

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the New Testament
Living the Message 2021-2022
February 2022 Study Guide for Participants and Facilitators

February Question:

Why Is Paul Such a Big Deal? *Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon*

[Click here to watch the video.](#)

Overview

Paul is often called the “second founder” of Christianity. And for good reason. Before Paul, Christianity was largely a Jewish sect, based in Jerusalem and surrounding territories, and made up almost entirely of Jews who confessed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

Paul’s ministry stretched from roughly 33/34AD to 63/64AD, when he was executed in Rome. By the time Paul was finished, Christianity had spread throughout the ancient world and was increasingly made up of Jews and Gentiles. The rapid spread was a cause of rejoicing and also created problems, particularly with regard to the question of whether one needed first to be Jewish in order to worship Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. Paul, Jewish by birth and a Pharisee by training, articulated a strong “gospel of grace” that located confidence in salvation not in any adherence to the law but rather in God’s free gift of grace in Jesus, a gift we appropriate through faith that Jesus is the Lord.

Paul was a missionary pastor, who spread the Gospel far and wide and with urgency because he believed Jesus would soon return. He wrote letters to congregations he founded, trying to answer their questions and solve their problems from a distance. Seven of those letters are in the New Testament. Paul’s influence was so great that, after his death, other Christian leaders tried to honor and extend his legacy and so authored six more letters in his name. Paul’s letters, as well as parts of the Acts of the Apostles, offer us insight into his life, ministry, and theology.

Initial Question (before watching the presentation)

What do you know about Paul? If you were to sum up his theology in a sentence, what would you say?

Further Questions (after watching the presentation):

1. What is one new insight about Paul’s theology that helps you understand your faith better?
2. What difference does it make to recognize that Paul did not imagine he was writing part of the New Testament, but rather was trying to address particular problems of his congregations? How does that help us read and apply Paul’s theology today?
3. Paul’s influence on Martin Luther was huge. Luther adopts Paul’s belief that we are justified by grace through faith, not by works, in his struggle with the medieval Roman Catholic Church. If someone were to ask you what we mean by “justification by grace,” how would you explain it?
4. How does Paul’s conviction that we each have something to contribute and together make up the Body of Christ shape your sense of your gifts, possibilities, and responsibilities as a member of the Church? How does that affirm you? How does it challenge you?

Key Passages

[Acts 9](#) – The story of Paul’s “conversion”

[Romans 3](#) – Paul articulates that God’s grace is given equally to all

[1 Corinthians 12](#) – The Body of Christ and its diverse and united members

[1 Corinthians 13](#) – Love as the basis for Christian community

Going Deeper into the Word with Pastor Ruud - Philippians

1. How does the likelihood that Paul writes to the Philippians from prison or while under house arrest affect your reading? Does it give any added weight or context to his words?
2. Paul's assertion, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," (Phil 4:13) is often used as a verse of triumphalist encouragement to win or achieve worldly greatness. How does reading the context surrounding the verse and knowing Paul's situation give insight into the interpretation? Reading the context, and knowing Paul's situation, how would you explain what he means by this?
3. Paul says we are to "work out our own salvation." In other words, we have been saved, now what? In what ways might you work out your salvation in the world? In what ways do you already do so?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, as we learn about Paul and read his counsel to early Christian communities, let us be renewed in our faith, confident that you come to each and all of us in grace and equip us to serve and love each other. Amen.