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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

The Pauline Paradox Series: Part 5 – Corinthians

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching continues the Pauline Paradox series by examining 1 and 2 Corinthians. It begins by reminding viewers that the previous teachings in the series establish the foundation for understanding Paul's writings. The goal is to demonstrate that Paul's letters are consistent with the message of Yeshua and the whole Word of God. The teaching emphasizes that Yeshua called God's people to repentance and obedience and that Paul's writings should never be interpreted in a way that contradicts the Torah or the teachings of the Messiah.

The first passage examined is 1 Corinthians 7:18–19, where Paul says that circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. The teaching explains that this statement cannot mean circumcision has no value because circumcision itself is one of God's commandments. Instead, Paul's concern is the first-century teaching that Gentiles had to undergo ritual conversion to Judaism in order to become part of God's covenant people. In that historical setting, "circumcision" often referred not merely to the physical act but to obtaining Jewish status through rabbinic conversion. Paul rejects the idea that salvation or covenant membership depends on becoming Jewish. Whether one is born a Jew or a Gentile, acceptance before God comes through faith in Messiah, while obedience to God's commandments remains important for all believers.

The teaching then explains the background of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Certain teachers insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised according to the custom of Moses. The apostles rejected this teaching and affirmed that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith. Paul's concern throughout Corinthians and Galatians is therefore not circumcision itself, but the false doctrine that ritual conversion and human effort secure salvation. Circumcision performed as an act of obedience is distinguished from circumcision required as a means of earning acceptance before God.

Attention then turns to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, one of Paul's most frequently misunderstood passages. Many interpret Paul's statement about becoming "all things to all people" to mean that he abandoned Torah observance around Gentiles while practicing it around Jews. The teaching argues that this interpretation portrays Paul as hypocritical and inconsistent. Throughout Acts, Paul repeatedly denies accusations that he teaches against the Torah, and he continually demonstrates his own obedience to God's Law. Therefore, Paul's words cannot mean that he pretended to follow God's commandments only when it benefited him.

Instead, the teaching explains that Paul adapted his methods of communication without compromising God's truth. He understood Jewish customs and traditions well enough to communicate effectively with Jews. Likewise, when speaking to Gentiles, Paul began with concepts familiar to them. His sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17 is presented as the clearest example. Rather than quoting Torah to an audience unfamiliar with Scripture, Paul began with their own altar to an unknown god and even quoted Greek poets before proclaiming the Creator. Paul's evangelistic strategy was to meet people where they were while remaining faithful to God's Word.

The teaching also addresses Paul's references to those "under the law" and those "outside the law." Building on earlier lessons in the Pauline Paradox series, it explains that "under the law" refers to those who stand under the penalty of the Law because of sin rather than to people who simply obey the Torah. Likewise, those "outside the law" refers to Gentiles who had not been taught God's instructions. Paul did not become lawless among Gentiles. Instead, he specifically states that he was not outside the Law of God but within the Law of Christ.

The lesson gives special attention to the phrase "the Law of Christ." It argues that this does not describe a new law replacing God's Torah. Instead, the Law of Christ is the Law of God as perfectly taught, interpreted, and lived by Yeshua. The Messiah did not invent new commandments but faithfully revealed the Father's instructions. Just as Moses, the prophets, and the apostles all taught God's Torah, Yeshua likewise taught the same Law in its fullness. Therefore, the Law of Christ and the Law of God are not competing systems but describe the same divine instruction understood through the Messiah.

The teaching then observes that Paul himself appeals to the Law of Moses as present-tense authority in the same chapter. In 1 Corinthians 9:8–10 he explicitly states that the Law of Moses speaks for believers and was written for their benefit. This demonstrates that Paul did not regard God's Law as obsolete or abolished. Instead, he consistently used it as authoritative Scripture for both Jewish and Gentile believers. The teaching concludes that Paul's ministry strategy involved adapting his presentation of the gospel without changing God's standards or compromising biblical truth.

The second half of the lesson examines 2 Corinthians 3, particularly Paul's description of the Law as the "ministry of death." The teaching explains that many assume Paul is condemning God's Law itself. However, Romans 7 clarifies that the Law brings death because it exposes human sin. The Law is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual, but

because all people have broken it, it reveals humanity's guilt and need for a Savior. In this sense, the Law functions as a ministry of death by showing sinners that they stand under the penalty of sin and death. Without this function, people would never recognize their need for redemption through Messiah.

The lesson carefully distinguishes between God's Law and the fading glory associated with Israel's response to it. Paul says the glory was fading, not the Law itself. The glory diminished because Israel's disobedience profaned God's instruction. The solution was never to abolish the Law but to restore its glory through transformed hearts. This restoration is accomplished through the New Covenant, in which God's Spirit writes the same Torah upon believers' hearts, fulfilling the promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.

The teaching emphasizes that the New Covenant does not introduce a new law but a new heart. The problem was never God's Torah; the problem was humanity's sinful heart. God promised to remove the heart of stone, give His people a heart of flesh, and place His Spirit within them so they would walk in His statutes. Paul draws directly from these prophecies in 2 Corinthians 3 by contrasting tablets of stone with tablets of human hearts. The New Covenant therefore changes believers rather than changing God's commandments.

Finally, the teaching explains that the Spirit gives life because the Spirit produces love for God. According to 1 John, loving God means keeping His commandments. God's grace demonstrated through Messiah's sacrifice creates within believers a desire to obey. This restored relationship brings lasting glory to God's Law because obedience now flows from transformed hearts rather than mere external obligation. The lesson concludes that when Paul is interpreted through the prophets and the promises of the New Covenant, his writings remain completely consistent with the ongoing authority of God's Torah and the message proclaimed throughout all of Scripture.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Paul taught that keeping God's commandments is what matters.
- Salvation comes by grace through faith, not through ritual conversion.
- Circumcision does not earn covenant membership.
- Acts 15 rejected the idea that Gentiles must become Jews to be saved.
- Paul adapted his teaching methods without compromising God's truth.
- Becoming "all things to all people" did not mean abandoning God's Law.
- Paul remained under the Law of God while serving under the Law of Christ.
- The Law of Christ is consistent with the Law of God.
- Paul continued to appeal to the Law of Moses as authoritative Scripture.
- The Law reveals sin and humanity's need for a Savior.
- The ministry of death refers to the Law exposing sin, not to the Law being evil.
- The New Covenant changes the heart, not God's commandments.
- God's Spirit writes His Torah on the hearts of believers.

- Obedience flows from transformed hearts empowered by the Spirit.
 - Paul's teachings remain consistent with the Torah and the prophets.
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FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Paul wrote that keeping the _____ of God is what matters.
 2. Salvation comes by _____ through faith.
 3. Acts 15 rejected the idea that Gentiles must be _____ to be saved.
 4. Paul became "all things to all _____."
 5. Paul said he was not outside the Law of _____.
 6. Paul appealed to the Law of _____ as authoritative.
 7. The Law reveals _____.
 8. The New Covenant changes the _____.
 9. God's Spirit writes His Torah on believers' _____.
 10. Obedience is the result of transformed _____.
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Challenging

1. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul contrasts circumcision with keeping God's _____.
2. The Jerusalem Council addressed whether Gentiles had to be circumcised according to the custom of _____.
3. Paul's sermon on Mars Hill began with an altar dedicated to the _____ god.
4. Paul quoted _____ poets while speaking in Athens.
5. The phrase "under the law" refers to being under the penalty of _____.
6. Paul stated that he was under the Law of _____.
7. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says the Law of Moses was written for our _____.
8. The "ministry of death" reveals humanity's _____.

9. According to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God promised to write His Torah on people's _____.
10. The New Covenant replaces the heart of _____ with a heart of flesh. _____

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Paul emphasized that keeping God's commandments matters more than one's physical status as circumcised or uncircumcised?
2. How does understanding the historical background of Acts 15 help explain Paul's teaching about circumcision?
3. What does Paul mean by becoming "all things to all people," and how can believers apply that principle today without compromising biblical truth?
4. Why is it important that Paul specifically says he was not outside the Law of God?
5. How does understanding the "Law of Christ" help reconcile Paul's writings with Yeshua's teaching?
6. Why does Paul continue to quote and rely on the Law of Moses throughout his letters?
7. What does Paul mean when he describes the Law as a "ministry of death," and why is that different from saying the Law is bad?
8. How does the New Covenant solve humanity's problem according to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Paul?
9. Why is it significant that God promised to change people's hearts instead of changing His Law?
10. After studying Corinthians, how has your understanding of Paul's view of God's Law changed?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Commandments
2. Grace
3. Circumcised
4. People
5. God
6. Moses
7. Sin
8. Heart
9. Hearts
10. Hearts

Challenging

1. Commandments
2. Moses
3. Unknown
4. Greek
5. Sin
6. Christ
7. Benefit
8. Guilt
9. Hearts
10. Stone