

Carla Swafford Works
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, DC, USA

“Slave of Christ, Slave to All: Lessons from the Apostle Paul”

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul boasts an incredible adaptability to engage those outside the church on their terms.¹ The apostle claims to become all things to all people so that by all means some might be saved. Paul alleges to become like a Jew to win Jews, like one under the law to win those under the law, and like one outside the law to win those outside the law. In his engagement with outsiders, Paul claims to “become” like the other, within certain perimeters, in order to “win” outsiders to the faith.

Paul’s adaptability, however, is not simply an approach employed to engage those outside the church. Along with the categories of being like a Jew or the “lawless,” Paul also tells the Corinthians that he becomes “weak” in order to win the weak. This language of weakness is significant. Paul’s lesson in versatility is directed at the church’s engagement with one another. He is recounting his strategy to the “knowledgeable” ones at Corinth, the ones who enjoy dining at the local temples in spite of the risk of influencing the “weak” in the congregation to return to a life of idolatry (1 Cor 8:7-13).² Thus, Paul’s stated strategy for relating to outsiders in 1 Cor 9:19 comes in a concrete situation in the life of the church—a situation in which some are in real peril of destruction (8:10-13).

The behavior of becoming all things to all people serves as a model for Paul’s relationships *inside* and *outside* the body of Christ. Paul’s chameleon-like behavior is not a sycophantic strategy to please people and, thereby, make the gospel somehow less offensive. Paul assumes that his advice will offend the knowledgeable. Paul’s claim to become weak comes in a section where he is highlighting his voluntary self-lowering of status. This apostle of the crucified Lord has renounced his apostolic rights in order to preach the gospel free of charge.

¹ The term adaptability here is being used in the widest possible sense. Paul claims to “become” like another, and this act of becoming implies change. I prefer this term over “accommodation” which may imply that Paul is sacrificing his own beliefs or values in his act of “becoming” all things. The act of accommodation requires knowing who is accommodating and what is being accommodated, see discussion in Paul Gooch, *Partial Knowledge: Philosophical Studies in Paul* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 127.

² The term “knowledgeable” is preferred to the label “strong” when discussing the dilemma of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1. Paul does not use the label “strong” to describe members of the community here, as he does in Rom 15:1. In Romans the community’s squabbles over food and religious festivals (Rom 14:1-15:13) are depicted as divisions between the “weak” and the “strong” (δυνατοί). Paul does refer the Corinthians as “strong” in 4:10: “we are weak, but you are strong (ἰσχυροί)” (similarly 1:27). In chapter 8, however, he emphasizes the knowledge that the Corinthians claim to have (8:7). So as not to conflate the issues between the Roman congregation and the Corinthian church, the term “knowledgeable” will be used to depict those who are claiming to have knowledge and who stand in opposition to the “weak” regarding the consumption of idol food (see 8:1-13).

Not only has he renounced his rights, but he has humbled himself. Paul, the free man, *enslaves* himself to *all*—knowledgeable or ignorant, lawful or lawless (9:19).

Being a “slave to all” is intricately related to Paul’s adaptability of becoming all things to all people. Paul believes that he and members of the church must be willing to adapt their behavior for the sake of the gospel. This does not mean that Paul is willing to make the gospel more palatable (see 1 Cor 2:1-5). Rather, Paul’s gospel is scandalous because it is a status-reversing model of service exemplified by Christ. The apostle, who also claims to be a slave of Christ, understands this role as one who is a slave to all.³ It will be argued in this paper that Paul’s practice of relating to outsiders, as worded in 1 Cor 9:19-23, is the same Christocentric paradigm that he holds as paradigmatic for the church’s behavior to one another—to love and to serve one another and thus fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

The Pauline Metaphor of Slavery

The apostle’s argument in 1 Corinthians 9 relies on the rhetoric of slavery. Paul here is adopting the metaphor of slavery to describe his behavior within the church and to those outside the congregation. The use of slavery as a metaphor is common in ancient literature to express devotion to the divine or, more negatively, to articulate a sense of captivity to desires.⁴ Both uses of this metaphor are visible in the Pauline discourse. In fact, slavery as a metaphor is widespread in Paul’s letters.

The metaphor of servitude frequently depicts Paul’s devotion to the divine. Paul repeatedly portrays his own apostleship as an act of service to God (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 4:5). Here, Paul has likely been influenced by the abundant servant images of Israel’s Scriptures that depict the faithful as servants of the Lord (e.g., Exod 32:13; Num 11:11; 12:7; 14:24; Deut 3:24; 9:27; 32:36; Josh 1:1; 5:14; 1 Sam 1:11; 3:9; 1 Kgs 8:22-40; 11:13).⁵ Furthermore, Paul uses the same metaphor in his exhortation for the church to show devotion to the Lord. If he is a slave to the divine, so, he contends, is the church: “But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved (*δουλωθέντες*) to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life” (Rom 6:22; cf. 12:11).⁶

Being a slave to the divine also means being a servant of one another (Gal 5:13; 2 Cor 4:5). In Romans 14:18, the one who *serves* (*δουλεύων*) Christ is also considered pleasing to God and approved by others. This call to service in Romans 14 comes in the midst of Paul’s discussion of food practices (Rom 14:13-23). The apostle warns the Romans that injuring

³ Paul portrays himself as a servant of Christ frequently (e.g., Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; 1 Cor 4:1; cf. Tit 1:1).

⁴ For a survey of literature, see I.A.H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church: From the New Testament to the Beginning of the Fifth Century* (JSNTSup 156; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 42-48.

⁵ Consider also Israel as God’s slaves in Lev. 25:42, 55.

⁶ Murray Harris contends, “As used of all Christian believers, the term *doulos* is not partially sweet and partially sour, but totally sweet” (*Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* [Leicester: Apollos, 1999], 142). Though Paul may have been comfortable using this metaphor to describe his devotion to the divine, it is apparent some members of the churches preferred to avoid slave-like qualities.

another by eating certain foods could cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died (Rom 14:15; cf. 1 Cor 8:11). Eating whatever one wishes with no regard for one's brother or sister is likened to destroying the work of God (Rom 14:20). As Paul reiterates in Rom 16:17-18, those who create dissension and allow themselves to be ruled by their own bellies are not acting like servants of the Lord Christ.

Paul also frequently uses the metaphor of slavery to portray the overwhelming enticement to desires or forces that are outside one's control. In Rom 6:16-20, Paul argues that one is either captive to God and God's righteousness or enslaved by the power of sin. Paul speaks of sin as a cosmic power that has the ability to reign, to enslave, and to kill (Rom 5:12-21; 6:14, 16-23). Captivity to sin or the flesh reflects the world's predicament, since sin's corrupting power always leads to death.⁷ Paul's gospel, then, is depicted as liberation from these enslaving powers: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1a; cf. Gal 5:13; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rom 6:14, 16-20). Yet even this freedom is enslavement to another master. Though no longer enslaved to sin, the baptized are enslaved to righteousness and obedience (Rom 6:16-20) and urged to walk according Spirit (Rom 8:1-17). One is either allowing the desires of the flesh to control behavior or living under the guidance of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26).

In sum, Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to express devotion to the divine, devotion to one another in the church, and captivity to other forces—either to sin and flesh or to the Spirit. In 1 Cor 9:19, however, Paul employs the metaphor of slavery to relinquish his status as a free man to become a "slave to all." On first read, being a "slave to all" might not seem to coincide with any of Paul's metaphorical uses of slavery. Here Paul claims to enslave himself not just to God or to Christ or even to those in Christ, but to *everyone*—insiders and outsiders, those who believe in the God of Israel and those of different faiths, those of low status and those of high status. What might it entail to be a "slave to all"?

A Slave to All?

How can one be a slave to all? This metaphor raises questions of status and expectations for a slave at the time—questions that are fraught with difficulty since the institution of slavery in the Roman world was extraordinarily complex. Being a slave does not necessarily place a person at the lowest end of the social spectrum. However, being a slave to *all* implies being a slave to slaves and to those whom Roman society considered outcast or expendable.⁸ For a free person willingly to adopt the status of a slave is worthy of note. In 1 Cor 9:19, Paul, who enjoys the status of a free man (9:19), an apostle of the Lord (9:1), and father to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 4:15), claims to be a slave to all.

It is hard to imagine what a "slave to all" might look like in reality. Slaves in the Roman Empire served a variety of functions and attained varying levels of social standing. Scholars such as Wayne Meeks and Dale Martin have drawn attention to the possibilities of upward social mobility of a free person who sells himself (or herself) to a respectable family and, thereby,

⁷ See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 125-136.

⁸ For a graph of the approximate make-up of Roman society between ruling class, laborers, slaves, and untouchables, see Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 5.

becomes affiliated with a particular household.⁹ It is even possible, though admittedly rare, that slaves in respectable households received an education and later, as freed people, enjoyed social standing in their communities. In 1 Cor 7:17-24, Paul may very likely be addressing the phenomenon of selling oneself into slavery to gain social standing when he urges the Corinthians to remain where they were when they were called (with the exception of allowing freedom, 1 Cor 7:21-23).¹⁰ Thus, while there seems to be some evidence of using slavery to gain status in Roman society, Paul is making the opposite claim. Becoming a slave to all would surely be going the opposite direction in the social hierarchy.

Even with varying degrees of social standing among slaves, there was still a stark divide between slave and free.¹¹ Since slaves were dependent upon external circumstances beyond their control, all slaves were subject to various forms of exploitation. Women and young men were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Adult male slaves were not permitted to claim paternity over their own offspring and, thereby, were denied the privilege of serving as head of a family.¹² The body of a slave was so thoroughly connected to the property of the slaveholder that the Greek term for body *σῶμα* is often used as a euphemism for slaves who are listed in wills and estate holdings.¹³ A free person had to be willing to take risks to enslave himself (or herself) to another, even if the intended outcome was to climb the social ladder.

Slaves, whatever their status, had an identity intertwined with the slaveholder. Slaves represented a household and particularly the master. In some instances, slaves could even serve the punishment that should have been inflicted on the slaveholder for failing to pay dues or for other infractions.¹⁴ In this way, slaves serve as a type of surrogate body for their owners. In the late second century, Artemidorus wrote a treatise on the interpretation of dreams, entitled *Oneirocritica*, in which he asserted that, in dreams, the appearance of one's slaves often represented the body of the master.¹⁵ Though it would be dangerous to assume that the identity of all slaves was so closely intertwined with the slaveholder's identity, this evidence does indicate the vulnerability of the slave's circumstances and the close connection between the servant and the one served.

When Paul claims to be a slave of Christ or a "steward of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4:1), the slave metaphor demonstrates the apostle's close connection with the one whom he claims to serve. He is affiliating himself with a master of the greatest possible status and seeing himself as doing the master's bidding. Martin argues that the title "slave of Christ" is not a title of self-

⁹ Wayne Meeks, *First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale, 1983), 19-23; Dale Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), 35-42, 50-85.

¹⁰ Bruce Winter, *Seek The Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 145-164.

¹¹ Consider Gal 3:28 or 1 Cor 12:12-13.

¹² Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11. Dale Martin points to a limited amount of evidence that suggests that in rare cases there were slave families who stayed intact within families ("Slave Families and Slaves in Families," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David Balch and Carolyn Oseik (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 207-230.

¹³ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 10-11.

¹⁴ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 15-16.

¹⁵ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 9.

abasement, but a title used to demonstrate the superiority of the household that Paul serves.¹⁶ It is paradoxically a title of high status among slaves because from Paul's perspective there is no higher household.

In 1 Cor 9:19-23, Paul, however, does not highlight his servitude to Christ, but his servitude to *all*: "Though being free from all, I made myself a slave to all, in order that I might gain the more" (my trans.). Paul's status as a free person is critical to his argument. While some may elect to sell themselves into slavery in the hope of social upward mobility, Paul's rhetoric assumes that he has renounced his higher status of a free person in order to become a slave, not for his own benefit, but the benefit of others.

The Topos of the Enslaved Leader

The concept of being a "slave to all" was prevalent in the writings of Greco-Roman moral philosophers regarding leaders. In his study, *Slavery as Salvation*, Martin has emphasized the role that this metaphor of servitude played among politicians of Paul's time. Most leaders presented themselves as "benevolent patriarchs," that is as fatherly, but kingly, figures, who led compassionately and thoughtfully from a position of authority, while never betraying their superior status or compromising their power.¹⁷ This respected leader was noble-born, a steward of the city's welfare, who exhibited a lifestyle of means, maintained social hierarchies, avoided manual labor or the appearance of servitude, and enjoyed the best education.¹⁸ This is, by far, the most dominant model of ideal leadership in Paul's world. In contrast, a leader who portrays himself in a lower position to his subjects, as their servant, represents a contrary model of leadership commonly referred to as the demagogic model or the populist leader.¹⁹

Both types of leadership had to choose their words and actions carefully in order to persuade others and to maintain their power. Persuasive orators skillfully adapted behavior, speech patterns, appearance, customs, or even beliefs in order to win over their audience.²⁰ Philo relates the adaptability of a politician to a physician who varies treatment according to what is best for the patient (*Joseph* 34). It was incredibly difficult, however, for orators to judge when the opportune time had come to make such adaptations.²¹ Orators could easily succumb to the accusation of flattery if the timing was off or the performance was not well-received by the audience. The efficacy of the speech depended on the character of the orator and the rapport he had with his audience.²² To win the audience's favor, rhetoricians were taught to avoid any

¹⁶ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 50-85, 117.

¹⁷ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 88-91, 125.

¹⁸ Consider Philo, *Joseph*, 67. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 114-115.

¹⁹ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 92-116, 125.

²⁰ Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 45-46. See also David Armstrong, "All Things to All Men: Philodemus' Model of Therapy and the Audience of *De Morte*," pages 15-54 in *Philodemus and the New Testament World*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Dirk Obbink and Glenn S. Holland (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

²¹ George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 63-67; Glad, 46.

²² Glad, *Paul and Philodemus*, 47.

gestures or show any emotions that made them appear like slaves or women when speaking.²³ Persuasive speakers were in complete command of their emotions as well as skilled at eliciting the feelings they hoped to evoke (Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.1.3). They epitomized the honorable, virtuous male in their speech (*Inst.* 11.1.14). Neither slaves nor women are thought to embody the virtues valued by the dominant culture—virtues that are indistinguishable from being a free, adult male.

Unlike the benevolent patriarch, who took advantage of his high status, the demagogue is repeatedly portrayed as a flatterer who is simply a slave of the people. Cicero negatively refers to this leader as a “smooth-tongued, shallow citizen” (*Amic.* 95). According to Philo, the demagogue always keeps the whims of the people in mind and ultimately becomes a slave with ten thousand masters (*Joseph* 35). This façade of service is nothing more than vanity (*Joseph* 34-36). The populist leader is often accused of being obsequious to the masses to secure power for himself. Aristotle equates a demagogue to a flatterer who is only truly sovereign over the opinion of the masses (*Pol.* 4.1292a). The demagogue claims to help the people, but fails to act (Dinarchus, *Demosth.* 1.31) because he is only concerned to say whatever pleases the masses (Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 9.4). Because the demagogue stands in opposition to the aristocracy, he gains the favor of the people (Demosthenes, *4 Philip.* 10.44). Yet Polybius accuses this leader of simply being a “mob-orator” with no real military training or ability to act for the people’s security (Polybius, *Hist.* 3.80). Instead, the demagogue displays unreasonable confidence in his own abilities and rises to a position of despotic power (Polybius, *Hist.* 15.21; cf. Plutarch, *CG* 1.5). Plutarch asserts that the true character of a king is neither a demagogue nor a despot (*Comp. Thes. Rom.* 2).

All characteristics of the demagogue topos are not negative. Although the demagogue walks a fine line between being versatile to persuade the crowd and being accused of flattery, the populist leader seeks to protect the people and to serve their interests. From the perspective of the common people, this leader is worthy of praise. In his vast survey of literature, Martin is only able to produce two texts that speak approvingly of the enslaved leader topos: Nicolaus of Damascus’s account of Cyrus and Antisthenes’ “Odyssean” speech.²⁴ In both cases, the leaders are praised for versatility and adaptability.

In light of the overwhelming weight of negative comments about the demagogue, the paucity of positive references is striking. This is no doubt due to the reality that the surviving literature preserves the perspective of the elite, who would feel the most threatened by the demagogue’s power.²⁵ Perhaps, more beneficial than praise for this topos are the writers who include some positive aspects of populist leadership even while they ultimately support the rule of a benevolent patriarch. As mentioned above, Philo noted that, as captains of a ship negotiate winds and physicians consider best treatments, all leaders have to make adjustments in their style for the common advantage (*Joseph* 33-34). Thus, populists might be praised for considering the needs or desires of the people and reacting nimbly. What creates a distinction between a good leader and a demagogue ultimately seems to be one of motive. All leaders must occasionally vary their style, but Philo accuses demagogues of voluntarily lowering themselves for their own

²³ Joy Connolly, “Mastering Corruption: Constructions of Identity in Roman Oratory,” pages 130-151 in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, edited by Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 135.

²⁴ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 103-107; see also Glad, *Paul and Philodemus*, 272

²⁵ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 100.

good rather than the good of the poor masses rather than the common good. In other words, these leaders fail to consider the good of the rich or the good of the whole.²⁶ Since they must keep the masses content to maintain their power, populist leaders are usually characterized as slaves to the ever-changing will of the people (*Joseph* 67). To put it another way, they are slaves to all.

Paul the Enslaved Leader

Paul's adaptability might be a virtue of any politician, but his voluntary enslavement to all would not be considered virtuous by those of high social standing. In fact, this voluntary act of self-lowering echoes some of the criticisms leveled at the demagogues, leaders who were slaves to the populace. Paul's claim to save some (1 Cor 9:22) recalls the demagogue's pretext to seek the good of the people. Likewise, becoming all things to all people could sound like empty flattery to some of the Corinthians. I will argue, however, that Paul differentiates himself from some of the scathing criticisms of the demagogue by demonstrating the sincerity of his words and by seeking the benefit of others rather than his own benefit. Paul's metaphor evokes the enslaved leader *topos*, but Paul is careful in his use of this image. He adopts the language of being a slave to all, language that would likely make the Corinthian elite uncomfortable, but he has to avoid the charges of flattery and vanity. Ironically, he avoids these charges by emphasizing his servitude.

Paul has emphasized his freedom only to renounce it (1 Cor 9:1,19). In 1 Cor 9:1-27, Paul notes that his apostleship does not look like the apostleship of others. He refuses the financial support of the Corinthians (9:15-18), likely because he does not want to be beholden to anyone in the congregation. To accept the money of wealthy benefactors would make Paul indebted to them in a patron-client relationship.²⁷ It would be difficult for Paul to correct the social elite, as he is doing in 1 Corinthians 9, if he were in this honor-bound relationship.

Instead of receiving the wage that he is entitled, Paul chooses to work with his hands. Because of Paul's trade as a tentmaker,²⁸ it has often been assumed that Paul was a commoner. His Roman citizenship and his education would normally be indicative of the upper classes.²⁹ Working as a tentmaker, however, would be considered demeaning work and would make him appear slavish.³⁰ According to Hock, Paul's use of the slave metaphor (1 Cor 9:19) and the language of humbling himself for work (*ἐμαυτὸν ταπεινῶν* 2 Cor 11:7) both portray upper class

²⁶ Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 114.

²⁷ For discussions of the patron/client relationship, see Anthony Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 73-88; see also J. Chow, "Patronage in Roman Corinth," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997), 104-125.

²⁸ Paul acknowledges working with his own hands in 1 Cor 4:12 and in 1 Thess 2:9. Though Paul never refers to making tents, there is little reason to question the reliability of Acts 18:3 on this point.

²⁹ A. Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 4; for a survey of church fathers, see Hock, 556-557.

³⁰ Ronald Hock, "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class," *JBL* 97.4 (1978): 555-64.

stereotypes of manual labor. These stereotypes would suggest that Paul is not from a background accustomed to labor. Thus, Paul's status as an educated, Roman citizen, would indicate that the apostle has enjoyed some social standing in the past and that he has truly demeaned himself to offer the gospel free of charge (1 Cor 9:18). In other words, in light of the rhetoric of an enslaved leader who speaks about lowering himself, taking up manual labor actually knocks Paul down the social ladder. Thus, Paul cannot be accused of merely flattering his audience by claiming to be a "slave to all;" his daily work supports this statement.

If the topos of the leader as "slave to all" was such an overwhelmingly negative view of leadership from the perspective of the elite, why might Paul employ this topos in 1 Corinthians 9? This question becomes all the more pressing when the context is taken into consideration. Paul is trying to convince the Corinthian knowledgeable, who are likely the social elite in the congregation,³¹ to adopt the behavior of lowering themselves to consider the needs of the weak.

The greater context of Paul's argument would support reading 1 Cor 9:19 as a paradigm of self-lowering. Paul is continuing an argument that he began in 1 Cor 8:1: Can the Corinthians consume food that has been offered to idols? Paul's response to this question is lengthy. In chapter 8, he restates some of the defenses used to support the arguments in favor of eating idol food: "an idol has no real existence," and "there is no God but one" (1 Cor 8:4).³² Then, in 1 Cor 9:1-27, Paul offers himself as an example of one who, though having status, willingly humbled himself for the sake of others' salvation.³³ The rather bizarre exodus retelling in 10:1-22 serves to highlight the peril of the Corinthians' flirtation with idolatry, to urge the believers to learn from the mistakes of their "ancestors" (10:1), and to encourage them to be faithful to a jealous God. The tenth chapter concludes with a concession to eat idol food in a private setting (10:23-11:1), but again Paul reiterates the need to consider the conscience of those who are present. Paul's response indicates that food itself is not the issue. The problem is that, in certain circumstances, eating the food could lead others back into a life of idolatry.

The dilemma of eating idol food includes social, financial, and theological ramifications. The knowledgeable are the ones who are invited to eat and drink in the local temples. Since most homes were too small to host a dinner party, the local temples offered dining halls for rent. All meals served at the local temple would have consisted of food sacrificed to the temple's deity.³⁴

³¹ Following the convincing argument of Gerd Theissen that the divisions of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 and 11:17-34 are largely divisions between the "haves" and the "have-nots." See *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 121-144.

³² For an overview of reading this text with the Corinthians' slogans, see J.F.M. Smit, "1 Cor 8:1-6: A Rhetorical Partitio. A Contribution to the Coherence of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1," in R. Bieringer (ed.), *The Corinthian Correspondence* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 577-91.

³³ When 1 Corinthians 9 is read as a defense of Paul's apostleship, it seems disjointed from the larger argument of whether or not the Corinthians are to eat food sacrificed to idols. Margaret Mitchell has well-demonstrated that this chapter is not a defense, but an example to the Corinthians—especially to the "knowledgeable" ones of what it looks like to relinquish one's rights in the service of others (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992]). When read in light of this larger argument, Paul's advice in chapter 9 highlights the apostle's self-lowering.

³⁴ John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1*. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2003), 63-70.

Thus, the Corinthians are wondering whether or not it is acceptable for them to consume food that has been sacrificed to an idol. The knowledgeable have argued that there is no such thing as idols (8:4). Thus, it should not matter whether or not they consume food that has been dedicated to an idol. The “weak,” however, have concerns over eating such food. It is likely that, for them, there are still live questions about the efficacy of an idol’s power (8:7-13). Paul fears that the theology of the knowledgeable will actually result in leading the weak back into a life of idolatry (8:10-13).

The matter is further complicated by the fact that the knowledgeable must maintain their social standing. Newton observes, “. . . meals not only held ‘religious’ significance, but simultaneously were considered to act as markers of socio-economic class divisions, as opportunities to converse and build friendships, and as means of fulfilling socio-political obligations.”³⁵ Refusing a dinner invitation would have social repercussions since one could not afford to shame a business associate or benefactor who had gone to the expense of hosting the event. Paul is not completely unsympathetic with the precarious social position of the elite in the church. He agrees that that the food itself does not actually pose a threat (8:8). This agreement accounts for his concession in 10:23-34 to consume whatever is sold in the market or offered in someone’s home without asking questions. The litmus test for consumption has nothing to do with the food itself, but with whether or not consuming the food would potentially lead the “weak” to return to a life of idolatry. Thus, Paul ends this section by reframing the dilemma: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (10:32).

Paul’s advice throughout 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 is directed toward the knowledgeable. Who are the “weak”? The “weak” in this argument are likely those of lower classes who rarely, if ever, receive invitations to such banquets. They likely do not have to face the dilemma of whether or not to consume idol food in the grand banquet hall of the temple. Yet, they know that the knowledgeable ones are somehow participants in rites honoring another deity. Though Paul seems sympathetic to the theological rationale of the knowledgeable (8:1-6), he also reveals affinity for the arguments of the weak (10:19-21). In 10:20-21, he acknowledges that members of the congregation cannot partake of the cup of demons and the cup of the Lord. Though Paul certainly affirms that there is only one God and one Lord (8:6), like the weak, he acknowledges the existence of other spiritual forces. For this reason, he wants both sides to do all that they can to remain faithful to a jealous Lord, who will not tolerate idolatry (10:1-22). In reality, both sides—the so-called knowledgeable and the so-called weak—are in danger of succumbing to their weakness.

Although in the immediate context Paul’s reference to being weak calls to mind those who are at risk of going back to idolatry, to Paul, weakness is also a universal human problem. In 1 Cor 15:43, when speaking of the resurrection of the dead, Paul claims that the body is sown in weakness, but raised by God in power. In his plea for the Romans to enslave themselves to righteousness, Paul says, “I am speaking to you in human terms on account of the *weakness* of your flesh” (Rom 6:19). Weakness is part of the human condition, and humanity is incapable of overcoming it. Why? The power of sin has corrupted the flesh to such a degree that humanity cannot defeat sin. The law was sent as a guide (Gal 3:23-29), but even the law—the good, holy, and just law (Rom 7:12)—was powerless to stop sin: “For God has done what the law, *weakened* by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with

³⁵ Derek Newton, “Food Offered to Idols in 1 Corinthians 8-10,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49.1 (1998): 181.

sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). God had to overcome the power of sin, a power great enough to weaken something as holy as the law. God claims victory over that power by sending his Son into the weakness: “For he was crucified in *weakness*, but lives by the power of God. For we are *weak* in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4). To Paul, all are weak (Rom 5:6). Only God has the power to overcome weakness, and the Holy Spirit “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). If the knowledgeable at Corinth can claim any strength, it is only because they have been known by God (1 Cor 8:3).³⁶

How does Paul’s rhetoric of slavery in 1 Cor 9:19-23 fit into his exhortation regarding idol food? Paul demonstrates through the scandalous rhetoric of being a slave to all what he sees as the responsibility of the so-called knowledgeable ones: to renounce their rights for the benefit of another’s salvation. The so-called weak are in real peril of returning to a life of idolatry and, thus, being destroyed (8:11). The knowledgeable must adapt their behavior in order to save the weak.

In 1 Cor 9:22, Paul gets to the heart of his illustration of adaptability. Unlike the knowledgeable, who act to protect their own interests even at the risk of the weak, Paul claims to become weak to win those who are weak. The references to Paul’s “becoming” the other include *ὡς*. He became *like* a Jew or *like* one under the law or *like* one without law. In verse 22, however, the earliest manuscripts omit this term. Paul does not become *like* the weak; he *becomes* weak. This act of becoming, as noted above, is visibly manifested not only in Paul’s manual labor, but also in his refusal to accept wages from the church. He is renouncing apostolic rights for support that are visible in Peter’s practice (9:5), supported by scripture (9:8-13), obvious from common sense (9:7), and commanded by Jesus (9:14).³⁷ Paul marshals a vast array of evidence to show that he is purposely humbling himself by not taking what he is due. Since Paul’s advice may have financial repercussions for the Corinthian elite, he demonstrates that his life models the advice that he is giving to the church. By working with his own hands, he has lowered himself and taken on the servile form of weakness for the benefit of others.

This is not the only instance in the Corinthian correspondence where Paul is associated with weakness. In 1 Cor 4:8-12, Paul creates a stark dichotomy between the “strong” Corinthians, who are puffed up in judgment over one another (4:5-7), and the “weak” apostles. He characterizes the Corinthians as “kings” while the apostles are “last” of all, “like those sentenced to death,” a “spectacle to the world and to angels and to humanity” (4:9), “fools for Christ,” disreputable (4:10), like “the rubbish of the world,” and “the dregs of all things” (4:13). To add to the humility, Paul says that he labors, working with his own hands (4:12) and is still hungry and thirsty, ill-clad and homeless (4:11). He does not stand up for himself when he is reviled. Instead, he blesses those who revile him and endures when persecuted (4:12). He does not retaliate when he has been slandered; instead, he seeks reconciliation (4:13). It is fair to say that this portrait of his apostleship looks nothing like the model of the benevolent patriarch. Moreover, his opponents in Corinth will later accuse him of being weak in bodily presence and having “contemptible speech” (2 Cor 10:10). Harrill argues that this insult is aimed at

³⁶ Consider also Paul’s commands to help the weak (1 Thess 5:14), to accept the powerlessness of the weak (Rom 15:1), and to avoid causing your brother or sister to stumble or to be weak (Rom 14:21).

³⁷ Paul’s refusal to accept support (9:15-18) would contradict the Lord’s command. See also David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 216-219.

discrediting his authority by attacking his moral character as a servile flatterer, who says one thing but does another.³⁸ Being accused of looking weak was akin to stripping Paul of his status as a free, adult male and instead treating him like a slave.³⁹ Paul is undaunted by this charge. He is fully aware of his weakness and even boasts in it (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 11:16-30; 12:7-10).

In light of Paul's use of the metaphor of slavery to all in 1 Cor 9:19-23, Paul's charge in 1 Cor 4:8 that the Corinthians are kings who are rich and full calls to mind the good leaders, the benevolent, patriarchs who rule from their elevated status.⁴⁰ It would be beneath these leaders to become weak, to be in need of basic life necessities, or to perform manual labor (see above). Hays argues that the true sage is depicted by Cynic and Stoic philosophers as being a king and a master: "But some think that the Stoics are jesting when they hear that in their sect the wise man is termed not only prudent and just and brave, but also an orator, a poet, a general, a rich man, and a king; and then they count themselves worthy of all these titles, and if they fail to get them, are vexed" (Plutarch, *De Tranq. An.* 472a).⁴¹ Paul may here be playing on the topos of the wise leader who lives like a king.⁴² What is clear is the stark contrast between the wise Corinthians who live like kings and Paul's characterization of himself and his colleagues as the scum of the earth (4:13).

Paul's voluntary self-lowering, a characteristic of the despised demagogue, is consistent with his understanding of the topsy-turvy effect of the cross. For those who prefer the benevolent patriarch model of leadership, the demagogue is detestable for renouncing his status and willingly lowering himself for the sake of the masses. This model of leadership seems like foolishness. In 1 Cor 1:18-25, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the scandal of the gospel. The word of the cross is foolishness to the sages of the world. God chose the foolish in order to shame the wise (1:27). The humiliation of the cross is evident in the portrait of Paul's apostleship as a slave to all. Paul is not judging his apostleship by the world's standards. He is not concerned that his leadership looks like foolishness to the elite. Instead, the word of the cross becomes the paradigm for Paul's behavior.

The Word of the Cross and the Law of Christ

³⁸ J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 36-57.

³⁹ Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 45-53.

⁴⁰ The charge of being like kings and already ruling has been interpreted through the lens of overrealized eschatology. For an overview see A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 357-359. In other words, the Corinthians, according to this reading, are claiming that the eschaton has already come. The Corinthians certainly are proud (4:6) and are probably claiming wisdom (4:10; 8:1-6), but the sarcasm of verse 8 does not require that the believers have actually portrayed themselves as kings who had "already" arrived at the glorious kingdom of God. In fact, there are many warnings in this letter that the eschaton is coming (e.g., 1:7; 2:6; 3:13-15; 4:5; 7:29, 31; 10:11; 11:26; 16:22). Perhaps the Corinthians are lacking in eschatological fervor, and Paul must remind them of the coming judgment to urge them on to faithfulness. Richard B. Hays, *1 Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 70.

⁴¹ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 70-71. Plutarch, *Moralia* with an English Translation by W. C. Helmbold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

⁴² See also Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 70-71.

Though Paul rarely uses language of gaining (κέρδος/κερδαίνω word group),⁴³ the verb κερδαίνω courses throughout this passage and illustrates Paul's purpose. The purpose of Paul's adaptability in 1 Cor 9:19 is not simply to "win" the Corinthians. Paul hopes to "win the more" (1 Cor 9:19). Paul is willing to endure all for the sake of saving others (9:22). In 1 Cor 9:19-23, Paul challenges the knowledgeable elite, those with proper theology, but thoughtless practice, to reframe their thinking around a larger goal: the gospel.

Along with becoming weak, Paul claims to become like a Jew, like one under the law, and like the lawless in order to save some. The first two ideas—being a Jew and being under the law—are analogous to one another. Whereas being a Jew is rather specific, being under the law might also include a non-Jewish, God-fearer. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews and a trained Pharisee, certainly knows how to live under the law, though he quickly adds that he does not consider himself under law (9:20). In Galatians 2:6-10, Paul acknowledges two missions: his mission to the uncircumcised and the Jerusalem church's mission to the circumcised (led by Peter, James and John). Paul seems to be supportive of a mission by law-abiding leaders to people who are already law-abiding, as long as that mission does not compromise the gospel. He strongly criticizes the Jerusalem church's mission when they place obedience to the law before welcoming the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-14). To Paul, this failure to welcome all and eat with them is a threat to the gospel itself (Gal 2:14). Paul is clear that the law itself is not the means by which the Gentiles have salvation. Though the law is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12), following the law will not lead to life eternal (Gal 3:21). Thus, Paul can say that he is not "under law."

In verse 21, the apostle claims to adapt to those who are ἄνομος or without law, but adds the qualification that he is ἐννομος Χριστοῦ, or in the law of Christ. Since Paul claims that the "law of Christ" is guiding his behavior, it is important to consider what the law of Christ might entail. Unfortunately, this is not a common phrase in Paul's letters. The only other instance in which Paul employs similar terminology is Gal. 6:2. In Galatians, Paul exhorts the churches: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ)." Not surprisingly, this little-used phrase has prompted numerous discussions. The "law of Christ" has often been considered a vague reference to Jesus' teaching.⁴⁴ The fact that Paul so willingly discounts a command from the Lord in 1 Cor 9:14, however, does not help this reading. Martyn has strongly argued that the law of Christ in Gal 6:2 must be a reference to the Torah since the vast majority of uses of νόμος in Galatians refer to the Mosaic law.⁴⁵ This reading has much to commend it. In Gal 5:14 Paul sums up the whole law in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (cf. Rom 13:8). Thus, bearing one another's burdens would then be a fulfillment of the law of loving one's neighbor, the law that Christ himself has fulfilled.⁴⁶

Though the reference to "the law of Christ" may very well be a reflection of Lev 19:18, it is a reflection embodied by Christ's sacrifice. In other words, the "law of Christ" evokes more than loving one's neighbor as oneself. In Gal 5:13, immediately preceding his summation of the whole law in 5:14, Paul exhorts the believers: "through love be servants of one another." In

⁴³ Phil 1:21; 3:7-8.

⁴⁴ For overviews of various approaches in interpreting "law of Christ" see Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 222-224; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 554-558.

⁴⁵ Martyn, *Galatians*, 554-558.

⁴⁶ Martyn, *Galatians*, 547.

other words, Paul interprets the command to love one's neighbor through the metaphor of servitude, a metaphor exemplified in Christ's service. Christ willingly lowered himself to take the form of a servant even to the point of death on a cross (Phil 2:6-11; cf. Rom 15:8-9). Christ humbled himself, but God super-exalted him (Phil 2:6-11).

To return to 1 Cor 9:21, the contrast between *ἀνομος θεοῦ* and *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* suggests that the genitive *Χριστοῦ* is of great significance. Paul elsewhere uses "law of God" to refer to the Torah (Rom 7:22). Furthermore, Paul has just claimed in 9:20 that he is not "under law (*ὑπὸ νόμον*)," an idea that runs parallel to being like a Jew (9:20a). In 9:21 the contrast with the law of Christ calls to mind more than a summation of the Torah. The intentional reference to Christ is another reminder of the scandalous word of the cross. Paul's enslaving himself to all (9:19) is an act of self-lowering that exhibits the love of Christ who humbled himself for the salvation of all. The law of Christ is an ethical paradigm of Christ's behavior.⁴⁷ Christ's sacrificial love becomes the model for how Paul claims to treat all.

Paul concludes this lengthy argument regarding idol food with a call to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1). In fact, the summation of the argument in 10:32-33 reiterates Paul's message of adaptability in 1 Cor 9:19-23: "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved." What is important to Paul is not that he maintains his status in the eyes of the world, but that he becomes the weak, the outcast, the outsider, or the "other" in order to display Christ's love. Paul's ministry--a ministry that is fraught with hardship, toil, and real peril (e.g., 2 Cor 4:8-12; 11:23-30)--demonstrates that this act of becoming the other is more than flattering rhetoric.

Lessons from Paul, the Slave of Christ and Slave of All

In 1 Cor 9:19-23, Paul claims to become all things to all people. Though Paul's metaphor of being a "slave to all" might initially seem unrelated to his status as a slave of Christ, these metaphors are intricately related. This servant of Christ sees his apostolic role as one who follows in Christ's footsteps, renounces the rights of his high status, humbles himself, and serves all.

The echoes of the demagogue topos only further highlight the lengths that Paul will go to serve others. The common criticisms of the populist leader revolve around the elite's distaste for voluntary self-lowering and the common charge of flattery. Though Paul is guilty of lowering himself, his refusal to accept financial support, his manual labor, and his endurance of hardships demonstrate that he is not a sycophant who plays to the whims of the crowd. By becoming weak, Paul has taken on the status of a servant. He willingly takes on servile characteristics that the proud Corinthians would find shameful. Furthermore, he urges the "knowledgeable" Corinthians to imitate him as he is imitating Christ, who took the form of a servant for the sake of the world's salvation.

What are the implications of Paul's adaptability for the church today? Paul's willingness to become all things to all people demonstrates a desire to meet people, to serve them, and to love them on their terms. Paul does not require those "without law" to live "under law." He adapts his approach accordingly. This adaptability, however, has limits. Paul believes that he is

⁴⁷ So also Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 228-231; Richard Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 268-290.

imitating Christ by living out the scandalous word of the cross. He only adapts in ways that, to him, demonstrate the gracious love of God. Everything that Paul does is for the sake of the gospel. He is keenly aware that he is an apostle, sent by God, to proclaim the good news to the nations.

How does Paul believe one should approach outsiders? Outsiders, whether Jew or Gentile, should be welcomed as Christ has welcomed all (Rom 15:7). Paul sees fundamental links between Jew and Gentile in the human condition. All are weak. All have been enemies of God. Christ took on weakness and died for the weak, for enemies, for the ungodly, for *all*.

Paul's command to imitate himself as he imitates Christ is directed to those of status. The rhetoric of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1 is aimed at those who are knowledgeable. As argued above, the knowledgeable are the ones who are invited to banquets and enjoy some social standing. Furthermore, Paul himself has status as an apostle and as the Corinthians' "father" in the faith (4:15). In other words, Paul is telling folks who have status to be willing to relinquish it for the sake of others. He did not turn to the weak and tell them to become weaker. He tells the strong in Rom 15:1 to bear with the powerlessness (*τῶν ἀδυνάων*) of the weak. For the weak, Paul's approach has an equalizing effect. The powerful stand in solidarity with the powerless.

In the end, Paul's approach to outsiders and to insiders is an attempt to imitate Christ. For Paul being a slave of Christ meant lowering himself to be a servant of all. Paul's actions, however, were only possible because of the power of the Spirit to enable and equip him to serve (Rom 8:1-17). Paul claims, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27) is not a one-time experience, but a way of life.⁴⁸ Perhaps, the church today could take this lesson from Paul, to be a servant of Christ looks like service to all.

⁴⁸ Gorman rightly refers to this life in Christ as "cruciformity," (*Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 120).