

STEPHEN WESTERHOLM

Law and Ethics
in Early Judaism and the
New Testament

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*

383

Mohr Siebeck

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zum Neuen Testament

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Stephen Westerholm

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and the New Testament

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For Monica

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Old Skins, New Wine

Pious Jews of the first century, as later, sought to conform their lives to Torah, the law God had given Israel.¹ Differences in circumstance and temperament meant that some Jews displayed more zeal in the attempt than others (cf. Gal 1:14). Different sects among them interpreted the law, and assigned competence in its interpretation, differently.² The pursuit itself, however, was a common one – so common that it invited hypocritical imitation, as the Synoptic Gospels are wont to point out. Yet the New Testament itself bears witness to the nobility of the endeavor: Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were “both righteous in the sight of God, blameless as they walked in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord” (Luke 1:5–6).

Proper observance of commandments presupposes their proper interpretation. In *Jesus and Scribal Authority*, I noted that the Pharisees understood the prescriptions of Torah as “statutes.”³ The precise wording with which advice, or even a command, is given may not be significant; that of a statute always is. If Deuteronomy 24:1 speaks of a divorce occasioned by “a matter of indecency,” then what, for the Pharisees, constituted legitimate grounds for divorce hinged on the definition of “indecency.” If Exodus 16:29 forbids leaving one’s “place” on the Sabbath, then those concerned not to transgress this *statute* needed to know how “place” was rightly construed. The rabbinic term *halakhah* may be used to designate efforts directed toward clarifying the ambiguities of Mosaic law so understood, filling in gaps left by its legislation, perhaps even making its observance practicable in circumstances changed from the time when the laws were given. The goal was to be as concrete and exhaustive as required to ensure compliance with the statutes of God’s law; indeed, to prevent their transgression by constructing a “fence” around Torah’s commandments wide enough to avert unwitting infringement (cf. *m. Avot* 1:1).

First-century Jews that they were, neither Jesus nor Paul could articulate their vision of what God was doing in their day without dealing with issues raised by its relation to God’s prior revelation in Torah. They fully affirmed

¹ See chapter 3 below.

² See chapter 2 below.

³ See also chapter 8 below.

that prior revelation. Still, the *primary* focus of both Jesus and Paul was on what God was doing in their day; to assess the legitimacy of their message merely by measuring it against the standard of some current understanding of Torah was to judge new wine by what it did to old wineskins. Decisive for one's relation to God – for Jesus, Paul, and, indeed, all the authors of the New Testament – was one's response to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Scholars of the New Testament must seek to do justice both to what was new and distinctive about the message of Jesus and his followers, and to the wide areas of continuity it shared with the convictions and practices of other pious Jews. If scholarship of earlier generations tended to emphasize the new while overlooking – if not denying – its continuity with the old, the pendulum, in our day, has perhaps swung to the other extreme. The chapters that follow represent my own attempts, over three decades and more, to rightly portray what was new and what was not, while fairly portraying the Judaism within which the new movement began.

Anyone who would consider *Jesus'* message of God's kingdom and its relation to Torah is immediately confronted by the question where Jesus' views can reliably be found. In my dissertation, I took up the challenge of demonstrating the plausible authenticity of particular sayings attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.⁴ I now regard such attempts as largely (perhaps not completely) pointless: to this day, however sophisticated the argumentation, scholars, in the end, tend to find authentic whatever agrees with their overall understanding of Jesus, secondary whatever does not. Broadly speaking, I believe we must concede Dale Allison's point: either we trust the *general* picture that the Synoptic Gospels give us of Jesus – or we abandon the attempt to speak of him at all.

If the primary sources produce false general impressions, ... then the truth of things is almost certainly beyond our reach. If the chief witnesses are too bad, if they contain only intermittently authentic items, we cannot lay them aside and tell a better story. ... Because the Synoptics supply us with most of our first-century traditions, our reconstructed Jesus will inevitably be Synoptic-like, a sort of commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Nothing else, however, can carry conviction.⁵

I am, however, more optimistic than some about particular sayings.⁶ Jesus was known as one who taught “in parables” (ἐν παραβολαῖς, Matt 13:34; cf.

⁴ *Jesus and Scribal Authority*. I assumed the results of that study in the article reproduced in chapter 8 below.

⁵ Allison, *Historical Christ*, 66.

⁶ In what follows, I repeat points made by my doctoral supervisor, Birger Gerhardsson, most convincingly – to my mind – in Gerhardsson, *Reliability*. In the writings collected in that volume, Gerhardsson provides, in addition to a fine restatement of his position, responses to the objections most frequently raised to his approach – which neither posits that the gospel tradition was transmitted according to a specifically

Mark 4:33–34; the Hebrew term is מִשְׁלִים, *meshalim* – the content of our book of Proverbs). The term included carefully (i. e., *memorably*) formulated one-liners as well as the illustrative short stories traditionally labeled “parables” in English. That the Synoptic Gospels sum up the teaching of Jesus on any number of important issues in concise, pregnant sayings is thus no accident (e. g., Mark 2:17, 27; 7:15; 8:35; 10:9, 25; 12:17).⁷ Sayings of this type were deliberately formulated to facilitate recollection: proverbs, proverbially, are not occasional, one-time utterances. And what are we to expect of disciples of one who taught in *meshalim* but that they retain and pass on their master’s pithy wisdom?⁸ Furthermore, the New Testament supplies ample evidence of the *intentional* preservation and transmission of Jesus tradition.⁹ It stands to reason, then, that behind programmatic sayings in the Synoptic Gospels there typically lie pronouncements of the historical Jesus.

Be that as it may, I shall be content in what follows to depict the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels – though, for the reasons just stated, I believe that what I say is also true of the Jesus of history. Four points about these Gospels’ *general* picture of Jesus merit attention here.

1. Jesus saw in his own activity the dawning of the kingdom of God. Jews knew in their bones, and their prophets had assured them, that in a world where much had gone wrong, God would some day put things right.¹⁰ Jesus saw, in his activity, the unprepossessing beginnings of that process, the tiny mustard seed that would one day grow into something mighty (Mark 4:30–32). Where the Synoptics summarize Jesus’ message, the dawning kingdom is the theme (Mark 1:14–15; Matt 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11). Terms of admission to the kingdom are the subject of numerous pronouncements (Matt 5:3, 20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24, etc.). Its mysteries are the subject of Jesus’ parables (Matt 13:1–52; 18:23–35; 20:1–16, etc.). Its powers are displayed in his mighty works (Matt 12:28). “The time [had] come,” and it was incumbent

rabbinic model nor is invalidated by the truism that particular sayings are reproduced somewhat differently in the different Gospels.

⁷ Such sayings were transmitted and recalled even when the context in which they were originally spoken was forgotten; the process can lead to an obscuring of their original point, as noted in chapter 10. In general, however, sayings proverbial in nature require no context for their understanding – and this surely applies to the *meshalim* of Jesus listed above.

⁸ The intentionality of the process renders moot questions of what, in general, hearers might recall of something spoken in their presence decades earlier. Chapter 10 below argues against the common assumption that perceived needs of the community inevitably shaped or determined what was transmitted.

⁹ E. g., 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3. Indirect evidence for intentional preservation is given in chapter 10 below.

¹⁰ Cf. chapter 14 below.

upon all who encountered Jesus to respond to the good news with faith (Mark 1:15).

2. Jesus saw in his mission the climax of the divine activity in Israel's past as recorded in its scriptures, and the start of the fulfillment of Israel's hopes: "Today this scripture is fulfilled as you hear it" (Luke 4:21).

3. Jesus acted in ways that invited the easy dismissal most concisely formulated in John 9:16: "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." Matthew 5:17 is clearly intended as a response to the same perception, and numerous accounts in the Gospels, while meant to counter the charge, at the same time provide evidence of the activity that provoked it. In the eyes of many of his contemporaries, Jesus at times acted in violation of God's law. Indeed, his association with the notoriously immoral suggested a general contempt for "morality" (to use *our* term; among first-century Jews, morality *meant* Torah).

4. For Jesus, earlier stages in the history of God's people, including the revelation given to Moses on Mount Sinai, must be interpreted in light of the new and decisive moment in salvation history, not the other way around. Something greater than wise figures of the past, the prophets, even the temple was here (Matt 12:6, 41–42). What prophets and righteous people had longed for could now be seen and heard (Matt 13:17). The period of anticipation represented by "the law and the prophets" had given way to the proclamation of God's kingdom (Matt 11:11–13; Luke 16:16). Whatever tensions arose between old revelations and the new must therefore be attributed to the partial nature of past revelation and its transcendence in the day of fulfillment. With full authority, Jesus, herald and inaugurator of God's kingdom, declared God's will.

Our concern here is with the ethical teaching of Jesus – and thus, necessarily, with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).¹¹ Any suggestion that Jesus meant to do away with Torah is emphatically denied; yet to speak of the law's "fulfillment" suggests something more than the mere reaffirmation of its commands (5:17).¹² Indeed, according to Matthew 5:20, it is not the inevitable transgressions of those committed to the law's observance that prevent their entry to God's kingdom; their very *righteousness* falls short. And, in the Sermon's antitheses, certain stipulations of Torah are declared inadequate statements of God's will.¹³ Here, as elsewhere in the

¹¹ In what follows, I draw upon my article "Law in the Sermon on the Mount"; cf. also my *Understanding Matthew*.

¹² See chapter 15 below. That πληρῶσαι ("fulfill") includes an element of transcendence is rightly insisted upon by Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 1.486–487; cf. 1.507–509.

¹³ The first, second, and sixth of the antitheses (5:21–22, 27–28, 43–45), though in-

Gospels, the relationship between Jesus' teaching and Torah is, I believe, a good deal more complex than is at times realized. Attempts to capture its essence need at least to take the following observations into account.

1. The Sermon on the Mount represents Jesus' expectations of how those who would have a part in God's kingdom are to live. Negatively, this means that the sermon is not intended as a blueprint for reforming the laws or institutions of current society.¹⁴ It is assumed throughout that Jesus' followers are and will remain a minority group subject to persecution (5:10–12) and abuse (5:39–40), living alongside scribes and Pharisees, tax collectors and Gentiles – all of whom live differently than they, but among whom they are to serve as “salt” and “light” (5:13–16, 45–47; 6:1–18, 32). Positively, Jesus' disciples must be “doers,” not mere “hearers,” of Jesus' words if they are to enter the kingdom (7:21–27).

2. That Torah, unlike the teaching of Jesus, served as the law of an earthly society is no doubt the reason why Jesus can find a number of its stipulations inadequate statements of God's will without questioning their divine origin.¹⁵ Deuteronomy's provisions for divorce represented a concession to human hardheartedness, not God's intention for the humans he created (so Matt 19:3–9; cf. 5:31–32). The same explanation presumably applies to stipulations in Torah related to oaths and the *lex talionis* (5:33–42): among hardhearted human beings, something was achieved by stressing, through oaths, the necessity of truth-telling at least in certain situations, and by restricting the natural desire for revenge. The laws of Torah served that limited purpose. But truth-telling is always to be the norm for God's children; and they are to respond to whatever abuse or demands they encounter, not with *lawful* self-assertion, but with expressions of God's goodness and generosity.

3. It is true that those who, following Jesus' teaching, are faithful in marriage, avoid oaths, and seek no revenge are not thereby *transgressing* Torah's commands. Crucially, however, those who punctiliously *comply with* Torah's provisions related to divorce, oaths, and the *lex talionis* fall short of doing God's will – as proclaimed by Jesus.¹⁶ Jesus does not *abolish* Torah; indeed,

roduced as contrasts between what was said of old and what Jesus demands, *can* be understood as a “spiritualizing” or intensifying of Torah's own commands. The third, fourth, and fifth antitheses (5:31–32, 33–37, 38–42) do not permit the latter understanding. See the discussion below.

¹⁴ See chapter 8 below.

¹⁵ Daube, “Concessions,” points out that concessions to sinfulness were a recognized feature in Jewish law. The point of the Sermon is that, in the kingdom of God, there can be neither place nor need for such concessions.

¹⁶ Jesus' position in these matters is *not* that of those who “made a fence around

if the essence of Torah is the demand for God-pleasing behavior, then the teaching of Jesus can be said to intend Torah's "fulfillment." Still, in the teaching of Jesus, the claim of various provisions of Torah to represent the righteous behavior God requires is clearly relativized.

4. Jesus finds fit for the kingdom, on grounds patently other than observance of the law, people whom society of the day regarded as particularly sinful (Matt 21:31–32; cf. Luke 7:36–50; 18:9–14; 19:1–10); and though, in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the Gospels, he demands of his followers boundless love, absolute purity, complete truthfulness, and utter self-denial, neither in the Sermon nor elsewhere are they told to observe the Sabbath or laws of tithing and ritual purity. Those who strictly observe the latter commandments are not faulted for doing so (cf. Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42); but their priorities are said to be skewed (Matt 9:13; 12:7; 23:23–24; Luke 11:42), and their zeal in condemning transgressors of norms in these areas is seen as misplaced (Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6; 7:1–23, etc.).

5. Jesus' stance throughout is *not* that of a mere interpreter of an authoritative law code, bound to its wording in his definition of what is right. Rather, in spelling out what God requires of those who would enter his kingdom, Jesus speaks with the same authority as the law itself: an authority that demands recognition without obvious legitimation (Mark 8:11–13; 11:27–33). Of those who would enter the kingdom, he repeatedly makes demands that go far beyond Torah's statutes (as the "rich young ruler" found to his dismay [Mark 10:17–22]).¹⁷ Among Torah's provisions, he sees in some, but not others, an adequate statement of God's will. Without pausing to construe what "work" Torah forbids on the Sabbath or what "matter of indecency" it sees as grounds for divorce, he finds it "lawful" to "do good" on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4), and declares, "What God has joined together, let no mere mortal put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

6. In form no less than content, Jesus' own statements of God's will are far removed from the halakhic endeavors of the Pharisees. As he conveys the *message* of the kingdom largely in parables, so the *requirements* of the kingdom are typically expressed in dramatic, poetic form, where the expectation is rather that disciples will show and act in accordance with the attitude illustrated in Jesus' command than that they will attempt to comply with its wording.¹⁸ Literalists will miss the point of Matthew 6:6 if they refuse to

Torah." The latter, assuming that commandments in Torah represented the divine will, attempted to guard against their transgression. Jesus' point is that *conformity* with certain of those commandments falls short of God's will.

¹⁷ See chapter 7 below.

¹⁸ Cf. Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, 46–63.

pray anywhere but in their rooms. They will be hard put to know how they can keep one hand from being aware of what the other is doing, or what logs are to be removed from their eyes (6:3; 7:5). Their self-congratulation that at least they have never thrown pearls to pigs will be premature (7:6). Yet, though Jesus' ethical teaching represents the opposite extreme from halakhic endeavors to define boundaries of proper behavior with maximum concreteness and comprehensiveness, it is not, for that reason, less serious, as any sensitive reader of the Sermon will attest.

Why the difference? East of Eden, after all, society does need laws – and laws need to be specific if they are to be enforced. Ideally, society's laws serve both to restrain evil and to inculcate virtuous behavior; society is the better where its laws are good and wise. Still, in the end, true *goodness*, the goodness at home in God's kingdom, though expressed in ways no law would condemn (cf. Gal 5:23), is not the same thing as careful compliance with rules.¹⁹ Labored compliance, while a vast improvement over unprincipled living, falls far short of the spontaneous selflessness and concern for others, the uncalculating generosity and kindness, the unstinting love of God and all his creatures that ought to mark God's children. Such goodness is related to joy, thankfulness, appreciativeness – though none of these qualities necessarily accompanies the most fervent strivings for self-discipline and virtue. It corresponds, rather, to the innocence of Eden, the fruit of genuine, unselfconscious delight in the goodness of God and his creation. That innocence (Genesis tells us) was lost when God's creatures chose to pursue their own perceived good rather than play their part in a divinely ordered cosmos; and innocence, once lost, cannot be recovered. Divine purposes were served (“for the hardness of your hearts”) when God gave his law to the most privileged of his wayward creatures; but no law could make them good. A tree must be good before it can produce good fruit (Matt 12:33): something of the power and goodness of God's kingdom must be experienced before its righteousness can be expressed.

The Sermon on the Mount must not be detached from the message of God's kingdom, the announcement of whose coming it follows (Matt 4:17). Jesus, who announces the coming of the kingdom, speaks with authority of the righteousness required of those who would enter it: it is new age righteousness, though meant to be practiced even now, under old age conditions, by the children of the kingdom. Jesus portrays such righteousness, not by exhaustively listing concrete rules to be scrupulously adhered to, but by illustrating the kind of attitude and action that mark children learning to imitate their heavenly Father (5:45–48; 6:1–18, 32).

¹⁹ Cf. Knox, *Ethic of Jesus*, 103–108; also his moving portrayal of the difference between a servant's and a son's obedience, 82–86.

There are parallels in Paul:²⁰ the conviction that the law, though divine, was too “weak” to produce God-pleasing behavior in sinful human beings (Rom 8:3); that the law served a limited purpose in the age of anticipation;²¹ that God-pleasing behavior can only follow from experience of the power and goodness of the new age – in Paul’s terms, the gift of God’s Spirit (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:22–23); that those who belong to the new age know and approach God as their Father (Rom 8:14–16; Gal 4:4–7). Most importantly, it was the arrival of the new age (for Paul, with the death and resurrection of Christ) that was the focus of Paul’s message, as it had been that of Jesus; the law became a factor for the apostle only when he encountered those who would impose old age requirements on those who were a part of the new creation.²² To this day, their number continues to grow.

The titles of a striking number of recent articles and books breathlessly announce to a world suspected of thinking otherwise that Paul was a Jew. The works in question regularly go on to add, as of particular moment, that he *remained* a Jew all his life. One can only agree, provided we understand the designation, as Paul understood his Jewishness, to refer to his Jewish ancestry: he was – and, to be sure, remained all his life – a Jew “*by birth*” (φύσει [Gal 2:15]); his kindred “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα) were similarly born (Rom 9:3; cf. 4:1). Since he was – and, to be sure, remained all his life – “of the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Benjamin,” he was, all his life, an “Israelite” (Rom 11:1; cf. 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5). This was not subject to change – and it was important to the apostle. In addition to shaping his conscious and unconscious thinking in countless ways,²³ Paul saw his identity as a Jew as proof that God had not forsaken his people; that a remnant of those born Jews, even in his day, were God’s chosen “by grace”; and that God could therefore be trusted to bring salvation to “all Israel” – the born descendants of the patriarchs, to whom irrevocable promises had been made.²⁴

²⁰ See chapter 7 below.

²¹ Paul does not, however, follow the Sermon on the Mount in speaking of the inadequacies of particular provisions in the law, highlighting rather the inability of the law as a whole to compel rebellious “flesh” to submit to its demands (Rom 7:14; 8:3). Conversely, Paul (but not the Sermon on the Mount) explicitly limits the period of the law’s hegemony: though the essential players in human history are Adam and Christ (founding figures of the old and the new humanity, respectively), the law was “added” to the old age scene at the time of Moses in order to clearly define, and even exacerbate, the rebelliousness of old age humanity (Gal 3:19, 22; Rom 5:13, 20; 7:5, 7–11, 13); it remained in force until the coming of Christ, the promised “seed” of Abraham (Gal 3:19; cf. 3:23–25; 2 Cor 3:11).

²² To judge, e.g., by the Thessalonian correspondence, the law of Moses played no part in Paul’s message in Thessalonica.

²³ See chapter 21 below.

²⁴ See the argument of Romans 11, and chapter 14 below.

Nonetheless, that Paul's Jewish ancestry was no longer what was most central to his identity is apparent from the terms "by birth" and "according to the flesh" by which he explicitly delimited his Jewishness.²⁵ Crucially, Paul could distinguish "being a Jew" from "living as a Jew," as he did when addressing Peter in Antioch: "if you, being a Jew, live 'Gentile-ly' and not 'Jewish-ly' (εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἔθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς)" (Gal 2:14). In the context, it is clear that Peter's (temporary) living as a Gentile and *not* as a Jew represented Paul's normal, and programmatically adopted, practice, that of eating with Gentile believers.²⁶ Since Paul went on to criticize Jewish believers who stopped eating with Gentiles for not acting in accordance with "the truth of the gospel," he evidently thought faithfulness to the gospel required them, too, to live "as Gentiles, and not as Jews" (2:13–14). That Paul himself no longer consistently lived in a recognizably Jewish way is presumably what he meant by speaking of his "former life in Judaism" (1:13–14).

Paul wrote Galatians to implore Gentiles not to take up the distinctively Jewish practices required by the law; one way he made the point was by telling them to become like him *as he had become like them* (i. e., like a Gentile [Gal 4:12]). He claimed, furthermore, that he would show himself a "transgressor [of the law]" if he were to reestablish ("build up again") what he had already "demolished" when he – as he put it, in the most *un*-Jewish statement he ever made – "died to the law *in order that he might live to God*" (Gal 2:18–19). In other words: he could not be guilty of transgressing laws to which he was no longer subject.²⁷

Another way of saying that Paul "lived as a Gentile, and not as a Jew" (Gal 2:14), or that, when with Galatian Gentiles, he "became like" them (4:12), was to say that when he was with those "without the law," he lived

²⁵ *Everyone* born a Jew is, *ipso facto*, a Jew "according to the flesh"; that Paul so delimits his own Jewishness can only mean that something else is even more fundamental to his identity. Cf. the claim that God's Son was born of the seed of David "according to the flesh" in Rom 1:3 – to which Paul immediately adds that "according to the spirit of holiness," he was "ordained Son of God in power by [or "since"] his resurrection from the dead" (1:4). That Christ, "according to the flesh," belonged to the Jewish people is not what Paul deems most important in Rom 9:5 either; he immediately adds, on the most natural reading of the text, that Christ is "God over all, blessed forever." Paul is no longer content with knowing Christ (or anyone else) "according to the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16).

²⁶ Attempts to show that Paul did nothing that others, who were considered law-observant Jews, were prepared to do are not without interest; for understanding Paul, however, it is of greater significance to see that *he* saw himself, at least at times, as living "as a Gentile and not as a Jew."

²⁷ His position is thus scarcely captured by saying that, when with Gentiles, he occasionally "took liberties" with the law. Those obligated to observe a law are not, in any case, at liberty to decide when and where they will obey it. But Paul's point is precisely that he was under no obligation to observe a "demolished," "died to" law.

“as without the law”: “with Jews I *became* as a Jew, in order that I might win the Jews; with those under the law, as one under the law – though not being myself under law – in order that I might win those under the law; *with those without the law, as without the law* – not being without the law of God, but subject to the law of Christ – in order that I might win those without the law” (1 Cor 9:20–21). The law to which *he* was not subject, but with which he – pursuing a mission based on a different vision – chose to comply when with those who were, was clearly that of Moses; the “law of God” to which he *was* subject – in his mission, and according to his new vision – was that which bound him to the service of Christ.

Paul was, after all, a “strong” believer who felt free to eat any food and treat all days alike (Rom 14:1–15:6).²⁸ It does not follow that he looked for pork chops on the menu wherever he ate. Martin Luther denounced those

²⁸ Cf. Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” In all likelihood, the assemblies in Rome in which Paul’s letter would be read were largely Gentile, though including a noticeable contingent of Jews as well. (Could a letter addressed to “all” those in Rome who are “beloved of God and called to be saints” [Rom 1:7] be intended to have *no* Jewish readers?) Paul’s concern that Jewish believers (patently, in Rome) not be disdained is evident in the specific warning given Gentiles in 11:13–24, as well as in 14:3, 10. His refusal to identify the “weak” in Romans 14 with Jewish believers was perhaps due in part to the sensitivity of the issue: direct identification might contribute to the very contempt for Jews that he wanted to avoid; but it is also likely true that *some* Gentile believers were numbered with the “weak.” But even if Paul envisaged his readership as entirely Gentile, and even if the issue lying behind Paul’s discussion was not Jewish food laws, the fact remains that Paul, Jew though *he* was, identified *himself* with those (“strong” in faith) who saw believers as free to eat any meat and who regarded no day as more sacred than another (cf. 14:2, 5; 15:1). And he cannot have imagined himself the only Jew entitled to do so, since he justified his freedom, not by speaking of what was peculiarly permitted an apostle to the Gentiles, but by citing a fundamental principle that he knew “in Christ Jesus” (14:14).

It is true that law-observant Jews could say, as Paul does in Romans 14, that no food, “of itself,” is unclean (Rom 14:14). So Rudolph, “Paul and the Food Laws,” 159–162, citing a well-known saying of Yochanan ben Zakkai. Yochanan’s *point*, however, was that the reason why we *must not eat certain foods* is not that such foods are inherently unclean, but that the Almighty *commanded* us not to eat them. Paul’s point, to the contrary, is that those aware that no food is inherently unclean are *free to eat “anything”* (cf. 14:2).

The rule of 1 Cor 7:17, 20, and 24 – that believers should remain in the state in which they were “called” – is sometimes interpreted as indicating that Jewish believers, but not Gentile, ought to keep all aspects of Mosaic law. But what Paul had in mind is shown by the illustrations he gives: since neither circumcision nor uncircumcision really matters, Jews should not attempt to reverse their circumcision, nor should Gentiles be circumcised; and slaves need not strive to procure their freedom. That, however, in the case of slavery, Paul’s “rule” is no more than a “rule of thumb” is evident from his implicit request for Onesimus’s freedom in his letter to Philemon; 1 Cor 7:21b may allow for other exceptions as well. Moreover, in the context in 1 Corinthians 7, the *point* of spelling out this policy is to say that both those married and those unmarried can best serve God by remaining in the marital status in which they found themselves when “called” – though here, too, Paul makes it clear that the unmarried are *not* obliged to follow this “rule” (v. 28). Whether or not Jewish believers retain an obligation to observe all parts of

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