

REVIEW

David Rudolph

A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

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This monograph, originally the author's dissertation, is devoted to understanding whether it is possible to interpret Paul's views in 1 Cor 9:19-23 as within the boundaries of "pluriform Second Temple Judaism" (p. 19). Rudolph argues that what he calls "the traditional view" of scholars—that this passage reveals that Paul no longer observed Jewish law—does not stand up to critical scrutiny, and that the time has come for a full-length re-examination of the issue. Rudolph ultimately argues that 1 Cor 9:19-23 "does not preclude a Torah-observant Paul." Instead, this passage, alongside its "recapitulation" in 1 Cor 10:32-11:1, demonstrates that Paul is following Jesus' example of "accommodation and open table-fellowship," in other words, Jesus' example of regularly eating with "ordinary Jews, Pharisees, and sinners," thus being flexible in matters of personal piety when it came to matters of ministry (p. 19).

Rudolph first presents the "traditional view" by briefly reviewing previous scholarship on this passage and the question of Paul's law-observance. Though Rudolph initially sets up the discussion around statements by Charles Cosgrove, it is understandably E. P. Sanders who occupies most of Rudolph's attention in this section (which also includes very brief reviews of more recent works like those of Wolfgang Schrage, and Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner). He discusses previous scholars' attempts to reassess the traditional view, particularly those of Peter Tomson (though he notes that Tomson's work was widely rejected), and Mark Nanos, whose work he returns to throughout his study. Rudolph breaks down arguments for the traditional reading into three rationales—the "intertextual," "contextual," and "textual" arguments—and devotes a chapter to refuting each one before proposing a new interpretation of the passage in the final chapter.

In chapter two, Rudolph takes on what he calls the "intertextual" argument that "1 Cor 9:19-23 is part of a group of texts in the Pauline corpus and Acts that depict Paul's Jewishness as erased or inconsequential in Christ" (p. 23). This chapter examines the texts that are used to support the traditional view that Paul only "occasionally conformed" to the Law, and then the texts that lend support to Rudolph's thesis that Paul remained a Torah-observant Jew. Though individual discussions of particular passages are strong, such as Rudolph's discussion of the "calling" language in 1 Cor 7:17-24, the organization of the chapter as a whole is lacking. It is not clear why the chapter proceeds in the order it does: is it meant to indicate relative strength of arguments? It is unclear, for example, given the serious question of the relationship between the Paul of the letters and the Paul of Acts, why the chapter begins with discussion of Acts 16 rather than discussion of other Pauline passages. Is this because proponents of the traditional view point to this passage as the most compelling? Rudolph's argument would be strengthened if he explained his choice of texts and his reason for working through them in the present order because at times his analysis seems wanting. Rudolph's discussion of the meaning of Paul's "former life" language (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:8) is unpersuasive, as it seems like it pushes past the plain sense of

the text. The brevity of his treatment of this passage is suspect—is this the strongest argument *against* Rudolph's thesis? Readers would be served by having a sense of what Rudolph believes is the most difficult evidence to overcome.

In chapter 3, Rudolph turns his attention to refuting the "contextual" argument that "1 Cor 9:19-23 is consonant with Paul's permissive stance on idol-food in 1 Cor 8 and 10, which was a radical break from Judaism" (p. 90). Rudolph strongly disagrees with the traditional view that Paul held "a permissive stance" on the eating of idol-meat; rather, Rudolph believes that Paul advocated a position that was at home in Second Temple Judaism, namely, that one should not eat food when its provenance was known to be a pagan temple, but that one could eat food if its provenance was unclear. Unfortunately, Rudolph does not have clear evidentiary support here. Rudolph builds most of this argument on Mishnaic texts (such as *m. Yoma* 8.5-6) which he reads as supporting "lowering the bar somewhat concerning indeterminate or forbidden foods" (p.102), and on reasonable conjecture. He is on sturdier ground in his claim that Qumranic texts (including the Damascus Document and 4QInstruction) interpret "stumbling block" metaphorically, demonstrating that Paul's ethic in 1 Cor 8:13 with regard to not causing weaker members to stumble is in line with aspects of Second Temple Judaism.

In chapter 4, which closes out the first section of the monograph, Rudolph deals with "textual issues," by which he means attention to matters of Greek syntax and language. He argues that one does not need to understand Paul's language to mean that he no longer considers himself Jewish. Rudolph argues, for example, that when Paul says that he became as one "under the law" (1 Cor 9:20), what he means is that he is no longer under sectarian interpretation of the law, as he was in his former life as a Pharisee. Rudolph argues that the modifying clause in 1 Cor 9:21, "for I am not without the law of God but am under the law of Christ," points back to the calling language in 1 Cor 7:17-20, and that "the two passages (1 Cor 7:17-20; 9:21) side by side suggest that Paul continued to live according to 'God's law' (i.e., 'the law of Moses' of 1 Cor 9:8-9)" (p. 162). Rudolph thus sets the table for his constructive argument.

In the final chapter, Rudolph presents a constructive case for understanding Paul's statements in 1 Cor 9:19-23 as reflecting "Paul's ethic of imitating Christ's accommodation and open table-fellowship" (p. 173). Crucial to Rudolph's thesis is his discussion of the relationship between this and 1 Cor 10:32-11:1, where Paul, at the close of this section on table issues, tells the Corinthians to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Rudolph argues that we should understand Paul's words in 1 Cor 9:19-23 as being part of the same discussion. Rudolph argues that Jesus had an ethic of adaptation, which Paul here encourages the Corinthians to imitate, and therefore "As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became 'all things to all people' through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those 'under the law') and Gentile sinners" (p. 190).

Rudolph's overall thesis is persuasive and compelling, particularly in light of his thoughtful analysis of Paul's "calling" language in 1 Cor 7:17-24, where he persuasively demonstrates that Paul intended Jewish Christians to continue following Jewish law, while Gentile Christians need not adopt these precepts. Each was to remain "called" in the state they were in. Rudolph argues that this provides the lens through which we should understand Paul's own relationship to Jewish law. Often, however, his constructive comments are drowned out by the organization of his work, which places the emphasis on refutation of others rather than construction of a sustained argument. Rudolph demonstrates real problems in the "traditional" understanding of 1 Cor 9:19-23, but does not fully engage the broader issues. There is no discussion, for example, of how this pericope fits into 1 Corinthians as a whole, a notable absence given Rudolph's keen interest in 1 Cor 7. In addition, Rudolph's crucial and extensive discussion of the implications of Paul's

language in 1 Cor 7 is buried in the middle of a long and somewhat unwieldy chapter, rather than being given the place of prominence it needs as part of a systematic constructive argument.

One major problem with the work as a whole is the lack of a systematic discussion of Rudolph's methodology for using Acts as a source for determining Paul's relationship to Judaism. In the introduction, for example, perhaps the place for a serious discussion of the issue, Rudolph adopts a surprisingly uncritical attitude towards Acts and offers no discussion of the extensive literature about the relationship between the Paul of Acts and the letters. Things improve somewhat over the course of the study, although when Rudolph does address this question, he does so in piecemeal fashion: first dispensing with the issue in a footnote in chapter one, then engaging in a slightly longer discussion when it comes to the use of Acts 21 in chapter two. Rudolph believes strongly that "An investigation of the evidence for the historical reliability of Acts as a whole, or the 'we-passages' in particular, is beyond the scope of this study" (p. 66), but this is not satisfactory, given how heavily Rudolph relies on this material for his presentation of Paul. Rudolph is heavily invested in Luke's presentation of the Apostolic Decree, for example, but he never deals with the question of whether we can trust Luke's presentation of the Decree or the relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem church. Given the important work of Ian Elmer on this matter, this is a serious deficit, leading Rudolph to draw problematic inferences such as "There is no direct evidence in Acts or the Pauline corpus that Paul ever rejected the decree" (p. 101), a misleading statement since there is no direct evidence even of the *decree* from the Pauline corpus.

Despite these critiques, overall this work is cogent and provides a good corrective to the mainstream of scholarship on 1 Cor 9:19-23, though it may actually be Rudolph's discussion of 1 Cor 7:17-24 that proves the most fruitful for future research.