

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Telling the New Testament  
Story of God



**SESSION 8**  
The Life of Paul

## NOTICE TO CLT PARTICIPANTS AND EDUCATORS

---

This is a contract. By using these materials you accept all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This Agreement covers all Leader's Guides, Student Guides, and instructional resources included in the Continuing Lay Training (CLT) website.

Upon your acceptance of this Agreement, Continuing Lay Training grants to you a nonexclusive license to use these curricular materials provided that you agree to the following:

### 1. USE OF THE MODULES.

- You may distribute educational materials in electronic form to students or other educational providers.
- You may make and distribute electronic or paper copies to students for the purpose of instruction, as long as each copy contains this Agreement and the same copyright and other proprietary notices pertaining to the Module. If you download the educational materials from the Internet or similar online source, you must include the CLT notice for the Module with any online distribution and on any media you distribute that includes the educational content.
- You may translate, adapt, and/or modify the examples and instructional resources for the purpose of making the instruction culturally relevant to your students. However, you must agree that you will not sell these modified materials without express, written permission from CLT.

### 2. COPYRIGHT.

The material is owned by CLT and is protected by United States Copyright Law and International Treaty provisions. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Module.

### 3. RESTRICTIONS.

- You may not sell copies of these educational materials in any form except to recover the minimum reproduction cost of electronic media or photocopy expense.
- You may not modify the wording or original intent of the educational material for commercial use.

## THANK YOU

Continuing Lay Training would like to thank Clergy Development for granting permission to modify and adapt their course of study materials for our educational purposes. Their willingness to partner with us is sincerely appreciated.

# The Life of Paul

## SESSION OVERVIEW

### Paul's Early Life

### Paul's Ministry: Christianity in an Urban Environment

### Chronology of Paul's Life

### Historical and Literary Issues for Paul's Life and Ministry

### The Art of Letter Writing: Possible Models for Paul's Letters

### Application

### Exam

### Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- develop a chronology for Paul's life.
- understand the historical, geographical, social, and literary setting for Paul's life and ministry.

## The Life of Paul

### INTRODUCTION



One of the most significant and influential persons in early Christianity was Paul. As indicated in our last session, Paul's missionary endeavors contributed to the Church becoming increasingly Gentile in composition as the first century proceeded. Who was this Paul? What was the course of his life and ministry? What were the primary forces brought to bear on his life? In what type of environment did he minister?

One of the ways Paul contributed to the advancement of the Church was through his letters. Paul's letters comprise approximately one-fourth of the New Testament. What is the nature of these letters? How are they to be viewed in the context of letter writing in the Greco-Roman world? To such issues we now turn.

## PAUL'S EARLY LIFE



### NOTES

Primary sources for our understanding of Paul are his own letters and the book of Acts. As indicated in Phil. 3:5, Paul was born of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews. The place of his birth was Tarsus in the region of Cilicia. Paul's Hebrew name was Saul that means asked for. He was named, therefore, after the first king of Israel. His Roman name Paul means little. At that time, it was common for a Jew to have both a Hebrew and Roman name.

Little information is known about his family. However, if Paul was born a Roman citizen as indicated in Acts 16:37-38 and 22:25-29, then his family likely possessed some wealth or social standing. Concerning his education, Luke records that Paul studied under Gamaliel of the liberal school of Judaism (Acts 22:3). As indicated by Ralph Martin, Paul's environment was three-fold. He was surrounded by the religion of the Hebrews, the civilization of the Greeks, and the administrative genius of the Romans. This environment shows itself in, for example, the illustrations which he selects from the areas of sports and games. He refers to running, boxing, wrestling, and the arena.

It appears that while being brought up in a Greco-Roman environment, Paul was extremely proud of his Jewish heritage. In Phil. 3:4b-6, Paul writes: "If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 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; as to zeal a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (NRSV). Paul's pride was overshadowed, however, by the central matter of importance in his life, namely his relationship with Christ.

As part of his devotion and service to God, Paul believed that it was important to persecute those persons (Acts 9:2, known as members of the Way) who viewed Jesus as the Messiah. It was while on the way to Damascus to facilitate this persecution Paul had a life-changing encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9:1-19, 22:3-16, 26:4-18; Gal.1:1-17; 1 Cor. 15:8-10; Phil. 3:5-16). From this experience, Paul, a man committed to his faith and zealous for its support, received an entirely new outlook. He did not change religions, but came to realize that Jesus was the fulfillment of the hope of his people and the peoples of the world. Paul is transformed from a persecutor of the Church to one of its greatest allies. Through Paul's ministry, the message of the gospel would spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, eventually reaching Rome that was the heart and center of that world.

## PAUL'S MINISTRY: CHRISTIANITY IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

### NOTES

Judging from the gospel stories, the Jesus movement had a rural beginning. Jesus and His disciples came from a rural, agricultural, and fishing society in Galilee. The settings of the parables indicate these social backgrounds. Currently, a rather large Roman city, Sepphoris, is being excavated about four miles from Nazareth. This has caused some scholars to rethink how rural Galilee really was. But the background of Jesus and His disciples is in sharp contrast to where the apostle Paul grew up and ministered.

As indicated, Paul, a Diaspora Jew, grew up in Tarsus, Cilicia. Some major characteristics of this city are as follows:

- It was a busy commercial city on the southeast coast of Asia Minor.
- It was a regional Roman capital, which meant Roman officials and their families would live in the city, and Roman officials from Rome would come and go periodically, bringing news and ideas from different parts of the empire.
- It was on a major road used for trade and moving military personnel. Information from far-off places would move right through town on a regular basis.
- It had a world-class university which specialized in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. Although we have no indication that Paul went to this university, it would not be surprising for him to have a higher common knowledge of these subjects. In fact, his writings give indication of his knowledge of the use of rhetoric.
- Greek language and culture predominated in Tarsus, but it also contained a Jewish community that was characteristic of many of the cities Paul evangelized. Paul's field training, or we might call it internship, was done in Antioch, Syria. This city has many similarities to Tarsus.

Some points of particular interest concerning Antioch include:

- It was in a similar cultural area to Tarsus.
- It was also on the major trade route.
- The church community in Antioch first consisted of Jews, perhaps Jews converted at Pentecost. Then Gentiles were converted and became a part of the Christian community, even before Paul got there.

 **NOTES**

- The Bible tells us the disciples were first called Christians there (Acts 11:26). Perhaps this was a name to distinguish them from the Jewish community who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, since Gentiles were also a part of the Church.
- After Paul's field training, he and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries by the church in Antioch.

An important observation is that the Church was growing fast in urban areas and the gospel was spreading to the surrounding areas through the communication networks already in place. This was because of the ability to reach more people quickly with the gospel and perhaps because those who moved to the cities were more open to learning new things and change in their lives.

## CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LIFE

### NOTES

There are differences of scholarly opinion concerning the exact chronology for Paul's life. Based on a survey of passages in Acts, Galatians, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, a possible chronology is as follows:

- 6 BC Paul's birth
- AD 28-30 Public ministry of Jesus
- AD 33 Paul's conversion
- AD 33-36 Paul in Arabia being taught by revelation of Jesus Christ
- AD 35 or 36 Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem
- AD 35-44 Paul preaches in Cilicia
- AD 44-46 Paul invited to Antioch, Syria, by Barnabas and famine in Palestine
- AD 46 Paul's second visit to Jerusalem
- AD 47-48 first missionary journey with Barnabas to Cyprus and Galatia
- AD 49 Jerusalem Council
- AD 49 Jews expelled from Rome by Claudius because of the Chrestus riot
- AD 49-52 second missionary journey with Silas through Asia Minor and Greece
- AD 52 third visit to Jerusalem and a visit to Antioch
- AD 52-55 third missionary journey (Ephesus)
- AD 55-57 third missionary journey (Macedonia, Illyricum, and Achaia)
- AD 57-59 fourth visit to Jerusalem, arrested, and imprisoned at Caesarea under Felix
- AD 59-60 appears before Festus and King Agrippa and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome
- AD 60-62 under house arrest at Rome
- AD 62-64 (65) Released, journeys to Spain?
- AD 64 fire in Rome during rule of Emperor Nero
- AD 64 (67) Paul returns to Rome and is martyred under Emperor Nero



## HISTORICAL AND LITERARY ISSUES FOR PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

### NOTES

Debate in the dating of Paul's life revolves around a perceived difference between events recorded in Acts and similar events recorded in Paul's letters. Acts records five trips of Paul to Jerusalem.

- Acts 9:26, right after his conversion
- Acts 11:29-30, to bring money for famine relief
- Acts 15:2-4, to attend the Jerusalem Council
- Acts 18:22, after his second missionary journey
- Acts 21:17, final visit when he is arrested

Paul's letters record only three trips to Jerusalem.

- Gal. 1:18, right after his conversion
- Gal. 2:1, to attend a council
- Rom. 15:25 and 1 Cor. 16:3, final visit when he was arrested

The debate comes in the middle of Paul's life: Which Acts visit is mentioned in Gal. 2:1-10? There are two positions; both positions are well accepted by scholars.

- One side assumes Paul is referring to the Acts 15 Council in Jerusalem in Gal. 2:1-10, and Paul's understanding of the outcome of the Jerusalem Council is very different from what Luke reports in Acts 15.
- The other side thinks Gal. 2:1-10 refers to the famine relief visit in Acts 11:29-30 when an informal Jerusalem council took place. This would place Peter and Paul's confrontation in Antioch before the formal Council of Jerusalem in AD 49 and would not necessarily reflect a difference in understanding of the Jerusalem Council decision.

### BACKGROUND ISSUES TO UNDERSTANDING PAUL IN HIS CONTEXT

There are four different but related views of the relationship of Judaism, Christianity, and Gentiles stated or reflected in the New Testament. These views all existed at the same time, bringing conflict and misunderstanding to the Early Church. Some of these views were more prevalent at different times than others.

NOTES**RAYMOND BROWN'S FOUR TYPES OF JEWISH/GENTILE CHRISTIANS**

*Gentiles must become Jews after becoming Christians.* This was the position of Judaizers who seemed to follow Paul wherever he went. They felt all Christians should keep all the Jewish laws including circumcision and diet.

*Gentile Christians are viewed as Gentiles living within Israel who must compromise so as not to offend Jews.* This was the position of James and sometimes of Peter. As such, Gentiles were to eat no meat offered to idols, keep from sexual immorality (as defined by Judaism), and avoid eating blood and meat from animals with blood inside of them.

*Gentile Christians are not under the law.* This was the position of Paul. By law, he meant Jewish dietary laws and practices. Paul further believed Jewish Christians were not required to abandon their Jewish heritage in churches inside or outside Israel.

*Jesus has replaced Judaism.* This was the position of John and the author to the Hebrews. This idea was taken from Jesus' words in Mark 2:21-22, "You can't put new wine in old wineskins." In John and Hebrews Jesus replaces the Temple, Temple worship, and major Jewish feasts. Jesus is better than anything offered in Judaism, so why stay with the good, when you can have the best?

## THE ART OF LETTER WRITING: POSSIBLE MODELS FOR PAUL'S LETTERS

### NOTES

As indicated earlier, Paul's letters comprise approximately one-fourth of the New Testament. The power of Paul's letters is voiced by his critics as recorded in 2 Cor. 10:10. It states: "For they [his opponents] say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'"

As mentioned before, Paul grew up in a town known for its rhetoric. An extension of rhetoric, which usually refers to the spoken word, is the letter. The typical letter of this period generally followed this pattern or form:

- salutation or opening (from/to and greeting)
- prayer or expression of thanks to a god or the gods (or certain groups or individuals) and greetings
- body (primary topic or topics under consideration/reason or reasons for writing)
- advice or exhortation (closing commands)
- closing farewell

In addition to the form of the letter, several documented types of letters were studied in the universities. Paul seems to incorporate elements from many of these types in creating his own type of a Christian pastoral letter. We will look at these types more in depth later in the course as we talk about each of Paul's letters.

**Letter of Friendship.** Ancient traditions asserted that friendship required the sharing of all things between socially and morally equal people, including affection and companionship. When being together was impossible, friendly letters were said to provide a suitable substitute for actual companionship.

No actual letters of friendship are given in the New Testament, but language from friendship letters is used: "absent in body, but present in spirit" (2 Cor. 5:3), "Sharing in one another's feelings" (Phil. 2:17-18), and "letter writing as a conversation" (1 Cor. 10:15).

**Letter of Praise and Blame.** Praising and blaming were fundamental activities through which the social construction of the ancient world was maintained. We refer to these types of societies as honor and shame cultures. Those who give praise and blame are trying to locate each person and thing in their proper place


**NOTES**

by bestowing honor and causing shame. No pure letters of this type are in the NT, but Paul makes significant use of praise in his thanksgivings. Praise and blame in 1 Cor. 11:2, 7, 22 and 1 Cor. 13 is comparable to passages in Greco-Roman literature that praise virtues.

**Letter of Exhortation and Advice.** There are seven subtypes isolated in this area in ancient literature. Exhortation can be defined as strong encouragement, which included not only telling the person what he or she is doing right, but also what he or she needs to change in his or her life. These styles are used quite extensively by Paul. They range from letters that provide a model of behavior, to giving a specific course of action, from gentle blame to rebuke and reproach, as well as consolation.

**Paraenetic Letters (exhortation and dissuasion or encouragement and confrontation on issues of right and wrong).** In a sample letter, Libanius illustrates the essential characteristic of providing a positive model of behavior that the reader is either explicitly or implicitly urged to imitate. The author's own behavior may be given as an example. Paraenesis concerns those basic and unquestioned patterns of behavior sanctioned by honor and shame. It is not supposed to teach anything new, but to encourage people to follow what they have been taught. Exhortation plays a major role in all the letters of Paul and the Pauline school, except Philemon. First Thessalonians is an excellent example of a paraenetic letter.

**Letters of Advice.** Advice differs from paraenetic letters, when a specific course of action is called for. Paraenesis only seeks to increase adherence to a value or to cultivate a character trait. Paul very skillfully mixes paraenesis and advice in 1 Corinthians (especially in 7-8 and 10-14).

**Protreptic Letters.** No theorist ever defined the protreptic letter in antiquity. It was neither a recognized type nor a widely used kind of letter. Nevertheless, it is important for those who have an interest in early Christian letter writing. Protreptic writings are those exhortations to take up the philosophical life. Protreptic works urge the reader to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life. In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is a protreptic letter.

**Letters of Admonition.** The gentlest type of blame was admonition. It is the instilling of sense in the person being admonished, and teaching what should and should not be done. The writer constructively criticizes certain aspects of the reader's behavior. Admonition is used very consciously and explicitly in the letters of Paul. Second Thessalonians 3:6-12 admonishes certain people in the community and 3:15 urges members to admonish one another.

 **NOTES**

**Letters of Rebuke.** Rebuke was considered harsher than admonition. Rebuke was directed at fundamental flaws of character or a basic pattern of immoral behavior. The rebuker tried to shame the sinner into stopping the misbehavior and often explicitly called for a change to an honorable way of life. Paul uses rebuke in his letter to the Galatians (1:6-10, 3:1-5, 4:8-10). His expression “I am amazed” and his denunciation of them as fools are characteristic of rebuke.

**Letters of Reproach.** Reproach was a harsh blame that only the sternest sort of philosopher considered morally beneficial. Letters of reproach seem absent from the corpus of early Christian letters. Paul contrasts the gentleness of his own teaching to harsher methods (1 Thess. 2:6-7) and the Pastoral Epistles argue against harsh and quarrelsome teachers (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

**Letters of Consolation.** Consolation was very important in the Greco-Roman world. It had an important place in both the philosophical and the rhetorical traditions. Consolation proper contains traditional materials such as quotations from the poets, examples, precepts, and arguments against excessive grieving. Giving consolation was considered one of the philosopher’s chief functions. Like many complex paraenetic letters, 1 Thessalonians contains a consolatory section (4:13-18). Paul’s call for the Thessalonians to stop grieving is a formulaic expression in consolatory literature. Like Paul, writers of consolations eased the sting of death by calling it sleep.

**Letter of Mediation.** The basic purpose of these letters is for one person to make a request to another person on behalf of a third party. Letters of introduction, which were very important to those who traveled and needed hospitality, are included in this category. Letters of introduction are mentioned several times in the New Testament (Acts 9:2, 18:27; 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 3:1-2). Philemon is an intercessory letter on behalf of a runaway slave.

**Accusing, Apologetic, and Accounting Letters.** These are technical and non-technical letters of petition, prosecution, and defense. There are technically no letters of this type in the New Testament. But Revelation 1-3 does seem to be a recounting of Christ’s evaluation or judgment of the seven churches in Asia Minor. This style would fit best under this category.

## APPLICATION



### NOTES

1. 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 on the life of Paul. How do these articles contribute to your understanding of Paul?
2. Read the following passages and construct a chronology of Paul's life:
  - Acts 9:1-31, 11:19-30, 13:1--28:31
  - Gal. 1:11--2:21
  - Rom. 15:22-29
  - 1 Cor. 16:1-9

How does your chronology correspond to that provided above in this session?

3. Read Paul's letters to the Philippians and Philemon and analyze according to the pattern of salutation (sender, receiver, greeting), prayer or expression of thanks to God or a member or members of the community, body (primary topic or topics under consideration/reason or reasons for writing), advice or exhortation (closing commands), and closing farewell.
4. Classify Philippians and Philemon in terms of the headings: letters of friendship, letters of praise and blame, letters of exhortation and advice, letters of mediation, and accusing, apologetic, and accounting letters. What types of letters are Philippians and Philemon? Why?

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. Saul became Paul on the road to Damascus as part of this encounter with the risen Christ.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. On the Damascus Road, Paul converted or changed religions from Judaism to Christianity.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Followers of Jesus were first called Christians in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Jerusalem
  - B. Damascus
  - C. Antioch in Syria
  - D. Tarsus
4. From Paul's own letters and the book of Acts, it appears that Paul was a person who was struggling with his faith and ability to serve God before his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. The background of Jesus and His disciples is in sharp contrast to where the apostle Paul grew up and ministered.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. Paul's third missionary journey largely focused on the regions of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Ephesus, Macedonia, Illyricum, and Achaia
  - B. Cyprus and Galatia
  - C. Italy and Spain
  - D. Bithynia and Pontus
7. The accounts in Acts and Paul's own letters are in complete agreement concerning the chronology for Paul's life.
  - A. True
  - B. False

 NOTES

8. Paul believed that Jewish Christians must abandon their Jewish heritage in churches inside or outside Israel.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. From the first, the Early Church was in general agreement about what was required of Gentiles after becoming Christians.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. The format of Paul's letters largely followed the pattern of the Greco-Roman world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
11. Paul's critics maintained that his letters were poorly written and ineffective.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. \_\_\_\_\_ urge readers to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life. In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is an example of this type of letter.
  - A. protreptic letters
  - B. letters of rebuke
  - C. apologetic letters
  - D. letters of reproach
  
13. \_\_\_\_\_ display essential characteristic of providing a positive model of behavior that the readers are either explicitly or implicitly urged to imitate. The author's own behavior may be given as an example. First Thessalonians is an excellent example of this type of letter.
  - A. letters of advice
  - B. accounting letters
  - C. letters of praise
  - D. paraenetic letters
  
14. Letters of introduction, which were very important to those who traveled and needed hospitality, are included in the category of letters of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. mediation
  - B. consolation
  - C. praise
  - D. admonition



## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

---

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What are the major periods in Paul's life and what did he accomplish during those times?
2. What are the major influences or characteristics of Paul that allowed him to do what he did in this life?
3. What type of person do you perceive Paul to be? Do you see any Pauline traits in the lives of persons in the modern world? Who? Why?
4. In terms of format, how do Paul's letters compare with letters in the modern world?
5. When was the last time you wrote a letter? What kind of letter was it? Have you ever written a letter with the intent of teaching or correcting someone? How difficult is that?