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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

The Pauline Paradox Series – Part 5: Galatians

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching examines the book of Galatians, one of Paul's most frequently misunderstood letters concerning the Law of God. It begins by explaining that Galatians is often considered the primary biblical argument against observing God's commandments. The teaching argues that reading Galatians as though Paul abolished the Torah creates contradictions with the rest of Scripture, including the teachings of Yeshua, the prophets, and Paul's own life. Because of this, the lesson emphasizes the importance of understanding Galatians within its historical and literary context rather than interpreting individual verses in isolation. The teaching also explains that the Pauline Paradox series is designed to demonstrate that Paul's writings remain fully consistent with the whole Word of God.

Before examining the difficult passages, the teaching explains the overall structure of Galatians. Paul begins by establishing his authority as an apostle and expressing astonishment that the Galatian believers are quickly turning to "a different gospel." This false gospel becomes the controlling theme for the entire letter. Paul repeatedly warns that anyone who preaches a different gospel is to be rejected because the true gospel came by revelation from God rather than from human tradition. The lesson stresses that understanding the identity of this false gospel is essential before attempting to interpret any of Paul's later statements about the Law.

The teaching then reviews Paul's background as a Pharisee. Before encountering Messiah Yeshua, Paul had been deeply devoted to the traditions of his fathers and had persecuted believers. By reminding the Galatians of his former life, Paul demonstrates that he personally understands the system that is now troubling the Galatian assemblies. His experience gives credibility to his warning because he once promoted the very teachings that he now opposes. According to the lesson, this background strongly suggests that the false gospel troubling Galatia originated from man-made religious traditions rather than from God's Torah.

Attention then turns to Galatians 2 and the issue of circumcision. The teaching explains that many readers mistakenly conclude that Paul opposed circumcision itself. However, the historical setting reveals a different issue. Certain members of the Circumcision Party taught that Gentiles had to undergo ritual conversion, receive circumcision, and submit to their sectarian requirements before they could be considered part of God's covenant people. Paul opposed this teaching because it made salvation dependent upon human effort instead of faith in Messiah. The lesson carefully distinguishes between circumcision as a commandment of God and circumcision as a requirement for earning salvation. Paul rejects the latter while never condemning the former.

The teaching connects Galatians with the events of Acts 15, explaining that both passages address the same controversy. The Jerusalem Council rejected the teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved. According to the lesson, this decision did not abolish God's commandments but rejected the misuse of circumcision as part of a man-made system of justification. Throughout Galatians, Paul consistently opposes legalism and works-based salvation rather than obedience to God's Law itself.

The lesson next examines Paul's confrontation with Peter in Antioch. Peter had freely eaten with Gentile believers until members of the Circumcision Party arrived. Out of fear of their criticism, Peter withdrew from fellowship with the Gentiles. Paul publicly rebuked Peter because his actions suggested agreement with the false teaching that Gentiles remained second-class members of God's people unless they underwent ritual conversion. The teaching emphasizes that the issue was never God's dietary instructions but Peter's willingness to allow man-made traditions to divide the body of believers.

Paul's statement that people are not justified by "works of the law" is then examined in detail. The teaching explains that the phrase "works of the law" referred to sectarian membership requirements rather than simple obedience to God's commandments. Drawing on historical evidence from early Jewish writings, the lesson argues that Paul was addressing the legalistic requirements imposed by the Circumcision Party. Justification comes through faith in Messiah rather than through ritual conversion or human achievement. At the same time, genuine faith produces obedience to God's commandments as its natural fruit.

The teaching continues by explaining Paul's statement, "Through the law I died to the law." The Law exposes sin, pronounces guilt, and reveals the penalty that sin deserves. Through Messiah's sacrifice, believers die to the Law's condemnation so they may live for God. This does not remove the authority of God's Law but frees believers from its penalty. Because Messiah bore the curse that belongs to sinners, believers receive forgiveness and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey God's instructions from renewed hearts.

Galatians 3 then becomes the focus. Paul reminds the Galatians that they received the Holy Spirit through faith rather than through ritual conversion or human effort. Abraham serves as Paul's primary example because he was declared righteous before receiving circumcision. His later obedience, including circumcision, flowed from faith rather than

producing it. The teaching emphasizes that this pattern has always characterized God's plan of redemption. Faith establishes the relationship with God, while obedience follows as evidence of that relationship.

The lesson next addresses Galatians 3:10–14 and the "curse of the law." It argues that Paul never calls God's Law a curse. Instead, the Torah itself teaches that obedience brings blessing while disobedience brings a curse. Humanity stands under the curse because everyone has broken God's Law. Yeshua became a curse for His people by taking upon Himself the penalty that sinners deserve. The Law continues to define sin, reveal righteousness, and identify the need for a Savior. Messiah removes the curse of disobedience, not the Law that defines righteousness.

Paul's question, "Why then the law?" is answered by examining Galatians 3:19–29. The teaching explains that the Law was added because of transgressions to reveal God's provision for dealing with sin. Particular emphasis is placed on the sacrificial system, which pointed forward to Messiah's atoning sacrifice. The Law served as additional revelation alongside the promise given to Abraham, revealing both humanity's need and God's redemptive plan. Rather than opposing the promise, the Law and the promise work together to reveal salvation through Messiah.

The teaching also explains Paul's description of the Law as a guardian or pedagogue. In the ancient world, a pedagogue escorted children to their teacher. Likewise, the Law leads sinners to Messiah by exposing sin and pointing to God's provision for redemption. Once a person has come to faith, the Law has fulfilled that particular function, but it continues to serve its other purposes, including defining righteousness and guiding holy living. The lesson stresses that Paul never teaches the abolition of God's Law but rather explains one of its many purposes within God's plan of redemption.

Galatians 4 addresses another commonly misunderstood passage concerning "days and months and seasons and years." The teaching demonstrates that Paul is speaking to former pagans who were returning to the religious calendars associated with their previous idolatry. Since they had never observed God's biblical festivals before coming to faith, Paul could not be accusing them of returning to Torah observance. Instead, he warns them against returning to pagan religious practices that once enslaved them before they knew the true God.

The lesson then explores Paul's allegory of Hagar and Sarah. It argues that the contrast is not between the Old and New Covenants, nor between the Torah and the gospel. Rather, Hagar represents attempting to obtain inheritance through human effort apart from faith, while Sarah represents receiving God's promises through trust in Him. The covenant at Mount Sinai was given to a people already redeemed by grace through the Passover. Israel was delivered first and then received God's Law. In the same way, believers today are saved by grace and then called to walk in obedience. The problem is not God's Law but attempting to earn righteousness through it apart from faith.

Finally, the teaching examines Galatians 5 and 6. Paul warns against returning to works-based salvation while affirming that the Holy Spirit leads believers into obedience rather than away from God's commandments. Being "led by the Spirit" does not place believers in opposition to God's Law because the Spirit writes God's Torah upon the hearts of His people. Paul concludes by teaching that the Law of Christ is the Law of God perfectly demonstrated by Yeshua. Bearing one another's burdens fulfills this law because loving one's neighbor is one of God's commandments. The letter closes by returning to its central theme: outward rituals do not save anyone, but inward transformation through faith produces a new creation whose obedience becomes the evidence—not the cause—of salvation. Throughout Galatians, Paul consistently opposes legalism and works-based justification while affirming God's grace, the authority of His Law, and the necessity of genuine faith that produces obedient living.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Galatians addresses a false gospel centered on works-based justification.
- Paul defended the gospel he received directly from God.
- The controversy in Galatians concerns ritual conversion, not obedience to God's Law.
- Circumcision does not save; salvation comes through faith in Messiah.
- Acts 15 and Galatians address the same fundamental issue.
- Peter was corrected for separating himself from Gentile believers.
- Justification comes through faith, not through the works of the law.
- Abraham was declared righteous before circumcision.
- God's promises to Abraham were always based on faith.
- The curse comes from disobedience to God's Law, not from the Law itself.
- Messiah redeemed believers from the curse by bearing its penalty.
- The Law was added because of transgressions and points people to Messiah.
- The Law functions as a guardian leading sinners to the Savior.
- Galatians 4 warns against returning to pagan religious practices.
- The Holy Spirit leads believers into obedient living.
- The Law of Christ reflects God's Law as perfectly lived by Yeshua.
- Genuine faith produces a transformed life marked by obedience.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Paul warned the Galatians about accepting a different _____.
2. Salvation comes through _____ in Messiah.
3. The controversy in Galatians centered on _____ as a requirement for salvation.
4. Abraham was counted righteous because of his _____.

5. Peter withdrew from eating with _____ believers.
 6. Messiah redeemed believers from the _____ of the law.
 7. The Law was added because of _____.
 8. The Law serves as a _____ leading people to Messiah.
 9. Paul warned the Galatians not to return to their former _____ practices.
 10. The Holy Spirit produces a life of _____.
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Challenging

1. Paul said he received the gospel through a revelation of _____.
 2. The men troubling the Galatians were associated with the _____ Party.
 3. The phrase "works of the law" refers to _____ requirements rather than simple obedience to God's commandments.
 4. The promise to Abraham came _____ the giving of circumcision.
 5. The Greek word often translated "guardian" in Galatians 3 is _____.
 6. The curse described in Galatians comes from _____ God's commandments.
 7. Hagar represents seeking inheritance through _____ effort.
 8. Sarah represents receiving God's promises through _____.
 9. Galatians 4 warns former pagans against returning to weak and _____ elemental principles.
 10. Paul concludes that what truly matters is becoming a new _____.
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GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Paul was so concerned about the Galatians accepting a "different gospel"?
2. How does understanding the historical background of ritual conversion help explain Paul's teaching on circumcision?

3. What is the difference between being justified by faith and attempting to earn righteousness through works?
 4. Why does Paul use Abraham as the primary example of salvation by faith?
 5. How does understanding the "curse of the law" change the way you read Galatians 3?
 6. What purpose does the Law serve according to Paul's explanation in Galatians?
 7. Why is it important to recognize that Galatians 4 addresses former pagans rather than people returning to God's biblical festivals?
 8. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit, and how does that relate to walking in obedience?
 9. How does the teaching explain the relationship between the Law of Christ and the Law of God?
 10. After studying Galatians, what has most changed or strengthened your understanding of Paul's message?
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ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Gospel
2. Faith
3. Circumcision
4. Faith
5. Gentile
6. Curse
7. Transgressions
8. Guardian
9. Pagan
10. Obedience

Challenging

1. Yeshua Messiah
2. Circumcision
3. Sectarian
4. Before
5. Paidagogos
6. Disobeying
7. Human
8. Faith
9. Worthless
10. Creation