

Ecclesiological Vision for *L’Dor Vador*

Paul and Jewish Identity in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and 7:17–24

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IF THE CHURCH DOES not have a theological commitment to Jews remaining Jews after they become followers of Jesus, then the salvation of all Israel will naturally lead to the disappearance of all Israel. Michael Wyschogrod puts it more constructively: “If it is God’s will that the Jewish people continue to exist as long as the world exists, then the church must preserve the identity of the Jewish people within the church and cannot depend on Jews who refuse to enter the church.”¹

But is it God’s will for the church to preserve Jewish identity? Christian theologians often answer this question in the negative. Many New Testament scholars depict Paul as a Jew who burst the bounds of Judaism. According to the traditional narrative, Paul’s revelation of the new creation in Christ resulted in a reassessment of the continuing need for boundary markers of Jewish identity like circumcision since, in the end, “there is no longer Jew or Greek” (Gal 3:28; 6:15, NRSV). Being a Jew “according to the flesh” was at the most an ethnic affiliation and no longer a matter of election, calling, or covenant responsibility. By divine design, Jewish identity had been superseded or revalorized to the point of indifference. In short, from the Pauline perspective, the only legitimate reason for Jewish Christians to live as Jews was to missionize Jews.

One of the most frequently cited passages in Paul’s letters to support this 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.² Peter Richardson

1. Wyschogrod, “Response,” 233.

2. The term “Torah-observant” in this essay refers to how Jews in the Second Temple period generally

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and Paul Gooch write, "For him [Paul], Judaism was superseded, not merely altered in certain ways; he hardly regarded himself as a Jew legitimately .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

John Barclay asserts, "C. K. Barrett 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

I think it is fair to say that these comments are indicative of how many New Testament scholars 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 suggests?⁷ And did the apostle, through his example and teaching, encourage other Jews to view themselves as no longer called by God to live out Jewish life except when it is a matter of missionary expediency? Over

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 boundary 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 by cultural norms or contextualization for mission.

3. Richardson and Gooch, "Accommodation Ethics," 107, 111.

4. Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 37.

5. Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy," 114n44, citing Barrett, *Commentary*, 211.

6. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was?" 182. Heikki Räisänen puts it succinctly: "1 Cor 9.20f. is absolutely incompatible with the theory of an observant Paul" (Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 75n171).

7. Sechrest, *Former Jew*, 156–64.

the past quarter of a century, an increasing number of researchers have begun to question the traditional reading of 1 Cor 9:19–23 and the supersessionist portrait of Paul that it presents. In this essay, I would like to (1) show how 1 Cor 9:19–23 can be understood as the discourse of a Jew who remained within the bounds of Second Temple Judaism, and (2) unpack 1 Cor 9:19–23 in light of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 7–11, particularly Paul's "rule in all the churches" (1 Cor 7:17–24), that Jesus-believing Jews should remain in their calling as Jews.⁸

THE FIRST-CENTURY JEWISH CONTEXT

Despite the seeming strength of the traditional reading of 1 Cor 9:19–23, there are underlying weaknesses. The most obvious problem is that the prevailing portrayal of Paul as a chameleon when it came to Jewish life is not historically realistic. It does not fit the first-century Jewish 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 light of his letters and Acts, it is apparent that he was often around Jews and Gentiles together, thus restricting his ability to be "all things to all people."⁹
2. The standard interpretation portrays first-century Jews as simpletons. It implies that Jews did not notice that Paul observed Jewish law only when he was around them.¹⁰
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 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."¹¹ 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.'"¹² Even today, Jewish writers describe Paul as a proponent of "trickery,"¹³ "deceit,"¹⁴ and "pious fraud"¹⁵ based on traditional explanations of 1 Cor 9:19–23. By contrast, Paul claimed to be

8. The case is more fully developed in Rudolph, *Jew to the Jews*.

9. Sanders, *Paul, Law, Jewish People*, 177–86; Ebeling, *Truth*, 115.

10. According to Luke, Paul's congregation in Corinth met in a house that was next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). See Koet, "As Close to the Synagogue as Can Be," 409.

11. Knox, *St. Paul*, 122n54.

12. Watson, *Paul*, 29.

13. Moshe, *Judaism's Truth*, 212.

14. Sigal, *Jews*, 272.

15. Drazin, *Their Hollow Inheritance*, 18.

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one who did *not* “practice cunning” when he proclaimed the gospel of God (2 Cor 4:1–2; cf. 1 Thess 2:3). Surely, there is something we are missing here!

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 separately, 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 narrower setting in which Paul's adaptation would have been considered acceptable to Jews. In what setting would this have been the case? Consider dining contexts.

Robert Kelley describes the fellowship aspect of commensality in first-century Israel and the Greco-Roman world: “In the various cultures underlying the New Testament, dining with someone indicated solidarity with that person. To eat with is to identify with.”¹⁶ 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, going from “house to house” and being a guest was a primary way that he came to know people intimately (Acts 20:20; cf. 16:15, 34, 40; 18:7; 20:11; 21:8, 16; Rom 12:13). Receiving hospitality was more than eating what was set before him. It was an experience of understanding the host, honoring the host's traditions, and ministering to the host.¹⁷

The Midrash describes a rule of hospitality that enjoins Jewish guests to adapt to the norms of their host:

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).¹⁸

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, 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. XVIII, 8) (Exod Rab 47.5).¹⁹

16. Kelley, “Meals,” 123. Cf. Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 176–77.

17. E.g., Philo, *Abr.* 107–108, 115, 118; Test Ab 4:15 (Short Recension), 4:7 (Long Recension) (“and whatever he says to you, this indeed do, and whatever he eats, you indeed eat along with him”).

18. Neusner, *Components*, 225. Emphasis mine. Cf. Lev Rab 34.8; Num Rab 10.6; Eccl Rab 3.14; b. B. Meṣ. 86b.

19. Freedman and Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 539.

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 (cf. t. Ber. 2.21).²⁰ Samuel Vollenweider asserts that the midrashic saying is historically rooted in the first-century travel rule echoed by one of the Jewish guests in Ep Arist 257. Vollenweider notes 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, Πᾶσαιν ἴσος 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.’”²¹

The Jewish rule of hospitality, combined with the travel rule attested in Ep Arist 257 (Πᾶσαιν ἴσος γινόμενος), and the Lord’s directive to follow the way of the host in Test Ab 4:7 (Long Recension) (καὶ ὅτι ἂν ἐσθίῃ συνέσθιε καὶ σὺ μετ’ αὐτοῦ), provide a reasonable basis to argue that γίνομαι . . . ὡς in 1 Cor 9:19–23 describes Paul’s adaptation to his host in Jewish and Gentile hospitality settings.²² 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.²³ This table-centred interpretation of γίνομαι . . . ὡς is supported by the hospitality context of 1 Cor 9:19–23:

1. “Food and table-fellowship” is a central theme in 1 Cor 8:1—11:1.²⁴ 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

20. Conzelmann, *Commentary*, 160n21; cf. Bornkamm, “Missionary Stance,” 195; Schoeps, *Paul*, 231; Daube, *New Testament Judaism*, 563; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 2:339.

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

22. 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, *Epistle to Jerome* 40.4; cf. 82; CSEL 34.2, 379–80; Augustine, *St. Augustine*, 413–14). See White, *Correspondence*, 168–69. Similarly, Chadwick (“All Things to All Men,” 275) suggests that Paul sought to “minimize the gap between himself and his potential converts.”

23. “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” (Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 55).

24. “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” (Tucker, “Role,” 88–89).

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- tradition of the Messiah's last Passover and the covenant meal instituted out of it (1 Cor 11:20–32; cf. 5:6–8).²⁵
2. Paul closes ch. 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 1 Cor 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), and eating holy food (v. 13).
 6. 1 Corinthians 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.
 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).

PAUL'S NOMISTIC LANGUAGE

Most contemporary studies of 1 Cor 9:20 ("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") assume without critical engagement that the expression *ὑπὸ νόμον* ("under the law") refers to "living under the authority of Mosaic law." This 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 νόμον* in the 1 Cor 9:20 context? Perhaps it refers to "those under [strict interpretation of] the law" as Markus Bockmuehl and Richard Phua have argued,²⁶ or it may refer to Pharisees in particular as Gerard Sloyan has suggested: "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

25. Passover and table-fellowship are also mentioned in 1 Cor 5:6–11. See Schwiebert, "Table Fellowship."

26. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 171; Phua, *Idolatry*, 193. See also Young, *Paul*, 20; Heydenreich, *Commentarius in priorem*, 2.41–42.

‘separated’ or *perushim* to which he gave his allegiance as a young man.”²⁷ In support of Sloyan’s hypothesis that Paul had Pharisees 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*).²⁸ Pharisees also lived among the people and were open to table-fellowship with non-Pharisee guests who accommodated to their halakhic standards. This is in contrast to some of the stricter sectarian groups (e.g., Qumran Jews). Jacob 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.²⁹

Paul would have also encountered Jews who were not Pharisees but who embraced aspects of Pharisaic halakhah. Pharisees in Israel and the diaspora likely exerted influence on some Jews to be stricter in observance specifically 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.³⁰

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).³¹ In such situations, it is proposed that Paul became as one

27. Sloyan, “Did Paul Think That Jews and Jewish Christians Must Follow Torah?” 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” (Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 4:222).

28. “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” (Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 135). Cf. Sievers, “Who Were the Pharisees?” 145; Bockmuehl, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 197; Peerbolte, *Paul the Missionary*, 140–42.

29. Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, 67. See also Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 236–42; Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 272, 286–87.

30. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 140; Dunn, “Incident,” 16. Sanders (“Jewish Association,” 172) points out that diaspora Jews did not tithe their food.

31. Paul’s second and third missionary journeys took him through the region of Tarsus and Jerusalem.

under (Pharisaic interpretation of) the law to win those under (Pharisaic interpretation of) the law.

Why would Paul use the expression “under the law” (ὑπὸ νόμον) 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” (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου) in Acts 21:20 (cf. 22:3).³² 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”).³³ 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. I suggest 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.³⁴

A second possibility is that the term ὑπὸ νόμον 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 as Matthew underscores: “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).³⁵

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” Jews³⁶ or observers of a “Torah-true life.”³⁷

A *fourth* possible explanation for the term (given Paul’s typically negative use of ὑπὸ νόμον in Galatians and Romans) is that the apostle considered narrow interpretation

Saldarini (*Pharisees*, 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.

32. According to Luke, Paul used the terms ἀκριβειαν (“strictly”) and ζηλωτής (“zealous”) together to describe his Pharisaic upbringing (Acts 22:3).

33. See Liebman, “Introduction,” xiv–xv.

34. Paul noticed the “extremely religious” (δεισιδαιμονεστέρους) among the Gentiles he sought to win (Acts 17:22).

35. Cf. the *shikmi* Pharisee in y. Sot. 5.5. See Weinstein, *Piety and Fanaticism*, 149.

36. Winston, *Unchosen*, 184n1.

37. Fishkoff, *Rebbe’s Army*, 31.

of the law a burden. Very strict Jews were “under [the burden of a stringent interpretation of] the law.” Contemporary *frum* Jews understand how a narrowly defined Torah-observant lifestyle can have a negative side due to the loss of personal freedom.³⁸ 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.”³⁹

What did Paul mean by his parenthetical qualification in 1 Cor 9:20a, “though I myself am not ὑπὸ νόμον”? 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 νόμον”) 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 he 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”). 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.⁴⁰

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

38. Margolese, *Off the Derech*, 311–13.

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

40. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 162–63; Nanos, “What Was at Stake?” 296–97; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 57–61; Barclay, *Jews*, 147, 435–36; Tomson, *Paul*, 231; Sanders, “Jewish Association,” 180; Dunn, “Incident,” 23.

table-fellowship with “sinners.”⁴¹ When Paul was under Pharisaic halakhah (*κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος* = *ὑπὸ νόμον*), 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* = *ἔννομος 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 fellowship with Christ.

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 *Ἰουδαίους* (“Jews”) in 1 Cor 9:20 refers to the wider Jewish community in which strict Jews form a sub-identity. In support of the view that *Ἰουδαίους* 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).⁴² 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, *War* 1.110; cf. *Ant.* 17.41). 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 νομικοὶ*) (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,⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ In addition to regional distinctions between Jews (e.g., Judeans, Galileans, etc.), there were “Hellenists” (*Ἑλληνιστῶν*) and “Hebrews” (*Ἑβραίους*) (Acts 6:1). Luke refers to Jews who identified culturally as “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of

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

42. See also Phil 3:5–6; Acts 22:3.

43. Sechrest, *Former Jew*, 156, who says, “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.”

44. Tobin et al., *In Every Tongue*; Ross, *Fragile Branches*; Lowenstein, *Jewish Cultural Tapestry*; Primack, ed., *Jews*; Cowen, *Jews*.

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 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.

PAULINE HYPERBOLE

In 1 Cor 7:19, Paul writes, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.”⁴⁵ 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 . . .”⁴⁶ Horrell assumes that “nothing” or “not anything” points to unimportance.⁴⁷ But given the context, Paul is more likely saying that οὐδέν is “related strictly to salvation,”⁴⁸ that is, “neither circumcision nor the lack of circumcision has ultimate bearing on salvation.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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” (οὔτε . . . 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 (οὔτε . . . ἐστίν τι οὔτε), 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*

45. Cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15.

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

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

48. Conzelmann, *Commentary*, 126.

49. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 284; also, Tomson, “Paul’s Jewish Background,” 266; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 550.

50. Cf. Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 131–34; Zoccali, *Whom God Has Called*, 129.

one's salvation in Christ, and the working out of that salvation through keeping God's commandments, being Jewish or Gentile is nothing. Here Paul refers to something genuinely important—Jewish calling and Gentile calling—to emphasize what is *even more important*.

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 (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).⁵¹

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]."⁵² Gordon Fee describes Paul as an "absolutely liberal" Jew who goes "quite over against his own Jewish tradition."⁵³ 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."⁵⁴ Since Paul's stance on idol-food in 1 Cor 8 and 10 appears to contravene normative standards of Second Temple Judaism, and since

51. 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 acknowledgment 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).

52. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed," 49.

53. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 360n10.

54. Dunn, *Theology*, 702.

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. But is this accurate?

A reasonable case can be made that Paul's stance on idol-food 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; (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 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 *un-Jewish* attitude. My own guess is that it too has a home somewhere in Judaism.⁵⁵

From the perspective of Sanders:

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.⁵⁶

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

55. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 281.

56. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 281; quotation from Sanders, “Jewish Association,” 180. Cf. Borgen, “Early Church,” 93–94.

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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 (σκανδαλίζω) is probably rooted in Jewish ethical categories of thought and legal tradition surrounding Lev 19. In sum, a compelling case can be made that Paul worked within Jewish contours of flexibility to respond to the issue of idol-food in Corinth.

THIRD ENTITY LANGUAGE

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.⁵⁷ 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,⁵⁸ 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).⁵⁹ 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 καί in the construction with an ascensive

57. "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, *Former Jew*, 156). See also Sanders, *Paul, Law, Jewish People*, 173–75.

58. Becker and Reed, eds., *Ways*, 22–23; Boyarin, "Semantic Differences"; Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*; Boyarin, *Border Lines*; Boyarin, *Dying for God*; Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways?'; Alexander, "Parting"; Gager, "Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?"; Lieu, "Parting of the Ways"; Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism*; Broadhead, *Jewish Ways*, 354–75; Runesson, "Inventing Christian Identity."

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

meaning, 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.”⁶⁰

PAUL’S RULE IN ALL THE CHURCHES (1 CORINTHIANS 7:17–24)

In 1 Cor 7:17–24, Paul refers to his “rule in all the churches”⁶¹ that Jews are to remain Jews and Gentiles are to remain Gentiles.⁶² Since this text describes “circumcision” and “foreskin” (metonymies for Jewish/Gentile identity and lifestyle)⁶³ as enduring *callings* and not merely temporary situations in life,⁶⁴ it adds strength to the argument that 1 Cor 9:19–23 assumes a Torah-observant Paul.

60. Tucker, “Remain in Your Calling,” 126.

61. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule’”; Rudolph, *Jew to the Jews*, 75–88.

62. NRSV, ESV, RSV, NIV, NJB, REB, NLT, NCV, NIRV, CJB; “I make this rule (διατάσσομαι) in all the churches” (BDAG 238). Cf. διατάσσω 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, *Commentary*, 126; Schlatter, *Korintherbriefe*, 86. For a study of how 1 Cor 7:17–24 fits within the context of Paul’s social vision in the letter, see Tucker, *You Belong to Christ*.

63. Paul’s congregation in Corinth appears to have begun with a core of Jesus-believing Jews—Aquila and Priscilla (Jews from Rome), as well as Crispus, the president of the synagogue (ἀρχισυνάγωγος) and his family (Acts 18:1–2, 8). See Fellows, “Renaming.” Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater were also Jews (Rom 16:21). Luke notes that Paul stayed “next door (συνομοροῦσα) to the synagogue” with a God-fearing Gentile named Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). The term συνομοροῦσα 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.

64. 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, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 575). Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 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 ([*First Epistle*], 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

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

v. 17 each one (ἐκάστῳ) should retain the place in life (περιπατεῖτω) that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him (ἐκλήκεν).

v. 20 Each one (ἐκαστος) should remain (μενέτω) in the situation/calling (κλήσει) which he was in when God called him (ἐκλήθη).

v. 24 each man (ἐκαστος), as responsible to God, should remain (μενέτω) in the situation God called him to (ἐκλήθη).

Verse 24 states: ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη . . . ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω (literally: “in what he was called, in this remain”). Here the “in what he was called” (“to which God called you,” NRSV) seems to refer to particular modes of life and not simply to “God’s call to salvation.”⁶⁵ This argument is strengthened when the parallel in v. 20 is examined: ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἧ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω (literally, “in the calling in which he/one was called, in this let him remain”). Most translators concede that κλήσει (v. 20) 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.⁶⁶ 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.*⁶⁷

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 Zetterholm, *Formation*, 158; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 81.

65. 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” (διακονιών) of God. Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 307, who says “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.”

66. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 216; Héring, *First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 54–55. Cf. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 310, where he says, “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, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 549; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 2:136–38; Conzelmann, *Commentary*, 125; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 309; Campbell, *Paul*, 91–92; Nanos, “Myth,” 3; Willitts, “Weighing the Words,” 28–30.

67. Augustine, *Op. mon.* 11 (12) (Muldowney, FC; emphasis mine).

Two arguments add to the cumulative case that Paul, in 1 Cor 7:19–20, viewed *περιτομή* (“circumcision”) and *ἀκροβυστία* (“foreskin”) as God-ordained *callings*. First, the Jew/Gentile distinction reflects an historic calling; the Lord elected Israel to be his “treasured possession (הַגִּלְגָּל) 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 (ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש)” (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18).⁶⁸

Second, in Rom 11:29, Paul uses the term *κλήσις* 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* (*κλήσις*) of God are *irrevocable*” (Rom 11:28–29). When *κλήσις* in 1 Cor 7:20 is interpreted in light of *κλήσις* in Rom 11:29, the position put forward receives significant support. Noting the possible correlation between the Jewish *κλήσις* in 1 Cor 7:20 and Israel’s irrevocable *κλήσις* in Rom 11:29, Adolf Harnack held that Paul in 1 Cor 7:20 was encouraging Jesus-believing Jews to view their Jewish identity and lifestyle 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 ἐπιπάσθω* (“do not put on foreskin”; metonymically, “do not assimilate or Gentilize yourself”).⁶⁹ 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 ἑαυτοῖς ἀκροβυστίας*), *and abandoned the holy covenant* (*καὶ ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ διαθήκης ἁγίας*).

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

68. Philo considers the Exod 19:6 calling fundamental to Israel’s identity (*Abr.* 56, 98; cf. *Legat.* 3; *1 Mos.* 149; *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.* 2.163–167). See Himmelfarb, *Kingdom*, 158–59.

69. “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, *Commentary*, 68). Contra Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, 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.

interrelated since circumcision is *pars pro toto* language for Jewish life as it relates to law, covenant, customs, and *l'dor vador* (Gen 17:9–12).⁷⁰

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.* 13.257–258, 318; Jub 15:25–34). 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.”⁷¹

Like Philo, Paul views circumcision in metonymic terms. He divides humanity into two groups: the circumcised and those with foreskin (Gal 2:7–9;⁷² 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).⁷³ Romans 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 (Jewish identity) as integrally related to Torah observance, and lack of Torah observance is indicative of foreskin (Gentile identity). Stated another way, circumcision is incomplete without the circumcised life.

In Gal 5:3, Paul makes the same point in more explicit language—“Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised (περιτεμνομένῳ) 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.⁷⁴ Following this line of thought, Dieter Mitternacht contends that Gal 5:3 should be read as “whoever is circumcised (including Paul) is obligated to observe the whole law.”⁷⁵ 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:

70. Cf. Acts 21:20–21.

71. Dunn, “Neither Circumcision,” 86.

72. 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).

73. 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.

74. Cohen, *Beginnings*, 218–19, 324–25.

75. Mitternacht, “Foolish Galatians?” 409. See Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” 151–52.

Jewish identity, without obligation to observe “the whole law.”⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸ 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 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.”⁷⁹

Why does Paul emphasize “obeying the commandments of God” in the middle of elucidating his ecclesiological 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).”⁸⁰ 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

76. Nanos, “Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context,” 405; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 171.

77. Harnack, *Date*, 43.

78. Harnack, *Date*, 44.

79. Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 101, who writes: “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.”

80. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 284.

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the Jewish law, and gentiles the Noachian code—in the version to be propagated by Paul.⁸¹

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."⁸²

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."⁸³ 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.

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.⁸⁴ 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."⁸⁵

81. Tomson, *Paul*, 271–72.

82. Tomson, "Paul's Jewish Background," 267–68.

83. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 170–71.

84. "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)" (Harink, *Paul*, 219); See also Tucker, "Remain in Your Calling," 62–88; Nanos, "Paul and Judaism," 54; Zetterholm, "Paul," 49–50; Holtz, *Damit Gott*, 247–50.

85. Runesson, "Paul's Rule," 222.

Finally, Paul's rule serves as a principal literary context for interpreting the circumcised apostle's nomistic language in 1 Cor 9:19–23.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Paul had an ecclesiological vision for *l'dor vador* when it came to Jewish believers in Jesus. Though New Testament scholars often point to 1 Cor 9:19–23 as evidence that Paul regarded Jewish identity and lifestyle as superseded in Christ, I have shown how this text can be understood as the discourse of a Jew who remained within the bounds of pluriform first-century Judaism.

The exegetical case centers 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 8–11, 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), I have 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 practicing Jews and not assimilate. To put it another way, as the "circumcised," messianic Jews have an irrevocable κλησις ("calling") to stay true to their identity as Jews for the generations to come (1 Cor 7:18; Rom 11:28–29).

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86. Tomson, *Paul*, 281; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 170–71.

87. "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" (Hall, "All Things to All People," 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). 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 Coppins, *Interpretation*, 55–77.

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The Future Restoration of Israel

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Edited by

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