

# The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews

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Since the emergence of historical criticism, many Christian and Jewish scholars have concluded that Jesus was Torah positive, upholding that not even a jot or tittle is to be removed (Matt 5:18). Thus, any ostensible disagreements Jesus had with Pharisees or other rival Jewish interest groups were not with the continued role of Torah per se, but with competing interpretations of how to apply Torah. But this new approach does not apply to the Apostle Paul. In fact, with this change of sentiment about Jesus, the significance for representing Paul as the real champion of the devaluation of Torah as well as the founder of Christianity has increased exponentially.<sup>1</sup> And for good reason: now Paul, not Jesus, substantiates the differences between these faith communities, because of his ostensible conversion from Torah to Christ. Jesus practiced Judaism, however different his halakhah may have been from that of his rivals; Paul did not. In view of his announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God, Jesus sought to refine prevailing interpretations of Torah; Paul altogether abandoned it. Thus ironically, the central propositions of Christianity, that it is not-Judaism, and of Judaism, that it is not-Christianity, revolve around the prevailing portrait of the "Law-free" (or better, "Torah-free") Paul, and his supposedly "Law-free [better, Torah-free] Gospel," instead of Jesus, and his teachings.

This characterization of Paul's attitude toward Torah and Judaism is so widely held that annotation would be superfluous, and inevitably incomplete. But I believe it represents a profound misreading of Paul. As I read the evidence, Paul did not teach a so-called "Torah-free Gospel," or the end of Torah. But he upheld that Christ-believing *non-Jews* were not to *become*

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<sup>1</sup> See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Daniel R. Langton, "The Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul' and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics," *JSNT* 28.1 (2005): 69-104; Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

Jews, and thus that they will never be under Torah in the same way that Jews, such as Paul himself, were, and remained. Paul observed Torah as a matter of faith, as incumbent upon himself as a faithful Jewish believer in Christ. He also affirmed Torah unambiguously, proclaiming that the good news in Christ "established" it (Rom 3:31); he went so far as to declare the Torah "spiritual" (7:14). At issue in his rhetoric, written to non-Jews, was how they were to become members of Judaism, of the communal life of the people of God, without becoming members of Israel, without becoming Jews. They thus remained without the "advantages" Torah offered (3:1-2; 9:4-5), but also without the responsibility to "fully" observe Torah in the same ways that he, and other Christ-believing Jews, retained (1 Cor 7:17-24; Gal 5:3).

I submit that the traditional and still prevailing myth of the Torah-free Paul and his supposed "Law-free Gospel" are mistaken, that there are viable alternative interpretations for each text around which these have been constructed. Thus the possibilities for each community's conceptualizations of the other need not be limited by the traditional portrayal of Paul; there are new perspectives that promise more positive relations going forward. This development is also relevant for both the Christian and Jewish community's own self-understanding, where Paul's voice is concerned, for example, for perceiving and articulating the balance between dependence upon God's favor (grace and faith) with the role of personal and corporate responsibility (works and faithfulness). Both are based on a covenant relationship, which, like in a human family, is much more than faith, or better, *trust*, and faithfulness, or better, *loyal behavior*. Yet both communities characterize the other in ways that limit the options for characterizations of self, and lead in unrealistic theological directions, ones that often require enormous leaps of logic, including perpetual contradictions, in order to retain such bifurcations as essential.

Thus some Christians claim to uphold grace and faith (as in belief) *alone*, apart from faithfulness, in ways that are unrealistic for reflecting Paul's values. Such teachings conflict with the enormous effort Paul spent in every letter exhorting his audiences to *behave* faithfully (e.g., declaring that "faith works through love," rather than the other way around [Gal 5:6]). They are also at odds with the primary effort of most homilies from the pulpit, namely, to urge the congregation to right living, faithfulness to the partnership with God and those of his family, and even the rest of humankind and creation, to which their confession of Christ by

definition commits them. One does not teach one's children to be free from law and commandments meant to guide their way. What is the purpose of Baptism or the Communion or Ordination, of Marriage or Burial? Are these rituals really only yokes that one should wish to be free *from*, or instead *to*, that is, to expressing in the fullest sense the God-oriented life that they represent, guiding and empowering one to be free from evil. One desires to be free to live fully, faithfully; it is Paul who affirmed that "the righteous by faithfulness will live" (Rom 1:17; 3:11; citing Hab 2:4).

Is it really the case that faith without works is the ideal in Christianity any more than the opposite is the case in Judaism? It became a battle cry in the face of inter-Christian disputes, and thus is limited to expressing an emphasis in polemical terms. At the same time, some Jews, polemically, in defiance towards Christian negative valuations of the primacy of observant behavior, claim to uphold works alone, as if independent of the role of grace. But the Tanakh emphasizes God's grace and faith as well as works, attested even in extreme halakhists like the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and this emphasis continues in Judaism to this day.<sup>2</sup> One need but consult the morning prayer, the Shacharis, to recognize that regardless of the call to responsibility, Jewish expectations are also based on God's lovingkindness, grace, and forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> The actions undertaken, just as for Christians, are in response to God's kindness, and the covenant relationship into which this people have entered. Who would want to behave otherwise, ungratefully, and without respect and loyalty to their covenant partner?

To date, Christians have often celebrated Paul for teaching above all freedom from Torah, usually stated to be "Law," hence, the so-called "Law-free Gospel." Even the choice of "law" to denote the matter highlights the problem of polemic at work. For "Torah" means "Teaching," including the teaching of freedom—a core ideal of Judaism as much as it is of Christianity: think of the centrality of the freedom from slavery in Egypt at the heart of Sabbath observance, Pesach, and various commandments for the humane treatment of others.<sup>4</sup> It is because of freedom that there is responsibility. Torah is not simply the teaching of

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., 1QS XI; 1QM XI.4; 1QH VIII.11-18; VII.29-39; XV.15-25.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Nosson Scherman, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur: Weekday/Sabbath/Festival: A New Translation and Anthologized Commentary* (ArtScroll Mesorah Series; The Rabbinical Council of America ed.; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah Publications, 1990), 24-27, 70-71, 82-83 (Ps 130).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Lev 26:13; Deut 5:15; 15:1-15; 16:1-12; 24:17-22.

commandments or rituals, but of a way of life that prizes the interests of God and God's creation. The "love command" quoted by Jesus and Paul is in the heart of Leviticus (19:17-18). The word "gospel" also communicated a central concept of Judaism, the message of good for Israel, and that news which the heralds from Israel will be privileged to bring to all of the other nations (e.g., Isa 52:6-10, cf. Rom 10:15).<sup>5</sup>

Jews have responded to this challenge, characterizing Paul as an apostate who either failed to understand Torah, or rejected it, because of his own inadequacies. Christians can have him, if they so choose, along with his worthless teachings.

Both of these polemical viewpoints depend upon certain ways of interpreting Paul's language and intentions, and responding to the results. Both communities rely upon these choices to protect them, to make them different from the other, to show their own religious impulses and systems to be superior. What Christians celebrate as freedom, Jews deride as antinomian, illogical, and harmful; what Jews celebrate as a special calling and sacred obligation, Christians deride as bondage, self-serving, and empty. Both want it to be clear that Christianity is not like Judaism, and Judaism is not like Christianity. It is difficult and threatening to seriously consider a different reading of Paul regarding Torah; that it is ideologically relevant to do so is thus self-evident.

### **Paul as a Torah-observant Jew**

What if Paul did not teach what both communities suppose? What if he observed Torah according to the prevailing halakhic conventions for a Jew of his time and place? That would be in keeping with the logic of his rhetoric. He claimed to be a Jew, indeed a Jew beyond reproach (2 Cor 11:22; Gal 2:15; Phil 3:3-6).<sup>6</sup> He argued in 1 Cor 7:17-24 that everyone is to remain in the state in which one was before responding to the gospel message, and thus, in his case, he should be expected to remain in a circumcised state. For, he argued, what mattered above all for everyone was not their different states of identity, but "keeping the commandments of God" (v. 19). Similarly, in Gal 5:3, when he argued against his non-Jewish

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<sup>5</sup> For more detail, see Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 288-96.

<sup>6</sup> Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78-96 [The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West"].

audience becoming Jewish proselytes following their decision for faith in Christ, he asserted that if one is in a circumcised state, one is obliged "to observe the whole Torah"! That challenge would have fallen on deaf ears if directed to an audience that knew he was circumcised, having in his flesh the work the Torah prescribes for Israelites, and thus had the privileges of Jewish identity that they wished to gain, but at the same time that he did not observe Torah fully. That would undermine his authority to speak of such necessarily logical obligations to them.

Some may argue that the very fact that Paul frames the matter in such terms shows his distaste for Torah. On the contrary, it is designed to express his disapproval of his competition, those whom he polemically characterizes as trivializing the advantages of Torah-based identity, since they avoid making plain the cost that is also involved. His goal is not to subvert Torah, but the authority of those who seem to his audience to represent its ideals. From Paul's perspective, the supposed complimentary good news that they present, proselyte conversion, is rather a rival "good news" to the "good news" in Christ for non-Jews apart from becoming Jews or members of Israel. Instead of ostensibly solving their social dilemma by making them proselytes instead of mere guests—and thus full members of the Jewish community beyond dispute, as the gospel claims make them wish to be—it by definition involves much more. It involves a compromise of the proposition that the end of the age "gathering of the nations alongside of Israel" has begun. And it involves the obligation to fully observe Torah. Paul thereby plants the seeds of distrust in the motives and teachings of those teachers for not making plain the cost to be counted.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interpreters miss the point of Galatians when conflating Torah-observance with Torah-identification, as if those whose influence Paul opposes were teaching those without Torah-identification of the need to undertake Torah-observance. But 5:3 makes plain that is not the case. Circumcision is not about Torah-observance for non-Jews, who are at issue, but for Torah-identification. Paul does not challenge Torah-observance at any point in the letter. Paul's usually supposed opposition to Jewish food norms and calendar are challenged in my *Irony of Galatians*, leaving only proselyte conversion (the calendar at issue in 4:8-10 is the local Romanized idol-oriented calendar to which they are tempted to return if not fully accepted by the Jewish community without becoming proselytes; there is no food issue in the letter, and see below for discussion of the topic of the Antioch incident), symbolized in the language of circumcision and works of Torah (that work which is at issue, the entrance requirement for gaining Torah/Jewish identity).

In other words, Paul was engaged in intra-Jewish polemic about how to interpret Torah precisely; not in disparagement of Torah, but of a rival presentation of the teachings. The rabbis similarly warn the potential proselyte candidate of the enormous responsibility to Torah observance that they will be required to undertake with the identity they seek to gain.<sup>8</sup> Not because it is undesirable, but because this privilege comes with great responsibility. It would not be righteous to obscure that fact. It would not represent the ideals of Torah that Paul upholds to be central, the love of one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14).

If we take seriously a portrayal of Paul as Torah-observant, consistent with his own self-witness, and confirmed by his earliest biographer, Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, might not both communities find themselves to be more similar than different?<sup>9</sup> Might the difference become more clearly about what each understands righteousness to have to do with the identity and meaning of Jesus, a Judean martyr of the Roman regime, and not about the shared concern for the "teaching" of faithfulness in light of the gracious calling of God? This is not an appeal to disregard differences, but to get them right.

There were significant differences between the Judaism of Paul, and his groups, and the other groups that did not profess commitment to Jesus Christ. The differences that have developed between Christianity and Judaism since, some designed to create and accentuate distinctions, are many and great. But I submit that the differences in Paul's time did not turn around the traditional derogatory views of Torah, or reactions to those views. And they need not do so today. They turned instead around the meaning of Christ for the people of Israel, the people who observe Torah, and for the people of the rest of the nations to which they are to proclaim Christ. The people from the other nations are not under Torah, because they are not members of Israel, even after deciding for faith in Christ. Whether Jesus was the promised one

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<sup>8</sup> *Yevamot* 47a-b; George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (2 vols.; New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 1.333; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (HCS 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 198-238.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., in Acts 21:15-26, Paul takes a Nazarite vow in the Temple to deny the rumors that he teaches Jews not to observe Torah, an act that involves a burnt offering. In 21-26, he affirms his identity as a Torah-observant Jew, indeed, a Pharisee, and one not guilty of the charges of breaching the Torah or desecrating the Temple. In 15:30; 16:4, Paul is presented to be the one who represents the Jerusalem church decision that Gentiles are to observe the apostolic decree, and in 16:1-1-3, he circumcised Timothy.

is a question that stands regardless of the continued role of Torah to define what was promised, and why, and how those of Israel who define themselves thereby will live.

At issue in Paul's letters was how to portray righteousness for the rest, those from the other nations. But this continued ethnic differentiation has been deemphasized in Pauline interpretive tradition.<sup>10</sup> Everything has been universalized, so as to apply to everyone, as if there was no difference between being an Israelite and being a member from the other nations. Torah-free is presented as if it represents the state of all Christ-believing humankind, as if a universal truth, and not as if applicable to the Gentile in ways that do not apply to the Jewish believer in Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Many will sense a deep and reprehensible threat to the very essence of Christianity in the notion of a Torah-observant Paul, as well as to the essential difference between it and Judaism. I believe that this concern is mistaken and unnecessary. If we examine the details of Paul's propositional truths, *there is no need for Torah to be abrogated in order for Christ-faith to be central in Paul's groups*. That it was not the case for Jesus, or for James and the other apostles of this movement, is widely recognized. For them, there was no dichotomy between Torah and Christ. Why *must* there be for Paul?

As I read Paul's letters, as largely confirmed by the Acts of the Apostles, as well as the Epistle of James—which I believe agrees with rather than corrects Paul, although perhaps challenging a misrepresentation of his teaching—he argued that Christ establishes Torah, that he is the righteousness to which Torah points. Anyone who believes in Christ is beholden to righteous living, just as is anyone who believes in Torah. In neither case is the pursuit of righteousness to initiate God's favor. But faithfulness is concomitant with the faith decision in order to retain right standing in a covenant relationship that is initiated with obligations for both parties. Anything other than the pursuit of what is right would represent continuing

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (Library of New Testament Studies 322; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006); Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> For more on this matter, including fuller bibliography, see Mark D. Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm: Why Not 'Paul's Judaism'?", in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle* (ed. Mark Douglas Given; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, forthcoming 2009; a version is also available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/Paul'sJudaism-5-28-08.pdf>>).

bondage to sin, when bondage to God, the righteous one—the one who does right and judges accordingly, by definition—is the desired alternative (cf. Rom 6–8).

The threat to the Christ-believing Jewish sub-group communities founded by Paul was, for him, one the one side, from the hostilities of their local communities, or from them continuing in idolatrous ways, or returning to them, perhaps to avoid such hostilities (e.g., I Thess 2; 1 Cor 8–10, discussed below; Gal 4:8-10;<sup>12</sup> Phil 3<sup>13</sup>), and on the other side, from the conversion of members of the nations into members of Israel. Both arose to a large degree from his opposition to the proselyte conversion of those turning to the God of Israel in Christ. Why did he oppose this identity transformation, which would have probably eased if not eliminated much of their suffering and confusion? In the traditional interpretive approach to Paul, it is argued to be because this was an inferior identity, one bound to Torah, and thus passé. It would trap them into works-righteousness. It would enslave them to Torah. On the "new perspective" view, it is because Torah was passé, even if not otherwise inferior, and it would trap them in the ostensibly essential Jewish problem of ethnocentric exclusivism.<sup>14</sup> Also, it would enslave them to Torah, a lifestyle which continues to be valued as immature for Christ-believers, who are ideally to be "free" from Torah in their supposed new religion, Christianity, even though the traditional Christian basis for the negative valuation of Judaism and Torah has been otherwise largely undermined by proponents of this perspective.<sup>15</sup>

Instead, I submit, Paul insisted that non-Jews must remain non-Jews, and thus not come under Torah on the same terms as Jews, because it would compromise the propositional truth of the Gospel that the end of the ages has dawned. That proposition maintains that the awaited age, when all of the other nations will recognize Israel's God as the One God, the Creator God of

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<sup>12</sup> Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 267-71.

<sup>13</sup> Mark D. Nanos, "Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs' (Philippians 3:2): 1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog?," *BibInt* (forthcoming, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 183-214 ["The New Perspective on Paul"].

<sup>15</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 798; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 88-95, where other examples of this phenomenon are provided, and the process of "Luther's trap" for the prevailing interpretations of the "weak" in Romans 14 is discussed. A more complete critique of The New Perspective approach to Paul and Judaism is undertaken in Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm."



all humankind, has begun with the resurrection of Christ and arrival of the Spirit among those confessing this truth. Gentiles are obliged to represent the righteousness expressed in Torah, that is, the love of God and neighbor, but as representatives of the *other* nations, and not as members of Israel, not as representatives of the Mosaic covenant. They represent the time when the covenant with Abraham, bringing blessing to all of the nations in his seed, has arrived. But if they were to become Jews by proselyte conversion, symbolized by circumcision for males—which in Paul's letters serves as a metonym for completion of the rite of proselyte conversion, just as does "works of Torah"—this would undermine the claim of the message of the arrival of the awaited good for Israel *and* the nations *now* in Christ Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The proclamation of this proposition was Paul's vocation: unlike his "former" understanding that non-Jews must become members of Israel to become members of the family of Abraham (Gal 5:11; cf. 1:23), this is the new "way of living in Judaism" to which he was called by Christ (Gal 1:13-16).

This position was simple, but confusing, and led to many problems for the first non-Jewish believers in the gospel of Christ, and for the Jews proclaiming this message of good as well. This created the need for a new social category to identify these believers. They were no longer idolaters, and thus no longer represented the status quo of the nations from which they came. But they were not Israelites, not Jews, and thus, not worshipers of the God of Israel on the same terms as Jews within the larger Jewish communities, or within their own idolatrous families and neighborhoods either. Yet they were to understand themselves, without becoming Jews, as fellow members of the Jewish way of life, of Judaism, of the people of God (cf. Acts 15). Their equal standing with Jews was legitimated by faith in Christ, the faithful representative of God's plan to reconcile *all* of the nations equally.<sup>17</sup> They were thus members

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<sup>16</sup> For details of this position, see Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, esp. 179-87; Mark D. Nanos, "Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema," to be published in a Festschrift honoring Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and Joseph A. Fitzmyer by the Catholic Biblical Association of America (ed. Peter Spitaler; CBQMS; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, forthcoming 2009; a version presented at The Jubilee Year of St. Paul Lecture Series, Villanova University, is available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/Paul-Shema-10-27-08.pdf>>).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

of a certain Judaism, of a Jewish subgroup, of a Jewish coalition, of Christ-faith Judaism, the Judaism of Paul post-Damascus.<sup>18</sup>

This nuanced and controversial way of incorporating Gentiles into the communal life of this Jewish subgroup led to many social problems, as well as confusion about these Gentiles' own sense of self. It is in this context that we can understand Paul's relativizing of all identities to the shared identity of Christ-faith, including the privileges of his own highly esteemed level of honor in Jewish identity terms (e.g., Phil 3:4-16), which he denies to his Gentile audience the opportunity to similarly gain, since they cannot become proselytes. The category Christian does not yet exist, yet he must make them realize that they are to no longer regard themselves as identified with the gods of the other nations, but also not on the way to becoming members of the nation Israel. This amorphous identity, which does not correspond with the communal lines defining identity on either side of the Jewish/Gentile divide, creates confusion and marginalization on both sides. It is one the non-Jews in Christ-believing communities seek to make sense of, or escape, in some cases, by seeking to become proselytes (in Galatia), in others, by claiming to have replaced Jews (in Rome, not of his own founding). And that is why we have Paul's letters. He sought to address some of the problems that arose among them from this controversial proposition of the "truth of the gospel" that they are now members of Judaism, of the people of the God of Israel as the One God of all the nations, without being re-identified as members of the nation Israel.

It is not possible in the limitations of an essay to discuss all of the passages that might be brought to bear on the matter, either for or against Paul as Torah-observant, let alone the vast corpus of secondary literature that overwhelmingly assumes when it does not argue that Paul left Judaism and was Law-free, and taught a Law-free gospel, etc. Let us consider one of the matters that highlights what is at issue in the discussion of Paul and Torah, or better, Paul's version of Christ-believing Judaism: did Paul eat according to Jewish dietary norms, or believe that other Jewish Christ-believers should? And what about Gentile Christ-believers; were they to observe Jewish dietary norms?

## **Paul and Jewish Dietary Norms**

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<sup>18</sup> Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm."

When discussions turn to why it is clear to both Christians and Jews that Paul did not observe Torah as a matter of faith, or in his daily life except when he sought to evangelize among Jews who observed Torah,<sup>19</sup> the prevailing view appeals to passages where Paul addresses dining conduct. The primary texts for this discussion include Galatians 2:11-15, the so-called Antioch Incident, when Peter withdrew from eating with Gentiles after the arrival of some from James; 1 Corinthians 8–10, the matter of eating in idol settings or of food that had been used in idol rites; and Romans 14–15, concerning how the "strong" ought to behave with respect to the "weak" in faith.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Antioch Incident***

In Galatians 2:11-15, Paul informs his audience in Galatia about an earlier incident in Syrian Antioch.<sup>21</sup> Paul says he confronted Peter for not living faithful to the truth of the gospel, because Peter, followed by the rest of the Jews, withdrew from eating with the Gentiles after the arrival of certain people from James. Thus the theological truth of the message of good in Christ is signified in the mixed meals that had been enjoyed prior to this breach of communal conduct.

On the traditional reading of this text, which continues in the "new perspective" analyses, the ones from James are understood to represent the ideological views of the Jerusalem church, namely, that the Christ-faith movement continues to be a subset of Jewish communal life, of Judaism. Concomitant with this viewpoint, according to the consensus, James and the Jerusalem church, so-called Jewish or Palestinian Christianity, upheld that meals were to be conducted according to prevailing halakhic dietary norms. Moreover, it maintained that Gentile believers in Christ should become Jews, proselytes; alternatively, if they did not,

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<sup>19</sup> That Paul occasionally observed Torah for the sole purpose of evangelizing among Jews is based on the consensus reading of 1 Cor 9:19-22. I offer a different reading of this passage; see discussion below.

<sup>20</sup> The order of this discussion is based on the consensus view for the chronological order of these texts.

<sup>21</sup> A more complete discussion is available in Mark D. Nanos, "What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 282-318; Idem, *Mystery of Romans*, 337-71 ["Peter's Hypocrisy in the Light of Paul's Anxiety"]. The related matter of the Jerusalem meeting in the prior passage is the topic of Mark D. Nanos, "Intruding 'Spies' and 'Pseudo-brethren': The Jewish Intra-Group Politics of Paul's Jerusalem Meeting (Gal 2:1-10)," in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Pauline Studies 2; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 59-97.

wishing to follow instead Paul's conviction that they should not, then this Gentilized, so-called Pauline Christianity should remain separate from Jewish Christianity. Any joint meetings, such as to celebrate the Lord's Supper, should be conducted according to the standards of Jewish Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Paul denounced this position at Antioch in no uncertain terms when joint meetings took place, for it was Torah-free standards that should be applied. Christianity was not Judaism; it was to be free from "bondage" to Torah. Anyone proclaiming otherwise subverted the Gospel of Christ.

That interpretation, regardless of variations for some of the elements among the commentators, depends upon several decisions. The following are a few of the most fundamental ones.

First, it is based on the notion that what was objectionable about the mixed meals for the "ones from circumcision," was that they were not conducted according to prevailing halakhic dietary standards.<sup>23</sup> Paul's accusation that Peter was compelling the Gentiles to "judaize," although he was himself "living like a Gentile," has been understood to mean that Peter had been eating Torah-free, and that he implicitly, if not also after his withdrawal explicitly, was teaching faith plus proselyte conversion and Torah-observance for Gentile Christ-believers.<sup>24</sup> That interpretation supposes that Christ-believers met independent of the

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<sup>22</sup> For the "commensality" alternative, see Magnus Zetterholm, "Purity and Anger: Gentiles and Idolatry in Antioch," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (2005): 1-24.

<sup>23</sup> Naturally, there were various interpretations of halakhic standards, including variations between communities in versus outside of Judea, and between communities in each location, for a variety of reasons, including local constraints. Dunn upholds that the standards at issue were those for Noahides, which lessens the matter of degree, but does not alter the traditional view that at issue was halakhic, having to do with laws governing food preparation, and it also does not work because Paul was accusing Peter of (implicitly) compelling "judaizing," not "noahidizing"; see Nanos, "What Was at Stake?," 282-318.

<sup>24</sup> Commentators have not usually differentiated adequately between circumcision, that is, proselyte conversion, which has to do with identity transformation, and Torah-observance, which applies only to Jews and those who have completed, or who are in the process of completing proselyte conversion. Circumcision is not prescribed in Torah for oneself, but for the male children of Israelites and *gerim*, and for the non-Israelite wishing to become an Israelite (which is what I believe Paul's metonym *ergōn nomou* ["works/deeds of Law," but I suggest it denotes "rites of Torah," specifically, those deeds/acts involved in becoming a Jew] refers, namely status transformation, which for non-Jews, is known as proselyte conversion, and for Jewish baby boys, as *Brit Milah*, the covenant of circumcision, when the child is named among the children of Abraham/Israel).

Jewish community and according to Torah-free norms, so that by definition, the Jews present were not behaving Jewishly.

Second, it is based on identifying the ones from James with James, that is, with representing his viewpoint, and to be one and the same as those whom Paul says Peter feared, namely, the "ones from circumcision."<sup>25</sup> Since Peter, alongside Paul and Barnabas and other unnamed Jews, was influenced to adopt or return to this position under the influence of the ones from James, it represents the view of James, of Jewish Christianity, or of a significant element of that movement, which supposedly maintained this position.

Third, Paul's opposition is thus not only to the advocacy of proselyte conversion for Christ-believing Gentiles, but also to Torah-defined dietary behavior, and by extension, Torah-observance as a way of life for Jews as well as Gentiles, at least when they mixed in the church, which would seemingly be in all cases in Pauline *ekklesias*, and probably most other Christ-believing groups as well.<sup>26</sup>

I disagree with each of these decisions.

On the first point, Paul's accusation that Peter was living like a Gentile, or Gentilely, Paul is not referring to a Torah-free lifestyle, but to Peter's living *justified* just like the Gentiles are, by Christ, and not by his standing as a Jew versus theirs as non-Jews.<sup>27</sup> According to Paul,

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<sup>25</sup> A minority position upholds that the ones from James, although they came from James, misrepresented his policies, if not perhaps his ideals; see George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology* (SNTSMS 35; 2nd ed.; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> There are some interpreters who maintain that Paul allowed for Jews not engaged in the Gentile mission to fully observe Torah, although he could not because of his close affiliation with Gentiles (e.g., Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007], 123). But it seems to me that this does not square with Paul's logic, which is based on principle, so that he either believed that Torah-observance still applied to Christ-believing Jews as a part of covenant faithfulness, or it did not, and that he would be committed to consistently living accordingly; he accuses Peter precisely for failing to do so. What would Christ-believing Jews (such as James, when Paul brought along Titus to the meeting in Jerusalem) be expected to do according to Paul's standards when a Gentile was present in their congregations, regardless of whether they had engaged in an active Gentile mission leading to this circumstance? The consensus view is that, like Paul, who is understood to "live like a Gentile," interpreted to mean he does not live Torah-observantly, any Christ-believing Jews would be expected to compromise Torah when in the company of Christ-believing Gentiles. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 185-87.

<sup>27</sup> Nanos, "What Was at Stake?," 312-16.

drawing on Habbakuk 2:4, "the just shall *live* by faithfulness" (3:11, 16-21; cf. Rom 1:17). Thus Gentiles were equal *in standing* before God with Jews, regardless of the advantage being a Jew otherwise conferred (cf. Gal 2:15; Rom 3:1-2; 9:3-5), and thus should be treated as equal in standing before each other (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:28-29; Rom 3:27—4:25; 15:5-12).

The accusation that Peter's behavior implicitly compels the Gentile Christ-believers to become Jews (*ioudaizien*),<sup>28</sup> is based not on Peter teaching Gentiles to proselytize, or some kind of change of dietary behavior. That Peter did not teach proselyte conversion is implicit in Paul's accusation of "*hypocrisy*" rather than "apostasy" or "heresy." He accused Peter of masking the conviction that Paul still believes Peter shares with him, that Gentile Christ-believers were to not become proselytes. But because of the exigencies of the moment, his fear of those who do advocate proselyte conversion, he is not behaving consistent with that conviction. And this expedient behavior is undermining "the truth of the gospel" that he otherwise upholds, that distinguishes this Jewish coalition from all other Jewish groups, namely, that Gentiles in Christ are equal members of the people of God already, descendents of Abraham, without becoming members of Israel.

Moreover, Peter, and everyone else at this table, including the Gentiles, had been eating according to Torah-defined dietary norms. The accusation is not that Peter was eating like a Gentile and then quit eating in this manner, and he is not accused of withdrawing for "fear of those advocating dietary norms." Rather, he is said to fear "those from circumcision," that is, presumably, those advocating the need for Gentiles to become circumcised to be welcome at this table on the terms being upheld at it.

Peter is described as withdrawing from eating *with* Gentiles, not from eating like a Gentile. If the ones from circumcision Peter feared had been advocating a change of menu, then Peter, and the other Jews present, including the ones from James, were in a position to change the menu, and to expect the Gentiles to either accept this, or to be the ones who

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Nanos, "What Was at Stake?," 306-12, where the arguments that *ioudaizein* in general as well as here refers only to behaving like a Jew, and not to proselyte conversion, are challenged. It is also important to note that this verb does not signify Jewish missionary behavior, but is a reflexive verb, denoting a non-Jew becoming a Jew (or behaving Jewishly). In other words, it is synonymous with references to the proselyte, not to those conducting non-Jews in the rites of proselyte conversion, or in some way seeking to persuade non-Jews to adopt such a course of action.

withdrew. It makes little sense for the Jews, including important figures like the ones from James, Peter, and Barnabas, to do the withdrawing. And again, the issue is about those "from circumcision," not "from the kosher menu committee"; a change of diet is certainly a less threatening option, and one that Gentile men should be expected to gladly accommodate versus the alternative of circumcision. But that is not what Paul states to be at issue.

The issue Paul addresses concerns *with whom* Peter was eating, and what his withdrawal from eating *with* them implies about their standing. Other Jewish groups also included Gentiles at meals without compromising Jewish dietary norms, everyone eating according to Jewish dietary rules in such cases.<sup>29</sup> However, in this group, which also ate according to Jewish dietary norms, there was something about their eating together that was distinctive. They sought to demonstrate in their table fellowship together as equals, Israelites and members from the other nations, that the awaited age to come had dawned in Christ, that the messianic banquet had begun in their midst. They thus likely arranged the seating, and distributed food and drink according to non-hierarchical arrangements, whereas it was likely normal in Jewish groups, as in Greco-Roman groups in general, to discriminate in such matters according to rank. Thus Gentile guests in other groups would be distinguishable as guests, however welcome. But not in these groups, where equality of Jew and Greek in Christ was being celebrated. That would account for the threat from the ones advocating circumcision of these Gentiles, if they were to be treated as if equal members of the people of God within the Jewish community of Antioch. But that is just how they are to be treated apart from proselyte conversion, according to the truth of the message of good that Paul and Peter proclaim. Such mealtime behavior cannot be avoided without compromising the very proposition around which this Jewish subgroup exists, and for which purpose it meets together to remember Jesus.

Second, Paul does not equate the ones from James with the ones from circumcision. The arrival of the ones from James represents a time marker: it is *after* their arrival that Peter and the rest of the Jews withdrew. But Paul does not equate them with the ones Peter feared. It

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. E. P. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul & John In Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (eds. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 170-88; Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, The Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 235-60.

could be that the two are synonymous, but Paul has just finished an argument in vv. 1-10 in which he concluded that James and the Jerusalem leaders were in full agreement with Paul that Gentile Christ-believers should not be circumcised (similarly, Acts 15).

Where many interpreters argue that James and the Jerusalem church now reversed their agreement with Paul in Jerusalem, Paul does not signal any reversal in principle, and does not accuse the ones from James, or James, of anything. Moreover, as already noted, he does not accuse Peter or the rest of apostasy or heresy, but only of "hypocrisy." An accusation of hypocrisy (of "masking") implies continued agreement on the principle of "the truth of the gospel" proposition that Gentiles are to remain Gentiles within this movement. Otherwise, one should conclude that the Jerusalem church leaders reneged on this agreement,<sup>30</sup> in spite of Paul's failure to state the matter in those terms. Yet Paul chose to introduce this example, presumably to persuade his audience that his position was normative for Christ-faith, and thus the only legitimate one for them to consider.

There are other more logical identifications of the ones from James. They may represent James, and thus join in at the same mixed table fellowship, only to arouse a heightened objection from local Antiochene Jews. They represented the last straw for those in the Jewish communities of Antioch who were opposed to developments within these subgroups. Not only were local Antiochene (Christ-proclaiming) Jews in these Jewish subgroups engaging in such questionable behavior based upon a propositional claim that these Gentiles were now equal members of the people of God, and thus to be eaten with as equals, albeit according to Jewish communal standards, but so too were those who came from James' coalition in Jerusalem. There could be no doubt that this was the position that all members of this movement upheld, and it was high time to oppose it vehemently. Thus, the Christ-believing Jewish members sought to dissipate the heat by a temporary, expedient withdrawal, but not to teach accordingly. Presumably, in due time, they would return to the mixed table.

Or it may be that the ones from James represented those who, as related in the prior Jerusalem meeting passage, were outsiders to the Christ-believing movement. They were

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<sup>30</sup> So argues Philip F. Esler, "Making and Breaking an Agreement Mediterranean Style: A New Reading of Galatians 2:1-14," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 261-81, based on recognizing the logic of this route, if one adopts the prevailing view that Paul was Torah-free and the other apostles were Torah-observant.



"inspectors" whom James allowed to be present at the Christ-believing coalition's otherwise private meetings in Jerusalem, or vigilantes.<sup>31</sup> In either case, Paul judged them to be "informants" who gained access, first, in Jerusalem, and now were also allowed to travel to Antioch to investigate matters there. If so, then they might well be "the ones from circumcision" Peter feared. They objected to the Christ-movement's standards for equal fellowship with non-Jews, and Peter worried that it might be unclear just how important it was in Antioch, as in Jerusalem, that Torah standards were upheld within these mixed meals. Thus, rather than allow for ambiguity, he withdrew to avoid any problems while they were around, presumably, seeking to find some reason to report back to Jerusalem that things were not as they should be. Perhaps the purpose was to bring greater pressure upon James and the Jerusalem church for supposed transgressions in the spreading network under their supervision, such as at Antioch, and Peter reasoned that avoiding normal behavior for a while would be a strategic way to avert their intentions.

On any of these alternatives for the identity of the ones from James, and their role in Antioch and relationship to the identity of the ones from circumcision, there is no implication that James represented a different view of proselyte conversion for Gentile Christ-believers or Torah-observance for Jews, or during joint meals, than did Peter or Paul. Thus the third major point in the prevailing views is challenged.

This passage does not show that Paul was against Torah-observance in his assemblies, including prevailing halakhic standards for dietary behavior. The topic at Antioch had nothing to do with what was being served (although perhaps with the egalitarian manner in which it was distributed), but with whom it was being shared, as if equal members, and not merely non-Jewish guests, if they did not undertake proselyte conversion, unlike in all other Jewish groups of which we are aware. For while Gentiles were welcome in other Jewish groups, they remained distinguishable as non-Jewish guests, and were not likely treated as if members unless they chose to become proselytes. Not so in the Christ-believing groups, in Antioch, and in Jerusalem.

That is the message I believe that Paul wanted to communicate to the Galatians, who were under similar pressure from the local Jewish communities of which their groups were a

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<sup>31</sup> Nanos, "Intruding 'Spies' and 'Pseudo-brethren.'"

part, in order that they would resist, just as Paul insisted on such resistance elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> When Jewish apostles and leaders like Peter and Barnabas slipped up, Paul was in their faces too. The truth of the gospel is at issue; their witness to the entrance of members of the other nations to the messianic meal is fundamental to the truth claims they seek to substantiate. Gentiles join Judaism, where the rules of Jewish diet reign, but they do not become Jews by the "work of Torah" that alters their identity, i.e., circumcision, and thus they are not under Torah in the fullest sense, as are Jews. But Gentile Christ-believers are nevertheless under the Torah of Christ, which includes the halakhic codes of behavior for guests, something indistinguishable from the Noahide commandments, as witnessed in the so-called Apostolic decree (Acts 15).<sup>33</sup>

In short, the Antioch Incident does not substantiate that Paul ate Torah-free on any occasion, or taught that Jews or even Gentiles should eat free of Jewish dietary norms. The implications of Paul's argument run in exactly the opposite direction. What it teaches is that Gentile Christ-believers must be proselyte-conversion free. Thus they are not under Torah, since they do not become Israelites, although they become enslaved to the love of neighbor that is the essence of Torah (Gal 5:13-14). And since their groups are Jewish, being Christ-believing subgroups of the larger Jewish communities, these non-Jews will eat and live together according to prevailing Jewish communal regulations that govern the lifestyle of the righteous non-Jew.

### ***Food Offered to Idols***

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul sought to instruct his audience in Corinth, apparently in response to their queries on the topic, whether they could participate in idolatrous settings, if not also in the rites themselves, or eat food that had been sanctified to idols.<sup>34</sup> An interpreter's decision

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<sup>32</sup> For the setting and message of Galatians, see Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*; Idem, "The Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark D. Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 396-407.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 50-57, 192-207.

<sup>34</sup> A full discussion of the prevailing views and my interpretation is available in Mark D. Nanos, "The Polytheist Identity of the 'Weak,' And Paul's Strategy to 'Gain' Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1," in *Paul: Jew, Greek and Roman* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; PAST 5; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2009; a version is available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/Polytheist-Corinth-1-15-08.pdf>>); Idem, "'But this Knowledge is Not in Everyone' (1 Cor 8:7): Who Were the 'Weak' in Corinth, and What Was the Harm Paul Feared They Would Suffer?," in *Saint Paul*

here is logically related to his or her decision about the implications of the Antioch Incident. If it is maintained that Paul did keep kosher dietary laws, as I have argued to be the implication of the Antioch Incident, then all the more would he not eat idol food. But if it is argued that Paul did permit and even ate idol food in some circumstances, then all the more it follows that he would not be concerned to keep kosher regulations regarding other food and meals.

The consensus view is that Paul permitted the eating of idol food in principle, but not when it could be calculated to bother the "sensibilities" (*syneidēsis*: "conscience," better, "consciousness") of the *asthenēs* ("weak," better, "impaired"). The "weak" are understood to be Christ-believers who are not secure enough in their faith to internalize fully the Torah-free principles of the gospel of Christ. They thus hesitate to eat idol food, or if eating it, are self-conscious in some way of participating in idolatry, even though the gospel proposition, as those who are secure in Corinth understand it, maintains that there are no real gods represented by these idols.<sup>35</sup> Thus it follows that the food dedicated to them is really profane (ordinary) food for those in the know.

The majority view maintains that for Paul, the food dedicated to idols is not dangerous in and of itself; nevertheless, in consideration of the sensibilities of those Christ-believers who are not secure yet in their faith, he exhorts those who are secure, when in their company, to forgo their freedom to eat food that has been dedicated to idols. It is more widely maintained, even by those who understand Paul to accept idol food in certain circumstances, that he did not allow for involvement in idol rites. Thus, in spite of this concession to Paul arguing from certain basic Torah-inspired sensibilities, if Paul is not against eating idol food in principle, he cannot be a Torah-observant Jew, certainly not one teaching a Torah-based approach to Christ-faith. And this conforms with the overwhelming agreement to interpret 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 to mean that Paul adapted his *behavior* to the Torah-observant and to those free of Torah equally. Depending upon which environment he was in, he sought to proclaim his

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*the Apostle and Corinth, 1950 Years Since the Writing of the Epistles to the Corinthians*, ed. Christos Karakolis, (International Conference in Corinth, Greece: Prefect of Corinth, forthcoming 2009).

<sup>35</sup> This observation also applies to those who emphasize the different socio-economic backgrounds to define these two groups; cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (trans. John H. Schütz; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 121-43.

gospel to each free of such supposedly non-essential requirements, such as Torah represents. Torah was for Paul *adiaphora*, a matter of indifference.

Unlike the overwhelming consensus that Paul was against keeping Jewish dietary norms in Antioch, there are some interpreters who maintain that the logic of Paul's argument here signals both that he did not accept the eating of food known to be idol food by his audience, and that there is no implication that Paul's logic allows for him to have eaten idol food himself, for example, when evangelizing among idolaters.<sup>36</sup> My own work strengthens this case. I believe that the "weak" or "impaired" are probably not Christ-believers, but polytheists (pagans), those who still practice idolatrous rites as a matter of principle. They are the ones who are unlike his audience, the "we" who "all have knowledge" that these statues do not rightly represent gods, knowing the One God (8:1-6). But "they" are the "some" who do not have this knowledge, being accustomed to eating food unto idols until now, that is, without sensing that it is not right to do so, for they do not know the One God yet (v. 7).

The issue raised by the Corinthian Christ-believers is about whether they can eat food that was being or had been sanctified to idols. They reason that since they now do not believe that these idols represent competing gods and lords, eating idol related food with indifference would bear witness to their gospel convictions. It is for them profane. They assume that it bears witness to their polytheist neighbors of their new-found faith without causing offense. And withdrawal from all contexts where it was being served, and from buying it thereafter in the marketplace, would be akin to social suicide, to living apart from the world. How were they to live when virtually every social engagement and much of the food available for meals involved some association with the idolatry of their polytheistic families, neighbors, and fellow workers, with civic life in general?

But Paul sees things from a Jewish Torah-based point of view, and the logic of their appeal to eat idol food escapes him; it is probably a surprise to him that they reasoned so. For

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<sup>36</sup> Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (CRINT; Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1990); Peter David Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context* (SCJ 5; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993); Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (WUNT 2.151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

Israelites have long upheld that idols were merely statues, ones that should not have been built. Those who worshiped the gods through them were regarded to be misguided, at the very least. But it did not follow that one should thus participate with indifference in idolatrous rites, or even eat food that had been used in any such rites, including when available in the marketplace. Rather, it must be avoided as if infected with powers that seek to rival God, and to harm his people.<sup>37</sup> So he argues that rather than bearing witness to their polytheist neighbors, it may scandalize them, leading them to continue in idolatry, as if even Christ-faith sanctioned such behavior. They will remain ignorant of the proposition of the One God that is at the heart of the confession of this Jewish subgroup community's faith in Christ.

But why doesn't Paul just come right out and say that the Torah teaches the "knowledgeable" about Christ not to eat idol food? Because his encoded audience is not composed of Jews; thus they are not under Torah on the same terms as Israelites. Paul's understanding of the logic of the truth of the gospel constrains him—to a point. So he begins chapter 8 with first principles. He agrees with the Christ-believers who "know" that there is no such thing as the gods and lords these statues seek to represent (v. 4). Yet he adds, as part of his logical appeal to the Shema—the proclamation that God is the One and Only God for Israel, and for the Christ-believing Gentiles too—that there are such things as other gods and lords, whom he will identify as daemons (v. 5; 10:20-21). Then he writes in the balance of chapter 8 that, because some do not have this knowledge, being "weak/impaired," the "knowledgeable" should refrain from behaving as if free to regard all things related to idols to be profane. It will harm the "weak" polytheists, for they think these things to be sacred to the gods and lords to which they are dedicated. It would not send the right message to these "impaired," not yet Christ-believing "brother[s] for whose sake Christ died" (8:11-12; cf. Rom 5:6-10), that they

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<sup>37</sup> Paradoxically, in Scripture idols are trivialized as not gods and meaningless and yet proscribed as demonic and dangerous for those in covenant with the One God (e.g., compare Deut 32:21 with vv. 16-17; Isa 8:19 and 19:3 with chapters 40 and 44; cf. Wis 13—16; see also Ps 106:36-39; *1 Enoch* 19; *Jubilees* 11.4-6); other gods and lords are implicitly recognized to exist, albeit to be lower than Israel's God, and they are not to be honored by Israelites (Exod 15:11; 20:2-6; 22:28; Deut 4:19; 29:26; 32:8-9; Ps 82:1; Micah 4:5; James 2:19); images of other gods are to be destroyed in the Land (Exod 23:24; Deut 7:5). See Tomson, *Paul*, 151-77, 208-20; Cheung, *Idol Food*, 39-81, 152-64, 300-1.

should desist from any such behavior and turn to the One God alone, with these Christ-believers, and all Israelites.<sup>38</sup>

After a digression in chapter 9 to explain Paul's own self-sacrificial way of living, including how he adapts his rhetoric to each group he seeks to win, in chapter 10 Paul moves the argument against eating idol food to the next stage. He appeals to the examples from Torah, although to some degree avoiding direct appeal to Torah injunctions, to make clear that one who eats at the table of the Lord cannot also eat at the table of other gods, so-called daemons. In other words, there are powers associated with idols, which undermines the concession with which he began this argument, as if sharing the premise that there were no such things as other gods and lords. Thus, regardless of the fact that God made all things to be eaten with sanctifying prayer, not all things can be eaten. Any food *known* to be idol food, whether available in the marketplace, or offered in a host's home, cannot be eaten. They must flee idolatry, both for their own sakes, just as the Israelites should have done, and for the sake of their polytheist neighbors, their brothers and sisters in the created order whom God in Christ seeks, through them, to redeem.

Paul did not permit the eating of food known to be idol food, and there is no implication that he ever ate it. Quite the opposite is the case. Moreover, the teaching of the early church for hundreds of years was that no idol food was to be eaten by Christians, in part, based on their reading of this text.<sup>39</sup> Paul's argument, including that contained in 9:19-22,

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Nanos, "Polytheist Identity," for full discussion of the logic for understanding the *asthenēs* ("weak/impaired") "brothers" to be non-Christ-believing idolaters, and the context of the letter to be concerned with the winning of them to Christ. Note that even late in the first or early in the second century, Ignatius calls upon his addressees to pray for outsiders to the church, and to conduct themselves as "brothers/sisters [*adelphoi*]" to them, which is expressed by imitating how Christ lived humbly toward his neighbor, including choosing to be wronged rather than to wrong them (*Eph.* 10; cf. *Mart. Pol.* 1.2). And although Chrysostom understood the impaired in 1 Corinthians 8–10 to be Christ-believers, he argued that on socio-economic grounds the Christian in his own audience ought to regard as *brother* the fellow-laborer more than the elite or wealthy (*Cor.* 117 [Homily XX]). For non-Christian examples of appeals to those outside of one's own philosophical group being regarded as fictive kin along this line, see Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.9.4-6; 1.13.4, on the Cynics in particular, *Diatr.* 3.22.81-82; Marcus Aurelius, 2.1; 7.22; 9.22-23.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 19-20; *Didache* 6.3; Ign. *Magn.* 8–10; Pliny, *Letters* 10.96; Aristides, *Apology* 15.4; 12; Justin, *Dial.* 34.8; 35.1-2; Tertullian, *Apol.* 9.13-14; *Cor.* 10.4-7; 11.3; *Spect.* 13.2-4; *Jejun.* 2.4; 15.5; *Mon.* 5.3; Clement, *Strom.* 4.15.97.3; Tomson, *Paul*, 177-86; Gooch, *Dangerous Food*, 122-27, 131-33; Cheung, *Idol Food*, 165-295; David

confirms that his audience knew him to be not only one who would not eat it, but also one who would not expect them to do so either. Thus, although they knew him to be Torah-observant when he had been among them in Corinth, their query protests the cost to their civic life and standing that this denial entailed, since they remained non-Jews, by the defining terms of Paul's own proclamation of the truth of the gospel.

In 9:19-22, Paul declares that he becomes like a Jew to win Jews, even like one "under *nomos* [law?; Torah?]," but also like the "lawless [*anomos*]," and also like the "weak," who are understood to be insecure in their freedom in Christ, and thus to avoid eating idol food. This statement has been universally understood to mean that Paul only regards Torah-observance, including the value of Jewish identity itself, to be a matter of evangelistic expedience.<sup>40</sup> That interpretation turns around understanding "causing myself to become like [*egenomēn hōs*]" members of each of the various groups to signify "causing myself to *mimic*" each of them. For the consensus view is not based on Paul sharing their propositional truths, but quite the opposite. It is based on his not share their reasoning. He merely copies certain aspects of their behavior, presumably, in order to gain a hearing among them by making them (mistakenly) suppose that he might actually share their convictions. But he does not. This is understood to extend to behavior such as eating according to Torah when with those who eat halakhically, and with no regard for Torah when with those who do not eat according to Jewish dietary norms. But there is another way to understand Paul's argument here, one that avoids implying that he regards Torah as a matter of indifference, but also one that does not compromise his morality in the way that the prevailing view does by way of ascribing to Paul a "bait and switch" strategy.

Rather than relating to each by *mimicking* their *behavior*, I submit that Paul is referring to his *rhetorical strategy* for *persuading* them. He begins from their propositional truths, whether

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Moshe Freidenreich, "Foreign Food: A Comparatively-enriched Analysis of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law" (Columbia University, 2006), 123-41. *Barnabas* 10.9, may suggest an early group that does eat anything, but it is not specific about idol food; and see Tertullian, *Apol.* 42.1-5.

<sup>40</sup> It is unclear how the reference to those "under law" differs from "Jews," for example, perhaps to proselytes or to those representing stricter standards such as Pharisees, and likewise whether *anomos* refers to lawless (such as non-practicing) Jews as well as to non-Jews, or instead refers only to non-Jews, as if he had written *xōris nomos* ("without law"). There are many options to explore, which are the subject of forthcoming work. Some discussion is included in Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm."

he shares them, such as he does in the case of Jews and those who are Torah-observant, or not, such as in the cases of the lawless and those who are impaired, that is, those who engage in idolatry as a matter of conviction. He does not behave like them, but, just as he approaches the knowledgeable in Corinth about idol food by beginning from their premises, he does the same with each group to which he seeks to relate the truths of the gospel, in order to gain them.

Thus I do not read "*becoming like*" to signify "*behaving like*," but rather "*arguing like*." Paul begins from the premises of the members of each of the groups to which he seeks to relate the gospel message. Yes, he still is engaged in persuasion by appearing to uphold premises with which he may disagree, such as in the case of polytheist notions of other gods and lords and the role of idols. But that is not the same as mimicking behavior without sharing the propositional bases thereof. Rather, it is the norm for argumentation to begin from the premises of those whom you seek to persuade to your own conclusions, even when seeking to undermine those premises, a strategy widely upheld in the philosophical traditions of Paul's time.<sup>41</sup>

An example of this interpretation of Paul is available in how Luke presented him to preach to the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Paul began from their premise that there is an "Unknown God," to whom they dedicated a statue. Paul did not begin by declaring there was no such thing as idols, but built on their (mistaken) conviction that there was a god thereby symbolized. Then he declared whom that God was, the God of Israel. He also proceeded to inform them that this God did not approve of the building of statues to himself, or to any other supposed god or lord. That criticism was buried in his opening, but it became transparent as he moved toward his conclusion that the God of Israel was the one and only Creator God of all humankind. One might call this "*becoming like*" an idolater to gain idolaters. It does not involve conducting himself idolatrously, mimicking their behavior, but like a Torah-observant Jew arguing from the premises of the polytheists he seeks to persuade.

The usual view, that Paul was alternately mimicking Torah behavior or its opposite, even idolatrous behavior, proceeds on the supposition that Paul does not reveal his criticism either way until his audiences have been duped into believing in a proposition without full disclosure of what they are getting into. A Torah-observant Jew will only later come to learn

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<sup>41</sup> W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1992), 90-101.



that they are to no longer regard Torah as a matter of faith, and an idolater will also only later learn that they cannot any longer regard idols to represent gods, or be involved in any way with rites or even the food that remains from rites associated with them. But by then they will have already subscribed to something other than they supposed—on false pretenses based on the hypocritical behavior of the messenger. The way out of this fix, should they seek it, will involve them in further complications among their former compatriots, whom they had abandoned and among whom they have become anathema, as well as condemnation from the members of the new groups they had naively joined.

My reading not only avoids this negative characterization of Paul and his methods as intentionally deceptive, bringing his commitment to righteousness, truth, and justice into question, but it also challenges the long-standing notion that this passage shows clearly that Paul is by definition Torah-free. Instead it substantiates that he is Torah-observant, that he constructs his arguments to his audience assuming their awareness of this fact. I believe that subsequent interpreters, unaware of this dynamic, and assuming that his audiences know him, as do they, to be Torah-free, have not only mischaracterized him, but they have missed the thrust of his teaching.

### ***Instructions to the Strong about the Weak***

In Romans 14:1–15:7, Paul exhorts the ones who are "strong" or "able" (*dunatoi*), to respect the "weak" or "stumbling" (*asthenēs*) and "unable" (*adunatoi*) in faith.<sup>42</sup> To whom each label refers is a matter of debate. The "weak" are characterized in Paul's argument, which is directed to the "strong," by their convictions about the value of certain foods, drink, and days. These characteristics appear to be typical norms for Jewish behavior, such as eating vegetables when properly koshered meat is not available, avoiding wine that may have been libated to the gods according to normal Greco-Roman practice, and Jewish calendrical observances, including Sabbath.

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<sup>42</sup> My views are set out in detail in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165; see also Idem, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304; Idem, "A Rejoinder to Robert A. J. Gagnon's 'Why the "Weak" at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews'," unpublished paper available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/Gagnon-rejoinder-6-20-03.pdf>> (2000).

According to the prevailing views, the "strong" are Christ-believers of Pauline persuasion, that is, Gentiles who abide by "Torah-free Gospel" terms, and some Jews, like Paul, who also supposedly do not observe Torah, including perhaps some proselytes. The "weak" are also understood to be Christ-believers, but in contrast, they still observe Torah, and probably consist mostly of Jews, with some "God-fearing" Gentiles perhaps included among them. Thus the conflicting identities turn around their relative valuation of Torah, for all of them are Christ-believers.

The fact that Paul includes himself among the "strong" has been taken to support the notion that Paul is Torah-free, although the logic is circular. For alternatively, if he is not Torah-free, perhaps they are not, or if they are not, perhaps Paul is not. This is coupled with Paul's declaration that he is "convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is impure in itself" (14:14). What makes something impure is someone's perception that it is; thus, for them it is impure. This has been understood to mean that Paul does not respect the Torah-defined foods and other such things in terms of pure and impure, but only as defined by personal or group convictions. Thus, Paul is not Torah-observant, or even Torah-respectful, except as a matter of concession to the convictions of others, who may be accommodated to advance more important matters, including peace in the assembly, and the witness of the gospel. I disagree with such readings.

I submit that at issue as reflected in the labels Paul uses for each group is not whether they respect and observe Torah-based norms, the "strong" rejecting them on Pauline terms of faith in Christ, while the "weak" observe them, signifying an inferior choice that manifests weaker faith, according to the ideals of Pauline Christianity. I also propose that Paul's appeal to the inherent purity or even goodness of everything God created is not a rejection of halakhic behavior. Rather, the distinction between the groups is with respect to their present level of "ability" or "inability" to believe in Christ. "Stumbling" or not over Christ, and the proclamation of the message of good in Christ to the nations, is at issue. They are in this way "weak" or "impaired" or "stumbling" with respect to faith in Christ, but they are not non-believers in God. They do not lack faith in general terms, but faith that God is bringing to pass what was promised by way of Christ (similarly, this language is used to describe Abraham's level of faith in 4:18-20).

The goal of Romans is to challenge the Gentiles addressed not to hold attitudes or behave in ways that will alienate the Jews of Rome from the gospel, or from the Jewish subgroups that adhere to and proclaim it. He finds it necessary to write this letter because he cannot get to Rome yet, and fears, presumably based on reports he has received, that there is reason to believe that the Gentiles are growing resentful and arrogant towards the Jews of Rome. Thus he writes to prevent this development until he is able to reach Rome to carry out his characteristic proclamation of the message to the Jews first, and then turn fully to the nations. He makes this turn fully, in part, in order to provoke those Jews who do not at first respond to his message positively to reconsider it, when they see the Gentiles turning from idolatry to the worship of the One God, just as is to be expected upon the arrival of the awaited age to come. In other words, for Paul, his fellow Jews who have not "yet" joined him as Christ-believers proclaiming the message of good to all of the nations, have not "yet" completed the mysterious process by which God is through Paul's ministry bringing about their restoration (11:1-36).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 239-88; Idem, "Broken Branches: A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36)," in *Romans 9—11 at the Interface Between the 'New Perspective on Paul' and Jewish-Christian Dialog*, (Göttingen, Germany: May 1-4, 2008; to be published in the forthcoming conference volume, eds. Ross Wagner and Florian Wilk; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; a version is available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/BrokenBranches-8-1-08.pdf>>). Unlike the traditional approaches or the so-called two-covenant idea of Gaston and Gager, which have to date been the only options available, I argue that Paul did not see those among his fellow Jews who did not agree with him about the meaning of Christ, and thus about the appropriateness of proclaiming the arrival of end of the ages in Christ to the nations at this time, as outside of Israel or in need of salvation as usually conceptualized, i.e., on the same terms as non-Jews. Both the prevailing options depend upon the notion that Paul was involved in a new religious movement, rather than in the ministry of Israel to the nations, as well as among his fellow Israelites. Rather, I maintain that Paul saw himself engaged, like the prophets, in the restoration of Israel, and that he saw some of his fellow Israelites to be in a temporary state of discipline for disobeying this truth claim, "stumbling," but not "fallen," but within the covenant standing of Israel, those whom Paul describes as having the certainty of receiving the gifts and calling of God promised to their fathers (Rom 9:4-5; 11:25-29, and in "Broken Branches," I explain why it is also affirmed in 11:11-24). In due time, as a result of his successful ministry among the nations, he believed, they would come to share his point of view (that of the remnant) and be restored to standing upright. I am pleased to say that Krister Stendahl affirmed my argument as one that he could embrace when he first heard my paper at the 1998 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, which is available with other papers from this session: Mark D. Nanos, "Challenging the Limits That Continue to Define Paul's Perspective on Jews and Judaism,"

But does Paul's ostensible relativizing of the value of pure and impure, for example, imply that he does not respect or observe Torah as a matter of conviction, and does not teach that either? No, it does not. The same sentiment is expressed in the rabbinic tradition.<sup>44</sup> It is a biblical prescript that God created everything good. The foods that are proscribed as impure are not inherently impure. They are impure because in Torah God has designated them to be so for Israel. Impure or pure for them is imputed, not inherent. Paul is appealing to the same notion here (and in 1 Cor 10:19–11:1), as does the (presumably Torah-observant) Psalmist whom he quotes (Ps 24:1; 50:12, in 1 Cor 10:26). It is a part of an argument, not the conclusion thereof. It is a premise offered with which he presumes his audience will identify positively, but he subverts this argumentative concession in the conclusions he draws. Regardless of whether the "strong" should conclude something to be pure or not, they are obliged to respect the sensibilities of those who conclude it to be impure or not, and to behave accordingly. Anything less is sin, and contributes not to testimony to their faith, but to their faithlessness, and to the ostensibly legitimate derision of their faith claims, to blasphemy itself. They can have no part in behavior that might lead to such results.

Whether one accepts my view of the identity of these groups, or that the divisions arise around Christ-faith (strong = "able" to believe) or not (weak = "stumbling" over the message of Christ), rather than around the relative degree of Torah-observance (strong = free from Torah versus weak = observing Torah), there is not enough information in this passage to make the traditional case that Paul did not observe Torah in matters of diet, or that he taught against it. Moreover, even according to the traditional view, Paul defends the Torah-observant, or at least calls for respectful behavior toward them. Granted, his logic, on the traditional interpretation, involves condescension, for the weakness of the stumbling is defined as their failure to trust God enough to abrogate Torah. It also embodies the very judgmentalism towards their faith in Torah that Paul's exhortation explicitly proscribes. But I submit that Paul instead argues here from the premises of a Torah-observant Jew, a faithful Israelite who believes that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and the Savior of the Nations too.

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in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations* (ed. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte; Romans through History and Culture Series; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 217-29.

<sup>44</sup> *Sifra Aharei* 93d; *Gen. Rabbah* 44.1; *Lev. Rabbah* 13.3; I. Grunfeld, *The Jewish Dietary Laws* (2vols.; London and New York: Soncino Press, 1972), 5, 12-19, 28-29; Tomson, *Paul*, 249.

## **Conclusion**

These are not the only topics or texts upon which the prevailing portrait of Paul's Torah-free Gospel and lifestyle are based, but they represent some of the ostensibly most self-evident material to which appeal is usually immediately made when the proposition of an always Torah-observant Paul is introduced. So far, I am unaware of any reason to doubt that the approach I suggest, which I have only been able to briefly describe here, is the most historically probable, helpful, and useful way to read Paul, and the best place from which to seek to apply his messages to the issues that arise today. I believe it can lead to a heightened recognition of the similarities between Judaism and Christian foundational texts and traditions. Moreover, combined with appropriate awareness of the differences that exist today between these faith traditions, it can also encourage a new level of respect in relationships.

These implications extend to include how each characterizes the other, which is so instrumental in the perpetuation of stereotypes. For even when these are ostensibly not encouraged outright, they often nevertheless travel implicitly in the interpretations we present. They are carried on in the ways that each explains the viewpoint of the other, often by appeal to the Apostle Paul, to Paulinism, as traditionally understood. For Christians, it is exemplified in celebrating how different this special apostle's values supposedly were from those of other Jews, including the other apostles, even from those of Jesus, although sometimes this supposed difference seems to be retained without reconciling the tension it produces. For Jews, it is expressed in undermining such notions and values, not necessarily by denying the claims that Christians make in Paul's name, but rather, by turning them upside down. It is obvious that an apostate representing such teachings, one who did not get Judaism or even Jesus right, is not a rival worthy of respect, let alone painstaking exegesis.

I have attempted to show both communities a better way forward. I hope each will give this critical approach a hearing, not only in the interest of seeking to read these texts in the most historically viable way possible, but for the sake of our welfare today, and for the generations to come.