

# Paul and Idol Food

Many people feel that Paul had a nonchalant attitude toward idol food, but a close study of 1 Corinthians in context reveals just the opposite.

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**P**aul's discussions on food contaminated by idolatry in 1 Corinthians 8–10 create the impression that he took a cavalier and loose attitude toward the prohibition on food offered to idols by permitting its consumption. This interpretation puts Paul at odds with the rulings of the Jerusalem Council, in which he himself had participated. If he permitted idol food for the Corinthian believers, then he contradicted two out of the four prohibitions issued by the Apostolic Decree: "Abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols ... and from what has been strangled" (Acts 15:29). Obviously, meat sacrificed to an idol would not have been properly slaughtered by traditional Jewish standards. To reconcile this apparent contradiction, we will need to reexamine Paul's words in their historical context.

## The Prohibition

The Torah prohibits the consumption of food contaminated by idols. Although there is no explicit *commandment* in the Torah to refrain from food sacrificed to idols,<sup>1</sup> the principle is rabbinically derived from several texts:

*And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted*

*to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction. (Deuteronomy 7:26)*

The Hebrew word for "abominable thing" here is the word *to'evah* (תועבה), which "refers to morally and religiously detestable practices and objects such as cheating, perverse sexual relations, impure foods, defective sacrifices, and especially idolatry and its rites."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the sages interpreted "abominable thing" in this verse as referring to that which had been tainted by idolatry. This included things that had been offered up to an idol or connected with *avodah zarah* ("foreign worship," עבודה זרה). In turn, Jewish law forbids Jews from benefiting in any way from things connected to idolatry.<sup>3</sup> This includes consuming idol food. To bring idolatrous things (including food) into one's house is to make oneself "devoted to destruction."

The sages further derived the prohibition on idol food from HaShem's warning to the children of Israel not to eat of the sacrifices to foreign gods:



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*Take care ... lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice. (Exodus 34:12, 15)*

Additionally, the Torah commands the Jewish people not to offer a sacrifice outside the Sanctuary (i.e., the Tabernacle and the Temple).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, any sacrifice slaughtered elsewhere is forbidden. The penalty for participating in such activities is to be “cut off” from Israel.

According to the sages, the prohibition on eating food sacrificed to idols even extends to Gentiles, under the Noachide laws.

HaShem also chastises Israel, saying, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering?”<sup>5</sup> From this passage the rabbis derived the prohibition against drinking wine offered to idols. In rabbinic literature, the discussion over idol food pertains primarily to concern over idolatrous wine (*yayin nesech*, יין נסח).

Jewish law treats this prohibition with utmost stringency. Note that in the Maccabean Era, the wicked King Antiochus and his armies tested the loyalty of the Jewish people to HaShem’s commands by making them “eat pork and food sacrificed to idols.”<sup>6</sup> According to the sages, the prohibition on eating food sacrificed to idols even extends to Gentiles, under the Noachide laws.<sup>7</sup> In the minds of the sages, to

benefit from that which has come into contact with idolatry was tantamount to actually worshipping idols. The Apostolic Era Jewish community treated the prohibition on idol food with utmost gravity.

## The Apostles on Idol Food

This contextual information helps explain why the apostles included the prohibition of idol food in the Apostolic Decree from the Jerusalem Council:

*Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to **abstain from the things polluted by idols**, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. (Acts 15:19–20, authors’ emphasis)*

Not only did the apostles command non-Jewish disciples to “abstain from the things polluted by idols” but also from “what has been strangled, and from blood,” which was a reference to meat that had not been ritually slaughtered according to Jewish standards (*shechitah*, שחיטה).<sup>8</sup> Naturally, one would find it difficult to obtain meat that had been both ritually slaughtered according to Jewish law as well as sacrificed to idols. In turn, these two prohibitions go hand in hand when it comes to permitted meats.

Paul himself participated in the Jerusalem Council and was commissioned by the council to publish the Apostolic Decree in the Diaspora.<sup>9</sup> On his second missionary journey through Anatolia and into Macedonia and Achaia (including Corinth), Paul brought along a copy of the Apostolic Decree: “As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). Later, as we see in Acts 21, Paul appeared before the Apostle James and the elders, before whom the decision

of the Jerusalem Council was brought up again in the context of discussing Paul's teachings in the Diaspora:

*But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. (Acts 21:25)*

Paul showed his agreement with this decision by going through a purification process and presenting an offering in the Temple for himself and several other men.<sup>10</sup>

The apostolic attitude on the subject comes to the surface again in the book of Revelation, some forty years after the decision by the Jerusalem Council. There is no sign that Yeshua, the Apostle John, or the book of Revelation relaxes the severity of the prohibition:

*But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. (Revelation 2:14)*

*But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. (Revelation 2:20)*

In both cases, the text links eating idol food with "sexual immorality" to the notoriously wicked biblical characters Balaam, Balak, and Jezebel. Balaam and Balak conspired to entice the men of Israel to commit sexual immorality and idolatry by inviting them to participate in eating food sacrificed to idols; Jezebel is infamous for bringing Baal worship to Israel.

## Early Christian Practice

Early church literature also censures the consumption of idol food. For example, the *Didache* takes a firm stand on the matter:

*And concerning food, bear what you are able; but against that which is sacrificed to idols be exceedingly on your guard; for it is the service of dead gods. (Didache 6:3)*

The late first-century *Didache* is addressed to Gentile believers. It represents a period of time in which Christianity still functioned as a sect of Judaism. It views the prohibition on idol food as the one dietary restriction absolutely incumbent on Gentiles and never to be transgressed.

**Justin Martyr linked the prohibition of eating meat sacrificed to idols with the "true and pure doctrine of Yeshua the Messiah."**

In the early second-century *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr linked the prohibition of eating meat sacrificed to idols with the "true and pure doctrine of Yeshua the Messiah."<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the second century, at a time when Christianity had severed all ties with Judaism, there is still evidence of Gentile believers seeking out kosher-slaughtered meat that would, naturally, be free from idolatry. Oskar Skarsaune observes the behavior of Christians in France during this era:

*Under torture, a girl named Biblias in a sudden burst of indignation said, "How*

can those eat children, who are forbidden to eat the blood even of brute beasts?" This clearly indicates that the community of Lyons [France] still observed the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 concerning kosher meat. As Frend aptly remarks, "The question arises, where did the Christians get their meat from? The only possible answer is, from a kosher market established for the Jews, and this in turn indicates fairly close personal relations between the Jews and Christians in the City."<sup>12</sup>

It is highly unlikely that Paul would have been the lone voice among the apostles that allowed believers to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Peter Tomson points out that while in the early days of Christianity the Western church was more apt to accept dietary prohibition than was the Eastern church, when it comes to the prohibition of food sacrificed to idols, there is universal agreement.<sup>13</sup> Leaders of the second-century church who were no less influential than Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all spoke strongly against the eating of food sacrificed to idols.<sup>14</sup> There is not one voice to the contrary.

To the third-century church Father Origen writes:

*For that which is offered to idols is sacrificed to demons, and a man of God must not join the table of demons. As to things strangled, we are forbidden by Scripture to partake of them, because the blood is still in them; and blood, especially the odor arising*

*from blood, is said to be the food of demons. Perhaps, then, if we were to eat of strangled animals, we might have such spirits feeding along with us. And the reason which forbids the use of strangled animals for food is also applicable to the use of blood. (Origen, Contra Celsus 8:30)<sup>15</sup>*

The fourth-century *Pseudo-Clementine* literature maintains the prohibition: "Abstain from the table of devils, that is, from food offered to idols, from dead carcasses, from animals which have been suffocated or caught by wild beasts, and from blood."<sup>16</sup> Even as late as the fifth century, the church fathers Augustine and Jerome (who rarely agreed on anything) agreed that the prohibition against idol food was still in force.<sup>17</sup>

### Is Paul the Odd Man Out?

Could Paul really have been contradicting all these men and their writings? Is it possible that Yeshua, the apostles, the book of Revelation, and Christian writers up through the fifth century forbade something that Paul permitted? Was Paul's participation in the Jerusalem Council and his publication of their decree hypocritical? Did he encourage Gentiles to ignore the prohibition that the apostles had bound them to? Peter J. Tomson writes,

*The early Christian unanimity on the prohibition of idol food makes the common scholarly view that Paul condoned it seem quite unlikely. If he did he would not just have been the first, but in effect the only early Christian authority to defend this position. Indeed, it would have been a miracle, resulting from pure misunderstanding, that First Corinthians was preserved at all by the early Church in its extant form.<sup>18</sup>*

It is highly unlikely that Paul would have been the lone voice among the apostles that allowed believers to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Instead, we will need to reexamine his words in 1 Corinthians.<sup>19</sup>

## Paul on Idolatry

To get some background, we will first need to do a quick survey of Paul's own words and behavior regarding idolatry that are recorded outside of 1 Corinthians. Most scholars believe that he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians in Ephesus, "where Paul is primarily and vividly remembered as the preacher against idolatry."<sup>20</sup> For example, while Paul sojourned in Ephesus, a large number of Gentiles turned to faith in Messiah Yeshua under his teaching. They made a brash public statement of faith by openly burning their idolatrous books as a sign of their repentance from things associated with idolatry.<sup>21</sup>

Before arriving in Corinth, Paul spent some time in Athens. While in Athens Paul's "spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). In his teaching to the people of Athens, Paul states, "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:29–30). Clearly, Paul viewed the worship of idols as an abhorrent and foolish practice from which people everywhere needed to be delivered.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he dedicates a section to vehemently warning against the dangers of idolatry:

*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be*

*sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."* (2 Corinthians 6:16–18)

These do not sound like the words of a man who saw no real threat in coming into contact with things tainted by idolatry. In fact, when Paul writes, "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" he is effectively telling his readers, "It is not enough to abhor idolatry, but one must also in no way benefit from pagan temples."<sup>22</sup> Paul's fierce opposition toward all things idolatrous should heavily influence our interpretation of his words about idol food in 1 Corinthians.

## Lost Letters

An important key to interpreting 1 Corinthians requires the reader to realize that he does not have a complete record of the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian congregations. Clues in Paul's epistles to Corinth seem to indicate additional correspondence that is no longer extant. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul references another letter that he had previously written to the Corinthian community before writing 1 Corinthians. The epistle of 1 Corinthians also infer responses to a return letter that the Corinthian community sent to Paul in response to this first letter. Alex T. Cheung writes,

*1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 could not have been the first time Paul discussed the issue [of idolatry] with the Corinthians. Given the importance of the subject of idol food and the length of Paul's previous ministry in Corinth, it is historically unrealistic to think that the Corinthians were asking Paul for the first time whether they could eat idol food. Hurd has persuasively argued that Paul's response in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 must be related to the "Previous Letter" and Paul's earliest preaching in Corinth.<sup>23</sup>*

Undoubtedly, Paul had instructed the Corinthian community on the subject of food

sacrificed to idols on previous occasions and, perhaps, in previous correspondence. With only modest amounts of speculation, we can infer an exchange of letters such as this:

Letters	Subjects Regarding Idol Food
1. Paul's initial letter to the Corinthians	Gives instruction on the prohibition of idol food
2. Corinthians' response letter to Paul	Questions and objections pertaining to Paul's teaching on idol food
3. 1 Corinthians	Paul's response to Corinthians questions and objections

Paul's initial words in his opening section on idol food are telling:

*Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*  
(1 Corinthians 8:1–3)

New Testament Greek does not have quotation marks that might set off a segment of text as a citation from a previous conversation or correspondence, but it appears that with the phrase "all of us possess knowledge," Paul was citing the return letter that he had received from the Corinthian community. His words indicate that some of the Corinthians had disagreed with him about the prohibition on idol food. It also seems to indicate that the Corinthian community had disagreed on the issue within their own membership. Cheung speculates that the Corinthians' argument could have read something like this:

*Paul, you say that idol food is off limits. But what about the marketplace food? Since*

*some of the food sold in the marketplace has been previously sacrificed, are you saying that we should always avoid shopping in the market? And what about dinner with our pagan friends? You know sometimes they may serve us idol food. You see, your instructions are simply impractical. To follow them, we will have to go out of this world!*<sup>24</sup>

In the Corinthian letter to Paul, some of the objectors argued that, like Paul, they also "possess[ed] knowledge"; that is, they possessed the knowledge that an idol is nothing because there are no other gods besides HaShem. Therefore, they saw no reason to accept the prohibition. It seemed unreasonable to them so long as they knew that "an idol has no real existence" and that "there is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Paul responded to them that "knowledge" can lead to arrogance—a reminder that he and the apostles had authority over the believers, regardless of what they thought they knew.

With this in mind, 1 Corinthians 8–10 should not be read as Paul arguing that the Corinthians should have permission to eat idol food. Instead, Paul was arguing against eating meat sacrificed to idols, but in his argument he occasionally stated their side of the argument before responding to it.<sup>25</sup> These Corinthian statements in favor of eating food contaminated by idolatry have been misconstrued, treated as if they were Paul's advice. This is why the argument sounds as if Paul was being self-contradictory.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian believers thought that meat sacrificed to idols should be permissible to them. They claimed, "All things are lawful, all things are permissible" and argued that an idol was nothing and that a thing sacrificed to an idol was nothing. In turn, since the idol was nothing, contamination from idolatry did not matter.

With this background information, we will now survey each of the three chapters: 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10.

## 1 Corinthians 8: A Philosophical Objection

As noted above, the ancient Greek manuscripts do not have quotation marks or other signals to let us know when Paul was quoting, but it seems that in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul twice quotes the letter he had recently received from the Corinthian congregations.

1 Corinthians 8:4–6	Paul quotes Corinthians
1 Corinthians 8:7	Paul replies
1 Corinthians 8:8	Paul quotes Corinthians
1 Corinthians 8:9–13	Paul replies

In 1 Corinthians 8:4 Paul seems to be referencing a philosophical and theological objection to the prohibition on food contaminated by idols. The Corinthians seem to have argued that since there is no other God but the LORD, and since an idol is not a god, one should not be concerned about ritual taboos associated with idolatry:

*Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:4–6, authors’ emphasis)*

The Corinthians alluded to the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4): “There is no God but one.” The Christians in Corinth knew the creedal statement of monotheism from their participation in the synagogue, and it may have been part of their own daily routine of prayer.<sup>26</sup> “Shema” means “the LORD is God *alone*”—that is, he is the only God.<sup>27</sup> The Corinthian Christians seem

to have used this central Jewish tenant of faith to argue that an idol has no real existence and need not be taken seriously.

This line of reasoning agrees with that of the sages:

*A basic affirmation of the rational view on idolatry combined with a subtle awareness of its power is found in the Tannaic Sages. While in the main they shared the view that “in the idol there is nothing real” ... [i.e.,] the reality of idolatry is in man ... they would never have thought of participating in the cult.<sup>28</sup>*

The Corinthians, however, took their philosophical approach to Judaism too far. They reasoned that since there is no such thing as an idol, there is no such thing as food contaminated by idols.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian believers thought that meat sacrificed to idols should be permissible to them.

Like the sages, Paul agreed with them philosophically, but he replies in 1 Corinthians 8:7, “However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.”

In their objection to Paul, the Corinthians state, “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” (1 Corinthians 8:8). To this Paul replies,

*But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling*

*block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:9–13)*

## Paul said that eating idol food in front of new believers would destroy their conscience.

Paul agreed that one who eats idolatrous food on the basis that “there is no such thing as an idol, so it does not matter” may have a valid philosophical point, but that the philosophy does not take into account the opinions of others who truly believe that idols represent the pantheons of the gods. Anyone observing a person eating food sacrificed to idols would assume that the individual eating was participating in the idolatrous worship of a pagan god and that followers of the Master participate in idolatry. When Paul says, “If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat,” his words sound much like a Jewish vow of voluntary abstinence from permitted food (*hanoder min habasar*, הנודר מן הבשר).<sup>29</sup> The solemn, legal formulation “indicates the seriousness of the matter for Paul.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Conscience of the Weak

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul refers to one who is weak. The weak people Paul has in view in 1 Corinthians 8 seem to be believers in the

church.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Paul urges his readers not to eat idol food in front of such individuals, because they might be led to assume that idolatry is permissible.

The “weak” Paul speaks of are probably new converts from paganism. They are called weak because their faith is still fragile.<sup>32</sup> Yeshua uses similar language to speak of new initiates into his school of discipleship when he warns his disciples, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Paul’s words, “Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9) seem to echo that saying of the Master. The fact that Paul refers to the weak as “the brother for whom Christ died” seems to indicate that Paul has novice believers in view. The new God-fearing Gentile believers in Paul’s communities probably had one foot still in the pagan social matrix. They needed encouragement to completely break from that world. If they saw other believers freely participating in things dedicated to idols, it would discourage them from making that break.

Paul said that eating idol food in front of new believers would destroy their conscience. Tomson points out that the word “conscience” (*suneidesis*, συνειδησις) is better translated “consciousness.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, “if his conscience is weak” could be translated “if his consciousness is fragile.” To eat food sacrificed to idols would destroy the “consciousness” of the new initiate because it would break his new fragile convictions.

In summary, Paul conceded the philosophical point that there is no real substance to idolatry, but at the same time he upheld the prohibition on things polluted by idols for the sake of those who do not hold the philosophical sophistication that a mature believer would: “For if anyone sees you who have ‘knowledge’ [i.e., that there is no such thing as an idol] eating in

an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?" The discussion about the "weak" and their "consciousness" attempts to argue for the Corinthians who object to the prohibition on philosophical grounds to nevertheless uphold the prohibition on social grounds, namely out of concern for others.<sup>34</sup> On a related subject, in Romans 14 Paul summarizes a similar argument by advising his readers to keep debatable matters off the table, saying, "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (Romans 14:22 NIV).

### 1 Corinthians 9: Sacrificing Personal Rights and Preferences

The discussion in 1 Corinthians 9 departs from the topic of things contaminated by idols, but the material contributes to the overall argument nonetheless. Paul now built his case for the believers conforming to his authority and for the apostolic prohibition on idol food by invoking his apostolic status and reminding the Corinthians of his manner of conduct among them. He reminded the Corinthians of how he had worked in their midst to pay for his own food, setting aside his own rights for the sake of advancing the gospel. He reminded them of how he had exercised self-discipline. He reminded them of how he had conducted himself with a mind to meet people where they were—to the strong, he was strong; to the weak, he was weak. But Paul's main point was that he had conducted himself not to fulfill his own desires but for the sake of the gospel:

*If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:12)*

*But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. (1 Corinthians 9:15)*

*But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27)*

All these statements contribute to the conclusion of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 10.

**Paul's main point was that he had conducted himself not to fulfill his own desires but for the sake of the gospel.**

### 1 Corinthians 10: The Case from Torah

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul appealed to logic and philosophical reasoning to persuade the Corinthians to refrain from idol food. In 1 Corinthians 10 he begins to build his case directly from the Torah.

Once again, Paul restated arguments posited by the Corinthians before refuting them. The Corinthians had claimed, "A thing sacrificed to idols is nothing, and an idol is nothing." They had claimed, "All things are lawful for us." Paul answered these statements with arguments for upholding the prohibition on idol food.

1 Corinthians 10:19	Paul quotes Corinthians
1 Corinthians 10:20–22	Paul replies
1 Corinthians 10:23	Paul quotes Corinthians
1 Corinthians 10:24–33	Paul replies

## Idolatry and Immorality

Paul reminded the Corinthians of how the children of Israel, who had been baptized in the sea and had eaten the spiritual manna and drunk from the rock of Messiah, fell into idolatry and were subsequently punished by HaShem. He warned against the snares of idolatry by citing the Torah's quintessential examples: the story of the golden calf (Exodus 32) and the idolatrous incident at Shittim (Numbers 25). He told the believers that these things had happened to provide an example for them:

*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall [i.e., fall into idolatry]. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:12–14)*

His allusion to food sacrificed to idols is not coincidental. Paul was working his case deliberately from the Torah.

Paul tied together sexual immorality with idolatry. Just as one must be on guard against falling into the sins of lust and promiscuity, so too must one be on guard against idol worship. Here he says, “Flee from idolatry,” the same language he applies to sexual sins: “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). He says, “We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day” (1 Corinthians 10:8). Both the story of the golden calf and the

story of the incident at Shittim had involved sexual immorality.<sup>35</sup>

Paul says, “Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play’” (1 Corinthians 10:7). His allusion to food sacrificed to idols is not coincidental. Paul was working his case deliberately from the Torah. Both the sin of the golden calf and the apostasy at Shittim began with eating and drinking. The worship of the golden calf began with sacrifices offered to the idol when “the people sat down to eat and drink” (Exodus 32:6). The incident at Shittim began when “the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods” (Numbers 25:1–2).

## Cup of Demons

Paul went on to argue against eating things sacrificed to idols from yet another angle. He reminded the Corinthians about how they regularly drank the “cup of blessing” and broke bread in a ritual meal of remembrance, and in so doing they spiritually partook in the blood and body of Messiah.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, he said, those who eat the sacrifices from God’s altar in Jerusalem partake in the holiness of the Temple.<sup>37</sup> How then was it possible that food consecrated to idols had no spiritual significance? The Corinthians had argued that an idol is nothing and that food sacrificed to it has no significance. Paul replies,

*What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:19–22)*

Although Paul agreed (in principle) with the philosophical argument that the idols are nothing, he still “recognize[d] that demonic forces lurk behind them, so that to take part in a pagan sacrificial feast is to ‘become partners with demons.’”<sup>38</sup> In fact, by mentioning “offer[ings] to demons,” using the words “provoking the Lord to jealousy,” and asking, “Are we stronger than he?” Paul alluded to the Torah’s prohibitions on food sacrificed to idols.<sup>39</sup> Notice the parallels in the texts below:

*They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. (Deuteronomy 32:17, authors’ emphasis)<sup>40</sup>*

*Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous **with my jealousy** among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel **in my jealousy**. (Numbers 25:11, authors’ emphasis)*

*They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (Deuteronomy 32:21, authors’ emphasis)*

*For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that **their power is gone** and there is none remaining, bond or free. Then he will say, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge?” (Deuteronomy 32:36–37, authors’ emphasis)*

Paul’s language comes from the Torah; he was appealing to the Torah to make his case. Cheung writes, “It is no accident that underlying Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 8–10 are

classic passages in the Torah against eating idol food, Deuteronomy 32 and Numbers 25.”<sup>41</sup> If Paul was appealing to the Torah to support his position, then clearly he was arguing *against* eating food sacrificed to idols, not *for* it.

## All Things Are Lawful

In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul returned to the philosophical argument of the Corinthian objectors. Once again he quoted from the letter he had recently received from them. Apparently the Corinthians had written to Paul, saying, “All things are lawful to us.” They did not mean that there were no prohibitions binding on them in Messiah. They meant that as Gentiles, the Torah tells them, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything” (Genesis 9:3). In other words, they argued against the prohibition on meat sacrificed to idols on the basis that they were Gentiles. When they wrote to Paul, saying, “All things are lawful to us,” they meant, “As Gentiles, all things are lawful for us to eat.”

Paul replied to them, “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Corinthians 10:23).<sup>42</sup> So Paul warned them to “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14) and to refuse to eat any food that they knew to be tainted by idolatry or consecrated to an idol.<sup>43</sup> With these words Paul defended the apostolic injunction prohibiting Gentiles from eating food sacrificed to idols—despite the fact that he could not produce a specific proof text that might counter the argument by explicitly forbidding Gentiles from food tainted by idolatry.

On the other hand, he conceded that their argument did have some merit. One need not be overly concerned regarding whether food purchased in the market was sacrificed to idols or not. Quoting Psalm 24:1 Paul writes:

*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the*

*ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” (1 Corinthians 10:25–26)*<sup>44</sup>

It is “clear that not all food [sold in the market place] was previously sacrificed. Otherwise, what is the point of ‘not asking’?”<sup>45</sup> Paul did not sanction food tainted with idolatry. He told the Corinthians not to raise questions about the issue but to abstain from anything that they knew to be consecrated to an idol:

*If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience. (1 Corinthians 10:27–28)*

If Paul was appealing to the Torah to support his position, then clearly he was arguing *against* eating food sacrificed to idols, not *for* it.

### **Rabbinic Argumentation**

Tomson points out that Paul’s main concern in 1 Corinthians 10 involved clarifying the status of doubtful food items:

*Paul defines what is idol food in doubtful cases. While 1 Corinthians 8 introduces the problem and 10:1–22 reiterates the general prohibition of food known to be consecrated to idols, 10:25–29 deals with food of unspecified nature in a pagan setting.*<sup>46</sup>

Paul’s criteria for dealing with food in uncertain situations has parallels in the *halachic* rulings of the sages.<sup>47</sup> The sages also had to resolve similar ambiguities that arose for Jews living in the midst of the Roman-era idolatrous world. While they certainly took the prohibitions of idolatry and idol food seriously, they needed to provide guidance for navigating doubtful situations.

The Mishnah considers the case of the *Mercurius*, a tribute to the god Mercury that was used by the Romans to mark the roads. People traveling the roads often left stones as a tribute next to the *Mercurius*, which designated those stones as offered up to idols and therefore forbidden for use. Rabbi Ishmael and the sages debated as to how one would know if the stones next to a *Mercurius* had been placed there for idolatrous purposes or simply by chance. These decisions would be important for the Jew who wanted to use the stones for one purpose or another:<sup>48</sup>

*Rabbi Ishmael says: “If three stones are lying side by side next to a Mercurius, they are prohibited; if there are two they are permitted.” The sages, however, say: “If [the stones] are seen to be connected with it they are prohibited, but if they do not appear to be connected with it they are permitted. (m.Avodah Zarah 4:1)*

Ultimately, Paul’s approach is similar to that of the sages of Israel:

*But all other things, if it not be specified [that they are for idolatrous purposes], are permitted [to be sold to idolaters], but if it be specified [that they are intended for idolatrous practices], they are prohibited. (m.Avodah Zarah 1:5)*

This ruling means that “even if there were idolatrous intentions, they were not openly uttered and did not represent the power of idolatry.

‘But if (the pagan) specified, even water and salt are forbidden’” (t.*Avodah Zarah* 1:21).<sup>49</sup> In other words, what you don’t know can’t hurt you.

## Kosher Meat?

So far we have established that contrary to popular readings of 1 Corinthians 8–10, the Apostle Paul did not espouse a cavalier or dismissive attitude toward food sacrificed to idols. Instead, he tried to convince the Corinthians to maintain the apostolic prohibition on idol food. He employed philosophical arguments, and he appealed to the authority of the Torah. Most of the misunderstandings regarding this subject result from Paul’s method of restating the Corinthians’ objections before offering a counterargument. Modern readers have read the arguments posed by the Corinthians such as “an idol has no real existence” and “all things are lawful” as if they expressed Paul’s own sentiments. With these issues clarified, we have resolved the tension between Paul and the Jerusalem Council’s Apostolic Decree that prohibited Gentile believers from things polluted by idols. But one difficulty remains.

Paul’s statement “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market” seems to imply that Paul was telling the Corinthians that they did not need to worry about another prohibition of the Apostolic Decree, namely, that Gentile believers need to abstain from “what has been strangled.” Was Paul telling the Corinthians that they could eat whatever meat they found in the market regardless of whether or not it had been ritually slaughtered (*shechitah*)?

Three different answers suggest themselves:

1. Paul and the Corinthian community did not submit to the Apostolic Decree’s prohibition on things strangled.
2. Paul did not consider meat that had been slaughtered for food as “strangled,” even when the method of slaughter did not conform to Jewish standards.
3. Paul was not speaking specifically about meat in 1 Corinthians 10.

## Submitting to Authority

Based on the above discussion regarding Paul’s relationship to the Jerusalem Council, the first option seems implausible. As we pointed out, Paul was present during the council’s deliberations and was commissioned, along with Barnabas and Silas, to publish the decree to the Gentile communities.<sup>50</sup>

Most of the misunderstandings regarding this subject result from Paul’s method of restating the Corinthians’ objections before offering a counterargument.

Moreover, this interpretation requires that Paul would have to have lived and taught in direct rebellion to the apostolic authorities. Everything we know about Paul indicates that he respected authority and abided by it. Why would Paul have chosen to defy the simple rulings that the Jerusalem Council had imposed?

Additionally, in Acts 21 Paul confirmed his compliance with the directives in the Apostolic Decree. Paul wrote the epistle of 1 Corinthians during the period of time between the events of Acts 15 and Acts 21. Therefore, if Paul was disregarding the Apostolic Decree in his letter, he was hypocritically and deceitfully trying to conceal that information from James and the apostles in Acts 21. Unless Paul was a liar and an apostate, he would not have disregarded the apostles’ rulings.

This position places far too much weight on one Pauline statement that addresses a completely different question. When Paul advised the Corinthians to eat whatever they found in the market, he was addressing uncertainty

over an item's relationship to idolatry, not the method by which it has been slaughtered.

When interpreted in the Jewish framework within which the injunction was given, “things strangled” is directly related to the prohibitions against blood.

### Method of Slaughter

The second suggestion supposes that when the Apostolic Decree referred to the prohibitions on “what has been strangled” and on “blood,” it referred only to animals that had been torn, had suffocated, or had died of natural causes. In turn, a regular slaughter by any butcher would have been permissible, regardless of how he had dispatched the victim. As plausible as this sounds, it does not hold up under contextual and historical evidence.

The majority of Bible scholars interpret “from what is strangled” (*pniktos*, πνικτός) as a prohibition against eating meat that has not been ritually slaughtered according to Jewish standards. For example,

*“Strangled meat,” i.e., meat from animals not slaughtered by pouring out their blood, in conformity with biblical and Jewish practice.*<sup>51</sup>

Meat that has been “strangled” refers to meat that has been improperly slaughtered, that is, not slaughtered by the traditional Jewish method (*shechitah*). Some interpreters have been confused by the negative proscription, but this is just the “negative corollary” to the positive commandment in Leviticus 17:13 to “pour

out the blood.”<sup>52</sup> We see an example of this usage of “strangled” in the Mishnah in which a method of improper slaughter using a dull instrument is called one that “strangulates.”<sup>53</sup> The word “strangled” is also used this way in the writings of Philo and in the apocryphal work *Joseph and Aseneth*.<sup>54</sup> When interpreted in the Jewish framework within which the injunction was given, “things strangled” is directly related to the prohibitions against blood:

The prohibition of “blood” came under the same requirement, referring to the consumption of the blood of animals in any form. These three requirements [abstention from food sacrificed to idols, things strangled, and blood] were thus all ritual, dealing with matters of clean and unclean food.<sup>55</sup>

This indicates that the prohibition on consuming blood is directly connected to the prohibition on consuming the meat of strangled animals. The Apostolic Decree clearly has in mind the traditional kosher method of slaughter, not just any method of slaughter. When an animal dies by any means other than by proper, ritual slaughter, Jewish law regards the animal as if the blood remains in the meat. Such meat is considered to have been strangled.

### Where's the Beef?

A third interpretation suggests that 1 Corinthians 10 does not refer to meat but to foods in general. When the apostles state that “Gentiles who turn to God ... should ... abstain from the things polluted by idols,” the prohibition does not refer exclusively to meat.<sup>56</sup> Any type of food could be polluted by an idol, and as we saw above in the Mishnah, this could even refer to non-food items such as stones that had been dedicated to an idol. Anything that had been consecrated for idolatrous service, not just meat, was to be avoided.

Additionally, when Paul speaks of “food offered to idols,” our English translations typically

render it as “food sacrificed to idols.” This creates the false impression that he is referring to the meat of animals that have been slaughtered as blood sacrifices to an idol. On the contrary, the Greek verb *thuo* (θυω) “means not only ‘slaughter,’ but also ‘offer’ (ceremoniously), ‘celebrate.’ Hence bloodless offerings to the gods such as wine, corn, or bread could be included.”<sup>57</sup> In fact, in all of 1 Corinthians 8–10, the word “meat” (*kreas*, κρεας) is only mentioned once in Paul’s hypothetical vow:

*Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.* (1 Corinthians 8:13)

Meat was not consumed on a daily basis, as is commonly the case in today’s Western world. In the Apostolic Era, the common lower class enjoyed meat only rarely and on special occasions. The issues that the Corinthians encountered ordinarily involved other types of food that had been tainted with idolatry. For example, Jewish law forbids Gentile wine on the possibility of its consecration to idols.

This now brings us to the main passage in question:

*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”* (1 Corinthians 10:25–26)

The Greek does not literally say, “Eat any meat that is sold in the meat market.” Rather, it states, “Eat anything sold in the *makellon*.” Although many English versions prefer to translate *makellon* (μακελλον) as “meat market,” the word actually refers to the whole marketplace in an ancient city:

*The word means not only a meat market but a food market in general. The meat market is part of the makellon. The arrangement of such markets is known to us from*

*excavations. It seems to have been everywhere the same, a rectangular court of pillars with a fountain in the middle and over, supported by the pillars a dome shaped roof. The booths on the sides, before them porticoes. In Pompeii there was found on the narrow east side a chapel of the imperial cult adorned with statues, to the south east there was probably a room for sacrificial repasts. It is most significant that the account of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:25 is confirmed by a Latin Inscription found in Corinth which contains the word macellum. According to the research of H.J. Cadbury, this macellum existed in the days of Paul.*<sup>58</sup>

**The Greek in 1 Corinthians 10:25 does not literally say, “Eat any meat that is sold in the meat market.”**

Therefore, Paul was not only talking about meat when he said, “Eat whatever is sold.” He also had in view bread, wine, and anything else that was sold in the market. He was not sanctioning all meat (even that which was not properly slaughtered) as permissible. His point was that with the presence of the idols in the *makellon*, one could presume that everything in the market was contaminated by idolatry. Instead, Paul told them to eat of the foods there without raising concerns.

The same is true in the following passage in which the NASB translators have supplied the word “meat”:

*If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for*

*conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake. (1 Corinthians 10:27–28 NASB)*

## Paul's rulings put him firmly within the Jewish tradition of the day as he adapted Torah for Gentiles in the Diaspora.

Again, the text does not say “meat sacrificed to idols.” Literally, the Greek says, “This is a thing offered to idols.” The passage refers to food in general, including beverages, vegetables, breads, etc.

Paul continued by speaking about the believer's liberty. He says, “I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?” (1 Corinthians 10:29). This liberty does not mean freedom from the Torah or freedom from the Apostolic Decree, as church interpretations often suggest, but rather freedom from the power of false gods and idolatry.<sup>59</sup> Although the apostles did not bind Gentile believers to the commandments of Torah in the same manner in which they did Jewish believers, they did prohibit them from things polluted by idols, from things strangled, and from blood.

Paul concludes his argument against eating food sacrificed to idols by instructing the Corinthians to conduct themselves in such a manner that they would not offend Jews, Gentiles, or the larger assembly of Israel: “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians

10:32–33). By the same token, Paul would not have advised the Corinthians to cause offense by disregarding the other injunctions of the Apostolic Decree.

### Conclusion

In the end, Paul urged caution regarding food sacrificed to idols and things potentially contaminated by idolatry. He forbade his congregations from intentionally partaking in food sacrificed to idols, but he steered them away from the hyper-litigious suspicion (or superstition) that would completely ban them from eating any food purchased in the market or prepared in the homes of unbelievers. Such a position would have caused severe hardship for the believer and would have all but severed his or her relationships with the Gentile world.

Paul's rulings put him firmly within the Jewish tradition of the day as he adapted Torah for Gentiles in the Diaspora:

*Paul's position in a nutshell is this: to eat idol food knowingly is to participate in idolatry; therefore, for the sake of the weak and for the sake of yourselves, avoid any food if, and only if, you know that it is idol food ... Paul stands firmly together with other Jews and Christians in seeing the conscious consumption of idol food as a denial of their allegiance to their Lord.<sup>60</sup>*

Rather than viewing Paul as having a cavalier and dismissive attitude toward the prohibition on idol food, we can see that he firmly upheld the prohibition of the Apostolic Decree. Paul vehemently opposed idolatry and its appurtenances wherever he went. In addition, he submitted to and taught in accordance with the rulings of the Jerusalem Council, including the prohibition on blood and on things strangled, that is, meat from animals that had not been slaughtered according to Jewish standards. 

## Endnotes

- 1 *Tikrovet avodah zarah*, תקרובת עבודה זרה.
- 2 Dr. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 91.
- 3 Anything connected to idolatry becomes *issurei hana'ah* (an item from which it is forbidden to derive any benefit, איסורי הנאה).
- 4 Leviticus 17:8–9.
- 5 Deuteronomy 32:37–38.
- 6 4 Maccabees 5:2.
- 7 Rabbi Moshe Weiner, *The Divine Code: Volume One* (Jerusalem, Israel: Ask Noah International, 2011), 224–35. Also, “Eat not blood, and abstain from things offered to idols” (*Sibylline Oracle* 2:115). It is found as well in the equally universal *Pseudo-Phocylides* 31, “Do not eat blood; avoid food offered to idols,” although many scholars feel this verse is an interpolation. See P. W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden, Germany: E. J. Brill, 1978), 135–36.
- 8 See Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 79–83.
- 9 Acts 15:2, 12, 22, 25.
- 10 Acts 21:25–26.
- 11 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 35.
- 12 Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 239.
- 13 Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 179.
- 14 E.g., Ignatius, *The Epistle to the Magnesians* 8–10; Tertullian, *Apology* 9:13–14. See Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 180–81.
- 15 See also *Contra Celsus* 8:24.
- 16 *Clementine Homilies* 7:8. See also *Recognitions of Clement* 4:36.
- 17 See Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 183–84. For a full survey of early church writers, see Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 165–295.
- 18 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 185.
- 19 Tomson explains the two ways in which the church fathers interpreted Paul’s words: “Two clear alternatives appear to have existed, and very likely they relate to local custom and/or religious taste. Paul’s permission to buy and eat without distinction is explained by a number of authorities as implicitly excluding idol food. Thus, plainly Clement of Alexandria, and similarly Tertullian: ‘(The apostles) handed the keys of the market hall to you with the permission to eat everything, while maintaining the exception of idol food.’ The alternative explanation was proposed by Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, and apparently Novatian and Augustine: What Paul meant was that food of unspecified provenance is permitted without questioning, but if specified by others as consecrated food it is prohibited” (Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 186).
- 20 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 110.
- 21 Acts 19:19.
- 22 Romans 2:22; Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 111.
- 23 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 109. Tomson allows that the initial instruction on idolatry could have been oral and not written: “A connection with Paul’s earlier teaching, either orally or in his previous letter, seems obvious. Such an important issue could not have been omitted in the Apostle’s initial instructions to the church of his founding. But during his absence problems appear to have arisen. This partly explains his cautious approach” (Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 190).
- 24 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 153.
- 25 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 193.
- 26 See Birger Gerhardsson, *The Shema in the New Testament* (Lund, Sweden: Novapress, 1996).
- 27 Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 76.
- 28 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 194, 196.
- 29 m.*Nedarim* 3:3.
- 30 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 196.
- 31 Mark D. Nanos (“The Polytheist Identity of the ‘Weak,’ And Paul’s Strategy to ‘Gain’ Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1,” [paper presented in a seminar at Lund University, Sweden, 6 May 2008], 32) suggests that the “weak,” “the brother for whom Christ died,” is not a fellow believer but rather a non-believing idolater, that is, a polytheist:  

The [weak] are to be treated differently than fellow Christ-believers, those “being named” brother and sister. Rather than being judged, polytheists are to be gained by behavior consistent with the confession of Christ-faith. That involves not eating any food known to be set apart to idols. It involves not insulting the “mistaken” beliefs of the [weak], but learning how to develop speech and behavior calculated to implicitly undermine them. The knowledgeable are to relate to the [weak] on terms that will communicate the “knowledge” of Christ to them, which means they must not live in a way that can be mistaken to deny their confession of the One.

- In his epistle to the Romans, Paul directly connects unbelief with those who are “weak”: “For while we were still *weak*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6, emphasis mine). This interpretation might find further support from the fact that 1 Corinthians 10 discusses buying food from the marketplace and eating in the homes of unbelievers, both of which involve coming into contact with unbelievers, that is, the weak (1 Corinthians 10:25, 27).
- 32 Note that the Greek word for “weak” (*asthenes*, ἀσθενής) actually appears transliterated in rabbinic literature as *astenas* (אסטנס), where it takes on the meaning of “delicate” (m.*Yoma* 3:5).
- 33 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 196.
- 34 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 109.
- 35 The Hebrew behind the story of the golden calf uses language suggestive of sexual immorality: the people “rose up to play” (Exodus 32:6); Moses “saw the calf and the dancing” (Exodus 32:19); “And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies)” (Exodus 32:25).
- 36 1 Corinthians 10:16.
- 37 1 Corinthians 10:18.
- 38 Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 256.
- 39 Additionally, compare “God is faithful” (1 Corinthians 10:13) with “a God of faithfulness” (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- 40 *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy 318 also uses Deuteronomy 32:17 in reference to the prohibition on idolatry.
- 41 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 300.
- 42 “For not everything is good for everyone, and not every person enjoys all foods” (*Ben Sira* 37:28).
- 43 1 Corinthians 10:27–28.
- 44 In rabbinic literature this psalm is used as the halachic basis for saying a blessing before eating (b.*Brachot* 35a). The sages often connected people’s lack of blessings at mealtimes with idolatry: “If three have eaten at a table and have spoken no words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten of idolatrous sacrifices” (m.*Avot* 3:3). Therefore, food eaten without any acknowledgement of God is likened to idol food. Along the same lines, Paul says, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4–5).
- 45 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 155. See also Cheung’s short survey of historical evidence that points to this on page 154, n. 230.
- 46 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 208.
- 47 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 208.
- 48 There was a similar case in early church literature: “In addition to rabbinic halakha, an answer is given by one of the Church Fathers. We referred earlier to the example given by Augustine of a hungry traveler who finds food in front of a statue or altar with nobody around. The fact, Augustine explains, that it is left where it is, indicates that it is intended as an offering and is therefore prohibited. But if there is no such indication it is not prohibited. This way of reasoning resembles the principles of halakha on idolatry” (Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 209).
- 49 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 218.
- 50 Acts 15:2, 12, 22, 25.
- 51 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 178–79. See also John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 330 and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 557.
- 52 “‘Things strangled’ (πνικτων) are prohibited in Leviticus 17:13. The difficulty with this term in the Apostolic Decree has arisen simply because Leviticus 17:13 is a positive prescription: that animals killed for eating must be slaughtered in such a way that their blood drains out. Abstention from πνικτων is the negative corollary, for an animal killed in such a way that the blood remains ‘choked’” (Richard Bauckham, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, Volume 4: Palestinian Setting* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995], 459).
- 53 m.*Chullin* 1:2. In Acts 10:14 when Peter states, “I have never eaten anything that is common [*chullin*, חולין],” he may be referring to the fact that he has never eaten meat that has not been ritually slaughtered. Joseph Shulam writes, “Since *chullin* may also refer to the manner in which un consecrated animals are slaughtered, Peter may be implying that he has never eaten anything which has been improperly slaughtered according to the halakhot of *chullin*.” See Joseph Shulam and Hillary LeCornu, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts* (Jerusalem, Israel: Netivvah Bible Instruction Ministry, 2012), 1:566.
- 54 Philo, *The Special Laws* 4:122; *Joseph and Aseneth* 8:5.
- 55 Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*, 330.
- 56 Act 15:19–20.
- 57 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 189.
- 58 Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 4:371.
- 59 Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 216.
- 60 Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 162, 299.