

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Ideas:

- Paul's concept of experiencing Christ's power in the Middle Letters
- Remember, Paul is an integrated thinker; so his concept of fully experiencing Christ's power is one integrated concept, even though it is unfolding throughout these letters.
- Failure to grasp Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles has to do with the loss of power and even the relevance of our faith and our churches in Paul's network.

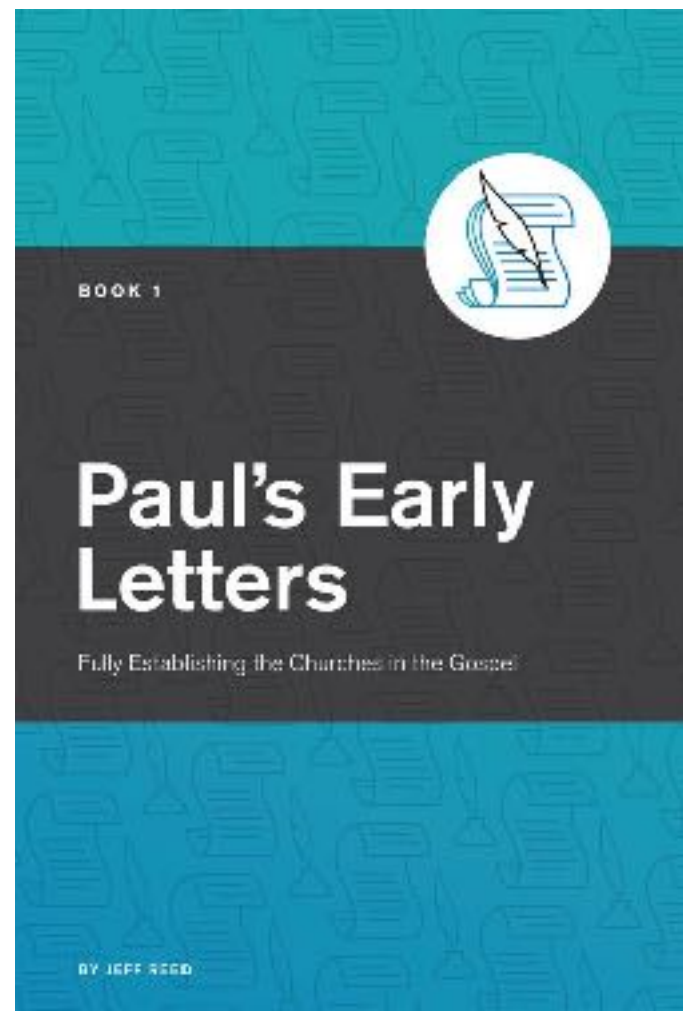
Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Issue: Participating in the Power of the Resurrection

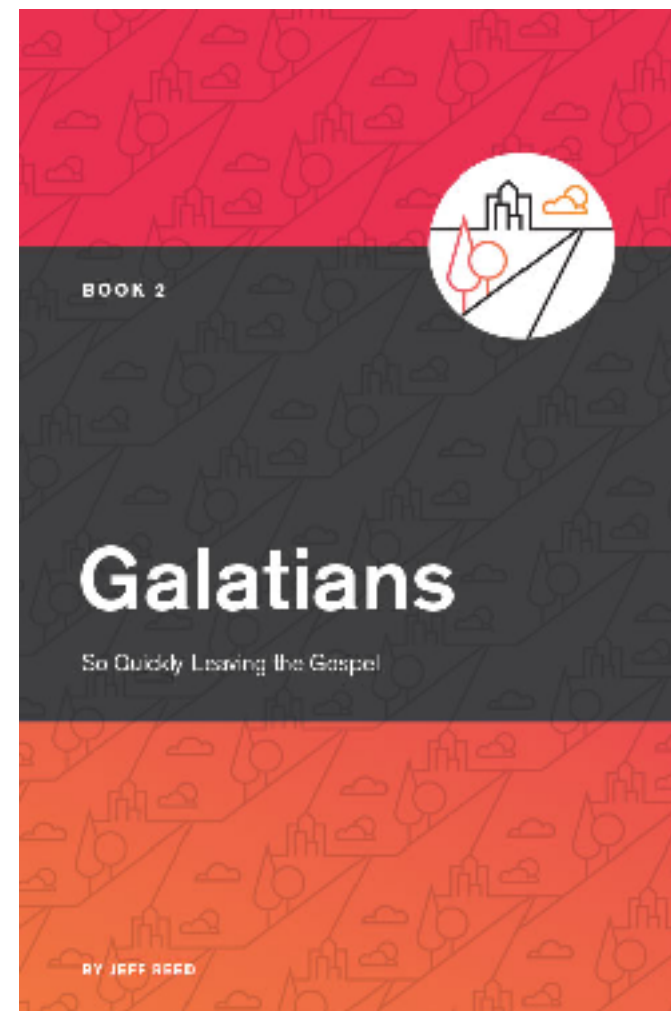
Questions:

1. What does Paul mean by knowing “the power of his resurrection” and “attain to the resurrection from the dead”? How does this idea build on his understanding of fully experiencing Christ’s power in his prayers in Ephesians and Colossians?
2. How does Paul relate attaining to the power of the resurrection to the Philippians fully participating with him in the progress of the gospel?
3. How does a one-minded focus on Christ and His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles relate to knowing the power of His resurrection?
4. What does following Christ’s first principles (in Paul’s teaching) have to do with fully experiencing Christ’s full power in their lives and churches?

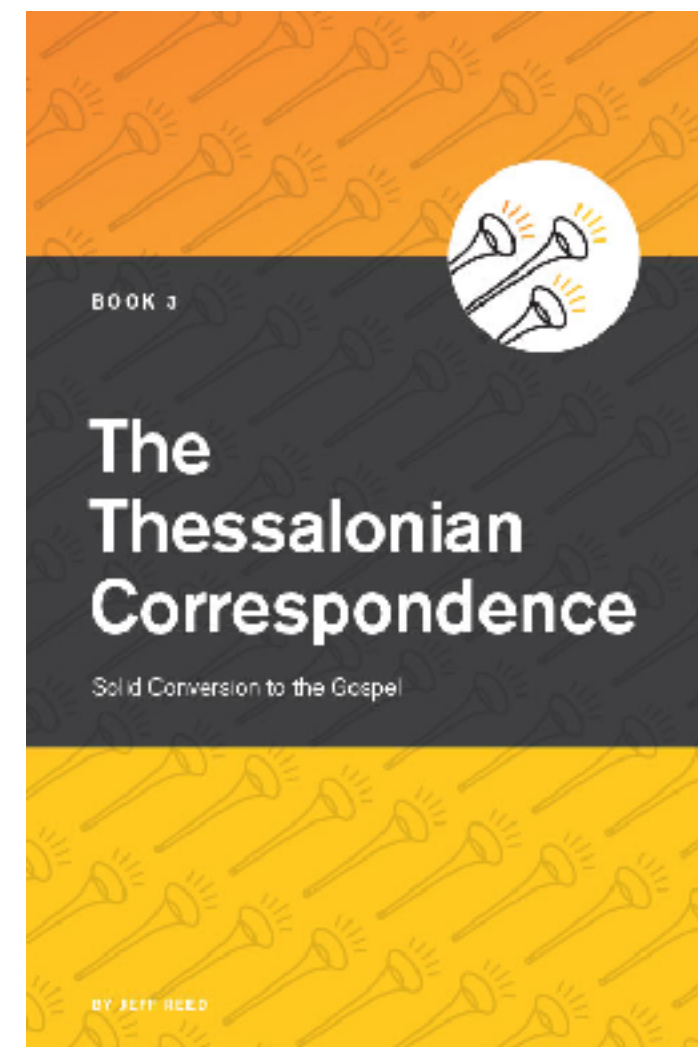
Paul's Early Letters



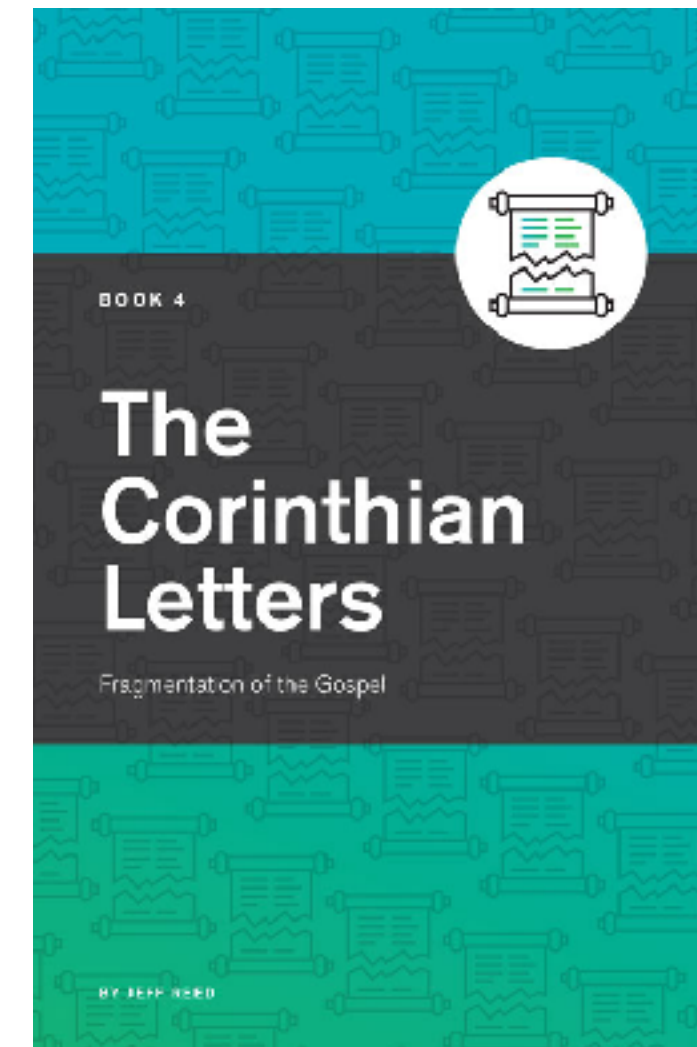
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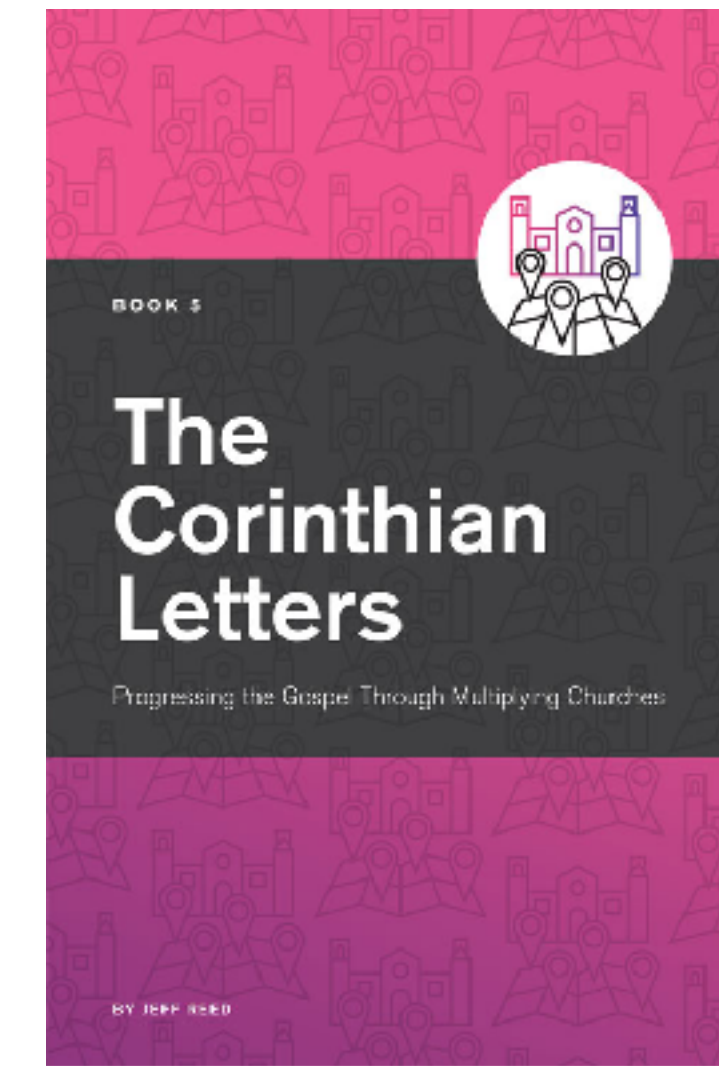
Autumn 49



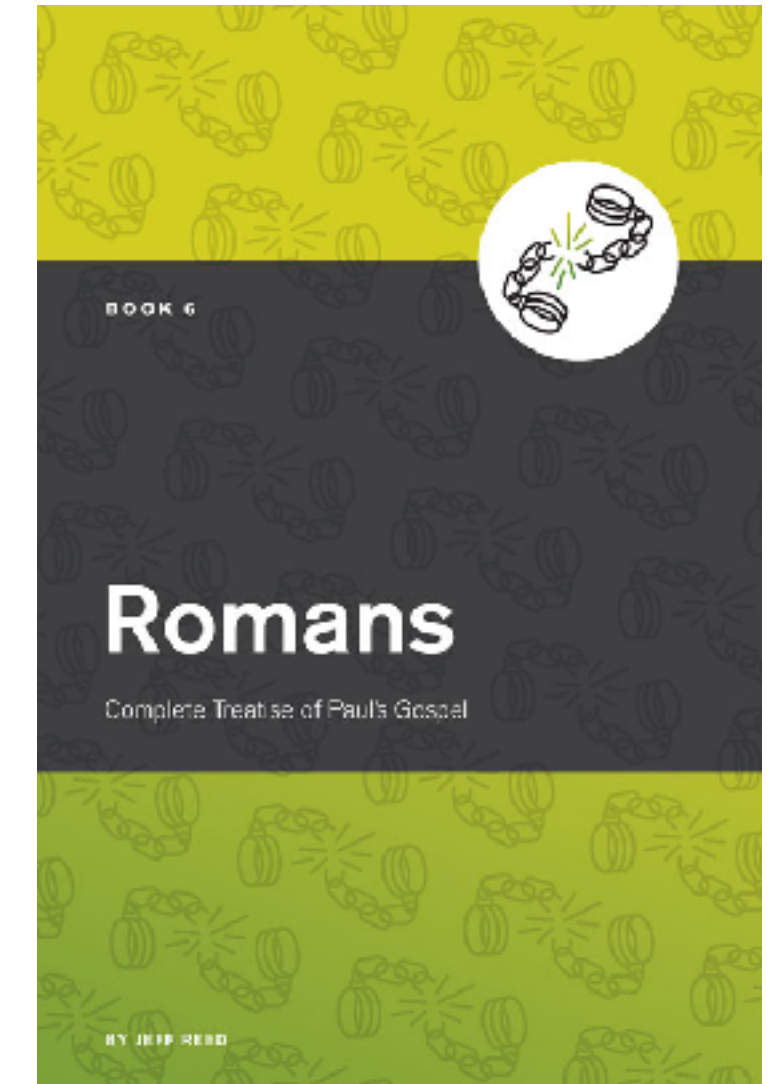
Winter/Sum. 51



Sept. 53



June 56



Nov. 56



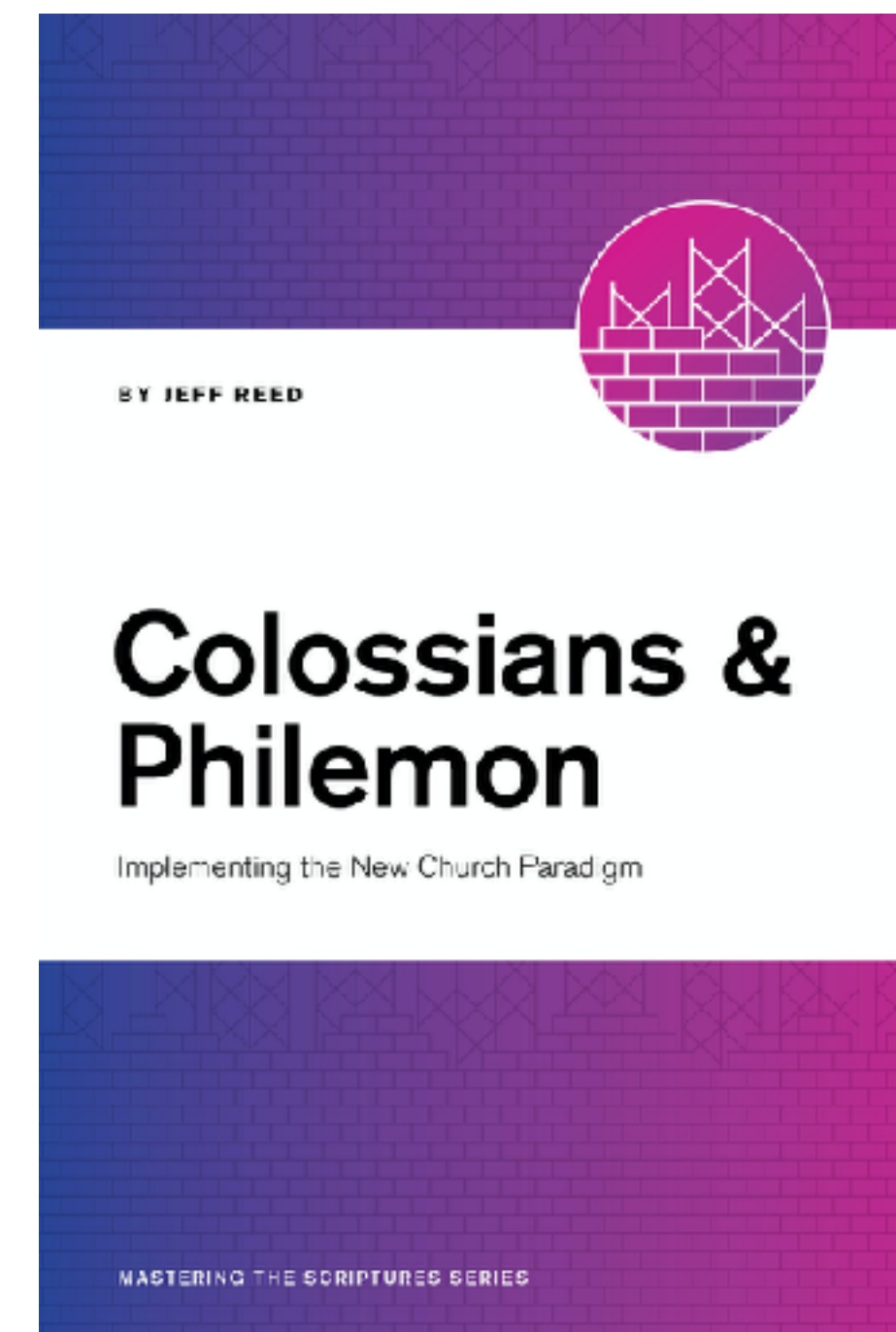
Paul's Middle Letters



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 each stands 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

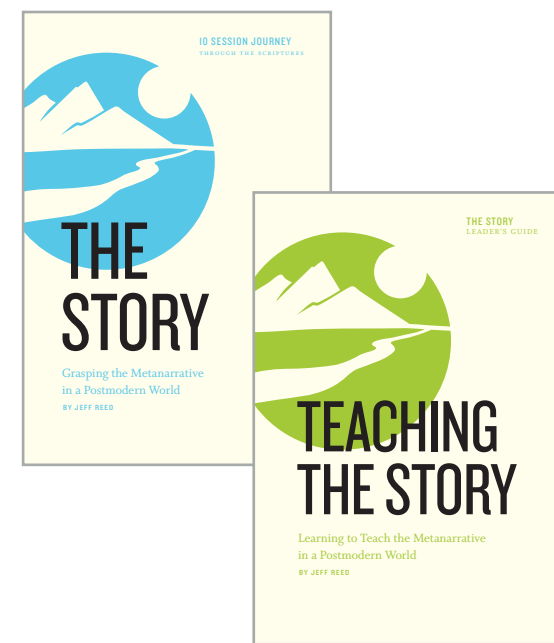
Old Perspective on Paul

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.

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

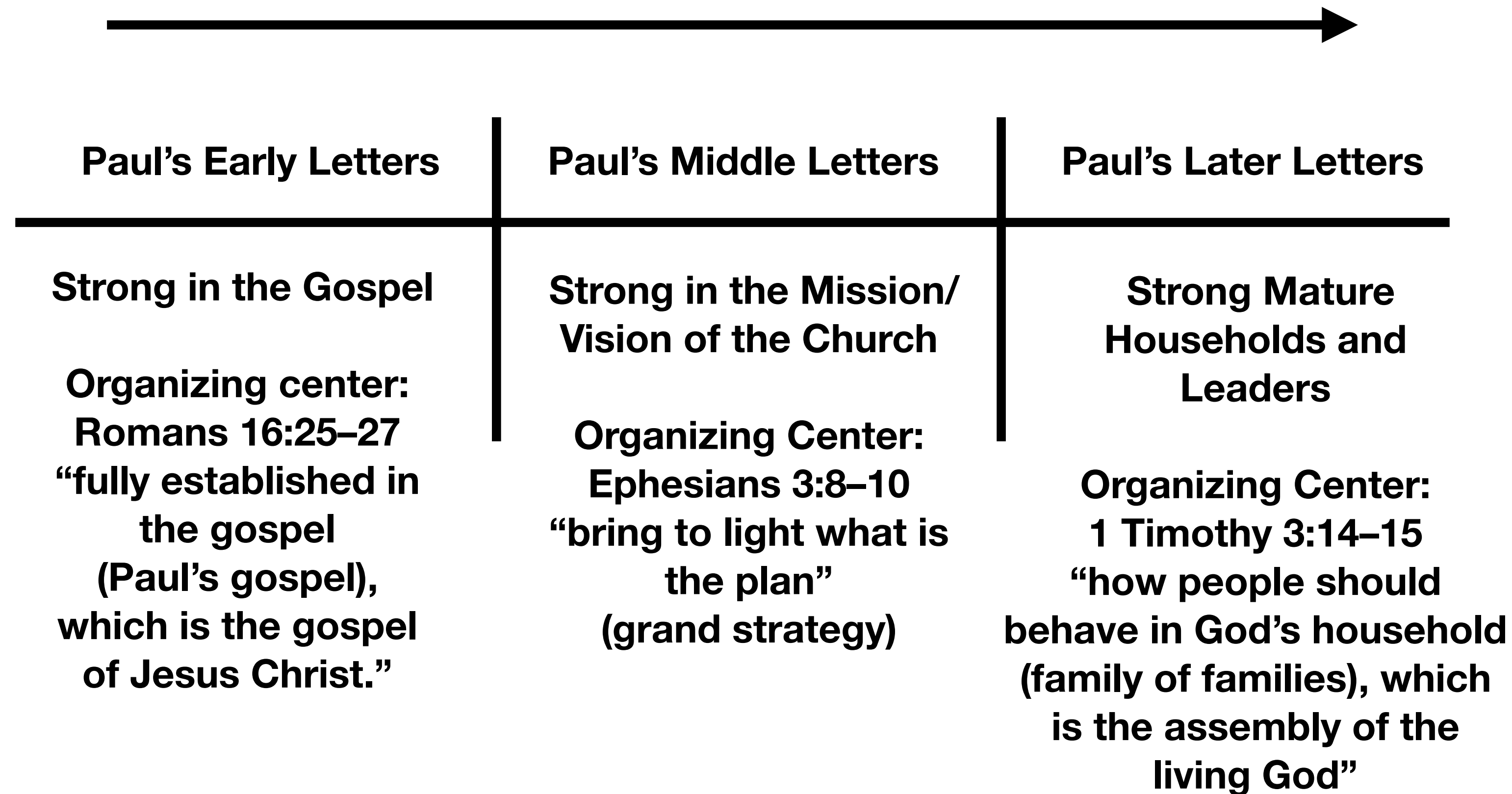


Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year



Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

The Process of Building Strong Churches



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

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

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.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

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.

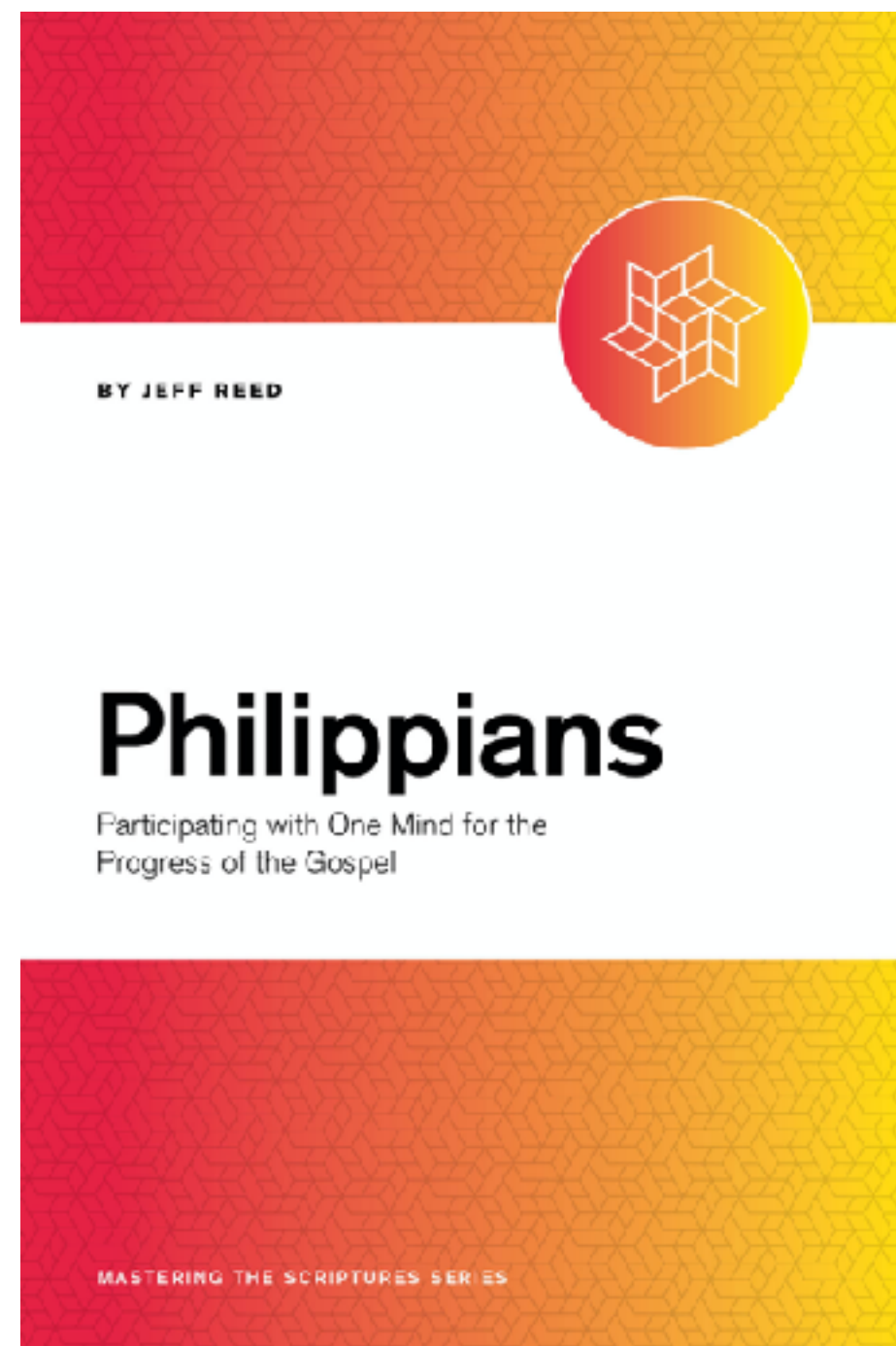
All 4 letters use similar terminology and sort of work as one growing theology of Christ's vision and mission for His churches.



Paul's Middle Letters

Fully Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians



Session 1: Fully Participating with Paul in the Progress of the Gospel

Session 2: Participating with a One-Minded Focus

Session 3: Participating in the Power of the Resurrection

Session 4: Participating with Our Financial Resources

Session 5: Participating with Paul's Complex Apostolic Network

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Let's go back to our outline. What does it mean for this strategic church to fully participate with Paul? As you will see as this letter unfolds, that participation was to be a huge focus of the Philippian churches.

Fully Participating with Paul in the Progress of the Gospel 1:1–26

In these first verses, Paul lays the foundation for challenging them to more fully participate with him in the progress of the gospel. After praising them for their unique, focused participation with him, he reflects on his imprisonment as being key to that progress as he defends and proclaims the gospel.

He is very frank about his role and the importance of his imprisonment.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating with a One-Minded Focus 1:27–2:30a

In this section of the letter, Paul challenges them to strive together with a focused, one minded, total commitment, participating with him in the progress of the gospel. He gives four examples of a focused, self-sacrificing, total commitment: Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Participating in the Power of the Resurrection 2:30b–4:9

Then Paul turns to that commitment being a life focus or goal, as citizens of heaven, to “attain to the full power of the resurrection.” He builds on the power he wants for the Ephesian church, while acknowledging that he himself has not fully attained it, a focus he models for them by everything in his life.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating with Our Financial Resources 4:10–20

He then turns to an aspect of their financial gifts to him, showing how his total commitment shapes how he thinks about his own resources and providing a framework for their continued total commitment of their resources as well, which he has commented on throughout the letter up to this point.

Participating with Paul's Complex Apostolic Network 4:21–23

In this final section, though only a short 3 verses, he ties the Philippians into the network he has unfolded in the first 3 letters. And assuming that teaching about the network, in this letter, he expands it enormously by completely focusing on the network participating with him in the progress of the gospel, tying it all together.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philippians

As we turn to this section, we need to realize that Paul is concerned that the Philippians develop the full power of Christ as they participate with him in the progress of the gospel.

It is the heart of this section: Paul's concept of the power of Christ.

Let's review his concept of power that has been unfolding in his Middle Letters.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

Ephesians 1:17–21 NRSV

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14–19 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Paul develops his concept of the power of Christ in these 2 prayers, with the full revelation of his plan in between them. Notice how he ties the power of Christ's resurrection with Him sitting on the throne and unfolding His plan.

1. God put His power to work in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand.
2. He has made this power available to us who believe, according to that power He put to work in Christ.
3. Christ's power is embedded in His church and will be unleashed in us as we increasingly comprehend Christ, His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:11–12 NRSV

Notice, Paul tells us to put on the power of Christ because of the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8–10), which means putting on Christ: His grand strategy, His philosophy, and His first principles. (3rd and 4th attempt; "I got it")

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power.... ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Colossians 1:11, 28, 29

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.

Colossians 2:8–10 NRSV

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Here we see Paul building on his concept of the power of Christ in Ephesians.

1. He challenges them to “be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power,” in the context of a prayer similar to the two prayers in Ephesians.
2. Here, we see holding to Christ's philosophy and first principles is tied to “fulness in him” and the whole argument of all three prayers.
3. Thus, again, the concept of experiencing the power of Christ relates to comprehending and following Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles.

Now, in Philippians 3, we will revisit this power, related to a one-minded focus on Christ: His grand strategy and first principles of that philosophy.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating in the Power of the Resurrection 2:30b–4:9

Then he turns to that commitment being a life focus or goal, as citizens of heaven, to “attain to the full power of the resurrection.” He builds on the power he wants for the Ephesian church, while acknowledging he himself has not fully attained it, a focus he models for them by everything in his life.

First, we will focus on Paul's goal of fully experiencing that power. 2:30–3:11.

Second, we will look at what it means, in Paul's example again, to expand that focus, on fully attaining that power, to a lifetime goal. 3:11–4:1 (the focus of our lives)

Third, we will look at standing firm in the teaching and patterns of Christ's first principles as taught by Paul. 4:2–9 (the focus of our minds)

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

³ Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.

² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Philippians 2:30b–3:1–6 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:7–11 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

What exactly is Paul saying when he says he wants to know Christ and “the power of his resurrection” and to attain to the resurrection from the dead”? There are two key words here.

know—come to know, to learn (BGD), to come to know, to know by reflection (LSJ)

attain—to come to, to arrive at a point (LSJ), to arrive at a particular state (LN)

The issue of this whole section is confidence in the flesh—the entire Jewish system that he was part of before and all of his accomplishments—as opposed to dropping all of it for knowing Christ and the power God put to work in Christ. Again, we’re looking at the philosophy and first principles of the world versus the philosophy and first principles of Christ.

God set His power to work in Christ: His grand strategy, His philosophy, and His first principles of that philosophy.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

What is Paul's concept of "experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection" or "to attain to the resurrection from the dead"?

1. This refers to the power God put to work in Christ and His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles, which needs to be fully comprehended.
2. This has to completely replace confidence in ourselves that is outside of the sphere of Christ, including all of our old ways of thinking about our own righteousness or any of our man-made systems.
3. He is also referring to a state of life and thinking in which, when attained, we fully comprehend and live by Christ, thus experiencing His full power in our lives, in our churches, and in our full participation in the progress of the gospel.
4. Paul is not willing to say he has fully arrived there, but he is seeking that state by continually coming to it in order to fully comprehend it.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Philippians 3:12–16 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Philippians 3:17–4:1 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Paul continues his reasoning in Philippians 1:12–4:1. He makes the following points concerning fully reaching this state of making Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and the principles of His philosophy his own, thus entering a state in which God's power is fully at work in him.

Twice he used the phrase “to make it my own,” verses 12 and 13. It literally means seize for oneself, to take to oneself, to make it your own (BGD).

Even Paul struggles to fully comprehend what was unfolding through and by him.

Yet Paul is confident that he has grasped Christ: His grand strategy, philosophy, and principles. So he expresses that everyone should imitate him, be of one mind with him; and if anyone cannot grasp it all, then stay of one mind and God will reveal it to you.

The final comment on this power is, as citizens of heaven, He will transform our bodies into His glory by that same power.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Paul's reflects now on his own state of fully knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, which again means his reflection on how well he has made Christ his own: fully comprehending His grand strategy, His philosophy and His first principles.

1. Paul is aware that he has not completely made Christ his own, but he is going to continue that focus to the end of his life, forgetting any failures or struggles of the past.
2. He is aware God has chosen him to reveal Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles, and he is so confident of the state of his grasp of Christ, that he tells them to imitate him.
3. He wants those who are mature to be one minded with him; and those who are on their way, to remain one minded and what they don't understand, God will help them make it more and more their own.
4. The more the Philippians make Christ their own, the more powerful their participation will be with Paul in the progress of the gospel.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ 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 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you

Philippians 4:2–9 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

In this last section which he began in 3:1, Paul simply reinforces what he has been arguing the entire letter. At a very practical level, to fully participate with Paul in the progress of the gospel, they must do the following:

1. Deal with any conflicts between co-workers that will affect their one-minded participation with him and, by implications of what he has just argued, affect the power of Christ in their midst.
2. Keep their minds focused on the first principles, not on negative thoughts, fears, or small personal interests, being careful to guard their mind in Christ.
3. And, keep doing what they “learned and received and heard and saw” in Paul, implying that Paul was responsible for delivering the mind of Christ to them: the grand strategy, philosophy, first principles and the accompanying one-minded focus.
4. All this was key to increasingly experiencing the power of Christ in their lives and churches.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Paul's concept of "experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection"

1. God put His power to work in Christ, beginning with the resurrection and continuing in Christ's grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles. As we increasingly comprehend the mind of Christ, we will experience that power.
2. Paul has not fully reached all that Christ intends for him; evidently, he has even more "to make his own." But in the process, Paul forgets what is behind him (struggles, lapses, etc.) and completely focuses on the goal of fully knowing Christ and His power.
3. Paul is aware that Christ is using him to reveal all of Christ — His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles — to the churches, so he demands that they follow him as he unfolds the entire mind of Christ within the overall plan of God.
4. He challenges his churches to work hard to make Christ and His power their own. And those who are not yet mature in these realities, need to stay the course and keep making them their own, and God will reveal more and more to them.
5. The Philippian churches need to continue following Paul and his teaching to fully know Christ and His power as they participate with Paul in the progress of the gospel.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Experiencing Paul's concept of "experiencing the power of Christ" in our churches today.

1. God put His power to work in us, through Christ, when we trusted in Christ and became part of His family. And now that power is available to us in our lives, families, and churches.
2. That power will be unleashed in us as we seek to know Christ—His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles—and as we seek to "make it our own," by seeking to fully comprehend and fully participate in His unfolding plan.
3. We will never arrive at a state of fully experiencing that power (the power of the resurrection and the future transformation of our bodies as citizens of heaven); but we need to make attaining to that state a lifelong focus.
4. As we participate in Christ's plan—participating with apostolic leaders, networks of churches, and their leaders—we need to work hard at living according to the first principles of the faith and not get distracted by fears, small conflicts, or anything that can distract from a focused one-mind participation in Christ's grand strategy.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Issue: Participating in the Power of the Resurrection Today

Questions:

1. What is involved in us fully experiencing the power of Christ in our lives and churches?
2. How does fully experiencing the power of Christ relate to our participation in the progress of the gospel today? How does it relate to our lives and to our churches?
3. How does a one-minded focus on Christ and His grand strategy, philosophy, and first principles relate to fully experiencing Christ's power in our lives and churches?
4. What does following Christ's first principles have to do with fully experiencing Christ's full power in our lives and churches?