

**A Torah-Observant Paul?:
What Difference Could it Make for Christian/Jewish Relations Today?**

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I am very grateful for this opportunity to discuss my interpretation of Paul and of what difference it might make for Christian/Jewish relations. My sincere thanks to Joseph Tyson and all of you for the invitation.

This essay will proceed in three parts. First, I will discuss a recent example of the state of affairs in the study of Paul and Christian/Jewish relations, and set out the importance of Paul and of the challenge to rethinking the portrait from which Christians and Jews have worked to date. Second, I will offer a new interpretation of Paul by investigating a few of his statements in various texts. And third, I will discuss some of the implications of this construction of Paul for Christian/Jewish relations.

[Note: This manuscript has become longer than I intended, which is due to expanding the second section (point 5). This paper represents development of a lecture presented first to Jewish and Christian clergy and then revised for General Theological Seminary's Annual Lecture on Jewish/Christian relations. I now hope to develop this into a monograph aimed at the kinds of folks who attended those lectures: informed Christian and Jewish people, clergy, students, and scholars who are interested in Jewish/Christian relations and/or Paul. I would appreciate any suggestions toward that goal, including style issues, passages to discuss, working assumptions that need to be explained better, publishers to consider, and so on. Thank you!]

The challenge to re-reading Paul within Judaism was made painfully clear in the recent review of Bruce Chilton's *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (Doubleday, 2004), which appeared in *The Jerusalem Report* (March 7, 2005, pp. 40-41). The review was entitled, "The Man Who De-Judaized Jesus." The author of the review, Tibor Krausz, brought Jewish sensibilities to bear upon the portrait Chilton painted of Paul. Krausz's

reaction to the book is captured in a poignant call-out that reads: “Most scholars agree that the apostle Paul ‘invented’ Christianity, but is it historically reasonable to suggest that what he did was good for the Jews?” It does seem irresponsible to suggest any such thing. Let’s look a little closer at the elements that bring Krausz to this insightful undermining of Chilton’s claim. For we can see clearly how Christians and Jews often work from the same construction of Paul to reach opposite conclusions, with problematic implications for Christian/Jewish relations. Progress on that front will perhaps continue to be impeded if not prevented entirely until there is a different Paul from which to work from both sides of the faith spectrum.

Krausz begins by observing that “every great story needs a villain and, from a contemporary Jewish perspective, in Early Christianity, it’s Paul. Medieval rabbis, tormented by unrelenting Christian persecution, saw Jesus himself as a diabolical sorcerer: the corrupter of earlier Jews and the bane of contemporary ones. Modern Jewish historians, however, have spearheaded efforts to re-historicize Jesus as a much misunderstood Jewish preacher. Hence Paul, the first true Christian who didn’t know Jesus in the flesh [*sic*; apparently overlooking that there were others before Paul, whom Paul tried to destroy], is now accorded almost sole *credit*—or *blame*, if you will—for *inventing Christianity*, by hijacking his master’s original message and initiating the resultant new religion’s fateful *anti-Judaism*” (p. 40; emphasis mine). Here we see at work between Chilton and his reviewer the agreement that Paul invented Christianity, however labeled or nuanced, yet the very different evaluations that interpreters who are Christian versus Jewish may make about that development—whether something to celebrate or bemoan, because of their personal stake in the outcome of that new religion’s place in the world.

Krausz then brings to bear the topic of his review: “No wonder then that in ‘Rabbi Paul,’ Bruce Chilton, a professor of religion at Bard College and a Roman Catholic priest [*sic*; actually, an Episcopalian priest], pronounces the founder of Christianity ‘the most successful religious teacher history has ever seen.’ Chilton’s hyperbole is not without some justification. As Oxford professor Geza Vermes has argued succinctly, ‘No Paul, no Christianity’” (p. 40). Skipping to the very different ideological payoff the reviewer understands to result, and here seeks to make explicit, Krausz declares, based on a similar interpretation of the passages to which Chilton has appealed: “Yet what’s remarkable about ‘Rabbi Paul’ is the extent of Chilton’s efforts to

re-Judaize Paul to show implicitly how his conversion turned Judaism's loss into humanity's gain. '[T]he apostle,' he writes, 'would insist that he had been sent by Jesus like the other apostles in order to fulfill Israel's purpose, not undermine it.' Would he? *Deriding leaders of the Jerusalem church* (Jesus' original apostles) as 'idolaters' and 'hypocrites'—respectively, for keeping *Shabbat* and *kashrut*—Paul (who had never met Jesus and had little to say about him in all his epistles) promptly *canceled* such hitherto obligatory preconditions as *circumcision* and *allegiance to Torah*. Insisting that Jesus delivered the faithful from 'the curse of the Law,' Paul proudly launched his 'apostolate of the foreskin' as against the benighted creed of 'the circumcisers' (Gal. 2:7). He wouldn't shirk from calling a liturgically obstinate Jew (and by extension all Jews inimical to his message) 'the devil's son... full of all deceit and all fraud... enemy of all righteousness' (Acts 13:10)" (p. 41; emphasis mine). Leaving aside the last comment, which depends upon citing the language of Luke's Acts instead of Paul's letters and a questionable extension of the implications, Krausz's argument that Paul accuses the apostles remaining within Judaism to be "idolaters" signals an allusion to Gal 4:8-10, wherein the traditional (and Chilton and Krausz's) interpretation understands Paul to draw an analogy between returning to idolatry and turning to observance of a Jewish calendar for guidance (hence, Paul against "keeping Shabbat" as indicating "idolaters"). The other observation is based upon a reading of the so-called Antioch Incident related in Gal 2:11-21, where Paul condemned Peter for "hypocrisy" for withdrawing from mixed-table-fellowship with Gentiles to eat at the Jews-only table (hence, Paul is against "keeping... kashrut," and keeping kosher is for "hypocrites"). Krausz then states that Paul canceled circumcision and Torah-allegiance, which are otherwise understood to be preconditions of Judaism. I do not know upon what passages Krausz depends, but will discuss several possibilities below, when undertaking to show specifically that the texts of Paul, as I read them, do not indicate any such things. Likewise, I will seek to explain why the interpretations upon which he depends for his observations about accusations of idolatry and hypocrisy to indicate Paul to be against Jewish calendrical and food observances are easily challengeable as mistaken.

Krausz's then reveals the ideological critique that is at the heart of the review: "Thus, through Paul, an originally Jewish movement *would become the primary source of anti-Semitism in history*. Chilton documents Paul's *turncoat theology* in minute detail while glossing over its *historical implications* entirely. By treating Paul's views in

isolation from some of their (perhaps unintended) consequences, he absolves Paul of culpability. His ‘most *successful* religious teacher’ in history is apparently also *the least accountable.*” (p. 41; emphasis mine). Again, both Chilton and Krausz share the view that Paul was engaged in something that undermined prevailing Jewish theology and later Jewish interests, but their relative valuations are very different: one sees successful development where the other sees a turncoat. Both basically see the same man.

Krausz expresses particular concern lest the reader overlook that Chilton, although writing in accessible style, nevertheless seeks to put forward a scholarly construction: the “blatant conjecturing” upon which Chilton’s portrait turns “can be insidious stuff,” observing that “apparently some respected Christian scholars regard Jewish history as a playground for their frolics of fancy. By implication, such scholarly apologias align with dogma in portraying Jews as the stray sheep who should see the light of reason about Christianity’s enduring Judaistic underpinnings at long last: Why, not only was Jesus perfectly Jewish, but so too was Paul!” (p. 41). Touché.

For one who is about to argue that Paul was “perfectly Jewish,” it is responsible and prudent to begin by addressing the accusation herein leveled. I believe that Krausz offers an important critique of efforts to re-Judaize Paul in which Paul is approached as he has been here by Chilton—and virtually every other interpreter of Paul—as one who created Torah-free Christianity, doing so clearly at the expense of non-Jesus believing Judaism (or Judaisms). That approach has historically carried within it the inescapable logical implication that there is—from the point of view of Paul-based Christianity—something wrong with Judaism for evermore. Leaving aside any effort to assign motives—unlike Krausz’s last comments—and sincerely doubtful that Chilton or other responsible scholars are in any way playing with Jewish history intentionally in the way Krausz might suppose, I seek to take both the historical and ideological implications seriously from a Jewish perspective (which represents my own location), and as far as I am able, with equal concern for Christian and Christian/Jewish relations’ perspectives too. [I trust you will help me to recognize where I may herein fail to do so.]

The point I wish to make is that both Chilton and the reviewer are working with notions of Paul’s relationship to and attitude toward the practice of Judaism and Torah-observance for Christ-believers that are standard, but which ought in my view to be challenged, not least because they carry within them the kind of negative implications that have gone apparently unrecognized, to which Krausz points. If I believed in the

Paul of the arguments made in the book that was reviewed, or those held by the reviewer, I would agree with the assessment that Paul is beyond re-judaizing. The implicit when not explicit criticism of Jewish values should not be masked: that Paul cannot be successfully re-judaized; at least, not in a way that satisfies common Jewish sensibilities, or that of this Christian/Jewish relations critic. Instead, he would be best understood as a renegade founder of a new religion that was contra-Judaism—indeed, contra-Jewishness—at its very core.

The reviewer's negative reaction to the effort is based on a certain portrayal of Paul that is argued by Christian interpreters to a different purpose, but it is that portrayal that creates the impasse in Christian/Jewish relations where Paul's voice is concerned. I believe the reviewer's evaluation of the results is legitimate. Chilton does not seem to recognize the beast his construction creates—or better, feeds. At the same time, the reviewer may not understand the ideologically desirable result (for Jews) that his review makes plain is based on continuing down a simplistic historical and intellectual course: that Paul, so long as he represents a non-Torah-based religion, remains beyond the pale and represents no viable challenge to Jews or Judaism, including those forms of Judaism that may not themselves otherwise emphasize the observance of Torah in the traditional ways.

Progress in Christian/Jewish relations is best made, in my view, by naming the obstacles to it as clearly as we can: the traditional construction of Paul, even with some elements altered to look a little more Jewish, is an enormous obstacle, and his voice must be mitigated rather than studied more closely if the kind of mutuality that many of us hope to achieve is to be realized. Before we attempt to make what amount to merely modifications to that Paul, we must recognize that a decision to proceed on that tradition-bound course ineluctably traps Christianity (so it seems to me) into defining itself—with that portrayal of Paul!—into being *not-Judaism*, if not always anti-Judaism. In other words, Christianity can not define itself independently, on its own terms, free from reference to being something other than Judaism, if it defines itself or is defined by others based upon the Torah-free Paul as understood by both Chilton and Krausz, along with most scholars, Christian and Jewish. At the same time, working from that Paul similarly traps Judaism into being and remaining *not-Christianity*. Is continuing the legacy of contra-narratives—albeit with modifications—our only viable choice?

1) Paul's voice as traditionally interpreted presents a significant obstacle to making progress in Christian/Jewish relations, indeed, even in Protestant/Catholic or Liberal/Conservative Christian relations—although inter-mural Christian, or for that matter inter-mural Jewish relations are not the matters I seek to address herein. While I propose that Paul can be understood in more helpful ways than he has usually been; it would be going much too far to suppose that Paul can serve as *the*, or even as a “model” for Christian/Jewish relations. *He cannot.* His is not a neutral voice, but that of one who became a believer in Jesus as Messiah. Yet the historical Paul, as I read him, does not represent the anti-model either.

The Paul I meet in these texts remained a Jew who practiced Judaism, and the communities he formed were Jewish subgroups, Judaisms—not the Jewish-free and Torah-free communities usually attributed to him. This historical Paul thus confronts the prevailing judgments of the Paul of traditional Paulinism—which stands for a kind of Christianity that is essentially gentilized, conceptualized as post Judaism—and the various ways that Paul has been used by various interest groups in the development and legitimation of their various agendas.

I also do not propose that a new reading of Paul *will* eliminate all of the differences between contemporary Judaism for Jews and Christianity for Christians—nor that it *should*. Nevertheless, we should strive to get our facts straight, to make our interpretations as historically probable as possible, and thereby get our differences right, instead of exaggerating them needlessly, or basing our understanding of them on misunderstandings of the historical developments from which they result. I believe that revisiting the interpretation of Paul's texts will result in a new level of recognition of similarities, and make more clear that the differences were originally not in terms of values, but of faith decisions about where we stand on God's timeline for bringing about the restoration of creation, and thus, what follows logically from the alternative reactions to that proposition. Rather than manipulating the traditional portrait of Paul to develop new opportunities in Christian/Jewish relations, we should make our best effort to listen to Paul in entirely new ways, testing new hypotheses for interpretations of his arguments, and then decide what to do with him in terms that speak to our concerns today.

2) Unlike some historical figures of his time who might be studied historically free of a great deal of ideological religious concern, such as say Plutarch or Seneca, no Christian or Jew reads Paul entirely free of self-interest:

a) *Everyone comes to the reading of Paul with a conception of Paul, whether developed with effort, or from assumptions.* Many Jews approach him with the prior knowledge that he was a renegade and worse than that, that he was anti-Jewish in a way that directly contributed to the harm the Jewish people have experience at the hands of Christians. Many Christians come to Paul with a picture of a great theologian of God's sovereignty and grace intent on resisting any human basis for boasting or attributing deep meaning to ritual, such as are assumed to be the problems with Judaism (Judaism, of course, often serving for Protestant critics as a cipher for criticisms aimed at Catholicism). Many perceive Paul to be extremely authoritarian, for some that means arrogant and inflexible, for others that means principled regardless of the social cost. Many believe Paul may have acted Jewish when it was expedient for him to do so to reach his fellow Jews. That approach proceeds on the basis that he was doing so without actually being so (which raises the problem of portraying him as deceitful, however justified or worded, since the Jews he would reach by this pretend behavior would then be expected to do the same thereafter in order to win/trick other unsuspecting Jews, a self-perpetuating strategy, trick, or lie—depending on your point of view). And so on. But on the issue of whether Paul continued to uphold the value of Jewish identity, Mosaic covenant, and the observance of the Torah, almost all Jews and Christians agree that *he did not*. They believe—and their arguments betray the conviction even when otherwise asserting that Paul remained a Jew, perhaps even that he continued to understand himself within the bounds of Judaism—that he actually, intentionally abandoned the central tenets of Judaism, such as the irrevocable election of Israel and the enduring role of Torah. In effect, Paul cannot be defined as practicing the prevailing identifying and halakhic standards of a religious first-century Jew. I do not agree.

b) *It is important to recognize how "Paul" has been constructed and used by Christians as the founder of Christianity (to negatively value Jewish identity, beliefs, and behavior), and by Jews in response (to negatively value and trivialize not only these Christian claims but also the founding of Christianity by an apostate).* Of lasting influence for Jewish perceptions of Paul has been the narrative of Heinrich Graetz. In his influential *History of the Jews*, Graetz

observed that Paul was the great “destroyer of Judaism,” from which Paul sought to separate his new religion, Christianity, to be its mirror opposite.¹ This viewpoint continues to ring out in the way Paul is used by both Jews and Christians to justify their suspicions of the other as the antithesis of themselves. Samuel Sandmel put the matter succinctly: Paul has been for Christians “the whip with which... scholars beat Judaism.”² In addition, although not really concerned with Paul or Christianity per se, this portrayal of Paul has lent itself also to being a whip employed by Jewish factions in intra-Jewish conflicts since the 19th century Jewish Enlightenment.³ Advocates of so-called progressive versus traditional positions and vice versa, have striped each other for representing alternately that which is wrong with Judaism (e.g., in terms of universalism versus particularism and pluralism versus ethnocentrism, relative significance of scrupulous rigor versus accommodation, etc.), acknowledging, on the one hand, with that Paul, the pressing need for reforms. On the other hand, traditionalists have demonstrated by way of that Paul what is wrong with moving in so-called progressive directions that lend creditability to such a renegade who became the founder of a wholly different religion, making clear how harmful such developments have continually proven to be to Judaism. At the same time, even among liberals, positive valuation of the place of Law is sometimes asserted, arguably, in order to make clear the continued distance from the antinomianism understood to characterize Paul’s critique of Torah.⁴

¹ Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 2.228.

² Baeck, *Leo Baeck on Christianity*, 16.

³ Many specifically *intra-Jewish* tensions are traced by Daniel Langton in his forthcoming essay in *JSNT* (Langton, “Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul”); and see Brumberg-Kraus, “A Jewish Ideological Perspective.” Fuchs-Kreimer observes that the four major functions of Jewish writings on the New Testament in the modern period were: “1. To defend the integrity of first-century Judaism and, by extension, modern Judaism against the perceived attack in New Testament writings. 2. To define a boundary between Judaism and its ‘other’ in the West, Christianity, in order to justify the continued separate existence of the Jewish people. 3. To link Jews with the majority culture by establishing a bond between Judaism and treasured aspects of Christian civilization. 4. To enable Jews to learn from and be challenged by a rediscovered Jewish, albeit sectarian, source for Jewish thought within the New Testament” (Fuchs-Kreimer, “The ‘Essential Heresy,’” 8-9).

⁴ Fuchs-Kreimer, “The ‘Essential Heresy,’” 13-16.

In other words, the prevailing portrait (including the variety of portraits drawn on the same basic canvas) of the historical Paul has a purpose to serve for each faith tradition. In Jewish groups it has been used to demonstrate and privilege one's particular Jewish group from other Jewish groups, as well as all Christian ones. Similarly, various Christian groups use Paul to legitimate their self-identity relative to their relationship to or distance from his voice. The point is that we are interested in Paul not because we are interested in Paul, but because we are interested in something else dear to our self- and group-identity in which Paul, as we interpret him, can be brought to bear. That is only natural.

It is interesting to note (with Krausz) that the prevailing traditional portrait of Paul as the founder of Christianity is a relatively modern development, traced to changing perceptions of Jesus that arose in the mid- to late-19th century. During the rise of historical criticism in that period, which for the first time included the participation of Jewish scholars in NT research, Jesus became recognized as a Jew who remained within Judaism instead of the founder of Christianity. That trend has continued to our own time, with the recognition of Jesus as a respectable Jewish rabbi now considered too obvious to contest. As a result, Paul became the architect of a religion "about" Jesus, but "unfaithful" to him, depending upon one's point of view, of course.⁵ Never mind the contradiction John Gager observed, that somehow the founder of Christianity was also the quintessential first convert to it. Anyway, constructing Paul became central to constructing the distance perceived to exist between Judaism and Christianity in a manner that had not previously been the case. Indeed, Paul was hardly ever discussed in Jewish writings prior to this development, for Jesus was the apostate instead, probably because Jews were not involved in close examination of these texts, and they were not in a position to critique the religion of the dominant culture without fear of negative consequences. Since then, the common refrain of Jews can be succinctly captured in this phrase, somewhat ironically of course, "Jesus, yes; Paul, may it never be!"

⁵ See discussions by Fuchs-Kreimer, "The 'Essential Heresy'"; Heschel, *Abraham Geiger*; Eisenbaum, "Following in the Footnotes"; Gager, "Scholarship as Moral Vision"; Langton, "Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul'."

To the degree that Christianity defines Paul's religion against Judaism, as not-Judaism, it paradoxically perpetuates Judaism as the signifier of Christianity. Thereby, Christianity cannot be defined on its own terms as beautiful without defining itself in oppositional terms to Judaism as not beautiful. At the same time, Judaism is trapped into responding, especially since Christianity has been in control of the world in which Judaism operated, and thus, in control of how the official story was told, depriving Judaism of its own story told in self-referential positive terms. Judaism has several strategies available to itself to respond, but the point is that it too must thereafter engage in counter-history, in defining itself against the Christian other, which has first defined itself against Judaism. Christianity becomes in this process the signifier of Judaism as not-Christianity—and Paul becomes the signifier of that which is wrong with it. Neither party is free to express their self-identity independent of announcing the distance they achieve from the undesirable attributes of the other; moreover, neither is free to acknowledge much less celebrate the positive attributes that the other upholds as most important—including the exemplification of values that are central to their own self-identity. That spiral of identity counter-claims makes the advancement of Christian/Jewish relations difficult if not insurmountable, not least where the voice of Paul is brought to bear.

Since every interpreter stands on one side of this divide, is it possible to challenge the interpretive tradition on either side without privileging one's own interests in the outcome? The answer must almost certainly be, "No, it is not possible"; but at the same time, "Yes, we can do better than we have done in the past!" To that end I hope to contribute, especially by keeping our focus on the quest to understand the historical Paul, who existed before the emergence of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism in the forms by which the various participants in that quest are now in certain ways constrained.

3) In the past 30 – 40 years, the traditional Christian concept of Jewish works-righteousness from which Paul supposedly sought escape, as one would expect any self-respecting person (and I would add, any Jew) to do, has been powerfully challenged as mistaken. That construction of Judaism was based upon an interpretation of Paul's polemical comments that negatively valued Judaism as trapped in a legalistic plight to keep the many commandments of Torah in order to attain

salvation, and thus caught in a spiral of self-righteous boasting and self-assertion, outward-oriented ritualism intended to impress others, exclusivistic pride toward non-Jews, and so on. Its primary framework as a polemic fashioned by reformers of Roman Catholic traditions, which read “Jews” and “Judaism” to connote Catholics and Catholicism, has been more fully recognized to have distorted the original rhetorical and historical situations of Paul’s Jewish context, and projected onto Jews and Judaism problems that arose within the framework of a different religious system and time; namely, Christianity. This challenge, first from Jewish voices who sought to speak for Judaism on its own terms—e.g., as spiritually oriented and based upon God’s mercy and lovingkindness [grace]—although largely unheard,⁶ was finally recognized among Christian interpreters of Paul in the second half of the 20th century, largely through the efforts of scholars such as Krister Stendahl, W. D. Davies, E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, among others who represent the so-called New Perspective(s) on Paul.⁷

⁶ Exemplifying this point are comments by the Jewish scholar Schoeps, *Jewish-Christian Argument*, 40-52, 165 (and already stated without alteration in the first version of 1937! [Schoeps, *Jüdisch-Christliches Religionsgespräch*; title altered for revised version from which the English translation was made: Schoeps, *Israel und Christenheit*]). Schoeps writes on 41: “What is the actual point of the Pauline view, the Christian evaluation of the law? Seen from a vantage point within Judaism, it is a misconception of monstrous proportions; for all Christian polemic—and especially modern Protestant polemic against the law—misconstrues the law of the Jews as a means of attaining justification in the sight of God (so-called ‘justification by works’). Wherever Protestant theologians today seek to use Luther’s language, they take over his point of view, which often simplifies far too much. The righteous demands of God’s law, which in reality is intended to confirm the covenant, are unintentionally put on the same footing as the actual ‘justification by works’ of the medieval Catholic Church, at least in its degenerate form. And all this because, after his experience on the road to Damascus, Paul was no longer able to understand what he, as a scholar, had surely known previously: that the law of the Torah was given, not to make the Jews righteous and acceptable before their Father in Heaven, but precisely because it proclaims the holy *will* of their Father in Heaven.... The rabbinic praises of the law can be understood only in this sense of fulfilling God’s will, and never in the sense of some ethics of merit, no matter how fashioned.” Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 4-9, 33-36, notes some other examples of which he was already aware, including C. Montefiore, G. F. Moore, and S. Sandmel.

⁷ Stendahl, *Paul*; Davies, *Paul*; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul*, 183-214 (“The New Perspective on Paul”).

4) Although much has changed about the perception of the Judaism with which Paul was in dialogue, not as much has changed in the interpretation of Paul. He appears either not to have understood Judaism, to have misrepresented it, or to have been somewhere in between these two extremes. Moreover, the portrayal of Judaism, even though often attributed to Judaism by way of characterizations of so-called Jewish Christianity, indeed, I think probably because of this move, has not really emerged from the oppositional portrayal of Judaism in the presentation of cherished Christian values.⁸ Rather than caricaturing Jews and Judaism as arrogant in the sense of seeking to win God's favor by works, the caricature of the new perspective advocates tends to move what is "wrong" with Judaism to ethnocentric exclusivism, to an ungracious attitude toward non-Jews, an unwillingness to share with them their good things from God. This is not the time to engaged in the details of this development, but simply to indicate that the promise of the new perspective for Christian/Jewish relations has not yet been realized, in my view, because it has not yet made sense of Paul's turn to faith in Jesus Christ in Jewish instead of *not*-Jewish terms.⁹ And it has not kept in focus the rhetorical nature of Paul's language and the intra-Jewish context of the audiences it implies. In other words, the construction of Paul undertaken still depends upon the notion that there must have been something wrong with Judaism for Paul to have come to faith in Jesus as Christ, instead of building upon the proposition that this was a result of what was right about Judaism, which could recognize the meaning of such an event for Israel first, but also for the world.

5) To begin to understand the historical Paul, we need to look closely at the historical situations his argumentative concerns imply. Paul's rhetoric concerns Jewish matters. It arises in texts that are written not to Jews but to non-Jews. It deals specifically with implications from his resistance to proselyte conversion for these Gentiles who had come to believe in Jesus Christ. These arguments have traditionally been understood to

⁸ Nanos, "Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric."

⁹ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, 197*, recognizes that his approach to Paul still constructs a Paul whose "view does not provide an adequate basis for a Jewish-Christian dialogue"; see critiques by Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 66-72; Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, 123-25; Kimber Buell and Johnson Hodge, "Politics of Interpretation," 242-43; Nanos, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm" (paper presented at Yale, 2005; available at <<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/projects.html>>).

explain what Paul found to be wrong or out of date with becoming Jewish or valuing Jewishness. But I propose that we meet in this rhetoric Paul's theological legitimization of a change of social policy with his message that resulted in the marginalization of these non-Jews—within the Jewish communal space that his subgroups operated—a bad news consequence of the good news in which they had believed.

It is because of *Paul's* message that *his addressees* could not become proselytes but were not to regard themselves as merely guests either (as expected of non-proselytes in other Jewish groups), but as equal co-members with Jews and proselytes, that *they* were perpetually marginalized on conventional Jewish communal terms of identity for the present age (rather than being the result of new policies by those who opposed these developments, the basis upon which many interpretations seem to proceed). In seeking to support these addressees when they found their expectations were not widely shared—that they remained in an inferior position to proselytes—Paul found it necessary to rhetorically seek to mitigate real Jewish advantage. He explained to these non-Jews that they had actually stepped-up to equal standing with Jews without becoming Jewish proselytes, regardless of the marginalization that they might continue to suffer in the present age, because the new age terms of their identity were not shared by those in charge of protecting Jewish communal norms.

In other words, when making the point that everyone is equal in that they are merely humans, and put on their pants one leg at a time, this does not eliminate the fact that they do not all put on trousers made of the same quality of thread. Or, in a different example, when the one who drives up in their brand new Mercedes wishes to make the point to their conversational partner that has driven up in their banged-up old Mini that the car does not make one better than another, that does not mean that each will not drive away in their respective car. Yet Paul's dissociating rhetoric, wherein he expresses the relative merit of his Jewish advantages vis-à-vis the perceived disadvantages of his non-Jewish addresses, interpreters suppose to mean that he no longer regards them to be of any value. It should be recognized, however, that they have no value to undermine if they have no value, if he does not still possess the advantages, and if they are not real advantages in the communities of those addressed. It was because Jewish identity was a precious stone that Paul found it imperative to make it clear that *if* it was made the basis for undermining the equality of identity in Christ shared with Jews by non-Jews, it was of no more *advantage* than dog waste (Phil 3:3-12). No matter how

much of an advantage, these non-Jews now had—before God and other Christ-believers—the same quality of standing as Jews, as righteous ones of God. This would be proven when the yet awaited age was fully realized. Such qualified comparative rhetorical points, if emptied of their context and universalized, no longer represent Paul’s historical voice.

Paul’s arguments depend on the proposition that this policy of non-proselyte conversion is consistent with the Shema’s declaration of God’s oneness, to which Paul appealed, based on his belief that the end of the ages had dawned. At that time, he believed, in keeping with at least a strand of Jewish interpretation of eschatological expectations, all of the nations were to join with Israel in the worship of the Creator God, living righteously in peace. However, they were not then to become members of Israel, not to become Jews by way of proselyte conversion; rather, they were to remain representatives of the other nations as expected with the arrival of the age to come, when the wolf and lamb will dwell together in shalom. The God who is the One God of Israel is the One God of all the nations; the Lord God of Israel is the creator God of all humankind. The new community of faith consists of Israel and representatives from all of the nations together as one worshipping the One God of all the world.

In Paul’s view, if representatives of the other nations became members of Israel in order to join in this worship, as proselyte conversion provides, that would undermine the proposition that the end of the ages—understood to consist of Israel *and* the Nations together worshipping the One God—has already dawned in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the World. But I am getting ahead of myself. It is time to discuss some of Paul’s texts, so see why I propose that we read Paul as a Torah-observant Jew of his time who was not proclaiming allegiance to a new religion, but the restoration of Israel and the inclusion of the nations, in expression of a Jewish hope that was a central tenet of Judaism—and one that still is. The difference is not one of kind, but of time. It involves different answers to the questions: What time is it? With Jesus Christ, has the end of the ages begun?

Discussion of Paul as Torah-Observant (or not) in Some Exemplary Texts

(NRSV translation introduces each passage; some translations in discussions are mine)

Let us examine a few of the texts that have traditionally been understood to demonstrate that Paul's change of course was a change of religious affiliation, a renunciation of the continued role of Torah-observance as an expression of faith for all Christ-believers. Instead, I will test the hypothesis that Paul remained faithful to prevailing halakhic behavior for an observant Jew, allowing for variation between Jewish groups but upholding that whatever the standards from group to group and place to place, Paul would have been understood to represent a lifestyle that we would today label Torah-observant, Orthodox, traditional—*mutatis mutandis*. The salient difference would arise in the halakhic details that a change of policy toward the identity and thus interaction with non-Jews as members instead of guests created: for example, the non-discriminatory seating of these non-Jews at a table, or the equal distribution of the food and drink to signify the equality of the nations that the good news proposition of the dawning of the end of the ages creates; however, not with respect to the choice and preparation of the food itself (which would be guided by "traditional" Jewish norms for the area). In fact, I will work with the notion that his rhetoric makes the most sense when it is approached as written to non-Jews who knew Paul (when among them or by his reputation amongst themselves) to be wholly observant—a circumcised Jew who observed—make that *guarded*—the whole Torah (cf. Gal 5:3 with 6:13). Hence, just as one reads the rabbis without suspecting them of failure to observe Torah when they seem to argue in sometimes audacious ways, and exhibit a wide range of opinions on any matter under debate, I suggest the following approach to Paul:

1) Whatever Paul argues should be read as issuing from the hand of one who is Torah observant. Let us see if this can make sense of his message.

2) In almost all cases, whatever Paul argues should not be universalized across the Jewish/Gentile or Israelite/members-of-other-Nations line. One might attach the phrase "for (Christ-believing) non-Jews" or "for a (Christ-believing) non-Jew" to virtually every proposition Paul upholds, rather than filling in "for every person" or "for every Christian," as traditionally implied when not stated.¹⁰

3) Paul's concerns address these non-Jews and their concerns. They arise in most cases from marginalization within Jewish communities as well as prevailing Roman and

¹⁰ The subject of my Yale paper, "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm"; available at <<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/projects.html>>.

Greek or other indigenous communal groupings of their time and place. At risk are status and other forms of social marginalization with its psychological and economic and political and religious effects that result directly from conformity to the identity and behavior propositions of the message of Jesus Christ.

4) While there is of course the need to deal with every text and especially those that have been traditionally privileged to construct the portrait of Paul's negative disposition toward Judaism and continued Jewish behavior for Christ-believing Jews as well as Gentiles, equal weight should be given to those texts that do not run in that direction.¹¹ It is time to put in the mix for constructing Paul and articulating his ethos Paul's declarations that, e.g., Torah is "spiritual" (Rom 7:14), that as a gift of God to Israel the Mosaic covenant is "irrevocable" (11:29), that Christ-believing Jews are to remain "in that state," i.e., remain Jews and thus Torah-observant (1 Cor 7:17-24), and that it is "keeping the commandments of God" that matters in the end of the day (v. 19).

Gal 1:13-16:

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being....

This text has been understood to mean that Paul formerly lived in Judaism, but that he no longer is identified with Judaism, and does not practice it. He is instead identified with something else and practices it, namely, Christianity, even if not yet so called. The Greek phrase τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφήν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ can be translated to read, "my former way of living (lifestyle) in Judaism," that is, moving the implication not to a change of religion from Judaism to something else, but a relative change of some aspect of lifestyle within or among Jewish religious groups, or even to a new way of living within a Jewish group. He now lives in Judaism (Jewishly) in a new way.

That this is a responsible translation and understanding of the language is witnessed by the fact that Paul refers within this statement to a particular Jewish group

¹¹ See the helpful formulation of this matter in Gager, *Reinventing Paul*.

in which he formerly operated, namely, the Pharisaic groups, which were defined by allegiance to their interpretation “of the traditions of the fathers.”¹² Moreover, Paul *had formerly lived within* that group in a particular *Judaism* that he claims his fellow members failed to match in their way of living within that Judaism, for he was more zealous for upholding *that Jewish group’s traditions* than his peers. Indeed, he had lived like one who, unlike the rest, sought to destroy the rival Jewish groups that he felt transgressed the traditions upheld by that Judaism in some (unexplained) way by how they lived based on their claim to faith in Jesus Christ.

Two specific ways arise to understand his dissociating rhetoric (from his former way of living in that Judaism, before a Christ-believer himself) that do not suggest any move away from Judaism itself per se: either he moved away from Pharisaism (from Pharisaic Judaism) in his current way of living (i.e., as a member within a different Judaism), or he moved away from a certain element of his way of expressing his zeal for the traditions of the fathers (i.e., from a certain element of Pharisaic Judaism that formerly drove him to such opposition to Christ-believers with Judaism). It seems to me that the latter option is implied. However, whether Paul left Pharisaism or not, he states that he no longer seeks approval from his (former) Pharisaic compatriots (the former contemporary Judean peers [συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου] among whom he had sought approval previously) when he says his approval and status is established by God, not human agency or agents (cf. 1:1, 10-16). I suppose that the distinction is one he seeks to make from Pharisaic approval, from which consensus his Christ-faith has led him to alienation, and more (if his former peers were now to be as zealous as was he formerly, and thus to seek to destroy his work, the severest form of disapproval).

In this same direction, today one may not have much trouble understanding the statement made by a fellow Christian that he or she is now living as a Christian in a way different than formerly. That can be taken to mean that he or she has changed affiliation, e.g., from Catholic to Lutheran or vice versa, or to suggest that he or she lives differently as a Catholic or Lutheran than he or she had formerly. Perhaps with more or less zeal, more or less observance according to the traditional or progressive interpretations of norms, and so on (e.g., from subscribing to a supersessionist

¹² Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297, 408; 17.41; cf. Baumgarten, “Pharisaic Paradosis.” Paul refers to himself as a Pharisee in the context of referring to his zeal to persecute the Christ-believers (Phil 3:5-6).

understanding of Christianity toward Judaism to upholding the aims of The Christian Scholars Group for Christian-Jewish Relations). In other words, Would such language be taken in the first instance to suggest that he or she was no longer living as a Christian in some way? If he or she wished to say that they were no longer living as a Christian, the most unambiguous way to communicate that is not with the kind of circumlatory language we meet here, but with a clear statement that one used to “be” a Christian, or e.g., a Catholic, but that one is no longer a Christian, or e.g., a Catholic.

All it takes to move from taking Paul’s language here to denote that he left Judaism (for a different religion; i.e., Christianity), to the working hypothesis I propose, is for those to whom he wrote to have known him still to live within Judaism, and for interpreters to imagine that possibility when reading this language instead of assuming or proposing that they know him to no longer do so. Paul’s possessive language about the traditions of the father, when stating the traditions of “my” fathers, and not merely of “the” fathers as if no longer of value to him and his self-identity, perhaps betrays just how far Paul was from the later understanding of him as no longer living in Judaism at this point.

Paul does not tell his readers here why he had been trying to destroy the Christ-believing Jewish groups, but he does refer to his activity as “persecution.” This is an interesting admission, because persecution is not what he would have likely called it when involved in that activity. He would almost certainly have believed himself to be engaged in behavior appropriate in response to *the discipline warranted* by certain members of these groups. Persecution is a subjective way of describing activity believed to be suffered inappropriately. And from Paul’s vantage point now, as one who suffers the disciplinary activities of his Jewish peers and regards that to be persecution, that is, inappropriate, because of the revelation of Christ which makes Paul’s behavior upright and thus not subject to disciplinary activity—if the perpetrators of such activity saw things aright, with Paul. Paul does not tell us what it was that aroused his former activity, but he does tell us in 5:11 why he is himself now being “persecuted”—i.e., disciplined. That is because he does not convert those non-Jews who turn to God through Jesus Christ into proselytes. Otherwise, he states, he would not be persecuted. This implies that the issue does not arise because of messianic claims for Jesus per se, or from failure to uphold and observe a Torah-based halakhic lifestyle as a Jew. Rather, it arises from his particular Jewish group’s propositional claim that challenges prevailing

tradition for how to incorporate non-Jews (through proselyte conversion) into full membership among the people of God in the present age; namely, by teaching against proselyte conversion for members of these subgroups. Because that propositional claim creates unavoidable social (and theological) implications for others who do not share it, it requires legitimation. Justification is offered based upon the underlying propositional claim of these groups that Jesus is the Christ who has brought the awaited change of aeons, which the Spirit of God has demonstrated to be the case, which warrants—make that requires—this change of policy toward non-Jewish Christ-believers.

It is logical to suppose that this gives us a window into the reason Paul formerly sought to discipline—i.e., persecute—Jewish believers in Jesus. Against the prevailing view that these Jews had abandoned or been lax in Torah-based halakhah, or alternatively, that proclaiming Jesus as Messiah was that objectionable per se, it makes sense to suppose that what Paul objected to was the manner in which these Jews were teaching non-Jews (members of the nations other than Israel) to identify themselves—as full members of Abraham’s family apart from proselyte conversion. What Paul formerly persecuted as wrong, he now champions as right.

Note that when Paul describes the revelation of Christ “in him” that leads to this change of lifestyles, it is specifically his vocational call to proclaim Jesus Christ “among the nations” that is mentioned, not a call to leave Judaism, or to leave behind the observance of Jewish halakhah. It is instead to bring the light to the nations, a fully Jewish aspiration based on the ideals of Torah and in keeping with the prophetic ideology that Israel’s special role was to bring the knowledge of her God to all of the nations in the end of days (more below). Nevertheless, he did not seek the approval of his Pharisaic brothers (i.e., “flesh and blood”; “human agents” and “agency”) on that point, presumably, because he was quite aware that apart from a revelation similar to his own, there would be no approval of his claim that the time had now begun for reaching the nations with this message of the arrival of the age to come.¹³ We will come

¹³ I believe Paul differentiated between his lack of concern for approval from humans (signifying Pharisaic Judaism and other Jewish groups that opposed his ideas and policies) from his belated approval from the other leaders of his Christ-faith based coalition (the other apostles, whose approval he did eventually seek, and gain). The failure to observe this difference at work in Paul’s rhetoric and the Pauline versus Jewish Christianity construction from which most interpreters work, are mistaken, in my view, and represent obstacles to the kind of improved Christian/Jewish relations that the re-reading in

back to this theme. The point at hand is that Paul's language here can quite easily be understood to mean the opposite of its traditional interpretation.

Paul describes a change of vocation, not a conversion to a new religion. His religious group affiliation has also changed so that he no longer gains the approval of his former Pharisaic peers for his change of policy toward the way non-Jews are included within Jewish groups. That change is based upon a revelation—not reasoning together from Scripture or based upon his former group's interpretation of the traditions of the fathers—that has changed his perception of the time and thus the place of the people of the nations: they are now to receive the message of the dawning of the age to come in Jesus the Messiah of Israel as the Savior of the Nations as well. Hence, they are not become proselytes of Israel, for reasons to be discussed more below.¹⁴

Gal 4:8-11:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

Chilton and his reviewer agree on the traditional reading of this passage, if not the valuation of the implications. That reading understands Paul to analogize observing the Jewish calendar with returning to idolatry. Chilton puts the matter this way: "keeping the festivals and Sabbaths of Judaism is as bad as serving idols [Galatians 4:8-11].... he [Paul] blasted any gesture by Gentile Christians toward an acceptance of Judaism."¹⁵ Interestingly, Chilton also argues that Paul's approach did not win the day. Instead, he writes, "[m]ore than a century after Paul there is excellent evidence that the Galatians were in fact keeping the calendar of Judaism, celebrating Easter in a tight correspondence with Passover, and observing regulations of food purity" (p. 195). I say

this direction offers. This is the topic of my current project, *Rival or Representative: Reevaluating Paul's Relationship with the Jerusalem Church*.

¹⁴ Cf. "Rethinking the 'Paul and Judaism' Paradigm," Yale seminar paper, March, 2005; available at <<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/projects.html>>.

¹⁵ Chilton, *Rabbi Paul*, 188.

interesting, because it could well be evidence that they understand Paul in the way I am proposing, thus confirming the success rather than failure of Paul's message advocating Christ-faith within Judaism! Consider the issue in Gal 4:10, where the mention of calendar is made.

Paul analogizes a return to idolatry—consideration of which he ridicules—to observance of a certain calendar. It is clear that the target audience for these remarks were formerly idolaters; hence, non-Jews. The question is, Which calendar is it that Paul fears them to observe, or perhaps more accurately, to be considering to observe? Interpreters have taken it to be the Jewish framework for time-keeping. I don't.

Look closely at the language. It describes the idolatrous calendar of the Romans ("days, months, seasons, years"), not that of the Jews (days, *weeks*, months, seasons, years). The Jews were the only people of the time to observe a seven day cycle—*weeks*, which is conspicuously absent from Paul's description! The Jewish calendar is built around the story of creation, of God's seven day cycle. The Roman calendar is built around the imperial gods and their representative on earth, Caesar. In other words, it is not merely a vague analogy between turning (again) to idolatry and observation of a calendar, but a direct reference to a calendar that turns around idol worship.¹⁶

Why do interpreters suppose Paul to expect his addressees to understand him to be alluding to the Jewish calendar apart from a reference to weeks, and thus suppose that he seeks to analogize any practice of Jewish time to returning to idolatry (from which they have turned to God through faith in Jesus Christ), when the association of a Roman calendar with idolatry is instead a direct one? Because they "know" that Paul has abandoned the Jewish calendar, Judaism. Here one's hypothesis makes all the difference. I believe that Paul has introduced them to life according to a Jewish calendar, if they were not already so accustomed by former attachment to Jewish communities in some manner of guests—in which case, he corroborate its continued relevance. Hence, they know that Paul thinks no such thing as the interpretive tradition supposes. They have begun (or been encouraged to continue) to practice Judaism's notions of time in the company of Paul when he was among them, and by his instruction, just as—because—they have abandoned the meaning of time as measured by adulation of the emperor (they could not of course ignore that calendar), for

¹⁶ See Martin, "Time-Keeping"; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 267-71.

example, in keeping with Jewish communal customs. And there is good reason to suppose that to be the case apart from discussion of this text in Galatians.

In 1 Corinthians 16:8 Paul tells his audience, formerly idolaters rather than Jews (at least his target audience, which has asked about eating idol food), that he will “stay in Ephesus until Pentecost,” that is, until the Jewish festival of Shavuot, celebrating the giving of the Torah to Moses. How would they know when that was unless they were in contact with Jewish communities? More important here, and all the more relevant if Paul’s community(s) are approached as if already separated from Jewish communal gatherings, even purposefully so, are the questions, Why would he mark time in this way? Why would he expect former idolaters to understand him, if he was not practicing, or even more puzzlingly, if he was teaching against ever adopting the Jewish calendar, so that they had not learned to mark time according to that calendar since their entrance into his groups? Even if one argued that they had been former righteous Gentile associates of the Jewish community of Corinth, which most interpreters do not argue in this case, the pertinence of the question of how they would know when that was still pertains, unless understood to be now functioning in Paul’s community within the Jewish community as a subgroup or subgroups. The dating of Pentecost/Shavuot is based upon the dating of Passover, which is observed according to a calendrical system unlike that of the Romans and other indigenous groups under their empire.¹⁷

Paul here describes the addressees’ temptation to return to the observance of civic and family cult, which is a return to idolatry. In practical terms, anyone but a Jew would be obliged to observe the local and imperial calendar in matters such as family and civic cult. To refrain would constitute an affront to normal sensibilities. It would jeopardize the interests of family, neighborhood, and town or city, not only fearing reprisals from human authorities, but even the wrath of the gods. Jews were understood to be different, and in general to be exempt from imperial cult obligations through the daily sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple in honor of Caesar on behalf of Judeans.¹⁸ Yet Paul’s message of Jesus as Lord compelled non-Jews to become more than mere guests of Jewish communities, who would be expected to continue to

¹⁷ For additional arguments from Corinthians and Acts, see David Rudolf, “‘Let Us Celebrate the Feast’ (1 Cor 5:8): Did Paul Advocate the Celebration of Passover at Corinth?” forthcoming, in....

¹⁸ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights; Nanos, Irony of Galatians*, 258-71.

participate in normal cultic activity apart from participation in Jewish communal activities, that is, to remain non-Jews, and thus obliged to the norms for non-Jews of that time and place.

Paul's communities called non-Jews to leave behind their identity as members of the idolatrous world. But how could this be accomplished? Usually, setting out on that course would lead to proselyte conversion, and thus to sharing in Jewish communal rights to abstain from civic cult. But since Paul's non-Jews could not take up that option, it led to an identity that had no place in normal communal terms of the present age.

Hence, we can suppose the non-Jewish addressees' temptation to understand that if they were not becoming proselytes, that they should not burden the Jewish communities with the threat of reprisals from the larger idolatrous communal leaders and citizens for permitting to go unchecked an affront to its norms for ostensibly harboring "should-be" idolaters who were not proselytes, and moreover, not even on the path to gaining proselyte identity. The pressure to conform to the standing norms would have been great. It is not hard to imagine that the addressees were tempted to reduce their dissonant identity and the marginality it created. They could do this within the existing communal norms—Jewish and non-Jewish by agreement, indeed, by Caesar's proclamation—by becoming proselytes, or, alternatively, by returning to some level of idolatrous practice (as expected of Jewish community guests), at least do so sufficiently to avoid the wrath of the larger community and their families and neighbors. They would thereby alleviate the protective concerns of the Jewish community's members, who feared loss of their own privilege to abstain, or worse, because of this breach of communal norms—an exception they claimed to be legitimated by appeal to the meaning of the death of a Judean martyred by the Romans, that is, by their faith in one whom neither the Jewish community at large nor the larger community shared their conviction about.¹⁹

¹⁹ That this privilege of the Jewish communities, granted by Julius Caesar and upheld by his successors, was at times resented and its continuation threatened by local communities is logical (special treatment is often a source of tension with those who are by implication not special, and in this case, there are a number of complicating economic, political, and religious reasons that resentment could arise), and well attested (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.185-267; references in above footnote to discussion of freedom of Jews from imperial cult).

Paul is calling his addressees to resist the temptation to compromise their Jewishness—although not Jews, but members of a Jewish group of Christ-believers—in the face of pressure to continue to celebrate, for example, Caesar cult. Failure to practice imperial cult publicly would be, e.g., analogous to avoiding the draft in the US, or not pledging allegiance to the flag. In the US, the Amish are legally exempt from military service. If during wartime, some American citizens sought exemption from the draft by claiming to be members of the Amish communities when they were not officially Amish, the Amish communal leaders would understandably have a vested interest in making it clear to them, and the American government, that this claim was illegitimate. If the communal identity boundary is allowed to be co-opted by such claims, the legitimacy of their own right to exemption might become challenged, because what was a special case was now subject to abuse in ways that defied the spirit of the law. They may generously offer the option of conversion to negotiate this identity problem, and if so, that would be, I believe, analogous to the proselyte conversion message of the influencers in Galatia. If that offer is rejected, as I suppose was required of Paul's addressees, then the option is to comply with the prevailing larger community's norms: in the Galatian non-Jew's case, to return to the appropriate practice of civic cult, or else suffer the consequences of marginality, and worse; in the non-Amish American's case, to submit to the draft, or accept the consequences of failure to do so.

The point is that Paul is not here analogizing idolatry with observance of the Jewish calendar, upon which the author and reviewer depend, in keeping with almost all interpretations and portraits of Paul. This is a good example of how extensive is the work of building a new portrait of Paul. It requires re-translating and interpreting anew every verse, every argument, re-imagining the rhetorical and historical situations every step of the way—and then challenging the historical and theological systems that depend upon the former interpretations, such as Paul against the Torah-based keeping of time for Christ-believers.

Gal. 5:3:

Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law.

This text has been understood to mean that Paul considers observance of the Torah—the whole Torah—to be an undesirable weight that anyone (i.e., Jew as well as Gentile) would want to avoid. The proposition is so self-evident that Paul can merely bring up the topic to communicate the threat. Is that really what was implied here for Paul and his addressees? I suggest several very different implications.

First, the idea that this is a burden not to be undertaken lightly, or more precisely, to be overlooked and underplayed by Paul's non-Jewish addressees suggests that they have their eyes on a goal other than the one which motivates a Jewish person, or a proselyte, and which should motivate a proselyte candidate. Instead of taking on the responsibility of an Israelite in view of the covenant obligations tied to the covenant promises, they are interested in solving a social identity problem. They want to gain acceptance, to fit in. Their eyes are not on the true meaning of proselyte conversion, on becoming bearers of the yoke of Israel, the one people that has willingly enslaved itself to the creator God. They want to resolve their identity dissonance in the manner that seems to represent good news without the bad news consequences Paul's approach has (unexpectedly?) returned. Paul's approach is consistent with the ironic rebuking style of the letter: it seeks to undermine their motives and magnifies their failure to contemplate the consequences, to understand what is "really" going on. They are naively supposing otherwise. Moreover, Paul's approach undermines their trust in those seeking to influence them with this "apparent" good news.²⁰

Instead of preparing them for the consequences, Paul implies that the influencers have self-interest instead of the best interests of these Gentiles in mind. They have not properly guided them toward the true meaning of proselyte conversion, having perhaps obscured it instead. Rather than urging caution in this weighty decision—a three-fold ritualized warning greets later rabbinic proselyte conversion candidates—they are being "compelled" in this direction by the interests of those influencing them. Elsewhere Paul accuses the influencers of seeking to resolve their own problems, posed by the addressees' failure to have become proselytes, or alternatively, to understand themselves to be merely guests. For example, I read Paul's accusation that those who seek to "compel" the addressees to circumcision yet fail themselves to "guard" the Torah in 6:13 in this same way. It does not imply that they do

²⁰ This is an essential element of my reading of Galatians in Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*.

not concern themselves with Torah-observance, but that their behavior toward these Gentiles is self-serving (“that they may glory in your flesh”) from Paul’s rhetorical point of view, because it represents a failure to observe Torah as they ought, and even more, to protect it (not least, from non-Jews becoming proselytes without being prepared to observe and guard it thereafter!), a responsibility those in such a position ought not to compromise. That they do not share Paul’s point of view toward what is appropriate for these non-Jews is besides Paul’s rhetorical concern, and his emphasis on the failure to guard Torah may well indicate self-awareness of that nuance.

In other words, the implication of this rebuke is that the influencers’ ostensible good news message is good news for themselves, not the addressees. It does not offer the supposed unequivocal terms that it has been represented to promise. It does not resolve the addressees’ identity dissonance without jeopardizing otherwise their faith in Christ (from Paul’s point of view, even if not from theirs), even if they can still hold to faith in Jesus, according to the influencers, while *in addition now* be counted among the children of Abraham on *indisputable* identity terms upon which both Jewish and the larger non-Jewish communities agree.²¹ It may promise to resolve that problem, but can they trust guides who hide the weighty implications that undertaking involves? (At the same time, one wonders if they might not feel the same way about the failure of Paul’s original message to prepare them for the negative consequences of marginality that define their present exigence, which has perhaps provided the basis for the influencers’ appeal, and any criticism toward Paul or his message that they may have leveled, or likely would in reply to the accusations of this letter.)

It is important to point out something here that interpreters of Galatians seem to consistently overlook when they approach the identity and message of the influencers, against which they measure Paul’s rhetoric.²² The influencers are clearly not offering a message about Torah-observance in contrast to Paul’s message! If they were, then

²¹ I understand Paul to be dealing with this nuance in his reference to this other message of good news (which is not another message of good news in Christ) to which he so vehemently objects as coming in alongside the message of good news in Christ, but implicitly undermining the message of good in Christ in a way that the addressees have apparently not been able to recognize in the message that does not concern itself with Christ but with proselyte conversion instead (Gal 1:6-9); cf. Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, esp. 284-316.

²² In a similar direction, although not without some differences, see Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 158-60.

bringing up the topic of Torah-observance that will become incumbent upon them if they should decide to become proselytes would not make tactical sense for Paul. In other words, the rhetoric of Galatians is not set against an alternative good news message of Christ *plus* Torah, as it so often is proposed to be by later interpreters. The issue is *not* Torah-observance. The influencers were not teaching Torah-observance. And that makes sense, because Torah-observance is for Jews, for the people Israel, who have accepted that yoke, and counted it a blessing; the influencers, like Paul, are addressing non-Jews. The issue for these non-Jews is one about *identity*, specifically, *gaining Israelite identity by proselyte conversion* (signified by *circumcision* of males), and it is against that topic that Paul's rhetoric (as well as that of the influencers!) should be measured. The contrast is not between faith in Christ versus Torah or works of Torah (or works-righteousness), but Christ-identity for a non-Jew who remains a non-Jew yet wants to be counted a child of Abraham (i.e., of God), a representative of the nations. Can this be accomplished without gaining proselyte identity?

The issues of identity transformation represented by circumcision—which is not Torah-observance for eight day old Jewish children, but their parents—and behavior, are reasonably easy to distinguish. That difference should be maintained when dealing with the topic of proselyte conversion: proselyte conversion is not so much Torah-observance as one of the ritual elements in the transformation of a person to Torah-identity, and thereafter, to Torah-obligations. I do not mean to neglect the fact that the proselyte candidate as well as the community members he or she will join upon completion of the rite of conversion understand this to be in accordance with Torah, but the point is that there is a different salience to this act of initiation. At issue is not a behavioral injunction for Jews, but a behavioral injunction within the orbit of identity transformation for non-Jews. The liminal state of proselyte candidates defies definitions within tidy boxes, but the distinction between membership entrance requirements and later requirements incumbent upon members and the implications for reading Paul's polemic should not be ignored, but all too often is when setting out the rhetorical context for interpreting Paul's language. Circumcision and Torah-observance are not equally interchangeable terms, as Paul's use of the terms in this verse makes very clear: Paul raises the concomitant topic of Torah-observance to surprise his addressees.

If the traditional contrast of faith (or faith alone) with works was at issue here, Paul certainly misses an important opportunity to score when he writes that what

counts is “faith working through love”; we should expect to read instead “love working through faith” (5:6). The implications should not be overlooked: Paul was not fearful of effort to do what is right, but of failure to do so. The issue is not as often posed, whether a non-Jew should or must become a Jew in order to be a Christ-believer (Christian), but rather whether one who is already a Christ-believing non-Jew should or even can become a proselyte. For Paul, he or she cannot! A Christ-believing non-Jew becoming a proselyte subverts the proposition that in Jesus Christ the end of the ages has dawned, so that non-Israelite nations and Israel together worship the one God of all creation. It instead resolves the matter in terms of the present age, in which only Israelites so worship, and in which only Israel is counted to be the people of God.

Because Paul’s propositional claim to accounting end-times identity among the righteous ones to these non-Israelites is in dispute for themselves and leading to their present marginalization within Jewish communities, Paul thus calls them to perseverance in 5:5, and thereafter, for the balance of the letter. They are to, “out of faithfulness to the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness.” They are not to join in the identity one-upmanship game that some of them undertaking proselyte conversion now would arguably promote, but to make the interests of the other their own, just as the Torah teaches, the so-called ethic of love (5:6, 13-15). They are to eschew self-conceit, provocation of rivalry, and begrudging of any advantages the other might gain, to walk in the way of the Spirit of the age to come, the Spirit by which their identity is now defined (5:25-26). Instead of judging any among themselves tempted to capitulate to the pressure to comply with the prevailing identity propositions on offer, they are to help them, knowing that they too might be tempted to give up the resistance (6:1-5). They are to endure, to “not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.” The behavior enjoined is defined as doing, within the constraints of opportunity: “do good to all men, and especially toward those of the household of the faith [in Christ]” (6:7-10).

On this reading, the instructions of the last two chapters of Galatians arise not because Paul has challenged Torah-observance, and thus must add a caveat against antinomianism, as proposed by most interpreters of Galatians. Rather, these instructions exemplify a call to those whom his message prevents from solving the identity problem that conformity to his message of Christ has initiated: they must accept the continued marginality that results from staying the course of resistance. Like

teenagers whom parents deny the medium that promises to provide peer group acceptance, there is the need to explain the larger consequences and create an alternative roadmap to eventual success if there is to be any hope of convincing the child to resist the powerful forces of conformity and the ineluctable need for social acceptance. So Paul explains that the resistance to which he calls them requires trust in God's enabling Spirit (which they have already experienced, which bears witness to God's guarantee of the identity they claim [3:1-5; 4:29; 5:5, 25], even if not satisfying the influencers' current standards for identity), attending to the needs of each other, and living lives that exemplify the ideals of proselyte identity (fulfilling the intent of Torah, behaving right-eously), without becoming proselytes. When the fullness of the awaited age arrives (which their faithfulness exemplifies in midst of the present [evil] age), their claimed identity among the righteous ones—representatives of the nations other than Israel—will be made manifest for all to see, beyond doubt.

There is a different matter to consider about Paul's rhetorical approach that bears directly on the topic of Paul's own level of Torah-observance, as implied in this statement if it is to have had any force. Does it not imply that the addressees, who know Paul as a Jew, a circumcised male, must know him to observe—even guard (6:13)—the whole Torah? He has the identity they wish to gain in order to escape their new marginality as non-Jews in Jewish communal life who claim equal identity with Jews, as can proselytes, after having found that claim to be denied. If they knew Paul, when among themselves, to have behaved "as one outside the Torah," as most interpreters understand Paul to say he behaved when seeking to win non-Jews to Christ (1 Cor 9:19-21), then why would they believe that being Jewish carried the responsibility to behave Jewishly; Torah-observantly, that is?

If Paul wasn't so obliged, why should they be? Would they not simply be expected to reply, "Paul, we just want what you have: indisputable standing because we will be Jews, even if counted by some other Jews to be sinners for failure to observe Torah? Since you are a circumcised Jew and do not observe much less guard the whole Torah, on what basis do you demand that we would be so obliged?" In fact, regardless of whether they immediately recognized this internal inconsistency in Paul's approach, would not Paul have noticed that this was not a good rhetorical approach to adopt? It takes both Paul and the addressees failing to recognize this problem (which has indeed been the case for interpreters, as far as I can tell) to suppose that it had any rhetorical

teeth, any chance of dissuasion—unless Paul knows that they know that Paul himself takes seriously the obligations that his identity as a Jew entail: full Torah-observance.

One last point. Many seek to phrase the issue of proselyte conversion for non-Jewish Christ-believers from Paul's point of view thus: Paul sought to communicate that one did not "have to" become a Jew in order to become a Christian, or if a Christian, in order to be a good one, or some such thing. Paul in Galatians, especially 5:2-6, makes it plain that a non-Jewish Christ-believer "cannot" become a proselyte. The difference is important, and brings up the question of why this is so. To that topic we will return. Here I want to note that it is mistaken to argue that Paul represented a kind of universalism that Judaism did not similarly offer, since it was open to Jew and non-Jew alike. We see in Paul's denial of proselyte conversion that his approach is particularistic too, albeit in a different way. It would be more universalistic if he allowed proselyte conversion, if it was simply the case that it was *not necessary* (as many phrase the issue) but was permitted to those who wished to take-up that course. He did not approach the problem that way—as this passage makes quite clear. Paul is not as practical or adaptable or motivated by expedience as he is often made out to be. Here we see a principle that limits the options, his and his addressees. Here we see ethnocentrism of the Christ-believing stripe. But is that not an approach that can be understood within Jewish terms? The next passage will continue this discussion.

1 Cor 7: 17-20:

However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.

This is a text upon which I do not need to spend much time. Countless exegetes have thrown up their hands in frustration with this text. It is not logical to suppose that there is neither circumcised nor foreskinned males within Paul's communities, although he does use that kind of language in Gal 3:38. Rather, Paul's point is that there should not

be any advantage to being one or the other, as Gal 6:6 and 6:15 indicate. Males are one or the other. Yet as usually argued, that is, against circumcision as an act of Torah-observance in Paul's theology post Christ-faith, the implication is that there are neither, which cannot be. What that viewpoint does is privilege the natural non-Jewish, i.e., foreskinned state to be the proper state for all (male) Christ-believers. It amounts to making no place among Christ-believers for a Jewish person to retain Jewish identity ("Jews from birth," as Paul refers to himself and Peter in Gal 2:15), which involves circumcising their sons.

Note that Paul here refers not to status transformation as in conversion, but to the state in which you were called, which for Paul, as argued above, involved a vocational reorientation. This can in some ways be argued to correspond to conversion, per Alan Segal, but it is a difference in language that may bear consideration. Paul's use of calling here does not imply a change of social standing along the axis Jew / non-Jew, but along the axis Christ-believer or not, retaining Jewish and non-Jewish identity within that new communal identity. It has been argued to represent a third race, (Sanders, et al), but that is based on the assumption that Paul has left Judaism for Christianity.

If Paul is approached as representing Judaism, then this language describes a subgroup identity within Judaism, a place where Israelites and members of the other nations join together in age to come terms, bearing witness to its arrival, in part, amongst themselves when in community (hence, "a new creation"; Gal 6:15). This new communal subgroup does not seek to supplant Israel, nor to exclude Jewish people who are not yet members of this coalition or subgroup from identity as "the Israel of God."²³ Paul regards some of his fellow Israelites to be presently in a stumbling (not fallen!) state that is somehow in the service of God's overall purpose for the restoration of all Israel, and the reaching of all the nations (cf. Rom 11).²⁴ Unfortunately, Paul himself undermines this otherwise clear point by way of his development of the olive tree metaphor, with some branches "pruned"—akin to "falling" in the stumbling while walking metaphor, where he insists that they have not fallen. The result has provided the basis or justification for those who propose the church has supplanted Israel, with

²³ Cf. Richardson, *Israel*.

²⁴ Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 239-88.

Christian Gentiles replacing non-Christ-believing Jews in the family of God, variously conceived. But this secondary metaphor (one of four Paul employs in chapter 11) is developed not to demonstrate the tree of God's family, as it is so often used, but to censure any Gentile Christ-believers' notions of supplanting and indifference or resentment toward the stumbling of Israel, instead of thinking and acting graciously, since they themselves are oddly placed. They are there only by grace, not because of any superiority that they might imagine; indeed, even their role, as discussed below, is designed to be in the service of Israel's restoration, not in celebration of her defeat. In that purpose—confronting incipient conceit—the olive tree metaphor works fine. It amplifies the overall message that the present state is a temporary anomaly that will soon be rectified. But when later understood by interpreters to signify Paul's view of the Church as the family of God to which Jews can be re-grafted, it instead subverts the force of the stumbling metaphor, wherein even those Jews who are resisting are in a present anomalous state that must not be regarded to represent their having fallen; i.e., they have not been "cut-out." That is a state the olive tree metaphor simply cannot represent well. Pruned branches do not later "stand," despite Paul's mixed metaphorical assertion (v. 20; in v. 22 he also mixes his metaphors, when writing of falling in the midst of the olive tree metaphor).

The point Paul drives home is that regardless of which state one was in when called, their present state requires attending to obedience to God's commandments—even guarding the interests of these commandments rather than the interests of identity as Jew or non-Jew. The noun *τήρησις* can be translated as "keep," or "obey," and carries the sense of "guard" or "watch over." There is no shadow of concern with works-righteousness, but rather, with failure to behave appropriate to the state of Christ-believingness. The details of this behavior are left unstated here, but presumably are the topic of the letter's instructions, and the broader axiomatic propositions and commandments upon which those instructions are based. What more need be said? Does this not sound like a Torah-observant Paul?

Paul's language here brings up a point that corresponds to several points in the previous discussion of Gal 5:3. In Paul's propositional arrangement, a Jew—such as he was—remained in-Christ a Jew, and thus obliged to observe Torah. However, a non-Jew in-Christ remained a non-Jew, and thus not obliged to observe Torah on the same terms as a Jew, since not a Torah-person. Nevertheless, a non-Jew was now obliged to

turn from slavery to sin to slavery to righteousness, which was defined in terms that embody an essentially Torah-observant life (cf. Rom 6:15-23; 13:8-14; Gal 5:6—6:10), the lifestyle incumbent upon a so-called righteous non-Jew (something of an oxymoron).

In the above discussion, we observed in Galatians 5:6, 13-14, that Torah-observance is equated with living in love of one's neighbor. Here we can begin to see that Paul's policy of maintaining identity difference (Jew and non-Jew) without discrimination (within the community of Christ-believers: "neither circumcision nor foreskin counts"; cf. Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:14-15), cannot be so neatly compartmentalized in practice. Although Paul may not openly call non-Jews to Torah-standards in every case, he indirectly brings them to the same place by various means, including by appeal to Torah, first principles, and concern for their neighbor. For what is "all observance" of the commandments but "training in the art of love," as Abraham Heschel so eloquently put the matter.²⁵

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Even interpreters of Paul who are otherwise reconsidering the Jewishness of Paul find themselves stymied by this passage. Here Paul's rhetoric is understood to communicate that he was not Torah-observant as a matter of faith, unlike a Jew who still valued the Mosaic covenant to be active. According to the prevailing interpretations, Paul explains to the Corinthians that he was willing to observe Torah for the expedient purpose of reaching Torah-observant Jews (including proselytes) with the message of Jesus Christ.

²⁵ Heschel, *Between God and Man*, 162.

He was equally willing to forgo Torah-observance to reach non-Jews. Torah was supposedly for Paul *adiaphora*, a matter of indifference.

As several of these same interpreters note, that is a perplexing course for Paul to adopt. Jews might be aware, and later almost certainly would be aware that that Paul has misrepresented himself and the propositional truths of his movement if he was not Torah-observant as a matter of principle; more importantly, if he was a representative of a coalition that actually sought to undermine the continued validity of the Mosaic covenant. What a Christ-believer might rationalize as an effective strategy, a non-Christ-believer would likely regard to be deceitfulness, living a lie that leads unsuspecting positive respondents down a course that eventually brings them to a place that they had no intention of going, on which they would not have begun if they “believed” that to be the outcome. It would seem to be a policy almost guaranteed to lead some if not many to renounce this course once the “truth” became evident.

Perhaps the most problematic issue with approaching the meaning in this way is that it implies that Paul meant to try to preserve the impression that this was a Jewish movement (otherwise, why not boldly exemplify that he no longer behaves like a religiously oriented Jew?). But if Paul seeks to uphold this impression, and it was not actually a movement that upheld the axioms to which it pretended, then—in addition to being downright deceitful—how could Paul think that this was viable or likely to be effective when Jews learned that he also behaved without Torah in the presence of non-Jews, and in his communities of Christ-believers consisting of Jews and Gentiles? It would seem to me that he had enough problems with his propositional claims for non-Jews without adding this element to it, which could be avoided by simply upholding Torah observance as the norm for Christ-believing Jews. Then he could hope to be taken seriously as representing a Jewish group alternative; otherwise, it would seem to be doomed from the start to being a new religious movement, something other than Judaism. One might modify certain halakhot, emphasize different elements, even withdraw from common culture (such as Temple attendance, as did the Dead Sea community, in protest of failure to observe Torah properly, according to their interpretations), but to abandon Torah-based behavior in order to bring in new members from non-Jews would seem to be one of the least principled and least effective options that could be conceived. This point is all the more relevant if weight is given to Paul’s claim that even his mission to the Gentiles was in the service of reaching his

Jewish kin (Rom 11:13-14). One wonders how this strategy, as usually understood, could hope to accomplish that end.

There is also the problem of squaring this traditional reading of Paul's pragmatism with his principled opposition to a similar pragmatic approach when practiced by Peter at Antioch (Gal 2:11-21), as that case is unusually interpreted. As Chilton put the matter: "observing purity at meals is hypocrisy [Galatians 2:13].... he [Paul] blasted any gesture by Gentile Christians toward an acceptance of Judaism."²⁶ Actually, the problem remains even if my interpretation of the Antioch Incident is granted. For I maintain that both Paul and Peter observed halakhic dietary customs at each table, but that Peter's withdrawal was because of social status inequality issues that arose when non-Jews were treated as if full members without having become proselytes, to whom such equality was extended, but not mere guests. Peter sought to dissipate the heat temporarily by choosing the expedient option of refraining from attendance for a short time. Peter had not changed his conviction that non-Jews remained non-Jews yet equals, in agreement with the good news message he shared with Paul. Hence, although Paul did not charge Peter with apostasy (which the prevailing readings seem to me to require), Paul charged Peter with hypocrisy for choosing an expedient solution.

Peter's effort to avoid conflict exposed the principle of the truth of the good news to legitimate criticism. According to Paul, his withdrawal implied that the traditional Jewish proselyte course to gain unequivocal full membership equality was actually still required to attain that standing even among Christ-believing Jews like Peter and those who joined him in withdrawing from the mixed table, although the message he taught—in agreement with Paul—was that it was not required to gain full standing as equals among Christ-believing Jews.²⁷ Yet Paul expresses just such a policy of compromising principles when expedient for achieving his own ends in 1 Cor 9:19-23

²⁶ Chilton, *Rabbi Paul*, 188.

²⁷ For the fullest treatment of the Antioch Incident, see my Nanos, "What Was at Stake?"; also developed in part in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 337-71; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 152-54. [Note: I intend to include a separate discussion of the Antioch Incident and cut down on the mention of my view here...]

(and Romans 14:1—15:13),²⁸ as commonly read. In the other direction, non-Jews led to faith in Christ ostensibly by the proclamation of a Torah-free message, indeed, based on a message predicated upon the basis of Torah's non-relevance for Christ-believers (as Paul's message is usually conceptualized), would likely find this behavior inconsistent at least. It threatens to compromise Paul's message in just the kind of ways he denies to themselves when seeking some pragmatic ways to negotiate social life, including in Corinth (5:9-10 in view of 8:1—10:33, since they cannot eat idol food if they know it to be such).

In my view, Paul is not here explaining how he acts when among Jews versus when among Gentiles. He is describing his rhetorical strategy. He is not admitting to the compromising of Jewish behavioral practices when among non-Jews, and covertly acting Torah-observant-like when among Jews. Rather, Paul is explaining how he relates to each group rhetorically in the midst of doing just that with respect to the issue of eating idol food.

This language arises in the middle of a discussion in chapter 8—10 about whether or not these non-Jewish Christ-believers can eat idol-food. If a Jewish group asked this question (which seems a bit preposterous, unless one believes that Paul teaches Jews to abandon Torah-standards on such matters, as many suppose), Paul would explain to them from Torah why they could not. If a Gentile group asked this question, Paul would proceed to give his reply by appeal to first principles, to inner- and intra-group and even inter-group terms, and to the example of Scripture, that is, in the way we find him proceeding in chapters 8—10. The outcome is the same as if he had taught them from Torah: they cannot eat idol food if they know it to be idol food.²⁹ But he arrives there circuitously, instead of in a straight line from Torah, because his target

²⁸ For my criticism of the prevailing views of the weak and strong in Romans, which includes putting that case into tension with the Antioch Incident in a way similar to the one that I seek to raise awareness of here, see Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 337-71.

²⁹ Paul's approach accords well with the later rabbinic principle articulated in *m. Aboda Zara* 1.5: "And as to everything else, [if] they are left without specification [as to their proposed use], it is permitted, but [if] they are specified [for use for idolatry], it is prohibited." For the implication that Paul's instruction is that they are not to eat idol food if they know it to be such, and spelling out that this was understood to be the case of Christians for centuries, see Tomson, *Paul*; Cheung, *Idol Food*; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*.

audience is not “under Torah” on the same terms as are Jews, by the teaching of his own message of Christ.

Moreover, I do not think it probable that Paul is describing a policy of behaving like the “lawless” or “sinful” (ἄνομος; 1 Cor 9:21)³⁰ to be among the “sinful ones.” That would be no more likely than it would have been for Jesus. He is presented in the Gospels as engaging in a similar policy of fraternizing with Jewish “sinners” and even tax collectors and non-Jews, yet it is not generally held that Jesus behaved sinfully or Gentilely or collected taxes to do so! Relating to sinners does not entail behaving sinfully, but quite the contrary: it behooves one seeking to influence them to behave righteously. However, they presumably do so without expressing the judgmentalism so characteristic of those who attend to such behavior to set themselves off as superior, not least in order to avoid the suspicions of others, including rivals. Many propose Jesus remained Torah observant in these relationships, Why must the assumptions about Paul be so different?

Note that in mentioning this particular effort to relate to sinful ones Paul is quick to avoid being mistaken to mean he behaves like a sinner: “not being sinful (or ‘lawless’) toward God.” When Paul writes alternatively, “I caused myself to become as a Judaeon to the Judeans, in order that I might profit the Judeans,” there is no such caveat attached, as one might expect based on the standard interpretation of his intent (there is a caveat for those “under law,” which is interesting, and I suppose it is a phrase signifying proselytes versus Jews/Judeans from birth). Paul is instead anxious to communicate that he maintains the priority of keeping the commandments, to refer to his language from 7:19.

In this same direction, it is not uncommon for one to relate to various people and groups in various ways appropriate to communicating and enjoying the company of each without being chameleon-like in the manner usually attributed to Paul here. One is at the same time a son, husband, father, employer or employee, religiously affiliated and perhaps recreationally affiliated, and so on. One can negotiate these various identities without the need to contradict the others, at least, it should not be necessary if one is true to who one is in each of these identities and relationships. For example, a father can relate to his teenage child when taking a fishing trip as friends or to enhance

³⁰ Stowers, *Romans*, 134-38.

familial bonds, that is, he can put off emphasis on the role of father and accentuate the role of fishing buddy. This need not require any behavior unbecoming to his role as father, although it may become necessary to switch roles at points along the way in order to establish boundaries that still pertain, that define the norms of friendship amongst themselves. There are grey areas that may arise in the process, and the salience of father or friend might rise and fall along the way. The same kind of analogy can be drawn for a professor and students: there is a point where you relate as fellow students, fellow fans, fellow sufferers, fellow sport players, and so on, yet without ever compromising the standards of identity as a professor. Indeed, such compromising behavior would undermine rather than enhance one's creditability.

The point is simply that identity is multifaceted, and there is no reason to suppose that Paul behaved like a sinner to relate to sinners and like a Torah-observant Jew merely to relate to such Jews. He could remain Torah-observant and relate to sinners as well; indeed, all the better, because he exemplified that to which he sought to convince the sinner to turn, from slavery to sin into slavery to righteousness. At the same time, this argument can be taken in the other direction: Paul could remain non-Torah-observant and relate to Torah-observant Jews, and it would be more honest to do so, since that is the direction in which he sought to lead them, if they believed his report. But could he do so and actually represent or even pretend to represent a viable Jewish group and alternative in the present age? Would it even occur to Paul as an option to explore?

I am not sure that my argument here suggests Paul is a consistently Torah-observant Jew as a matter of principle, but I do think that this reading throws into doubt the consensus view that here we meet a Paul who could not have been so. Indeed, the writer of this text could practice Torah-based halakhah rigorously, but be adaptable in his rhetorical approach and way of relating to others so that his new defining identity in Jesus Christ was not compromised regardless of the groups to which he sought to relate the reasons why that was so for him. Unlike the implied interest of those who wished to eat idol food to assert their standing in Christ without having become proselytes, regardless of the effect on others, Paul calculates the implications of his choices and persona in order not to give offense: he chooses to behave with "self-control" in order to "win the more." Can that be construed to mean

with no regard for guarding Torah in every situation in which he might find himself? I don't think so.

Rom 11:29:

for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

It is interesting to note what Hans J. Schoeps regards to follow logically from the proposition that, "If God is the God of truth, there can be for Jews no salvation other than within the law of the *berîth*, the covenant which God concluded with the fathers, which cannot be revoked or annulled." Thus, "Contrary to his own theory, Paul himself is forced to admit this (Rom. 11:29): 'For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.'"³¹

The view Schoeps expresses is widely held. In fact, Joseph Sievers' investigation of the interpretative tradition on this verse demonstrates that until recent years it has hardly been discussed even in commentaries, although it has become an important one in Christian/Jewish relations, from Pope John Paul II's reference to the "people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God,"³² to its central place in many Catholic as well as Protestant reappraisals of their tradition's valuation of Jews and Judaism.³³ Otherwise, this passage has been regarded to be an anomaly to be given little weight in developing a portrait of Paul and his theology. The language just doesn't make sense of the traditional Paul, who understands the election of Israel to have fulfilled its role, and the blessings (but not curses!) of the Mosaic covenant and all of the rest of those promises to pertain now only to those who believe in Jesus Christ, Gentile and (former) Jew alike. I believe that approach is mistaken. Here is a clear signal that that Paul just doesn't work.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he lists many of the gifts to the called ones of Israel. These include being "entrusted with the oracles of God," which seems to indicate the special role of representing God's righteous words to the nations (3:1). Writing

³¹ Schoeps, *Jewish-Christian Argument*, 40 (emphasis added).

³² Sievers, "'God's Gifts and Call Are Irrevocable.'"

³³ See the many essays on this and related topics written by members of the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations in Boys, ed., *Seeing Judaism Anew*, especially the essays by M. C. Boys, F. Sherman, and E. J. Fisher, which explicitly address the topic.

explicitly of his fellow Jews who do not (yet) share his faith in Jesus Christ, he argues (in the present tense): “to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ” (9:3-5). He wants his addressees to recognize that “Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs” (15:8). In the case of our passage, 11:29, Paul bases this truth-claim not on Israel’s faithfulness, but on God’s: “regarding election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers” (11:28).³⁴ Indeed, because of this propositional truth Paul is certain that somehow, in God’s mysterious design, “all Israel will be restored” (11:25-32). Does not fulfilling Israel’s calling to reach the nations with the news of God’s righteousness require the continuation of the Jewish people and the covenant made with them at Sinai, and all the more among Christ-believing Jews who understood, with Paul, that they were (and are?) fulfilling that role with the message of Jesus Christ? Consideration of these matters brings me to the next passage to discuss.

Rom 11:13-14:

³⁴ Sadly, the NRSV here (similarly, the RSV, NEB, NAB, and many others) translates the first clause of v. 38: “As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake.” The Greek text does not contain any reference to God. What it communicates is in keeping with the mystery Paul is involved in revealing in this passage. Some Israelites are presently in their stumbling state with respect to believing in the good news proclamation (perhaps in the sense that they are not bringing the news of Christ to the Gentiles in the way that Paul and other Christ-believing Jews are, thus not making them aware of the good news for the members of the nations, which is arguably just what they are stumbling over in the argument made in 9:30—10:21). In other words, according to the good news arrangement made by God’s design for the good news (κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον), they are presently estranged (alienated or enemied [ἐχθροί is notably a plural adjective] = stumbling, in the walking metaphorical sense, pruned, in the olive tree metaphorical sense) on your behalf (“because of you [δι’ ὑμῶς]”), presumably as just described in vv. 25-26, in that some of Israel are hardened in order that the fulness of the Gentiles may arrive. This state of estrangement or alienation or enemy-ation, if you will, is consistent with the language of v. 22, indicating God’s “severity” toward those who have been pruned in the olive tree metaphor, which would align with those hardened, or in the case of the walking metaphor, with those stumbling. Cf. Beck, “Translations of the New Testament.”

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.

Here we meet Paul directly addressing the non-Jewish target audience of his letter to the Romans (not Jewish people), in order to make a less than flattering point about their place in Paul's thinking and work. Although he is the apostle to the Gentiles or Nations by definition, and thus within his rights to address them in the ways he undertakes to do in this letter, his ministry is not as focused on their interests as it might otherwise seem. Actually, they are a part of a larger program—a cog in the wheel, you might say—in the service of his continued central concern for the restoration of his fellow Israelites. I would not be surprised to learn that it is the language Paul adopts here and following it (in developing the olive tree metaphor to confront any conceited response to Israelites presently suffering unfaith in Christ), that he has particularly in mind when toward the close of the letter he observes that "I have written to you boldly [or, daringly] on some points" (15:15).

Although risking offense, for Paul it is more imperative that they understand his message and cooperate—play their appointed subordinate role—in bringing about that which Paul seeks to accomplish thereby, believing it to be the will of God carried out in an unanticipated, mysterious way. That way includes the inclusion of some non-Jews alongside some Jews (representatives of the remnant, like Paul), within the "new creation community" of Christ-believers representing the dawning of the age to come, before some of Paul's fellow Jews join him. That is hardly the way that Israelites have understood the final scheme would play out—and hardly the way that it has.³⁵ Rather, it was expected that Israel would be restored, and then the rest of the nations gathered to join them in worship of the One God of all the nations. Hence, Paul explains what he

³⁵ Paul's development of this language of mystery to describe what I understand him to be explaining to be taking place within his lifetime, but that did not, leads Paul to conclude chapter 11 with an appeal to a God bigger than the boxes that even Paul could construct. I believe that this language provides hermeneutical space to reconsider the implications for Christian-Jewish relations after Paul's time (Nanos, "Challenging the Limits": I am particularly proud of the reaction this essay, when presented as an SBL paper [Romans in History and Culture Section, 1998] received from Krister Stendahl as a productive way to reformulate the issues).

now understands to be taking place as a mystery, one in which the outcome depends not only upon Paul, but upon the representatives of the nations behaving graciously toward the stumbling of Israel (since they stand only by similar grace shown to themselves by the God who is orchestrating this scheme, and by Jews such as Paul), instead of contemptuously, as they may be tempted to do, a problem all too common to “the have’s” (as they see things) when judging the fortunes of the “have nots” among their “neighbors.”

The point I want to focus on here is what Paul writes in vv. 13-14, and what he does not write. A look at virtually any interpretation of this language will note that Paul seeks to make his fellow-Jews who do not believe in Christ (often, simply referring to Jews in general, or Israel, seemingly giving no weight to Paul and his argument that he represents the “yes” of the remnant of Israel alongside the “no” of some other Jews, for whom the remnant exists to preserve hope of eventual restoration of the whole) jealous in the sense of envy, aroused to anger. And specifically aroused by the good fortune of these non-Jews, as if Jews would be so stingy as to reject the inclusion of non-Jews in the good things of God. I challenge both of these notions about what Paul is communicating here.³⁶

First, Paul uses the language of jealousy, which was not synonymous with envy, as it is commonly used in modern English. Envy (φθόνος) refers to “begrudging” in Greek, in Paul’s time and to this day in Greece, and is part of a highly articulated system, often still recognized within the evil eye belief system.³⁷ This system expresses the views of people who see resources in a kind of zero-sum game. Thus the advances of the other provoke worry that this development might reflect equalizing loss for themselves, and hence, the gaze of the other upon oneself is thought/feared to carry the power/threat to level, to jeopardize the retaining of that new good fortune or stage in life (in our culture, the knock on wood when announcing good things is a witness to this universal concern, even if dismissed lightly as folklore). Without here trying to develop the details of the system and its variations and expressions in many

³⁶ For a more complete discussion of this passage and many other implications, see Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, esp. 247-55, and Nanos, “Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience,” esp. 300-4.

³⁷ See Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 186-91, 279-80; and my “The Social Context and Message of Galatians in View of Paul’s Evil Eye Warning (Gal. 3:1)” available at <<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/nanosmd/projects.html>>.

Mediterranean cultures from antiquity to today, and among other cultures too, the point is that begrudging does not depend upon whether the one who envies possesses the good thing(s) at issue (the thing[s] or person[s] that is observed), but whether one feels pained at the getting of that thing (or something equivalent, or better!) by another.

Jealousy (ζηλόω), on the other hand, is generally a positive force, and can be usually translated as “emulation,” as wanting something good for oneself (exemplified when reacting to someone who does a brilliant job: “I want to be like that”; envy would be exemplified instead when reacting to someone doing a brilliant job with a pained, begrudging feeling like “why does he or she get all the attention” or “all the opportunity” or “all the resources,” and so on, so that it is their harm, not the challenge to yourself to do better that is stirred-up inside oneself). One finds God written about as jealous, as wanting something good for God’s self, but not as envious, as begrudging something good to another. Here Paul refers to *emulative jealousy*, and it stands to reason, because he states clearly that he seeks a positive reaction: it is the *reconsideration* and not the dismissal and resentment of his fellow Jews that he has in mind to raise.

Secondly, it is not jealousy of *the new fortune of non-Jews* that Paul states to be that which he “magnifies” to gain this reconsideration. (Overlooked by those who hold this view is the fact that it requires expecting non-Christ-believing Jews to subscribe to the Christ-believer’s supersedionist assumption that these Gentiles are getting something positive that those Jews do not have or get or want to be gained by these Gentiles, even though their non-Christ-believing state bears witness to the fact that they do not believe that Christ-believing results in getting something positive to be envied, or they would be Christ-believers too.) Rather, it is “his ministry” among the nations that is in view! In other words, it is the positive Jewish anticipation of the privilege of bringing God’s good things to the non-Jews upon which Paul’s intended provocation plays (not the supposed stinginess that is so often the focus of Christian non-Jew’s suspicions, as revealed in their comments on this passage). He knows that his fellow Israelites await the day when they will be privileged to bring the light to the nations (3:2), that their impulse toward the nations can be trusted to be generous, even if he believes that some of them are presently failing to see things in this generous way (the implication of why some are stumbling in 9:30—10:4, 14-21).

Paul claims in his ministry to the nations to be already fulfilling in the present age Israel’s anticipated role, bearing witness to the dawning of the age to come in the

turning of these Gentiles to the One God of Israel. What is really at issue between these various Jews can be oversimplified in this way: What time is it? Is it the time we await, or more precisely, is it the beginning of that time in the work of Jesus Christ, who is claimed to have initiated that day in his resurrection from among the dead ones within the constraints of the present evil age (cf. Gal 1:1-5). In Paul's concept, the graciousness of these non-Jews toward the stumbling of Israel will provide a powerful witness that they live on behalf of the restoration of the stumbling of Israel. That outcome is in stark contrast to the contemptuous he seeks to circumvent, perhaps because of how their own faith claims are being received with suspicion, perhaps even with denial of access to goods to which they believe they are now entitled as full members and not merely Gentile guests (implied in 8:18-39?), if not also as the result of the teaching of some group telling them there is no need to continue to respect Jewish norms of communal behavior (14:1-15 on my reading of the weak and strong, and 16:17-20).³⁸ Here we see Paul seeking to prevent the sowing of the seeds he fears are being spread among the addressees, which may sprout into harmful denunciation of this proposition and its proponents before he can arrive to set matters right.³⁹

This expectation of positive awareness of these non-Jews in Jewish eschatological communal terms is difficult to reconcile with the prevailing approaches to the situation in Rome. For most interpreters, the Christ-believers Paul addresses already meet outside of the synagogues and any Jewish community's jurisdiction. That is all the more the case for those who submit that the edict of Claudius language of Seutonius, *Claudius* 25.4, indicates that the Jews of Rome were expelled because of the Christ-believers or reactions to them, so that by the time Paul writes Christian churches were autonomous and largely Gentile in make-up and character.⁴⁰ How would Jews have learned of the developments of which Paul writes, or had any chance of regarding them in the positive light as fulfilment of their own expectations for Israel, for Jewish communal hopes?

I find in this language a very Jewish Paul, one who could hardly expect the outcome of which he writes to develop if he at the same time taught that the election of

³⁸ See Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165, 201, 293 n. 11; also on 16:17-20 along this line, see Sandnes, *Belly and Body*.

³⁹ Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 21-40, passim.

⁴⁰ For my critique of this construction and the reading of Romans that results, see "Some Problems with Reading Romans through the Lens of the Edict of Claudius," in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 372-87.

Israel had completed its course, that the covenant with Moses had been fulfilled so that it was in essence revoked (or at least its commandments were to be regarded with indifference among Christ-believing Jews like himself). Could Paul really have lived without regard to Jewish halakhic norms among the non-Jews with whom he worked as an apostle and expect his Jewish kinsmen to reconsider that his message and ministry expressed the hopes of every Israelite to bear the light of God's righteousness to all of the nations, so that they would reconsider the meaning of Jesus Christ for themselves, and join Paul and his "remnant" in celebration of the dawning of the awaited age? I do not see how that would make sense to Paul—or to his interpreters.

Rom 3:28-31:

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

The discovery of the Shema Israel as central to Paul's theology was a profound moment for me, and has shaped my reading of him ever since. If I was writing a theology of Paul, it would be the center around which all other topics turned. Here we see it employed clearly and in a pivotal point in his argument in Romans for why non-Jewish believers in Christ must remain non-Jews and not become proselytes, and by the implication of his logic, why Jews remain Jews after faith in Christ: "since [if indeed] God is one." Paul's language here, and throughout Romans and Galatians,⁴¹ calls to mind the central prayer of Judaism, repeated twice daily, and the last words a pious Jew hopes to pass his or her lips, which begins: "Hear [*shema*] Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

I believe that Paul is here developing the tension between the special privilege of being Israel: the Lord is *our* God, the God of the covenants made with our fathers, and that God's role as the creator of all humankind, of all of creation: the Lord alone, the

⁴¹ See full discussion in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 179-201; and Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 99-102.

God of all, in whose service God has called and set apart the people Israel to demonstrate his righteousness and express his grace. Here we meet so-called particularism and universalism in unison, not as binary opposites, as they are so often treated. That Paul's argument is consistent with interpretations of the Shema unconnected with Christ-faith can be demonstrated in Jewish literature. Consider the language of the *Sifre* on Deuteronomy 6:4 (Piska 31), when discussing why the Scripture says the Lord both "our God" as well as "is One," concludes first that "'our God,' however, serves to teach us that His name rests in greater measure upon us.... upon Israel," and then offers this alternative interpretation:

"The Lord, our God," over us (the children of Israel); "the Lord is one," over all the creatures of the world. "The Lord, our God," in this world; "the Lord is one," in the world to come, as it is said, "[T]he Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day shall the Lord be one and His name one (Zech. 14:9)."⁴²

Likewise, somewhere halfway between Paul's time and our own Rashi wrote, to explain the repetition of the Name (Hashem, the Name, a rabbinic circumlocution for YHWH/Lord) in the Shema:

"The Lord who is our God now, but not (yet) the God of the (other) nations, is destined to be the One Lord, as it is said, 'For then will I give to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent' (Zeph 3:9). And (likewise) it is said, 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One and His name One' (Zech 14:9)."⁴³

Paul's argument is that the God who now righteous Israel is the same God who now righteous non-Israelites who turn to Israel's God in Jesus Christ as the Lord of all the Nations too. He is the one whom both the members of Israel and of the other nations within the Christ-groups choose—like the special one that someone falls in love with like no other, thereafter the *only one* for themselves.⁴⁴ For Paul, if non-Jews in-

⁴² Hammer, *Sifre*, 58-59.

⁴³ Lamm, *The Shema*, 31

⁴⁴ Moberly, "Toward an Interpretation of the Shema."

Christ become Jewish proselytes, and thereby Israelites, they do not bear witness to the arrival of the day when representatives from all of the nations turn from idols to the worship of the One God, but simply to the truth that in the present age Israel represents the righteous ones of God, members of which they become by proselyte conversion. That identity transformation for non-Jews is available apart from the confession of faith in Jesus Christ in most other Jewish groups of the time, which provide for proselyte conversion to join the family of Abraham, of God, within the present age, and await with Israel the hope of the age of reconciliation of the nations, when the wolf (such as is Rome) will lie down with the lamb (Israel), without devouring her.

At issue is not that most other Jewish groups would likely disagree with Paul's proposition that such reconciliation will occur when that day arrives, so that members of other nations do not then join Israel to join with her in worship of the One Creator God of all humankind. Some may believe that day will be accompanied by the conversion of the nations, in the sense of proselyte conversion to Israel; others might await the destruction of those of the other nations as foremost in their hopes. These expectations and others can be gleaned from the Scriptures and other writings of Paul's time.⁴⁵ But even those who hope for reconciliation with the nations and expect them to remain not-Israel would not agree with Paul that this moment had arrived in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or even just begun to arrive and be witnessed in the life of the communities of believers in that proposition—unless sharing Paul's faith in Christ. In their groups the distinction and membership that follows from it remains between Gentiles, however welcome as friends and guests, and Jews or Israelites, a category that includes (albeit with some variety among groups) proselytes, those who have turned from idolatry to worship the One God and have completed the rite of conversion signaling that they have joined the people of that God in full membership, so that they are no longer regarded as mere guests. That is where Paul's (and other Christ-believing) groups were "unique," as far as we are aware, among Jewish groups of his time.

⁴⁵ Donaldson, *Paul*, 60-74, for discussion of various expectations for non-Jews, including a natural law non-Jew who turns from idolatry but is not identified with circumcision and other special laws for Israelites, e.g., observing dietary customs; righteous gentiles; and eschatological pilgrimage scenarios. Examples include Josephus, *Ant.* 20.41 (34-48); Philo, *QE* 2.2; *Moses* 2.4; *Abraham* 3-6, 60-61; *Virtues* 102, 181-82, 212-19; *Spec. Laws* 1.51; 2.42-48; 4.178; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *t. Sanh.* 13.2. Cf. Fredriksen, "Another Look," 236-47; Wyszogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 162-63, 190-95.

That I believe was “the rub,” and just what Paul sought to proclaim and to bring his communities into conformity with his teaching to exemplify. In his view, it was by subordination to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit which makes possible life according to the dynamics of the age to come, which is granted to Gentiles in Christ—on the same terms as Jews—apart from them becoming Israelites. In particular, the challenge for Christ-believing Jewish communities to live out the proposition that while difference continues in this-age terms between, for example, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and masters, those with black and white pigmentation of skin, poor and rich, and so on, they are to no longer express the discrimination associated with that difference in present “evil” age terms. Of course, since they are but humans, and in human terms where there is difference there will be discrimination, Paul recognizes that this ideal can only be achieved by dedication to this proposition, to one another, and by yielding to God’s Spirit in their lives together.

I do not agree with the view of many interpreters of Paul—Jewish as well as Christian—that Paul taught the dissolution of differences, that there were no longer Jews and Gentiles in Christ, but a kind of new, third race, as some have phrased it. I grant that he does sometimes write that there is neither this nor that. But it cannot be so. There remain fundamental biological differences between women and men, for example, and the male penis has either been circumcised or remains in its foreskinned state. Recognition of this reality is witnessed in his arguments, including about just this matter, and in his continued employment of this distinction to address and explain the composition of the world from an Israelite-based conceptualization of reality: he does not address anyone as “Christian,” but as Jew or non-Jew, circumcised or foreskinned, and within those categories, as having faith in/of Jesus Christ (Messiah), or not.

In my view, what Paul believes sets this Judaism (this Jewish community inclusive of non-Jews as more than mere guests) apart from all other Jewish groups, is the maintenance of difference without advantage. All in-Christ have stepped-up to the favored status at issue, and become children of Abraham, children of the One God of all humankind, as proclaimed in Israelite terms for the awaited age to come. It is the truth of this proclamation’s claims in Jesus Christ to which they must be dedicated in all of their thinking and behavior by the “renewal of their minds” (12:1-2 and following), or its witness to the Jewish people and the rest of the nations in Israelite-based terms will not be borne. In the meantime, regardless of their disputed identity (in Jewish

communities in which their subgroups dwell) because of failure to become proselytes, they must not think of themselves or try to gain standing in this-age terms as either Jews or mere guests still obliged thereby to participate in idolatrous practices when among family and fellow townspeople, but to stand fast in the truth of their identity in the new-age terms of Christ, and thus “out of faithfulness to the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5, the goal of the letter, in my view).

6) (Now to the) Implications for advancing Christian/Jewish relations:

a) *this approach undermines the traditional portrayals wherein Paul must have found something wrong with or passé about Jewish identity, faith, motives, or actions—such as being particularistic instead of universalistic, or exclusivistic, legalistic, enslaving, narrow-minded, outwardly ritual-oriented instead of spiritual, and so on—in order to advocate the inclusion of non-Jews apart from the traditional convention of proselyte conversion.*

b) *Instead it offers a portrait of Paul that confirms the advantages of being Jewish while at the same time advocating that there is no disadvantage to not being Jewish, if in Christ. This solution makes sense of Paul as a Jew and his movement as a Judaism, or rather, as a Jewish coalition of subgroups within local Jewish communities and various expressions of Judaism. Paul’s proposition is problematic, since in the present age difference necessarily involves discrimination, and thus he speaks of the need to be committed to turning from non-Jewish ways of life to Jewish ways of life, and to the role of the Spirit of the age to come to lead communal and personal life for those in-Christ. The seeds of eventual distance developing between his Jewish groups and other Jewish groups are sown in the very proposition that something has changed in this age that requires halakhic adjustments in Jewish communal life, when that change is a matter of faith instead of objective reality. Those that do not perceive that change to have taken place will not agree with the propositions that follow from believing that it has.*

c) *This provides a place to reconsider Christian/Jewish historical developments in less polemical and value-laden terms, and to revisit the implications for re-reading Paul in*

terms of Christian/Jewish relations today. The tensions we detect in Paul's rhetoric can be evaluated in *intra-Jewish* terms, as those that arise within and between Jewish groups, and avoid the anachronistic and detrimental constructions perpetuating Christianity versus Judaism, which persist in the (it seems to me still) anachronistic but similarly (it also seems to me, albeit largely unrecognized by its proponents) problematic intra-mural Christian approaches.⁴⁶ We can read Paul's literature as Jewish, as evidence of conflicting Jewish viewpoints and policies, especially in the case of subgroups working within the larger minority and thus fragile Jewish communities under Roman rule in the Diaspora. The values at the origins of Christianity in terms of Paul are not antithetical to the values of Second Temple Judaism of his time and place (which must be put into play with developments in rabbinic Judaism). What divides his Judaism from others involves different convictions about the meaning of Jesus. For some Jews, he signaled the awaited dawning of the age when all the nations will worship God in peace; for some non-Jews, he signaled their inclusion in that day. Jews observed Torah, as to be expected; non-Jews did not, at least not in the same complete way as did Jews, which was also to be expected in that day. Paul's rhetoric grew out of the effort to make this policy a reality in the midst of an age when it goes against the grain of human group dynamics.

His ostensible undermining of Jewish Torah and election was just that, apparent, for it arises in rhetoric developed to raise the self- and group-esteem of non-Jews among whom the advantages of being Jewish—which they could gain by means of proselyte conversion in other Jewish groups, but which were denied to them within Paul's subgroups—were not in doubt. They needed to be persuaded that they were not thereby disadvantaged, and of the advantages of holding fast to the course upon which this policy had set them after responding positively to Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ. In other words, we can promote mutual respect while also recognizing differences of faith about this particular matter and the implications that flow from believing or not believing Paul's proposition about Jesus.

⁴⁶ See Nanos, "Inter-Christian Approaches to Paul's Rhetoric."

Recognizing that Paul did not come to his faith by way of rational argument from Scripture but from a personal experience of revelation, one that most Jewish people have not shared, should serve as a reminder that the issue is not one of rejecting truth, but of different perceptions of truth, different convictions based upon what is evident to one person or another. If they do not propose to harm fellow-humans, is it not possible to uphold what we believe to be true, and our participation within a religious system with others who share that conviction, without demeaning in any way the different faith convictions or religious systems of others? Can we not embrace the nobility of the motives and choices of the other as we wish them to embrace the nobility of our own?

d) Approaching Paul and Christian/Jewish relations in this new way raises a few new problems:

1) *It is problematic for Christians to think of what Paul did as Judaism, pre-Christianity, and different from the focus of Christianity that later emerged, which thus raises an internal critique that requires sorting out. Even for those who reject traditional triumphalistic replacement theologies, it can be problematic to give up the idea of having become in some way true or real or spiritual Israelites or Jews. Also, there are many implications that arise in terms of how Jewish norms would have guided Paul and his communities, and questions for later Christians that arise from these, whether they are Jews or non-Jews by birth.*

2) *It is problematic for Jews to think of what Paul did as Judaism, pre-Christianity, and thus to rethink his ideas and activities as representative of options within the Judaism of his time. Considering this is threatening, because it requires a new openness instead of easy dismissal, generating interest and respect for Christian origins as something that is not alien and easily dismissed as of little interest or consequence for Jews.*

e) But this re-consideration of Paul offers several important benefits that I believe outweigh the risks:

1) *For both interested parties, it offers a more probable approach to historical material of consequence for both, which is in part its own reward. Who wants to*

base their foundational narratives and theology, or alternately, their contra-narratives and theology on faulty historical premises? Who would want to knowingly obstruct a better grasp of Paul speaking for himself, of advancing a portrayal of Paul closer to how he was, and thus most likely would have wanted to be known? This approach promotes the noble values of taking the other on their own terms, and of respecting the faith convictions of the other as one wishes for their own to be respected. The counter-history that has been central to each party's claims to superiority, framed by being other than the other, need no longer limit each other's recognition of similarity, even if not always emphasis, even celebration of this unity including its diversity, without the negative valuations of the other being so central to positive valuations of self.⁴⁷ It promotes a shared theological heritage based upon conviction in the same One God, and the shared value systems that flow from this, not least the centrality of love of God and neighbor as advocated in shared Scriptures and traditions.

2) *For the Christian*, this approach offers new perspectives on their heritage and on spiritual communal life, as well as the advantages of more respectful views of and interaction with Jewish people and their beliefs, motives, and practices. Respecting the continuing covenant with Israel,⁴⁸ and understanding

⁴⁷ In a similar direction, David Novak, "Mitsvah," in Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al, eds, *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 116, states: "When Christians stop seeing Judaism as legalism, they will be in a much better position to realize the importance of law in Christianity. And when Jews stop seeing Christianity as antinomian, as against the law, they will be in a much better position to realize the importance of grace in Judaism. Indeed, such understanding of each side by the other might lead each tradition not only to a better understanding of the other but to a better understanding of itself."

⁴⁸ In her perception explanation of a problem that arises in Christian theological approaches to the Mosaic or Sinai covenant when treated in an unhistorical fashion as fulfilling its function in terms of Christ, which fail then to make plain that the covenant continues to be in force for Jews even after the coming of Jesus Christ, Theresa O'Keefe (in a review of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], available at <<http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/reviews/mroc.htm>> as of April 20, 2005) works from the viewpoint that "Paul's relationship with the Law is ambiguous at best": "Finally, it has to be recognized that Paul was not concerned with maintaining the validity of the ongoing covenant of God with those Jews who did not believe in Jesus as the Christ. His intention was to preach Christ crucified and raised, and that the only way to live was to live a life in Christ." This follows from her earlier observation about Ratzinger's approach: "For throughout the text, referencing Paul's

themselves to be a part of God's plan for the Nations alongside of instead of replacing Israel, is foundational to undermining replacement theologies, and the disrespect for Jewish disagreement about Jesus that has been characteristic in the past, and served as the basis for policies that harmed Jewish people and institutions. Not least, this approach offers the opportunity to engage in self and group-definitions and activities that are not bound up with and thus limited by negative evaluations and actions toward others. Christians are free to be similar yet different, without requiring ungracious value judgments of the other that paradoxically undermine their own claim to exist only because of the graciousness of God.

3) *For Jewish people*, this approach offers new perspectives on the breadth of Jewish diversity of ideas, and the institutions that are able to spring from them, enhancing the direction in which recent research has already been moving. It also offers an avenue to define self and group without being framed by otherness to Christianity that has often led, for example, to downplaying central Jewish concepts, such as dependence upon the mercy and lovingkindness of God and not merely the ability to do mitzvot (commandments). Perhaps the greatest good for the Jewish person is that which is gained by the good will of Christians that this approach promotes, instead of contempt. If in order to promote good

interpretation, he speaks of the Sinai covenant as 'transitory,' and 'conditional, that is, temporal; within God's providential rule it is a stage that has its own allotted period of time' (pp. 53 and 68). Represented in this way it implies that the Sinai covenant has outlived its usefulness to humanity, and is no longer of value as a way of life."

O'Keefe makes excellent points, and I support her argument in view of the direction that Christian theology has and often continues to take (in denying the continuing validity of the Mosaic covenant), but her approach would be strengthened if she could appeal to Paul as unambiguously holding that viewpoint. If Paul is approached as Torah-observant, and as known to be so by his (at least Christ-believing) contemporaries, than it is *self-evident* that Paul viewed the Mosaic covenant as continuing to apply to Jews after Jesus Christ, including Christ-believing Jews, and it eliminates the problems of temporality attributed to the covenants made specifically with Israel, and of unhistorical approaches to the various covenants. Paul's rhetoric, when not attending to this conviction explicitly, should not then be taken to imply what has historically (in later Christian interpretive tradition) been deduced; namely, that Paul believed the purpose of the Sinai covenant had been fulfilled, and thus it had become obsolete going forward. His own life among the communities to which he wrote—and taught, although those words are not available to us—made that an unthinkable supposition.

will toward Jewish people and institutions, Christians could *appeal* to their foundational texts instead of having *to take exception* to them, that benefit alone would be a gain too great for words to adequately describe.

f) What do we do from here?

1) *Both parties need to make an effort to promote this joint venture to re-visit our sacred texts and traditions with new motives and expectations, not just to find that which advances our self- and group-esteem, but that of the other too. Much more attention should be paid to the nature of rhetoric and especially polemical language as situational, not universal, and thus requiring historical engagement and qualification when seeking to draw lessons for the reader today. In addition to rhetorical qualification of language within its own historically limited context, we need to censure texts and interpretive traditions when they fall short of their own stated aspirations to uphold the highest values of love of God and neighbor, which is often most evident when the values being promoted involve the necessary disregard for the other. For this involves a kind of counter-history built into its own self and group definition, which limits freedom to be “for” the other instead of “against” them.*

Interpreters are always involved in making choices, in emphasizing certain patterns of ideas and actions and of the texts and traditions that legitimate them over other patterns, ideas, and actions that can also be supported by indications in those texts and traditions. They are culpable for the choices made, and should proceed in ways that promote mutual respect, that is, so that concern for the self- and group-esteem of the other, also made in the image of God, is upheld in the same way that each wishes for its own self- and group-esteem to be respected.⁴⁹

2) *Christians need to learn more about Judaism, both the Judaism of Paul’s Second Temple times including its Graeco-Roman context, and the rabbinic Judaism that has emerged from it, and as it is practiced by Jewish people today,*

⁴⁹ Martin Buber proclaimed: “The mystery of another lies deep within him, and it cannot be observed from without. No man outside of Israel knows the mystery of Israel. And no man outside of Christianity knows the mystery of Christianity. But in their ignorance they can acknowledge each other in the mystery” (*Die Stunde und die Erkenntnis*, 155, as cited by Schoeps, *Jewish-Christian Argument*, 167).

sometimes in ways that have been shaped in reaction to Christian choices of self- and group-identity and policies toward Jews. Differences as well as similarities are to be noted, and some effort should be made to recognize that the diversity is wide enough to permit an array of positions that accentuate similarity as well as difference. In keeping with the message I have explored, it is important to conceptualize the group boundaries and interactions in new ways, recognizing polemical rhetoric and activity that has often been approached as adversarial across Christian/Jewish lines involves other lines within each group, and historically, was often more intra-group than realized. Overall, fostering interaction with Jewish people and ideas is important to advancing Christian/Jewish relations, and it will help to break down stereotypes derived from traditional interpretations of Paul's voice. In the end, Christianity will be able to celebrate its own cherished values without being invested in a counter-narrative for enhancing self-esteem that involves the demonstration of itself as not-Judaism, in other words, it can be freed of a self-identity that by definition must denigrate the Jewish other in order to assert its own self-worth.

In a slightly different direction, Michael Wyschogrod suggests that Christians should change the church policy that holds Jews to be no longer Jews upon becoming Christians, so that after baptism they cannot observe Torah, or if they do, that it cannot be respected as an act of faith, so that the difference between Jews and non-Jews in church is erased in the direction of Gentile-only identity. This posture infers that the election of Israel is superseded by that of the church and that the covenant with the Jewish people is regarded to be over. In other words, not urging Jews in Christ to remain Jews betrays disrespect for the place of empirical Israel.⁵⁰

3) *Jews need to help Christians learn about Judaism* in a mutually respectful gesture of good-will, avoiding polemic. In view of the many strides that have been made toward positive reassessment of Judaism on its own terms, not least the revisiting of Christian culpability, it is only right to reciprocate by way of re-

⁵⁰ Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*; also see the Introduction essay by Soulen, p. 18. In a similar direction, Rudolph, "Messianic Jews and Christian Theology," argues that Christianity must acknowledge the place of Jesus-believing Torah-observant Jews in their theology and model for community, and that representatives of Messianic Judaism should be included in inter-faith dialogue.

examining long-held negative stereotypes and notions about Christians and Christianity.⁵¹ As Jews learn more about voices like Paul's constructed in ways such as I have suggested, they will have new opportunities to challenge the polemical approaches that have often been based upon other interpretations of his work. Instead of dismissing Paul's voice, there is the opportunity to challenge the Christian to live up to Paul's values, and to reconsider whether what the Christian has understood Paul to stand for is actually based upon the most probably reading of Paul.

Jews can help Christian people learn about Jewish aspects of their own faith and the contexts that arise in their texts. There is simply no denying the essential power of foundational texts to shape the values of a faith community. While the power of certain texts that have led to misunderstanding and harm can be mitigated by the liberal elite, this will not reach the more conservative in faith. And when hard times come, as they no doubt will, when the need to scapegoat and distance the minority outgroup arises, these texts will once again inflict harm, whether wielded by the Bible oriented, or those who merely exploit their views. Unless they have taken on new meaning among the interpreters of these texts, so that they have been retranslated, rethought, and used in new and positive ways. That is the promise of historical critical attention to these texts guided by Christian/Jewish relations criticism, among other important methodologies that contextualize ancient polemic in ways that promise relevance not only for the learned postmodernist, but at the other extreme, for the anti-intellectual "true-believer"; because that is what "the text means" can ring out in new ways, if we join in the journey. In its outcome we cannot help but share.

Jews can join in the very involved task of trying to re-interpret Paul instead of accepting the prevailing portraits, and feeling confined to subverting them by contra-narratives that limit their independence to being not-Christianity. They can help find the Judaism in Paul, e.g., as I have tried to do.

I know that all of you hold some view of Paul, and that it may be in certain if not profound ways different from that which I have expressed to represent the options to

⁵¹ In this direction, see Frymer-Kensky et al., eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms*.

be. Of course, I do not suppose to be right on every point, or that only my approach offers promise for Christian/Jewish relations. Having shown some of the problems that remain for the prevailing approaches, I do hope you will consider engaging the propositions I have outlined here, and examine my exegetical works. Please help me see the weaknesses in my reading of Paul or oversights in drawing out the implications, since progress requires a communal enterprise, including the expression of respectful disagreement. Together, may we reverse the legacy of distrust and harm, and contribute to positive relations between Jews and Christians and our respective religious institutions, in the balance of the present age.

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