

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the New Testament
Story of God



SESSION 9
The Teachings of Paul

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The Teachings of Paul

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Teachings of Paul

Paul's Theology

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- identify the major points of Paul's theology.
- understand the questions Paul was facing in his ministry.

The Teachings of Paul



INTRODUCTION

As indicated in our last session, Paul was an effective letter writer. At times, his letters contain some complex arguments. They are in the form of stories like the gospels and must be understood in the broader context of Paul's life and ministry in the Greco-Roman world. It is important to note that Paul was not the proverbial ivory tower theologian. Indeed, Paul's letters reflect the teachings of a person who was directly involved in, at times, messy issues that are encountered in ministry. His letters are best understood as being occasional or rather as being written to address specific situations. His letters are not formal theological essays. They do contain, however, a wealth of theological insights and teachings they were of extreme value for early Christianity, as well as the Church or body of Christ today.

One of the interpretative problems encountered in understanding Paul's letters is that we as readers of these letters are third parties. In reading Paul's letters, we are in effect, reading someone else's mail. Paul's letters were not written with us in mind. They were written to address real people and situations in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD. We must, therefore, infer the precise situations Paul was addressing from the content of his letters or from what he has to say. We have Paul's answers or solutions to issues, however, we are not always certain what the precise questions were. In any event, in addressing various situations within the early church, Paul's letters show the great diversity and wide range of thoughts that were present among various communities.

THE TEACHINGS OF PAUL



NOTES

WHICH LETTERS DID PAUL WRITE?

Over the last 200 years, scholars have been examining and dissecting Paul's letters in the New Testament. Right now most scholars agree Paul wrote: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. These books seem to fit Paul's historical situation and his theology. There is less agreement on Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians, with some scholars making the argument that these books reflect a more developed church with needs in the area of organization and the second coming of Christ.

Many scholars, including evangelical scholars, do not think the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) were written by Paul because the language, content, and style are so very different from his other letters. They argue these reflect an older, more established Church. The argument has its merits, but it is also important to point out that one major reason these books are so different from the others is they were written to people in leadership and administrative positions—not to congregations or lay members of congregations—as all of Paul's other letters were. The fact they reflect an older, more established Church might be because Paul is addressing second-generation leadership, who must lead the Church through the next phase of its development. Language, style, and content tend to change depending on the audience and the reasons for writing.

Whether one thinks Paul wrote all 13 epistles (or not), it is still scholarly responsible to draw on all 13 books for Paul's theology. Even those who deny Paul's authorship of some of the books, say whoever wrote these books belonged to the school or way of thinking of Paul. So Paul's theology is recognized as consistent through all the books traditionally assigned to Paul. It is to these letters (supplemented at points by Acts) we turn in order to gain insights into the nature of Paul's teachings and their relationship to Jesus' gospel.

PAUL'S GOSPEL AND JESUS' GOSPEL

On the issue of the differences between Paul's gospel and Jesus' gospel, there are basically two main viewpoints.

The Rationalistic Viewpoint

- Jesus taught a simple ethical spirituality, or called for political or social revolution.

 **NOTES**

- Paul transformed the simple, gentle Jesus into an idealized divine man.
- This position does not acknowledge Jesus as the divine Christ and further argues Jesus did not see himself as divine either. Jesus is described as a sage, reformer, or revolutionary, but not as the divine Son of God. They would say it was Paul who mythologized the human Jesus and transformed the simple, ethical message of Jesus into the story of a divine human who came to die for our sins.

Orthodox Christianity Viewpoint

- Acknowledges there are differences between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and Paul's of the risen Christ. But the differences are incidental to the fact that God was manifesting himself in the ministry of Jesus.
- Paul and Jesus are not identical in their message, but they are complementary.

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

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While Paul's letters are not formal theological essays, much can be learned from them about God, understanding of God, humanity, and their relationship. In following sessions, we will look more closely at specific writings of Paul. An initial survey of Paul's letters, however, introduces Paul's teachings on certain key issues. A selection of key beliefs held by Paul follows:

GOD IS TO BE FEARED, LOVED, SERVED, AND WORSHIPED

God is at the center of Paul's theology. Of the 1,300 times the New Testament uses the word God, more than 500 of them are in Paul's writings.

- God is all-wise and all-knowing (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 1:21, 24, 2:7; Eph. 3:10).
- God is worthy of all praise and glory forever (Rom. 16:27; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18).
- God is faithful (2 Cor. 1:18) and commands that the gospel be made known to all (Rom. 16:26).
- God comforts the distressed (2 Cor. 1:3-4), raises the dead and rescues from deadly peril (2 Cor. 1:9-10), and establishes believers in their faith and gives us His Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22).
- God is the creator and sustainer of creation (Rom. 1:25; Col. 3:10; Acts 14:15-17).
- God is the King of Kings, immortal, invisible (1 Tim. 6:15-16).
- God is one: versus polytheism or the belief in many gods (1 Tim. 6:15; Rom. 3:30; Gal. 3:20).
- God is personal and accessible versus stoicism/fatalism where there is no concept of a personal God (2 Cor. 1:3-4, 10, 21-22).
- God is concerned with social morality and personal ethics versus Roman and Greek mythology where no such concerns are present (Rom. 1:18-2:11, 12:20-21).
- God is more than a spirit experienced through rites of worship, ascetic denial, or mystical sensuality: versus mystery religions (2 Cor. 5:18-6:4, 6:16b-18).


NOTES
EVIL

- Paul does not speculate on the origin of evil, but does acknowledge that under the ultimate rule of God (1 Tim. 3:15), evil exists, orchestrated by the devil or Satan, mentioning the devil 5 times and Satan 10 times (1 Cor.7:5; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26).
- The devil/Satan is a personal, powerful, malevolent being with subservient underlings, human and angelic (Eph. 6:11-12; 2 Cor. 11:14-15, 12:7).
- Evil, mentioned by Paul 43 times, is real and influential, but passing, and will not triumph (2 Tim. 4:18; Eph. 6:10-16).

HUMAN CONDITION

- Human beings were created in God's image: we are God's offspring (Acts 17:28-29).
- Each person has an outer nature (body) and an inner nature (mind, soul, heart) (2 Cor. 4:16, 5:8). The body can be controlled by the mind or the inner person (1 Cor. 9:27).
- Human beings have physical bodies here on earth, but they will be transformed into spiritual bodies in heaven (1 Cor. 15:35-46). The future Christian hope involves a clothed existence.
- Each person has a conscience (Rom. 2:15) which may be spoiled by sin (1 Cor. 8:7; 1 Tim. 4:2).
- No one is righteous within oneself (Rom. 3:1-20).
- Human beings can be good or bad depending on the one to whom they belong (2 Tim. 3:13-17).
- All have sinned (Rom. 3:23-28), and naturally follow the passions of the flesh (Eph. 2:1-5). They are held captive by the devil, but can escape with God's help (2 Tim. 2:24-26).
- Each person has a mind which has been darkened by sin (Eph. 4:17-18) but can be renewed by God (Rom. 12:2).
- Christians are adopted by God and, therefore, become His children, not just His servants (Gal. 4:1-9).



THE LAW

- The Law or the Old Testament is authoritative for all (Rom. 3:31, 7:12, 14; Gal. 5:13-14, 6:2) and emphasizes that all are lost (Rom. 3:10-11, quoting Ps. 14:1-3). It condemns legalism which believes one is saved by the merit of one's good works and points to the need of forgiveness (Rom. 3:23-24; Col. 1:13-14). Therefore, it points to Christ (Rom. 3:21-24; Gal. 3:24).
- The law or the Jewish dietary or circumcision customs are definitely not necessary for salvation. Paul characterizes this use of the term as a legalistic misrepresentation of the Old Testament. The Law rightly understood requires salvation by faith, wrongly understood requires salvation by works (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:15).

PEOPLE OF GOD

- Paul does not see himself as the founder of a new religion. He sees the Church as continuity with the true Jews, a remnant truly following God's will. The foundation of Paul's gospel is on the covenant God made with Abraham (Acts 13:17; Rom. 9:4-8, 11:12; 2 Cor. 11:22; Gal. 3:8-9).
- As people of God we are children and heirs of God, no longer servants or slaves (Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:16-21; Phil. 2:15).

REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

- Paul was called to reveal the gospel or the mystery of the gospel and lay the foundation for the Gentiles' faith. God gave him special grace for this task (Rom. 15:15-16, 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:6-9).
- Christ is the awaited Messiah, the Word of salvation itself (2 Tim. 2:10).
- Gentiles were co-heirs of God's covenant favor with believing Israel (Eph. 3:4-9).
- These ideas were also held by Christ, other apostles, and Old Testament scripture (Acts 24:14; Gal. 2:6-9).
- All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for correcting and instructing people so they might be equipped for the ministry God has for them (2 Tim. 3:16-17).



NOTES

CHRIST/MESSIAH

- Messiah: Paul uses the Greek translation of Messiah, Christ, close to 400 times.
- Christ is one with God, yet willingly humbled himself by taking on human form and endured the shameful cross (Phil. 2:6-11).
- Christ was integral in creation and even now upholds the created order (Col. 1:15-20).
- Christ came in human likeness, vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, proclaimed to the nations, believed in all over the world, and taken up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16).
- “God was in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19).

REDEMPTION

- Christ died for us when we were still sinners (Rom. 5:7-8; 1 Tim. 2:6).
- Redemption refers to the paying of a price or ransom for the release of prisoners from captivity. It has rich Old Testament associations with the liberation of God’s people from Egypt. It is a present event involving forgiveness of sins (Rom. 3:24-25). It is also a future event involving all of creation including our bodies (Rom. 8:18-23).
- We are redeemed by the blood of Christ which means we have forgiveness of sins, and inheritance in Christ, and have received His Holy Spirit as a pledge of our coming redemption (Eph. 1:7-14).

THE CROSS

- Crucifixion was the punishment reserved by the Roman overlords for the most despicable crimes. Jews in Jesus’ day interpreted Deut. 21:23, “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse,” to refer to crucifixion and thus this proved to them Jesus was not the Messiah, but was cursed by God (1 Cor. 1:18-23; 2 Cor. 13:4).
- Paul turns this around to say Christ became a curse for us so blessing might come to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:13-14).
- The Cross became a symbol of the means by which God in Christ atoned for sins (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 2:14).



- The Cross is also the means by which believers walk in the footsteps of Christ. It is an inspiration and effective agent in killing the sinful nature and its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24, 6:14).

RESURRECTION

- Paul refers to resurrection at least 60 times in his letters (2 Tim. 2:8).
- He says the Christian message stands or falls with the truth of Jesus Christ rising bodily from the dead (Acts 13:34-37; 1 Cor. 15:14).
- There will be a resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous before judgment (Acts 24:15-21).
- Jesus' resurrection means we have victory over sin which is the ultimate cause of death (Rom. 4:24-25).
- Jesus' resurrection means we will also be resurrected (Rom. 8:11).

THE CHURCH

- Paul uses the term the Church over 60 times in his letters.
- The Church is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23).
- The Church is the one body God created out of two: Jew and Gentile. It emphasizes unity and interdependence (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-16; Rom. 12:3-5).
- The Church as a social entity means the believers are to live humbly and exercise their gifts for the sake of others in the body of Christ and for the extension of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 12:1-31).
- The Church is connected to Christ, the bride of Christ, and so must be holy and pure (2 Cor. 11:2).

ETHICS

- We are to be imitators of God and Christ (Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5-11).
- Our conduct is regulated by God's presence in our lives and His purpose in saving and calling us (Eph. 1:4, 4:1; Titus 2:6-10).
- We are the temple of God and as such, we must keep ourselves holy (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Titus 2:14).

**NOTES**

- Our ethics are also a means of witness. We are to meet the minimum expectations of a decent person in our society (1 Thess. 4: 11-12; Titus 3:1-14).
- Above all, love is the crowning virtue (1 Cor. 13:13).

LAST THINGS

- The future has profound implications for how life is to be lived now (Rom. 2:1-11, 8:15-18).
- Creation itself is waiting and longing for redemption (Rom. 8:19-22).
- When Paul talks about the *parousia* (appearing) of Christ it includes final judgment (2 Thess. 1:5-10).
- The Holy Spirit is a sign of the end of the age which believers are already enjoying. The Holy Spirit is a seal of the inheritance and adoption believers have and enables them to call God, "Abba" (Rom. 8:15-17).
- Paul's view of the end times means we must live in a state of readiness for Christ's return as well as continue to spread the good news of salvation to everyone who will hear it (Rom. 13:11-14; Phil. 3:17-4:1).

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Read and summarize what is said about **two** of the following topics:
 - *God*: Rom. 11:33-36, 16:26-27; 2 Cor. 1:3-22, 5:18-6:4; Acts 14:15; 1 Tim. 1:17, 6:15-16
 - *Evil*: Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 11:12-15, 12:7; Eph. 2:2, 6:10-16; 1 Tim. 3:7, 15; 2 Tim. 2:26, 4:18
 - *Human Condition*: Rom. 2:15, 3:1-20, 23-28, 12:2; 1 Cor. 9:27, 15:35-46; 2 Cor. 4:16, 5:8; Gal. 4:1-9; Eph. 2:1-5, 4:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26, 3:13-17; Acts 17:28-29
 - *The Law/law*: Rom. 3:10-11, 21-31, 7:12, 14; Gal. 2:16, 3:24, 5:13-14, 6:2; Eph. 2:15; Col. 1:13-14
 - *People of God*: Acts 13:17; Rom. 8:16-21, 9:4-8, 11:12; 2 Cor. 11:22; Gal. 3:8-9, 4:4-5; Phil. 2:15
 - *Revelation/Scripture*: Eph. 3:4-9; Rom. 15:15-16, 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:6-9; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim. 2:10, 3:16-17
 - *Messiah/Christ*: Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16
 - *Redemption*: Rom. 3:24-25, 5:7-8, 8:23; Eph. 1:1-14; 1 Tim. 2:6
 - *The Cross*: 1 Cor. 1:18-23; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 3:13-14, 5:24, 6:14; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 2:14
 - *Resurrection*: 1 Cor. 15:14; Acts 13:34-37, 24:15-21; Rom. 4:24-25, 8:11; 2 Tim. 2:8
 - *Church*: Eph. 1:22-23, 2:11-16, 4:15, 5:22-23; Rom. 12:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; 2 Cor. 11:2
 - *Ethics*: Eph. 1:4, 4:1, 5:1; 1 Cor. 3:17, 13:13; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; Titus 2:7-14, 3:1-14
 - *Last Things*: Rom. 2:1-11, 8:15-23, 13:11-14; Phil. 3:17-4:1; 2 Thess. 1:5-10

How do your insights on these passages correspond to the comments presented in this session? Similarities? Differences?

 **NOTES**

2. Using study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, or Internet websites (Biblical Studies Foundation <http://www.netbible.com>; Blue Letter Bible <http://www.blueletterbible.org>; or Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools <http://bible.crosswalk.com>) look up and read articles relating to two or more of the topics listed above. How do these articles further your understanding of these areas? How does this information contribute to your understanding of God, humanity, and their relationship?

EXAM


NOTES

1. Paul generally wrote with the broader Christian Church in mind.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. There is widespread agreement among scholars that _____ are among the letters written by Paul himself.
 - A. Romans, 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Timothy
 - B. 1, 2 Corinthians and Titus
 - C. Romans, Philippians, and Philemon
 - D. 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians

3. Orthodox Christians recognize that Paul and Jesus are not identical in their message, but they are complementary.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Paul maintains that the Christian message stands or falls_____.
 - A. depending upon the witness of believers to the world
 - B. with Christians exercising their gifts for the sake of others in the body of Christ
 - C. depending upon our recognition that Christianity has supplanted Judaism
 - D. with the truth of Jesus Christ rising bodily from the dead

5. Paul believed that _____ was the crowning or primary Christian virtue.
 - A. generosity
 - B. commitment
 - C. love
 - D. righteousness

6. Paul's letters were, in some sense, formal theological essays which were generally written during times of quiet contemplation.
 - A. True
 - B. False

7. According to Paul, our conduct is regulated by our self-determination to do the will of God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

 **NOTES**

8. For Paul, the Cross became a symbol of the means by which God in Christ atoned for sins.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. According to Paul's understanding regarding ethics and last things, the future hope of the Christian has nothing to do with how life is lived in the present world.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. For Paul, sin is the ultimate cause of death.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Jesus' death on the Cross proved to the many Jews that Jesus truly was the Messiah. They expected a suffering Messiah based on passages from Isaiah.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. According to Paul, our reception of the Holy Spirit is a pledge of our final coming redemption.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. Paul believed that Christ died for us so that we might not become sinners.
 - A. True
 - B. False

14. While at some level disturbed by the idea, Paul recognized that he was, in effect, founding a new religion.
 - A. True
 - B. False

15. Paul viewed the devil/Satan as a symbolic representation of the forces of evil in the world.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Imagine Paul has just written you a letter concerning your life as a Christian in society. What would it say? How would you react?
2. How do Jesus' message and Paul's message differ? How are they alike?
3. What are some of Paul's ethical principles? How would you apply them to Christian living today?
4. How did Paul view the relationship between Christianity and Judaism?
5. If you could sit down and talk to Paul, what topic would you want to discuss? Why?