

Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations

A peer-reviewed e-journal of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations

Published by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College

The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews¹

Mark D. Nanos
Rockhurst University

Volume 4 (2009)

<http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol4>

mark@marknanos.com

¹ This essay is dedicated to Krister Stendahl, may his memory be for a blessing. Special thanks to Andy Johnson, David May, and Bill Stancil for comments on earlier versions of this paper, which was presented as a guest at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) Annual Meeting, Providence, RI, November 21, 2008.

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 of the Torah is to be removed (Matt 5:18). Thus, any ostensible disagreements Jesus had with Pharisees or other rival Jewish interest groups were not about the continued role of Torah per se, but over competing interpretations of how to apply Torah. But this new approach does not extend to the Apostle Paul. In fact, this new understanding about Jesus has magnified exponentially the tendency to represent Paul as one who devalued Torah and founded Christianity.² Now Paul, not Jesus, by his ostensible conversion from Torah to Christ, substantiates the differences between these faith communities.³ Jesus practiced Judaism, however different his halakhah may have been from that of his rivals; Paul did not. With his announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God, Jesus sought to refine prevailing interpreta-

tions of Torah; Paul altogether abandoned it. Thus ironically, a central proposition of Christianity, that it is "not-Judaism," and of Judaism, that it is "not-Christianity," revolves around the prevailing portrait of the "Law-free" (or better, "Torah-free") Paul and his supposedly "Law-free Gospel" (or better, "Torah-free Gospel"), instead of around Jesus and his teachings.⁴

When Christians celebrate Paul as the apostle of "the gospel of freedom from law," this nomenclature highlights the problem of polemic at work at the level of ideology. "Torah" means "Teaching" rather than "Law." Torah is not simply the teaching of commandments or rituals, but of a way of life that prizes the interests of God and God's creation. The "love command" quoted by Paul (and Jesus) is from the heart of Torah, Leviticus 19:17-18. Torah includes the teaching of *freedom*, a core value for Judaism just as it is for Christianity. Freedom is at the heart of the celebrations of Sabbath and Pesach, of many commandments enjoining the humane treatment of others, reasoning that extends to the treatment of animals.⁵ It is because of freedom that responsibility to God and to each other are magnified in Torah. And the word "gospel" also communicates a central concept of Judaism, the message of good for Israel, and that news which the heralds

² Surveys of modern Jewish views of Paul include: Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, *The "Essential Heresy": Paul's View of the Law According to Jewish Writers: 1886-1986* (PhD diss., Temple University, 1990); Stefan Meißner, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers: Studien zur jüdischen Auseinandersetzung mit Paulus*, WUNT 2.87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Pamela Eisenbaum, "Following in the Footnotes of the Apostle Paul," in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, eds. Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 2004), 77-97; 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; idem, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground," *JSNT* 28.2 (2005): 217-58; Alan F. Segal, "Paul's Religious Experience in the Eyes of Jewish Scholars," in *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, eds. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond and Troy A. Miller (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 321-43.

³ Richard L. Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 114, put the matter succinctly: "'Jesus, yes; Paul, never!' would seem to be the watchword of much of the thoughtful Jewish New Testament scholarship in modern times."

⁴ This characterization of Paul's attitude toward Torah and Judaism is so widely held that annotation would be superfluous, and inevitably incomplete.

⁵ See, for example, Lev 26:13; Deut 5:15; 15:1-15; 16:1-12; 24:17-22. I do not mean to discount the weight of the responsibility to do the commandments, which rabbinic Judaism characterizes as the "yoke of the commandments," referring to the Shema (Deut 11:13-21; *B. Berakhot* 2.2), but this is the responsibility of those who are in a covenant relationship with the God who delivered Israel from Egypt, which is also a central element of the *Ge'ulah* (redemption) blessing recited following the Shema; similarly, Paul bases the call to keep the commandments on covenant identity in Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:13-6:10).

from Israel will bring to all of the other nations (e.g., Isa 52:6-10, cf. Rom 10:15).⁶

In response to the way that Judaism is portrayed in Christian interpretations of Paul, Jews traditionally characterize him as an apostate who either failed to understand Torah, or rejected it because of his own inadequacies. Even generous treatments of Paul today conclude that his teachings on Torah indicate a religious way of life that does not represent Judaism, instead perhaps advocating its mirror opposite.⁷ Yet the Tanakh itself as well as later forms of Judaism emphasize God's grace and faith, just as Paul did. We find this view even among extreme halakhists like the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and this emphasis continues in Judaism to this day. One need but consult the rabbinic morning prayers to recognize that while responding to God's call to responsibility, Jews also look to God's lovingkindness, grace, and forgiveness.⁸ The actions undertaken, just as for Christians, are in grateful response to God's kindness and the covenant relationship into which this people have entered.

Both of these polemical viewpoints about the other depend upon certain interpretations of Paul's language and intentions. Each community relies upon these choices to protect themselves, to make them different from the other, to show their own religious impulses and systems to be superior. What Christians might celebrate as freedom, Jews might deride as antinomian, illogical, and harmful; what Jews might celebrate as a special calling and sacred obligation, Christians might deride as

⁶ For more detail, see Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 288-96.

⁷ See, for example, 1QS XI; 1QM XI.4; 1QH VIII.11-18; VII.29-39; XV.15-25.

⁸ See Nosson Scherman, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur: Week-day/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).

bondage, self-serving, and passé. Members of both communities want it to be clear that Christianity is not like Judaism, and Judaism is not like Christianity. Consequently, it is difficult and threatening to consider seriously a different reading of Paul regarding Torah that might undermine this dichotomy; that it is ideologically relevant to do so in an age of Christian-Jewish reconciliation is self-evident.

I submit that the prevailing portrayal of Paul's heralding a "Law-free Gospel" and teaching a life "freed from Law" for all Christ-followers represents a profound misreading of his texts. For Jews, such as himself, Paul did not teach the end of Torah, including Jewish dietary norms. But he did uphold that Christ-believing *non-Jews* were not to *become Jews*, that they should never be under Torah in the same way that Jews were and remained. Paul himself 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" (Rom 7:14). At issue in his letters to non-Jews was how they were to become members of Judaism, of a politico-religious community and its way of life, without becoming Jews ethnically, that is, without becoming members of Israel. They thus remained without the "advantages" Torah offered (Rom 3:1-2; 9:4-5), but also without the responsibility "fully" to observe Torah like him and other Christ-believing Jews (1 Cor 7:17-24; Gal 5:3). This mixing of different people while retaining their different religio-ethnic identities and thus different relationships to Torah confused some of his original audiences, provoking him to write letters intended to clarify this proposition, but they have misled later interpreters reading his instructions to non-Jews in particular as if universal truths Paul applied without distinction to every person, including Jews.

There are viable alternative interpretations for each text upon which the traditional and still prevailing myth of the Torah-free Paul and his supposed Torah-free Gospel has been constructed. Thus these traditional portrayals of Paul need not delimit the possibilities for each community's ongoing conceptualizations of the other; there are new perspectives that promise more positive relations going forward. I will demonstrate this in an examination of Paul's treatment of the Jewish dietary commandments, a topic that is central to the traditional and still prevailing constructions of Paul as "Torah-free." First, we turn to a general discussion of Paul's Jewish identity and behavior.

Paul as a Torah-observant Jew

That Paul observed Torah according to the halakhic conventions for a Jew of his time and place—including dietary norms—would be in keeping with the logic of his rhetoric. He claims to be a Jew, indeed a Jew beyond reproach (2 Cor 11:22; Gal 2:15; Phil 3:3-6).⁹ He argues 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 own case, he should be expected to remain in a circumcised state.¹⁰ He argues that what matters above all for everyone is not their different states of identity, but "keeping the commandments of God" (v. 19).¹¹

⁹ 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."

¹⁰ Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697-1776), made a similar point. See Harvey Falk, "Rabbi Jacob Emden's Views on Christianity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, no. 1 (1982): 107-9.

¹¹ Regardless of its historical accuracy Acts bears witness to this interpretation of Paul by his earliest extant biographer. 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 chs. 21—26, he affirms his identity as a Torah-observant Jew, indeed, as a Pharisee not guilty of charges of breaching the Torah or desecrating the Temple. In 15:30 and

How does this logic apply to Galatians 3:28, where Paul declares that among those who are in Christ there is oneness, and thus that there "is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male and female"? In the traditional view, this indicates that Paul eliminates religio-ethnic difference. Yet Paul and his communities know full well that there are differences between slaves and freepersons, between men and women, and that he gave different instructions for each. Instead, in this text, Paul is elaborating on his theme of eliminating discrimination among Christ-followers, and not ignoring the fact that differences remain for these dyads, including the religio-ethnic distinction between Jew and Greek.

Paul's argument in Gal 5:3 similarly derives from Paul's maintaining his own Jewish identity. There, following their decision to be faithful to Christ, he argues against his non-Jewish audience's becoming Jewish proselytes, asserting that if one is circumcised, one is obliged "to observe the whole Torah." That argument would not have made sense, to the point of undermining his authority, had his audience thought that he, a circumcised Jew, did not himself observe Torah fully.

Some may argue that the very fact that Paul tries to dissuade the Galatians from circumcision on these terms shows his distaste for Torah. On the contrary, Paul's intent is to subvert not the Torah, but rather the authority of those his audience might suppose represent its ideals. He criticizes his competition, suggesting that they trivialize the advantages of Torah-based identity when they avoid making plain the cost that is involved. From Paul's perspective, the supposedly good news that they present as a complement to faithfulness to Christ, namely, proselyte conversion, is rather a rival "good news" to the "good news" in Christ for non-Jews, who should not become Jews or members of Israel according to Paul's gospel. Although prose-

16:4, Paul represents the Jerusalem church decision that Gentiles are to observe the apostolic decree, and in 16:1-1-3, he circumcises Timothy.

lyte conversion ostensibly would solve their socio-religious dilemma by making them not mere guests but proselytes—and thus full members of the Jewish community in religio-ethnic terms—it actually compromises the gospel proposition that the end of the ages has begun with gathering of the nations alongside of Israel. In addition, proselyte conversion incurs the obligation fully to observe Torah. Paul thus plants here seeds of distrust in the reliability of his competitors' motives and teachings.¹²

In other words, Paul is engaged in intra-Jewish polemic about precisely how to interpret Torah and not in disparagement of Torah. The rabbis similarly warn potential proselytes of the enormous responsibility involved in the privilege of Torah observance that comes with this identity transformation.¹³ Paul understands that obscuring this fact is itself not righteous; it fails to uphold a central ideal of Torah, the imperative to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14).

There were significant differences between the Judaism of Paul and his disciples and the other Jewish groups which did not profess commitment to Jesus Christ. But these differences did not find expression in derogatory views of Torah, or in reactions to such views. Instead, they focused on the meaning

¹² 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 of non-Jews is not about Torah-observance, but about Torah-identification. Paul does not challenge Torah-observance at any point in the letter. In *Irony of Galatians*, 267-69, I challenge Paul's usually supposed opposition to Jewish food norms and calendar, leaving only his opposition to proselyte conversion, symbolized in the language of circumcision and works of Torah (that work being specifically the entrance requirement for gaining Torah/Jewish identity).

¹³ *Yevamot* 47a-b; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 198-238.

of Christ both for the people of Israel who observe Torah and for the people of the rest of the nations to whom Israel is to proclaim Christ. The tensions over the interpretation of Torah primarily arise over Paul's claim that the people from the other nations are full co-members of the people of God and yet not under Torah because they are not members of Israel, even after they decide for faith in Christ. For Paul, whether Jesus is the promised one is a question independent of whether Torah continues to define what was promised, and why, and how those of Israel who define themselves by Torah will live.

At issue in Paul's letters is how to portray righteousness for those from the other nations. The dominant Pauline interpretive tradition deemphasizes this continued ethnic differentiation between the nations and Israel.¹⁴ Often citing as evidence Gal 3:28, it interprets Paul to have universalized all religio-ethnic difference, so as to apply his every instruction to everyone equally, making immaterial any distinction, including Jewishness as an identity and as a way of life.¹⁵ When combined with

¹⁴ Challenging this tradition, see Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Anders Runesson, "Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity?: Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology," *Studia Theologica* 54 (2000): 55-75; Kathy Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); 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).

¹⁵ See, for example, Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Contraversions 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 4-12, passim. Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 84 (cf. 114, 159), writes: "... (Gal 3:28) is not good for Jews, whose identity is then erased. In the church, the vision came true." Closer to my view on this passage are Pinchas Lapide, "The Rabbi From Tarsus," in *Paul, Rabbi and Apostle*, eds. Pinchas Lapide and Peter Stuhlmacher (Minneapolis: Augsburg,

the traditional interpretation of Gal 4:8-10, which understands Paul to be constructing an analogy between Jewish calendrical observances (including the Sabbath) and idolatry, this logically generates a Pauline teaching that privileges non-Jewish identity and behavioral norms for Christ-followers.¹⁶ They present "Torah-free" as the ideal state universally for all Christ-believing humankind, and not as something applicable to Gentiles in ways that do not apply to Jewish believers in Christ.¹⁷ Thus, they assert that Pauline teaching by definition undermines the very essence of Jewish and Israelite identity as set apart by God from that of other peoples and nations, and non-Jewish becomes equivalent to universal. At the same time, logically, Christ-faith now becomes a religio-ethnic identity marker that separates Christ-followers from all others, including Jews, making it no more universal than the Judaism with which the traditional as well as "New Perspective" interpretations find fault for drawing religio-ethnic boundaries between Israel and the nations.

The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle of James¹⁸ confirm that Paul teaches that Torah is established by Christ, that Christ's faithfulness exemplifies righteousness, that this righteousness was first Israel's, and that now it is Israel's special role to declare this righteousness also to the nations. Anyone who believes in Christ is obligated to live righteously, as is anyone who believes in Torah. In neither case is the goal of pursuing righteousness undertaken to initiate God's favor.¹⁹ Both Jews and Christ-followers decide to be faithful in order to retain right standing in a covenant relationship that presents obligations to both parties. Anything other than the pursuit of what is right would represent continuing bondage to sin, when bondage to God, the righteous one—the one who does right and judges accordingly—is the desired alternative (cf. Rom 6-8).

The threats to the non-Jews within the Christ-believing Jewish communities founded by Paul were, on the one hand, from their local "pagan" community's hostile reactions to their avoidance of participation in civic and familial cults, tempting

1984), 31-55, 64-74; Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 146; Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 188-201; and those listed in the immediately previous note.

¹⁶ This widely held interpretation has been challenged by Troy Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal. 4:10 and Col. 2:16," *NTS* 42 (1996): 120-32; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 267-69. The calendar Paul mentions lacks the one element that would signify a Jewish way of marking time, namely "weeks." This suggests that Paul is writing about the Roman and local idolatrous calendars, not the Jewish calendar, consistent with his challenge here to those returning to idolatry.

¹⁷ For more on this matter, including fuller bibliography, see Mark D. Nanos, "Paul and Judaism: 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>.

¹⁸ James agrees with rather than corrects Paul, although perhaps he challenges a misrepresentation of Paul's teaching.

¹⁹ This insight is central to the "New Perspective on Paul." See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); 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," especially 185-86. It has been frequently noted by Jews writing about Paul since the mid-nineteenth century. See, for instance, Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument*, 41-44, 165; idem, *Jüdisch-Christliches Religionsgespräch in 19 Jahrhunderten: Geschichte einer theologischen Auseinandersetzung* (Berlin: Vortrupp, 1937), 49-61, 152; Will Herberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Their Unity and Difference," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity: Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Will Herberg, and Abraham J. Heschel*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Crossroad, 1990; rpt. from *JBR* 21 [1953]), 249-50. Some other earlier examples are discussed in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 33-59, which also explains the traditional viewpoint that Sander's challenges. It is now a point commonly made; see the discussions listed in footnote 2.

these non-Jews to continue in or return to practicing idol rites to avoid such hostilities (e.g., 1 Thess 2; 1 Cor 8-10, discussed below; Gal 4:8-10;²⁰ Phil 3²¹), and on the other hand, from the temptation to overcome such religio-ethnic identity problems by undertaking proselyte conversion into Israel in addition to confessing Christ. These social identity conundrums arose to a large degree from Paul's way of teaching non-Jews that they were no longer idolaters and yet they were not becoming Jews either, but rather fellow members of Jewish groups out of the other nations, representing the assembly of the righteous from all of the nations at the dawning of the age to come (Rom 15:7-12).

Why did Paul oppose this religio-ethnic identity transformation into Jews and Israelites by way of proselyte conversion, which would have probably eased if not eliminated much of the Gentile Christ-followers' suffering and confusion? The traditional interpretive approach to Paul argues that in addition to obstructing the universal appeal of the gospel, he considered Israel/Jew to be an inferior identity bound to Torah and thus passé. It would trap these Christ-followers into works-righteousness. It would enslave them to Torah. These non-Jews are instead members of true or spiritual Israel, which is superior to carnal Israel. The "New Perspective" view argues that it is because the ethnic or boundary marking elements of Torah such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary rules were passé, and observing these would trap these non-Jews in the ostensibly essential Jewish problem of ethnocentric exclusivism. By definition, only universalization in the church could free carnal Israel from this problem, leaving in Christ

neither Jew nor Greek.²² Even though proponents of this perspective have otherwise largely undermined the traditional Christian basis for the negative valuation of Judaism and Torah, they continue to suggest that attaining Jewish proselyte standing would enslave Christ-followers to a lifestyle which is immature, because they are ideally to be "free" from Torah in their supposed new religion, Christianity.²³ These are aspects of the "New Perspective" view that I seek to challenge.

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 of Christ that the end of the ages has dawned. That proposition maintains that with the resurrection of Christ and arrival of the Spirit the awaited age has begun, when all of the other nations will recognize Israel's God as the One God, the Creator God of all humankind. In this age, Christ-following non-Jews are obligated to bear witness to 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

²⁰ Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 267-71.

²¹ 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).

²² Cf. James D. G. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity," *NTS* 45 (1999): 174-93, who, on 192, argues that Paul would not give a straight "No" to his identity as a Jew, as long as it was qualified "to come from within and not from without, and that the trappings of Jewish identity, most explicitly the practice of circumcision and food laws, could be equally taken on or put off without affecting the integrity of that Jewishness either way." But Paul would give a clear "No" to being "in Judaism": "the term had become too much identified with ethnicity and separation from other nations; and Paul's self-understanding on just these points had been too radically transformed by his conversion...for 'Judaism' to continue to define and identify himself or his apostolic work." See also Dunn, "New Perspective," in *Jesus, Paul*, 198. For critique of this view, see Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 66-72, 108.

²³ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC 38b (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 798; in my *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 88-95, I provide other examples of this phenomenon, and discuss the process of "Luther's trap" for the prevailing interpretations of the "weak" in Romans 14; see also my "Paul and Judaism."

Israel and her Mosaic covenant. This age represents the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham, bringing blessing to all of the nations through his seed. But non-Jews becoming 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 law"—would undermine the message that the awaited good for Israel *and* the nations had arrived *now* in Christ Jesus.²⁴ 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; Rom 3:28–4:25), this is the new-age "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 as well. It created the need for a new religio-ethnic 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. Neither ethnic Jews who did not share their faith in Christ, nor their own idolatrous families and neighbors perceived them as full members. Rather they were merely guests of or sympathizers with the socio-ethnic community practicing Judaism. Yet they were to understand themselves 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

24 For details of this position, see my *Mystery of Romans*, esp. 179-87; "Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema," forthcoming in a festschrift honoring Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, ed. Peter Spitaler, CBQMS (Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2010; 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>).

Christ, the faithful representative of God's plan to reconcile *all* of the nations equally.²⁵ They were thus not Jews or Israelites, but members of a certain Judaism, of a Jewish subgroup, of a Jewish coalition, of Christ-faith Judaism, the Judaism of Paul post-Damascus.²⁶

This nuanced and controversial way of incorporating non-Jews into the communal life of this Jewish subgroup led to many social problems, as well as confusion in 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. This includes his own highly esteemed and honored identity as a Jew (e.g., Phil 3:4-16), a socio-religiously advantageous identity within the Jewish community, and one that provides for respectful avoidance of idolatrous cults within the broader community, including those related to imperial cult, but an identity that he denies to his non-Jewish audience, since they cannot become proselytes according to his teaching. The category "Christian" does not yet exist, yet he must make these non-Jews realize that they are neither identified any longer with the gods of the other nations, nor are they on the way to becoming members of the nation Israel, even though they now worship Israel's God as the only God of all humankind. This amorphous identity, which does not correspond with the communal lines defining socio-religious identity on either side of the Jewish/Gentile divide, creates confusion and marginalization on both sides. It is one that non-Jews in Christ-believing communities seek to make sense of or escape, some by seeking to become proselytes (in Galatia), others by supposing to have replaced Jews (in Rome, independent of Paul's instruction). Paul responded to these developments in his letters. He addressed some of the problems that arose among them from this controversial proposition of the "truth of the

25 Cf. Stendahl, *Paul*.

26 Nanos, "Paul and Judaism."

gospel": that these Christ-following non-Jews are now members of Judaism, of the socio-religious people of the God of Israel, who the One God of all the nations incorporates in the *ekklesia* without re-identifying them religio-ethnically as Jews or members of the nation Israel. They are thus without the same relationship to Torah that applies to the Jewish members. At the same time, because these Gentiles are now members of the Jewish community, they are not without a relationship to Torah-defined norms for living, including dietary practices when among Jews.

Paul and Jewish Dietary Norms

It is not possible in this context to discuss all of the relevant passages about Paul's Torah observance, or the vast corpus of secondary literature that overwhelmingly assumes (when it does not explicitly argue) that Paul left Judaism, was Law-free, and taught a Law-free gospel. Instead, I will focus on the topic most often discussed in this context, 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-followers should? What about Gentile Christ-followers; were they to observe Jewish dietary norms? The primary texts for this discussion include Galatians 2:11-15, the so-called Antioch Incident, when Peter withdrew from eating with Gentiles because he feared "the ones from circumcision" following the arrival of "certain ones from James;" 1 Corinthians 8-10, the matter of eating in idolatrous 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.²⁷

²⁷ The order of this discussion is based on the consensus view for the chronological order of these texts.

The Antioch Incident

In Galatians 2:11-15, Paul informs his audience about an earlier incident in Syrian Antioch when he confronted Peter for lacking faithfulness 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 ones from James."²⁸ Thus, for Paul, the mixed meals that they celebrated prior to this breach of communal conduct signified the theological "truth of the message of good" in Christ.

The traditional reading of this text, which continues in the "New Perspective" analyses, understands the "certain ones from James" to represent the ideological view of the Jerusalem church that the Christ-faith movement continues to be a subset of Jewish communal life, of Judaism, in a way that supposedly clashes with Paul's viewpoint.²⁹ Accordingly, James and the Jerusalem church, so-called Jewish or Palestinian Christianity,³⁰ held that meals were to be conducted according to prevailing halakhic dietary norms. Moreover, they maintained that Gentile believers in Christ should become Jewish proselytes; alternatively, if they wished to follow instead Paul's

²⁸ A more complete discussion is available in my "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; *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 my "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.

²⁹ James D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11-18)," in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*, ed. Mark D. Nanos (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 225-30.

³⁰ Problems of terminology and definition are discussed in Matt A. Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

conviction that they should not become Jews, 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.³¹ In contrast, in Antioch, Paul had denounced this position in no uncertain terms, asserting that when joint meetings took place, 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.

This traditional reading, in its various forms, depends upon several decisions. The following are a few of the most fundamental ones.

First, it bases its interpretation on the notion that what "the ones from circumcision" found objectionable about the mixed meals was that they were not conducted according to prevailing halakhic dietary standards.³² Paul's accusation that Peter was compelling the Gentiles to "judaize," although Peter was himself "living like a Gentile," has been understood to mean that Peter had been eating Torah-free, and that he implicitly, if not explicitly, was teaching faith plus proselyte conversion and Torah-observance for Gentile Christ-followers.³³ That interpre-

³¹ For the "commensality" alternative, see Magnus Zetterholm, "Purity and Anger: Gentiles and Idolatry in Antioch," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (2005): 1-24.

³² Naturally, for a variety of reasons, including local constraints, there were various interpretations of halakhic standards, inside and outside of Judea, and between communities in each location. Dunn holds that the standards at issue were those for Noahides, which lessens the matter of degree. However, this does not alter the traditional view that the issue was halakhic, having to do with laws governing food preparation. It also does not work because Paul was accusing Peter of (implicitly) compelling "judaizing," not "noahidizing"; see my "What Was at Stake?," 282-318.

³³ 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

tation supposes that Christ-followers met independently of the Jewish community and according to Torah-free norms, so that by definition the Jews present were not behaving Jewishly.

Second, this reading understands the "certain ones from James" to represent James' viewpoint and presumes that these people are those whom Paul says Peter feared, namely, "the ones from circumcision."³⁴ Since it was the influence of the "certain ones from James" that led Peter as well as Barnabas and other unnamed Jews to adopt (or return to) this position regarding Gentile Christ-followers, the traditional interpreters thus infer that it represents the view of James, of Jewish Christianity, or of a significant element of that movement.

Third, these interpreters conclude that Paul's opposition is thus not only to proselyte conversion for Christ-believing Gentiles, but also to Torah-defined dietary behavior. By extension, he also then objected to Torah-observance as a way of life for Jews as well as Gentiles, at least when they mixed in church, which would seemingly apply to all cases in Pauline assemblies, and probably most other Christ-believing groups as well.³⁵

completed or who are in the process of completing proselyte conversion. Circumcision is for the male children of Israelites, slaves, and strangers living among them, and for the non-Israelite wishing to become an Israelite. I suggest that Paul's metonym *ergon nomou* ("works/deeds of Law") denotes "rites of Torah," specifically, those deeds/acts involved in a non-Jew becoming a Jewish proselyte.

³⁴ A minority position upholds that the "certain ones from James," although coming from James, misrepresented his policies, or 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).

³⁵ There are some interpreters who maintain that Paul allowed Jews not engaged in the Gentile mission to observe Torah fully, although he himself could not because of his close affiliation with Gentiles (e.g., Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 123). But this does not square with Paul's logic, which is based on principle. He either believed that Torah-observance still applied to

I disagree with each of these decisions.

On the first point, when Paul says Peter is living like a Gentile, or "gentilely," Paul is not accusing him of a Torah-free lifestyle, but of living *justified* by Christ just like the Gentiles are, not also by his standing as a Jew.³⁶ According to Paul, drawing on Habbakuk 2:4, "the just shall *live* by faithfulness" (3:11, 16-21; cf. Rom 1:17). Thus non-Jews were *living equal in standing* before God with Jews, without the conferral of ethnic identity and concomitant advantage of being a Jew within the Jewish community (cf. Gal 2:15; Rom 3:1-2; 9:3-5). Because these Gentiles have attained equal standing with Jews before God, naturally, they should be treated as equal in standing among each other (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:28-29; Rom 3:27-4:25; 15:5-12).

Paul's accusation that Peter's behavior implicitly compels the Gentile Christ-followers to become Jews (*ioudaizien*),³⁷ does not derive from Peter teaching non-Jews to become

Christ-believing Jews as a part of covenant faithfulness, or it did not; he himself was committed to living consistently, and he accuses Peter precisely for failing to do so. What would Christ-believing Jews 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.

³⁶ Nanos, "What Was at Stake?," 312-16.

³⁷ Cf. my "What Was at Stake?," 306-12, where I challenge the arguments that *ioudaizein* in general as well as here refers only to behaving like a Jew, and not to proselyte conversion. 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.

proselytes or adopt some kind of change in dietary behavior. This is implicit in Paul's accusation of "*hypocrisy*" rather than of "apostasy" or "heresy." He accused Peter of masking the conviction that Paul still believes Peter shares with him, that Gentile Christ-followers were to not become proselytes. But because of the exigencies of the moment and his fear of those who do advocate proselyte conversion, Peter is not behaving consistently with that conviction. His expedient behavior is undermining "the truth of the gospel" that he otherwise upholds, that Gentiles in Christ *live* as equal members of the people of God already, descendents of Abraham, without becoming members of Israel. This is what distinguishes this Christ-following Jewish coalition from all other Jewish groups.

Moreover, Peter, and everyone else at the table, including the non-Jews, had been eating according to Torah-defined dietary norms. Paul does not accuse Peter of eating like a Gentile and then ceasing to eat in this manner; he does not accuse him of withdrawing for "fear of the ones advocating dietary norms." Rather, he relates that Peter fears "the ones 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.

In other words, Paul describes Peter 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 "certain ones from James," were in a position to change that menu and to expect the Gentiles either to accept this or to be the ones who withdrew. It makes little sense for the Jews, including important figures like the "certain ones from James," Peter, and Barnabas, to do the withdrawing. And again, the issue is about "those *from circumcision*," not "those from the kosher menu committee." A change of diet certainly would be a less threatening option, and one that non-Jewish men should

be expected to accommodate more gladly than 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 non-Jews at meals without compromising Jewish dietary norms, everyone eating according to Jewish dietary rules.³⁸ 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 through 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.³⁹

In other Jewish groups, non-Jewish guests 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 that circumcision of these Gentiles was necessary, if they were to be treated as if equal members of the people of God within the Jewish community of Antioch. But according to the truth of the message of good that Paul and Peter proclaim, they are to be treated as religio-ethnic equals without proselyte

³⁸ Cf. E. P. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:1-14," 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.

³⁹ Nanos, "What Was at Stake?," 304 n. 75.

conversion, that is, without religio-ethnic sameness. Thus to avoid seating and serving people from the other nations equally would compromise the very proposition around which this Christ-following Jewish subgroup exists, and for which purpose it meets together to remember Jesus.

Second, Paul does not equate the "certain ones from James" with "the ones from circumcision." The arrival of the "certain ones from James" represents a time marker: it is *after* their arrival that Peter and "the rest of the Jews" withdrew. Paul also does not equate these "certain ones from James" with "the ones from circumcision" Peter feared. It 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-followers 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 in fact signal any reversal in principle, and does not accuse the "certain ones from James," or James himself, 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 theoretical agreement with and teaching 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,⁴⁰ in spite of Paul's failure to state the matter in those terms. Yet Paul chose to introduce this example. Presumably he did so to

⁴⁰ 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, then Philip F. Esler's case is cogent. See his "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.

persuade his audience that his position was normative for Christ-faithfulness, and thus the only legitimate one for them to consider in their own situation in Galatia.

There are other more logical identifications of the "certain ones from James." They may be James' representatives, and thus, like him, they join in mixed table fellowships and arouse a heightened objection from local Antiochene Jews who were already upset with such practices. Their joining this mixed table fellowship represented the last straw for those in the Jewish communities of Antioch who opposed such developments within these Christ-following subgroups. Those who came from James' coalition in Jerusalem were reinforcing the claim of local Antiochene Christ-believing Jews that these Gentiles were now equal members of the people of God, welcome as full members of table fellowships being otherwise conducted according to normal Jewish dietary laws. Antiochene Jews could not doubt that this was the position of all members of the Christ-believing movement, and it was high time to oppose it vehemently. In response, the Christ-believing Jewish members sought to dissipate the heat by a temporary, expedient withdrawal, but without changing their teachings. Presumably, in due time, they would return to the mixed table.

Or it may be that the "certain ones from James" represented those who were outsiders to the Christ-believing movement, as related in the prior Jerusalem meeting passage (2:1-10). They were "inspectors" whom James allowed to be present at the Christ-believing coalition's otherwise private meetings in Jerusalem.⁴¹ In either case, Paul judged them to be "informants" who gained access in Jerusalem, and now were allowed to travel to Antioch to investigate matters there also. If so, then they might well be synonymous with "the ones from circumcision" whom Peter feared. They objected to the Christ-movement's standards for equal fellowship with non-Jews, and

⁴¹ Nanos, "Intruding 'Spies' and 'Pseudo-brethren.'"

Peter worried that it might be unclear just how important it was in Antioch, as in Jerusalem, that Torah standards be upheld within these mixed meals. Thus, rather than permit ambiguity, he withdrew to avoid any problems while these informants were seeking to find some reason to report back to Jerusalem that things were not as they should be. Perhaps the inspectors' purpose was to bring greater pressure upon James and the Jerusalem church to respond to supposed transgressions within the spreading network under their supervision, including Antioch, and Peter reasoned that avoiding normal behavior for a while would be a strategic way to avert their intentions.

None of these alternatives for the identity of the "certain ones from James" concerning their role in Antioch and for their relationship to "the ones from circumcision" implies that James differed from Peter and Paul in his expectations of proselyte conversion for Gentile Christ-followers or Torah-observance for Jews, or participation in joint meals. This challenges the third major point of the prevailing views.

Galatians 2:11-15 thus shows that Paul objected neither to Torah-observance in his assemblies, nor to prevailing halakhic standards for dietary behavior. The issue at Antioch had to do not with the food being served, but instead with how it was being shared with non-Jews as if equal members of the fellowship rather than as non-Jewish guests or proselyte candidates. This was unlike the practice of 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 likely were not treated as members unless they chose to become proselytes. Not so in the Christ-believing groups in Antioch and in Jerusalem.

That is the message that Paul wanted to communicate to the Galatians, who were under similar pressure from their own local Jewish communities. He expected them to resist these

pressures, just as he insisted on such resistance elsewhere.⁴² When Jewish apostles and leaders like Peter and Barnabas erred, Paul criticized them too. "The truth of the gospel" was at issue; the entrance of members of the other nations to the messianic meal was fundamental to the propositional truth claims they sought to substantiate. Non-Jews join Judaism, but they do not become Jews through the "works of Torah" that alter their religio-ethnic identity to make them Jews. For that they would need to complete the rites of proselyte conversion, which involves circumcision for males. Thus they are not under Torah in the fullest sense, as are Jews. But Gentile Christ-followers are nevertheless under the Torah (i.e., teaching, principles) of Christ, which includes the halakhic codes of behavior for guests, which cohere with the Noahide commandments, as witnessed in the so-called Apostolic decree (Acts 15).⁴³

In short, the Antioch Incident does not substantiate that Paul ate Torah-free on any occasion, or that he 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. He teaches that Gentile Christ-followers must be proselyte-conversion free. They do not undertake the "works/actions of Torah" that create Jewish religio-ethnic identity and thus they are not under Torah; they do not become Israelites, although they become enslaved to the love of neighbor that is the essence of Torah, and thus Israelite covenant life (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

⁴² For the setting and message of Galatians, see my *Irony of Galatians*; and my, "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.

⁴³ Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 50-57, 192-207.

according to prevailing Jewish communal regulations that govern the lifestyle of the righteous non-Jew.

Food Offered to Idols

1 Corinthians 8–10 is Paul's response to apparent queries from his Corinthian disciples about whether they might participate in idolatrous rites, or eat food that had been sacrificed to idols.⁴⁴ Interpretations of this passage logically must be consistent with interpretations of the Antioch Incident. If one maintains that Paul did keep the kosher dietary laws, then he certainly would not eat food from idolatrous sacrifices. But if one argues that Paul did permit and even ate idolatrous food in some circumstances, then it follows that he would not keep kosher regulations regarding other food.

The consensus view is that Paul permits the eating of idolatrous food in principle, but not when it would bother the "sensibilities" (*syneidesis*: "conscience," or better, "consciousness") of the *asthenes* ("weak," or better, "impaired"). The "weak" are understood to be Christ-followers 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 idolatrous food, or when eating it, are conscious in some way of participating in idolatry. They misunderstand the gospel proposition (according to the "knowledgeable") that there are no real

⁴⁴ A full discussion of the prevailing views and my interpretation is available in my "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, 2008), 179-210; and "'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 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).

gods represented by these idols.⁴⁵ The food dedicated to them is really profane (ordinary) food and should be of no real concern.

It is widely maintained, even by those who understand Paul to accept eating idolatrous food in certain circumstances, that he did not permit participation in idolatrous rites.⁴⁶ This would seem to suggest that Paul does indeed argue from certain basic Torah-inspired sensibilities. Nevertheless, those maintaining the consensus view hold inconsistently that unless Paul is opposed to eating idolatrous food because it is intrinsically impure, he cannot be a Torah-observant Jew, or one teaching a Torah-based approach to Christ-faith. They combine this with their decision to interpret 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 to mean that Paul adapted his *behavior* equally to the Torah-observant and to those free of Torah.⁴⁷ Depending upon which group he was among, he sought to proclaim his gospel free of such supposedly non-essential requirements, since Torah is for Paul *adiaphora*, a matter of indifference.

While the overwhelming consensus agrees that Paul was against keeping Jewish dietary norms in Antioch, some interpreters recognize that the logic of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians signals both that he disapproved of other's eating of food known to be idolatrous, and that he did not eat idolatrous food himself, for example, when evangelizing among

idolaters.⁴⁸ My own work strengthens this second case.⁴⁹ The "weak" or "impaired" in 1 Corinthians 8–10 are probably not Christ-followers, but polytheists (pagans), those who still practice idolatrous rites as a matter of principle. Unlike Paul's audience, who are the "we" who know the One God and who "all have knowledge" that these statues do not represent real gods (8:1-6), "they" are the "some" who lack this knowledge of the One God, who until now have been accustomed to eating idolatrous food without sensing that it is not right to do so (v. 7). And why would they if they are not Christ-followers but idolaters?

The issue raised by the Corinthian Christ-followers is whether they may eat food that was being or had been sacrificed to idols. They reason that since they no longer believe that these idols represent gods and lords, food offered to them has no holiness. Eating idol-related food with indifference would have the advantage of bearing witness to their gospel convictions and at the same time not giving offense to their polytheist neighbors. Withdrawal from all contexts where it was being served and from buying it in the marketplace, in contrast, would be akin to social suicide, to dwelling apart from the world. How were they to live when virtually every social engagement and much of the food available for meals involved

⁴⁵ This observation also applies to those who define these two groups by their different socio-economic backgrounds; cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 121-43.

⁴⁶ C. K. Barrett ed. *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 50-52.

⁴⁷ Peter Richardson, "Pauline Inconsistency: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Galatians 2:11-14," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979): 347 (347-62); Segal, *Paul*, 228, 229-40; Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus*, 106-10.

⁴⁸ 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*, JSNT Sup 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).

⁴⁹ "Polytheist Identity"; "Paul's Relationship to Torah in Light of His Strategy 'to Become Everything to Everyone' (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)," Interdisciplinary Academic Seminar: New Perspectives on Paul and the Jews, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium, September 14-15, 2009, sets out this case in detail.

some association with the idolatry of their polytheistic families, neighbors, and fellow workers, with civic life in general?

However, Paul sees things from a Jewish Torah-based point of view, and the logic of their appeal to eat idolatrous food escapes him. Their reasoning probably surprises him, for Israelites have long upheld that idols were merely statues, ones that should not have been built. Those who worshiped the gods through "idols" were regarded to be misguided, at the very least. But it does not follow that one could participate with indifference in idolatrous rites or even eat food that had been used in any such rites, including when it was later available in the marketplace. Rather, it must be avoided as if infected with powers that seek to rival God and to harm his people.⁵⁰ So Paul argues that rather than bearing witness to their polytheist neighbors, eating this idolatrous food may serve as a scandal for them, leading them to continue in idolatry under the impression that Christ-faith sanctions 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 idolatrous food? Because his intended 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

⁵⁰ Paradoxically, Scripture trivializes idols 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.

of the gospel constrains him—to a point. So he begins 1 Corinthians 8 with first principles. He agrees with the Christ-followers 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 all things related to idols should be considered profane. To do so 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 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, together with these Christ-followers and all Israelites, should desist from any such behavior and turn to the One God alone.⁵¹

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, Paul moves the argument against

⁵¹ Cf. Nanos, "Polytheist Identity," for full discussion of the logic for understanding the *asthenes* ("weak/impaired") "brothers" to be non-Christian-believing idolaters, and of the letter's concern with winning them to Christ. Note that Church fathers continued to operate according to this understanding of constructing outsiders as kin. Ignatius (late 1st-early 2nd c.) calls upon his addressees to pray for outsiders to the church, and to conduct themselves as "brothers/sisters [*adelphoi*]" to them, as expressed by imitating how Christ lived humbly with his neighbor, including choosing to be wronged rather than to wrong them (*Eph.* 10; cf. *Mart. Pol.* 1.2). And although Chrysostom (late 4th c.) understood the impaired in 1 Cor 8—10 to be Christ-followers, 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 concern for those outside of one's own philosophical group, 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.

eating idol food to the next stage in chapter 10. Although to some degree avoiding direct appeal to Torah injunctions, he invokes examples from Torah to make clear that one who eats at the table of the Lord cannot also eat at the table of other gods, the so-called daemons. In other words, he admits that there are powers associated with idols, undermining the theoretical concession with which he began this argument that apparently shared these Gentile Christ-believers' 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. Purity is not inherent to the food, but imputed by the command of God. Any food *known* to be idolatrous food, whether available in the marketplace, or offered in a host's home, may not be consumed. Christ-believers, like biblical Israelites, must flee idolatry, both for their own sakes and for the sake of their polytheist neighbors, their brothers and sisters in the created order whom God in Christ seeks to redeem through them.

Paul did not permit the eating of food known to be idolatrous food, and there is no indication that he himself ever ate it. Quite the opposite is the case. Moreover, the teaching of the early church for centuries was that Christians were not to consume idolatrous food, in part, based on their reading of this text.⁵² Paul's argument, including that contained in 1 Cor 9:19-22, confirms that his audience knew him to be not only one who would not eat such food, but also one who would not expect them to do so either. Thus, although they knew him to be

⁵² Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 19-20; *Didache* 6.3; Ignatius, *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 Moshe Freidenreich, "Foreign Food: A Comparatively-enriched Analysis of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law" (PhD Thesis: Columbia University, 2006), 123-41. *Barnabas* 10.9, may suggest an early group that does eat anything, but it is not specific about idolatrous food; and see Tertullian, *Apol.* 42.1-5.

Torah-observant when he had been among them in Corinth, their query protests the cost to their civic life and standing caused by Paul's denying this food to them as Gentiles. They knew that by the defining terms of Paul's own proclamation of the truth of the gospel, he understood that they remained non-Jews and were not subject to Torah.

In 9:19-22, Paul declares that to win Jews he "became like a Jew," to win the "ones under *nomos*" (law/convention/Torah?) he "became like the one under *nomos*," but also to win the lawless he "became like a lawless one" (*anomos*), and to win the "weak" that he "became weak," who are understood to be insecure in their freedom in Christ, and thus to avoid eating idolatrous food.⁵³ This statement has been universally understood to mean that Paul regards Torah-observance, including the value of Jewish identity itself, to be only a matter of evangelistic expedience. That interpretation, which for analytical purposes may be called "lifestyle adaptability," depends on understanding "causing myself to become like" (*egenomen hos*) members of each of the various groups to signify "causing myself to *mimic the conduct*" of each of them. In the consensus view, Paul does not share the various groups propositional truths, but rather 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. This applies to such conduct 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. In other words, Paul does not actually "become" or "become like" each referent, but

⁵³ It is unclear how the reference to those "under law" differs from "Jews," for example. Perhaps it refers to proselytes or to those representing stricter standards like Pharisees; alternatively, it may refer to being under Roman or other laws or conventions. Likewise it is not clear whether *anomos* refers to lawless (perhaps non-practicing) Jews as well as to non-Jews, or only to non-Jews, as if he had written *xoris nomos* ("without law"). See my "Paul's Relationship to Torah" and "Paul and Judaism."

instead merely "pretends on the surface to live like" each one when among each. Then he abandons that conduct and lives like the other ones when among them. But there is another way to understand Paul's argument here, one that both avoids implying that he is indifferent to Torah and also one that does not compromise his morality by ascribing to him a "bait and switch" strategy.

Rather than suggesting that he relates to each person or group by *mimicking* their *lifestyle*, Paul is referring instead, I propose, to his *rhetorical strategy* for *persuading* them. His "*becoming like*" signifies not "*behaving like*," but rather "*arguing like*," or "*reasoning like*." He employs a strategy of "rhetorical adaptability" widely upheld in the philosophical traditions of his time wherein a speaker begins with the premises of those whom they seek to persuade, whether or not they intend ultimately to undermine these premises.⁵⁴ It was the way of Socrates, and it is still employed as one of the best methods for teaching students. Paul routinely begins with his audience's propositional truths, whether he shares them, like he does with Jews and those who are Torah-observant, or not, like in the cases of those he calls lawless, or the impaired who engage in idolatry as a matter of conviction. He does not behave like them, but he makes his arguments in ways that adapt to the propositional thinking of each group he seeks to persuade to the gospel. So too here, he approaches the knowledgeable in Corinth about idolatrous food by appearing to uphold premises with which he may disagree in order to lead them to different conclusions than those they have drawn.

Luke portrays Paul preaching to the philosophers in Athens in just this manner (Acts 17:16-34). Paul begins from their premise that there is an "Unknown God" to whom they dedicated a statue. Paul does not begin by declaring there is no such thing

⁵⁴ W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1992), 90-101.

as polytheist gods, but builds on their (mistaken) conviction that this "idol" symbolizes a god. Then he declares the identity of that god as really the God of Israel. He next proceeds to inform them that this God does not approve of building statues to himself, or to any other supposed god or lord. Paul does not make this criticism obvious in the beginning of his address, but it becomes transparent as he moves toward his conclusion that the God of Israel is the one and only Creator God of all humankind. In this way Paul "became like" an idolater to gain idolaters. He does not conduct himself idolatrously or mimic idolater's conduct; rather, he remains like a Torah-observant Jew while arguing from the premises of the polytheists he seeks to persuade.

My reading not only avoids the negative characterization of Paul and his methods as intentionally deceptive, with a questionable commitment to righteousness, truth, and justice, but it also challenges the long-standing notion that 1 Corinthians 8–10 shows clearly that Paul is by definition Torah-free. Instead it substantiates that he is Torah-observant and that he constructs his arguments assuming that his audience is aware of this fact. Subsequent interpreters, assuming that his contemporary audiences shared the later understanding that Paul was 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" (*asthenes*), who are "unable" (*adunatoi*) in faith.⁵⁵ To whom

⁵⁵ For more detail, see my *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165; "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304; and "A Rejoinder to Robert A. J. Gagnon's 'Why the "Weak"

each label refers is a matter of debate. Paul's argument, directed to the "strong," characterizes the "weak" 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 offered as a libation to the gods according to normal Greco-Roman practice, and observing the holy days of the Jewish calendar, including the Sabbath.

According to the prevailing views, the "strong" are Christ-followers of Pauline persuasion, that is, they are "Torah-free" whether Gentiles or Jews. The "weak" are also Christ-followers, but in contrast, they still observe Torah and probably consist mostly of Jews, perhaps with some "God-fearing" non-Jews included among them. Thus the conflicting identities turn around their relative valuation of Torah, for all of them are Christ-followers.

These interpreters take the fact that Paul includes himself among the "strong" as support for the notion that Paul is Torah-free, but their logic is circular. If the Romans believe Paul to be Torah-observant, then their shared strength would be presumed to have nothing to do with Torah, but with shared faith in Christ. The prevailing view couples this reading with Paul's declaration that he is "convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is impure in itself," (14:14), meaning that what makes something impure is someone's perception that it is, not something intrinsic to it. They understand Paul to define categories of purity and impurity not according to Torah, but rather according to Christ-based personal or group convictions as if inherently different from those defined by Torah for Jewish people and groups. Thus, Paul is not Torah-observant, or even Torah-respectful, except in concession to the convictions of others,

at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,' available at <http://www.marknanos.com/Gagnon-rejoinder-6-20-03.pdf>.

whom he accommodates to advance more important matters like peace in the assembly and the witness of the gospel. I disagree with such readings.

I propose that the distinctions Paul makes between "strong" (or "unable") and "weak" (or "stumbling") do not revolve around their observance of Torah-based norms, the "strong" rejecting them and the "weak" observing them with this signifying an inferior choice (weaker faith) according to the ideals of Pauline Christianity. Nor does Paul's appeal to the inherent purity or even goodness of everything God created indicate a rejection of halakhic behavior. Rather, the distinction between the groups arises from their present level of "ability" or "inability" to believe in the gospel proposition.⁵⁶ At issue is whether or not they are "stumbling" over the proclamation of the message of good in Christ to the nations. They are in this way "weak" or "impaired" or "stumbling,"⁵⁷ but they are not non-believers in God. They do

⁵⁶ Note how Paul works around *dynatos* in 15:1

⁵⁷ For further explanation, see my "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>); and *Mystery of Romans*, 239-88. Paul saw himself, like the prophets, engaged in restoring Israel. He viewed some of his fellow Israelites in a temporary state of discipline for disobeying this truth claim. They are "stumbling" but not "fallen," within the covenant standing of Israel, having the certainty of the gifts and calling of God promised to their fathers (Rom 9:4-5; 11:25-29). In due time, as a result of his successful ministry among the nations, Paul maintains that they will come to share his point of view and be restored to standing upright. I am pleased to say that Krister Stendahl embraced my argument when he first heard it at the 1998 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, now available in "Challenging the Limits That Continue to Define Paul's Perspective on Jews and Judaism," in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations*, eds. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte, Romans through History and Culture Series (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 217-29.

not lack faith in general terms, but faith that God is bringing to pass what was promised in Christ.⁵⁸

But does Paul's ostensible relativizing of the value of pure and impure, for example, imply that he does not respect, observe, or teach Torah as a matter of conviction? No, it does not. Rabbinic tradition relativizes these categories, making them apply only to Israel.⁵⁹ According to the Bible, God created everything good. The foods that are proscribed as impure are not inherently impure; rather, they are impure for Israel because God has designated them to be so in the Torah. Impurity or purity is an imputed, not an inherent characteristic. Paul appeals 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). However, Paul raises this as an argument, not its conclusion. He presumes his audience will identify positively with this premise—but characteristic of his rhetorical tactics, he subverts this argumentative concession in his subsequent conclusions. Regardless of whether the "strong" should identify something as pure or not, they are obliged to respect the sensibilities of those who conclude it to be impure, 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, i.e., to blasphemy itself. They can have no part in behavior that might lead to such results.

Therefore I propose that the divisions between these groups arise around their expression or lack thereof of the identity markers of Christ-faith ("strong"="able" to believe; "weak"="stumbling" over the message of Christ), and not around their relative degree of Torah-observance ("strong"=free from Torah;

"weak"=observing Torah). Whether or not one accepts my view, this passage does not provide enough information to support the traditional case that Paul did not observe Torah in matters of diet, or that he taught against it. Moreover, even according to the consensus view, Paul defends the Torah-observant, or at least calls for respectful behavior toward them. Paul also explicitly proscribes the very judgmentalism towards the weak that this view imputes to him in understanding "weakness" to be stumbling over trusting God enough to abrogate Torah. 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.

Conclusions and Implications

Those promoting the prevailing portrait of Paul's Torah-free Gospel and lifestyle do not depend exclusively on these texts and topics, but they usually appeal to them first as the ostensibly most self-evident sources that contradict the proposition of a Torah-observant Paul. In each case, I question their readings. At this point, 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. My understanding can lead to a heightened recognition of the similarities between first-century 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

⁵⁸ Abraham's level of faith is described in similar terms in 4:18-20.

⁵⁹ *Sifra Aharei* 93d; *Gen. R.* 44.1; *Lev. R.* 13.3; I. Grunfeld, *The Jewish Dietary Laws* (2 vols.; London and New York: Soncino Press, 1972), 5, 12-19, 28-29; Tomson, *Paul*, 249.

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, much less painstaking exegesis.

Some Christians may sense a deep and reprehensible threat to the very essence of Christianity at work in the notion of a Torah-observant Paul, a threat that undermines elements considered essential to highlighting Christianity's difference from Judaism. I believe that this concern is mistaken and unnecessary. When 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 to Paul's theology. It is widely recognized that indifference to Torah was not the norm either for Jesus or for James and the other apostles of this movement. For them, there was no dichotomy between Torah and Christ. Why *must* there be for Paul?

If we take seriously a portrayal of Paul as Torah-observant, one which is consistent with his own self-witness and confirmed by his earliest biographer in the Acts of the Apostles, might not the Jewish and Christian communities find themselves to be more similar than different? Should not the differences become more clearly related to how each community values the identity and meaning of Jesus, a Judean martyr of the Roman regime, and not to their shared concern for the "teaching" of faithfulness in response to the gracious calling of God? This is not an appeal to disregard differences, but to get them right.

I hope each community 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.

