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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Pauline Paradox: Part 3 – Why is Paul So Difficult to Understand?

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching continues the Pauline Paradox series by examining why Paul’s writings are often misunderstood, particularly in matters relating to the Law of God. The teaching begins by reminding viewers that truth must be determined by the Word of God rather than by teachers, traditions, or theological systems. Believers are encouraged to test everything against Scripture and to focus on how faith should be lived out after entering God’s plan of salvation through faith in Yeshua. Salvation is through the finished work of Messiah, while obedience is presented as the practice of faith rather than a means of earning salvation.

The lesson explains that many believers experience tension when comparing what they have traditionally been taught about Paul with the evidence presented in Scripture. This tension is described as cognitive dissonance. Three possible responses are presented: rejecting Paul altogether, ignoring the evidence and maintaining existing beliefs, or allowing the tension to motivate a deeper search for truth. The teaching encourages viewers to choose the third option and carefully examine Paul’s writings in light of the whole Bible.

A central passage in the teaching is 2 Peter 3:15–17, where Peter states that some things in Paul’s letters are difficult to understand and are often twisted by ignorant and unstable people. Peter warns that such misunderstandings can lead to the “error of lawless people.” The teaching emphasizes that Peter’s warning should shape the way believers approach Paul’s writings. Rather than assuming Paul is easy to understand, believers should recognize the need for careful study.

The first major reason Paul is difficult to understand is identified as ignoring the front of the book—the Scriptures that existed before the New Testament. Peter’s reference to “the other Scriptures” is understood to mean the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The teaching argues that many misunderstand Paul because they attempt to interpret the Old Testament

through selected passages from Paul instead of interpreting Paul through the foundation already established in Scripture. Several examples are presented, including passages from Galatians, Hebrews, and 1 Timothy that are often interpreted as opposing the Law of God. The teaching argues that such interpretations create conflicts with passages that describe God's law as perfect, true, liberty, and everlasting.

The second problem discussed is ignoring context. The teaching points out that many people isolate individual statements from Paul, such as "not under law but under grace," while neglecting other statements in which Paul praises, upholds, and serves the Law of God. Examples from Romans are examined to show that Paul's writings can appear contradictory when verses are removed from their context. The lesson argues that Paul's letters must be read as complete arguments rather than as collections of isolated statements.

A third reason Paul is difficult to understand is misplaced trust in human teachers and traditions. The teaching reviews statements from popular Christian scholars, ministries, and study Bibles that describe the Law of God as bondage, shackles, or obsolete. These views are contrasted with biblical passages that describe God's law as liberty, truth, and righteousness. The lesson encourages believers to test all teachings against Scripture rather than accepting theological traditions simply because they are widely held.

The fourth problem is a lack of historical context. The teaching explains that Paul often addressed specific first-century debates and misunderstandings. Statements about circumcision, works of the law, and other controversial topics must be understood within the historical issues Paul was confronting. Without that context, readers can easily misunderstand Paul's intent and incorrectly conclude that he taught against God's commandments.

The fifth reason discussed is doctrinal programming. Many believers approach Paul with assumptions they have inherited from religious traditions. The teaching identifies several common beliefs, such as the idea that the Law of God is bondage, that obedience is opposed to faith, or that the law itself is a curse. These assumptions are examined in light of Scripture. The teaching argues that the Bible consistently presents God's commandments as truth, liberty, and an expression of love. Obedience is described as the practical outworking of faith and love rather than an attempt to earn salvation.

The lesson also emphasizes that love and obedience are inseparable. Yeshua taught that the Law and the Prophets hang on the principles of loving God and loving others. Likewise, 1 John teaches that love for God is demonstrated by keeping His commandments. The teaching argues that God's instructions define what loving God and loving others looks like in practice.

The final major reason Paul is difficult to understand is his use of the word "law." The teaching explains that the Greek word *nomos* and the Hebrew word *Torah* both refer to instruction. Paul uses the word "law" in several different ways throughout his letters. Examples include the Law of God, the law of sin, the law of sin and death, the law of the

Spirit of life, the law of faith, the law of righteousness, and the law of Messiah. Because Paul does not always specify which law he is discussing in every verse, readers must rely on context. Failure to recognize these distinctions can lead to significant misunderstandings of Paul's writings.

The teaching concludes by summarizing six common reasons people misunderstand Paul: ignoring the front of the book, ignoring context, placing too much trust in human teachers, failing to understand historical context, approaching Scripture with doctrinal assumptions, and failing to recognize Paul's different uses of the word "law." Understanding these issues is presented as preparation for future teachings that will examine Paul's difficult passages in greater detail.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Believers should test all teachings against the Word of God.
 - Salvation comes through faith, while obedience is the practice of faith.
 - Peter warned that Paul's letters contain difficult passages.
 - Ignoring the Old Testament contributes to misunderstanding Paul.
 - God's law is described in Scripture as perfect, true, and liberty.
 - Paul's writings must be read in context rather than verse by verse in isolation.
 - Human traditions can reinforce misunderstandings of Paul.
 - Historical context is essential for understanding Paul's arguments.
 - Many people approach Paul with preconceived doctrinal assumptions.
 - Scripture connects obedience with love for God and others.
 - Paul uses the word "law" in several different ways.
 - Context is necessary to determine which law Paul is discussing.
 - Peter warned against being carried away by the error of lawless people.
 - Understanding these issues helps believers interpret Paul more carefully.
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FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Peter warned that some things in Paul's letters are hard to _____.
2. Believers are instructed to test everything against the _____ of God.

3. According to the teaching, obedience is the practice of _____.
 4. Peter warned believers not to be carried away by the error of _____ people.
 5. The first major problem discussed is ignoring the _____ of the book.
 6. Psalm 119 describes God's law as _____.
 7. Paul wrote that believers should uphold the _____.
 8. Historical _____ is important for understanding Paul's letters.
 9. Yeshua taught that the Law and the Prophets hang on loving God and loving _____.
 10. Paul used the word "law" in several different _____.
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Challenging

- Peter described those who twist Paul's writings as ignorant and _____.
- The Greek word commonly translated "law" is _____.
- The Hebrew word behind the concept of God's law is _____.
- According to the teaching, the Septuagint is the _____ translation of the Old Testament.
- Paul referred to the law of sin and _____.
- Romans 8:2 mentions the law of the Spirit of _____.
- The teaching identifies _____ dissonance as the tension caused by conflicting beliefs.
- Galatians 5:1 is often cited regarding a yoke of _____.
- According to Deuteronomy 11, disobedience leads to a _____.

- Peter's warning appears in _____ Peter 3:15–17.
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GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Peter specifically warned believers about misunderstanding Paul's writings?
 - How can studying the Old Testament help us better understand the New Testament?
 - What are some dangers of building doctrine from isolated verses rather than larger contexts?
 - Why is it important to test teachers and traditions against Scripture?
 - How can historical context affect our understanding of Paul's letters?
 - Have you ever experienced cognitive dissonance while studying Scripture? How did you respond?
 - What does it mean that God's commandments are connected to loving God and loving others?
 - Why is it important to recognize that Paul uses the word "law" in different ways?
 - How can preconceived beliefs influence the way we read Scripture?
 - What practical steps can we take to better follow Peter's warning and avoid misunderstanding Paul?
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ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Understand
2. Word
3. Faith
4. Lawless
5. Front
6. Liberty
7. Law
8. Context
9. Others
10. Ways

Challenging

1. Unstable
2. Nomos
3. Torah
4. Greek
5. Death
6. Life
7. Cognitive
8. Slavery
9. Curse
10. 2