

The Circumcised Apostle: Paul and Jewish Identity in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

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In his magnum opus *History of the Jews*, Heinrich Graetz describes Paul as “the circumcised apostle,”¹ a sarcastic designation intended to highlight the Ebionite view that Paul, a circumcised Jew, purportedly taught first-century Jews not to circumcise their children or keep the Law. Almost two millennia later, many New Testament scholars similarly depict Paul as a Jew who burst the bounds of Judaism. According to the traditional narrative, Paul’s revelation of Christ resulted in a radical rethinking of his theology and ethics to the point that he no longer felt responsible to keep the Torah, or at least those aspects of Torah that served as boundary markers of Jewish identity. For the Christian Paul, being a Jew was no longer a matter of election, calling or covenant with God walked out in Torah observance.² By divine design, Jewish identity had been erased, superseded or revalorized to the point of indifference in Christ.

One of the most frequently cited passages in Paul’s letters to support this dejudaized portrait of Paul is 1 Cor 9:19–23. Here Paul puts forward his principle of accommodation, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those without the law I became as one without the law...” (vv. 20–21). Not a few New Testament exegetes understand this principle to mean that Paul no longer considered himself to be a Torah-observant Jew or even a Jew at all. Peter Richardson and Paul Gooch write:

For him [Paul], Judaism was superseded, not merely altered in certain ways; he hardly regarded himself as a Jew legitimately . . . His freedom from all people and systems opens up for him a new identity “in Christ.” He is really a Jew no longer.³

D.A. Carson contends:

Paul occupies a *third ground* and, so far as law is concerned, is prepared to move from that ground to become like a Jew or like a Gentile, because in his relationship to Torah he is neither one nor the other. This also explains why Paul could be charged with being antinomian by some of his contemporaries – because his understanding of God’s redemptive purposes in history left Torah *qua* covenant superseded.⁴

¹ Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews II* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1893), 367.

² The term “Torah observance” in this paper refers to how Jews in the Second Temple period generally related to God’s commandments in the law of Moses. Two nuances are implied by my usage of the expression: (1) A sense of obligation with respect to boundaries markers of Jewish identity in the Torah; and (2) Observance as a response in part to God’s election, calling and or covenant rather than motivated wholly by cultural norms or contextualization for mission.

³ Peter Richardson and Paul W. Gooch, “Accommodation Ethics,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 107, 111.

⁴ D. A. Carson, “Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and Galatians 2:11–14,” *Churchman* 100:1 (1986): 37.

John Barclay asserts:

C. K. Barrett [1971:211] rightly comments on 1 Cor 9.20 that Paul “could become a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and become something else. His Judaism was no longer of his very being, but a guise he could adopt or discard at will.”⁵

James Dunn writes:

What is striking here is the fact that Paul, even though himself ethnically a Jew, can speak of becoming “as a Jew.” To become as a Jew is obviously to follow the patterns of conduct distinctive of Jews. In other words, Paul speaks as one who does not acknowledge “Jew” as his own given identity, or as an identity inalienable from his person . . . So we ask again: Did Paul think of himself as a Jew? The answer is evidently No, for the most part. Insofar as “Jew” was an ethnic identifier (and insofar as he was an ethnic Jew), Paul wished neither to be known as such nor to identify himself as such. Insofar as “Jew” denoted a lifestyle, a commitment to the ancestral customs of the Jews, Paul wished neither to exercise such a commitment nor to insist that other Jews be true to their ethnic-religious identity.⁶

Heikki Räisänen puts it succinctly:

1 Cor 9.20f. is absolutely incompatible with the theory of an observant Paul.⁷

I think it is fair to say that these comments are indicative of how the majority of New Testament scholars who have written on 1 Corinthians 9 understand Paul’s principle of accommodation in 1 Cor 9:19–23—Paul was indifferent to Jewish identity. But is this interpretation accurate? Did Paul really regard himself as a “former Jew” as Love Sechrest proposes in her monograph?⁸ And did the circumcised apostle, through his example and teaching, actually encourage other Jews to view themselves as no longer called by God to live as Jews? Over the past quarter of a century, an increasing number of Pauline scholars have begun to call into question the traditional reading of 1 Cor 9:19–23 and the dejudaized portrait of Paul that it presents. In the remainder of this paper, I would like to (1) survey several reasons why this reassessment is warranted and in the process show how 1 Cor 9:19–23 can be understood as the discourse of a Jew who remained within the bounds of pluriform Second Temple Judaism; and (2) make a case that 1 Cor 9:19–23 should be read through the lens of Paul’s rule in 1 Cor 7:17–24 that Jesus-believing Jews should remain Jewish. All of these arguments are unpacked in my 2011 monograph *A Jew to the Jews*.⁹

⁵ John M. G. Barclay, “Deviance and Apostasy: Some applications of deviance theory to first-century Judaism and Christianity,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 114 n. 44.

⁶ James D. G. Dunn, “Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity,” *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 182.

⁷ Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 75 n. 171.

⁸ Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009).

⁹ David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

I. Reasons to Rethink the Traditional View

In this section, I would like to discuss seven areas that inform our understanding of Paul's Jewish identity in relation to 1 Cor 9:19–23. They are the socio-historical context, Paul's "I became as" statements and nomistic language, the meaning of the term "Jews," Pauline hyperbole, food sacrificed to idols and third entity language.

a. *The Socio-Historical Context*

Despite the seeming strength of the traditional view, there are underlying weaknesses. The most obvious problem is that the standard portrayal of Paul as all things to all people is not historically realistic. It does not fit the first-century socio-historical context or what is known of Paul's character. There are numerous problems:

1. Paul could not have been "all things to all people" all the time as the traditional interpretation maintains. When Paul is viewed in his first-century setting, it is apparent that he was often around Jews and Gentiles together, thus restricting his ability to be "all things to all people."¹⁰
2. The standard interpretation portrays Jews as simpletons. It implies that Jews did not notice that Paul observed Jewish law only when he was around them. More likely, however, the Jewish community knew how Paul lived.¹¹
3. It is doubtful that Paul employed such a foolhardy approach. Once his inconsistency with respect to basic Torah commandments became known, it would have caused him to "stumble" the very people he was trying to "win." His behaviour would have been seen as devious, thus bringing his message into disrepute. Was Paul so lacking in common sense? As Wilfred Knox put it, "Obviously no Jew would be in the smallest degree influenced by the fact that he observed the Law when it suited his purpose to do so; obedience to the Law was a lifelong matter."¹² Francis Watson concurs, "Occasional conformity to the law is entirely alien to the Jewish way of life, and could never have helped him to 'win those under the law.'"¹³ Even today, Jewish writers describe Paul as a proponent of 'trickery',¹⁴ 'deceit',¹⁵ and 'pious fraud'¹⁶ based on the traditional explanation of 1 Cor 9:19–23. By contrast, Paul claimed to be one who did not "practise cunning" when he proclaimed the

¹⁰ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 177–86; Gerhard Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel: An Exposition of Galatians* (trans. David Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 115.

¹¹ According to Luke, Paul's congregation in Corinth met in a house that was next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). See Bart J. Koet, "As Close to the Synagogue as Can Be: Paul in Corinth (Acts 18.1–18)," in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (ed. R. Bieringer; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 409.

¹² Wilfred Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 122 n. 54.

¹³ Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 29.

¹⁴ Beth Moshe, *Judaism's Truth Answers the Missionaries* (New York: Bloch, 1987), 212.

¹⁵ Gerald Sigal, *The Jews and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity* (New York: Ktav, 1981), 272.

¹⁶ Michael Drazin, *Their Hollow Inheritance: A Comprehensive Refutation of Christian Missionaries* (Safed: G. M. Publications, 1990), 18.

gospel of God (2 Cor 4:1–2; cf. 1 Thess 2:3). Surely, there is something we are missing here!

b. Paul's "I Became as" Statements

The traditional argument assumes that Paul's "I became as" language in 1 Cor 9:19–23 refers to behavioral adaptation in the widest sense. However, as we have seen, this is not possible since Paul was often around Jews and Gentiles together. Even if Paul at times met with Jews and Gentiles exclusively, occasional conformity to Jewish law would have undermined his ministry to Jews. This means that we should consider the possibility that Paul's "I became as" language refers to a more narrow setting in which Paul's adaptation would have been considered acceptable. In what setting would this have been the case? Consider dining contexts.

When invited to a home in the ancient world, whether Jewish or Gentile, guests sought to adapt to the way of their hosts. As Robert Kelley has noted, "In the various cultures underlying the New Testament, dining with someone indicated solidarity with that person. To eat with is to identify with."¹⁷ When Paul wrote that he "became as" Jews or Gentiles, he may have meant that he closely associated with them in dining contexts and conformed to their customs within the limits of God's law. For Paul, being a guest was a primary way that he came to know people intimately (Rom 12:13–14). Receiving hospitality was more than eating what was set before him. It was an experience of understanding the host, respectfully following the host's traditions and way of doing things, and ministering to the host.¹⁸

The *Midrash* describes a universal rule of hospitality that enjoins Jewish guests to become like their hosts: "If you go to a town, behave according to its customs." Hans Conzelmann maintains that this teaching, which came to be interpreted by Jews as a charge to imitate one's host, goes back to Hillel:¹⁹

There is a saying: "If you go to a town, follow its custom." Above, where there is no eating, Moses went up and *made it his business to look and act like them*: "Then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights. I did not eat bread or drink water" (Deut. 9:9). Below, where there is eating: "And he stood by them under the tree while they ate" (*Gen. Rab.* 48.14).²⁰

The proverb runs: "If thou goest into a city, thou must act according to its customs." When Moses ascended on high, where there is no eating or drinking, *he emulated the heavenly example*,

¹⁷ Robert L. Kelley, "Meals with Jesus in Luke's Gospel", *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17:2 (1995): 123. Cf. Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 176–77.

¹⁸ E.g. Philo, *Abr.* 107–8, 115, 118; *T. Ab.* RecShrt. 4.15; RecLng. 4.7 ("and whatever he says to you, this indeed do, and whatever he eats, you indeed eat along with him").

¹⁹ Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. J. W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 160 n. 21; cf. Günther Bornkamm, "The Missionary Stance of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 and in Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 195; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (trans. Harold Knight; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 231; David Daube, *New Testament Judaism: Collected Works of David Daube* (ed. Calum Carmichael; Berkeley: The Robbins Collection, 2000), 563; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag and Benziger Verlag, 1995), 2:339.

²⁰ Jacob Neusner, *The Components of the Rabbinic Documents: From the Whole to the Parts IX. Genesis Rabbah Part Five* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 225, emphasis mine. Also *Lev. Rab.* 34.8; *Num. Rab.* 10.6; *Eccl. Rab.* 3.14; *b. B. Mesi'a* 86b.

and when the angels descended on earth, where there is eating and drinking, they ate and drank, for it says, And he [Abraham] stood by them under the tree, and they did eat (Gen. 18:18) (*Exod. Rab.* 47.5).²¹

Samuel Vollenweider asserts that the saying is not handed down from Hillel (“Das Dictum stammt nicht von Hillel”)²² but is historically rooted in the first century travel rule echoed by one of the Jewish guests in the *Letter of Aristeas* 257. Vollenweider recognizes the similarity between this travel rule and Pauline accommodation in 1 Cor 9:19–23:

The *travel rule* in *Let. Aris.* 257 comes in a certain formal nearness to the Pauline accommodation: How can one find a good reception in a foreign land? “If he makes himself similar to all [sich allen gleichstellt, Πᾶσιν Ἰσος γινόμενος] . . . and presents himself as inferior to his host rather than superior to him. For God is also accustomed in accordance with his nature to accept that which lowers itself.” God is here compared with the host, who values modesty and humility. Such a travel rule is also attested in *Gen. Rab.* 48.14 and *Exod. Rab.* 47.5: “From there comes the saying (*Mashal*): ‘If you come into a city, then act according to its customs.’”²³

The rule of hospitality, which may indeed go back to Hillel (*t. Ber.* 2.21), combined with the travel rule attested in the *Letter of Aristeas* 257 (Πᾶσιν Ἰσος γινόμενος), and the Lord’s directive to follow the way of the host in the *Testament of Abraham* RecLng. 4.7 (καὶ ὅτι ἀν ἐσθίη συνέσθιε καὶ σὺ μετ’ αὐτού), provide a reasonable basis to argue that γίνομαι . . . ώς in 1 Cor 9:19–23 describes Paul’s adaptation to his host in Jewish and Gentile hospitality settings.²⁴ If this is correct, Paul’s “I became as” statements refer to his regular practice of accommodating to his host, especially with respect to eating what was set before him. Receiving hospitality made it possible for Paul to share with his host the gospel of God.²⁵

This table-centred interpretation of γίνομαι . . . ώς in 1 Cor 9:19–23 is supported by six observations:

1. “Food and table-fellowship” is a central theme in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1.²⁶ There are more than twenty-five references to food and commensality in the pericope. Following 1 Cor 11:1, Paul continues his focus on food and table-fellowship by discussing the tradition of the

²¹ Soncino 1939, emphasis mine.

²² Samuel Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung: Eine Untersuchung zur Eleutheria bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 218 n. 94.

²³ Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung*, 218.

²⁴ The view that Paul sought to please his host by adapting to his host comes close to Augustine’s portrayal of Paul as one who empathized with all, “A person who nurses a sick man becomes, in a sense, sick himself, not by pretending to have a fever but by thinking sympathetically how he would wish to be treated if he were sick himself” (Augustine, *Epist. to Jerome* 40.4; cf. 82; CSEL 34:2:379–80; FC 12:413–14). See Caroline White, *The Correspondence (394–419) Between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 168–69. Similarly, Henry Chadwick, “‘All Things to All Men’ (1 Cor IX.22),” *New Testament Studies* 1 (1955): 275, suggests that Paul sought to “minimize the gap between himself and his potential converts.”

²⁵ “Thus, from Acts as well as Paul’s own letters we begin to get the impression that for the apostle ‘meal’ and ‘gospel’ belong together” (John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* [Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001], 55).

²⁶ “Banquet as Missionary Approach (1 Cor 10:31–11:1). The Corinthians attended meals that both Christ-followers and pagans attended, as seen in 1 Cor 8–10. These meals provided opportunities for mission . . . Paul’s overarching missionary approach is summarized in 1 Cor 10:31: ‘Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ . . . Paul concludes with an imperative ‘be an imitator of me.’ This imitation relates directly to Paul’s missional behaviour” (J. Brian Tucker, “The Role of Civic Identity on the Pauline Mission in Corinth,” *Didaskalia* [Winter 2008]: 88–89).

Messiah's last Passover and the covenant meal instituted out of it (1 Cor 11:20–32; cf. 5:6–8).²⁷

2. Paul closes chapter 11 with guidelines for proper conduct when the congregation eats together (1 Cor 11:33–34). He reminds them that they are not in their own homes (the implication is that they are guests) and they should think of the others present (1 Cor 11:33).
3. Paul has in mind the scenario of being a guest at an unbeliever's home in 1 Cor 10:27a, "If an unbeliever invites you to a meal . . ."
4. In 1 Cor 10:27b, Paul echoes Jesus' rule of adaptation with respect to being a guest in another's home ("eat what is set before you" [cf. Luke 10:8]).
5. In chapter 9 the verses that lead into vv. 19–23 focus on food and receiving hospitality. Paul refers to the "food and drink" (v. 4) he had a right to receive from the Jesus-believers in Corinth, eating from a vineyard and drinking milk (v. 7), eating grain (v. 9), sharing in the harvest (v. 10), eating holy food (v. 13).
6. 1 Cor 9:19–23 seems to assume a hospitality context. One of the only occasions when Paul would have been around Jews or Gentiles exclusively was when he ate in a Jewish or Gentile home. Proponents of a hyper-literal interpretation of 1 Cor 9:19–23 are unable to explain how Paul could become a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles in a larger setting where Jews and Gentiles were present together. I propose that Paul "became" all things to all people by adapting to his Jewish or Gentile host. By being an accommodating guest at the table, Paul entered into the lives of all so that all could enter into his life in Christ.
7. Given Paul's reference to dominical sayings that point back to Jesus' example and rule of adaptation at the table (1 Cor 9:14; 10:27/Luke 10:7–8), and Paul's recapitulation in 1 Cor 10:32–11:1 which concludes with the statement, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," it would seem that Paul's accommodation in 1 Cor 9:19–23 was an imitation of Christ's accommodation and open table-fellowship with all (Mark 2:15–17; Matt 9:10–13; 11:19; Luke 5:29–32; 7:34–36). As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became "all things to all people" through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those "under the law") and Gentile sinners.

c. Paul's Nomistic Language

Most contemporary studies of 1 Cor 9:20 assume without critical engagement that the expression ὑπὸ νόμου refers to "living under the authority of Mosaic law." This starting point presupposition leads to the view that Paul was no longer a Torah-observant Jew and that he played fast and loose with the law. But is there another way to understand the term ὑπὸ νόμου in the 1 Cor 9:20 context? I would like to suggest that it may refer to "those under [strict interpretation of] the law" as Markus Bockmuehl and Richard Phua have argued,²⁸ or that it may refer to Pharisees in particular as Gerard Sloyan has suggested:

²⁷ Passover and table-fellowship are also mentioned in 1 Cor 5:6–11. See Jonathan Schwiebert, "Table Fellowship and the Translation of 1 Corinthians 5:11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127:1 (2008): 159–64.

²⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T, 2000), 171; Richard Liang-Seng Phua, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8.1–11.1 in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 193. See also Brad H. Young, *Paul the*

This seems to hint at a distinction between ordinary Jews and a new class of Law observants (“those under the Law”) who were perhaps the “separated” or *perushim* to which he gave his allegiance as a young man.²⁹

In support of Sloyan’s hypothesis that Paul had Pharisees particularly in mind, it is notable that Paul uses νόμος in reference to a stricter Pharisaic interpretation of the law in Phil 3:5 – “as to the law, a Pharisee” (κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος).³⁰ Pharisees also lived among the people and were open to table-fellowship if a guest accommodated to their halakhic standards. This is in contrast to some of the other stricter sectarian groups (e.g. Qumran Jews). Neusner points out:

Both Christians and Pharisees lived among ordinary folk, while the Qumranians did not. In this respect the commonplace character of Pharisaic table-fellowship is all the more striking. The sect ordinarily did not gather *as a group* at all, but in the home. All meals required purity. Pharisaic table-fellowship took place in the same circumstances as did the meals of outsiders. Pharisees were common folk, who ate everyday meals in an everyday way, among ordinary neighbors, not members of the sect.³¹

Paul would have also encountered Jews who were not Pharisees but who embraced aspects of Pharisaic halakhah. Dunn notes that Pharisees in Israel and the Diaspora exerted influence on some Jews to be stricter in observance particularly with respect to ritual purity:

We may justifiably infer then that wherever Pharisaic influence was strong during the middle decades of the first century of our era, both within Palestine and among strong concentrations of Jews in the Diaspora, there would be pressure on those who thought of themselves as good Jews to observe the halakhic clarifications of the laws on tithing and purity – that is to say, pressure on devout Jews (including proselytes) to observe strict limits in their practice of table-fellowship.³²

Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 20; August Ludwig Christian Heydenreich, *Commentarius in priorem divi Pauli ad Corinthios epistolam* (Marburg: J. C. Krieger, 1825–1828), 2:41–42.

²⁹ Gerard Sloyan, “Did Paul Think That Jews and Jewish Christians Must Follow Torah?” in *Bursting the Bonds? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Jesus and Paul* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 172. Similarly, Bishop John Lightfoot proposed at Cambridge in 1664 that Paul “distinguished, as it seems by the verse before, between the ‘Jews,’ and those that are ‘under the law’: which may be understood of the Jews in general, and of the Pharisees in particular; because the Pharisees seemed more to subject themselves to the law than the rest of the nation” (John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica: Matthew – I Corinthians* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979], 4:222).

³⁰ “Paul’s concise claim, ‘in relation to (*kata*) law, a Pharisee’, most naturally means living Jewish life according to the Pharisaic interpretation of the law” (Anthony J. Saldařini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 135). Cf. Joseph Sievers, “Who Were the Pharisees?” in *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders* (ed. James H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 145; Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A & C Black Limited, 1998), 197; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 140–42.

³¹ Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism: The Haskell Lectures, 1972–1973* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 67. Also Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, 236–42; Saldařini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 286–87, 72.

³² James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 140; James D. G. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 16. E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association With Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 172, points out that Diaspora Jews did not tithe their food.

In addition to eating in the homes of Pharisees and Pharisee-oriented Jews in the cities he visited, it may be reasonably conjectured that when Paul returned to Tarsus or Israel (see Acts 9:11, 28–30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3; 26:4–5), he received hospitality from Pharisees he knew intimately. After all, he was from a family of Pharisees (Acts 23:6; 26:4–5; cf. Phil 3:5; Gal 1:14).³³ In such situations, it is proposed that Paul became as one under [Pharisaic interpretation of] the law to win those under [Pharisaic interpretation of] the law.

Why would Paul use the expression “under the law” ($\underset{\circ}{\nu}\pi\circ\ \nu\mu\nu$) to refer to Pharisees or Jews who strictly adhered to the law? One explanation is that Pharisees and other ardent observers of the law *stood out* among the law-observant populace as particularly zealous for the Torah, “I advanced in Judaism *beyond* many among my people of the same age, for I was *far more zealous* for the traditions of my ancestors” (Gal 1:14). It should be remembered that in a society where it was normative for Jews to be law observant, *if a Jew referred to other Jews as “under the law,” it would have likely had the connotation “under the law in a particularly fervent way,”* perhaps comparable in meaning to “zealous for the law” ($\zeta\eta\lambda\omega\tau\alpha\iota\ \tau\o\ \nu\mu\nu$) in Acts 21:20 (cf. 22:3).³⁴ In contemporary Israeli parlance, such Jews are referred to as the *haredim* (Hebrew for “ultra-Orthodox”) or *frum* (Yiddish for “very religious”) in contrast to the *masorti* (Hebrew for “traditional”).³⁵ Each generation of Torah-observant Jews has insider language to describe fellow Jews who are especially scrupulous in their interpretation and application of Jewish law. It is proposed that Paul either coined the term “under the law” or borrowed it from contemporary usage to refer to the *haredim* or *frum* of his day.³⁶

A second possibility is that the term $\underset{\circ}{\nu}\pi\circ\ \nu\mu\nu$ is ironic and should be in quotes – the Pharisees stood out as “under the law” because some made a show of their strict Torah observance.³⁷ Matthew writes, “They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries [tefillin] broad and their fringes [tsitsit] long” (Matt 23:5; cf. 6:1, 16; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

A third possible explanation is that “under the law” is a term that the Pharisees and other strict sects used to describe themselves in contrast to the general populace, “We are the ones who live under the law. We are the true Jews. We are the circumcision”. Sometimes very religious Jews today refer to themselves as “Torah-true” Jews³⁸ or observers of a “Torah-true life.”³⁹

A fourth possible explanation for the term (given Paul’s typically negative use of $\underset{\circ}{\nu}\pi\circ\ \nu\mu\nu$ in Galatians and Romans) is that the apostle considered narrow interpretation of the law a burden. Very strict Jews were “under [the burden of a stringent interpretation of] the law.”

³³ Paul’s second and third missionary journeys took him through the region of Tarsus and Jerusalem. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 137, 142–43, notes, “It is likely that the Pharisees and their influence extended into Palestine and adjacent areas in Syria and Cilicia . . . The Pharisees had a following in Palestine and probably in the immediately surrounding territories, including Tarsus which was close to Antioch in northern Syria.” Consistent with this data, Matt 23:15 indicates that Pharisees crossed “sea and land” for outreach purposes.

³⁴ According to Luke, Paul used the terms $\alpha\kappa\rho\beta\epsilon\iota\alpha\iota$ (“strictly”) and $\zeta\eta\lambda\omega\tau\iota\zeta$ (“zealous”) together to describe his Pharisaic upbringing (Acts 22:3).

³⁵ See Charles S. Liebman, “Introduction,” in *Conflict and Accommodation between Jews in Israel: Religious and Secular* (ed. Charles S. Liebman; Jerusalem: Keter, 1990), xiv–xv.

³⁶ Paul noticed the “extremely religious” ($\delta\epsilon\iota\sigma\delta\alpha\mu\omega\epsilon\sigma\tau\epsilon\o\upsilon\zeta$) among the Gentiles he sought to win (Acts 17:22).

³⁷ Cf. the *shikmi* Pharisee in y. *Soṭah* 5.5. See Sara Epstein Weinstein, *Piety and Fanaticism: Rabbinic Criticism of Religious Stringency* (London: Jason Aronson, 1997), 149.

³⁸ Hella Winston, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels* (Boston: Beacon, 2005), 184 n. 1.

³⁹ Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe’s Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 31.

Contemporary *frum* Jews understand how a narrowly defined Torah-observant lifestyle can have a negative side due to the loss of personal freedom.⁴⁰ As one who had lived most of his life as a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5; Phil 3:5-6) and then experienced the relative freedom of common Judaism, Paul intimately understood the restrictive nature of Pharisaic halakhah. Thus, the polemical descriptor “under the law” may have subtly expressed the nuance “under heavy burdens [of the law], hard to bear.”⁴¹

What did Paul mean by his qualification in 1 Cor 9:20a – “(though I myself am not ὑπὸ νόμου)”? Perhaps he meant that he no longer viewed himself as under the jurisdiction of Pharisaic halakhah. Paul remained a Pharisee in pedigree, kinship and mindset, but he burst the bounds of Pharisaic halakhah by closely associating with Gentiles and not consistently eating tithed, ordinary food in a state of ritual purity. If the initial restrictive clause in 1 Cor 9:20 (“though I myself am not ὑπὸ νόμου”) means that Paul no longer viewed Pharisaic (or other strict sectarian) halakhah as a final authority in his life, then Paul was indifferent to certain halakhic interpretations and expansions of Mosaic law but not necessarily to the law itself. The second restrictive clause (“though I am not without the law of God”) informs the reader that Paul remains within the bounds of Mosaic law, though he challenges Pharisaic interpretation of the law (or narrow definition of Torah observance). In this sense, Paul’s lifestyle was fully consistent with the portrait of Jesus in the gospels that a number of contemporary scholars maintain: Jesus lived according to Mosaic law but did not consistently conform his lifestyle to Pharisaic halakhah (Mark 7:1–22; Matt 15:1–20).

Paul’s statement – “To those without the law I became as one without the law” (1 Cor 9:21a) – probably refers to the apostle to the Gentiles visiting Gentile homes, sharing table-fellowship with Gentiles, and conforming to the customs of his Gentile hosts as he travelled from place to place. However, this cannot be used as incontrovertible evidence that he was indifferent to Jewish law because of the restrictive clause that immediately follows 1 Cor 9:21a (“though I am not without the law of God”). In order to establish that Paul was indifferent to Mosaic law, one must demonstrate that Paul could not have eaten with Gentiles and stayed within the contours of Jewish flexibility. Recent studies have shown, however, that Second Temple Judaism was diverse and that some first-century Jews did eat with Gentiles without compromising their status as Torah-observant Jews.⁴²

Finally, what did Paul mean by his statement that he was “in Christ’s law” (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ [1 Cor 9:21])? Given that Paul uses the term in relation to his ministry to Gentiles (“to those without the law”), perhaps living “in Christ’s law” refers to Paul’s Torah-observant accommodation to “Gentile sinners” in the manner of Christ’s open table-fellowship with “sinners.”⁴³ When Paul was under Pharisaic halakhah (κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος = ὑπὸ νόμου),

⁴⁰ Faranak Margolese, *Off the Derech: Why Observant Jews Leave Judaism* (New York: Devora, 2005), 311–13.

⁴¹ Cf. Matt 11:28–30; 12:1–8, 9–14; 15:1–20; 23:1–4; Luke 11:37–46; Acts 15:10.

⁴² Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2005), 162–63; Mark D. Nanos, *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 296–97; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 57–61; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 147, 435–36; Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 231; Sanders, “Jewish Association With Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14”, 180; Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” 23.

⁴³ The term ἐννομος Χριστοῦ may refer to God’s law (the law of Moses) in the hand of Christ as reflected in Christ’s association with sinners.

in all likelihood he avoided the homes of Jewish sinners; how much more the homes of Gentile sinners. But now Paul was a member of the Nazarene sect and under Christ's halakhah (*κατὰ νόμον Χριστός* = ἐννομος Χριστοῦ). Christ's halakhah was reflected in Jesus' example of eating with sinners.

The overall picture we get from Paul's nomistic language in 1 Cor 9:19–23 is that it is informed by Jesus' example and rule of adaptation with respect to commensality (1 Cor 10:32–11:1; cf. 1 Cor 9:14; 10:27/Luke 10:7–8). As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became “all things to all people” through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those “under the law”) and Gentile sinners. Through accommodation and open table-fellowship, Paul entered into the lives of all so that all could enter into his communion with Christ.

d. The Meaning of the Term “Jews”

If ὑπὸ νόμον refers to strict observers of the Torah or Pharisees in particular, it may be inferred that the designation Ἰουδαίοις (“Jews”) in 1 Cor 9:20 refers to the wider Jewish community in which strict Jews form their subidentity. In support of the view that Ἰουδαίοις is Paul’s designation for ordinary Jews and ὑπὸ νόμον is Paul’s designation for strict Jews, it is significant that in 1 Cor 10:18 Paul moves from the universal to the particular, from the set of all Jews (the people of Israel) to the subset of strict Jews (priests).⁴⁴ Josephus likewise describes the Pharisees as a subset of Jews – “a body of Jews (Ἰουδαίων) with the reputation of *excelling the rest of their nation* in the observances of religion” (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.110; cf. *Ant.* 17.41; italics mine). Mark refers to “the Pharisees, and all the Jews” (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) (Mark 7:3). Luke distinguishes “all the people” (πᾶς ὁ λαός) from “the Pharisees and the lawyers” (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ νομικοί) (Luke 7:29–30). I conclude that in 1 Cor 9:20 Paul moves from the universal to the particular.

It is notable that there is no restrictive clause in 1 Cor 9:20a clarifying “(though I myself am not a Jew).” This is because Paul considered himself to be a Jew. The ὡς in 1 Cor 9:20a does not suggest that Paul regarded himself as a former Jew,⁴⁵ but points to the diversity that existed in the worldwide community of “Jews.” Far from being monolithic, ordinary Jews were extremely diverse, even as they are today in Israel and the Diaspora.⁴⁶ In addition to regional distinctions between Jews (e.g. Judeans, Galileans, etc.), there were “Hellenists” (Ἐλληνιστῶν) and “Hebrews” (Ἑβραιούς) (Acts 6:1). Luke refers to Jews who identified culturally as “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene . . . Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:9–11). In the course of his travels, Paul encountered the rich cultural tapestry of Jews who lived throughout the Roman Empire. When Paul says “To Jews I became *as a Jew*,” he

⁴⁴ See also Phil 3:5–6; Acts 22:3.

⁴⁵ Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, 156, “Thus, when Paul maintains that he can ‘become *like* a Jew’, he clearly implies that he does not see himself as a Jew in the first place.”

⁴⁶ Diane K. Tobin, Gary A. Tobin and Scott Rubin, *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People* (San Francisco: Institute for Jewish and Community Research, 2005); James R. Ross, *Fragile Branches: Travels Through the Jewish Diaspora* (New York: Riverhead, 2000); Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Karen Primack, ed., *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1998); Ida Cowen, *Jews in Remote Corners of the World* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

may simply mean that he received hospitality from ordinary Jews in Israel and the Diaspora whose customs and culture were vastly different from his own.

e. Pauline Hyperbole

In 1 Cor 7:19, Paul writes, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.”⁴⁷ David Horrell takes this to mean that “identity distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, is now ‘nothing’ (*οὐδέν*) since both are part of God’s new creation in Christ...”⁴⁸ Horrell assumes that “nothing” or “not anything” points to unimportance.⁴⁹ But given the context, Paul is more likely saying that *οὐδέν* is “related strictly to salvation,”⁵⁰ that is, “neither circumcision nor the lack of circumcision has ultimate bearing on salvation.”⁵¹ With respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant.

I contend that Paul uses hyperbole in 1 Cor 7:19 to stress that being “in Christ” is *more important than* being Jewish or Gentile.⁵² This means that being Jewish or Gentile could still be very important to Paul. He is simply relativizing A to B. In support of this possibility, notably there are several occasions when Paul uses “nothing” (*οὐδέν*) or “not anything” (*οὐτε . . . τι*) language in a clearly hyperbolic way. For example, with respect to the work of planting the Corinthian congregation, Paul describes himself as nothing compared to the Lord:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything (*οὐτε . . . ἐστίν τι οὐτε*), but only God who gives the growth (1 Cor 3:5–7).

Are Paul and Apollos truly nothing? Did they really do no work of any significance? On the contrary, their work was vital to the establishment of the Corinthian congregation. But *relative to* what God did, the miracle of changing lives, their work was nothing. Similarly, Paul writes in 2 Cor 12:11, “I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing (*οὐδέν εἰμι*).” Again, was Paul – the apostle to the Gentiles – truly “nothing”? Or is he saying that, *relative to* the Lord, he is nothing, even as *relative to* the super-apostles he is something? In the same way, in 1 Cor 7:19, Paul is likely saying that *relative to* one’s salvation in Christ, and the walking out of that salvation through keeping God’s commandments, being Jewish or Gentile is nothing.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15.

⁴⁸ David G. Horrell, “‘No Longer Jew or Greek’: Paul’s Corporate Christology and the Construction of Christian Community,” in *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole* (ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 343.

⁴⁹ Horrell, “No Longer Jew or Greek,” 343.

⁵⁰ Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 126.

⁵¹ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 284. Also Peter J. Tomson, “Paul’s Jewish Background in View of His Law Teaching in 1 Cor 7,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 266; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 550.

⁵² Cf. Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131–34; Christopher Zoccali, *Whom God Has Called: The Relationship of Church and Israel in Pauline Interpretation, 1920 to the Present* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 129.

Here Paul refers to something genuinely important—Jewish calling and Gentile calling—to emphasize what is *even more important*.

f. Food Sacrificed to Idols

Paul's discussion of food sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 was prompted by a question that he received from the Corinthians concerning this subject (1 Cor 8:1; cf. 7:1). Because Jews regarded idol-food as forbidden food, Paul's response to the query provides the exegete with something of a barometer of his Jewish convictions. What was Paul's stance?

Though Paul prohibited the eating of idol-food in a temple, he permitted the Corinthians to eat freely from the meat market, “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience” (1 Cor 10:25). They could also eat freely in the homes of polytheistic Gentiles. Only if they were explicitly informed that the food before them had been offered to idols were they to refrain from eating it. Declining in this situation was not because idol-food was dangerous, but because of the other person's conscience, “If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience, I mean the other's conscience, not your own” (1 Cor 10:27–29).⁵³

Most commentators agree that Paul's approach to idol-food burst the bounds of Judaism. C. K. Barrett remarks that “Paul is nowhere more un-Jewish than in this μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντες [‘without raising questions’, 1 Cor 10:27].”⁵⁴ Gordon Fee describes Paul as an “absolutely liberal” Jew who goes “quite over against his own Jewish tradition.”⁵⁵ James Dunn sums up the standard view, “The usual understanding of Paul's advice in the matter is that it disregarded traditional Jewish sensibilities: the Paul who counselled the Corinthians not to raise questions (*mēden anakrinontes*) about the source of the meat served (10.25, 27) was no longer governed by the characteristically Jewish antipathy to idolatry so fundamental to Jewish identity.”⁵⁶ Since Paul's stance on idol-food in 1 Cor 8 and 10 appears to contravene normative standards of Second Temple Judaism, and since 1 Cor 9:19–23 occurs in the middle of the 1 Cor 8–10 pericope, it is concluded that 1 Cor 9:19–23 was written by someone who was no longer a Torah-observant Jew.

Paul's stance on idol-food, however, was fully within the contours of Second Temple Judaism. His position was twofold: (1) Jesus-believers were not to eat food in a pagan cultic context; and (2) Outside of a pagan cultic context, indeterminate food was permitted, while known idol-food was forbidden. The assumption behind the consensus view is that mainstream

⁵³ Paul refers to four venues in which the Corinthians would have encountered food offered to idols: (1) in the “temple of an idol” (1 Cor 8:10); (2) at the “table of demons”, possibly a literal table on which sacrificial food was placed in temple precincts (1 Cor 10:21); (3) at the “meat market” (1 Cor 10:25); and (4) when invited to a meal by an “unbeliever,” presumably at a private residence (1 Cor 10:27). There is widespread agreement that Paul prohibited the eating of idol-food from venues 1 and 2 (the temple and table of demons). There is also general acknowledgement that venues 3 and 4 (1 Cor 10:23–11:1) are related; the food for the meal at the private residence was likely purchased at the *macellum* (meat market).

⁵⁴ C. K. Barrett, “Things Sacrificed to Idols,” *New Testament Studies* 11 (1965): 49.

⁵⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 360 n. 10.

⁵⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 702.

Jews never ate indeterminate food from the *macellum*. But what is the basis for this? What if the Jewish supervised food was too expensive? What then did they eat? It is likely that some Jews ate indeterminate food from the *macellum* regularly or on occasion. E. P. Sanders concurs, “One of Paul’s responses as he wrestled with the problem of meat offered to idols was, When a guest, do not raise the question, but do not eat the meat if its origin is pointed out (1 Cor 10:27–29). This may well have been a common Jewish attitude when dining with pagan friends. Barrett thinks that this is Paul’s most *unJewish* attitude. My own guess is that it too has a home somewhere in Judaism.”⁵⁷ From Sanders’s perspective,

it should be borne in mind that many Jews wanted to fit into the common culture, as long as doing so did not involve blatant idolatry. Some Jews participated in the main socializing aspects of Gentile city life – theatres, gymnasia and civil government. “These activities included at least passive contact with idolatry, and they show willingness to overlook formal, civic idolatry in order to participate in the broader civilization”. Such Jews may have taken the very attitude towards food which Paul recommended in 1 Cor 10:27–29, and for very similar reasons . . . We cannot quantify, but we may suppose that Jewish attitudes towards pagan meat varied.⁵⁸

What did Jews in Sardis do when properly slaughtered and supervised food was banned from the *macellum* in their city? It is not inconceivable, given these kinds of circumstances, that Jews adapted by lowering the bar a notch, permitting indeterminate food but drawing the line at food known to be offered to idols. Gentile believers in Corinth were similarly constrained by their circumstances because they were Gentiles. For example, what did the wives of unbelieving Gentile husbands do if their husbands required them to purchase food from a specific butcher at the *macellum*? Paul was aware of these realities on the ground.

When the 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 pericope and its background are examined for evidence of Jewish influence, it becomes apparent that Paul’s perspective on idol-food is informed by Jewish thought. First, Paul refers to passages in Israel’s Scriptures that condemn idolatry. Second, the formulation of Paul’s stance on idol-food resembles biblical case law. Third, Paul’s approach is not as original or un-Jewish as scholars typically assume. Contrary to Barrett and Fee, there is no evidence that all Jews avoided *macellum* food. Fourth, the principle of lowering the bar with respect to indeterminate (or even forbidden foods) due to overriding circumstances is attested in later Jewish literature. Paul may have considered his stance on indeterminate food a necessary adaptation given the unique circumstances of the Gentile believers. Fifth, some Jews in Corinth may have regarded sold objects to be “non-sacral” in status. This would have mitigated the problem of eating indeterminate food from the *macellum*. The early rabbis adopted a similar approach by focusing on the question of idolatrous or non-idolatrous intention. Sixth, Paul’s ethic of not causing the weaker brother to stumble ($\sigma\kappa\alpha\nu\delta\alpha\lambda\iota\zeta\omega$) is probably rooted in Jewish ethical categories of thought and legal tradition surrounding Lev 19. All of these points problematise the traditional view that 1 Cor 9:19–23 precludes a Torah-observant Paul. A compelling case can be made that Paul worked within Jewish contours of flexibility to respond to the issue of idol-food in Corinth.

⁵⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990), 281.

⁵⁸ Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, 281; quotation from E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association With Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 180. Cf. Peder Borgen, “The Early Church and the Hellenistic Synagogue,” in *Paul Preaches Circumcision and Pleases Men: And Other Essays on Christian Origins* (Trykk: Tapir, 1983), 93–94.

g. Third Entity Language

Love Sechrest interprets 1 Cor 10:32 (“Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God”) to mean that Paul regarded himself as part of a third entity, the church, and that he left his Jewish identity behind when he became a Christ follower.⁵⁹ An underlying presupposition of the third entity ecclesiology is the existence of hermetically sealed boundaries between Jews, Gentiles and members of the church; no overlap is possible.

The third entity reading of 1 Cor 10:32 makes sense within a supersessionist framework that presupposes a first-century “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity. However, this assumption is now widely challenged,⁶⁰ and the viability of the model is significantly weakened by Pauline references to Jesus-believing Jews as “Jews” and Jesus-believing Gentiles as “Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22, 24; 12:13).⁶¹ Paul does not speak of them as “former Jews” and “former Gentiles.” Moreover, there is no direct evidence that the third entity in 1 Cor 10:32 is independent of Jews and Gentiles. It is just as possible, if not more likely given the context, that Paul viewed the third entity as a body of Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus. Viewed in this way, Paul would have seen himself as part of the first category (“Jews”) and the third category (“the church of God”).

Along these lines, Brian Tucker notes that 1 Cor 10:32 is “used to substantiate the claim that there are three entities in Paul’s identity framework: Jews, Greeks, and the ἐκκλησία’. However, if one takes the final καὶ in the construction assensively, the verse is then rendered, ‘Give no offence to Jews and Greeks, even to those belonging to the ἐκκλησία’. In that case, Paul is describing those within the ἐκκλησία in the context of their continuing ethnic identities.”⁶²

⁵⁹ “Here we see that Paul has three groups in view and that in this case, he sees himself as a member of this third collective” (Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, 156). See also E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 173–75.

⁶⁰ Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds. *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003), 22–23; Daniel Boyarin, “Semantic Differences; or, ‘Judaism’/‘Christianity,’” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 65–85; Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Marydom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Paula Fredriksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways’? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 35–63; Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); John G. Gager, “Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 361–72; Judith Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” in *Neither Jew nor Greek: Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 11–29; John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Edwin K. Broadhead, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 354–75; Anders Runesson, Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. Bengt Holmberg; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–91.

⁶¹ Cf. Gal 2:3, 12, 14; Rom 11:13; Eph 2:11; Col 4:10–11; Acts 21:39; 22:3.

⁶² J. Brian Tucker, “*Remain in Your Calling*: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 126.

II. Paul's Rule That Jesus-Believing Jews Should Remain Jewish (1 Cor 7:17–24)

In 1 Cor 7:17–24, Paul refers to his “rule in all the churches”⁶³ that Jews are to remain Jews and Gentiles are to remain Gentiles.⁶⁴ Since this text describes “circumcision” and “foreskin” (metonymies for Jewish/Gentile identity and lifestyle)⁶⁵ as enduring *callings* and not merely temporary situations in life,⁶⁶ it adds strength to the argument that 1 Cor 9:19–23 does not preclude a Torah-observant Paul.

⁶³ For a fuller discussion of this topic, see David J. Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in All the Churches’ (1 Cor 7:17–24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 1–23; Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*, 75–88.

⁶⁴ NRSV, ESV, RSV, NIV, NJB, REB, NLT, NCV, NIRV, CJB; “I make this rule ($\delta\alpha\text{-}\tau\alpha\sigma\sigma\omega$) in all the churches” (*BDAG* 2000:238). Cf. $\delta\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\sigma\omega$ in 1 Cor 9:14; 16:1; 2 Tim 1:5; Luke 17:9–10; Acts 7:44; 18:2; 23:31; 24:23. See Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 2:351; Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 126; Adolf Schlatter, *Die Korintherbriefe* (Stuttgart: Calwer Berlag, 1950), 86. For a study of how 1 Cor 7:17–24 fits within the context of Paul’s social vision in the letter, see J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010).

⁶⁵ Paul’s congregation in Corinth appears to have begun with a core of Jesus-believing Jews – Aquilla and Priscilla (Jews from Rome), as well as Crispus, the president of the synagogue ($\alpha\rho\chi\iota\sigma\nu\gamma\omega\gamma\omega\varsigma$) and his family (Acts 18:1–2, 8). See Richard G. Fellows, “Renaming in Paul’s Churches: The Case of Crispus-Sosthenes Revisited”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 56:2 (2005): 111–30. Lucius, Jason and Sosipater were also Jews (Rom 16:21). Luke notes that Paul stayed “next door ($\sigma\nu\nu\mu\nu\rho\nu\varsigma\varsigma$) to the synagogue” with a God-fearing Gentile named Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). The term $\sigma\nu\nu\mu\nu\rho\nu\varsigma\varsigma$ means “was bordering on” or “having a common wall with.” Perhaps the Jesus-believers in Corinth first met in this home next to the synagogue. “The fact that Luke shows that Paul remains spatially as near to the synagogue as possible is more or less a metaphor for his being as closely connected to the synagogue as can be and that thus Luke makes a point about Paul’s desire for a continuing relation to Jews” (Koet, “As Close to the Synagogue as Can Be,” 409). Paul’s reference to Jews and Greeks (1 Cor 1:22–24; 9:20–21; 10:32; 12:13), circumcised and uncircumcised (1 Cor 7:17–20), Apollos (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4–5, 22; 4:6; 16:12; cf. Acts 18:24; 19:1), Cephas (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; cf. Gal 2:7), Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; cf. Acts 16:1–4), Passover (1 Cor 5:7), the people of Israel (1 Cor 10:18), the timing of the Jewish festival of Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8) and the gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3) all suggest that Paul’s congregation in Corinth remained within the orbit of Jews and Judaism.

⁶⁶ Does 1 Cor 7 reflect an imminent eschatology? There is a spectrum of views on Paul’s eschatological expectations in 1 Corinthians. “As Deming and Wimbush urge, Paul’s pragmatic pastoral criteria [e.g. his instruction in 1 Cor 11:2–16 that women should wear headcoverings] do not suggest a theology of eschatological imminence which depends on the conviction that the Pauline communities are the last generation” (Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 575). David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 328–29, concurs, “He is not talking about how little time is left but about how Christ’s death and resurrection have changed how Christians should look at the time that is left . . . Fee comments (1987:339), ‘Those who have a definite future and see it clearly live in the present with radically altered values as to what counts and what does not’. It requires them ‘to rethink their existence.’” For my argument, however, the more important point is that even if one were to conclude that Paul expected an imminent return of the Messiah, it would still remain necessary not to overstate an eschatological motive for his instructions; Paul was also influenced by christological and ecclesiological concerns, among others. Granting an imminent eschatology, the question would still remain, “How imminent? And what was the interim ethic Paul envisaged for Jesus-believers in Corinth?” Following this line of thought, a reasonable argument can be made based on Paul’s “rule in all the churches” and the principle of divine callings (1 Cor 7:17–24) that Paul wanted his communities in the interim to reflect Torah-defined ecclesiological variegation. A related question is whether Paul viewed the church as a prolepsis of Israel and the nations in the eschaton. If this was the case, Paul’s interim ethic could have been informed by Second Temple Jewish eschatological expectations that envisioned Jewish and Gentile identity continuing in the age to come. See Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 158; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 81.

A closer look at 1 Cor 7:17–24 should begin with the parallel verses – 1 Cor 7:17, 20 and 24:

- v. 17 each one (έκάστῳ) should retain the place in life (περιπατείτω) that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him (κέκληκεν).
- v. 20 Each one (έκαστος) should remain (μενέτω) in the situation/calling (κλήσει) which he was in when God called him (έκλήθη).
- v. 24 each man (έκαστος), as responsible to God, should remain (μενέτω) in the situation God called him to (έκλήθη).

Verse 24 states: ἐν φί ἐκλήθη . . . ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω (literally: “in what he was called, in this remain”). Here the “in what he was called” (NRSV “to which God called you”) seems to refer to particular modes of life and not simply to “God’s call to salvation.”⁶⁷ This argument is strengthened when the parallel in verse 20 is examined: ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἥ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω (literally: “in the calling in which he/one was called, in this let him remain”). Most translators concede that v. 20 κλήσει refers to one’s place in life when called (NRSV, ESV, NASB, REB, NET; cf. 1 Cor 1:26). This would suggest by extension, on the basis of Paul’s use of ἐκλήθη in vv. 20, 24, that the “situation” (κλήσει) in life is itself a calling.⁶⁸ This is how Augustine interpreted 1 Cor 7:17–20:

“Was one called having been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised [1 Cor 7:18],” *that is, let him not live as if he had not been circumcised . . .* Because of the view which he expressed in the words: “Was one called having been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was one called being uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised [1 Cor 7:18],” *he actually conformed to obligations.*⁶⁹

Two arguments add to the cumulative case that Paul in 1 Cor 7:19–20 viewed “circumcision” (περιτομή) and “foreskin” (ἀκροβυστία) as God-ordained *callings*. First, the Jew/Gentile distinction reflects an historic calling; the Lord elected Israel to be his “treasured possession (**תְּגִילָה**) out of all the peoples” (i.e. set apart in identity and manner of life). The Jewish nation was called to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation (**מַלְכַּת כֹהֲנִים וְגוּי קָדוֹשׁ**)” (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Some commentators maintain that Paul only uses call language to refer to God’s call to salvation. However, Paul refers to his apostleship as a calling, “Paul, called to be an apostle (κλητὸς ἀπόστολος)” (1 Cor 1:1; cf. Rom 1:1). Here, “called” does not refer to a calling to salvation but a calling to a particular kind of service in God’s kingdom. Later, in 1 Cor 12:4–5, 28–31, Paul identifies apostleship with “gifts” (χαρίσματα) and “services” (διακονιῶν) of God. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 307, “The verb *kalein* denotes not merely a ‘call’ to salvation or to Christianity, as in 1:9 (see NOTE there; also Gal 1:15; Rom 8:30; 9:24), but a call to it in a certain ethnic, legal, or social status, reiterated in vv. 20 and 24; with the same verb in vv. 18, 21–22.”

⁶⁸ William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 216; Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Alcock; London: Epworth, 1962), 54–55. Cf. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 310, “But the concern throughout is with their social situation *at the time of that call*, which is now to be seen as that which ‘the Lord assigned to each’ . . . Paul means that by calling a person within a given situation, that situation itself is taken up in the call and thus sanctified to him or her.” See also Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 549; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 2:136–38; Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 125; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 309; William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), 91–92; Mark D. Nanos, “The Myth of the ‘Law-Free’ Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 3; Joel Willitts, “Weighing the Words of Paul: How do we understand Paul’s instructions today?” *The Covenant Companion* 3 (2009): 28–30.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Op. mon.* 11 (12) (trans. Muldowney [FC], italics mine).

⁷⁰ Philo considers the Exod 19:6 calling fundamental to Israel’s identity (*Abr.* 56, 98; cf. *Legat.* 3; *Mos.* 1.149;

Second, in Rom 11:29, Paul uses the term κλῆσις to refer to the “irrevocable calling” of the Jewish nation:

... but as regards election they [the Jewish people] are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the *calling* (κλῆσις) of God are *irrevocable* (Rom 11:28–29).

When κλῆσις in 1 Cor 7:20 is interpreted in light of κλῆσις in Rom 11:29, the position put forward receives significant support. Noting the possible correlation between the Jewish κλῆσις in 1 Cor 7:20 and Israel’s irrevocable κλῆσις in Rom 11:29, Adolf von Harnack held that Paul in 1 Cor 7:20 was encouraging Jesus-believing Jews to view their Jewishness as a divine calling.

The notion of a “Jewish calling” finds further exegetical support in Paul’s command to Jesus-believing Jews in 1 Cor 7:18: μὴ ἐπισπάσθω (“do not put on foreskin”/ metonymically: do not assimilate or Gentilize yourself).⁷¹ The language is a likely allusion to 1 Macc 1.11–15 where the expression “removed the marks of circumcision” is linked to dejudaization and the adoption of Gentile customs that collapse Jew/Gentile distinction:

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, *for since we separated from them* many disasters have come upon us.” This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to *observe the ordinances of the Gentiles*. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, *and removed the marks of circumcision* (καὶ ἐποίησαν ἔαντοις ἀκροβυστίας), *and abandoned the holy covenant* (καὶ ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ διαθήκης ἀγίας).

Notably, the clause “and removed the marks of circumcision” is immediately followed by the words “and abandoned the holy covenant” (1 Macc 1.15). The two are interrelated since circumcision is *pars-pro-toto* language for Jewish life as it relates to law, covenant and customs.⁷²

In the first century, Philo makes the same correlation by placing circumcision at the beginning of his discussion *On the Special Laws* (*cf.* 1 Macc 1.48, 60–61; 2.46; 2 Macc 6.10; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.257–58, 318; *Jub.* 15.25–34). James Dunn explains:

Circumcision was not merely a single act of law-keeping. It was the first act of full covenant membership and obligation. “Circumcision” could stand metonymically for a whole people precisely because it characterized a people’s whole existence, a complete way of life. As Christians today speak of a “baptismal life,” so we could speak of a “circumcision life.”⁷³

Praem. 114; *Spec.* 1.97, 168; *QE* 2.42) and compares the Jewish nation’s role to a king’s royal estate and to a priest who ministers on behalf of a city (*Plant.* 54–60; *Spec.* 2.163–67). See Martha Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 158–59.

⁷¹ “Let him not undo his circumcision . . . Paul is thinking of more than surgical operation, of one kind or another. The converted Jew continues to be a Jew, with his own appointed way of obedience” (Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 68). Contra Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 146–64, who argues that 1 Cor 7:20 refers to epispasm operations. Winter, however, offers no direct evidence that epispasm was common enough in the first century to warrant Paul making a “rule in all the churches” (v. 17) banning the operation. It should be noted that the metonymic and non-metonymic positions are not mutually exclusive. A metonymic interpretation of 1 Cor 7:20 would include epispasm among the diverse ways that Jews could assimilate into Gentile identity and lifestyle.

⁷² Cf. Acts 21:20–21.

⁷³ James D. G. Dunn, “Neither Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, but...(Gal 5.2–12; 6.12–16; cf. 1 Cor 7.17–20),” in *La Foi Agissant par L’amour (Galates 4,12–6,16)* (Rome: Benedictina, 1996), 86.

Like Philo, Paul views circumcision in metonymic terms. He divides humanity into two groups: the circumcised and those with foreskin (Gal 2:7-9;⁷⁴ 5:3; Rom 2:25-27; 3:30; 4:9-16; 15:8; Phil 3:3; cf. Eph 2:11; Col 3:11; 4:11).⁷⁵ Rom 2:25 and Gal 5:3 confirms that Paul linked circumcision to law observance. In Rom 2:25—“Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision (*περιτομή*) has become uncircumcision (*ἀκροβυστία*)”—Paul describes circumcision as integrally related to Torah observance (Jewish identity), and lack of Torah observance is indicative of foreskin (Gentile identity). Stated another way, circumcision is incomplete without the circumcised life.

In Galatians 5:3, Paul makes the same point in more explicit language—“Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised (*περιτεμνομένω*) that he is obliged to obey the *entire law* (*ὅλον τὸν νόμον*)”—Paul uses circumcision here as *pars pro toto* language for keeping all of God’s commandments. Covenant responsibilities (detailed in the law) are binding on the circumcised one.⁷⁶ Following this line of thought, Dieter Mitternacht contends that Galatians 5:3 should be read as “whoever is circumcised (including Paul) is obligated to observe the whole law.”⁷⁷ Paul’s words appear to imply that he was living the circumcised life. Otherwise, his words would have had no force:

If the Galatians did not know Paul as a Torah-observant Jew, then the rhetoric of 5:3 would have no bite: “I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law.” Otherwise, they might simply respond, “but we want only what you have: Jewish identity, without obligation to observe ‘the whole law.’”⁷⁸

Against this Second Temple Jewish backdrop, we can understand Paul’s rule in 1 Cor 7:17b—*μὴ ἐπισπάσθω* (do not put on foreskin/ do not assimilate or Gentilize yourself)—as an imperatival instruction to remain faithful to Jewish identity.⁷⁹ Since the law was fundamental to Jewish identity, Harnack concluded that *μὴ ἐπισπάσθω* encouraged Jesus-believing Jews to remain Torah observant:

...the Jewish Christian is to keep the Law because in it is given the manner of life which God had willed *for him*. Hence *the whole Law* continues to exist as custom and ordinance for Jewish Christians.⁸⁰

Harnack’s interpretation of 1 Cor 7:18 and 20 is strengthened by Paul’s use of nomistic language in 1 Cor 7:19 – “obeying the commandments of God” (*τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ*). Frank Thielman

⁷⁴ The distinction between Jewish and Gentile identity in Christ is so fundamental that Paul can speak of “the gospel of the foreskin” (*τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας*) and “the [gospel] of the circumcised” (*τῆς περιτομῆς*) (Gal 2:7).

⁷⁵ Paul’s inclusion of women under the categories of circumcised and foreskin adds to the case for a metonymic interpretation of 1 Cor 7:18.

⁷⁶ Shaye J. D Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 218-19, 324-25.

⁷⁷ Dieter Mitternacht, “Foolish Galatians?—A Recipient-Oriented Assessment of Paul’s Letter,” in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 409. See Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 151-52.

⁷⁸ Mark D. Nanos, *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 405; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 171.

⁷⁹ Adolf von Harnack, *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (trans. J. R. Wilkinson; New York: Williams & Norgate, 1911), 43.

⁸⁰ Harnack, *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels*, 44.

has shown that the expression “obeying the commandments of God” occurs in various forms throughout Second Temple Jewish literature and consistently means “keeping the law of Moses.”⁸¹

Why does Paul emphasize “obeying the commandments of God” in the middle of elucidating his ecclesiastical rule that Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles are to remain in their respective callings? A reasonable explanation would seem to be, as Harnack contends, that Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus have different sets of commandments to keep. Raymond Collins points out that “‘Keeping the commandments of God’ is similar to the exhortation that the Corinthians conduct their lives in a way that is in accordance with their call from God (v. 17).”⁸² To put it another way, since the κλήσει (calling) differed between Jew and Gentile (1 Cor 7:18–20), Paul likely held that God’s commandments differed as well. This is how Peter Tomson interprets 1 Cor 7:19:

Paul can only mean that gentiles should obey commandments also, although evidently not the same ones as Jews. He views gentiles as included in the perspective of the Creator which involves commandments for all. In other words: he envisages what elsewhere are called Noachian commandments . . . The saying would then imply that whether or not one is a Jew does not matter before God, but whether one performs the commandments incumbent upon one does: Jews the Jewish law, and gentiles the Noachian code – in the version to be propagated by Paul.⁸³

I conclude that the observance of distinct sets of commandments by Jewish and gentile Christians was the basic principle of Paul’s missionary work, and he laid it down in the rule, “circumcision is nothing and the foreskin is nothing, but keeping God’s commandments.”⁸⁴

Markus Bockmuehl arrives at the same conclusion in his book *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*:

The apostle himself in 1 Corinthians 7:17–20 makes clear that his “rule for all the churches” is for Jews to keep the Torah (indeed Gal 5:3, too, may mean they are obliged to do so) and for Gentiles to keep what pertains to them – and only that. In either case, what matters are the applicable commandments of God.⁸⁵

This reading of 1 Cor 7:19, which is overlooked by many commentators, fits the 1 Cor 7:17–24 context and reflects the implications of the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15. Thus 1 Cor 7:19 may likely mean: with respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant. What is important in God’s eyes, what pleases him, is that Jews and Gentiles keep their respective commandments.

⁸¹ “The phrase ‘the commandments of God’ is frequently used in the Jewish and Jewish Christian literature of Paul’s time to refer to keeping the law of Moses. Late in the second century B.C., for example, the grandson of the Jewish scholar Ben Sira translated his grandfather’s summary of the law this way: ‘Guard yourself in every act, for this also is the keeping of the commandments [*tērēsis entolōn*]’ (Sirach 32:23). Similarly, Matthew translates Jesus’ reply to the rich young man’s question about how to obtain eternal life as ‘Keep the commandments’ (*tērēson tas entolas*), a clear reference to the law of Moses, as Jesus’ list of commandments and summary of the first table of the law from Leviticus 19:18 demonstrate (Mt 19:17–19). Moreover, the Septuagint’s translation of Ezra 9:4 uses the phrase ‘commandments of God’ as a synonym for the law of Moses. The phrase Paul has chosen to refer to God’s commandments, therefore is one that in his cultural context clearly referred to the Mosaic law” (Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994], 101).

⁸² Collins, *First Corinthians*, 284.

⁸³ Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 271–72.

⁸⁴ Tomson, “Paul’s Jewish Background in View of His Law Teaching in 1 Cor 7”, 267–68.

⁸⁵ Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 170–71.

How does Paul's rule in 1 Cor 7:17–24 inform our understanding of 1 Cor 9:19–23? Since Paul was circumcised (Phil 3:5), and his “rule in all the churches” was for Jesus-believing Jews to remain Jewish and not Gentilize themselves, one would reasonably assume that Paul kept his own rule and lived as a Torah-observant Jew.⁸⁶ Anders Runesson concurs:

As one ponders the historical Paul as well as his later interpreters through the centuries, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, contrary to much that has been written, Paul is likely to have applied the universal rule of Jews remaining Jewish “in Christ” also to himself, if we assume that there is at least some consistency between his practice and his belief. A study of Paul’s rule in all the *ekklēsiai* seems, therefore, to add a supporting voice—this time Paul’s own—to James’s and the elders’ exhortation in Jerusalem as they instruct a complying Paul in Acts 21:24 (NRSV): “Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law.”⁸⁷

Finally, Paul’s rule serves as a principal literary context for interpreting the circumcised apostle’s nomistic language in 1 Cor 9:19–23.⁸⁸ The various parallels between 1 Cor 7:17–24 and 9:19–23 add exegetical weight to the assessment that we should view Paul’s rule as defining the parameters within which his accommodation took place.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Since the publication of E. P. Sanders’s seminal work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), a massive reassessment of the New Testament writers’ views of Jews and Judaism has occurred and this reevaluation continues unabated. There is no question that this new scholarship has resulted in a sea change in how the field of New Testament studies understands Second Temple Judaism. Riding the wave of this new scholarship, I have attempted to challenge the view that 1 Cor 9:19–23 is incompatible with a Torah-observant Paul. By demonstrating that the arguments

⁸⁶ “Paul nowhere suggests that Jews should reject their Torah observance, and in fact seems to assume that they would and should remain committed to it (1 Cor 7:17–20; cf. Gal 5:3; Acts 21:17–24)” (Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003], 219); See also Tucker, “*Remain in Your Calling*,” 62–88; Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism,” in *Codex Pauli* (Rome: Società San Paolo, 2009), 54; Magnus Zetterholm, “Paul and the Missing Messiah,” in *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Magnus Zetterholm; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 49–50; Gudrund Holtz, *Damit Gott sei alles in allem: Studien zum paulinischen und frühjüdischen Universalismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 247–50.

⁸⁷ Anders Runesson, “Paul’s Rule in All the *Ekklesiāi*,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 222.

⁸⁸ Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 281; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 170–71.

⁸⁹ “In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul responded to the first of a series of questions or issues the Corinthian Christians had raised with him by letter. 1 Corinthians 8–10 takes up a second issue. 1 Corinthians 7 is, therefore, an important part in the literary context of 1 Cor 9:19–23” (Barbara Hall, “All Things to All People: A Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23”, in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* [ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990], 145). Both sections (1 Cor 7:17–24 and 1 Cor 9:19–23) refer to (1) Jews and Gentiles; (2) God’s law/commandments; and (3) Being free/slave. The term Paul uses in 1 Cor 7:17 to refer to his *rule* in all the churches (*διατάσσω*) is the same word he uses in 1 Cor 9:14 to refer to the Lord’s *command* (*διατάσσω*). Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 104, argues that the second restrictive clause in 1 Cor 9:19–23 (“though I am not without the law of God”) points back to “the commandments of God” in 1 Cor 7:19. See also Wayne Coppins, *The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul: With Special Reference to the ‘German’ Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 55–77.

which underpin the traditional view do not stand up under close scrutiny, I destabilise the consensus reading and open the door for scholars to take a fresh look at 1 Cor 9:19–23.

I have also attempted to show how one might understand 1 Cor 9:19–23 as the discourse of a Jew who remained within the bounds of pluriform first-century Judaism. This is how I see it: The exegetical case centres on interpreting 1 Cor 9:19–23 in light of Paul’s recapitulation in 1 Cor 10:32–11:1, which concludes with the statement, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Given the food-related/hospitality context of 1 Cor 8–10, and Paul’s reference to dominical sayings that point back to Jesus’ example and rule of adaptation (1 Cor 9:14; 10:27/Luke 10:7–8), it is argued that 1 Cor 9:19–23 reflects Paul’s imitation of Christ’s accommodation and open table-fellowship (Mark 2:15–17; Matt 9:10–13; 11:19; Luke 5:29–32; 7:34–36).

As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became “all things to all people” through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those “under the law”) and Gentile sinners. The restrictive clause in 1 Cor 9:21 (“not without the law of God”) should be interpreted in light of Paul’s rule in 1 Cor 7:17–20 that Jesus-believing Jews like Paul are to remain practising Jews. Upholding Christ’s halakhah with respect to table-fellowship with sinners is what Paul meant by being “in the law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21).