

# A FORMER JEW

Paul and the Dialectics of Race

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- 1 Paul's claims about **Christian kinship have a realism that tells us that he thought of the Christian community in familial terms** and that he saw genuine kinship relationships emerging from God's ability to create the real out of the unreal.
- 2 Abraham is the ancestor of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, and these descendants are the heirs of Abraham's legacy of faith. Along with ἐκ πίστεως descendants, however, Abraham also has a second group of descendants, non-believing Jews or ἐκ τοῦ νόμου descendants, and Paul declares that the latter too will receive the promised inheritance through faith in accordance with grace (cf. ἔλεος in Rom. 11.17-32).
- 3 When in 1 Cor. 10.1 Paul mentions that the Exodus generation was also the ancestor of the mostly Gentile Christians at Corinth, his interest is not in shared bloodlines but in shared history. In both Rom. 4.23-24 and 1 Cor. 10.11 Paul views the history of Israel as particularly important and instructive for the Christian community, and, more importantly, as forming a shared history among Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians, and pre-Christ Jews.
- 4 Finally, according to Phlm. 16, birth kinship can strengthen the bonds of Christian kinship.

## 2. Paul's Self-Identity and Group Affiliation

In *Early Judaism*, Martin Jaffe explores the relationship between religion as a way of life and personal identity. According to Jaffe:

[Religion] heightens awareness of morally binding connections between the self, the human community, and the most essential structures of reality ... Personal identity in a religious setting ... includes far more than the web of relations containing the individual, the family, friends, or immediate social group of one's personal acquaintance. It normally includes a conception of how all these relationships are connected to generations of the distant past and the far-off future, as well to the forces and powers that are held to account for the world as it is.<sup>44</sup>

Jaffe's description of religion sets the stage for this investigation of Paul's identity by emphasizing the way that religion and personal identity are inextricably linked in the past and present by connections to other individuals and groups. As suggested by Jaffe, inevitably we will find that it is impossible to synthesize Paul's comments about his own identity without learning about his 'web of relations' or relational matrix.

We know Paul primarily through two self-characterizations that were integral to his self-image – he was an apostle to the Gentiles convinced of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he was descended from the

44 Martin Jaffe, *Early Judaism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), p. 7.

people of Israel. The remainder of this chapter pursues an understanding of Paul's self-identity by examining texts that describe Paul through these images. I begin with a shorter section on Paul's apostleship, even though his self-identity as an Israelite is chronologically prior to his apostleship. The section on Paul's apostleship examines two passages in detail, while the second, longer section on Paul as an Israelite synthesizes the passages about Paul's group membership and Israelite identity across a number of texts.

#### *a. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles*

Clearly, Paul's commission as apostle to the Gentiles was tremendously important to his self-understanding (Rom. 1.5, 13; 11.13-14; 15.16, 18; Gal. 1.16; 2.2, 7-9; 1 Thess. 2.16), and it is fitting that we examine this aspect of his self-identity, if only briefly. Of these texts, we consider Rom. 11.13-15 and Gal. 1.15-16 below, since these texts not only provide insight into Paul's apostolic identity but also offer clues about his relational matrix.

#### *1. Romans 11.13-14*

Paul has two rhetorical goals in the passage that contains Rom. 11.13-14. Romans 11.11-24 first describes the way that Jewish rejection of faith in Christ inaugurates a chain of events that paradoxically ends by producing Jewish acceptance of this faith. The chain of events involves Israel and the Gentiles in a symbiotic relationship in God's plan of redemption, in which the actions of each group contribute to the other's salvation. To start, Jewish rejection of faith in Christ somehow enables the extension of salvation to the Gentiles for an unknown period of time (11.11, 25). Next, Gentile 'fullness' in the gospel provokes Israel to jealousy, a jealousy that moves Israel in turn to accept salvation (11.11-15). Having laid out the mutual interdependence of Israelites and Gentiles in redemption, Paul finally warns his Gentile audience against a dangerous arrogance towards Israel. Gentiles should not assume that Israel's rejection is permanent and that Gentiles replace Israelites in the patriarch's family tree (11.19, 23-24).

We are most interested in 11.11-15, a passage in which Paul connects his ministry to the cycle of salvation described in the larger context. In 11.11 Paul repudiates the notion that Israel's misstep has led to a complete rejection by God. Instead, according to God's plan Israel's misstep results in salvation for the Gentiles, a salvation that stimulates Israel to jealousy. Paul elaborates on this idea in 11.12: if Israel's misstep results in riches for the world and for Gentiles, then surely their acceptance of Christ will result in even greater riches. Then, in a parenthetical statement in vv. 13-14, Paul explains that his own ministry to Gentiles is also a ministry to Jews:

And I say to you Gentiles accordingly, as long as (ἐφ' ὅσον) I am apostle to the Gentiles, if I could somehow make my biological kin (μου τὴν σάρκα) jealous and save some of them, then I hold my ministry in honor (δοξάζω). (Rom. 11.13-14, LLS)

The translation above differs from the usual one because most scholars reject the temporal interpretation of ἐφ' ὅσον ('for as long as'). This difference probably results from the fact that most regard Paul's comment in this verse as not truly indicative of how he understood his ministry over time.<sup>45</sup> As will become apparent, however, I maintain the temporal interpretation of this phrase for just that reason. That is, I think there is evidence in the corpus that Paul's sentiment in Rom. 11.13-14 represents his central conviction about his ministry and its contribution to the unfolding drama of the gospel of Christ, and the translation above better communicates this aspect of Paul's logic.<sup>46</sup> Paul expects (παραζηλώσω; future tense, 11.14) that the continuing significance of his own ministry to Gentiles (δοξάζω; present tense, 11.13) remains tied to the possibility that he will be able to provoke Jewish jealousy of Gentile salvation and thus stimulate Jewish salvation. For all practical purposes, therefore, Paul's mission to Gentiles has Jewish salvation as its ultimate goal.

As implied in the discussion of the translation of ἐφ' ὅσον above, there are various opinions about the way in which we should understand Paul's remarks in 11.13-14 about the function of his apostolate. While **Brendan Byrne agrees with the assessment that Jewish salvation is the ultimate goal of Paul's ministry, Munck goes beyond what is said here, maintaining that Paul believed that his was a decisive role in the unfolding drama of the gospel.**<sup>47</sup> Dunn, on the other hand, recognizes that stimulating Jewish jealousy is a 'crucial factor in the final act of the world drama' for Paul, but rejects the idea that this is the ultimate goal to which Paul's ministry moves. For his part, Moo dismisses the remarks, deciding that Paul here offers only one of the lesser motivations for his work.<sup>48</sup> With a view towards understanding Paul's missionary practice, **E.P. Sanders maintains that in Romans Paul considers for the first time the failure of the Jewish mission in light of his own singular success with Gentile evangelism.** According to Sanders, Paul revises the traditional scheme to fit the facts; God will save Israel only after the salvation of the Gentiles, and not before as expected. In so doing, he assigns himself only a minor role in the

45 Dunn, *Romans*, 2.655. On ἐφ' ὅσον in a temporal sense, cf. especially 2 Pet. 1.13, Mt. 9.15 (BDAG, s.v. ἐπί, 18.b). See also Gal. 4.1: 'For as long a time (ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον) as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave.'

46 δοξάζω is at the end of the clause in 11.13 for emphasis.

47 Byrne, *Romans*, p. 339; Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (trans. Frank Clarke; Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1959), pp. 36-68.

48 Dunn, *Romans*, 2.656, 669; Moo, *Romans*, p. 691 n. 45.

mission to Israel.<sup>49</sup> I propose, however, that Rom. 11.13-14 represents an accurate statement of the goals of Paul's commission and that an examination of Gal. 1.15-24 casts doubt on the idea that he assigns himself a role in a mission to Israel only as an afterthought.

## 2. Galatians 1.15-24

Appendix IV of NA<sup>27</sup> indicates that Gal. 1.15 alludes to Isa. 49.1. According to this index, there are 28 citations or allusions to verses in Isaiah 49 across 12 New Testament works, making these verses among the most-quoted OT passages in the early church.<sup>50</sup> Verses from this chapter appear six times in Paul (Rom. 9.16; 14.11; 2 Cor. 6.2; 7.6; Gal. 1.15; Phil. 2.7), five times in Luke, twice in Acts, and once each in Ephesians and Hebrews.<sup>51</sup> Overall, this text seems to have been a favorite of writers in Paul's orbit.<sup>52</sup> I include a translation of the first six verses here for convenience in following the subsequent discussion:

<sup>1</sup>'Hear me you islands, and pay attention O nations! In due course, it will be established', says the Lord. He called my name from my mother's womb (ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομά μου), <sup>2</sup>and he appointed my mouth to be like a sharp sword. He hid me under the covering of his hand, he appointed me as a select arrow; thus in his quiver he protected me. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, 'You are my slave (μοι δοῦλός μου εἶ σύ), O Israel – in you I will be glorified (ἐν σοὶ δοξασθήσομαι).'

<sup>4</sup>Then I said, 'Vainly I have labored, that is, I have given my strength in futility and for nothing. Because of this, the turning point of my life is with the Lord, and my suffering has been in the presence of my God.'

<sup>5</sup>Yet now thus says the Lord, the one who created me from the womb as his very own slave (ὁ πλάσας με ἐκ κοιλίας δούλον ἐαυτῶ), to gather Jacob and Israel to him – 'I will be gathered and I will be glorified before the Lord (καὶ δοξασθήσομαι ἐναντίον κυρίου), and my God will be my strength!' – <sup>6</sup>He said to me, 'A great thing has been done in you; you have been called to be my servant to establish the tribes of Jacob, and to turn around the dispersed ones of Israel. Behold, I appoint you to be a testament to all of the races of humanity (τέθεικά σε εἰς διαθήκην

49 Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 184–85.

50 Other frequently cited OT passages include Deut. 32 (36 times in 12 NT works); Daniel 2 (34 times in eight NT works), Dan. 7 (57 times in seven NT works) and Daniel 12 (28 times in nine NT works); Isaiah 40 and 53 (29 times in 12 NT works and 42 times in 13 NT works respectively).

51 An allusion to Isa. 49.18 at Rom. 14.11, as affirmed by the editors of NA<sup>27</sup>, is not convincing. The editors apparently discern an allusion in the expression ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος. However, this phrase occurs several times in the LXX outside of Isa. 49.18 (Num. 14.28; Zeph. 2.9; Jer. 22.24; 26.18), including 11 times in Ezekiel.

52 The remaining references appear in the Apocalypse, where there are six allusions and one quotation, and one reference in each of the Synoptic Gospels.

γένους), to be a light to the nations (εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν τοῦ εἶναί), so that you will stand for salvation unto the ends of the earth (σωτηρίαν ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς).’ (Isa. 49.1-6, LLS)

Luke especially associates Isaiah 49 with Jesus: there are allusions to this OT passage both at the scene of Simeon’s prophecy at the presentation of Jesus at the temple (Lk. 2.25-32), and at the ascension (Acts 1.8).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel (παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ; cf. Isa. 49.13), and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup>‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation (τὸ σωτήριόν σου), <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἔθνῶν; cf. Isa. 49.6, 9) and for glory to your people Israel’. (Lk. 2.25-32)

‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς; cf. Isa. 49.6)’. (Acts 1.8)

As a part of Luke’s strategy to associate early church leaders with Jesus’ authority, he then explicitly quotes Isa. 49.6 and associates it with Paul at Acts 13.46-47:

Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles [cf. Rom. 11.13-14]. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles (εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν; cf. Isa. 49.6), so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth (εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς; cf. Isa. 49.6)”’.

Paul also applies the text to himself. He uses it to refer to his call (Gal. 1.15), his preaching (2 Cor. 6.2), and his ministry (2 Cor. 7.6; Phil. 2.16):

But when he who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me (ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας; cf. Isa. 49.1) by his grace was pleased to reveal (ἀποκαλύψαι) his son in me (ἐν ἐμοί), so that I might

<sup>53</sup> Allusions to Isa. 49.12, 22 in Luke also appear in Jesus’ teaching at Lk. 13.29 and 15.5 respectively.

preach him to the Gentiles, I did not then consult with flesh and blood. (Gal. 1.15-16, LLS)<sup>54</sup>

For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you' [Isa. 49.8]. See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! (2 Cor. 6.2)

But God, who consoles the downcast (ὁ παρακαλῶν τοὺς ταπεινοὺς; cf. Isa. 49.13), consoled us by the arrival of Titus. (2 Cor. 7.6)<sup>55</sup>

It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain (κενὸν ἐκοπίασα; cf. Isa. 49.4). (Phil. 2.16)

From the allusions at Gal. 1.15; 2 Cor. 7.6; and Phil. 2.16, we can see that Paul read himself into the implied story in Isaiah 49 on at least these three occasions. Yet, a closer examination of Gal. 1.15-24 suggests that Isaiah 49 has shaped this passage to a greater degree than that realized by the editors of NA<sup>27</sup>. In addition to the allusion to Isa. 49.1 in Gal. 1.15, there is also an allusion to Isa. 49.3 in Gal. 1.23-24:<sup>56</sup>

They only heard it said, 'The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy'.<sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me (ἐδόξαζον ἐν ἐμοὶ τὸν θεόν). (LLS)

The phrase ἐδόξαζον ἐν ἐμοὶ τὸν θεόν echoes ἐν σοὶ δοξασθήσομαι from Isa. 49.3.<sup>57</sup> Further, the phrase ἐν σοὶ from Isa. 49.3 may explain the somewhat unexpected use of ἐν ἐμοί in Gal. 1.16 and 1.24. There is no consensus in the interpretation of these ἐν ἐμοί phrases in Gal. 1.16 and 24, and several modern commentaries completely ignore the prepositional phrase.<sup>58</sup> Here once again Paul reads his own experience in light of the implied narrative of Isa. 49. In fact, given the clear linguistic imprints of Isa. 49.1 and 3 in this opening section of Paul's autobiography, it is not

54 With many, I think the words ὁ θεός in Gal. 1.15 are a later gloss. J.B. Lightfoot notes similar additions in Pauline text such as Gal. 1.6; 2.8; 3.5; 5.8; Rom. 8.11; Phil. 1.6; 1 Thess. 5.24 (*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* [London and New York: Macmillan, 1865], p. 82).

55 There is another possible echo to Isa. 49.13 that is not listed in NA<sup>27</sup> but is similar to the one at 2 Cor. 7.6: the idea of God's comfort at 2 Cor. 1.3-4.

56 So also Lightfoot (*Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 86), and Richard Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), p. 42.

57 Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 42.

58 For example, Hans Betz notes that the 'mystical experience' interpretation of ἐν ἐμοί has fallen into disfavor. He himself takes the phrase as equivalent to a simple dative, but ultimately decides that for Paul internal and external visions of Christ may have been all of a piece (cf. Gal. 1.15; 1 Cor. 9.1; 15.8; Acts 9.1-9; *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], p. 71). Lightfoot, on the other hand, seems to combine the two alternatives, speaking of a revelation made through Paul to others (*Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 83; see also Richard Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', in Keck [ed.], *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 11: 183-348 [215]).



too difficult to see the thematic coherence between Isa. 49.2 and the autobiographical narrative in 1.16-17. In these verses, Paul may be speaking about his hiddenness from other leaders of the church during this period in a manner that echoes Isa. 49.2:<sup>59</sup>

He hid me under the covering of his hand, he appointed me as a select arrow; thus, in his quiver he protected me. (Isa. 49.2, LLS)

Even after we notice these additional allusions to Isaiah 49, however, we have not exhausted the thematic correspondence between Paul's narrative and the ideas in that prophetic chapter. For example, the correspondences between Galatians 1 and Isaiah 49 draw our attention to Isa. 49.5-6:<sup>60</sup>

Yet now thus says the Lord, the one who created me from the womb (cf. ἐκ κοιλίας in Gal. 1.15) as his very own slave (cf. δούλος in Gal. 1.10), to gather Jacob and Israel to him – 'I will be gathered and I will be glorified (δοξασθήσομαι; cf. ἐδόξαζον ἐν ἐμοὶ τὸν θεόν in Gal. 1.24) before the Lord, and my God will be my strength!' – He said to me, 'A great thing has been done in you, you have been called (κληθῆναι σε; cf. καλέσας in Gal. 1.15) to be my servant to establish the tribes of Jacob, and to turn around the dispersed ones of Israel. Behold, I appoint you to be a testament to all of the races of humanity (διαθήκην γένους), to be a light to the nations (εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν τοῦ εἶναι σε; cf. ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν in Gal. 1.16), so that you will stand for salvation unto the ends of the earth. (Isa. 49.5-6, LLS)

The many correspondences between Gal. 1.15-24 and Isa. 49.1-5 suggest that Paul sees himself as a light to the Gentiles as described in Isa. 49.6. Yet these numerous correspondences also demand that we consider whether the motif earlier in Isa. 49.6 of the servant as the gatherer of Israel also reverberates in the literary space of Gal. 1.15-16. Paul's statements in Rom. 11.13-14 confirm the idea that Paul understood his mission to extend to both Jews and Gentiles as described in Isaiah 49. He sees himself as having received a prophetic call (Gal. 1.15; Rom. 1.1; cf. Isa. 49.1), as having endured a time of hiddenness (Gal. 1.16-17; cf. Isa. 49.2), and as having experienced the comfort of God throughout his ministry (Phil. 2.16; 2 Cor. 3.4; 7.6; cf. Isa. 49.13). He is a slave of Christ (δούλος; Gal.

59 Hays makes a similar suggestion about echoes of Isa. 49.4 in 2 Cor. 5.18-6.2: 'If [the] whole depiction of the servant's charge (Isa. 49.1-13) is read in counterpoint with Paul's account of "the ministry of reconciliation" in 2 Cor. 5.18-6.2, as Paul's citation of Isa. 49.8 [in 2 Cor. 6.2] encourages us to do, both texts take on a new resonance. Even Paul's admonition that the Corinthians not accept the grace of God "in vain (*eis kenon*)" echoes the Servant's lament in Isa. 49.4: "I have labored in vain (*kenōs*), and I have given my strength for vanity and for nothing"' (R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 225 n. 48).

60 Dunn (*Romans*, 1.8), Munck (*Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p. 26), and Longenecker (*Galatians*, p. 30) all note the similarities with Rom. 1.1, 5.

1.10; cf. Isa. 49.3, 5), but a slave in whose ministry God is glorified (δοξαίζω; Gal. 1.24; Rom. 11.14; cf. Isa. 49.3, 5). Above all, he serves not only as a light to the Gentiles but also as a gatherer of the dispersion of Israel (Gal. 1.16; Rom. 11.13-14; cf. Isa. 49.5-6).

These conclusions are consonant with those of Traugott Holtz, who clearly reads Paul against the background of Isaiah and discusses a relationship between Isaiah 49 and Rom. 11.13-14, though without adducing all of the allusions to Isaiah 49 described here.<sup>61</sup> Betz, on the other hand, reasons that though Paul saw his mission as limited to Gentiles, he nevertheless conceived of it in terms of Jewish eschatology and as 'a part of his Jewishness'. Moreover, he warns against importing ideas from Isaiah about Paul's apostleship. Dunn and Bruce associate the 'servant of the Lord' motif with Jesus instead of Paul, viewing Paul as a participant in Jesus' ministry as the Servant of the Lord rather than thinking that Paul saw himself in such terms.<sup>62</sup> However, given that these scholars see several allusions to Isaiah 49, it seems puzzling that they reject the possibility suggested by the allusions to Isaiah 49 that Paul saw himself as involved in 'the gathering of Israel', an idea that is explicitly confirmed in Rom. 11.13-14. Are these scholars influenced by Luke's association of the text with Jesus? Are they perhaps persuaded that Paul's comments in Rom. 11.13-14 are isolated references, and that Paul only hits on this idea of his admittedly indirect ministry to Jews in anticipation of the difficulties he is likely to face in Jerusalem? Since Paul probably wrote Galatians and Romans far enough apart in time to allow Paul to change his arguments, the fact that the allusions to Isaiah 49 in Galatians are made explicit in Romans 11 tells against this scenario for understanding Romans. Romans 11.13-14 is no afterthought or consideration of a problem that had previously gone unrecognized, as maintained by Sanders, but clearly reveals important information about Paul's understanding of his mission, information that lies just below the surface elsewhere in his writings. Although we will now turn to a consideration of a different aspect of Paul's self-identity, in the next chapter we will pursue additional evidence that Paul ultimately saw his apostleship in terms of the gathering of Israel.

#### b. Paul the Israelite

Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr's analysis of Paul's Jewish identity holds that Paul's appeal to his Jewish background in Gal. 1.13-14; 2 Cor. 11.22-23; and Phil. 3.5-6 demonstrates that his Jewish identity was integral to his

61 Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 70, 72; Traugott Holtz, 'Zum Selbstverständnis des Apostels Paulus', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 91.5 (1966): 321-30.

62 Dunn, *Romans*, 1.8; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 92.

work as apostle to the Gentiles. Niebuhr holds that far from disregarding his former life as a law-observant Jew, Paul tells of his past as an exemplary Jew as a way of establishing his authority to address the question of the role of the law for Christians.<sup>63</sup> In an article that considers many of the passages reviewed in this section, Dunn concludes that Paul's identity was in flux. Paul thought of himself as a Jew in a qualified sense, but he embraced Israelite identity and sought to promote his understanding of Israelite identity among his converts.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, John Barclay also examines many of the texts discussed here and concludes that Paul was an apostate Jew.<sup>65</sup> A careful review of these and related texts brings us closer to Barclay than to Dunn or Niebuhr, showing that while Paul makes regular *reference* to his Jewish background, he refrains from *identifying* himself as a Jew.

### 1. 'Israelites' in Romans 9–11

We begin our discussion of Paul's self-identity and relational matrix with a discussion of Romans 9–11, in which Paul's use of the word 'Israel' creates no shortage of interpretive difficulties. In this passage, we are particularly interested in noting Paul's group affiliation and in determining the number and nature of the groups in Paul's relational matrix. Beginning with Rom. 9.3, we see that Paul refers to 'brothers' who are his relatives according to the flesh. 'Brother' is a family term that appears no less than 113 times in his letters, more frequently than in any other part of the Bible. What is intriguing is that there are only two cases apart from Rom. 9.3 where ἀδελφός refers to a biological relationship. First Corinthians 9.5 and Gal. 1.19 both use ἀδελφοί in reference to Jesus' brothers, and since the people in question are Christians even in these instances, Rom. 9.3 is the only place in the Pauline corpus in which the word applies to a non-believer. Thus, it seems that for Paul 'brothers' and 'brothers who are kindred according to the flesh' are potentially two separate groups, Christians and non-Christian Jews respectively.

Paul calls these non-Christian Jews 'Israelites' in Rom. 9.4. In view of his own self-description as an 'Israelite' later in Rom. 11.1, this would seem to indicate that he and these non-Christian Jews were members of the same group, despite the fact that Paul is 'in Christ' and they are not. On the other hand, Paul's claim in 9.6 that the word 'Israel' does not include everyone descended from Israel points in a different direction

63 Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel: Die jüdische Identität des Paulus nach ihrer Darstellung in seinen Briefen* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), e.g., pp. 20–23, 87–103, 110, 158–75.

64 Dunn, 'Who did Paul Think He Was?'

65 John Barclay, 'Paul among Diaspora Jews: Anomaly or Apostate?' *JSNT* 60 (1995): 89–120.

(Rom. 9.6-13, 25-9; 11.5-6). While Paul concedes common descent with these brothers, the ensuing discussion makes it clear that he does not acknowledge that Jews are ἐξ Ἰσραήλ if they are not in Christ (Rom. 10.1-13; 11.13-14).<sup>66</sup> Thus it seems that there are at least two kinds of Israelites in Paul's relational matrix, Israelites like Paul – that is, 'true' Israelites – and those who are Israelites merely κατὰ σάρκα. Though confusing, in Romans 9–11 the word 'Israel' can refer to either group.<sup>67</sup>

Paul's self-identification as an Israelite in Rom. 11.1 is similar to the expression in 2 Cor. 11.22, where he describes his Jewish Christian opponents in Corinth with the same set of characterizations that he uses of himself: they are Hebrew, Israelite, descendants of Abraham, and servants of Christ:

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite (ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλίτης εἰμι), from the seed of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin (ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν). (Rom. 11.1, LLS)

Are they Hebrews (Ἑβραῖοί εἰσιν)? So am I. Are they Israelites (Ἰσραηλίται εἰσιν)? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ εἰσιν)? So am I.<sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? . . . I am a better one. (2 Cor. 11.22, LLS)

**In both texts the word 'Israelite' stands without a qualifying phrase and thus contrasts with references to Israelites in other texts** (e.g., 1 Cor. 10.18; 2 Cor. 3.7; Gal. 6.16). For instance, when Paul refers to Ἰσραήλ κατὰ σάρκα in 1 Cor. 10.18, we gain additional insight into Paul's group affiliation. In 1 Cor. 10.16-18 Paul contrasts Christian and Jewish styles of eating sacrifices and in v. 18 refers to a group that he calls 'Israel according to the flesh', a phrase which is usually taken as a reference to the Israelites of the wilderness generation (cf. 1 Cor. 10.1-5).<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, it is possible that the group in 10.18 is that composed of Paul's non-Christian Jewish contemporaries who offer sacrifices to God in Jerusalem. While tense forms are not always a reliable indicator of the

66 Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, p. 175; Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, p. 279. Niebuhr (*Heidenapostel aus Israel*, p. 161), on the other hand, supposes that Paul refers to these non-Christian Jews as brothers because of his continuing belief that they are members of God's elect people.

67 Similarly Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', p. 688.

68 Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 172; F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 234; C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 235; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 470. Fee adds that Paul's reference to Ἰσραήλ κατὰ σάρκα in 1 Cor. 10.18 implies the existence of an Ἰσραήλ κατὰ πνεῦμα (*First Corinthians*, p. 470 n. 38).

time at which an action takes place, Paul's use of aorist and present indicative verbs in this chapter is suggestive, as may be seen by comparing the aorists used for the group in 10.3-4 (βρώμα ἔφαγον . . . ἔπιον πόμα . . . ἔπινον γάρ . . .) with the present indicative used for the group in 10.18 (οἱ ἐσθιόντες τὰς θυσίας κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου εἰσίν).<sup>69</sup> Further, Paul uses a present-tense verb to address the Corinthian congregation in 10.1a (οὐ θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί) but then switches to an exclusive use of aorist indicatives to describe the wilderness generation in 10.1b-11. After 1 Cor. 10.11, there are no other aorist indicatives in the chapter, and present-tense verbs appear in every verse from 10.13 to the end of the chapter in 10.33 with the exception of an aorist imperative in 10.15.<sup>70</sup> In other words, all of the actions of the historical group in 10.1-11 are described by means of aorist indicatives, after which these forms disappear. While this analysis is not conclusive, it at least opens the possibility that Paul refers to his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries when he speaks of 'Israel according to the flesh' in 10.18.

The third-person reference to 'Israel according to the flesh' in v. 18, moreover, contrasts with a Christian 'we' group in vv. 16 and 17 that participates in the Lord's Supper. We can infer from Paul's first-person plural reference to the group in 10.16-18 that Paul includes neither himself nor the Corinthians in the 'Israel κατὰ σάρκα' group, despite his self-identification as an Israelite in Rom. 11.1. In addition, the often negative associations of σάρξ in Paul are completely absent from the only other unambiguous references to pre-Christ Israel in the corpus; 2 Cor. 3.7 and 3.13 refer to Moses-era Israelites as 'sons of Israel'.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the idea that 'Israel according to the flesh' refers to Paul's non-Christian Jewish contemporaries seems viable in view of the way that Paul refers to these Jews in Rom. 9.3-4, calling them 'my kindred κατὰ σάρκα' and

69 Porter argues that tense forms communicate an author's subjective description of action and do not necessarily describe action as it 'objectively' takes place, even in the indicative mood. He does concede, however, that the nature of the perfective aspect, which is grammaticalized by aorist tense forms, results in a high frequency of this tense form in descriptions of past time action (Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* [Studies in Biblical Greek; New York: Peter Lang, 1993], pp. 102-103, 198-99). Given this overlap, it is reasonable to explore whether and in what way this correspondence between past time action and aorist tense forms applies in 1 Cor. 10.

70 Present indicatives predominate except in 10.14, 24-25, 32 where present imperatives exhort the congregation to exhibit specific behaviors. The aorist imperative in 10.15 does not appear in a context that refers to past time action.

71 Paul's reference to Israelites in 2 Cor. 3.4-18 is not so much a negative comment on the deficiencies of the old covenant as it is a comparison between the old covenant and the new. The old covenant is glorious, but its glory is surpassed by the glory of the new (2 Cor. 3.7-9; see Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 137-39).

'Israelites' in consecutive clauses (τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλίται).

It is possible that Israel κατὰ σάρκα in 1 Cor. 10.18 refers to pre-Christ Israel, as maintained by those who point to the clear reference to this group from history in 1 Cor. 10.1-5. This conclusion, however, stands in tension with the way Paul speaks of this historical group in 2 Cor. 3.7 and 3.13 and with the way he describes Jewish Christians in 2 Cor. 11.22. On the other hand, the reference in 1 Cor. 10.18 mirrors the way he refers to non-Christian Jews in Rom. 9.3-4.<sup>72</sup> In addition, a reference to ancient Israel in 10.18 becomes more doubtful given that Paul switches from a narrative using aorist verbs to speak about past actions in 10.1-11, to a discussion using present indicatives to speak about contemporary concerns in 10.13-33. All of this suggests that we can name the two groups of Israelites implied in Rom. 9.1-6 'Israel' and 'Israel κατὰ σάρκα'.

Returning to Romans 11, we can see that the olive-tree metaphor that appears in 11.17 subtly modulates the image used in Romans 9 to describe the division in Israel between those in Christ and non-believers. Now the latter become 'some' branches that have been broken from the cultivated olive tree. Since most scholars rightly take the root of the olive tree as a representation of the patriarchs, the tree must represent 'Israel', even though faith is the criterion by which branches become or remain attached to the tree (Rom. 11.20, 23; cf. 4.11-12).<sup>73</sup> The olive-tree metaphor thus brilliantly illustrates the three central groups in Paul's relational matrix: wild branches are those (former) Gentiles that are grafted into the tree based on faith (ἀγριέλαιος; 11.24); cultivated but broken branches are unbelieving Jews (καλλιέλαιος; 11.24); and branches connected to the tree, both wild and cultivated, are Gentile and Jewish Christians (11.20, 23). The metaphor depicts how both sets of branches, those now connected and those now broken, did or do grow out of (i.e., 'descend from') the root of the patriarchs, and it shows that the vital thing is whether or not the branches are attached to the tree.

In the conclusion of the discourse, Paul anticipates an eschatological reunion of Israel and Israel κατὰ σάρκα through Christ (Rom. 11.25-26).<sup>74</sup> The division in Israel between Jewish Christians and non-Christian

72 See Nils A. Dahl, 'Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung von Gal.6,16', *Judaica* 6 (1950): 161-70 (163). According to Dahl, Gal. 4.29 shows that the antithesis between Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα and Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ πνεῦμα (i.e., Christians) was close to hand in Paul even if not explicit.

73 See, for example, Moo, *Romans*, p. 705 and Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 310.

74 For a description of the questions and interpretive options at Rom. 11.25-26 (e.g., ethnic vs. spiritual Israel, eschatological vs. historical salvation, salvation through Christ vs. *Sonderweg*) and the scholars who adopt them, see the summary in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 618-20. For interpretations that engage the interpretation above pro and con, see Wright, 'Letter to the Romans', pp. 688-90; C.E.B.

Jews is, therefore, in Paul's mind, temporary. Nevertheless, the idea that there are two separate groups of Israelites *prior to the eschaton* still holds, and thus is applicable to the question of Paul's self-identification. With all this in mind, we can see that Paul's relational map contains at least four groups to which the word 'Israel' may be applied:

- 1 Paul and his Jewish-Christian opponents at Corinth are Israelites in an unqualified sense (Rom. 11.1; cf. 2 Cor. 11.22; Phil. 3.5). Though the point is debated, I maintain that Paul is referring to this group when in Gal. 6.16 he calls Jewish and Gentile Christians the '*Israel of God*'.
- 2 In Romans 9–11 Paul distinguishes 'elect' Israel (9.4, 6-8; 11.1-5) from hardened, 'broken off' Israelites (9.18; 11.20, 25). Based on the discussion above, I am proposing that this group corresponds to *Israel κατὰ σάρκα* (1 Cor. 10.18; Rom. 9.3-4).
3. Abraham and the '*sons of Israel*' are the ancestors both of the Israel of God and of Israel κατὰ σάρκα, as discussed above (2 Cor. 3.7, 13; Rom. 4.11-12, 16).
4. In Paul's view, '*all Israel*' is the unification of the Israel of God and Israel κατὰ σάρκα at the eschaton (Rom. 11.25-26; cf. 11.15).

## 2. *Philippians 3.2-9*

Philippians 3.2-9 most clearly shows that Paul's discussions about Christian identity take place within the framework of the Jewish understanding of race described in Chapter 3. Here Paul describes his identity by means of a contrast between his former identity in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί) and his new identity in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ).

He opens the passage with a pointed remark, declaring in 3.2-3 that worship or serving (λατρεύοντες) in the Spirit represents 'true' circumcision, and portrays physical circumcision as a mutilation, a deformity. By tradition circumcision was the seal of the covenant between God and the progeny of Abraham. After the Maccabean period, circumcision was such an important and time-honored indicium of identity that by Paul's time it had become virtually synonymous with Jewish identity, pointing beyond itself to a Torah-compliant lifestyle (Rom. 3.1).<sup>75</sup> In the language of

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Cranfield, *Romans, A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 2.577; Dunn, *Romans*, 2.682–83; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 723–25. The conclusion above, that Paul anticipates a reunion of Israel and Israel κατὰ σάρκα through Christ at the eschaton, emerges from (1) the earlier discussion of the correspondence between Rom. 11.17-24 which assumes faith through Christ, and Rom. 4.11-16 which implies that Christians and non-Christian Jews are separate sets of descendants of Abraham who both ultimately inherit the promises made to Abraham through faith; and (2) the mention of resurrection in Rom. 11.15 which points to eschatological salvation.

<sup>75</sup> Hodge, *If Sons then Heirs*, pp. 60–61; Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp. 39–40; Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, referring to both the Maccabean period and the repression under

identity from Chapter 2, this means that circumcision was an indicium of identity that marked a male as a member of the community and a descendant of Abraham. In fact, Paul himself often uses the word as a synonym for Jewish people, as is apparent in the contrasts between circumcision and uncircumcision in Rom. 3.30; 15.8; and Gal. 2.7.<sup>76</sup>

The two references to circumcision in Phil. 3.3 and 3.5 function similarly. Just as a circumcision/uncircumcision contrast stands by metonymy for Jews and Gentiles in Rom. 3.30; 15.8; and Gal. 2.7 and often signifies their differing lifestyles vis-à-vis the law, so too mutilation (κατατομή) and circumcision (περιτομή) in Phil. 3.2-3 represent two groups characterized by different practices. Although there is doubt about whether this party was actually present in Philippi, the ‘*mutilation faction*’ is probably a polemical reference to Jewish-Christian missionaries who emphasized circumcision and law observance (3.3, 6).<sup>77</sup> The ‘*[true] circumcision faction*’, on the other hand, refers to Christians who instead practice serving ‘in the Spirit of God’, a characterization that also relates to a certain type of conduct (3.17).

In the context of Phil. 3.5, however, Paul is using circumcision as a sign of Jewish descent, a point that he reinforces in four of the following five clauses.<sup>78</sup> These clauses contain a description of Paul’s Jewish heritage and in context put a heavy emphasis on physical kinship (‘I also have confidence in the flesh’; cf. 3.3, 3.5).<sup>79</sup> This kinship emphasis appears in

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Hadrian, points out that attempts to repress circumcision only strengthened its theological significance (‘Der Verzicht auf die Beschneidung im Frühen Christentum’, *NTS* 42 [1996]: 479–505 [483]; see also Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* [Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985], pp. 24–25; and Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel*, p. 105). In an interesting study Richard Hecht concludes that circumcision is unrelated to the covenant in the Philonic corpus, even though focused on the law. According to Hecht, Philo saw circumcision as a symbol of the mortification of sensual pleasures and therefore as a prerequisite for a life lived in conformance with the law (‘The Exegetical Contexts of Philo’s Interpretation of Circumcision’, in Fredrick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton Mack [eds], *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984], pp. 51–79). Romans 3.1-3 may prompt us to think that Paul shared Philo’s understanding of circumcision as a sign of a Torah-compliant life. There Paul speaks about faithfulness or unfaithfulness with reference to the ‘oracles of God’, a statement that is an answer to a question about the value of circumcision.

76 Marcus, ‘Circumcision and Uncircumcision’, p. 76; Dunn, *Romans*, 1.120, 209; id., ‘Who Did Paul Think He Was?’, p. 189; Hodge, *If Sons then Heirs*, p. 60.

77 Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A&C Black and Henrickson, 1998), p. 183; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 8–10, 293–97; *contra* Gerald F. Hawthorne who thinks these opponents are non-Christian Jews (*Philippians* [WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], pp. xlv–xlvi, 125–26).

78 Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel*, p. 105.

79 *Contra* Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, p. 302, who says that ἐν σαρκί refers ‘first to circumcision’ and then to life outside of Christ.



the triple use of the phrase ἐν σαρκί (once in 3.3 and twice in 3.4), and the consecutive phrases ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, and Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων (3.5). Here Paul again characterizes himself as an Israelite, but speaks of his membership ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ. This passage is one of only three passages in which Paul uses the word 'race' with respect to a people-group, all of them referring to Jews (2 Cor. 11.26; Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.5; cf. 1 Cor. 12.10, 28; 14.10). Here, the immediate context suggests that the kinship element of the race dialectic is foregrounded, but it is interesting to note that the other two passages each highlight one of the remaining elements of the dialectic of race: religion in Gal. 1.14 and social group awareness in 2 Cor. 11.26. Although Paul does not explicitly apply the word γένος to believers, we shall see that he nevertheless draws on the elements of the race dialectic in describing Christian identity.

Many scholars take 'Hebrew of Hebrews' as a reference to Paul's ability to speak Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>80</sup> However, given the context of the consecutive phrases φυλῆς Βενιαμίν and Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, he more likely emphasizes the antiquity of his lineage.<sup>81</sup> Both Josephus and the Greek Scriptures mainly use the word 'Hebrew' to refer to pre-exilic Israelites. In Josephus, fully 90 percent of the 313 uses of the word refer to Jews as a group and appear in the first half of *Antiquities*. In the LXX, with only one exception, the word 'Hebrew' appears in contexts in which it is either a reference to Jews by outsiders or a Jewish self-identification in speech to outsiders. A single impulse may link these two uses, in that literate Jews may have preferred to represent themselves to outsiders in terms that communicated the antiquity of their people, since ancient lineages were revered throughout this period. Paul's ability to identify his tribal origins in the φυλῆς Βενιαμίν phrase could serve to enhance his portrait of his lineage.

The next three phrases about law, zeal, and righteousness describe religious behavior as opposed to kinship,<sup>82</sup> and Paul continues to fill out the contrast between ἐν σαρκί and ἐν Χριστῷ in 3.9-11, setting out the

80 This inference is probably based on the portrait of Paul in Acts (see Acts 21.40; 22.2; 26.14). Fee calls such interpretations 'strapping Paul in a Lucan straitjacket' (*Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, p. 307 n. 14). Although Niebuhr (*Heidenapostel aus Israel*, pp. 105-7) also sees a reference to language in this clause, he thinks that Paul emphasizes his Jewish descent and origins in this passage, seeing 'Hebrew of Hebrews' as a climactic concluding allusion to people, tribe, family, and home life (p. 107).

81 Harvey notes that 'Hebrew' connotes conservatism or traditionalism and most often invokes an association with Abraham as patriarch (Graham Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew, and Israel in Ancient Judaism and Early Christian Literature* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996], pp. 9, 116, 124, 129, 146-47, and esp. 132).

82 Niebuhr sees a similar distinction, noting that the ἐκ phrases in 3.5 emphasize origins, while the κατὰ phrases in 3.5-6 emphasize behavior (Niebuhr, *Heidenapostel aus Israel*, p. 107).

terms of the contrast in vv. 7-8 using the language of gain and loss. In 3.9-11 we learn that being found in Christ first involves a reordering of the relationship with God, that is, δικαιοσύνη no longer comes by means of the law but now through πίστις Χριστοῦ. Finally, in 3.21 we find an appeal to a Christian sense of citizenship involving the kinds of references to state or government normally found in ἔθνος language. According to Paul, Christians are already members of a heavenly πολίτευμα ruled by the Lord Christ, who will presently bring all things into subjection to his rule.<sup>83</sup>

More importantly, we can see that the three elements that operated as synonyms in Romans 4 are also at work in the contrasts in Phil. 3.2-9. In Rom. 3.27-4.22, we saw that terms associated with physical descent, circumcision, and justification from works of law coalesced. Figure 4.2 shows that there are three elements that function as antinomies to these coalesced terms in Phil. 3.3-9: being [found] in Christ (3.3, 9), worship in the Spirit (3.3), and righteousness διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (3.9). An antithesis between circumcision and worship in the Spirit emerges clearly in 3.3a, and an antithesis between righteousness from law and righteousness from πίστις Χριστοῦ emerges just as clearly in 3.9. The last antithesis, between physical descent and being-in-Christ, is admittedly more allusive and thus is more difficult to see, but seems clearest in the latter half of 3.3 (καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκί). In 3.9, Paul may also speak evocatively of this antithesis between physical lineage and being-in-Christ when he talks of being found in Christ. This verse is reminiscent of the lineage discussion in Gal. 3.16, 28, in which Paul says that Christ is the one seed of Abraham and that believers are one in Christ (3.16: καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός; 3.28: ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).

Furthermore, it is easy to discern the three elements in the Jewish dialectic of racial identity behind the two antithetical triads. First, the antithesis between righteousness or justification by law and righteousness through πίστις Χριστοῦ clearly represents the religious component of racial identity. Second, as we have just seen, in 3.3-5 boasting in Christ seems to be in opposition to boasting in the flesh via indicators of physical descent, a contrast that corresponds to the kinship element in the model of Jewish racial identity. Finally, as we have also seen, Paul uses ἡ κατατομή and ἡ περιτομή as polemical metonymies for distinct people-groups, and the usage corresponds to the social identity element in the model of race. The specific social difference at work in this contrast has to do with identifying practices, since 'mutilation' was a polemical reference to a group that was emphasizing circumcision and law observance, while 'circumcision' was a reference to Christians who 'serve in the Spirit of

83 Ibid., p. 102.

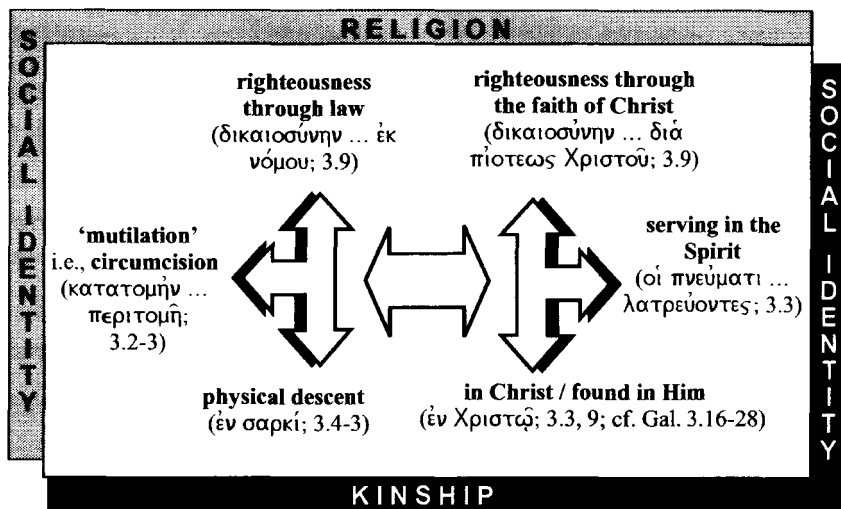


Figure 4.2 – Antitheses in Philippians 3:3-9

God'. Thus, this key Pauline text on the contrast between Jewish and Christian identity proceeds in terms of the elements from the Jewish model of racial identity, elements that are also visible in Paul's arguments about justification in Rom. 3.27–4.22. Further, as we noted earlier when the same elements appear in Rom. 3.27–4.22, justification by works of law, circumcision, and physical descent from Abraham are virtual synonyms, an observation that is congruent with the idea that these elements were already available as a framework for identity within Paul's Jewish matrix.<sup>84</sup> In other words, when Paul reached for language to describe the apocalyptic creation of a new people in Christ, he articulated the contours of this new identity by drawing freely on the construct of race that already existed in his social context, a construct containing an association between kinship, social distinctiveness, and beliefs about God.

### 3. Galatians 2.13-15 and Romans 3.5, 9

Galatians 2.13-15 is important for discerning Paul's views on Christian identity, and I will revisit these verses in Chapter 5. For the purposes of

<sup>84</sup> In his essay on Paul's treatment of Abraham in Romans 4, Richard Hays makes a similar point: "Throughout Paul's discussion from 3.27 to 4.22 there is an interweaving – indeed a virtual equation – of three theoretically distinguishable motifs: justification by works of the law, circumcision, and physical descent from Abraham. The connection of these motifs is not a systematic one; they are bound together, in a way characteristic of Paul, by an *associative* logic. All three are components of a particular "profile" of Jewish ethnic/religious self-understanding that Paul is seeking to correct' (*The Conversion of the Imagination*, pp. 78–79; emphasis original). I would add that Paul's 'correction' proceeds in terms of distinctively Christian ethno-racial reasoning.

the present discussion, however, we note one interesting aspect in these two passages – these verses represent the closest that Paul ever comes to identifying himself as Jew. However, we see that Paul actually refrains from doing so when we notice the designations of all of the actors in this narrative and consider the implications of these verses for understanding Paul's relational matrix and self-identity.

Galatians 2.13-15 describes Paul's confrontation with Peter after the arrival of a group sent by James, presumably from Jerusalem. The confrontation concerns Paul's reaction to Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentile Christians under pressure from this party (2.12). Note that Paul calls Peter a 'Jew' when he censures him, and that Peter is compelling the 'Gentiles' at Antioch to observe Jewish food laws (2.14-15; cf. 2.13):

And the other Jews (οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι) joined [Cephas] in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) to live like Jews? We ourselves are Jews by birth (ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι) and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. (Gal. 2.13-16)

Setting aside the matter of Peter's Jewishness for a moment, we should pause at Paul's use of the word 'Gentile' to refer to people who are certainly Christian converts. Paul carefully distinguishes his converts from Gentiles in 1 Thess. 4.3-5, and he speaks in the past tense of converts' Gentile identity in 1 Cor. 12.1-2.<sup>85</sup> With these passages in mind, it is likely that Paul refers strictly to birth circumstances when he speaks about Gentiles and Jews in Gal. 2.14 (cf. 2.7, 9).<sup>86</sup> Galatians 2.15 confirms this point when Paul identifies himself and other Jewish Christians as 'Jews by birth'.<sup>87</sup> In context and against the background of the other texts considered here, this indicates that even though Paul and Peter were Jews

85 Barclay notes Paul's apparent desire to avoid placing his Gentile converts in the negative category of 'Gentile sinner' (Barclay, 'Paul among Diaspora Jews', p. 107).

86 See also Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 78.

87 Given the contrasting reference to Gentiles, φύσις refers to 'origin' rather than 'nature' (i.e., character or temperament acquired through growth). Thus, the word here means 'birth', as it frequently does when associated with persons (LSJ, s.v. φύσις). So also many scholars and English versions: Helmut Merklein, "'Nicht aus Werken des Gesetzes ...". Eine Auslegung von Gal 2, 15-21', in Helmut Merklein, Karlheinz Müller, and Günter Stemberger (eds), *Bibel in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition* (Bonn: Anton Hain, 1993), pp. 121-36 (123); Betz, *Galatians*, p. 115; Bruce, *Galatians*, pp. 136-37; BDAG, s.v. φύσις; Helmut Koester, 'φύσις', *TDNT* 9.272; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 83; NET, NIVB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, RSV; *contra* J.L. Martyn, *Galatians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 248; NAU.

by birth, Paul considered them to be Jews no longer, a perspective corroborated by Paul's earlier reference to his 'former life in Judaism' (Gal. 1.13).<sup>88</sup>

Some scholars also think that Paul identifies himself as a Jew via the first-person plural verbs in Rom. 3.5, 9. Moo's summary of the two principal approaches to this notoriously difficult passage can help address this possible objection.<sup>89</sup> Moo identifies an older, traditional approach that holds that Paul addresses Jews in 3.1-4 (or 1-3) but that he shifts to address humanity in general in 3.4 or 3.5-9.<sup>90</sup> Moo then identifies a recent and now more popular approach that sees Paul addressing Jews from 3.1 to 3.9a.<sup>91</sup>

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

<sup>2</sup>Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup>What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup>By no means! Although everyone (πᾶς . . . ἄνθρωπος) is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written, 'so that you may be justified in your words, and prevail in your judging'. <sup>5</sup>But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way [κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω].) <sup>6</sup>By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup>But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup>And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), 'Let us do evil so that good may come'? Their condemnation is deserved! <sup>9</sup>What then? Are we any better off (προεχόμεθα)? No, not at all; for we have already charged (προητησάμεθα) that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. (Rom. 3.1-9)

88 Sanders (*Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, p. 175) reads Gal. 1.13 in a similar fashion; cf. Barclay, 'Paul among Diaspora Jews', p. 113. On the other hand, Gal. 2.15 is often read as Paul's affirmation of his Jewishness (e.g., Harvey, *The True Israel*, p. 7; R.B. Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', in Keck [ed.], *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 11: 183-384 [236]; Hodge, *If Sons then Heirs*, p. 57).

89 In addition to the two approaches described here, a different line of interpretation views this passage as a Pauline dialogue with a hypothetical interlocutor, an approach that puts the statements in 3.9 on the lips of this interlocutor. On this approach see S.K. Stowers, 'Paul's Dialogue with a Fellow Jew in Romans 3.1-9', *CBQ* 46 (1984): 707-22; id., *A Rereading of Romans*. For a critique of Stowers see R.B. Hays, "'The Gospel Is the Power of God for Gentiles Only'": A Critique of Stanley K. Stowers' *A Rereading of Romans*', *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 9 (1996): 27-44. Compare Stowers' approach with Douglas A. Campbell, 'Determining the Gospel through Rhetorical Analysis in Paul's Letter to the Roman Christians', in L. Ann Jervis and Peter Richardson (eds), *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (JSNTSS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 314-36.

90 E.g., Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, pp. 68-77.

91 Moo, *Romans*, pp. 179-202 and many others.

Notwithstanding the weight of recent scholarly opinion, I follow the first approach described by Moo and maintain that Paul speaks of Jews only in 3.1-4a, and thus does not identify himself as a Jew via the first-person plurals in 3.5, 9. Three textual details support this claim. First, when Paul does clearly speak of Jews in 3.1-4a, he does so in the third person. Second, in 3.4b-6 the phrases ‘let ... everyone be a liar’, ‘I speak in a human way’, and ‘judge the world’ respectively signal a broadening of the topic beyond issues strictly related to Jews. Third, the two first-person plural verbs in 3.9 (προεχόμεθα present middle, ‘offer an excuse’<sup>92</sup>; and προητισάμεθα aorist middle, ‘charged beforehand’) must both refer to the same subject – Paul himself, since only Paul can be the subject of the latter verb. Thus, 3.9 means

What then? Do I offer excuses [when in 3.7-8 I suggest people should not be judged as sinners when our falsehood abounds to his glory]? No! I have already accused both Jews and Greeks, that they are all under the power of sin. (LLS)

#### 4. *Romans 2.17-29*

Paul does not explicitly identify himself or his group affiliation in Romans 2, but his discussion of circumcision and the law in this chapter is of interest here because of what it reveals about Paul’s concept of Jewish identity. While many exegetical difficulties arise in interpreting this passage, the majority opinion understands Paul to be engaged in discussing Jews and Jewish identity in 2.17-29.<sup>93</sup> We have already noted that the first three chapters of Romans argue that both Jews and Gentiles

92 BDAG, s.v. ‘προέχω’, 2.

93 See for example, Dunn, *Romans*, 1.119–28; Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 123–32; Byrne, *Romans*, p. 105; Sanday and Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 67–68; Moo, *Romans*, p. 157; and Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 75; Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, pp. 151–53; *contra* N.T. Wright, against the majority opinion, who argues that Paul refers to Christians in Rom. 2 (‘The Law in Romans 2’, in James D.G. Dunn [ed.], *Paul and the Mosaic Law* [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996], pp. 131–50). According to Wright, 2.25-29 describes Gentile Christians because of (a) its similarity to Rom. 7.6; 2 Cor. 3.6; and Phil. 3.3 (but all of these contain a reference to Christ within two verses while no such reference appears near Rom. 2.25-29); (b) the apparent allusion to the new covenant passage in Ezek. 36.24-28 (but even Wright concedes that this text refers to Jews among the nations, not Gentiles); (c) use of the (divine) passive verb λογισθήσεται in 2.26 (cf. 4.3-23; but ‘righteousness’ is explicit in Rom. 4, not circumcision); (d) the assertion that Paul is anticipating his later arguments and here contrasts the Jew who does not keep the law with the Gentile Christian who keeps or fulfills the law. This last step in Wright’s argument is interesting but does not conform to the language that Paul uses to describe the difference between ‘keeping’ and ‘fulfilling’ the law elsewhere. When Paul speaks of Christians who fulfill the law, he uses a form of the verb πληρώω (Rom. 8.4; 13.8-10; Gal. 5.14; 6.2). In contrast, the verb in 2.26 that describes law observance is φυλάσσω, which is one of many verbs that denote Jewish obedience to the law (e.g., πράσσω, ποιέω, ἐμμένω, τελέω, etc., see Moo, *Romans*, p. 170 n. 21).

are equally accountable to God and under the wrath of God, and most scholars agree that Romans 2, for all its puzzles, is the Jewish counterpart to the indictment of Gentiles in Romans 1. Of interest here are several elements in Paul's criticism of Jewish religion from Romans 2. First, in Rom. 2.17-24 Paul rejects the idea that simple membership in the Jewish race confers privilege. Paul insists that pride in membership must be accompanied by a Jewish lifestyle, and implies that the mere existence of Torah-breaking Jews and the condemnation of such is enough to demonstrate that Jewish birth alone does not confer an advantage over Gentiles when it comes to God's judgement (Rom. 2.13-15).<sup>94</sup>

Paul's point that Jewishness entails obedience to Torah emerges also in 2.17-20. In the context of Paul's critique of a misplaced confidence in membership in the Jewish people, this section contains an extended description of what it means to be identified as 'Jewish'. A diatribe in vv. 21-22 that calls that named identity into question interrupts the description in vv. 17-20.<sup>95</sup> Verses 17-20 primarily depict Jewish identity in terms of how the law functions in relationships between Jews and outsiders, while the questions in vv. 21-22 more briefly focus on an individual Jew's conduct vis-à-vis the law. Although the 'if' statement begun in 2.17-20 is interrupted by the questions in vv. 21-22, the ideas of 'boasting' and 'naming' are resumed in 2.23 and signal the end of the unit by reiterating its major concern – that the one who identifies himself as a Jew stands in a unique relationship to the law and thus to outsiders (2.17, 19, 20, 23-24, 29).<sup>96</sup> In other words, Paul argues that one cannot be a 'true Jew' without a public alignment with the Torah. Further, in 2.25-29 Paul undercuts his interlocutor's pride in circumcision as a sign of the covenant between Jews and the God of Abraham and thus as a distinctive mark of Jewish identity. Instead, Paul insists that the true significance of circumcision emerges in its association with covenant obedience.<sup>97</sup>

94 George P. Carras, 'Romans 2,1-29: A Dialogue on Jewish Ideals', *Biblica* 73.2 (1992): 183-207 (199-200); Dunn, *Romans*, 1.114; see also Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 69.

95 Günther Bornkamm, 'Paulinische Anakoluthe', in id., *Das Ende des Gesetzes* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), pp. 76-78; Käsemann, *Romans*, pp. 69-71.

96 Similarly, Moo, *Romans*, pp. 161-63. In addition, see Moo's discussion of the way that Paul ironically reuses Isa. 52.5, which in context indicts foreign powers for their oppression of God's people: 'Perhaps Paul intends the reader to see the irony in having responsibility for dishonoring God's name transferred from the Gentiles to the people of Israel' (p. 166). Cf. Merklein, "'Nicht aus Werken des Gesetzes ...'", p. 123.

97 In particular, Carras' approach accounts for the particularly 'Jewish' tenor of Rom. 2 (e.g., 2.12-15, 26; cf. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 123-35, who maintains that the text is a Jewish synagogue sermon) and the way the passage functions with reference to the rhetorical questions in Rom. 3.1. The questions in Rom. 3.1 ask for an explicit description of the advantages of Jewish vs. Gentile identity, questions that seem urgent after Paul has systematically deconstructed a commonly accepted catalogue of Jewish advantages (cf. n. 17 above on Paul's rhetorical questions). Carras should also be

Within this framework, we can see that this text contains important information about the main elements of Jewish identity. Paul criticizes Jewish practice when there is no consistency between the criterion and indicium of Jewish identity. In 2.17-24, he points out that lack of Torah observance calls one's membership in the Jewish people into question, while 2.25-29 makes the same point about the indicium of circumcision. The visible indicium is meaningless if the sign of the covenant is not accompanied by covenant obedience (cf. Jer. 9.23-25).<sup>98</sup> In making this argument, Paul displays a sophisticated understanding of the proper relationship between indicium and criterion. An indicium is valuable only to the degree that it corresponds to the realities of group membership. When Paul insists that circumcision is meaningful only when it points beyond itself to true membership as gauged by obedience to Torah, he reinforces the point from 2.17-24. Further, his reference to uncircumcised Gentile law keepers who will judge Jews is a dramatic overstatement. When circumcision is not accompanied by the obedience to Torah that is at the heart of Jewish identity, the sign is so worthless that even the uncircumcised will have a higher status at the judgement than Torah-breaking Jews.<sup>99</sup> In all this, Paul describes his understanding of Jewish identity and practice in terms that could have passed muster in many Diaspora synagogues.<sup>100</sup> Below we will see that this portrait of Jewish identity stands in considerable tension with Paul's description of his own behavior, and thus raises questions about his identity and group affiliation.

### 5. 1 Corinthians 9.19-23, 10.32

On the issue of Paul's Jewishness, 1 Cor. 9.19-23 is the passage that represents a significant retreat from Jewish identity. In contrast to the

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commended for his interpretation of 2.17-24, which is superior to interpretations that see in this passage an indictment of all Jews for the failures of a few (cf. Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983], p. 100; *contra* Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 69) or the implication that the law must be done perfectly (Moo, *Romans*, p. 168).

98 Since Jer. 9.23-25, with its mention of circumcision transformed into uncircumcision, is the background for the latter half of Rom. 2, it is likely that Paul is anticipating the discussion in Rom. 9 in which he makes use of the disjunction between 'the elect' and 'the rest'. In other words, via his deconstruction of circumcision in Rom. 2, Paul opens the first salvo of his later argument in 9.6 that 'not all Israelites are truly from Israel'. See Sanday and Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 67; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1.176.

99 Carras, 'Romans 2,1-29', p. 158.

100 I do not think that Paul borrowed heavily from homiletical material in the Jewish Greek-speaking Diaspora in composing the chapter as Sanders does, but I agree with his major point that it represents a not uncommon view among Diaspora Jews about the relationship between identity and keeping the law (see Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, pp. 123-35).



straightforward statements of Israelite identity elsewhere, here Paul describes his ability to be 'like' Jews who are under law and 'like' Gentiles who are without law. This passage occurs in a discourse about the responsibilities of Christian liberty that extends from 1 Corinthians 8 to 11.1, and is especially concerned with the question of eating meat originally sacrificed in pagan temples. We saw earlier that ch. 9 frames this issue as a balance between liberty (ἐξουσία; 1 Cor. 8.9; 9.4, 5, 6, 12, 18) and self-sacrifice for the sake of others in the community. In its nearer context, 9.19-23 concludes Paul's personal illustration of this principle, describing the way that he freely relinquishes his apostolic right to support from the churches in order to remain above reproach in his ministry.

With reference to 9.19-23, some scholars assert that these verses characterize Paul's missionary strategy only, and debate whether Paul intends them for application within the Christian community.<sup>101</sup> A related question more pertinent here concerns whether Paul speaks of non-Christian Jews or Christian Jews in 9.20. On the one hand, Paul's use of 'save' (σώζω) in 9.22 favors a reference to the former, especially since the placement of this verb at the end of the sentence for emphasis explicates his use of 'gain' (κερδαίνω) throughout this section. On the other hand, the reference to the 'weak' in the same verse (9.22) recalls the earlier discussion of weak Christians lacking in knowledge (8.7), and favors the understanding that Paul refers to Christian Jews in 9.20.

I do not think that the argument of ch. 9 is limited to a defense of Paul's apostolic rights or missionary practice; instead, he illustrates the principles that are to apply in interpersonal relationships within the community. Paul chooses to relate the story for the purposes of influencing the behavior of Christians, and both the example in 9.19-23 and the other practice highlighted in ch. 9 (i.e., apostles receiving support from their churches) provide illustrations of the main theological principle developed in this discourse. Thus, it seems likely that when Paul speaks of Jews in 1 Cor. 9.20, he refers to non-Christian Jews rather than Jewish Christians, even if some Jewish Christians constitute the audience for his exposition in ch. 9.

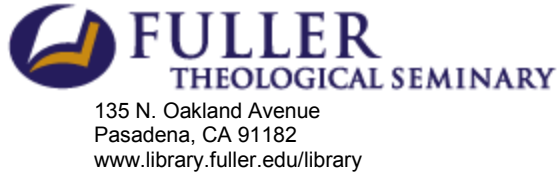
In 9.19-23, Paul speaks about Jews in the third person and speaks with nearly perfect ambivalence about Jewish practices and sensibilities. Just as Paul displays a willingness to assume a temporary yoke of law, he also

101 Against Paul's application of these verses to evangelism see G. Bornkamm, 'The Missionary Stance of Paul in Acts and his Letters', in L. Keck and J.L. Martyn (eds), *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 194-207; for other perspectives see Wendell Willis, 'An Apostolic Apologia? The Form and Function of 1 Corinthians 9', *JSNT* 24 (1985): 33-48 (37); Stephen C. Barton, 'All Things to All People: Paul and the Law in the Light of 1 Corinthians 9.19-23' in Dunn (ed.), *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 271-85 (279); and P. Richardson and P. Gooch, 'Accommodation Ethics', *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 89-142 (97).

displays a willingness to assume a situational antinomianism. I characterize Paul's ambivalence as nearly perfect because he is careful to adopt a certain existential reserve. With respect to those under law, he is not himself under law (μή ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον) and with respect to those without law, he is not free from law but he is in the law of Christ (μή ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ). The clear implication of this text is that even though Paul feels free to assume these kinds of behaviors in evangelism, neither of these behaviors or labels describe Paul's true socio-religious identity. Paul's ambivalence towards the law in this text is entirely at odds with his description of Jewish identity in Rom 2.17-29, discussed above. Thus, when Paul maintains that he can 'become *like* a Jew', he clearly implies that he does not see himself as a Jew in the first place.<sup>102</sup>

The reserve with reference to Jewish identity at 9.19-23 is especially interesting in view of a statement near the end of the discourse. The discussion about Christian liberty and responsibility in 1 Corinthians 8-10 ends at 10.32, where Paul concludes his teaching in a single sentence: 'Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God.' Here we see that Paul has three groups in view and that in this case, he sees himself as a member of this third collective. Further, when we recall our earlier discussion of the circumcision/uncircumcision contrast as a metonymy for Jews and Gentiles in Paul, we will be able to see that the tripartite division in 1 Cor. 10.32 is reiterated elsewhere in the corpus in the perspective of Gal. 6.15: 'Neither circumcision . . . nor uncircumcision, but new creation!'

102 Although this seems to me to be a rather straightforward conclusion from this text, the idea that Paul has dissociated himself from being Jewish is routinely rejected, either implicitly or explicitly. See for example, Conzelmann, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 160; Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 428; Richardson and Gooch, 'Accommodation Ethics', p. 96; and Hays, *First Corinthians*, p. 153. C.K. Barrett, on the other hand, seems to have changed his mind on this point, maintaining that Paul was a Jew in one commentary (Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 210-11), but later on holding that he 'could become a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and become something else' (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: A&C Clark, 2nd edn, 1971], p. 211). I think that there is a reluctance to acknowledge that in 1 Cor. 9.19-23 Paul withdraws from Jewish identity due in part to a well-meaning desire to avoid even the appearance of Christian anti-Judaism. Such political reactions from the interpretive community may be useful and even necessary in the wake of the Shoah and beyond. But it seems to me that a retreat from Jewish identity is problematic when 'Jewish' somehow represents a negative or undesirable identity, a stance clearly at odds with Paul's own inclinations (Rom. 9.1-3; 11.15). Perhaps it may be possible to achieve similar political ends by reclaiming both the more likely interpretation of 1 Cor. 9.19-23 described above, along with Paul's own positive construction of Jewish identity. For more on how my interpretation of Paul's identity engages the problem of Christian anti-Judaism see Chapter 6 below, pp. 217-24.



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