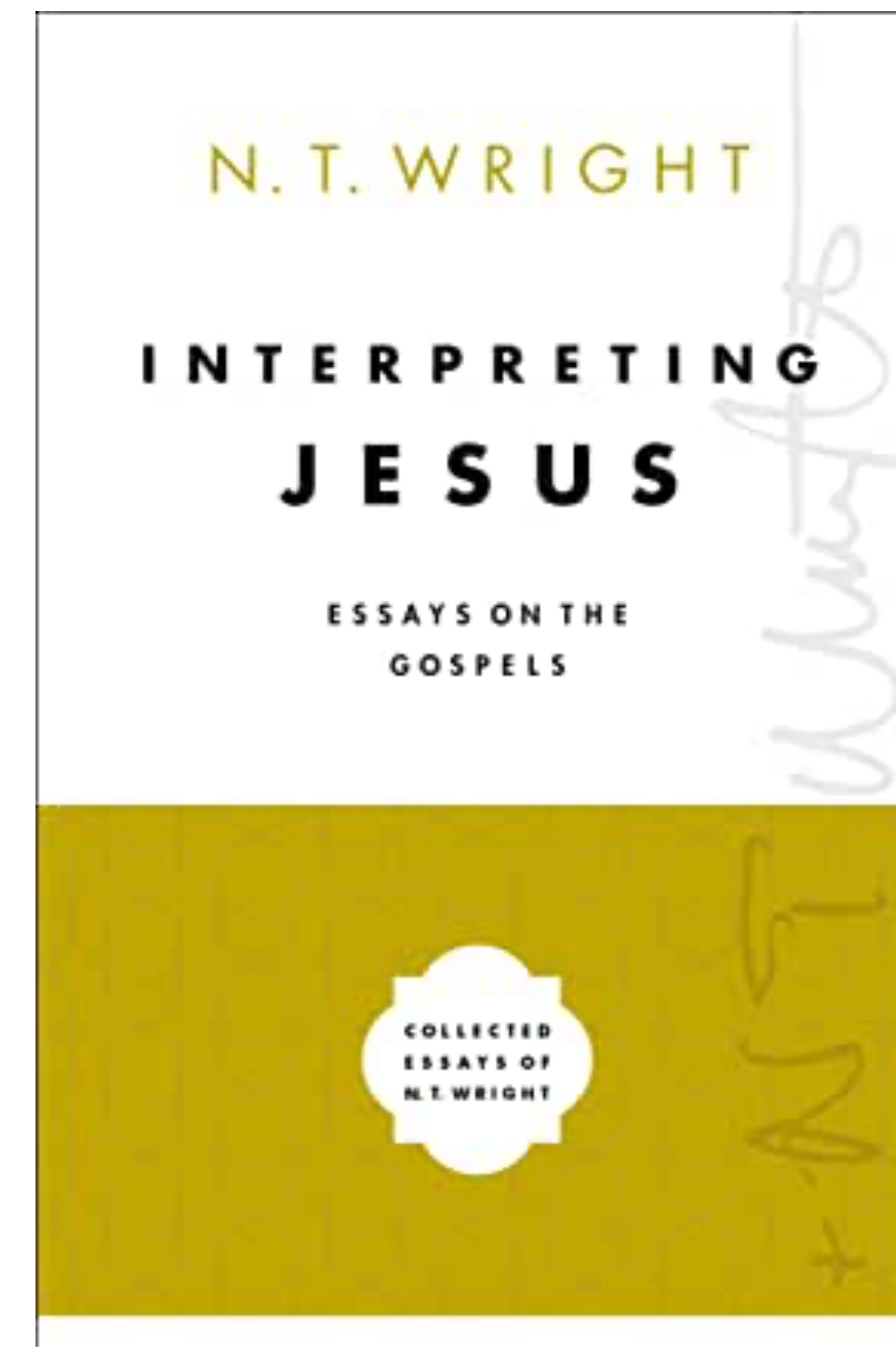
# New Perspective on Paul—Evangelical



2020



2020



2020

# New Perspective on Paul

Interpreting III: New Perspective on Paul, A Radical Hermeneutical Turn

Units:

Unit 1: A New Perspective in Hermeneutics

Unit 2: Interpreting Paul

Unit 3: Paul and Greco-Roman Research

Unit 4: Practicing Pauline Theology in Culture

Unit 5: Toward a Post-Perspective Old and New Testament Theology

# New Perspective on Paul

## Old Perspective on Paul

Sanders: “Paul was a coherent, but not systematic, thinker” (like systematic theologians since the Reformation).

Johnson: (What) “they have been taught has been abstracted from certain dialogues and arranged into a logical system that is nowhere to be found as such in the dialogues themselves.” (Plato)

Wright: “not just bits and pieces, miscellaneous topoi which just happen to turn up in these irrelevant ‘contingent’ contexts like oddly shaped pearls on an irrelevant string.”

## New Perspective on Paul

Sanders: “Paul as a theological thinker with a coherent viewpoint”

Johnson: “When they actually begin to read the dialogues in all their particularity and complexity, they begin to discover how much exciting and challenging thought has escaped the usual categories.” (Plato)

Wright: “The more time we spend in the careful reading of Paul and in the study of his worldview, his theology, and his aims and intentions, the more he emerges as a deeply coherent thinker. His main themes may well not fit the boxes constructed by later Christian dogmatics of whatever type. They generate their own categories....”

# New Perspective on Paul

## Old Perspective on Paul

Paul was a systematic theologian like Calvin, but contained unsystematized doctrine that could be systemized by future theologians. But his thought was not organized and fully developed nor fully logical; therefore, it must be made clearer and clearer by highly skilled (Western) systematic theologians.

## New Perspective on Paul

Paul was a coherent thinker who did theology in culture amongst his churches, from a framework of fully integrated historical narrative and dense cyclic organizing centers (theological core/topoi). It enables us to do similar theology in culture amongst our churches today, together they make up the essence of Christ's grand strategy.



# New Perspective on Paul

## Old Perspective on Paul

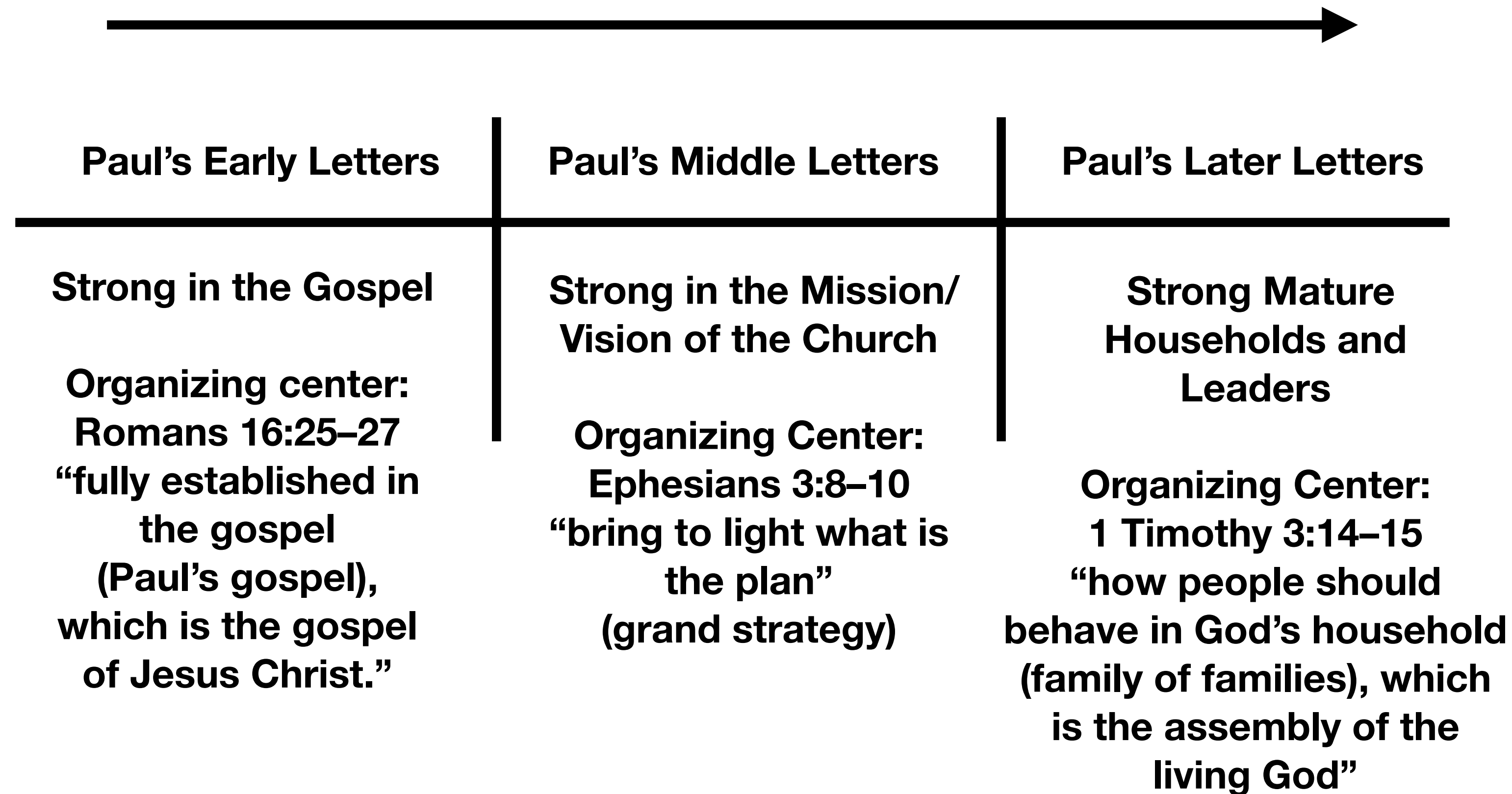
Paul's letters contain miscellaneous, often unrelated topics, that would be useful for future believers, especially in dealing with sin, salvation, and living the Christian life. These topics are a significant part of today's ever growing systematic theologies.

## New Perspective on Paul

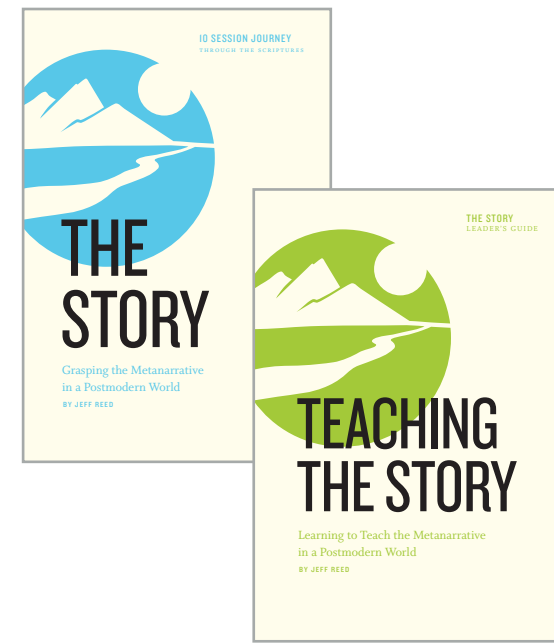
Paul's letters form a coherent, interlocking shape, foundational for churches in any generation to fully understand Christ's grand strategy of the Church being central to His unfolding kingdom and to live in full alignment of that grand strategy.

# Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

## The Process of Building Strong Churches



# New Perspective on Paul



**Kerygma**  
**Early Acts**  
**Apostles' Teaching**  
**6 months**  
**Paul: 3 years "night and day"**



**Didache**  
**Body of Acts**  
**Theology of Paul**  
**1½ years**



**Full Kerygma**  
**After Acts**  
**Apostles' Gospels**  
**1 year**





# Paul's Middle Letters

Fully Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

In the middle letters, we get a full revelation of Christ's grand strategy after He inaugurated the Kingdom—that is the Church.

We will also look at the letters from the viewpoint of Paul building his global apostolic network, as we began to do in his early letters.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

These middle 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

These letters give us the full revelation of the Church. But think of the battles that were fought before this.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

The battle for the gospel went from Autumn A.D. 47, until the writing of Romans in the middle of November 56—ten years

Paul's first confrontation with Peter—Autumn 47 (Gal. 2:1–10)

Peter in Antioch—Autumn 49 (Gal. 2:11–16)

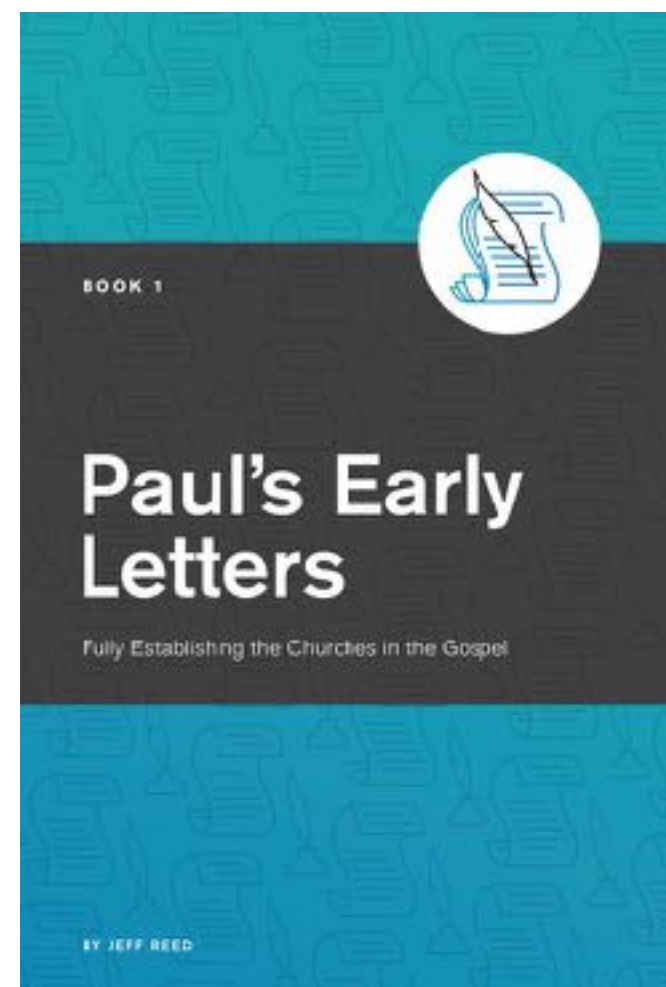
Jerusalem Council—Autumn 49

Then the early letters of Paul—Autumn 49 to Romans in 56

It took Paul a decade to win that argument, which he completed with his Romans manifesto on the gospel.

Now on to his rather compact, full unveiling of the Church.

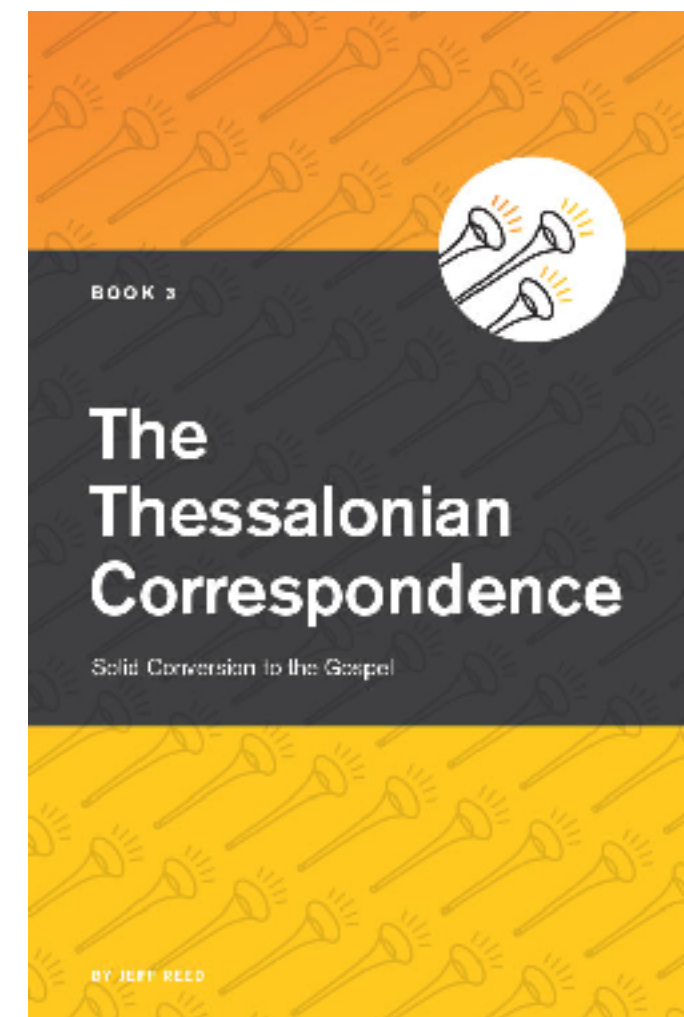
# Paul's Early Letters



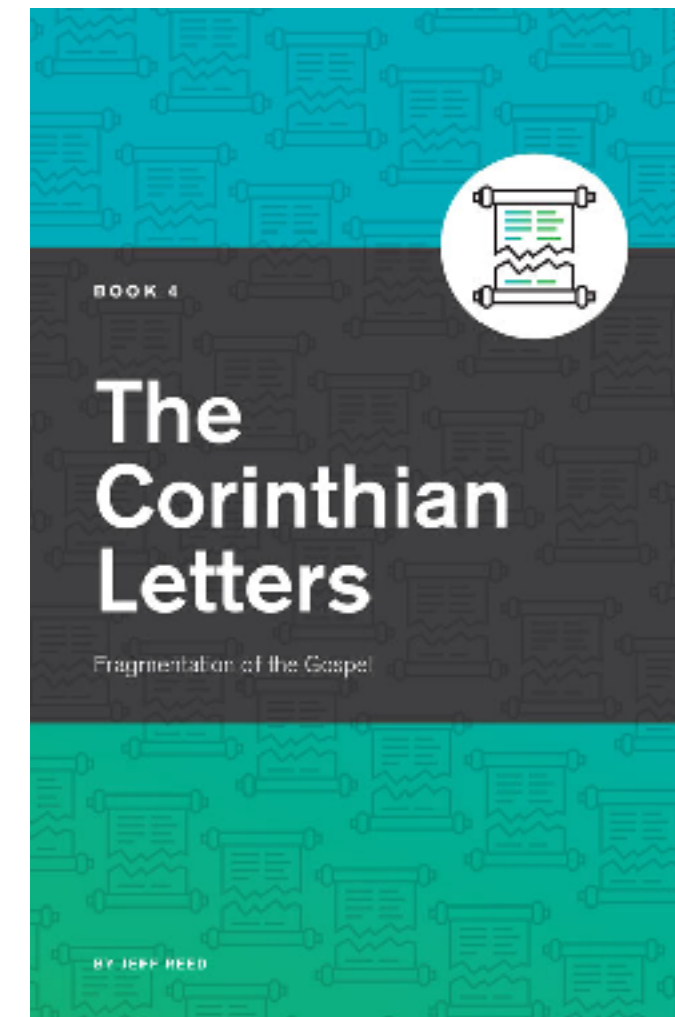
A.D. 49–56



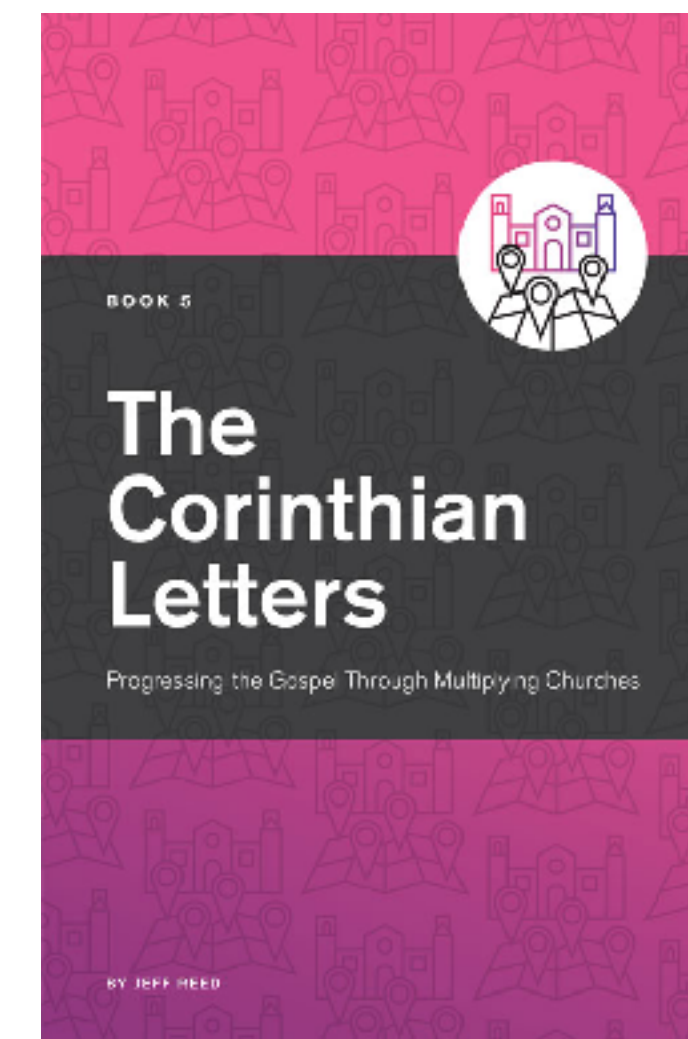
Autumn 49



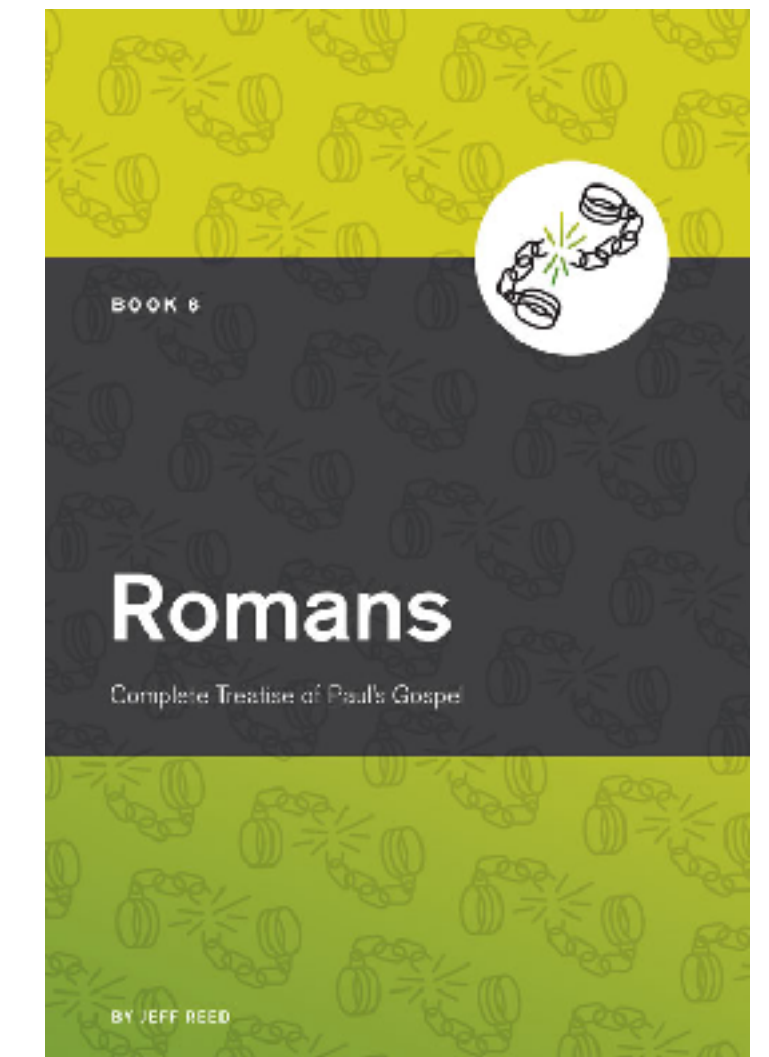
Winter/Summer 51



Sept. 53



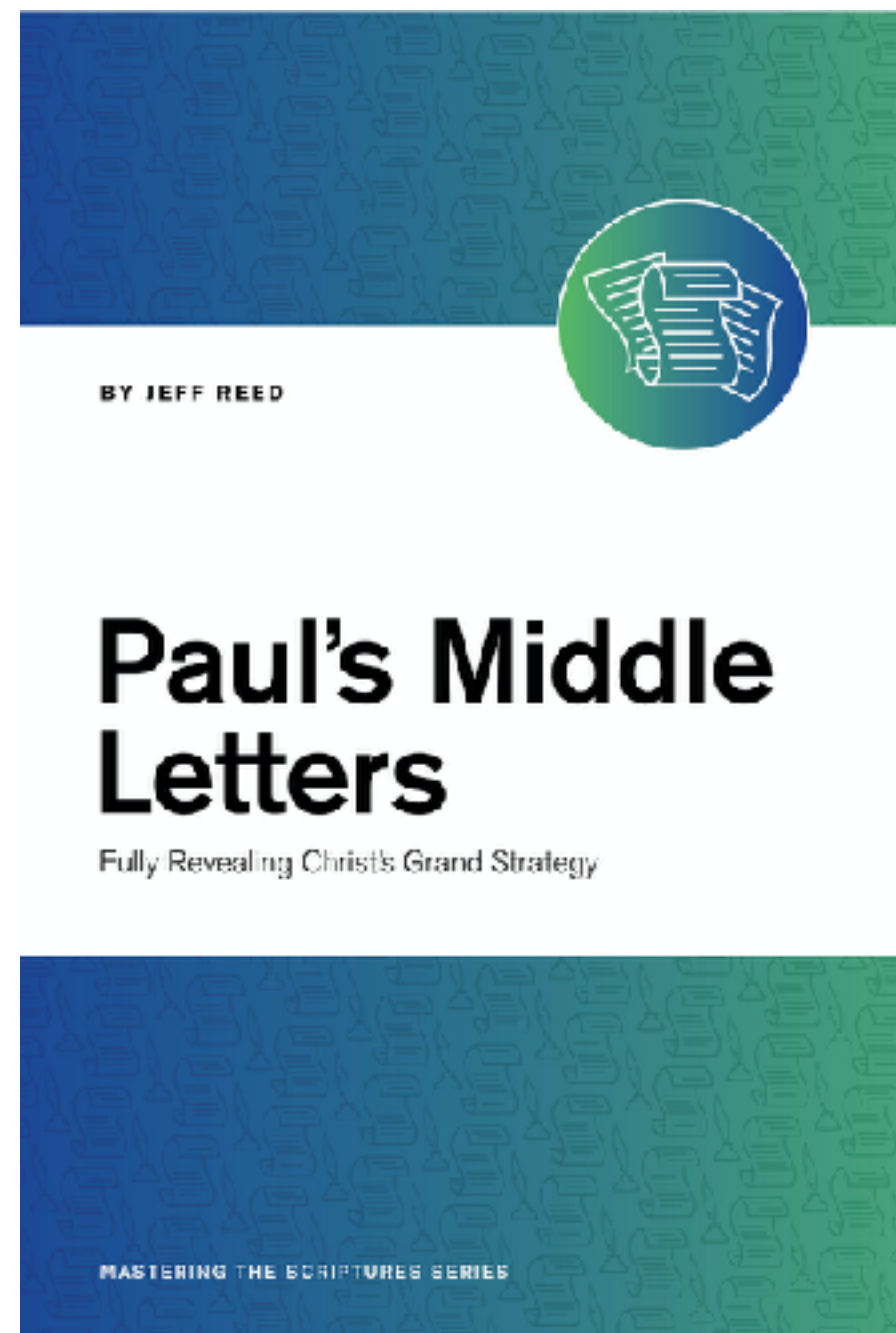
June 56



Nov. 56



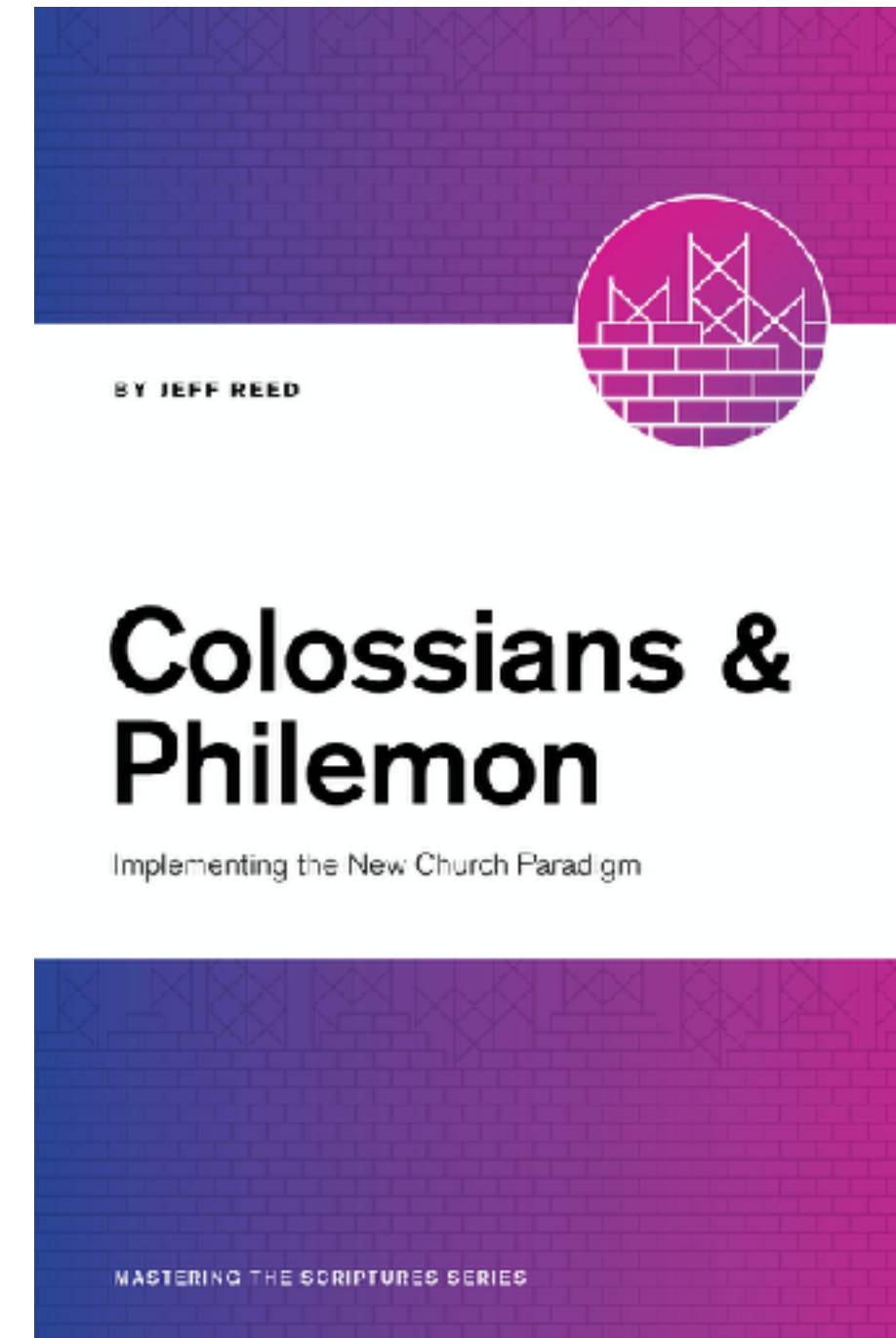
# Paul's Middle Letters



Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62

# 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
<b>Strong in the Gospel</b>  Organizing center: Romans 16:25–27 “fully established in the gospel (Paul's gospel), which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.”	<b>Strong in the Mission/ Vision of the Church</b>  Organizing Center: Ephesians 3:8–10 “bring to light what is the plan” (grand strategy)	<b>Strong Mature Households and Leaders</b>  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”

# Introduction to 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 A.D. 60

Colossians and Philemon—Autumn 61

Philippians—early Spring 62

In these letters, we are looking into the heart of Paul's network:

Ephesians—hub churches

Colossians and Philemon—cluster churches

Philippians—node churches

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

In these 2 compact years and 4 small letters we get a full revelation of Christ's Church, which had never before been fully revealed.

The organizing center of these letters:

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup> 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 NRSV

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul lays out his job description very clearly.

Paul's 2-fold job description:

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

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

## **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.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

## 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.

We looked briefly at 4 key passages in Ephesians:

2:19–21; 3:7–10; 4:1–6; 4:11–16

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

From these passages we began to build the picture of the Church.

- It is a large household—one big global family.
- It has one foundation—the Apostles and prophets—with Christ as the cornerstone.
- The whole structure is built by Christ—His tools are the Apostles and prophets.



# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul lays out his job description very clearly.

Paul's 2-fold job description:

1. Preach the gospel to the Gentiles (a 10-year battle for the gospel).
2. 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.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

We saw more about that foundation.

- There is just one foundation being laid—one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God—weaving it all together in His great plan for fully realizing His kingdom with Christ on the throne.
- The one hope and one faith are essentially overlapping concepts referring to *the kerygma*—the gospel story, the core of our hope; and the faith is the didache, the teaching, the deposit, the sound doctrine.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

In the final passage, we saw how the Church is built and what it does.

- It is built by those gifted leaders—apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers. They equip the saints in the churches to do the work of the ministry—service.
- The saints do the work of the ministry (not hired ministers); and when they are equipped and doing the ministry, the church will mature; and when the church matures fully in Christ, the watching world will see Christ, and it will stun rulers in the heavenly places.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

## 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 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 and to restructure 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.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

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

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

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

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

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

Here Paul lays out the core first principles of Christ.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

So what was Paul saying to the Colossians?

1. You are now part of Christ's kingdom and part of His body, the church, of which He is the head.
2. You need to become fully established in His grand strategy—His philosophy, His teaching—and you need to fully embrace His “first principles,” not the “first principles” of the world from which you came.
3. You are now part of my commission and my network for carrying this out in your generation.
4. You are a key cluster in this network and need to become a strong, unified network cluster—Colossae, Laodicea, and Hieropolis.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

## Colossians – Cluster Churches

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# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

What does this show us about “doing theology in culture” based on “the first principles”?

We can see several things here.

1. Paul's household texts on masters and slaves is similar in Colossians but not the same, showing he is truly working with principles.
2. His focus is on the slaves, not the masters, because, evidently, he is working with a principle of authority from many angles—cultural reality, attitude toward authority, perspective on unjust treatment by authority, and God's perspective in light of eternity.
3. His extensive focus on slaves again in Colossians sets the stage for the other letter he is sending with it—Philemon.
4. In Colossians, he just gives a one line review of husbands and wives and parents and children, which shows he is focused on the Philemon situation.
5. In his letter to Philemon, he is giving us a clear illustration of “doing theology in culture” by using the principles to address the real live situation between Onesimus and Philemon.



# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Now we turn to Philippians—the last of Paul's middle letters

Why was it included in the New Testament?

What value does it have for us today?

In Philippians, what do we learn about churches participating in the progress of the gospel? about our focus and sacrifice for that progress globally?

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

## 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 in his letter to the Ephesians of the centrality of the Church as the heart of Christ's grand strategy for bringing in the kingdom, Philippians illustrates the importance of churches participating with one mind in the progress of the gospel through His grand strategy—the Church.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Issue: Significance of Philippians

Questions:

1. This letter is not theological in the same sense as Ephesians and Colossians. Why was it included in the collection?
2. How does it contribute to the vision of the centrality of the Church as Christ's grand strategy, as unveiled through Paul in Ephesians and Colossians?
3. What problems were emerging in the Philippian churches that caused Paul to write this letter?
4. In what sense is the church at Philippi a prototype for all churches participating in the progress of the gospel?

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup> to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup> having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:3–11

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

This section sets the focus of the whole letter.

1. He praises them for participating with him in the gospel from the very beginning, and he wants them to continue, gain even greater insight into God's purposes, and fully complete their work, enjoying the full rewards of the harvest.
2. They shared in God's grace to Paul, gifting him to take the gospel to the Gentiles—referring to the defense and confirmation of the gospel.
3. He prays they may “gain more knowledge and full insight”— I'm sure alluding to his fuller revelation in the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians.

How exactly did they participate?

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

What did it look like for the Philippian churches to participate with Paul and his team in the progress of the gospel?

First, they sent money to him—consistently.

<sup>15</sup> You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup> For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.

Philippians 4:15–17

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

What did it look like for the Philippian churches to participate with Paul and his team in the progress of the gospel?

Second, Euodia and Syntyche (and several others) from the Philippian churches were co-workers on his apostolic team.

<sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Philippians 4:2–3

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

What did it look like for the Philippian churches to participate with Paul and his team in the progress of the gospel?

Third, they sent Epaphroditus to serve as Paul's personal assistant while he was in prison. He was so committed he almost died in that service effort.

<sup>25</sup> Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup> He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. <sup>28</sup> I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, <sup>30</sup> because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

Philippians 2:25–30



# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Very specifically, he wanted them to mature even more, to finish the work God began in them, and to fully enjoy the harvest and all its rewards—in this life and the life to come.

<sup>27</sup> Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.

Philippians 1:27

To do this, they needed to set aside their own rights and fully “empty themselves” toward this purpose—chapter 2 examples:

Jesus did it.

Paul did it.

Timothy did it.

Epaphroditus did it.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Remember the six summary sections in Acts: 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31

<sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.  
Acts 16:5

These six statements are all talking about the progress of the gospel.

- The churches were established in the faith and continued to multiply.
- The Word progressed.
- The disciples increased daily.

That is the harvest, and the Philippine churches were participating in it fully.

And the same goes for us.

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

One mindedness was essential for them to continue to be a “strategic partner church”

<sup>27</sup> Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel .... 1:27 NRSV

2:1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ....  
2:1-5 NRSV

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

One mindedness was essential for them to continue to be a “strategic partner church.”

<sup>15</sup> Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold fast to what we have attained (*standard*). <sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example (*pattern*) you have in us. 3:15–17 NRSV

<sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4:2–3 NRSV

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul's "coherent" concept of "one mindedness"

There are 8 key words in multiple phrases.

They are spread throughout his early and middle letters.

It would take a week to study all the aspects of this "coherent idea."

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul's "coherent" concept of "one mindedness"

1. One mindedness is critical to remaining a strategic partner church and to reaching the goal of fully attaining to Christ and completing our work.
2. The mature are to work hard at being of one mind, and others maturing in it will fully understand as they seek to follow Christ, as revealed through Paul.
3. One mindedness is built around the example and patterns revealed and modeled through Paul.
4. One mindedness is difficult to maintain, as seen in Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.
5. Leaders are particularly prone to putting their own interests first, as seen both in Paul's comment about Timothy and in Euodia and Syntyche; leaders must deal with those damaging that one mindedness.
6. To reach the full harvest, God intends for our churches to require love with an ever-growing "real knowledge and all discernment."

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul's concept of finishing

- the prize—fulfilling one's stewardship
- attaining to the resurrection of Christ
- to live is to more fully complete one's stewardship
- to live is to more fully understand
- to die is full transformation

Keith

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Philippians—the last of Paul's middle letters

Why was it included in the New Testament?

What value does it have for us today?

In Philippians, what do we learn about churches participating in the progress of the gospel? about our focus and sacrifice for that progress globally?



# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Philippians is the last of the 4 letters

Ephesians—Christ's whole plan: the centrality of the church, the household of God

Colossians—the plan put into action in a cluster of churches

Philemon—doing real theology with the household plan

Philippians—the plan in a key strategic partner church

# Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

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Questions:

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