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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

The Pauline Paradox Series – Part 5: Ephesians

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching continues the Pauline Paradox series by examining the book of Ephesians, with special attention given to Ephesians 2:14–15. The lesson begins by explaining that many believers understand these verses to mean that Yeshua abolished God's Law in order to unite Jews and Gentiles. The teaching argues that this interpretation creates several serious problems. If God's Law were abolished, then the biblical standard of holiness would also be abolished. Additionally, such an interpretation would place Paul in direct contradiction with Yeshua's statement that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. Finally, the Torah itself contains provisions that welcome foreigners into covenant life under the same standards as native-born Israelites, meaning the Law of God was never intended to create division between believing Jews and Gentiles.

The teaching then begins working through Ephesians from the beginning rather than focusing only on one or two verses. In chapter one, Paul explains God's eternal plan to adopt His people as sons through Messiah Yeshua. Through Yeshua's sacrifice, believers receive redemption, forgiveness, and the promise of an inheritance. Paul describes this as the mystery of God's will, a plan established before the foundation of the world. Believers are chosen to be holy and blameless before Him and are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their future inheritance.

Moving into chapter two, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they once lived in sin and followed the ways of the world. They were dead in their trespasses and part of the sons of disobedience. The teaching notes that sin and disobedience are defined by Scripture as violations of God's Law. Therefore, if Paul speaks of sin and disobedience, the Law of God must still exist as the standard that defines those concepts. Paul then emphasizes that salvation comes by grace through faith and not through human works. However, he immediately explains that believers are created for good works that God prepared beforehand. The teaching argues that these good works are consistently defined throughout Scripture as walking in God's commandments and ways.

The lesson highlights several passages from Deuteronomy and other Scriptures that connect holiness, obedience, and walking in God's commandments. Paul's statements in Ephesians 1 and 2 are shown to align with these earlier biblical teachings. God's people have always been called to walk in His ways, and this purpose existed from the beginning. Salvation is not earned through obedience, but obedience remains the expected response of those who have received God's grace.

The teaching then turns to Ephesians 2:11–13 and explores the historical background of the terms "circumcision" and "uncircumcision." In the first century, certain Jewish groups taught that Gentiles could not become part of God's people unless they underwent ritual conversion and obtained Jewish status. Circumcision often served as shorthand for this larger conversion process. Paul addresses this false teaching by reminding Gentile believers that they have been brought near through the blood of Messiah and accepted into God's people through faith rather than through ritual conversion.

A major emphasis is placed on Paul's statement that Gentile believers were once alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise but have now been brought near. The teaching argues that Paul is not describing Gentiles replacing Israel or forming a separate people of God. Rather, Gentiles become fellow citizens within the commonwealth of Israel through Messiah. This understanding is connected to God's long-standing purpose for Israel to be a light to the nations and to bring His truth to the Gentiles.

The lesson explains that first-century Jewish leadership often created barriers that hindered Gentiles from approaching the God of Israel. Man-made traditions, oral laws, and requirements for ritual conversion created hostility and separation between Jews and Gentiles. Examples are drawn from Acts 10, where Peter initially believed it was unlawful to associate with Gentiles because of traditional teachings rather than God's Law. These traditions functioned as both spiritual and practical barriers that prevented Israel from fulfilling its mission to be a light to the nations.

When the teaching arrives at Ephesians 2:14–15, it argues that the "dividing wall of hostility" was not God's Law but man-made decrees and ordinances. Attention is given to the Greek word *dogma*, which is used for decrees and man-made regulations rather than God's Torah. According to the teaching, Paul is describing the abolition of man-made religious laws and traditions that excluded Gentiles from full participation in the covenant community. These man-made barriers were contrary to both the Torah and the gospel message.

The teaching concludes that Yeshua did not abolish God's Law. Instead, He abolished the hostility and man-made regulations that separated Jews and Gentiles. Through His death and resurrection, He brought both groups together into one body, allowing Gentiles to become full members of the household of God without undergoing ritual conversion. As fellow citizens of the commonwealth of Israel, believers are united in Messiah and are called to walk in the commandments and purposes God established from the beginning.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Ephesians 2 must be interpreted within the context of the entire letter.
- God's plan of redemption existed before the foundation of the world.
- Believers are adopted as sons through Messiah Yeshua.
- Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works.
- Believers are created for good works prepared beforehand.
- Scripture consistently defines those good works as walking in God's commandments.
- First-century Judaism often required ritual conversion for Gentiles seeking inclusion.
- Paul taught that Gentiles are accepted through faith, not ritual conversion.
- Gentile believers become fellow citizens of the commonwealth of Israel.
- Israel was called to be a light to the nations.
- Man-made traditions created hostility between Jews and Gentiles.
- The dividing wall in Ephesians 2 refers to man-made decrees, not God's Law.
- Yeshua abolished hostility and exclusion, not the Torah.
- Jews and Gentiles are united as one new man in Messiah.
- The household of God includes all believers who enter through faith.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Paul teaches that believers are saved by _____ through faith.
2. Believers were created in Messiah Yeshua for good _____.
3. Before coming to faith, the Ephesians were dead in their _____.
4. Paul says Gentile believers were once alienated from the commonwealth of _____.
5. Gentiles were brought near by the blood of _____.
6. Israel was called to be a light to the _____.
7. The dividing wall of hostility separated Jews and _____.
8. Paul teaches that believers are fellow citizens in the household of _____.
9. Yeshua came to make the two groups into one new _____.

10. The teaching argues that Yeshua abolished hostility, not God's

_____.

Challenging

1. Paul describes God's plan of redemption as the mystery of His

_____.

2. The first-century false teachers taught that Gentiles had to become

_____ to be saved.

3. Acts 15:1 records the claim that circumcision was necessary for

_____.

4. The Greek word dogma is commonly used to describe man-made

_____.

5. According to Ephesians 1, believers were chosen before the

_____ of the world.

6. Peter learned in Acts 10 not to call any person common or

_____.

7. The Hebrew word translated "nations" in Isaiah is

_____.

8. Paul says Gentiles were once strangers to the covenants of

_____.

9. The physical barrier in the temple courts was called the middle wall of

_____.

10. The teaching argues that ritual conversion requirements rendered God's Law

_____ among the Gentiles.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to read Ephesians 2 within the context of the entire letter?
2. How does understanding salvation by grace help clarify the role of obedience?
3. What do the "good works" in Ephesians 2:10 refer to according to this teaching?
4. Why were many Gentiles separated from the commonwealth of Israel in the first century?
5. How does the concept of being fellow citizens of Israel challenge common assumptions about the church?
6. What role was Israel intended to play among the nations?
7. How can man-made traditions become barriers to God's purposes?
8. Why does the teaching argue that the dividing wall was not God's Law?
9. What practical lessons can believers learn from the unity between Jews and Gentiles in Messiah?
10. How does this teaching affect your understanding of Ephesians 2:14–15?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Grace
2. Works
3. Trespasses
4. Israel
5. Messiah
6. Nations
7. Gentiles
8. God
9. Man
10. Law

Challenging

1. Will
2. Jewish
3. Salvation
4. Decrees
5. Foundation
6. Unclean
7. Goyim
8. Promise
9. Separation
10. Powerless