

PARTICIPANT GUIDE
PAUL – SESSION 6 (Called to Be Faithful)

Opening Prayer: Holy God, make us ever more aware of ways that we, too, can follow Jesus. Enable us to follow Jesus, even at personal cost to ourselves. Thank you for examples of fellow believers who have lived lives of faith and courage. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Last session summary: The fifth session video tracked Paul's third missionary journey and focused on the wealthy city of Ephesus, where he stayed and preached for over 2 years.

Intro

After leaving Ephesus, Paul went to Caesarea, and then on to Jerusalem, where he was arrested for violating Temple rules. It was a capital offense. He pled his case before the Sanhedrin, then to the Roman authorities, and finally was sent to Rome to be tried because he was a Roman citizen. After a trip there, which included a shipwreck where he saved others, Paul was held under house arrest for 2 years. During that time, he brought people to Christ. Paul's life ended by execution in Rome.

View video (17:20) – you may see this ahead of time

Questions for thought

1. The video takes us to several places where tradition says that Paul was housed and imprisoned. Have you visited any of these sites? If so, what do you most remember? Share your impressions with the group. What strikes you about seeing these places in this video? How did seeing these sites help you relate to Paul?
2. During Paul's journey to Rome (shipwrecks, landing on Malta and being welcomed by the non-Jewish locals, etc.), nonbelievers consistently showed him kindness. This is in stark contrast to the violent reaction of some of his fellow Jews, who were threatened by the message Paul preached. Paul lived, ate and preached among Gentiles and welcomed them as brothers and sisters in Christ without their observing circumcision or kosher dietary regulations. These things were offensive to Jews. Note how Paul defends his welcome of Gentiles:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:16-17

For God shows no partiality.¹² All who have sinned apart from the law (Gentiles) will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law (Jews) will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the

doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. ¹⁵ They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all. ¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God ¹⁸ and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, ²¹ you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

²⁵ Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. ²⁹ Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God. Romans 2:11-29

What is Paul's definition of the gospel? According to Paul, can a Gentile ever be righteous despite not having the Law, and despite not being circumcised? If so, why? According to Paul, can a Jew be unrighteous, despite having the Law and being circumcised? If so, why? At the end of the day, can a Gentile be a true Jew? If so, how?

3. Take another look at the message of Paul's above. Why do you think Paul encountered resistance and even violence from Jews nearly everywhere he went? If you had been a first-century Jew hearing this message, would you be offended? Do you imagine that it still offends Jews today? On the other hand, what elements of this message are inclusive and non-condemnatory?
4. Adam Hamilton points out that Paul's response to the hardships of being beaten and imprisoned is to remain faithful to God and to preach the gospel to whomever he meets – even his jailers. How does your faith support you in times of trial? What aspects of the Christian faith help you to endure difficult challenges?
5. As this study of Paul draws to a close, what is the most surprising thing that you learned about Paul? Did your view of Paul change? What are the 2 or 3 most important things

that you will take away from this study? How might they impact your life going forward?

Closing prayer: Holy God, like Paul, we are sometimes blind to your call. We answer our own wants and desires rather than answer your call. Open our eyes to your holy presence; open our ears to your voice; open our hearts to the movement of your Spirit. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.