

The Heart of Paul's Theology

Study Guide

LESSON
ONE

PAUL AND HIS THEOLOGY



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STUDY GUIDE

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How to use this lesson and study guide

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Preparation** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule breaks** — Review the outline and the time codes to determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions in the outline.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Notes** — Use the Notes section to follow the lesson and to take additional notes. Many of the main ideas are already summarized in the notes, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Review Questions** — Questions on the basic content of the lesson. Answer review questions in the space provided. Review questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Application Questions** — Questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read Acts 9:1–21:17

Outline

- I. Introduction (0:25)
- II. Cultural Background (1:46)
 - A. Jewish culture (2:48)
 - B. Gentile culture (9:03)
- III. Apostolic Ministry (13:42)
 - A. Office (14:22)
 - B. Mission (19:11)
 - 1. First Journey (19:22)
 - 2. Second Journey (20:40)
 - 3. Third Journey (22:20)
 - 4. Fourth Journey (23:16)
 - C. Writings (25:32)
- IV. Central Outlooks (30:15)
 - A. Reformation (31:05)
 - B. Eschatological (35:03)
 - 1. Terminology (36:28)
 - 2. Structure (37:49)
 - 3. Implications (50:50)
- V. Conclusion (59:15)

Notes

I. Introduction

II. Cultural Background

Jewish culture greatly affected Paul as well as his exposure to Gentile, Graeco-Roman culture.

A. Jewish culture

Paul was self-conscious of his Jewish heritage before he became a Christian.

Paul's remained deeply indebted to his Jewish culture after he became a Christian.

Paul believed in the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul held firmly to the Jewish belief that God would one day send the Messiah, the great son of David who would end Israel's suffering and extend the kingdom of God to all the Gentile nations.

B. Gentile culture

The Holy Spirit used Paul's contact with Gentile culture to shape his theology.

At different times in his life Paul lived in the Gentile world.

- Acts 21:39
- Acts 22:3
- Acts 9:30
- Acts 11:25

Paul enjoyed full Roman citizenship.

Paul showed himself knowledgeable of sophisticated pagan literature.

Effects of Paul's contact with the Gentile world:

Paul was equipped to minister to Gentiles outside the church.

Paul was prepared to minister to Gentiles within the church, and to even fight for them.

A central theme in many of Paul's epistles was that Jesus had flung open the door of salvation to the Gentile nations so that any Gentile who was in Christ was counted as a full-blooded Jew and perfect Law-keeper in God's eyes.

III. Apostolic Ministry

Paul's service to the church provided a constant reference point for his theology and deeply influenced what he believed.

A. Office

Christ ordained apostles to speak with absolute authority to the church on his behalf.

Paul met a set of qualifications established for apostleship.

Authoritative apostles of Christ had to meet three criteria:

- Acts 1:21, they had to have been taught directly by Christ during his earthly ministry.
- Acts 1:22, they had to be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.
- Acts 1:23-26, new apostles had to be chosen for the office by the Lord himself.

Paul's qualifications:

- Gal 1:11-18
- Acts 9:1-6
- Acts 9:15

Galatians 2:7-8: “[They] saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.”

The New Testament made it clear that Paul was a legitimate apostle.

B. Mission

We get a good idea of Paul's work by looking at his three missionary journeys and his trip to Rome.

1. First Journey (Acts 13–14)

The journey began when God told the church in Syrian Antioch to set aside Paul and Barnabas for a special work. They traveled through the isle of Cyprus and onto a tour of Asia Minor traveling as far east as Derbe.

Paul's first journey as an apostle of Christ was relatively short and uncomplicated.

2. Second Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

This expedition began when the apostles and church leaders in Jerusalem selected Paul and Barnabas to deliver a letter to the churches in Antioch, Syria, Cilicia and Galatia, explaining that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised or to keep the Law of Moses in order to gain salvation.

3. Third Journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)

Paul went from Syrian Antioch through Galatia and Phrygia, and then established a thriving ministry in Ephesus. He also visited churches he had planted in his previous trip to the region.

4. Fourth Journey (Acts 27–28)

Paul's appeal to Caesar led him on his fourth missionary journey to Rome.

The region between Jerusalem and Rome reveals that Paul visited many different places, making contact with thousands of people in more than twenty-five cities.

Paul's theology did not allow him to be an armchair theologian. Paul was well educated and was very intelligent. But, his theology led him to a life of sacrifice and service.

C. Writings

When Paul wrote his epistles (13 letters), he was concerned to address the specific needs of those particular situations. Because Paul's letters were so occasional, written to address specific problems, none of his letters lay out his whole theology in a systematic way.

A closer examination of Romans reveals Paul wrote to them to stabilize relationships between Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome.

- Romans 1–3: Jews and Gentiles are equally sinners, neither had a right to claim superiority over the other.
- Romans 4–8: God provided the same way of salvation both for Jews and Gentiles.
- Romans 9–11: Complementary roles for Jews and Gentiles in God's plan for human history.
- Romans 12–16: Issues of practical Christian living closely related to conflicts between Jews and Gentiles.

We are right to believe that Paul had a well-formed, logical set of theological beliefs, or what we might call systematic theology. But, Paul's system of theology remained unwritten, even though it undergirded his epistles.

IV. Central Outlooks

A. Reformation

Prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church taught that salvation required both God's grace and human merit. Justification is a long process by which God infuses grace into the believer, and this grace allows the believer to become more righteous by doing good works.

Paul opposed this legalism in the early church, and insisted that justification was a unique event that occurred apart from works of the law.

Sola fide (by faith alone): Believers are justified solely by means of faith in Christ, and not by means of faith plus our good works.

Protestants have held that Paul developed his theology primarily around the theme of how salvation is applied to individual believers. Paul's theology was thought to be structured around the *ordo salutis*, or the order of salvation.

Paul was also concerned with the long history of God's redemption that climaxed in the death and resurrection of Christ, *historia salutis*, or the history of salvation.

B. Eschatological

The eschatological perspective on Paul's theology is the idea that the history of salvation is central to Paul's theology.

1. Terminology

“Eschatology” comes from the Greek word *eschatos* which means “last” or “end.”

In traditional systematic theology, “eschatology” has primarily referred to the Bible’s teaching about the second coming of Christ. In the “eschatological” approach to Paul, we must expand the term to refer to much more than the second coming of Christ.

2. Structure

a. Origins

Jewish theologians:

This Age >> Messiah >> Age to Come

- The present age of sin and trouble (this age)
- A future age of blessing (the age to come)
- Messiah is crucial turning point between ages

Paul held same basic two-age view of history:

- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- 1 Corinthians 1:20
- 1 Timothy 6:19
- Ephesians 2:7
- Ephesians 1:21

b. Development

The transition from this age to the age to come was not a simple shift from one age to the next. It involved a period of overlap when both ages occurred simultaneously.

c. Themes

“Already and not yet”- some aspects of the end times or last days had already become reality in Christ, while other aspects had not yet been realized.

- **Already**

This theme appears in Paul’s writings in three ways:

- First, the final stage of the Kingdom of God began when Jesus ascended to his heavenly throne.
- Secondly, an aspect of the age to come which is already present with us is the foretaste of our eternal inheritance in the Holy Spirit.

- Finally, Paul pointed to the fact that Christ had inaugurated the new creation associated with the age to come.

- Not-yet

Paul believed that the blessings of the last days had not yet come in their fullness. Paul looked forward to Christ's return as the time when Christ would fulfill the final judgments and blessings.

Three ways Paul's perspective comes into view:

- First, Paul taught that Christ the King is now reigning from his throne in heaven. But Paul also believed that when Christ returns he will bring in the fullness of God's Kingdom.

- Secondly, Paul believed that the Holy Spirit is the firstfruits of the harvest of salvation, and the down payment of our inheritance. "Firstfruits" and "down payment" indicate that the full reception of our inheritance is in the future.

- Finally, although the new creation has become a spiritual reality in the lives of believers, we also await the complete renewal of creation and our eternal reign over the new earth.

3. Implications

Paul expressed his theology largely in the context of pastoral ministry. Paul explained what God had done for believers in the first coming, and taught Christians how to live their lives as they waited for Christ's return.

a. Union with Christ

Romans 6:3-4: Our union with Christ actually moves us from this age to the next age.

Romans 6:10-11: Paul's teaching about our union with Christ applied eschatology to the practical lives of all believers.

b. Divine Purpose

God's plan for the overlap of the ages included uniting believing Jews and Gentiles into one people of God.

Church might reach a measure of spiritual maturity.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Ephesians 4:15-16

Romans 11:25

Ephesians 3:4-6

c. Christian Hope

Paul's eschatology gives us hope for the future by pointing out that we have already begun to enjoy many benefits of the age to come.

The blessings that still lie ahead of us are so astounding that they utterly overshadow any trials we experience in this life.

V. Conclusion

5. What key events took place during each of Paul's missionary journeys as well as his trip to Rome?

6. What was the main purpose of Paul's writings?

Application Questions

1. In light of Paul's background and ministry, what questions should we keep in mind as we read his writings?
2. Why does living in the "already" bring encouragement to you as a follower of Christ?
3. Why does living in the "not yet" bring encouragement and purpose to you as a follower of Christ?
4. How can a proper understanding of Paul's theology compel and inspire you to radical service for Christ?
5. How does an understanding of the already-not-yet paradigm help shape your understanding of suffering in this world?