



**PAUL
THE
PROGRESSIVE?**

THE COMPASSIONATE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE
TO RECLAIMING THE APOSTLE AS AN ALLY

ERIC C. SMITH

**SMALL GROUP
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

CHAPTER 1

Hating Paul (An Introduction)

- Do you hate Paul? Why, or why not?
- What do you think about the “ground rules?” Do they make sense to you? Are you hesitant about them in any way?
- Have you been operating under the “Traditional Perspective” on Paul? Where did you get that perspective?

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Paul the Misogynist

CHAPTER 2

- Comparing passages about women from Paul's undisputed letters and the Pseudo-Paul material, what differences do you see?
- Looking closely at 1 Corinthians 11:2–6, what situation do you think Paul was responding to, and what do you think he was hoping to accomplish with his response?
- Look at Romans 16 and locate as many women's names as you can. What can you tell about them from the few words Paul writes? Do you identify with any of them? Would you like to have known any of them?

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CHAPTER 3

Paul the Homophobe

- How have you encountered these “clobber texts” before? How have you seen them used?
- How do the Pseudo-Pauline writers “fix” Paul?
- How should we think about Paul’s views on sexuality, given the “occasional” nature of his letters?
- How does the quote from Seneca in footnote 10 help you think about ancient attitudes toward sex, and about Paul’s perspectives on sex?
- What happens when we read 1 Corinthians 11:17—13:13 as a source for Christian ethics?

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- How should Christians wrestle with the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism? What kinds of biblical interpretation and what kinds of actions are necessary to undo this centuries-long legacy?
- How does it change your perception of the ancient world to understand that “conversion” from one religion to another wasn’t really something that happened?
- What shifts in thinking does the New Perspective on Paul require?

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CHAPTER 5

Paul the Prude

- Do you have any experience with Christian purity culture? What impacts has it had on your life or on the lives of people you know?
- What happens when we recognize that Paul thought the world was changing or ending soon? How does that affect our perception of his writings?
- Beginning from the principles listed on pages 86–88, how might we go about rethinking Christian attitudes toward sex?

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Paul the Slavery Apologist

CHAPTER 6

- How does the meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:21–24 change if you read it as encouraging enslaved persons to seek freedom if the opportunity presents itself?
- If you are using this study guide by yourself, take a moment to read Philemon. If you are using this study guide in a group, have someone read the whole book out loud—it won't take long. Then, think about how Paul is using his power and authority in the book, and what goals he is pursuing. What do you think Philemon's response would have been?
- Think about Nancy Ambrose and her refusal to hear Paul's words read aloud. Is it permissible to say "no" to the biblical text? In what circumstances? What about when two or more parts of the Bible conflict with each other? What should we do then?

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CHAPTER 7

Paul the Xenophobe

- Think about the gospel stories of Jesus' trials and death. As a follower of Jesus, and as a frequent target of Roman violence and intimidation himself, how might Paul have felt about Roman power?
- Of the possible interpretations of Romans 13 offered in this chapter, which make the most sense to you?

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Paul the Debt and Guilt Monger

CHAPTER 8

- Have you heard about the “Romans Road” model of evangelism, and the view of salvation that it presupposes? Have you ever experienced it in any way?
- What happens if we shift the emphasis of salvation from the individual to the communal?
- What is the difference between “faith” and “faithfulness”? What about the difference between “faith in Christ” and “the faithfulness of Christ?”

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CHAPTER 9

Paul the Hijacker (A Conclusion)

- Has your view of Paul changed through reading this book? How, and why?

- What do you want to know more about, now that you have read this book?

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