

The Corinthian Letters

Fragmentation of the Gospel



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

I am increasingly becoming aware of how critical the two Corinthian letters are and what a vital part they are in establishing churches in the gospel.

And I am increasingly aware of how little they are used, in comparison to Galatians and Romans, in fully understanding the gospel. Little attention is paid to them in the massive writings on “the new perspective on Paul.”

This morning, I am going to begin to set the context of the Corinthian letters in both Paul’s early letters and in his corpus as a whole.

Galatians and Romans play the largest role in fully understanding the gospel; the Corinthian letters’ role is in fully building the gospel into the community life of churches and networks of churches.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

This has become much clearer to me over the last four years.

First, in our 2021 global and regional Executive Education Zoom meetings, I've seen the reaction from almost all our networks to “the meal” and “the symposium” (*the gathering*) being normative for all churches.

Second, in the open letter to churches in China to avoid “Jeff’s leadership system,” it is clear to me now that this is actually an issue of these churches not being established in the gospel.

You see, *the gathering* is not primarily an issue of the didache, but of the kerygma.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

This is how I began this study of the Corinthian letters in 2017:

“Huge issues here!

Not understanding the Corinthian letters is why we have the fragmentation of denominationalism.

Luther recovered the gospel, but he failed to build networks of churches on it. As a result, all kinds of secondary traditions were built on it leading to denominationalism.

Even N. T. Wright, while also recovering the gospel, has failed to build on it; instead, he continues to live in his secondary tradition. He breaks out of it in some of his quotes, but he still lives in the Anglican system.”

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

I was saying Luther recovered the gospel, but not the Church; but in reality, he only discovered part of the gospel, primarily Galatians and Romans.

Think of the Western church in the wake of the Reformation, especially the high church, like the Anglican Church (the church of England—N. T. Wright) and Reformed churches.

In essence, they merely modified the Catholic mass with its communion, with a modified mass church service led by clergy, and communion basically remained the same. And all denominations followed.

This has huge implications. It causes me to conclude that the Reformation actually only recovered part of the gospel. In all the fervor and dogmatism of Reformed theologians as the great and last defenders of the gospel, today, *the gathering* is replaced with a modified mass service and networks of churches are replaced with institutional denominations.

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In addition, I see Paul doing theology like we saw him doing with *slavery* in Colossians and Philemon. In 1 Corinthians, he handled all the divisions; that theologizing is based on the gospel being rooted in his churches at Corinth.

Because of the 6-month work I did in producing *The Gathering* encyclical, I decided I need to reteach 1 Corinthians before it is published.

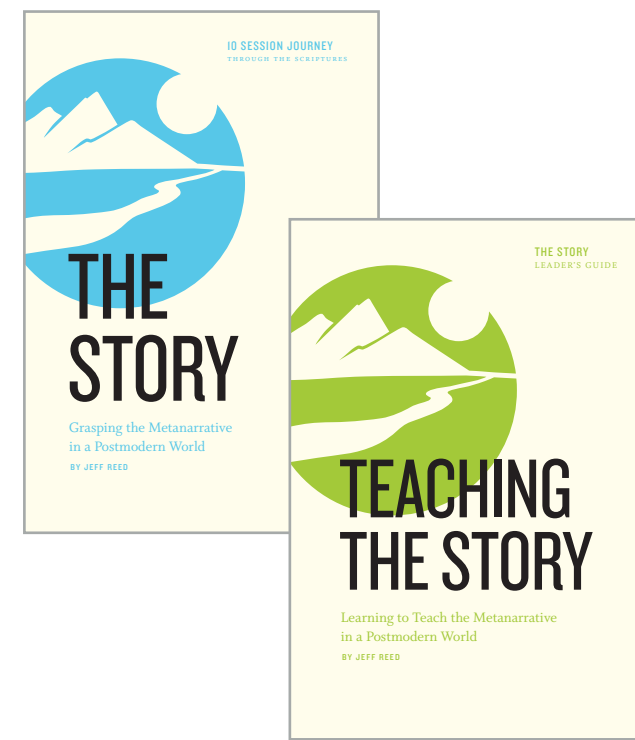
I am very happy with the other early letters. Galatians and Romans are good as they were taught; I studied the Thessalonian correspondence for three decades related to the Pastoral Care taxonomy, and it is good; and I will improve 2 Corinthians slightly by the fresh work I do reteaching 1 Corinthians, but otherwise 2 Corinthians is very good.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul wrote these letters? What was his intention?
2. What was the main problem Paul was confronting with the Corinthian churches?
3. What are some of the ways this problem was manifesting itself in the churches? How did Paul become aware of the extent of these manifestations?
4. How did Paul relate “a full understanding of the gospel” as the fundamental solution to these manifestations?

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



The Later Letters

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

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

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

Book 4: 2 Timothy: Investing in Intergenerational Apostolic
Leadership

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



The Middle Letters

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

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The Early Letters

Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Book 2: Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel

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

Book 4: The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

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

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



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Mastering, Teaching, and Using the Mastering the Scriptures

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

Session 2: Canonical Structure and the New Perspective on Paul

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

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

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

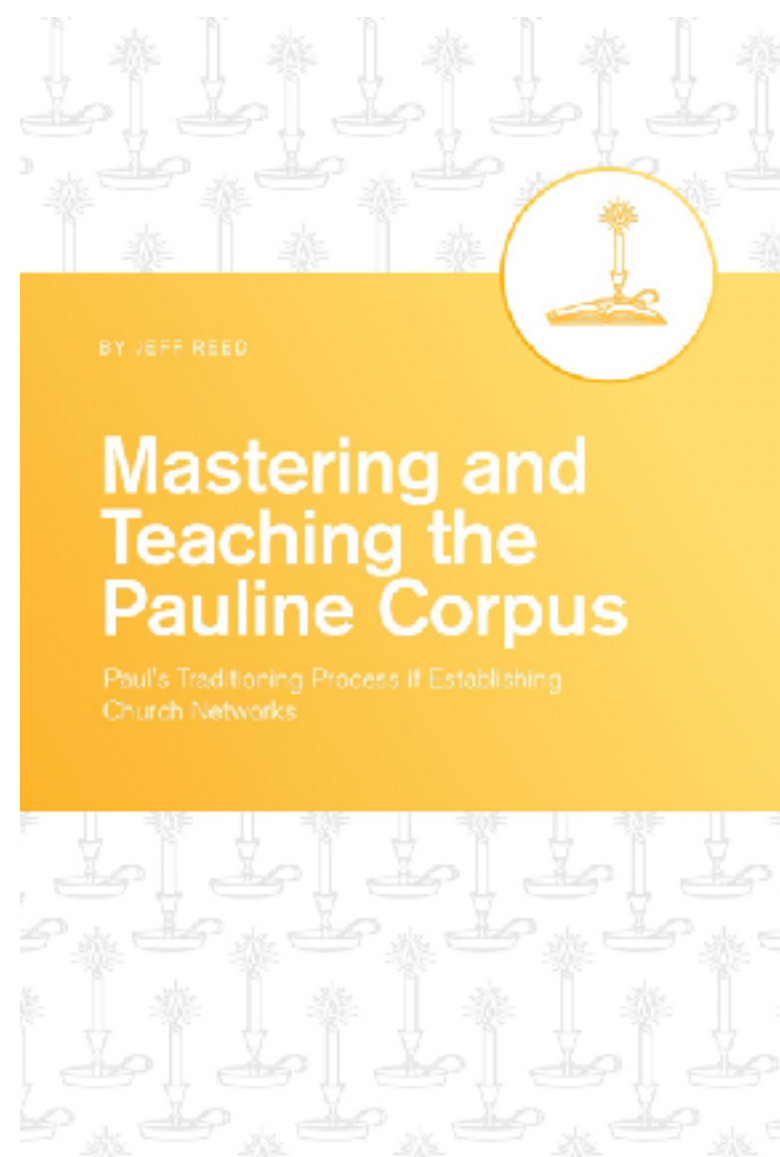
Session 6: The New Perspective on Paul and the Gospels

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

Appendix 1: Comprehensive Assessment of Complex Apostolic Networks

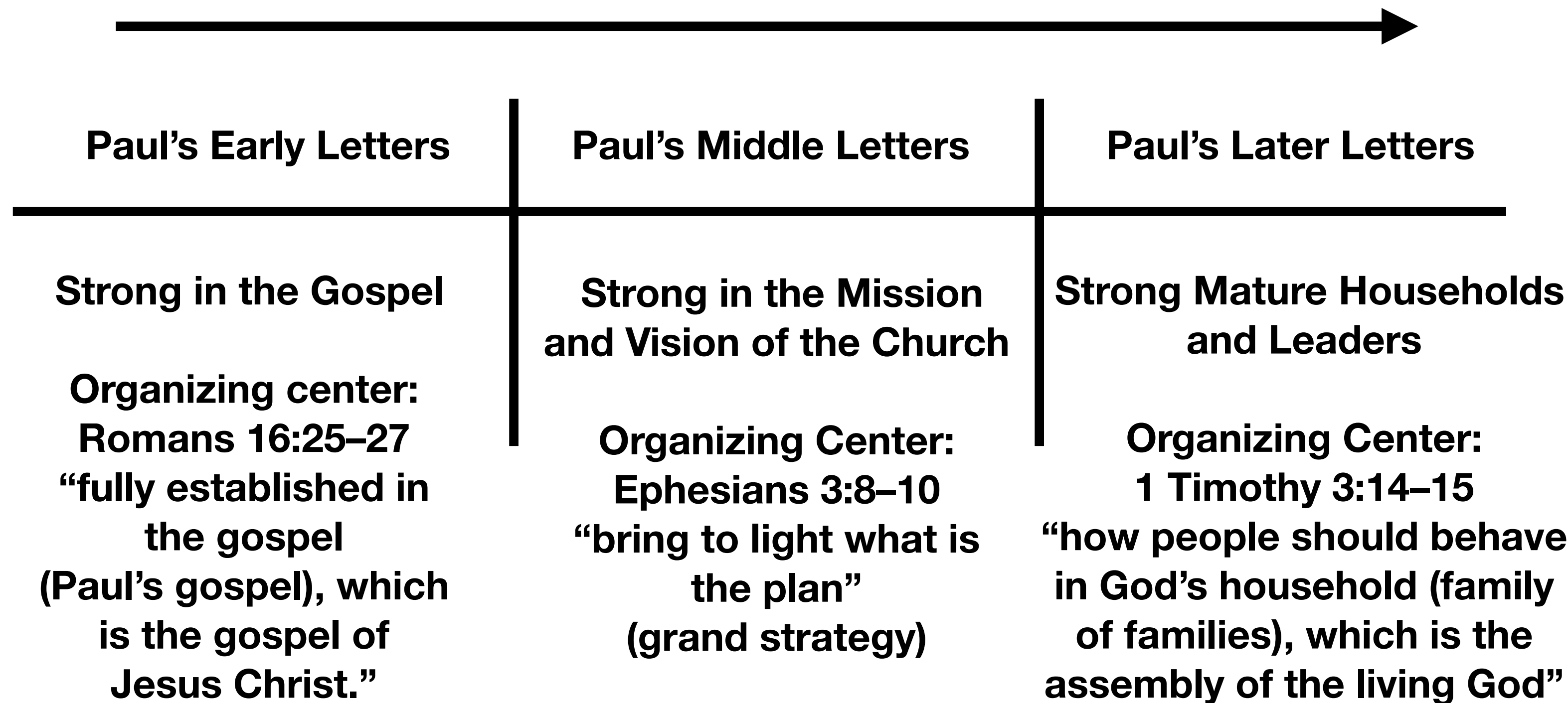
Appendix 2: Greco-Roman Annotated Research Library

Appendix 3: Glossary of Key Biblical Terms and Concepts



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

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

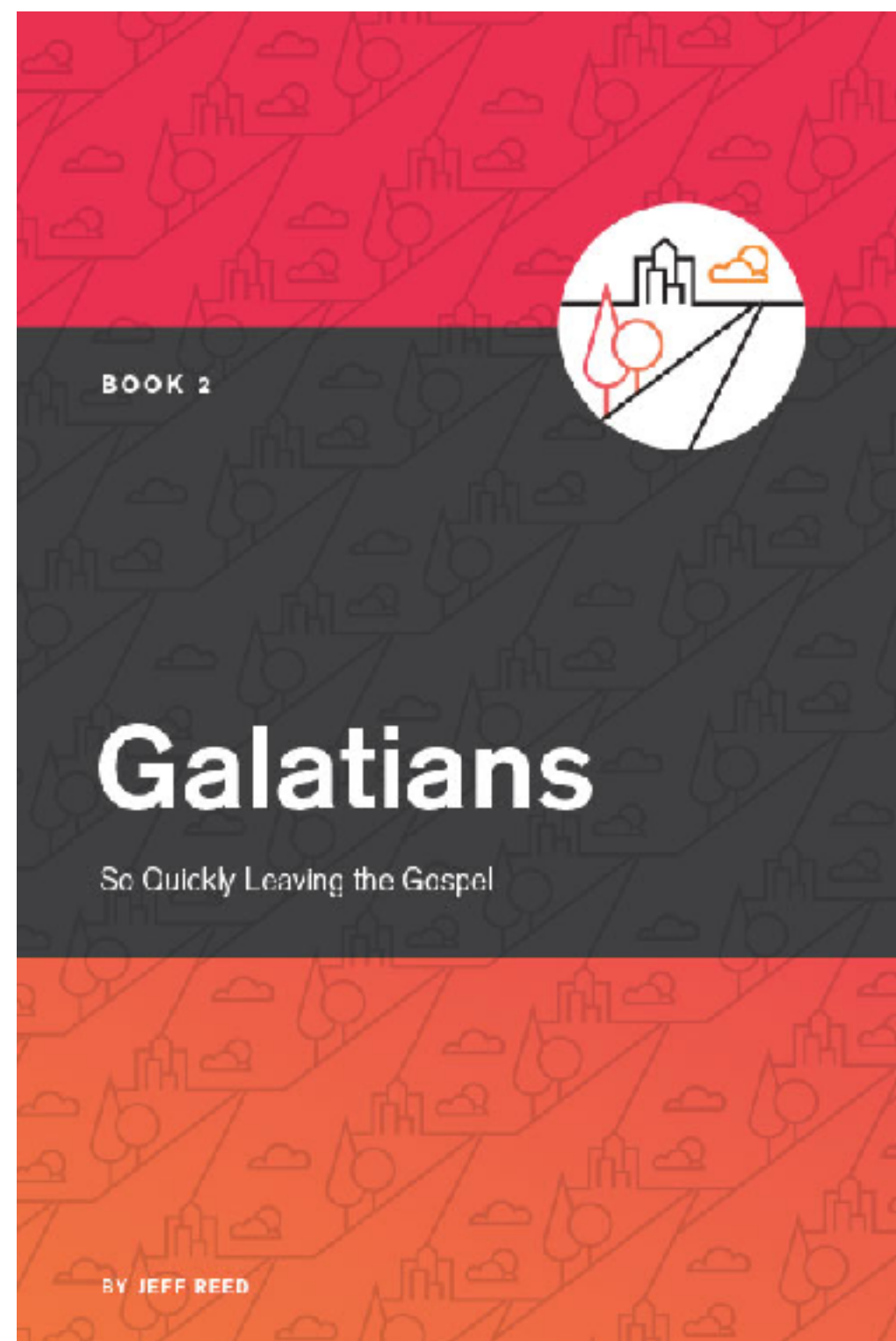


Literary Design: Complex Network Establishing (Encoding) Benchmarks (Traditioning of Paul)



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

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel, Book 2

Session 1: The Galatian Problem

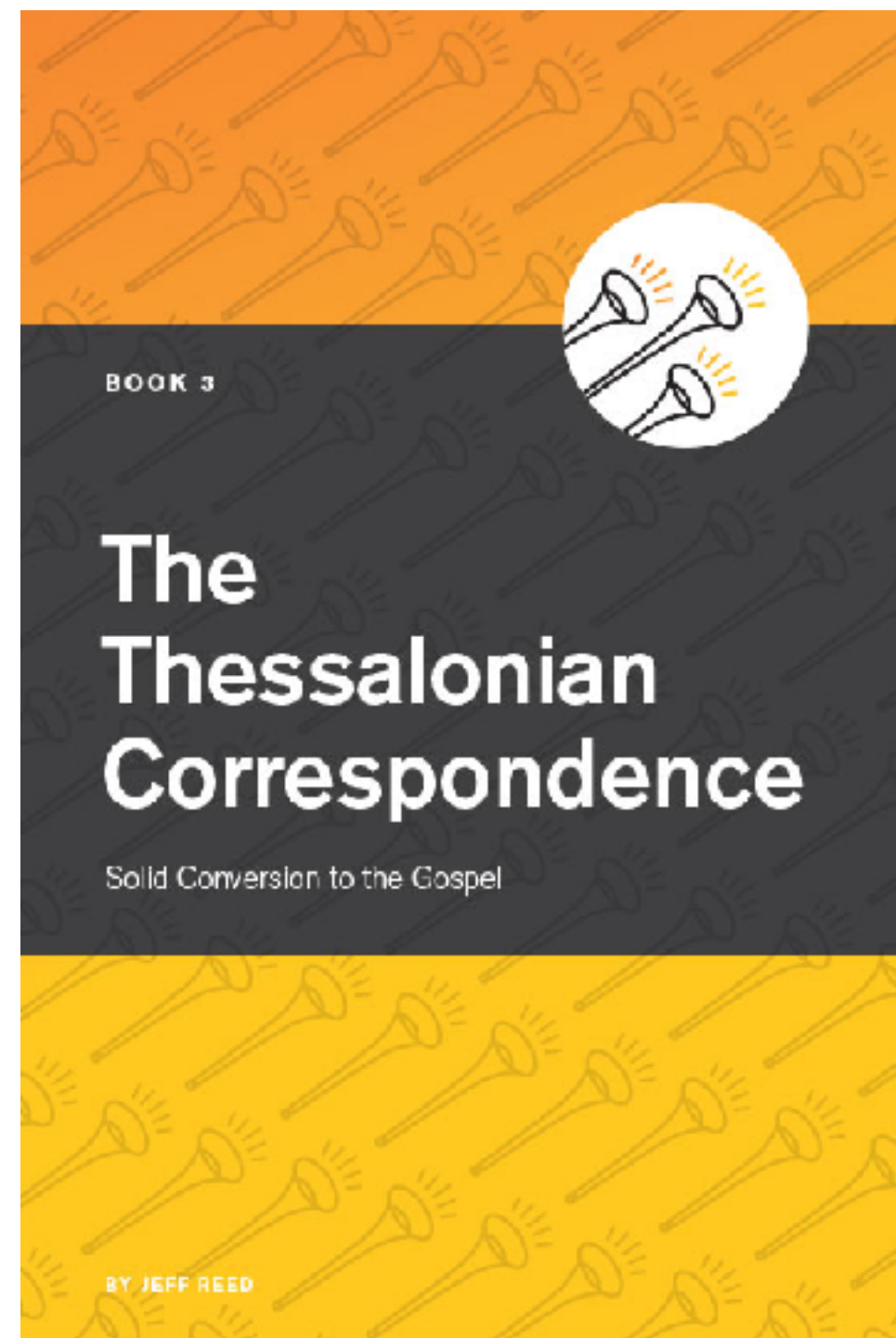
Session 2: The Pure Gospel

Session 3: The Gospel as a System of Living

Session 4: The Gospel and Walking in the Spirit

Session 5: The Gospel and Respecting Leaders

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



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

Session 1: Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians

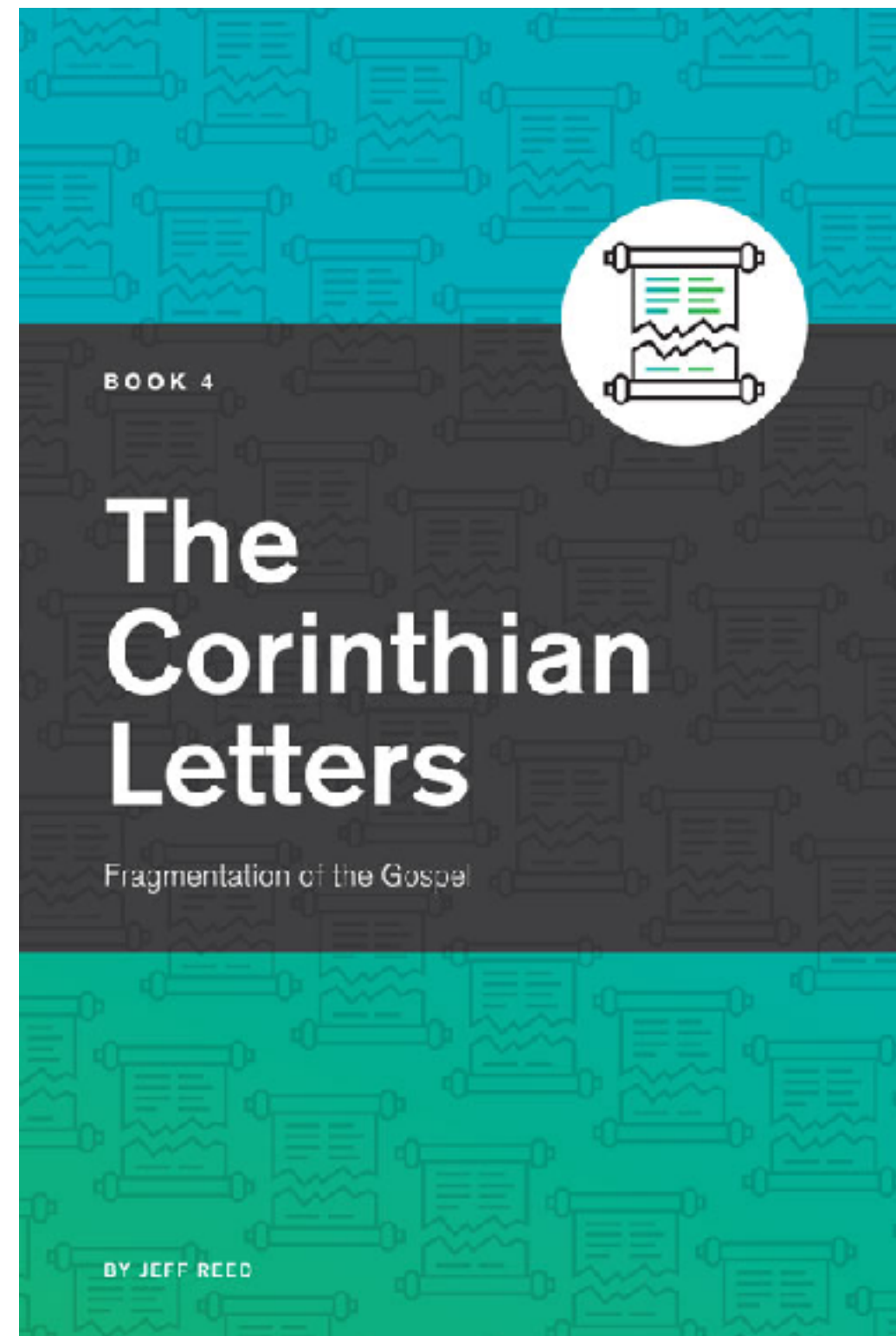
Session 2: Their Dramatic Conversion

Session 3: Three Emerging Problems — Letter 1

Session 4: Further Clarification — Letter 2

Session 5: Solidifying Their Conversion

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel,
Book 4

Session 1: The Fragmentation of the Gospel

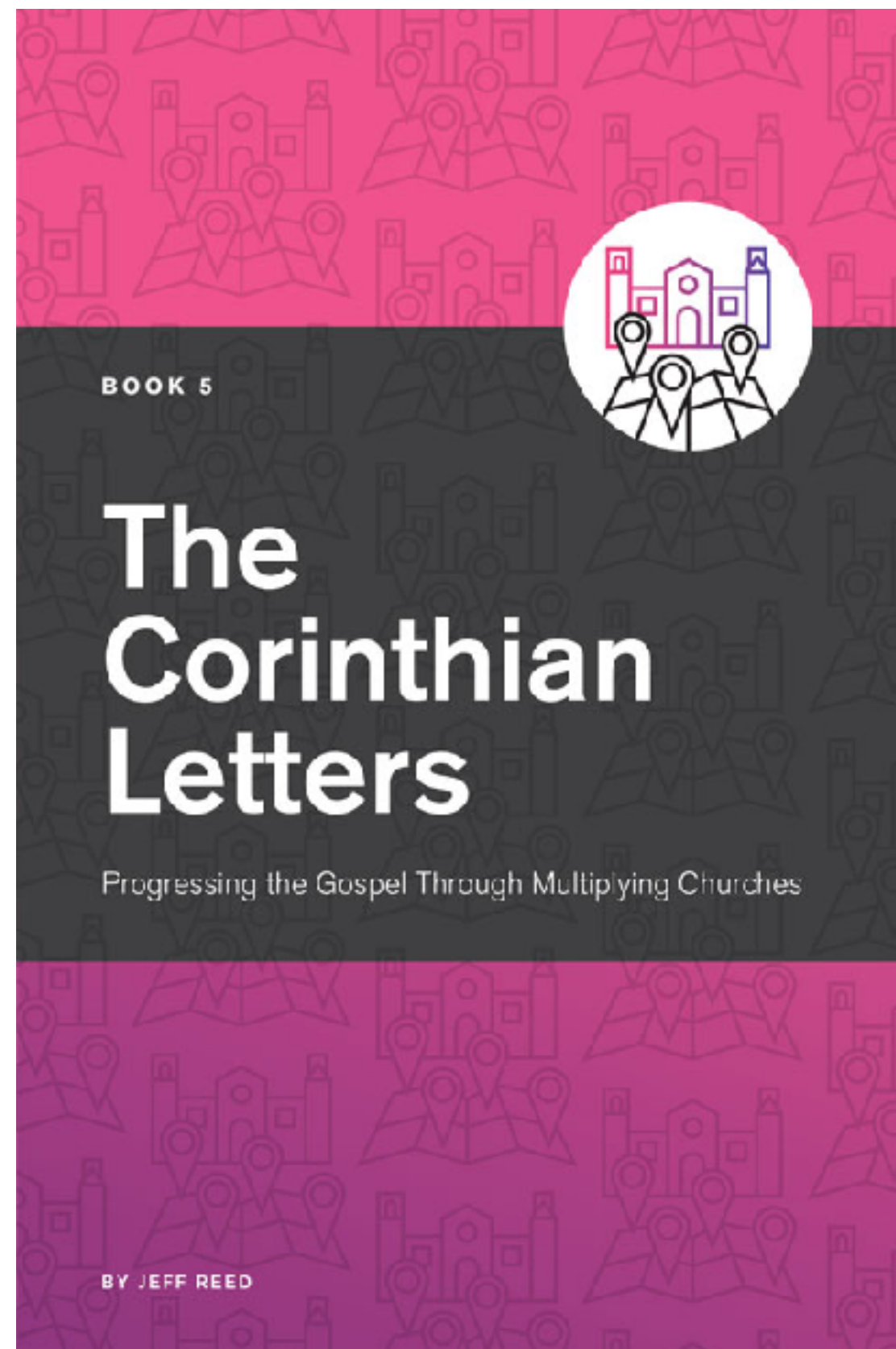
Session 2: Building on One Foundation: The Traditions

Session 3: Divisions in Their Community Life

Session 4: Divisions in Their Community Gatherings

Session 5: Back to the Gospel Foundations

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



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

Session 1: The Pressure of Leading Church Networks

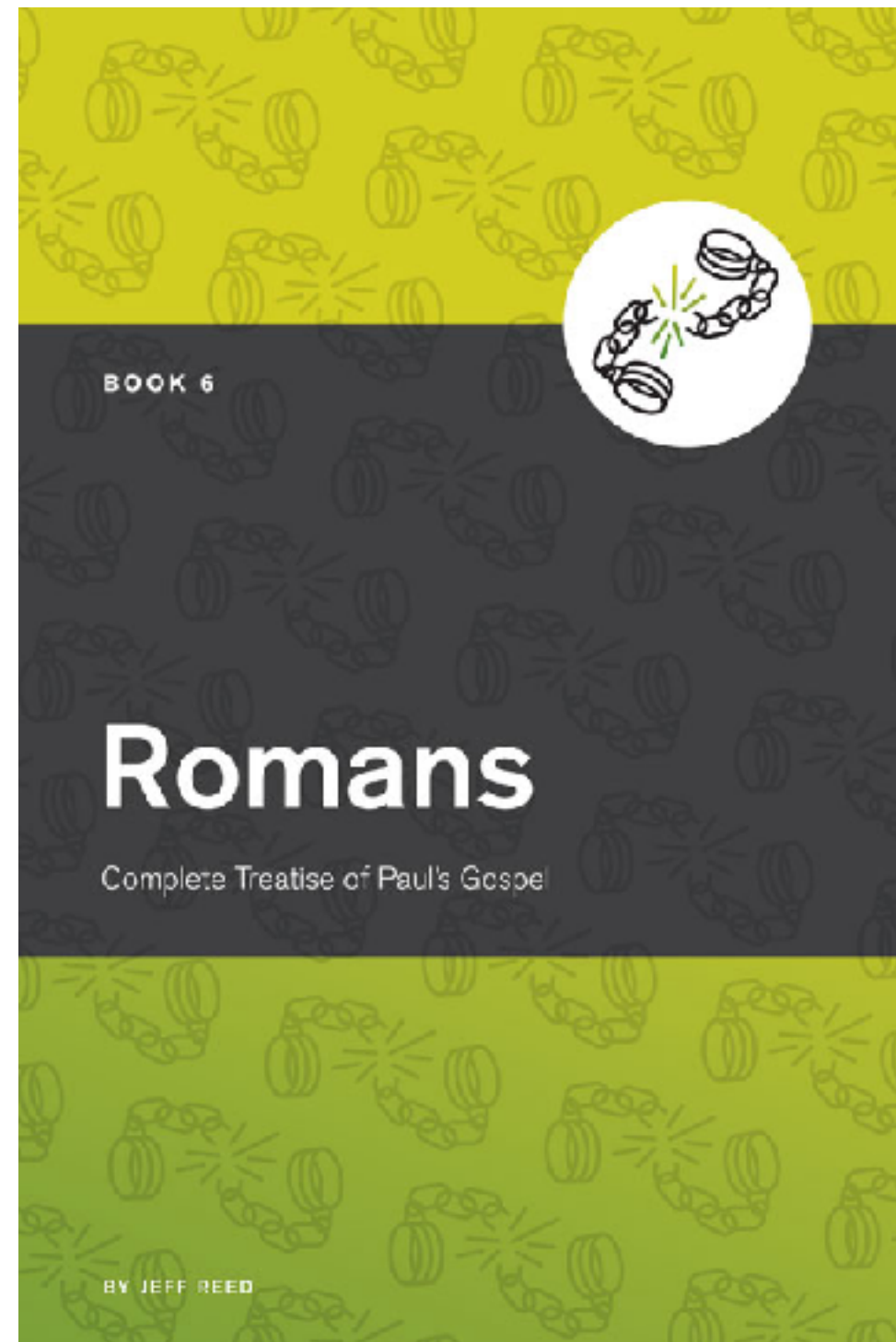
Session 2: The Ministry of the Gospel: Conflicts Without and Fears Within

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

Session 4: The Importance of Apostolic Leadership

Session 5: The Appeal to the Corinthian Churches

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



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

Session 1: The Intention of Romans

Session 2: The Gospel and The Story

Session 3: The New Gospel Worldview

Session 4: Reframing the Jewish Story

Session 5: The Gospel in Transformed Community

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The Corinthian Letters (1)

- _____ Is their evidence in our churches or church networks of a fragmentation of the gospel taking place, especially in the form of following particular apostolic leaders while criticizing others?
- _____ Is there a clear process in place for challenging the churches to build on the one foundation laid by Paul, taking care to realize that as networks grow globally, this will increase and be a constant need?
- _____ Are there divisions emerging in our churches or networks that relate to an incomplete understanding of the gospel that need addressing, like in the Corinthian churches (such as divisions in marriage, divisions over social status/lifestyle, and divisions over men's and women's roles)?

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The Corinthian Letters (1)

_____ Are there divisions in our gatherings as churches related to the gospel, either at the Lord's Supper meal or at the open meeting following the meal (the symposium), such as eating separately, not recognizing the less gifted, and incorrect teaching? And are we following Paul's tradition of the assembly meeting, recognizing that the design of the meeting is part of the way to root the gospel deeply in our churches?

_____ Are we taking care to root all of these divisions back to the gospel foundations reviewed by Paul as a "kerygmatic formula" he received from Peter and the Apostles? He believed if the gospel was fully understood, it would provide solutions to many problems in the first phase of fully establishing churches.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The Corinthian Letters (2)

- _____ As key apostolic leaders fight for the progress of the gospel, are the pressures taking their toll on some of the leaders in our churches or network of churches, leading to great discouragement, even depression, especially as the gospel, as delivered by Paul, is under constant attack from within the churches and the outside world?
- _____ Do apostolic leaders, their teams, and key churches understand that the new covenant ministry—as both described by Paul and experienced by Paul—as “conflicts without and fears within” is to be expected and, as a result, will cause us to grow deeper in our faith and see more clearly?
- _____ Do our churches and church networks understand that we are partners with other networks in the global progress of the gospel and that this will demand sacrifice at times when other networks are in need, even involving financial sacrifice if needed?

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The Corinthian Letters (2)

- _____ Do key apostolic leaders and their teams understand the tremendous importance of their role in the progress of the gospel: that this will require great sacrifice and hardship to faithfully carry out their stewardship; that there is constant pressure of caring for churches and that they have a role to aggressively seek to expand the reach of the gospel into unreached spheres?
- _____ Do we understand the importance of constantly appealing to our churches to become a vital part of a complex apostolic network and to become fully established in the gospel, with special appeal to churches in strategic cities to fully realize their opportunity for significant impact beyond their own churches?

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Assessment Planning Guide

Early Letters Sessions

___ The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel, Book 4

- ___ Session 1: The Fragmentation of the Gospel
- ___ Session 2: Building on One Foundation: The Traditions
- ___ Session 3: Divisions in Their Community Life
- ___ Session 4: Divisions in Their Community Gatherings
- ___ Session 5: Back to the Gospel Foundations

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

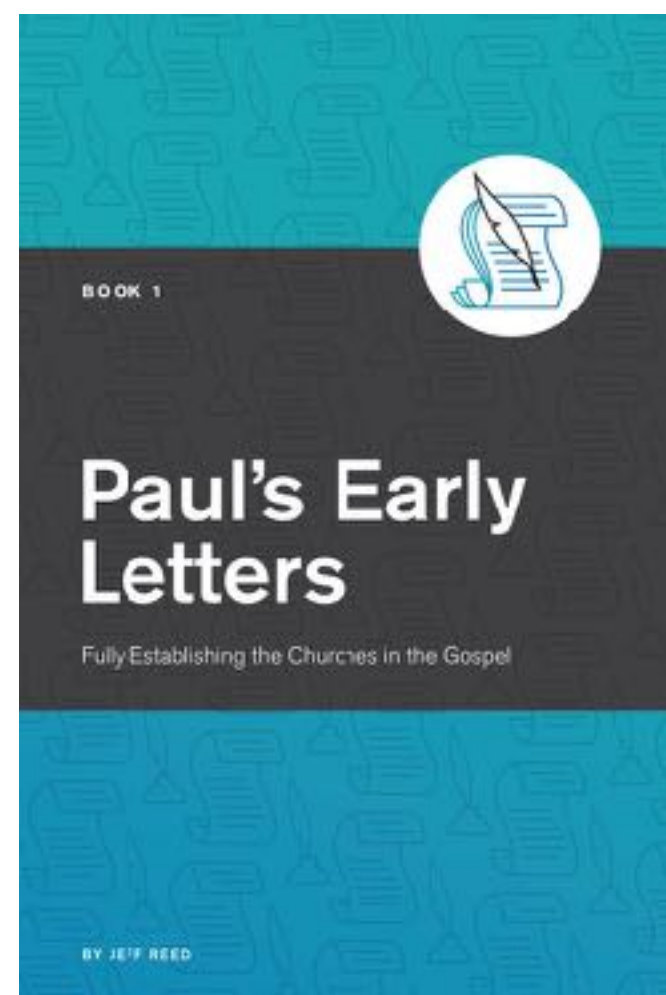
Assessment Planning Guide

Early Letters Sessions

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

- ___ Session 1: The Pressure of Leading Church Networks
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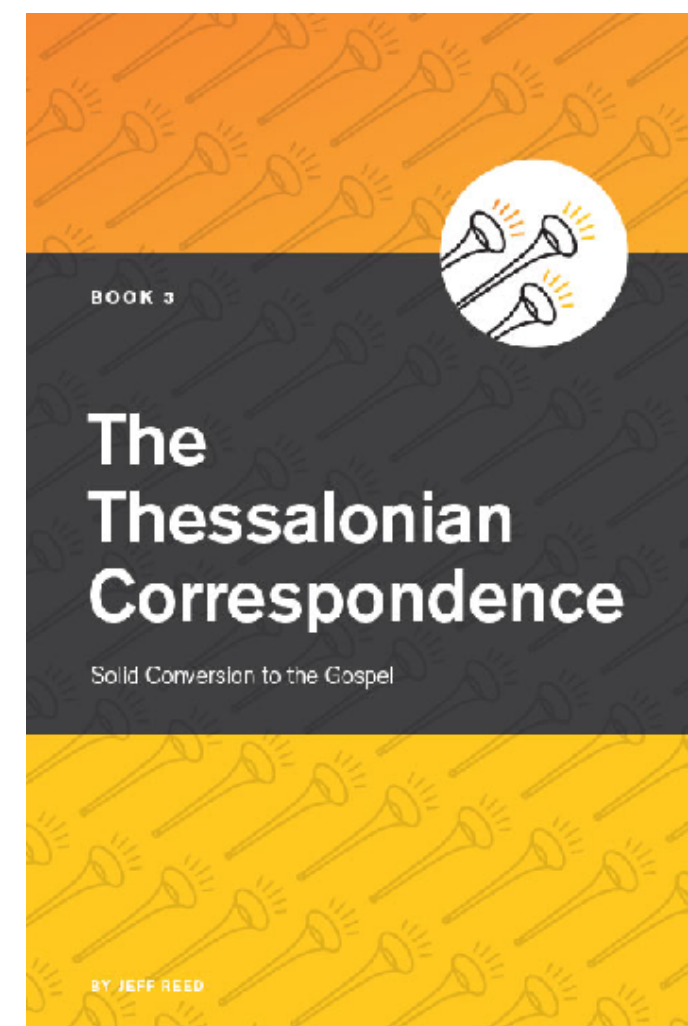
The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel



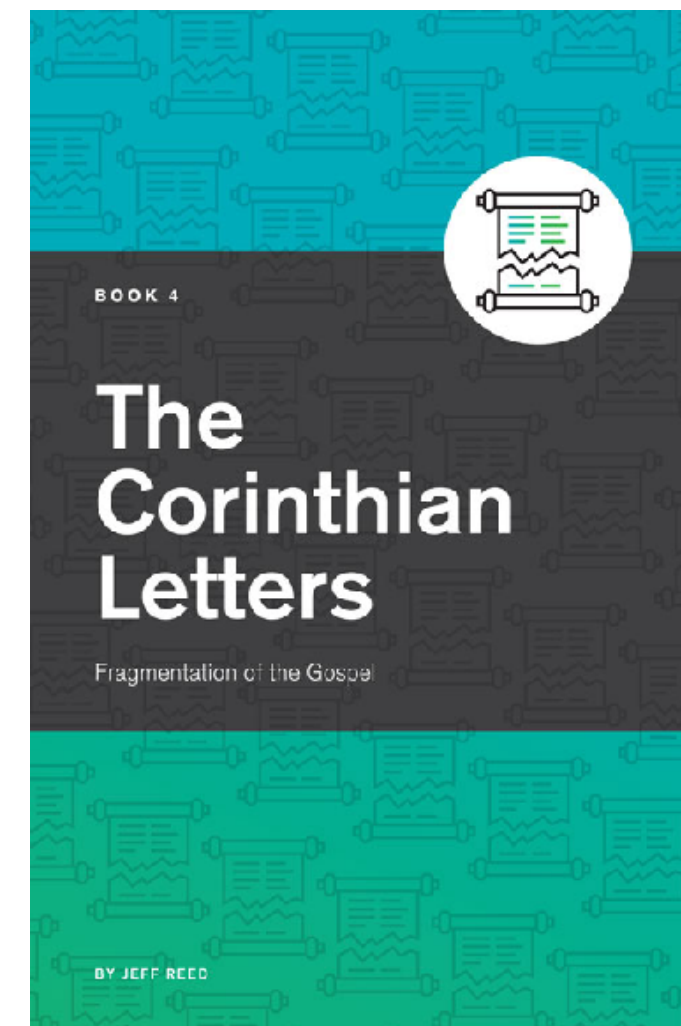
A.D. 49–56



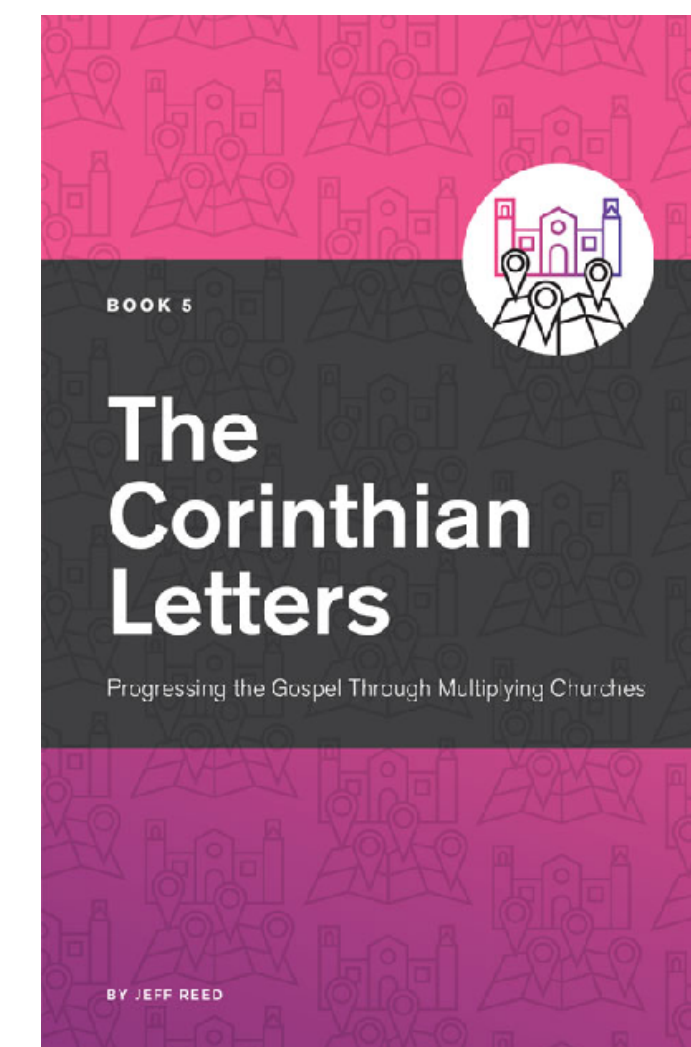
Autumn 49



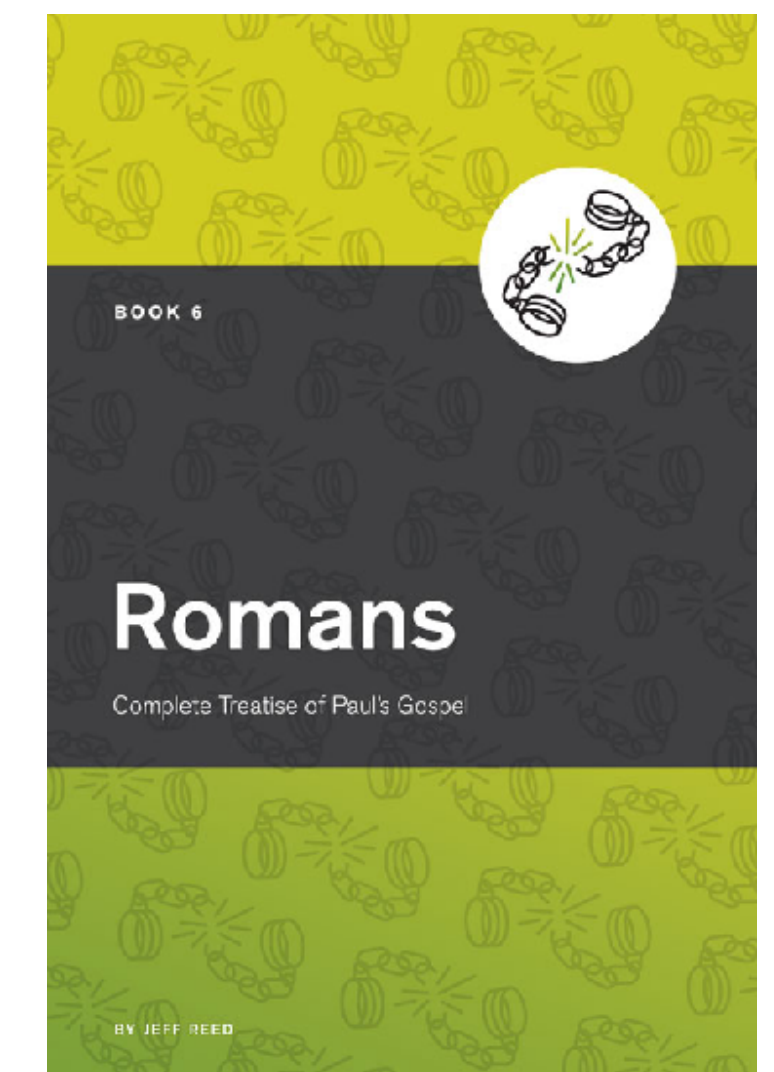
Winter/Summer 51



Sept. 53



June 56



Nov. 56

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

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 ending with 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.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The intention of these early letters is to establish the churches in the gospel.

Paul broadens the understanding of the gospel, and he roots the solutions to the problems his churches were encountering to that growing and broadening understanding of the kerygma and its implications.

This intention will become clearer and clearer as each letter unfolds.

We will validate this in the six books of this series, as we look at the correspondence of these early letters:

- The Galatian letter

- The Thessalonian correspondence

- The Corinthian correspondence

- The letter to the Romans

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Quite a bit of background is needed to answer the questions concerning the basic problems Paul was having with the Corinthian churches and to begin reconstructing Paul's intent in writing to them.

All of this background is found in the letters and the book of Acts.

In addition, we will rely on a wealth of early Greco–Roman research, gathered by a set of scholars over the last 40 years, as we attempt to grasp the intention of these letters.

The key work and author carrying the conversation is Gerd Theissen.

The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth by Gerd Theissen, (Fortress, 1982) cracked the code on the Aegean mission phase 1: Paul's early letters.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The following book has 22 Greco-Roman essays on the Corinthian Church and summarizes all the key areas of the conversation:

Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church, edited by Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (WJK, 2004).

Two books contribute to getting on top of the conversation:

Beginning From Jerusalem: volume 2 of Christianity in the Making by James D. G. Dunn (Eerdman, 2009).

This contains a summary of almost all the current research on the “quest for the historical church.” See these sections on the Corinthian churches: “The Founding of the Church at Corinth” pages 692–702 and the four Corinthian letters, pages 780–857.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

The second book that contributes to getting on top of the conversation:

Dictionary of the Letters of Paul: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship,
editors: Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (IVP, 1993).

The key article is “Corinthians, the Letters of” pages 164–179.

I will also use the Corinthian volumes of Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible:

1 Corinthians by Hans Conzelmann (Fortress, 1988).

2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul
by Hans Dieter Betz (Fortress, 1985).

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

I will use N. T. Wright's treatment of the gospel in the Corinthian letters in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Fortress, 2013).

The use of Wright will be to trace the development of the gospel in the Corinthian letters. Most of Wright's work focuses on Galatians and Romans, which is also why he misses the focus on the quest for the historical Church, of which 1 and 2 Corinthians are so important.

Three other books will be important for sections of the Corinthian letters:

- *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 in Light of First Century Greco-Roman Rhetorical Culture*, Michael A. Bullmore (ISP, 1995).
- *The Earliest History of the Christian Gatherings: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, Valeriy A. Alikin (Brill, 2010).
- *Worship in the Early Church*, Ralph P. Martin (Eerdman, 1974).

Malherbe, Verner, and Theissen cracked the code.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Some of the key ideas I am beginning with are these:

- Building on one apostolic foundation
- Rhetoric of the gospel—not based on orators
- Systematic solving of issues that fractured the churches
- The church meeting anchored in the Lord's Supper as the unifying center
- The power of the New Covenant apostolic ministry
- The importance of apostolic leaders and their sphere of ministry—building a network

As I mentioned, quite a bit of background is needed to answer the questions concerning the basic problems Paul was having with the Corinthian churches and to begin to reconstruct Paul's intent in writing them.

One of the first things we need to note is that these two letters were part of four letters Paul actually wrote to the Corinthian church.

We only have two of them.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Background

1 Corinthians 5:9 “I wrote to you in the previous letter...” N. T. Wright

2 Corinthians 2:4 “Now I wrote to you in floods of tears, out of great trouble and anguish in my heart...” ??? N. T. Wright

Some say the first letter was hastily written and did not sufficiently impress the Corinthians, so it was not worth retaining and copying for wider use.

“It is probably simpler, however, to deduce that this first letter was fairly brief, perhaps hastily written, and was superseded by the more extensive and more carefully expressed 1 Corinthians.”

The Making of Christianity: Beginning From Jerusalem, James G. D. Dunn, p. 786.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Let's begin by reading several passages from the two letters we have and then try to recreate Paul's intention in writing 1 and 2 Corinthians.

¹⁰ Now I must appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, through the name of King Jesus our Lord, that you should all be in agreement, and that there should be no divisions among you. Instead, you should be fully equipped with the same mind and the same opinion. ¹¹ You see, my dear family, Chloe's people have put me in the picture about you—about the fact that you are having quarrels. ¹² What I'm talking about is this. Each one of you is saying, "I'm with Paul!" "I'm with Apollos!" "I'm with Cephas!" "I'm with the Messiah!"

1 Corinthians 1:10–12

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

1 Corinthians 1:26–29

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

¹⁴ I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷ For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. ²¹ What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

1 Corinthians 4:14–21

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

¹⁵ Now, brothers and sisters, you know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints;
¹⁶ I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them. ¹⁷ I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; ¹⁸ for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. So give recognition to such persons.
¹⁹ The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord. ²⁰ All the brothers and sisters send greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1 Corinthians 16:15–20

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

²³ But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. ²⁴ I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

2:1 So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. ⁴ For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

2 Corinthians 1:23–2:4

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¹²When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; ¹³ but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia.... 7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within. ⁶ But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. ⁸ For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly.

2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–8

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¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. ¹⁴ For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action.

2 Corinthians 10:13–16

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Background: Situating the Corinthian entire correspondence with the Corinthian churches toward grasping the two letters in the Pauline corpus:

- Paul lives with Aquila and Priscilla (same occupation); he taught in the synagogue.
- Paul separates from the synagogue and moves meetings to the house of Titus Justus.
- Paul moves on with Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus and encounters Apollos, who is eloquent but untaught.
- Paul writes the first separation letter (1 Corinthians 5:9).
- The Corinthians write a community letter asking many questions around the separation issue.
- Paul writes 1 Corinthians.
- After writing 1 Corinthians, new rival missionaries change the whole situation (2 Corinthians 10–13).
- Paul wants to save his authority with an interim visit, but instead, he writes a tearful third letter from Ephesus, which again we do not have (2 Corinthians 2:1–5)
- After a time of imprisonment in Ephesus, Paul skips an open door for the gospel in Troas and travels to Macedonia, where he meets Titus bringing good news about Corinth.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Situating the Corinthian correspondence:

- Paul then writes a 4th letter, 2 Corinthians, setting the whole conflict with the Corinthians in context of his authority, network, and role in progressing the gospel.
- In these letters, Paul was regulating their community life since the community was mixed socially, creating factions, and since rival missionaries were accentuating the crisis.

This background was built off of Theissen's work in *Fortress Introduction to The New Testament*.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Paul's Gospel

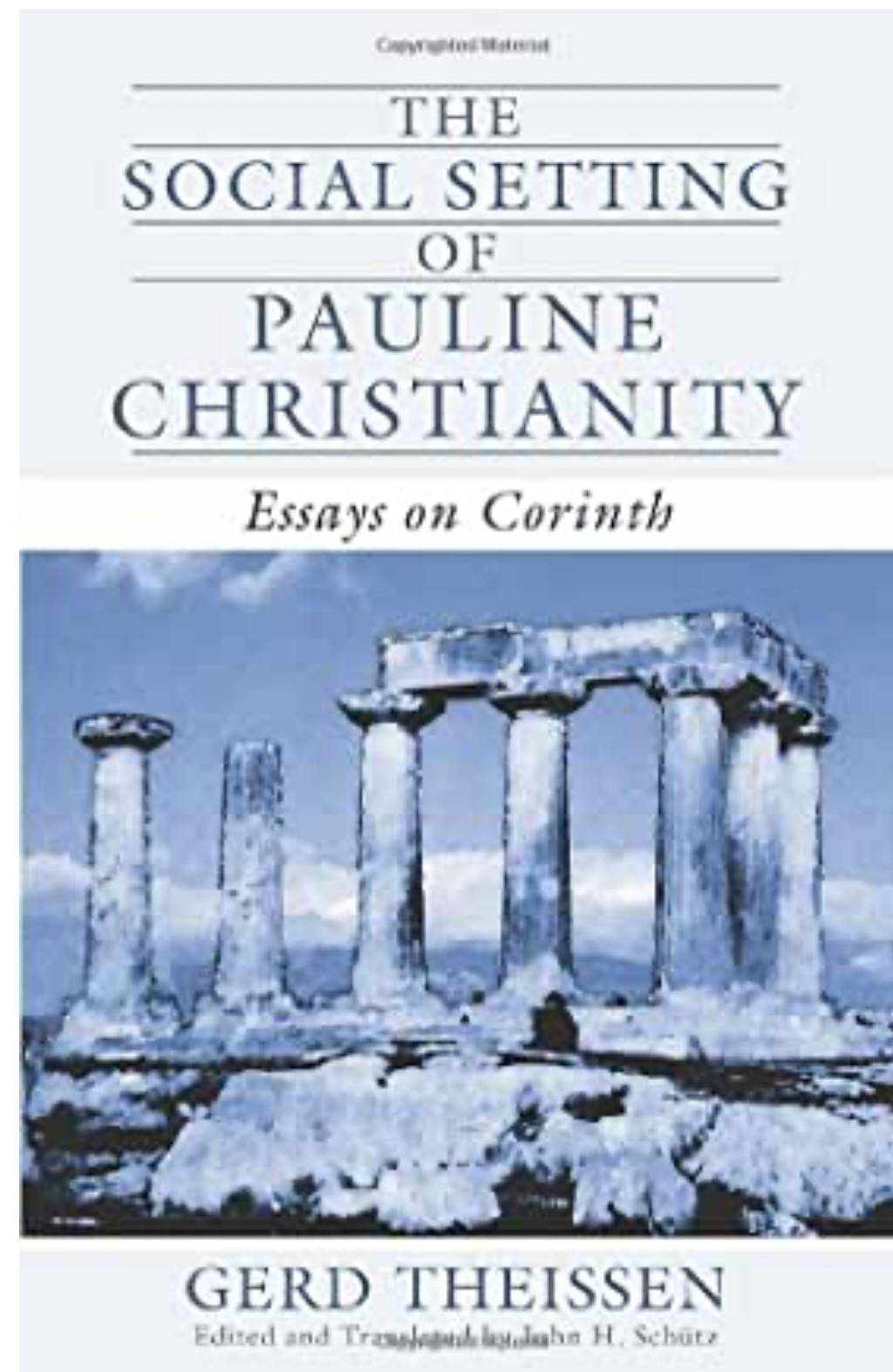
Three main points fill out our understanding about what it means to establish churches in the gospel:

1. It was Paul's job to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles; he had to defend it against the confusions and attacks by other "so called" apostles.
2. The gospel had huge implications for the community life of the Corinthian churches, including how they met as churches.
3. Part of his sphere was the strategy for the progress of the gospel; as the gospel progressed, he had to assure that all churches were in line with his proclamation of the gospel.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

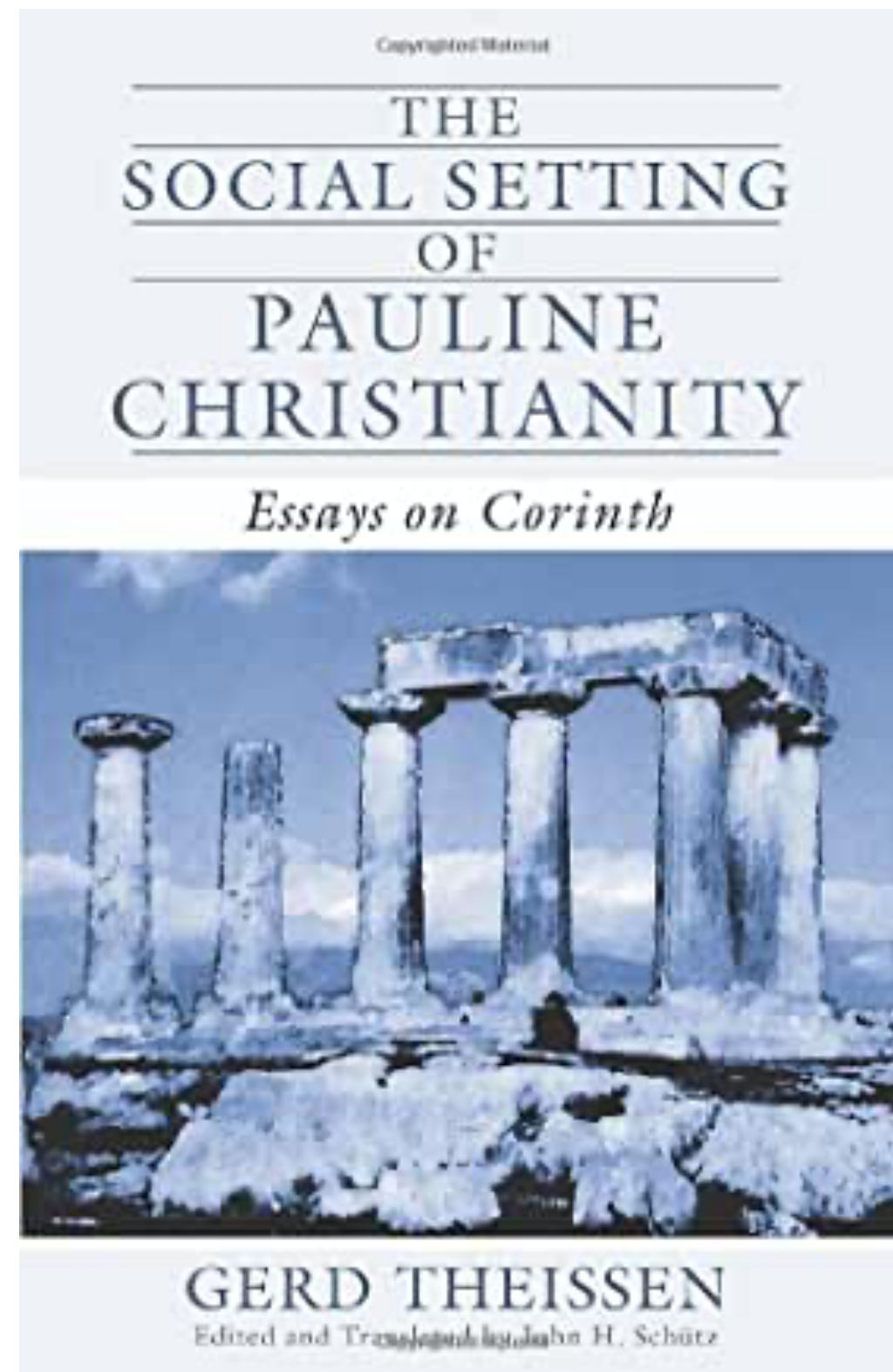
Theissen on 1 Corinthians: Key observations:

- The framework is the cross and the resurrection; he frames both in the gospel: 1:2–5 and 15:1–6.
- The cross (1:18ff) sets us all free; Paul aims at freeing Christians without losing their capacity to engage in dialogue with the environment.
- Paul sets another understanding of corporality: the whole person will be transformed.
- Christians must take seriously all that pertains to the body: sexuality (5:1–7:40), eating (8–11) and the tongue (14).
- In 2 Corinthians, Paul develops his self-understanding as an Apostle, in response to attacks by rival missionaries.
- Paul moves back and forth between authority and a sense of inferiority.
- Because of the nearness of Christ, Paul is convinced he will win over the community with his arguments, although he is working out his weaknesses.



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Who was Paul really fighting?



Initially, it was factions in the Corinthian churches—some who were resisting his authority and claiming to be following Peter or Apollos.

By 2nd Corinthians, itinerary charismatics were undermining Paul's authority amongst the churches.

Theissen develops a very key idea: Itinerate charismatics vs. community organizers

The gospel spontaneously expanded through itinerate charismatics (temporary) but needed to be followed by community organizers (Paul's role); it was resisted by some as Paul exercised his apostolic authority.

Question: Is this a normative struggle in every generation as new movements emerge? (India?)

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

How did Paul shape the movement? How did he use his authority? What does it take to bring the churches under the authority of Christ and His apostolic leadership?

There are huge implications here in shaping church-planting movements in “the way of Christ and His Apostles”!

How did Paul shape the movement? How did he use his authority? What does it take to bring churches under the authority of Christ and His apostolic leadership?

The power of his arguments in these letters are over the power of the itinerate charismatics and the experiences they generated.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

This explains the need in Global Pentecostalism today:

There are itinerate charismatics everywhere who were part of the spontaneous expansion. Many are false apostles.

They must be followed by community organizers—like the BILD apostolic team—to bring the churches under the apostolic authority of “the way of Christ and His Apostles” — primarily apostolic leaders exercising the authority of “Pauline theology.”

How did Paul shape the movement?

Primarily by building a strong team and a few larger, influential churches within the Corinthian churches:

Crispus

Gaius

Tertius

Stephanas

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

How did Paul shape the movement?

The congregation as a whole—not many:

- wise (negative)
- powerful (negative)
- noble born (positive)

Noble = high social status (DNT), open-minded (DBL), less prejudice (ANLEX)

Crispus—conversion of great significance, wealthy man, esteemed man, high social status (1 Cor. 1:14). (See section by Dunn.)

Erastus—city treasurer (city manager, 1 Cor. 4:1) travels with Paul. Paul sends him with Timothy via Macedonia to Corinth and Jerusalem (Acts 19:22).

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

When all is said and done, we have a list of 16 names, apart from Chloe's people:

Achaicus

Aquila

Erastus

Fortunatus

Gaius

Jason

Crispus

Lucias

Priscilla

Phoebe

Quartus

Sosipater

Sosthenes

Stephanas

Titius Justus

Tertius

Chloe's people

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

We have a list of 16 names, apart from Chloe's people.

“The result is clear. The great majority of the Corinthians known to us by name probably enjoyed high social status.”

Of the 17 people including Chloe's people, 3 services were rendered:

- houses

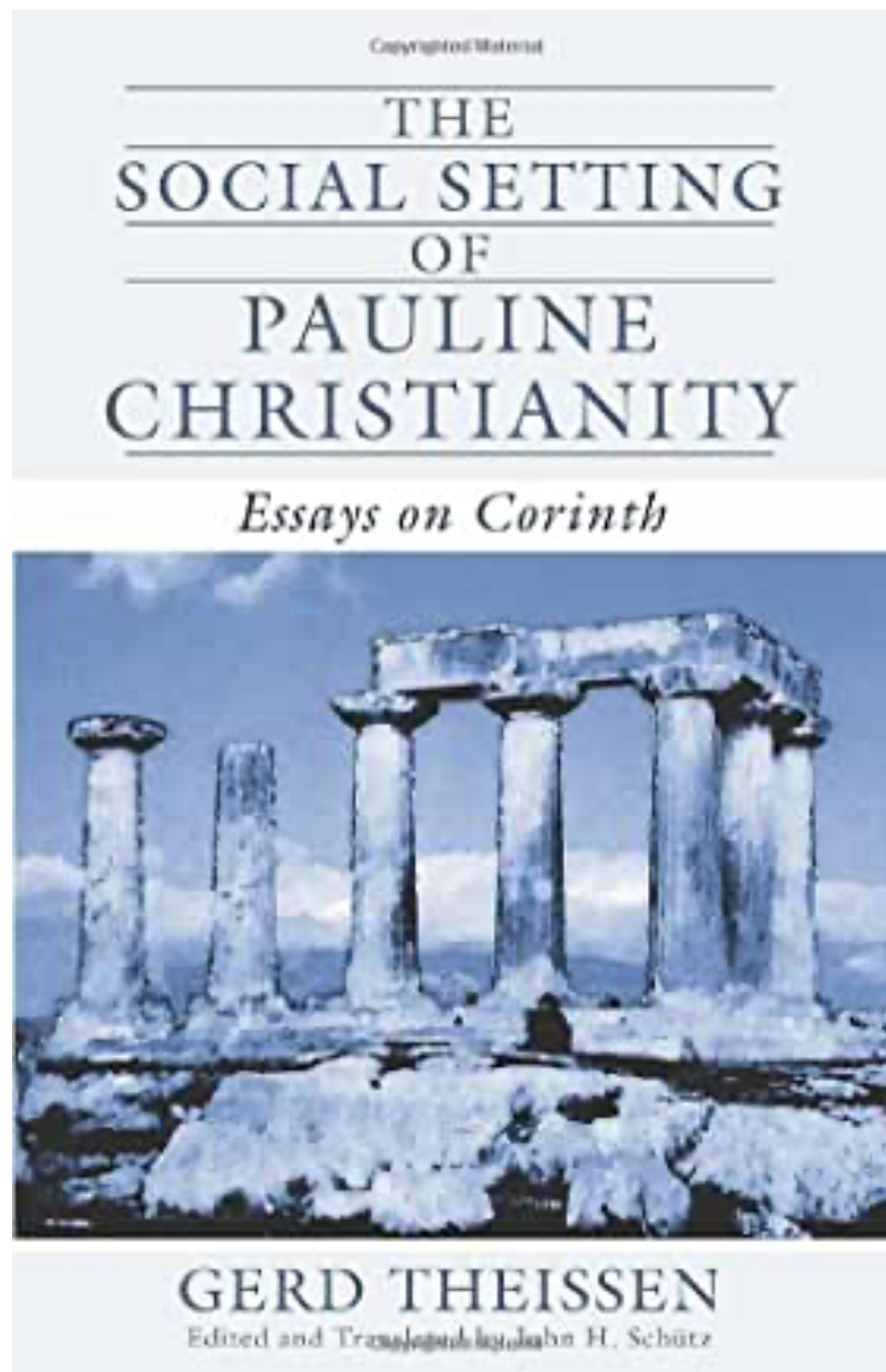
“Reference to someone's house is hardly a sure criteria for that person's high social status, but it is a probable one, particularly if other criteria point that direction” p. 87

- services rendered

- travel

Of the 17 people mentioned, 9 engaged in travel; that implies helping Paul solve problems and build his network.

(See summary quote on page 95 of the 17 people, Theissen)



The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

How did Paul shape the movement?

He shaped social stratification through the church gathering and sacramental activity of the Lord's Supper

- Wait for one another
- A proper meal occurs during the Lord's supper
- Not a special meal before for wealthy benefactors

On one hand, in society, remain as you are.

But in the church, you are one body, one family, equal, no social strata differences.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Key background issues: These will be critical as the letters unfold, especially 1 Corinthians.

On one hand, in society remain as you are.

But in the church, you are one body, one family, equal, no social strata differences.

Statements about divisions in the church:

- The Lord's supper
- Material and financial achievements
- Litigation
- "Wisdom" and "knowledge"
- Advice to slaves

Social structure of the city of Corinth

- Corinthian citizens were on the rise economically, on a rapid economic upturn.
- Corinthian wealth was based on trade.
- Corinthian wealth, inseparable from commerce, was banking.
- Governmental administration was an additional wealth factor.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Key issues:

Social conditions of the Pauline mission

- A majority of Corinthian Christians came from the lower strata.
- Paul came from the upper strata—a citizen, educated, and he was relatively independent.

The strong and the weak

- The strong were the upper class who ate meat often.
- The weak were the lower strata who saw meat as something special, only distributed on ceremonial occasions of some sort.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Let's turn to forming heuristic author's intention statements.

Intention Statement for the Corinthian Letters

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

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

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

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Intention Statement of 1 Corinthians

To deal with internal divisions, rooted in differing social statuses fragmenting the Corinthian churches, with the view of the Corinthian churches fully participating with him in the progress of the gospel

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

by specifically addressing factions in

- community life and
- community gatherings

by appealing to the future resurrection

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Intention Statement of 2 Corinthians

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

by describing his internal stress in carrying out his stewardship

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

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

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

How do we bring one-mindedness in churches and church networks today?

At least 5 things can be seen in how Paul worked with the Corinthians:

1. He worked tirelessly and genuinely fought for their loyalty to the gospel proclaimed (kerygma) and delivered to them, refusing to let them go a wrong direction.
2. He unpacked the teaching that he delivered to them which was delivered to him by Christ, dealing with their divisions with the teaching (didache—“to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.” (1 Cor. 4:17)
3. He used his authority by confronting internal divisions directly—through letters, through his team, and through personal visits.
4. He built a very strong team of well-trained, highly influential leaders, whom he used to shape the Corinthian churches.
5. He gave them a sense that they were part of something much bigger than themselves, enabling the gospel to progress, and empowering him to proclaim the gospel in new lands.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Theissen cracked the code on the first phase of Paul's Aegean ministry (second phase: middle and later letters) Theissen's 5 essays

4 steps in how to build a one minded foundation:

1. rural itinerates (Palestine) to Paul's one foundation
2. social stratification (Corinth)
3. strong/weak
4. Lord's Supper–Symposium

India

1. wandering itinerates to way of Christ and His Apostles
2. India caste system
3. strong/weak debates
4. Lord's Supper

This will become clear as these two letters unfold.

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Back cover quotes:

“Theissen describes how early Christianity was a movement dominated by wandering charismatics, whose mission was largely concentrated on rural areas of Palestine, and how, with Paul’s mission, it entered a new phase which would ultimately qualify it to become the religion of the Empire.”

“He suggests that Paul resolved conflicts within the community at Corinth through a form of “love-patriarchalism”: a hierarchical pattern of social relations was softened by his emphasis on the unity of all in the body of Christianity.”

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Issue: Building a one-minded focus in churches today

Questions:

1. What sorts of divisions distract our churches from participating in the progress of the gospel?
2. What should leaders expect as they seek to progress the gospel through building networks of churches?
3. How can a church that is highly fractured be brought together in a one-minded fashion?
4. What role do apostolic leaders play today in bringing about the kind of one-minded focus Paul built into the Corinthian churches?

The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

“This is going to be a very exciting study.

It you work along with me, you will be able to master the argument as it unfolds and be able to participate in the study in a way that will introduce you to the theological method of using the 40-year growing conversation of Greco-Roman research, which is reshaping our understanding of early Christianity and the intention of Paul’s letters.” (JR, 2017)