

1 CORINTHIANS FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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abandonment of the Jews. Luke understands that Paul's statement applies only to his time in Corinth, where he leaves the synagogue and establishes the kind of inclusive assembly which is now imperative."⁴⁰ Here, a more neutral rendering of "to the nations" for *eis ta ethnē*, is highly useful, because now Paul will focus his efforts on **everyone** out in the world. "To the nations" is not to the exclusion of his fellow Jews, but rather serves to include Greeks, Romans, and whoever else God will draw into His Kingdom. And, as C.K. Barrett points out, "For Paul's turning to the Gentiles...Luke evidently thinks of it as a frequently repeated pattern rather than as a once-for-all event,"⁴¹ as the further record of the Book of Acts does not indicate that Paul ever stops reaching out to his fellow Jews at their local synagogue. With the Messiah followers establishing their fellowship immediately next to the Corinthian synagogue (v. 7), the outreach to the Corinthian Jews for Yeshua is hardly over.

7 When he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. 9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." 11 And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

18:7 After leaving the Corinthian synagogue, "Paul went into the house of a man named Titius Justus, a God-fearer whose house was next door to the synagogue" (TLV), as the venue changes for Paul to conduct his ministry activities in the city. The host, who opens up his home to the Messiah followers, is *Titiou Ioustou sebomenou ton Theon*, "Titius Justus worshipping - God" (Brown and Comfort).⁴² It is widely agreed that Titius Justus the same person who is called Gaius in Paul's letters (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14), meaning that his full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. Longenecker interjects the sure possibility, "he was doubtless a Roman citizen and may have been from a family brought in by Julius Caesar to colonize Corinth."⁴³

Paul's Corinthian Jewish opponents were surely not pleased by the location where the Messiah followers would be meeting. Interpreters who read Paul's word of v. 6 as meaning an effective termination of Jewish outreach with the gospel, **have a real problem** with the Believers meeting right next to the Corinthian synagogue. Even though Marshall was one who asserted that Paul was not concerned with the Corinthian Jews any more, he still has to say how this "can hardly have made for good relations but was no doubt an effective location

⁴⁰ Squires, in ECB, 1250.

⁴¹ C.K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary: Acts 15-28* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 867.

⁴² Brown and Comfort, 485.

⁴³ Longenecker, in EXP, 9:483.

for influencing attenders at the synagogue.”⁴⁴ Witherington is much fairer in his conclusion, “Besides showing Paul’s boldness, this move may also reflect Paul’s desire to continue to try and convert Jews, even though he would be outside the synagogue and would be concentrating his efforts on Gentiles.”⁴⁵ What Bruce says, is probably more what was Paul’s intention than anything else, as “people who had been accustomed to attend the synagogue did not have to leave their habitual route if they wished to continue hearing Paul; they made their way towards the synagogue as usual, but turned in next door.”⁴⁶

Wall’s summary on what has transpired, in the Believers moving right next to the Corinthian synagogue, cannot go unnoticed by Messianic readers. As a Christian commentator, he concludes that the intention of Paul moving into Titius’ home—which had to have afforded some degree of space for the Believers for sure—was to mainly assure that the ties of the *ekklēsia* would not be broken from Judaism or Torah practices:

“Paul’s departure from the synagogue for Titius’s house may well indicate something of a solution in maintaining the fragile accommodation of his Christian beliefs with his Jewish practices, which is the hallmark of his mission in Acts 18 (cf. 1 Cor 9:16-23). Indeed, the participants in this new house congregation—Paul, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila (cf. 1 Cor 16:19), Titius, Crispus (cf. 1 Cor 1:14), Sosthenes (cf. 1 Cor 1:1)—are all former members of the Corinthian synagogue who follow Paul’s example and would presumably want to preserve Jewish traditions in the new setting. Reading the text by the light of the Jerusalem Council adds an additional layer of meaning to this movement: Leaving the synagogue may afford the best chance of preserving what is Jewish for the future church.”⁴⁷

The Corinthian Believers, as seen in Luke’s record from Acts, were forced to leave the local synagogue. The tenor of the later Corinthian correspondence indicates that as the good news was declared, the demographics became overwhelmingly drawn from the pagan strata of the city several years later. While it indicates great success for the spread of the gospel, Paul’s letters also indicate how some things got significantly out of control.

18:8 The Apostle Paul, as described by Luke, has had some considerable ministry success so far in Corinth. He details, “Crispus, the president of the synagogue, came to trust in the Lord, along with his whole household; also many of the Corinthians who heard trusted and were immersed” (CJB). Crispus was the *archisunagōgos*, which BDAG describes as the “**leader/president of a synagogue**...an official whose duty it was esp. to take care of the physical arrangements for the worship services (Hebr. [*rosh ha’knesset*]).”⁴⁸ Crispus is among “many of the Corinthians,” *polloi tōn Korinthiōn*, who have believed in Yeshua. Having been the leader of the Corinthian synagogue, Crispus finds himself moving next door to the developing assembly of Messiah followers.

⁴⁴ Marshall, 295.

⁴⁵ Witherington, *Acts*, 549; similarly Schnabel, 759.

⁴⁶ Bruce, *Acts*, 371.

⁴⁷ Wall, in *NIB*, 10:252.

⁴⁸ BDAG, 139.

Noting how Paul's previous word, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (v. 6), can be read as being anti-Jewish, various Christian commentators have expelled some effort to describe how moving next door to the Corinthian synagogue (v. 7), is more than anything else a venue change for the Believers. The Messiah followers are not a new and separate religion, but are operating as a sect of First Century Judaism. William H. Willimon is broadly correct in his remarks, mainly directing Christians of our present day,

"When Paul declares, 'from now on I will go to the Gentiles,' it does not mean that he no longer attempts to convert his fellow Jews or that he will cease going to the synagogue first. He is simply moving his base of operations in Corinth. Christianity is a sect within Judaism—as even Gallio knows. The new movement must not be severed from its roots, as Paul's vow in conformity with ancient tradition shows [v. 18]. The claims of Christians make sense for Luke (and for us?) only within the context of the hopes of Israel."⁴⁹

Squires' observations on what has happened, should actually ring widely true for what we see taking place in the contemporary Messianic movement:

"Although established independently of the synagogue, the assembly in Corinth nevertheless shares characteristics with messianic assemblies in many other places. What begins here is not a new movement, apart from Judaism; it is rather the manifestation of the kind of inclusive community which is now to characterize messianic believers."⁵⁰

Messianic congregations and fellowships today, frequently in the Western Diaspora, are often demographically diverse bodies of Jewish and non-Jewish people, with sure continuity with non-Messianic Judaism, but also welcoming whomever the Lord directs in.

For sure, the thought that the Apostle Paul has no further Jewish outreach in Corinth, is without textual basis. As Spencer puts it, "[he] ends up staying a long time...proclaiming God's message to 'many' receptive Jews as well as Gentiles who believe the word and are baptized (18.7, 11)...[H]e continues to evangelize members of the local Jewish synagogue, including one rather special member named *Crispus*."⁵¹ Wall probably goes the furthest among the Acts commentators we are considering, noting that the as-close-as-possible location for the Messiah followers next to the Corinthian synagogue, was to establish for the non-Jewish Believers, a need to recognize that their primary community was one where the God of Israel was acknowledged, and not the wider pagan community:

"This transition from synagogue to house must also be understood in terms of the concerns raised by James at the Jerusalem Council. Whatever confidence James has that a diaspora congregation of mixed constituency will retain its Jewish heritage is predicated on a mission that is synagogue-based, since Moses will be preached every Sabbath (see 15:21). God-fearing Gentiles, who are attached to the synagogue and hear Moses preached, will more likely understand how they should live among their Jewish brothers and sisters. The

⁴⁹ William H. Willimon, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 146.

⁵⁰ Squires, in *ECB*, 1250.

⁵¹ Spencer, pp 186, 189.

relocation of Paul's mission from synagogue to house may well imperil the sabbath reading of Moses and thus make more likely the 'gentilizing' of Christian faith."⁵²

As will be noted by Paul's Corinthian correspondence, there were many internal divisions that arose among the Corinthian Believers (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 11:17-34; 12:1-14:40). While there had to have been some problems erupt from the Corinthian Believers being forced out of the local synagogue, more of the problems probably need to be placed at the feet of the overall paganism of the city.

18:9 While Paul and the Believers did face some challenges in Corinth, even with the good news making significant strides, Paul had to be encouraged that the pattern which had happened previously in other cities, did not repeat itself in Corinth, with him now being forced to leave. It is described, "And, in a vision by night, the Lord said to Paul, 'Dismiss your fears: go on speaking, and do not give up'" (Weymouth New Testament). This is not the first time that Paul had seen the Lord in a vision (9:4-6; 1 Corinthians 15:8). Spencer appropriately associates this scene with encounters previous figures, from the Tanach, had with the Lord. He details, "Similar commissions, backed by the promise of divine presence and protection, were issued to anxious Israelite prophets of old, such as Moses (Exod. 3.10-15; 4.10-12), Joshua (Josh. 1.1-9) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1.4-10)."⁵³

In terms of Christology, though, when "the Lord" is properly identified to be Yeshua the Messiah, it serves to indicate that the First Century Believers truly considered Him to be God. Marshall aptly describes, "It is significant that the message is couched in the language used by God himself in the Old Testament when addressing his servants (...7:9; Ex. 3:12; Dt. 31:6; Jos. 1:5, 9; Is. 41:10; 43:5; Je. 1:8). The New Testament assigns to Jesus a function and status equal to those of God the Father himself."⁵⁴

18:10 The reason that Paul is told not to worry, is how Yeshua tells him, "for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (ESV). There might be some connection intended between the Lord's word here, and Isaiah 43:5, "Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and gather you from the west." Surely, with Corinth as a large and strategic city in the Eastern Roman Empire, the capital of Achaia, and located on the isthmus between the Peloponnesus and the Greek mainland, qualified this an important place for an assembly of Messiah followers to be established. It was the Lord's intention that a community of His followers be established, and so the Apostle was not just going to leave. For the long term, the Body of Messiah today possesses two letters written by Paul to the Corinthians—which while indicating a high level

⁵² Wall, in *NIB*, 10:254-255.

Wall's view corresponds widely to that of the author, as the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21, when followed, was to sever the new, non-Jewish Believers from their pagan spheres of social and religious influence, and see them attached to a community where Moses was being taught every Sabbath. Consult the author's commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*.

⁵³ Spencer, 186.

⁵⁴ Marshall, 296; also Bock, 579.

of spiritual challenges they faced—doubtlessly are to aid modern Believers in the challenges that they face today. None of this would have been too possible without Paul's extended service in Corinth, though.

Various commentators have brought out some kind of connection between the use of *laos* in v. 10, and how it is used in “the Septuagint more than fifteen hundred times for [*am*]” (*Thayer*),⁵⁵ which surely refers to the people of Israel.⁵⁶ **This obviously means that there were many Jews in Corinth who must receive the good news of Israel's Messiah.** At the same time, in view of James' word of Acts 15:14, “Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name,” there would be many from the nations who would be involved in not only the reception of the good news, but ultimately what would be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom in Yeshua. Spencer indicates, “As in James' report of Peter's testimony before the Jerusalem council in 15.14, the customary Lukan term for the ‘people (*laos*)’ of Israel now includes Gentiles (Greeks) as well as Jews within the one people of God.”⁵⁷ Peterson's thoughts more fully summarize what was happening, especially given James' expectation of the Messianic Kingdom being restored as the Tabernacle of David with the Twelve Tribes of Israel at the center, and expanded borders to incorporate the righteous from the nations (cf. 15:15-18; Amos 9:11-12, LXX):

“This takes up the theme introduced in 15:14 (God intervened ‘to choose a people for his name among the Gentles’), where the covenant formula of Exodus 19:5 (cf. Ex. 23:22; Dt. 7:6; 14:2) was applied to those who believe in Jesus from among the nations...The Lord's promise is that, as a result of Paul's preaching, more will become believers and show themselves to be part of this elect but inclusive people of God.”⁵⁸

18:11 Luke records that “Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (NIV). The Apostle notably stayed in Corinth more than any other place, except Ephesus (20:31), often recognized by scholars to be the Fall of 50 C.E. to the Spring of 52 C.E. As he would relate to the Believers he served in this city, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Corinthians 1:26). The bulk of Paul's service to the Corinthians was to the lower classes and poor of the city.

⁵⁵ *Thayer*, 373.

⁵⁶ Cf. Fernando, 493; Witherington, *Acts*, 551; Wall, in *NIB*, 10:255; Squires, in *ECB*, 125.

⁵⁷ Spencer, 186.

⁵⁸ Peterson, 514.

12 But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, 13 saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” 16 And he drove them away from the judgment seat. 17 And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

18:12 While the Apostle Paul was assured by the Lord that there were many of His people in the city of Corinth (v. 10), and it is recorded how he spent eighteen months with the Corinthians (v. 11), Luke does record an incident that arose, which narratively serves as an indication that it was time for Paul to move on. The scene is introduced, “But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jewish leaders made a united attack against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat” (TLV). The presence of Gallio as proconsul or “governor” (NLT) of Achaia, enables examiners to reasonably date Paul’s time in Corinth to around 50/51-52 C.E., and also date his composition of 1&2 Thessalonians. Gallio was actually the brother of the famous Roman orator Seneca, and his appointment as proconsul of Achaia was but one of several noted acts in his political career:

“Eldest son of Lucius Seneca, father of the philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca. Annaeus Novatus (Gallio) was adopted by the senator Lucius Iunius (Gallio) and took his name. The banishment of his brother Seneca early in Claudius’s reign (41 C.E.) may have affected Gallio’s career, but soon after Seneca’s return in 49 Claudius appointed Gallio proconsul of Achaia. An inscription found at Delphi, probably dating to the early summer of 52, mentions Gallio. Thus, Gallio probably began as proconsul sometime between 50 and 51 but apparently did not complete his two-year term due to his dislike for the Greek province.

“Much of what can be established about Paul’s chronology hinges upon the dating of Gallio’s tenure. Acts 18:12 reports that while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews in Corinth brought a case against Paul before him. Gallio refused to hear the case.

“Later, Gallio was named consul under Nero in 58. Tacitus reports that when Seneca was implicated in Nero’s death and forced to commit suicide, Gallio ‘begged for his own safety’ in the senate” (EDB).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Scott Nash, “Gallio,” in *EDB*, 481; also Klaus Haacker, “Gallio,” in *ABD*, 2:901-903

Even though in much Roman history, Gallio was regarded somewhat highly, there is every reason for us to think that although he dismissed the charges brought against Paul (vs. 14-15), that he was anti-Semitic.⁶⁰

18:13 The accusation that is brought by the Corinthian Jewish leaders before Gallio, while serious to them for sure, has been a challenge for various examiners to evaluate. It was claimed, “This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law” (NRSV), *para ton nomon*. Is the law or *nomos* referenced the Torah of Moses or Pentateuch, some sort of Jewish religious law involving both the Torah and Rabbinical rulings or precedents, or is Roman law in view? Many interpreters actually think that what is intended here is not the Torah or some sort of Jewish religious law, but instead Roman law.⁶¹ As Eckhard J. Schnabel notes, “Scholarly discussion has focused on what ‘the law’ ([*ho nomos*]) refers to. Some see a reference to the Mosaic Torah, some to Roman law, and some take the charge to be deliberately ambiguous.”⁶² The Kingdom New Testament does actually have, “This man...is teaching people to worship God in illegal ways,”⁶³ perhaps noting some of the ambiguity thought to be present.

The intention of the charges brought before Gallio, were to certainly discredit and disestablish the Messianic Believers from Judaism, which was a protected or legal religion in the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar himself had decreed that the Jewish people would be able to retain their priesthood and ancestral traditions:

“Gaius Julius Caesar, imperator and high priest, and dictator the second time, to the magistrates, senate, and people of Sidon, sends greeting. If you be in health, it is well. I also and the army are well. I have sent you a copy of that decree, registered on the tables, which concerns Hyrcanus, the son of Alexander, the high priest and governor of the Jews, that it may be laid up among the public records; and I will that it be openly proposed in a table of brass, both in Greek and in Latin. It is as follows:- I Julius Caesar, imperator the second time, and high priest, have made this decree, with the approbation of the senate: -Whereas Hyrcanus, the son of Alexander the Jew, has demonstrated his fidelity and diligence about our affairs, and this both now and in former times, both in peace and in war, as many of our generals have borne witness, and came to our assistance in the last Alexandrian war, {a} with fifteen hundred soldiers; and when he was sent by me to Mithridates, showed himself superior in valour to all the rest of that army; for these reasons I will that Hyrcanus, the son of Alexander, and his children, be governors of the Jews, and have the high priesthood of the Jews for ever, according to the customs of their forefathers, and that he and his sons be our confederates; and that besides this, everyone of them be reckoned among our particular friends. I also ordain, that he and his children retain whatever privileges belong to the office of high priest, or

⁶⁰ Witherington, *Acts*, 551; Bock, 580.

⁶¹ Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:486; Stott, 299; Fernando, 493; Wall, in *NIB*, 10:255.

⁶² Schnabel, 762.

⁶³ Also *The Message*, “This man is seducing people into acts of worship that are illegal.”

whatever favours have been hereto granted them; and if at any time hereafter there arise any questions about the Jewish customs, I will that he determine the same. And I think it not proper that they should be obliged to find us winter quarters, or that any money should be required of them” (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.190-195).⁶⁴

Among Acts commentators, Marshall details some of the major options present, for those trying to determine what law the Messiah followers were accused of violating:

“If we take this to refer to persuading Jews to act contrary to the Jewish law, the question was whether the governor could be expected to enforce their own domestic laws. In this case, the force of the accusation could have been that the Christians had no right to claim the protection afforded to adherents of Judaism as a *religio licita*, i.e. a religion officially tolerated by the state...It is also possible...that the charge was that Paul was persuading men in general to worship contrary to the Roman law; this would have been a better charge for the Jews to pursue.”⁶⁵

On the whole, there tend to be more Acts commentators than not, who favor the law in v. 13 being the Believers violating Roman law. Bruce is reflective of this view:

“The charge which was preferred against Paul before Gallio was that of propagating a religion not authorized by Roman law. Judaism was a *religio licita*, but Paul’s Jewish opponents refused to recognize the gospel that he preached as having anything to do with their ancestral faith. It was something new and un-Jewish, which they wholeheartedly repudiated; it was, they urged, a *religio illicita* which accordingly ought to be banned by Roman law; Paul should be inhibited from its further propagation, if not indeed punished for his activity in propagating it thus far.”⁶⁶

Not all Acts commentators, though, see Roman law as being what the Corinthian Jewish leaders intended by their statement. More or less favoring the view that violation of the Torah or Jewish law was in order, with these people declaring Yeshua as the Messiah, Witherington remarks, “It is possible that the Jews deliberately made the charge ambiguous, hoping that Gallio would think Paul had offended against Roman religion. It may also be the case that they were suggesting that Paul was preaching a new religion that was illicit, not a form of Judaism...”⁶⁷ Peterson is much clearer in his conclusion, “it seems more likely that the Jews were appealing to Gallio for protection of their own religious community ‘against a disturbing intruder’. Gallio certainly saw the matter as a dispute among Jews about words and names and their own law (v. 15).”⁶⁸ And is it true that for Rome, given the uprest over the gospel causing the Edict of Claudius (v. 2), that instability within the Jewish community would not prove advantageous for the Empire.

⁶⁴ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 378.

⁶⁵ Marshall, pp 297, 298.

⁶⁶ Bruce, *Acts*, 374.

⁶⁷ Witherington, *Acts*, 552.

⁶⁸ Peterson, pp 516-517.

Messianic versions have often chosen to render the clause *para ton nomon* as “in ways that violate the *Torah*” (CJB) or “contrary to the *Torah*” (TLV), apparently favoring how the charge brought before Gallio is intended to connect the Believers’ crime with some form of Torah violation. In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David H. Stern at least mentions how Roman law could be a factor.⁶⁹ What the interpreter has to fairly weigh for v. 13 specifically, is what was in the mind of the Corinthian Jewish leaders who spoke *nomos* to Gallio. Longenecker is correct to direct how for Gallio, “What Paul was preaching, in his view, was simply a variety of Judaism that did not happen to suit the leaders of the Jewish community at Corinth but which was not for that reason to be declared *religio illicita*.”⁷⁰

As we evaluate the possible dimensions of *nomos* in v. 13, what was most likely intended by the accusation, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the Law” (PME), is a combination of Jewish religious and Roman civil factors. The Corinthian Jewish leaders accusing Paul, surely believed that his declaration of Yeshua as Messiah was in violation of their religious rulings and *halachah*, and in violation with their interpretation of the Torah and Tanach. So, sitting outside of their normative Judaism, these Messiah followers should not have been protected as a legal religion by the Roman state.⁷¹ With this in mind for what was brought before the proconsul Gallio, it is probably best for English translations to leave *nomos* as “law,” and not have Torah.

18:14-15 The proconsul Gallio recognizes that there has not been any sort of incident in Corinth, and that the accused Paul has not committed any crime. His annoyance with the Corinthian Jewish leaders is fairly obvious in his word, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you” (v. 14, NIV). Paul has not violated Roman law, either in disrupting the peace or in violating the stipulations whereby Judaism was a legal religion. The disagreements that the Corinthian Jewish leaders have with Paul, are regarded by Gallio to be a matter that they should settle internally to the Synagogue and Jewish community. Gallio rules, “But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things” (v. 15). Here, while *nomou tou kath’ humas* would obviously involve some form of Torah-based jurisprudence, Messianic versions actually render it as “your own law” (CJB/TLV), the NLT paraphrase being “your Jewish law,” at least recognizing that while an internal matter to the Synagogue, how *nomos* would involve Jewish rulings and *halachah* to be observed in addition to Torah principles.

18:16-17 After Gallio makes his ruling concerning Paul, Luke narrates, “So he had them ejected from the court” (v. 16, NIV). It is further stated, “And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this” (v. 17, RSV). While Crispus the synagogue leader, was among the first brought to

⁶⁹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 290.

⁷⁰ Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:486.

⁷¹ Barrett, pp 872-873 tends to favor some combination of Paul violating Jewish law, and hence forfeiting the right to Roman protection as being a member of a legal religion.

Messiah faith (v. 8), Sosthenes was either the one who succeeded him, or he was a fellow leader who had served alongside of him. Either way, on account of the Corinthian Jewish leaders losing their case before Gallio, Sosthenes is beaten.

Who was beating Sosthenes? Was it fellow Jews, or was it pagan Corinthians? Various interpreters just list the available options,⁷² but the witness of the Textus Receptus is that it was Greeks who beat Sosthenes: “Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat” (NKJV).⁷³ If local Greeks were responsible for the beating, then this was an act of anti-Semitism. But, if the non-believing Jews beat Sosthenes for losing their case, then this can be used to demonstrate how divisive the gospel message can be among people whose power or position is threatened. Acts commentators are divided as to who the “they” were who beat Sosthenes.

More tend to favor the local Greeks or pagan Corinthians being those who beat Sosthenes, as the Jewish community of the city must have been viewed as a nuisance. The thought of Bruce is, “As they went away, an incident occurred which reveals how prone the populace of these Gentile cities was to anti-Jewish demonstrations. Taking advantage of the snub which the proconsul had administered to the leaders of the Jewish community, the crowd of bystanders suddenly seized one of the leaders, Sosthenes...But Gallio judged it politic to turn a blind eye to this brutal ventilation of popular anti-Jewish sentiment.”⁷⁴ Peterson further indicates, “Presumably, he felt that public order would not be threatened if he allowed a few angry people to vent their rage like this.”⁷⁵

The second possibility, that the non-believing Corinthian Jews beat up on one of their own leaders, is not without significant merit. Marshall directs, “It could...have been the Jews who seized Sosthenes and administered the thirty-nine stripes (the regular synagogue punishment, 2 Cor. 11:24) to him, while Gallio refused to interfere in the administration of Jewish justice.”⁷⁶ Marshall is one who notes the ramifications of either identification of the “they” of v. 17, describing how “On either interpretation Gallio refused to intervene in matters involving the Jews. In the former case, he connived at injustice against the Jews, while in the latter he did nothing to protect Christians from synagogue injustice.”⁷⁷

What is important for readers to further weigh, is how a Sosthenes is mentioned in the opening greeting of 1 Corinthians 1:1: “Paul, called as an apostle of Yeshua the Messiah by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.” Who this Sosthenes is, is largely unknown, as no details are provided in Paul’s letter. If this is the same person who was beaten, then he could have been beaten by the non-believing Jews because he was a sympathizer to Paul, and by the

⁷² Witherington, *Acts*, pp 555-556; Schnabel, 765.

⁷³ Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, pp 463-464.

⁷⁴ Bruce, *Acts*, 375; also Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:486; Barrett, 875; Wall, in *NIB*, 10:256.

⁷⁵ Peterson, 518.

⁷⁶ Marshall, 299.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

time the letter of 1 Corinthians was written, came to Messiah faith. Spencer describes the possibility,

“We might speculate that Sosthenes had not supported their cause vigorously enough or was even siding with Crispus in support of Paul...If they lose one of their leaders to Paul’s sect and lash out at another when things do not go their way, ‘the Jews’ scarcely represent a model of unity and stability. Quite the contrary, they seem to be self-destructing while Paul calmly presses on with his work.”⁷⁸

At the same time, there is nothing which requires this Sosthenes to have been mentioned in 1 Corinthians, as this could be someone else. There is surely room to maneuver in determining who beat Sosthenes, and whether he became a Believer subsequent to Paul’s appearing before Gallio. What is known for certain, is that Paul’s appearing before Gallio helped to conclude his eighteen month period of service in Corinth.

18 Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

18:18 After some more time in Corinth, it was apparently clear to Paul that it was proper to move back toward the East. Luke describes, “Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken” (2011 NIV). Cenchrea was one of the major ports for Corinth, on the Aegean Sea. Phoebe the deacon was from Cenchrea, being the one who was entrusted by Paul for carrying his letter to the Romans (Romans 16:1-2).

As the NLT puts it, “There he shaved his head according to Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow.” It is commonly concluded that the Apostle Paul must have observed some kind of Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21), during which no wine or grape products are to be consumed, and hair is not to be cut. When finished, the hair on one’s head is to be completely shaved off and burned at the Tabernacle or Temple (Numbers 6:18), along with some specific offerings presented (Numbers 6:14-17). Paul’s vow may have been made in light of the vision he received (vs. 9-10), out of thankfulness. Various Acts resources, though, have at least made mention of how in classical sources, having the head shaved can be viewed as a means of gratitude:

“The captain nursed his lame vessel through to the inner basin, its waters so tranquil that a rowboat could ride there. The crew, with shaven heads, safe home, took garrulous pleasure in telling their adventures. So off with you, lads: show reverence both in thought and speech” (Juvenal *Satires* 12.80-83).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Spencer, 190.

⁷⁹ Juvenal: *The Sixteen Satires*, trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 95.

Not all are convinced that Paul undertook a Nazirite vow, given how it would have needed to be completed in Jerusalem. Yet, it can be deduced that what Paul undertook was a Nazirite vow accommodated for Diaspora circumstances, as the shaving off of the hair could have been offered at another place, with the offering made in Jerusalem later, as indicated in the Mishnah (m.Nazir 3:6). The main issue for Christian readers of v. 18 is not whether a Nazirite vow could have been adapted for a setting outside of Israel, but with whether Paul would even have made such a vow. One will see various concessions issued that Paul, not out of adherence to the Torah but out of choice for his fellow Jews and their culture, would adhere to various Torah regulations. Stott is one who thinks,

“Once Paul had been liberated from the attempt to be justified by the law, his conscience was free to take part in practices which, being ceremonial or cultural, belonged to the ‘matters indifferent’, perhaps on this occasion in order to conciliate the Jewish Christian leaders he was going to see in Jerusalem.”⁸⁰

Witherington draws a similar conclusion:

“One may make the...point that 1 Cor. 9:20 must have some concrete meaning, and the taking of a Nazirite vow would not have violated Paul’s commitment to a gospel that rejected a requirement of circumcision and keeping kosher. In fact this vow is a purely voluntary act in any case, and it simply shows that Paul did not completely cease being a Jew when he became a Christian. This historical Paul could well have submitted to this rite, just as we know in fact that he voluntarily submitted to other Jewish rites and customs (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 11:22-24).”⁸¹

Stern is better in his remarks, “No matter what the detail’s of Sha’ul’s vow were, this verse proves that he did not abandon the *Torah*; on the contrary, even when he came as a Gentile among Gentiles he continued to observe Jewish practices. See 13:9N, 1 C 9:20-22&NN.”⁸² Messianic readers of v. 18 do not have to conclude that Paul violated the Torah by shaving off his head at Cenchrea, with a later intention of presenting an offering at Jerusalem. The real issue, for sure, is whether Paul’s observance of a vow is somehow associated with 1 Corinthians 9:20, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.” Is Paul’s Torah observance one of him identifying culturally with his people, or out of a genuine obedience to God? Readers evaluating his keeping of a modified Nazirite vow have to decide whether 1 Corinthians 9:20 is associated with this, or if 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 in total, with additional groups mentioned, convey the thought that in his ministry service, Paul tries to put himself in the place of others, and the groups mentioned are widely *ad hoc*. If this is what is intended by these words, then Paul’s vow came as a result of genuine, Spirit-compelled obedience to God’s Torah—not Paul trying to establish human favor with others.

⁸⁰ Stott, 301.

⁸¹ Witherington, *Acts*, pp 557-558; also Bock, 586.

⁸² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 291.